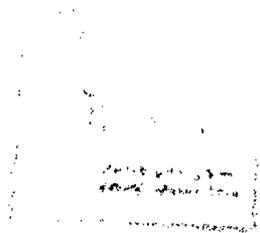


Voice and e-quality: the state of electronic democracy in Britain

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Abstract

This dissertation is broadly concerned with the issue of electronic democracy, i.e. whether, under what conditions and how does the Internet strengthen democracy in advanced industrial polities. Specifically, this work applies the theory of participation to recent British data on online political engagement in order to understand:

- whether and how the Internet modifies the existing structure of political inequality;
- whether and how the Internet alters the context of traditional political action;
- whether the Internet holds a democratising potential and what is its nature.

Data collected and analysed include a survey of British citizens' online political behaviour, and three smaller, in-depth surveys of citizens' online political activities within limited settings: a national online consultation forum, routine politics by young party activists and charity work by an elderly activist network. More generally, the dissertation contributes towards clarifying the ongoing debate on electronic democracy, by examining the discourse surrounding the evolution of the issue. It reviews a large portion of the existing literature on online political engagement, organised in three main approaches. It presents and analyses seminal data on British online political engagement to assess the state of electronic democracy in Britain. Importantly, it advances a theoretical framework for the understanding of the 'real' digital divide, drawing on the theory of participation. The theory is an ideal explanatory base from which to depart in order to find the factors shaping the structure of online political opportunities and the way in which preferences are voiced, and heard, through the Internet. This dissertation speaks directly to the electronic democracy debate by setting the agenda on the notion of democratic equality and by focusing on the structure of voice in the information polity.

Acknowledgments

But I kept rhymin' and stepwritin' the next cypher
Best believe somebody's payin' the pied piper
All the pain inside amplified by the fact
That I can't get by with my 9 to 5

Marshall Bruce Mathers

Halfway through this journey I felt I should start thanking people for their help, support, inspiration, approval. The thought hit me on the train from Manchester to London, on my way back to Italy, homebound. Reading a journal article, thinking of book proposals, SPSS files, the next APSA conference and a seaside weekend, all of which seemed to go together well, three years in the PhD. I tried at first to dismiss the thought, as the journey was still long, the dissertation half-through. Yet it was then that I first realised that the journey was safe, mainly due to the people I wished so strongly to thank. Thus it was, in the end.

Thanks to Maggie, for all her help, advice, understanding and respect; she has seen this work through difficult times. So is life. Thanks to Steve and Rachel for providing the material means of my subsistence, and for the time and freedom to pursue a distinct intellectual project from my terms of engagement with two exciting projects. They have shaped my thinking in countless ways. Thanks to the EMTEL bunch, the old hands and the young, who helped relieve my academic pains with good times and inspiring discussion. Thanks to Roger, a humanist, intellectual, and hombre vertical. Thanks to all of the above, and many others, for putting up with me at good and at bad times. These 'many others' include the members of my upgrade committee, Sonia Livingstone and Shani Orgad, Stephen Coleman and other people at the Hansard Society, the commissioning editor of Hampton Press, Nick Jankowski, and all others who went out of their way to read and listen. Obviously, I am very grateful to the University of Bologna, to the European Commission and to the ESRC for the financial support they have provided throughout my doctoral studies.

Two things I will never forget that I heard at the beginning of this work. The first is about 'writing a thousand words before breakfast', which haunted me all through the PhD. I would have to get up at 4am to stand a reasonable chance, let alone the quality of the results. The second is about the PhD being 'three years when all you have to do is read and write'. As it happens, the longest period I was able to sit down and think through things was three months. Yet these phrases encapsulate the challenges and rewards of a long intellectual journey, one that rests on the right and duty to think, incessantly, and on the duty and right to share one's thinking with others. This I have done, I hope, during the last few years; this thesis is the result of such thinking and sharing. Needless to say, I do not see why anyone else than me should be blamed for the inaccuracies, mistakes and shortcomings of this work.

Lastly, and most importantly. Thanks to Gisella and Sesto, Cristina and Barbara, my family, who would look at me, not quite understand, and love me all the more for that. Thanks to Anusca, my family, who would look at me, understand all too well, and expect me to finish.

It is to my loving, demanding family that this work is dedicated.

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Introduction – The quest for democracy in cyberspace

This dissertation is broadly concerned with the issue of electronic democracy, i.e. whether, under what conditions and how does the Internet strengthen democracy in advanced industrial polities. Specifically, this work applies Verba's theory of participation to recent British data on online political engagement in order to understand:

- whether and how the Internet modifies the existing structure of political inequality;
- whether and how the Internet alters the context of traditional political action;
- whether the Internet holds a democratising potential and what is its nature.

Data collected and analysed include a public opinion survey of British citizens' online political behaviour, and three smaller, in-depth surveys of online political activity within limited settings: a national online consultation forum, routine party politics by young activists and charity work by an elderly activist network. More generally, the dissertation contributes towards clarifying the ongoing debate on electronic democracy, by examining the discourse surrounding the evolution of the issue. It reviews a large portion of the literature on online political engagement, organised in three main approaches. It presents and analyses original data on online political engagement to test the state of electronic democracy in Britain. Finally, it advances a theoretical framework for the understanding of the 'real' digital divide, drawing on the theory of political participation.

1.1 The prevalence of the Internet

The Internet, also referred to as new information and communication technologies (ICTs), the Net, new media and cyberspace, was assembled in 1969 as a research / military communication infrastructure in the United States. Since the early days, the network has evolved through a number of functional and architectural structures, yet preserving the original distributed morphology (Abbate, 1999). The latest phase of Internet evolution, starting in the mid 1990s, was driven by privatisation and marketisation logics. This caused a rapid increase in the Internet audience, from a minority of researchers and military users in the United States to the world public. Possibly, the first head of state to send an e-mail was Queen Elizabeth II, on 26 March 1976, from the Royal Signals and Radar Establishment in Malvern (Zacon, 2003). Three decades later more than half of the British population access the Internet daily from home, the workplace, public places and mobile devices (OII, 2003).

From the early days, much was written about the economic, social and political consequences of the medium. As regards specifically the political, a powerful discourse unfolded around the concept of electronic democracy (or e-democracy). E-democracy encompasses a set of different, largely positive answers to the rhetorical question: are new

media inherently democratic? The Internet – the discourse goes – is a powerful driver of modernisation and democratisation in both advanced industrial democracies and developing nations, as it provides the material and symbolic incentives for a ‘leap across’ inter-personal, social, global and ultimately democratic divides. This discourse matured over three decades, following rather than driving technological change, which was dictated mainly by endogenous dynamics (Castells, 2000).

1.2 Approaches to electronic democracy

In contrast with the unifying simplicity of the electronic democracy discourse, research brought to bear on electronic democracy is multifaceted. I argue here that the discussion of online politics qua electronic democracy has been conducted within four main approaches – articulated at three different analytical levels – over the three-decade evolution of the Internet:¹

1. Macro / polity level of analysis
 - Systemic – theoretical approaches
 - Archetypal approaches
2. Meso / arenas level of analysis
 - Agency – middle-range approaches
3. Micro / citizen level of analysis
 - Individual – inductive approaches

Early views of the Internet and politics tended to consider systemic aspects of the technology. According to macro theorists, the political value of ICTs descends from their very novelty (Enzensberger, 1970; Hiltz & Turoff, 1993; Pool, 1983). The social processes of a new democratic polity are predicated upon new media’s technical characteristics – interactivity, flexibility, multiple connectivity, high speed, low marginal cost, diffused media ownership and access, and control of the medium. Overall, it was argued, the Internet incarnated the myth of democratic decentralisation (Mosco, 1998). Simply put, political power is decentralised along with political communication qua new media. With the increasing prevalence of ICTs in different nodes of the polity, however, democratic decentralisation was modelled more precisely around definite technical characteristics, creating archetypes of electronic democracy. According to this set of views, new media would allow citizens to bypass traditional authorities to directly *decide* (teledemocracy), *deliberate* (online deliberation), and *share* with fellow citizens (virtual community). Macro-level theorisation on e-democracy is grounded in a competent understanding of ICTs, their technical characteristics and historical development in the framework of western polities.

¹ I have identified the approaches by the level of analysis rather than by gnoseological attributes. The macro / meso / micro partition has wide currency in political science, especially in connection with participation and comparative politics (also Norris, 2002b; see for instance Rokkan, 1970).

A 'normalisation backlash' followed – circa 1997 – stemming from sceptic assumptions as to the political value of the Net, with an increased focus on meso-level political players, on the content rather than the structure of the Internet. Meso theorists limit the democratic potential on four important accounts (Resnick, 1997). Firstly, the prominence of politics over technology is stated. Secondly, 'so what': the radical potential of the medium is contested. Thirdly, 'intra-net politics' and 'Internet policy' are disregarded, as only 'real life' political phenomena are counted in the e-democracy equation. Finally, a meso-level of analysis unveils the complexity of online politics. The analysis of a narrower political space – generally limited to the electoral circuit – generated more sober conclusions on electronic democracy. Normalisation works benefit from specific knowledge about politics in advanced industrial democracies, and the increasing 'tactical' use of the media by specialist political brokers – political parties, electoral campaigns, pressure groups and government agencies.

With the expansion of Internet content and user base (circa 1999, see Lyman & Varian, 2000), research appeared that assessed the importance of the Internet for democracy qua the citizen. As the Internet has become a 'general purpose technology' fit for a multiplicity of economic and social uses (Lovelock & Ure, 2002), increasingly more citizens gained access to the Net. In 2005, more than half of the British population could access the Internet and used it on a relatively regular basis (OII, 2003). A proportion of this population engaged in online political activities such as political information seeking, discussing politics on mailing lists and weblogs, donating online to political cause and engaging in online party activity (Gibson, Lusoli, & Ward, 2002a; Norris & Curtice, 2004). A set of questions has been asked about the political value of the Internet for individuals and mediating organisations; the extent to which and how citizens use the Internet to participate in political life; the marginal importance of new media for individual political participation (Bimber, 2003). The growing micro literature can be organised in three main streams, concerned with different aspects of Internet, participation and democracy. *Resources* studies examine users' socio-demographic profiles, and other predictors of Internet political use. *Uses* studies are concerned with different types of online political engagement and the motivations of specialised online activities. *Effects* studies are concerned with the outcomes of Internet adoption access and use for offline participation and the externalities of the Internet for citizen engagement.

1.3 Research questions

The literature suggests that the democratic implications of new media are more complex than the e-democracy discourse may suggest. They are composed of three main interrelated elements: the democratic potential of new media and the implications of new media for the democratic transactions of the polity; the implications of new media for the institutions inscribed in the polity; and the implications of new media for the micro distribution of

political opportunities. These three elements operationalise the ‘electronic democracy’ question into manageable analytical units, which this work addresses:

1. The structure of online political equality. Does the Internet increase or reduce citizens’ access to political information and to the decision-making circuit?
2. The institutional contexts of online action. What are the actors and factors, if any, which mediate citizens’ online engagement?
3. The political nature of the Internet, at the interface between institutions and citizens. What, if any, is the political quality of the technology?

To illuminate online engagement in a way conducive to conclusion on electronic democracy, I draw on the theory of political participation. The theory of participation was formalised by Verba and Nie in the 1970s and subsequently developed in different directions by numerous scholars (Barnes & Kaase, 1979b; Parry, Moyser, & Day, 1992; Pattie, Seyd, & Whiteley, 2003; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). The theory maintains that it is possible to determine the degree and nature of democracy in a polity or across polities according to the differential analysis of individual levels, modes and styles of political engagement. The theory of participation is useful for the study of electronic democracy in a number of ways. Firstly, it provides the necessary bridge between democratic theory and the empirical study of actual political behaviour. Secondly, it helps the articulation and analysis of the concept of political action both quantitatively (modes) and qualitatively (dimensions). Thirdly, it offers a malleable explanatory model based on a socio-economic baseline (SES), which is consistent with soft-technological determinism and social-shaping approaches to the techno-political. Finally, the underlying assumption of Verba and Nie’s work is that democracy resides at the interface between individuals, institutions and political organisations. The initial model, based on the explanatory power of individual socio-economics to predict participation (Verba & Nie, 1972), lays the foundations for subsequent work on the importance of group political consciousness, the role of mobilisation agencies and political voluntarism (Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 1995; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978). In fact, the standard socio-economic model is an explanatory base from which to depart in order to find the ‘additional factors’ that shape participation and, as applied to ICTs, online participation. With them, ‘we are interested in these additional social circumstances, attitudes, and social and political structures because they modify the working of the socio-economic model’ (Verba & Nie, 1972: 14).

The participation approach helps evaluate the role of the citizen as a political user of new media, and the political importance of technology at citizen level. ICTs influence the participatory opportunities citizens can and do avail in ‘real life’. Digital resources can thus

re-equilibrate, further skew or have spurious effects on the structure of political equality, and ultimately democracy. Following the participation tradition, and responding to a challenge posed in the existing literature, the focus of the research is explicitly on individuals, and the way, intended as modes and dimensions, in which they adapt and adopt the Internet to participate in the political process, in specific techno-institutional contexts. In short, this research examines the structure, modes and dimensions of online political engagement. Firstly, it makes inferences from the micro-empirical to the theoretical layer regarding the role of the Internet in shaping the structure of political equality. What are the consequences of the Internet for the existing structures of political inequality in advanced industrial democracies? Secondly, this work examines new media political agency, and the interaction of the Internet with offline political dynamics. What is politically new about new media, and why, if at all, does it matter for democracy?

1.4 Data and methodology

Britain was selected as the unit of reference for the study of e-democracy through the lens of participation. This choice was natural, as it descended from reasons of relevance and opportunity. The review of macro, meso and micro literature attested the clear predominance of the United States as a context for the study of e-democracy. The fact that the US is the largest and most developed online political market accounts for this predominance. Furthermore, the electronic democracy discourse, it is argued in Chapter 1, is anchored to a 'democratic deficit' discourse generated in the United States. Although this is no impediment to theorisation, it is necessary to consider electronic democracy in other political settings, where this 'deficit' is arguably less apparent. In many European countries voter turnout is relatively high, parties are weaker than in the past but still enjoy considerable popular support, and citizens are satisfied with the quality of democracy and are not entirely disengaged from the political process. This is clearly the case in Britain. Secondly, one might expect citizens in different countries to differ in terms of their uses of the political Internet. While US users are more likely to be engaged in politics than non-users (e.g. Bimber, 1999), European users, for instance, tend to have lower participatory profiles, as offline generations constitute the participation core of the country (Gibson & Ward, 1999b). In Britain, there is a lack of systematic evidence on citizen engagement with new media for political purposes; the available evidence, however, suggests a relatively ambivalent citizenry (Gibson, Lusoli, & Ward, 2002a; Norris & Curtice, 2004; Ward, Gibson, & Lusoli, 2003). Finally, the electronic democracy discourse is well rehearsed in Britain, a country at the forefront of e-democracy developments in Europe. This makes Britain a theoretically suitable unit of context. Regarding opportunity, being based in Britain gave this author easier access to country-related evidence. Specifically, the author was able to collect and analyse data in the framework of a large research project concerned with the Internet, political organisations and

participation in Britain.² Although similar data was available for the US and other OECD countries,³ the author enjoyed a much higher degree of control over the British data. Of course, the ideal study of electronic democracy according to the theory of participation would entail a multi-country research design, with an over-sample of theoretically significant groups, and a nested longitudinal (panel) component. However, this goes beyond the limited resources available for this dissertation, and for most other individual efforts that purport to examine e-democracy systematically.

The research design consists of a two-level, nested analytical framework (Chapter 6). At the micro level, citizens' online engagement is surveyed and analysed; at the meso level, the role of context to co-shape the dimensions of participation is assessed. The design includes a nationally representative survey of the British population (N = 1972, stratified sample, face-to-face, May 2002). The survey provides information on the extent of citizens' participation online, and their awareness of the political web-sphere (Foot & Schneider, 2002). Furthermore, questions are asked about citizens' *modes* of involvement in offline and online politics, how they interact online with other citizens and political organisations, and about the role of political organisations in shaping participatory opportunities online (Chapter 7). Nonetheless, although the survey yields necessary insights into the online structure of political equality in Britain, closer inspection of the data confirms the limits of large-scale surveys with respect to the assessment of the dimensionality of political participation. Partly, this is due to the limited extent of online political activity, which does not allow for in-depth probing;⁴ partly, it depends on the very nature of survey research, as neither the temporal nor the contextual effects of ICTs can be considered.

Under these conditions, case study research usefully integrates the research design (Collier, 1993; Yin, 1994). Three cases were selected to investigate in depth the dimensions of online participation, whether and how the enabling characteristics of the Internet – high speed, inter-connectivity, interactivity, low cost – interact with the SES model in limited contexts of online political engagement (Chapter 8). The first case considers the earliest example of online deliberation in Britain, a forum of experts run by the Hansard Society (HS) on behalf of the UK Parliament Public Administration Select Committee. The unfolding of discussion in the forum is structure and content analysed over the duration of the experiment (64 participants, November 1999), and a follow-up survey of participants

² 'Internet, participation and political organisations' (<http://www.ipop.org.uk>) funded under the ESRC Democracy and Participation Programme (Grant L215252036). The project, running between August 2001 and December 2003, was directed by the principal applicants Rachel K. Gibson and Stephen Ward. A full, auditable account of this author's involvement is provided in Appendix 6.

³ Respectively through the General Social Survey 2000 computer supplement and the World Internet Project.

⁴ As only 17 % of the British population engage in active online political behaviour, the cost of successive survey waves was prohibitive.

administered at its conclusion. The second case considers young Liberal Democrat party members (LD), and the way they use the Internet to keep in touch with the party and engage in political activities such as letter writing, attending party meetings and public demonstrations. The case features an online survey of membership subscribed to the party e-mail list (N = 288, March 2002). The third case examines the e-activists network of the charity Age Concern England (ACE), a mailing list of supporters engaged in online political activity on behalf of the organisation (N = 208). The selection of the cases follows criteria of relevance and accessibility; these are fully detailed in the methodology (section Cases and their selection, p. 140). The cases selected reflect the modes of participation returned by dimensional analysis of survey data, while the collection of case evidence – design and administration – was undertaken in co-operation with the organisations involved, within the framework of two research projects that the author was involved with.⁵

1.5 Chapter synopsis

Chapter 1 comprises an introduction to the study of online politics and the exploration of the electronic democracy discourse. I argue that the discourse hinders the full development of critical, evidence-based theories of electronic democracy, and therefore needs checking. The discourse of electronic democracy is first defined and then discussed in relation with its historical emergence, its current shape and its implications for empirical research. Special attention is paid to the e-democracy discourse in Britain.

Chapters 2 and 3 constitute the main literature review, where the claims of different approaches to electronic democracy are critiqued. Chapter 2 reviews the macro and meso literature on electronic democracy, assessing the claims of theorisation unfolding across system, archetype and model approaches. Particular attention is paid to the idea of democratic decentralisation and to the new techno-political centres underpinning e-democracy archetypes. The chapter then examines the assumptions of the normalisation camp and its analytical building blocks. Finally, the chapter reviews the claims on electronic democracy that arise from empirical studies of new media impact specifically on the electoral process and party competition. Chapter 3 examines the existing micro evidence on e-democracy nexus, as organised in three main streams: resources, uses and effects. While resources studies build on the ‘digital divide’ debate to examine the democratic nature of access, direct-modelling studies regress Internet engagement on a range of explanatory factors (uses modelling), or regress offline politics, mainly voting, on Internet access and use (effects modelling).

Chapter 4 formalises the research questions set for this work. It then critiques the theory of political participation in order to assess its value as interpretive framework for the study of

⁵ Please see Appendix 6 for a full account of the author’s involvement.

electronic democracy. I trace the early evolution of the theory and devote more attention to the five analytical components of the theory. Firstly, a multivariate relation between individual participation and democracy. Secondly, the assumption of instrumentality of political action. Thirdly, the introduction of sophisticated SES modelling, which is used to disentangle the structure of political inequality. Fourthly, the introduction of aggregate 'modes' of political participation. Finally, the definition of 'dimensions', or styles of political participation. These components, I argue, make the theory of participation a suitable tool for the assessment of electronic democracy claims.

Chapter 5 presents the dissertation's research design, which comprises a representative survey of online engagement in Britain and a case-study component. The survey allows for the collection of data from a wide, representative sample of respondents in Britain. Statistical modelling is based on the theoretical assumptions and analytical routines of the theory of participation. Survey analysis directly leads to conclusions with respect to the Internet and the structure of political equality in Britain. The case study component draws on in-depth case analysis, survey analysis and content analysis. Case analysis refines survey results and provides a deeper understanding of the dimensions of participation, aimed at providing supplementary testing of question two and three, about the political nature of the Internet.

Chapter 6 reports results concerning the structure of online participation in Britain. The chapter comprises three main themes. Firstly, the socio-demographic and political correlates of the British Internet audience are examined. Particular attention is devoted to the British online political domain and to the 'funnel' of access to the Internet and to political opportunities online. Secondly, I examine directly the amount and nature of online participation and online contacting in Britain, and the importance of stimuli and intermediaries for individual engagement. Thirdly, online participation is modelled on SES, technical factors and pre-existing political behaviour, in order to discern the structure of online political inequality into two inter-related components: the digital funnel, discussed previously, and 'accelerating' factors that further explain the uptake of new media for political action.

Chapters 7 and 8 report the results of dimensional analysis. Chapter 7 uses cross-tabulation, factor analysis and dimensional analysis to illuminate the stratified morphology of online political engagement. It examines how and why political activity is engaged in online and identifies the political characteristics of the technology that explain and motivate Internet use for political purposes. Three dimensional poles of political engagement are identified: expediency, synergy and efficacy. The three subsequent sections examine the dimensions underlying the poles, discuss dimensionality in relation to offline engagement and trace the dimensional contours of non-engagement. In Chapter 8, evidence is marshalled from the cases to demonstrate the extent to which the expediency, synergy and efficacy of

online political communication are enhanced – or otherwise – by electronic means. First, I discuss the significance of each case as concerns dimensionality. Then I deal with each dimensional pole and the underlying dimensions. Conclusions are drawn based on the cases regarding the importance of immediacy, synergy and efficacy in the economy of this work, and the meaning of Internet political dimensionality for e-democracy in Britain.

Finally, the conclusions review the results with respect to the three research questions proposed, and more broadly, to the two general concerns guiding this work: what is the democratic nature of new media, and does it match the prevailing, positive discourse on electronic democracy? Overall, the conclusion will speak to the discourse of electronic democracy in Britain, and stress the need to align discourse to practice if the democratic potential of the Internet – the very possibility of electronic democracy – is to be fulfilled.

Chapter 1 - The e-democracy discourse

Science must begin with myths, and with the criticism of myths.

Karl Popper, 1957

One cannot understand the place of computer communication technology without taking account of some of the central myths about the rise of global computer communication systems, particularly those identified by Internet, cyberspace, or the so-called Information Highway ... Myths are important both for what they reveal, in this case a genuine desire for community and democracy, and for what they conceal, here the growing concentration of communication power in a handful of transnational media businesses.

Vincent Mosco, 1998

1.1 Introduction

This chapter frames the political consequences of new media in relation to the electronic democracy theme. In the first two sections (1.2 and 1.3), I discuss the emergence of 'electronic democracy' as a primary lens for the understanding of the political effects of new media, and the political conditions that favoured its emergence. In the next two sections, I document the historical origins of an e-democracy discourse during the cold-war period in the United States (section 1.3.1). In section 1.4, I describe the surfacing of the e-democracy discourse in Britain during the 1990s and assess the role of different players in its construction. I then discuss the local and global nature of the discourse (section 1.4.2), with specific reference to the role of the new media industry (section 1.5). The concluding section evaluates the capacity of the academia to shape the discourse by means of critical counter-discourses and discusses the semantic resilience of the concept to critical understanding (1.6).

1.2 Online politics and electronic democracy

The socio-political consequences of each 'new' means of communication have received extensive academic attention (Ankey, 2003). There is wide consensus that radio and television changed the way politics was interpreted, by enabling the broadcast diffusion of political information and the amplification of ongoing political debate. The political import of radio before and during the second World War has been widely recognised (Craig Douglas, 2000; Ryfe, 1999). The Kennedy-Nixon televised duel had profound consequences for the practices of production and consumption of political communication, hence for the wider polity (Druckman, 2003; Schudson, 1995: 116-119). Today, new ICTs present new challenges to researchers and policymakers. Not only has Internet access almost equalled access to traditional media in industrial democracies (Bimber, 2003; J. E. Katz & Rice, 2002;

Norris, 2001a), thus engendering familiar debates on content, distribution and ownership of political communication channels (McChesney, 1999; McChesney, Wood, & Foster, 1998). ICTs offer new participatory opportunities directly to citizens, groups and institutions. Internet demographics crossed with participation data show that users actively participate in political life and vice versa, political participators consistently use ICTs (Bimber 1999). Citizens and political groups use ICTs to obtain political information, to discuss political issues, to vote in binding elections (Solop, 2001), participate to community life (Bryan, Tsagarousianou, & Tambini, 1998) and to engage in direct political action (Walch, 1999). Due to the global diffusion of ICTs, online participation transcends national and institutional borders; it sometimes engenders novel practices of social and political action (McCaughey & Ayers, 2002; Meikle, 2002). Bruce Bimber argued that new media are an accelerator of pluralist politics, as a variety of interests are organised by electronic means that would not otherwise coalesce. More generally, ICTs prime change in the way politics is organised, discussed and lived: it amplifies ongoing change in the political process (Agre, 2002), creates virtual sounding boards for citizens' voice (Wilhelm, 1999) and nurtures cultural pluralism (Papacharissi, 2002). Online politics encapsulate the growing complexity of contemporary politics. Indeed, new media are intertwined with recent trends of socio-political development in advanced industrial democracies regarding growing individualisation and the rise of non-traditional forms of engagement, and the ways in which these are conceptualised in political science (Bennett, 2003b; Norris, 2002b). Therefore, due to the increasing prevalence of online politics and to the fecund implications it bears for political theory, the study of online processes presents serious challenges to political analysts.

In a seminal review of research on ICTs and politics over two decades, Bill Dutton noted that 'teledemocracy is a general concept covering a *variety of visions* of how electronic media could be used to facilitate more direct and equitable participation in politics' (Dutton, 1992: 505, italics mine). Since, the expression 'electronic democracy' has gained momentum to define these broad visions (Hagen, 1997a: 13-20). Political change qua ICTs has seldom been identified as a change in the practice of governance, hence information politics or information polity (Bellamy & Taylor, 1998). Much more often, it has been framed as a change of perspective in democratic theory, hence 'electronic democracy'. Since the inception in the 70s of political studies of 'new new media', democratic theory and visions have become the stepping stone for different explanations of online politics and, circularly, most often its conclusion. The theory and (best) practice of e-democracy has become the Holy Grail of the enquiry on the political Internet.⁶ This is a 'story about how ever smaller,

⁶ Or possibly the Holy Ghost, as compared to the wide interest in the information economy, an important driver of the discourse (Couldry, 2002), and in the information society (Selwyn, 2004).

faster, cheaper, and better computers and communication technologies help to realize, with little effort, those seemingly impossible dreams of democracy and community with practically no pressure on the natural environment' (Mosco, 1998: 59). E-democracy entails an overarching vision of popular empowerment that conceals as much as it discloses the true promises of the technology. The 'information superhighway', Kubicek and Dutton argued (1997), is a metaphor at the time simple and ambiguous.⁷ New media help people make sense of the complexity of modern life, reconcile individuality with longing for community and transform the 'messy complexities of history into the pristine gloss of nature' (Mosco, 1998: 59), thus meeting people's needs and expectations of control over their own life, power and a longing for community. Finally, the myth transcends history, being the product of an incontrovertible rupture with the past – the coming of the Information Age. The 'end of history', predicted by Francis Fukuyama with the end of ideology (1989), rather comes along as the end of geography.

1.3 E-democracy and political momentum

Electronic democracy originates in the context of a convergence between supply and demand of democratic potential in a specific marketplace of ideas. On the one hand, there are new technological developments, and their vast communicative power. According to leading scholars of technology, three laws govern Internet evolution regarding information processing, connectivity and data transfer. Moore's law, predicting that computing power (the number of circuits on a computer chip) will double every 18 months has proved remarkably accurate over the last 40 years. According to Metcalfe's law the value of a computer network is proportional to the square of the numbers using it. Hence, each new user contributes geometrically the value of the network. Gilder's law predicts a threefold increase in data bandwidth every year for the next 25 years, thus ensuring that more Moore's and Metcalfe's laws, implying a huge increase in the circulation of data on the network, do not strain a limited physical infrastructure (Lovelock & Ure, 2002: 351-352). As a result, new media users are today at the centre of an unprecedented flow of information, increasingly acting as producers rather than consumers of an increasing knowledge base (Lyman & Varian, 2000). Information stored on a range of supports – digital, optical, analogue, magnetic – is distributed and communicated primarily through the Internet (Lyman & Varian, 2003). Although the growth of user base follows more traditional rules, as there are Malthusian limits to the numbers who can access the network, audience growth has followed the S-shaped path of technology diffusion typical of traditional media (Bimber, 2003; J. E. Katz & Rice, 2002; Norris, 2001a). However, the curve of Internet diffusion is steeper, as it has moved faster than previous technology including radio and television form

⁷ On the complexity of the 'Information Technology Revolution' see Castells (Castells, 2000: 61-79).

ideation to popular fruition (Stowers, 1999). The concurrence of digitalisation, compression and miniaturisation, boosted by impressive growth rates of consumer markets, and NASDAQ market performance led industry experts to talk about a 'new economic paradigm and the burgeoning of a knowledge society founded on the new technology and mode of production'.⁸ The 'new economy' is based on four macroeconomic pillars: high rates of sustainable growth, low levels of inflation, the prevalence of ecologic sources of growth, and *ceteris paribus* stable employment rates (OECD, 2000). As extraordinary as it might sound, this implies that the Internet-enabled economy might have prevented the failure of post-war social democracy to implement sustainable re-distributive policies.

Concurrently, many observers have stressed the urgent need for new modes of citizens' participation in politics. There are different aspects of this 'democratic deficit'. Decreasing rates of voting turnout, declining confidence in political institutions (Dalton, 1988), decline in the membership of voluntary associations (Putnam, 2000) and other worrying symptoms of citizen disengagement with representative institutions – parties, pressure groups and trade unions (R. Katz & Mair, 1994) – have turned the attention to the causes and the possible solutions to this civic debacle (Bennett, 1998; Putnam, 2000). More worryingly, the 'crisis of democracy' is not limited to the nation state, but affects the health of transnational civil society and institutions (cf. Offe, 1996). One of the culprits is broadcast media (Norris, 2000a), especially television, which is seen to obstruct the articulation of increased political information into increased political knowledge, a process Russell Neuman has defined the 'paradox of mass democracy' (1986).

The Internet has met the rhetorical needs of the 'democratic deficit' debate from its very inception. Kees Brants has defined this convergence as 'a distinctive coincidental and interdependence between socio-political developments leading to up what has been dubbed by many 'politics in crisis' and the different generations of ICT' (1996). A dominant discourse has thus started to unfold, which is based on the convergence of a 'paradigmatic shift in society, due to the introduction of the new technologies, and a urgent need for democratic restructuration' (Hague & Loader, 1999). An agenda of claims and concerns regarding electronic democracy is set and pursued by governments, political oppositions and corporate interests. With governments, 'oppositions and lobbies [are] adopting both the rhetoric and the policy prescriptions which seem to them to be appropriate' (Bellamy & Taylor, 1998: 4). The resulting discourse is function of and reflexively functional to ICTs policy agendas of Western polities and supra-national entities – the EU, various UN agencies, the WTO and the World Bank.

⁸ Carlo De Benedetti, Olivetti CEO, lecture given at the London School of Economics on 15 February 2000.

1.3.1 *The cold war and the discourse in the US*

Arguably, the techno-political encounter between democratic crisis and the new media saviour has been in the making for a long time. From its very inception, both the media and scientific research have framed the Internet as a hyper-political technology. The founding myth of the Internet dates back to the cold war, in 1969, when the distributed structure and redundant transmission protocols of the seminal Internet were designed in the United States by the military for the military to resist a nuclear attack.

Of all the technologies built to fight the Cold War, digital computers have become its most ubiquitous, and perhaps its most important, legacy. Yet few have realized the degree to which computers created the technological possibility of Cold War and shaped its political atmosphere, and virtually no one has recognized how profoundly the Cold War shaped computer technology. Its politics became embedded in the machines — even, at times, in their technical design — while the machines helped make possible its politics. (P. N. Edwards, 1996: II)

The Internet, the discourse goes, would have allowed the transmission of information and the preservation of the military chain of command-and-control under conditions not viable for traditional Information, Communication, Command and Control systems (ICCC). While US political leaders bear most of the responsibility for the public expression of the idea, the making of the discourse, Edwards argues, is largely the product of cold-war popular discourse.

Cold War popular culture grasped the intimate connection between the closed world and the cyborg. Closed-world drama, in film and fiction, repeatedly dramatized them together, articulating the simultaneous construction of the material realm of technology, the abstract realm of strategy and theory, and the subjective realm of experience' (P. N. Edwards, 1996: VII)

Thus Ronald Reagan rode the (radio) waves to proclaim that

Technology will make it increasingly difficult for the state to control the information its people receive. ... The Goliath of totalitarianism will be brought down by the David of the microchip. (Ronald Reagan, speech at London's Guildhall, 14 June 1989)⁹

That it was economic crisis, industrial and labour market rigidities and a crisis of political legitimacy rather than information technology relapse and loss of political control that lost the USSR the cold war is an unimportant detail.

The denial of history is central to understanding myth as depoliticized speech because to deny history is to remove from discussion active human agency, the constraints of social structure, and the real world of politics. According to the myth, the Information Age transcends politics because it makes power available to everyone and in great abundance. The defining characteristics of politics, the struggle over the scarce resource of power, is eliminated. (Mosco, 1998)

Although recent research has corrected this founding myth (Abbate, 1999), the rhetoric of 'democratic decentralisation' has persisted unabated. Later leaders were no less enthusiastic about the democratic potential of new media. President Clinton was asked about

⁹ Cited in Kalathil and Boas (2003: 1)

the 'creative destruction of the Internet', whether it was 'about to hit government', and if next decade was 'going to be as revolutionary and creative a period in American politics as was the period between the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the Constitutional Convention in 1787'. Reportedly:

President Clinton: I strongly agree that the Internet and information technology has the potential to strengthen our democracy and to make government more open, efficient, and user friendly I think that the potential payoffs are enormous, and will only increase as many Americans gain access to the Internet, and as Internet technology becomes more versatile and powerful The Internet of the 21st century will not only be a global electronic marketplace – it may also become the town square. (William J. Clinton, Q&A with Stateline.org 26 January 2000)¹⁰

Vice President Gore was one of the drivers of the National Information Infrastructure (NII), soon to become the Global Information Infrastructure. 'Gore's long held conviction that new technology would be critical to securing the USA's role as a leading nation in the global economy has been consistently augmented by the belief that ICTs also provide the means for enhancing democratic and civic life' (Bellamy & Taylor, 1998: 65). Gore expressed Reagan's 'the microchip is power' discourse in a more sophisticated, forceful way:

In the past, all computers were huge mainframes with a single processing unit, solving problems in sequence, one by one, each bit of information sent back and forth between the CPU and the vast field of memory surrounding it. Now, we have massively parallel computers with hundreds – or thousands – of tiny self-contained processors distributed throughout the memory field, all interconnected, and together far more powerful and more versatile than even the most sophisticated single processor, because they each solve a tiny piece of the problem simultaneously and when all the pieces are assembled, the problem is solved.

Similarly, the GII will be an assemblage of local, national, and regional networks, that are not only like parallel computers but in their most advanced state will in fact be a distributed, parallel computer.

In a sense, the GII will be a metaphor for democracy itself. Representative democracy does not work with an all-powerful central government, arrogating all decisions to itself. That is why communism collapsed. (Gore, 1994)¹¹

The discourse instead survived the end of the cold war, and thrived. Presidential candidate Ross Perot, the former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and, to a lesser extent, President Bill Clinton during the 1992 electoral campaign (Hacker, Howl, Scott, & Steiner, 1996). According to Clinton's adviser Dick Morris,

The Internet offers a potential for direct democracy so profound that it may well transform not only our system of politics but also our very form of government ... The

¹⁰ Also see the remarks of Dick Morris, Clinton's communication adviser, on the democratic power of ICTs (Morris, 2001).

¹¹ Gore's enthusiasm and support for the Information Superhighway backfired during the 2000 presidential campaign. Gore's claim to have been functional in creating the Internet – 'During my service in the United States Congress, I took the initiative in creating the Internet' (Gore, 1999) – was framed by the national media and the Bush campaign as a claim to have 'invented the Internet' (Wiggins, 2001) although Vint Cerf and Bob Kahn – the very 'inventors' of the Internet – publicly endorsed Gore's statement (Cerf, 2000).

result will be a system of governance that pays closer heed to public views and that tethers more closely to the opinions of the people. Whether this greater public participation in decisions of government is desirable or not, it is inevitable as the Internet over-comes the logistical barriers that required delegation of decision-making to elected representatives in far-off Washington, D.C. (Morris, 2001: 1033-1034)

1.4 The e-democracy discourse in Britain

Britons followed suit. In 1995, the Labour party officially set their policies for the Information age in 'Communicating Britain's future', a white paper on new information technologies. The paper – the British response to the NII and to the EU Bangemann report (Bangemann, 1994) – was overtly optimistic as to the importance of ICTs for the future of the nation.

We stand on the threshold of a revolution as profound as that brought about by the invention of the printing press. New technologies, which enable rapid communication to take place in a myriad of different ways across the globe ... will bring fundamental changes to all our lives.

The information society can create enormous opportunities for economic, social and democratic regeneration. It can help to make our society more open and accessible. It can empower people in a world where, increasingly, knowledge is a source of power... Labour will ensure that the information society is liberating, not alienating. (Labour Party, 1995: 4, 17)

The priority attributed to ICTs by Labour, second only to the welfare state in 1995, was not hard to explain. In a leader of the Financial Times, Kevin Brown noted that 'Information fits neatly into the modern political image being crafted by Mr Blair. And it is an area in which Labour can meld its growing enthusiasm for free markets with a clear role for government planning' (K. Brown, 1995). The values associated with 'New Public Management' characterised Labour's vision of the Information Age Government, in ways that 'at the rhetorical level, at least – avoided 'going back' to the old 'public service' values that had characterised the British state during the last period when Labour had been in office' (Chadwick & May, 2003: 288). Reinvention of the party, reinvention of government and reinvention of democracy appear to go hand-in-hand.

Just a few months later, the media featured the Labour party conference as the first online party conference. On the occasion, Graham Allen MP, then shadow minister for media and broadcasting, argued that 'more people will have access to a political party conference than ever before, and an opportunity to participate in an online debate about the potential of digital democracy to revitalise British politics' (NA, 1995). Geoff Mulgan, former director of Demos, a prominent Labour Party think-tank, is a keen techno-enthusiast. In various speeches and writings he extolled the virtues of new media to radically change the hierarchical political process, promoting a 'lean democracy' (e.g. Adonis et al., 1994).

Although Tony Blair is personally a techno-phobe,¹² he advanced the discourse in many occasions.

Information is the key to the modern age. The new age of information offers possibilities for the future limited only by the boundaries of our imaginations. The potential of the new electronic networks is breathtaking – the prospect of change as widespread and fundamental as the agricultural and industrial revolutions of earlier eras. (Blair, 16 April 1998, quoted in Akdeniz, 2000)

My point is this: this technology is revolutionising the way we work, the way we do business – the way we live our lives. Our job is to make sure it is not the preserve of an elite – but an Internet for the people. We have to democratise the new economy. We must ensure that it is open to all. (Blair, 2000)

... globalisation is a fact and, by and large, it is driven by people. Not just in finance, but in communication, in technology, increasingly in culture, in recreation. In the world of the Internet, information technology and TV, there will be globalisation. (Blair, 2001b)

Tony Blair's speechwriting is closely informed by Labour's policy position since the early 90s, as the themes and tone of the two scripts, five years apart, are remarkably similar: 'revolution' and its 'taming', and the importance of the 'people' feature prominently in both the speech and the 1995 white paper. These aims consolidated in September 1999 with the creation of the first e-Envoy, operating within the Cabinet Office, with the specific (and daunting) remit to provide universal access to ICTs to all UK citizens who want it by 2005 (UK Online, 2001). Within the remits of the e-Envoy, participation looms large via e-democracy, again framed as 'power to the people'. Asked about his plans to further e-democracy, Tony Blair reportedly responded:

I have asked my right hon. Friend the President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons to chair a new Cabinet Committee on e-democracy ... "To consider ways of strengthening the democratic process by engaging the public and their elected representatives through the use of the internet and other electronic means." (Blair, 2001a: Column 1056W)

Although ministerial speech is more cautiously balanced on the democratic potential of new media (Chadwick & May, 2003), the same elements of the discourse – empowering technology and importance of the people – can be traced again. Comparing old and new media control in authoritarian states, Alex Allan (first E-commerce minister), remarked

I remember how effective it was when the military leadership in Poland cut all telephone access to prevent internal or external opposition knowing what was going on. That has become much harder now, thanks to advances in technology. We now have a position where journalists can file stories direct using a solar-powered personal computer and satellite phone. And the internet has enabled many people access to information that their Governments would wish to suppress. (Allan, 2000)

As to the new media,

¹² In Tony Blair's own words to the Liaison Committee of the House of Commons, on 8 February 2005 (<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/commons/story/0,9061,1408212,00.html>). The Prime Minister had no public e-mail address until late in 2003 (<http://www.theregister.co.uk/content/6/31142.html>).

The internet has unleashed huge new opportunities for people to take more control over their lives. And I suspect that will be the biggest driver of political change. E-democracy may come about in quite unexpected ways. (Allan, 2000)

The following DTI E-commerce minister, Douglas Alexander:

We must make citizens feel democratically empowered beyond their few seconds in the polling booth. We have already taken some steps to make e-democracy a reality in the UK ... I believe that it is now time to set all this activity into a clear policy framework and put e-democracy on the information age agenda. Government should set out what it means by e-democracy and how it intends to use the power of technology to strengthen democracy. (Alexander, 2001)

In the Foreword to a consultation paper prepared by the e-envoy on e-democracy, e-voting and e-participation, the Rt. Hon Robin Cook, Leader of the House of Commons declared:

Information and communication technology (ICT) provides a means by which public participation can be increased, and we hope that with an active government policy the potential benefits can be maximised. e-Democracy offers new ways of participating and seeks to complement rather than replace existing structures. The aim must be to give individuals more choice about how they can participate in the political process. (E-envoy, 2002: 5)

The Liberal Democrats (LD) did not trail far behind. The 1997 Manifesto claimed that the party would 'improve access to information technology and the Internet ... ensure that everyone in Britain can have access, either individually or through a wide range of public access points, to a nationwide interactive communications network by the year 2000' (Liberal Democrats, 1997). Partly, the commitment to new media was due to the personal interest of Paddy Ashdown, then the LD leader. The LD support of ICTs, Ashdown affirmed, is linked to the party concern with liberty values: 'freedom of Information is central to the philosophy of the Liberal Democrats, and I am convinced that this core belief is the reason why the Party has embraced e-mail and the Internet with such alacrity' (Ashdown, 1997: 7). Since, the LD have been at the forefront of Internet adoption and democratic innovation amongst British parties, trade unions and pressure groups (Ward, Lusoli, & Gibson, 2003).

1.4.1 Bipartisan support for e-democracy

It thus seems that discourse on ICTs is permeated by the 'new left' and 'third way' political rhetoric – as it were a third way 'technological fix' (cf. Street, 1992)¹³ – both in the UK and the US. As Lipow and Seyd argued, 'techno-populism', the technological vanguard of anti-partyism 'is designed to address the multiple economic and social changes within capitalist society after the end of the cold war' (Lipow & Seyd, 1995: 297). In fact, the current political momentum builds on political dynamics of bipartisan support for new media rather than confrontation, as documented both in Britain (Bellamy & Taylor, 1998: 68-72)

¹³ Whereas the UK rhetoric concerns both the social and the economic aspects of the divide, the 'US discourse is firmly anchored directed at the economy' (Couldry, 2004). The citizen vs./as consumer theme features prominently in EU discourse on the information society, alongside technological determinism, threat/opportunity of ICTs and market dominance (Goodwin & Spittle, 2002).

and in the US (M. A. Smith & Kollock, 1998: 23-24). The transformation brought about by ICTs, Triebwasser argues, 'increases the possibilities of freedom in ways which both the left (who would emphasise human expression) and the right (who would focus on easy business entry and the operation of the free market) would appreciate' (1998: 179). However, bipartisan support might rather be the effect of dynamics of political contention than of a genuine evaluation of the democratic potential of new media. Discussing the potential of ICTs to enhance democracy, Arterton and colleagues note that 'leaders and statesmen seek to reinforce their own power by stimulating citizen participation. In the main, broadened participation has been purportedly promoted in order to accomplish certain desired policies or to secure political power' (Arterton et al. 1984: 29). Technologies in general, in particular ICTs, occupy an increasingly central position in left-wing party manifestos in both pre-electoral and electoral times in Britain, the United States and other OECD countries. Gary Chapman, an acute observer of the connection between technology and politics, quotes from an interview to Ralph Nader, the Green Party candidate for the 2000 Presidential elections in the US, to expose this link.

"There are certain technologies that are very important to human beings and the planet that are subordinated in every way to the glamorous and lucrative technologies," he said. He contrasted solar power with the mania over the Internet and telecommunications. "It would be far better for the world if solar technology were promoted more than telecommunications technology. Which is the most important technology? Solar tech doesn't get any press, any public support, Clinton and Gore don't fly to 'Solar Valley,' and so on," he said. (Chapman, 2000)

Although the rhetorical discourse of ICTs and democracy has evolved thematically over time, it has remained a constant feature in the media landscape, regardless of the governing party (Solomon, 2000).

1.4.2 Local and global dimensions of the discourse

These rhetorical dynamics also unfold in more limited political contexts, such as Amsterdam's Die Digitale Stad (DDS), Bologna's Iperbole and Santa Monica's PEN community networks (Bryan, Tsagarousianou, & Tambini, 1998). In Amsterdam, the political climate of 'crisis of democracy' in connection with a left-wing administration has favoured experiments in local electronic democracy (Brants, Huizenga, & vanMeerten, 1996; see also van Dijk, 1996). DDS was initiated by 'Amsterdam-based people with a media and culture background ... working at the politico-cultural centre 'De Balie' ... in association with members of the Dutch hackers' organization, Hacktic, in order to start a social experiment with new digital media' in the context of the 1994 elections (van Lieshout, 2001). The Iperbole civic network in Bologna was designed and inspired by a coalition of the city (then) left-wing political administration and city intellectuals (cf. Tambini in Bryan, Tsagarousianou, & Tambini, 1998; Guidi, 1998). Santa Monica's Public Electronic Network (PEN) was initiated by a left-wing joint council-community effort, based on a clear open-

access, two-way communication ethic (Docter & Dutton, 1999; Schmitz, Rogers, Phillips, & Paschal, 1995).¹⁴

In fact, the discourse is global, and touches other advanced industrial democracies such as the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Canada, Italy and Australia, developing democracies and autocracies alike. A Council of Europe research report, drawn from a survey of elites in EU countries, extols the 'democratic potential' of the new communication and information services (COE, 2001). The OECD report *Citizens as partners* highlights the importance of the Internet for information and consultation (OECD, 2001). The democratic implications of the Internet have been discussed in relation with democratic transition in eastern-European (e.g. Kedzie, 1995); with the 1997 democratic transition of Hong Kong (Fung, 2002); with repression in communist China (Kalathil & Boas, 2003), especially at the time of the Tien-an-Men square crisis (Conklin, 2003). More widely, the impact of ICTs has been assessed in relation to world democratisation and world development (e.g. Norris, 2000a, , 2001a), both of which are sectors in 'permanent crisis'. According to a World Bank report:

[ICT] is creating economic, social, and political empowerment opportunities for poor people in the developing world. Direct and independent access to information about prices and exchange rates can transform the relationship between poor producers and middlemen. Connectivity through telephones, radio, television, and the Internet can enable the voices of even the most marginal and excluded citizens to be heard, promoting greater government responsiveness. ICT can thus help to overcome poor people's powerlessness and voicelessness even while structural inequities exist in the distribution of traditional assets such as education, land, and finance. (Cecchini & Shah, 2002).

These techno-political dynamics, spanning from the local council to advanced industrial polities to less-developed democracies, help construct a shared vision of the significant momentum of new media, and their intrinsic socio-political value.

1.5 The role of the new media industry in the construction of the discourse

Although government and oppositions at local, national and global level are largely embedded in the e-democracy discourse, it would be naive to believe that any discourse concerning technologies unfolded independently of industrial interests (Hoff, 2000). The basic idea is that the construction of electronic democracy is not limited to the 'linear' electoral circuit between elites and the people. Rather, new media business constitutes a third interested party in the discourse. By this interpretation, the introduction of a new technology and its adoption are shaped by three main actors involved in the process: the producers and consumers of the technology, and the institutional framework of production/consumption (Hoff, 2000; see also van Bastelaer & Lobet-Maris, 1998: 13). As for the discourse around ICTs (Hoff, 2000) and specific early conception and implementations of digital cities (van Bastelaer & Lobet-Maris, 1998), the discursive relations between these actors: political

¹⁴ The next chapter explores in more detail the rhetoric of electronic community. For comments relevant to point made here see Loader & Keeble (2003) and Bakardjieva & Feenberg (2002).

participation, policy regulation and market relations shape the overall discourse about the democratic potential of new media. Computer corporations like IBM, NTT and Microsoft, telecommunication corporations (e.g. AT&T), governmental and supra-national regulatory agencies such as ITU, the World Bank and OECD (Cecchini & Shah, 2002) share in the construction of electronic democracy and its discourse (see e.g. Couldry, 2004). Tambini surveyed the interplay of strategies in different contexts that made the civic networking a key trend in the 1990s:

The expansionist plans of government information departments; pressure from new communitarian / civil society think tanks; lobbying by telecommunications providers; EU initiatives; and the aims of accountability, transparency and efficiency associated with 'New Public Management' in local government (Tambini, 1999: 307).

The role of governments is pivotal in channelling change. 'By either stalling, unleashing or leading technological innovation [the state] is a decisive factor in the overall process, as it expresses and organizes the social and cultural forces that dominate in a given space and time' (Castells, 2000: 13). Sometimes, however, governments are driven into change by the sheer force of the discourse, fuelled by industrial efficiency and citizen participation concurrent discourses. Regarding efficiency, Goodwin and Spittle argued that the widespread perception, amplified by media, industry and academic hype that we are entering an 'information revolution' makes it 'politically untenable for governments to be seen to be doing nothing' (Goodwin & Spittle, 2002: 226). It was argued that 'information age industries are promoting a new public interest around the notion of a steep change in communications capabilities which is advanced under the banner of the 'information superhighway'' (Bellamy & Taylor, 1998: 133).

The rhetoric of the information age is both forming around this new industrial complex and being formed by it. It is a powerful rhetoric, suffusing all sectors of society, economy and polity, as it promotes the uptake of technologies ... governments cannot be immune from these issues. Indeed, they increasingly perceive technological innovation to be central to their own 'reinvention'. (Bellamy & Taylor, 1998: 4)

In Britain, it is argued, the government may be hostage to an oligopolistic IT industry, as 'government-IT industry relations have become dangerously unbalanced' (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, & Tinkler, 2004). In turn oligopoly hinders government ability to steer successful and effective IT operations – including e-government and e-democracy projects. Bipartisan agreement on deregulated info-tech policy – and the ensuing freedom of action for big players, ascribed above to 'pure' dynamics of political contention, may have deeper roots. As Beth Noveck has noted,

[F]oes of media regulation in the public interest have cropped up in the United States on the Left (in the name of freedom of speech) and on the Right (in the name of privatisation and efficiency), and in Europe, where traditional public broadcasting and its ornate regulatory system have come under increasingly vocal attack. On both Continents, proponents of privatisation argue [for] the end of spectrum scarcity. (Noveck, 1999: 4)

As concerns citizen participation, it was convincingly argued that the idea of a multimedia superhighway is legitimated to a great degree in the policy arena by the rhetoric of expanding democratic participation (Calabrese & Borchert, 1996: 251). Again, this is not the net result of purely political dynamics. Mansell's analysis, back in 1993, demonstrated that the rhetoric of expanded participation and universal access does not minimally meet with how public networks are designed, that is to the advantage of corporate actors and large user groups (Mansell, 1993). Barber and colleagues argued that 'the Internet is following the paths of radio and television by moving quickly from rhetoric about democracy and the public good to a practice defined by merchandising and entertainment' (Barber, Mattson, & Peterson, 1997). Unsurprisingly, the more people are using the Internet, the more hardware, software and connectivity applications can be marketed (e.g. Oracle, IBM), proprietary hardware and software standards enforced and / or reinforced (e.g. Microsoft), network position profits reaped (e.g. AOL), and more contents sold (e.g. MSN). In fact, the 'participation' rhetoric is fuelled by direct and mediated corporate speech. In the preface of a major survey research on e-democracy, the NTT Data Corporation affirms,

At NTT Data Corp. we believe that the next issues in electronic government are the broadening of channels between citizens and governments in both directions, and the improvement of facilities by which both sides can cross the bridge between them. These facilities will allow citizens to participate in the process of proposing and implementing policies. We believe that the next generation of electronic government will be the social infrastructure through which citizens can form consensus about the nature of the society that we should have, and to formulate plans through which it can be achieved. At NTT Data, we call this type of activity "e-Democracy". (NTT, 2002: 3)

These aims resemble the states aims of IBM's Institute for Electronic Government. The mission of the centre is to 'focus on issues including public policy as it relates to technology strategy and execution, economic development and education, online citizen and business services, and e-democracy'.¹⁵ Microsoft's Bill Gates wrote no less than a best seller to make the case for the information revolution and its benign social consequences (Gates, Myhrvold, & Rinearson, 1996). Later, Microsoft funded a 1.4 billion USD project aimed at improving learning opportunities, including the Gates Library Initiative to 'bring computers, Internet access and training to public libraries in low-income communities in the United States and Canada'. As it happened in the past for the construction of physical and communication infrastructure, private interests are promoting access to ICTs.

1.6 Resilience of the e-democracy discourse

The discourse of the information superhighway, or more recently the digital divide has a distinct 'economics' contour, which limits the development of 'social-inclusion' counter-discourses. Nick Couldry's analysis of the digital divide discourse suggest that 'it's the (new) economy, stupid' (2004). As it happens, new media hype is more difficult to challenge

¹⁵ From <http://www.ieg.ibm.com>.

than traditional media rhetoric due to the persistent novelty of new media. Livingstone noted that ‘a considerable difficulty with new media is precisely that they are not there. Researchers cannot research them, users cannot use them and policy makers cannot gauge their significance’ (Livingstone, 1999: 61). As knowledge about new media developments is in the hands of producers, critical counter-discourses are not as convincing as they should be. This is not to claim that the e-democracy rhetoric goes unchallenged. I will argue in Chapter 1 that new media radical theorists, lawyers, hackers and practitioners expose and challenge both the ideology and the praxis of structure, content and discourse of the network (Agre, 1998), the dynamics of proprietary code-productions (e.g. GNU, FLOSS and other open source movements) and the uneven distribution of valuable content in cyberspace (Sunstein, 2001). These three grounds serve as platforms to launch assaults on the dual rhetoric of the Information society and its electronic democracy offspring. Ironically, the role of the critical social scientist (see Livingstone, 1999), the computer-expert-turned-intellectual (e.g. Schuler, 2001), and the intellectual computer-expert (Agre, 2003) are once again crucial to a proper understanding of new media. The Internet ‘expand[s] the field and capacities of the intellectual as well as the possibilities for public intervention’ (Kellner, 1999: 110). In quite the same way, however, the Internet also favour the formation of a new information elite, a class whose ideology and praxis are substantially different from the mainstream information-consumer class, and integral to the new technological system (Luke, 1991). For intellectuals, cyberspace is the equivalent of pre-modern Latin, which insulated them from the common folk. Integrated learned classes are extra-territorial, in that they inhabit a space that is beyond reach of ordinary people. The Internet brings ‘the members of the knowledge classes close to each other’ (Bauman, 1999: 124, 130).

Finally, semantic dynamics make electronic democracy remarkably resilient to critical analysis. Electronic democracy is

the one most often used by those dealing with implications of computer technology for the political process ... To some extent, ‘digital democracy’ would be a more precise term. Other synonyms are also possible: ‘Cyberdemocracy’ ..., ‘Virtual democracy’, or ‘Information Age democracy’ ... However, it is now the term ‘electronic’ which has become to imply ‘the application of interactive technology’ itself. (Hagen, 1997b)

The two forming words are in fact both intensely connotative and largely denotative terms. ‘Electronic’ denotes every aspect of modern life, either as strictly defined in the Oxford English Dictionary¹⁶ or in the common acceptation of the term. As Street notes, ‘the key development of IT has been the ability to convert different forms of communication into a single medium – an electronic pulse’ (Street, 1992: 161). Referring to everyday life, the radio, Play Station, television and computer are just some electronic devices.. Despite this

¹⁶ Sub 2. ‘Of or pertaining to electronics; esp. of something operated by the methods, principles, etc., of electronics’ OED Second Edition 1989.

ample denotation, 'electronic' is as a proxy for a convergence and multiplicity of other concepts such as multimedia, interactivity, connectivity and, albeit improperly, digitalisation.

The same is true for democracy.¹⁷ Central to political theory, democracy embeds dense concepts such as institutions, political participation, deliberation, collective decision, popular will and community.¹⁸ Fulfilling Churchill's prediction, albeit unperfected democratic polities have scored much better than any other form of government, specifically in relation with not waging war against each other, having a clean sheet as regards famine and not perpetrating large scale abuse or violence upon their populations (Warren, 2002: 677). From an epistemic perspective the government by the people is at least as good as any other way to fulfil people's preferences. Where one assumes 1) a large polity, and 2) that every individual is even marginally more likely to understand public policy right rather than wrong, then different decisional procedures – elitist, pluralist and participatory – are equally capable of allocating societal values according to the preferences of the population (List & Goodin, 2001). Furthermore, democracy is the moral benchmark for the political systems of the twentieth century, both empirically and epistemically. The democratic ethos reaches beyond the limits of its definition, as authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, with the word, also claim legitimacy and recognition (Collier & Levitsky, 1997; Sartori, 1965).

The resulting concept, electronic democracy, reflects an extremely complex set of issues. Ironically, adding electronic to democracy expands rather than limit its semantic field: democracy is never diminished by electronic means; rather it is expanded, extended, improved. The concept of democracy seems to incur further 'conceptual stretching' by electronic means, yet not as classically predicted by Sartori, its '*denotation [being] extended by obfuscating the connotation*' (1970: 1041). Rather, democracy is stretched and expanded by further specification, its being or becoming electronic, rather than increased generalisation. That is to say, the rhetoric of e-democracy also operates at the semantic level. Such a broad semantic extension has reached the status of a self-fulfilling prophecy, or worse of the un-testable assumption of a unified, positive rhetorical discourse. Or a myth, according to Roland Barthes's classic definition (Barthes, 1972). As a consequence, the question is not easily asked: is the Internet bad for democracy?

1.7 Conclusions

In this chapter, the political consequences of new media have been framed according to electronic democracy theme. It was argued that the study of online politics has identified as a change of perspective in democratic theory (e-democracy) rather than as a change in the

¹⁷ This does not want be a comprehensive discussion of democracy, it serves only to illustrate the extension and intension of the concept.

¹⁸ 'Democracy', in Dictionary of the Social Sciences. Craig Calhoun, ed. Oxford University Press 2002. Retrieved 11 June 2003 from Oxford Reference Online, <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t104.000434>>

practice of governance (e.g. information polity). The e-democracy discourse encapsulates a vision of epochal revolution via new media and the prospect of imminent popular empowerment – local, national and global. The discourse is largely rhetorical, and builds principally on political, structural and semantic dynamics unfolding in the cultural domain. As such, the discourse is more the product of largely collusive dynamics than of any instrumental alliances. The discourse is as old as the Internet, and originated in the United States. A window of opportunity opened, where politics in crisis met with the new media saviour on both sides of the Atlantic, a convergence between a ‘paradigmatic shift in society, due to the introduction of the new technologies, and a urgent need for democratic restructuring’ (Hague & Loader, 1999). Today, the e-democracy discourse is promoted by left-wing political entrepreneurs in strange alliance with the ‘dark’ forces of high-tech capitalism, mainly amongst academic quiescence. In this chapter, I examined the link between quasi-public and private interests in constructing the discourse (Howard, 2003).

However, it was also argued, the discourse does not hinder the political transformative potential of the new technology. On the contrary: it transfigures the political, contentious potential of the Internet into a democratic potential tout court. Nonetheless, the discourse is an impediment to the realisation of the alleged democratic benefits of the Information Revolution, in as much as democracy is best served by political equality than by unspecified popular empowerment. Two decades ago, Christopher Arterton and colleagues warned against the strong temptation to ‘phrase the quest for expanded political participation in broad terms of political crisis in the legitimacy of the American political system ... a more responsible and empirically valid rationale should be staked upon the age-old pursuit of political equality’ (Arterton, Lazarus, Griffen, & Andres, 1984: 28; see also Blumler & Coleman, 2001). A decade later, Robin Mansell demonstrated that the rhetoric of expanded participation and universal access did not minimally meet with how public networks were designed, in fact to the advantage of corporate actors and large user groups (Mansell, 1993). Today, it is equally urgent to critique the transformative potential of the Internet and to ask questions directly about the Internet’s consequences for citizen participation and political equality. I address the first issue in the following two chapters and the second issue in the three empirical chapters of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 - Macro and meso approaches to e-democracy

What matters above all is the power of the network to connect anyone to anyone, to circumvent anything, to short-circuit any intermediary, and therefore supposedly to destroy all hierarchies of whatever sort ... This technological teleology, this electronic scatology is, we are given to understand, the information revolution to end all revolutions.

Philip Agre, 1999

2.1 Introduction

It was argued that the idea of electronic democracy stems from the positive answer to the rhetorical question: are new media democratic? In contrast with the discourse, research brought to bear on electronic democracy is mixed. Until 1999, primary literature was limited in scope and consistency, secondary and review works virtually absent. As Russell Neuman noted, the body of knowledge on e-democracy stemmed from novel interest rather than being firmly rooted in the social sciences (1999). The literature's 'lack of comprehensiveness and unidisciplinary focus, [was] often insufficient to grapple with the complexities of online political life' (Wilhelm, 2000: 9). However, the empirical study of e-democracy has evolved considerably since 1999. There is today a large body of knowledge on Internet and politics, encompassing the work of scholars of rhetoric (Gurak, 1997; Gurak & Logie, 2002), political theory (e.g. Barber, 1998a), political sociology (e.g. Jordan, 1999) political communication (Davis, 1999; Davis & Owen, 1998; Norris, 2001a) and a score of other disciplines.¹⁹ Due to the rapid accumulation of evidence, fragmentation has replaced scarcity as the main obstacle facing critical evaluation. Increasingly, the challenge is to define the shape and nature of the intellectual object electronic democracy before assessing its properties. This chapter offers a way to systematise existing empirical evidence by framing it through three main approaches: macro, meso and micro (section 2.2). The following sections reviews macro accounts of e-democracy based on the concept of 'democratic decentralisation' (2.3), focussing specifically on the democratic potential of the internet (2.4) and on e-democracy archetypes (2.5). Section 2.6 reviews the macro obstacles facing electronic democracy. In the last three sections, I introduce the *normalisation* critique of macro approaches, loosely based on a sceptical stance toward the democratic potential of new media (2.7). I then map in greater detail the common theoretical ground of a variety of meso studies under the normalisation rubric (2.8), and review the empirical evidence of normalisation in two main areas: online electoral campaigns and online parties (2.9).

¹⁹ For an overview see <http://www.esri.salford.ac.uk/ESRCResearchproject/links.html>.

2.2 Three approaches to electronic democracy

It is commonly argued that research on politics and the Internet has progressed through three phases: a euphoric, utopian first phase, balanced by dystopian, apocalyptic claims, finally followed by a 'normalisation' backlash, where techno-realists take a sceptical stance on the political value of ICTs (Wilhelm, 2000). While this is accurate, the picture is however more fine-grained. Scholarly research on electronic democracy has in fact evolved through three main approaches. The first approach is systemic – theoretical (macro level of analysis). Developed since the inception of the Internet (Hiltz & Turoff, 1993), it considers the Net as a system of signs articulated at different levels: architecture, protocols, content and discourse (Agré, 1998). Macro theorists are concerned with the consequences of ICTs for the polity along the lines of decentralisation of knowledge that the new media allow. Three main visions, or archetypes, were proposed with respect to the democratic value of the Internet. These draw on models from political theory: direct online democracy, or teledemocracy, virtual communities and online deliberation. The second approach to electronic democracy, commonly defined as the 'normalisation backlash', rests on the analysis of institutional agency (meso level of analysis). It has two main components. The first is a counter-discourse of 'politics as usual', which is sceptical of the democratic potential of the Net; the second is the idea that electronic democracy is better tested on the grounds of a Schumpeterian model of political competition. Different 'normalisation' scenarios were theorised, as the interaction between the Internet and the political process is more complex than a baseline Schumpeterian model suggests. The third approach is individual – inductive (micro level of analysis). It is concerned with citizens' use of the Internet to participate in the political process, and the impact of the Internet on levels of democratic participation. Drawing on a variety of data and statistical techniques, micro studies examine the impact of Internet access and use for declining levels of citizen engagement.

Analytically, the three approaches reflect the emphasis that social change theories place on factors explaining long-term change in political participation (Norris, 2002b: 19-31). Macro approaches draw on modernisation theories, whereby social change – defined as rising standards of living, the growth of the service sector and expanding educational opportunities – weaken existing institutions and hierarchical organisation in favour of more decentralised, individual-based modes of engagement. Meso approaches draw on agency theories' attention to traditional mobilizing organisations – institutions, political parties, trade unions and pressure groups – and how they recruit, organise and engage activists. Finally, micro studies build on the theories of citizen participation. interest with 'the role of social inequalities in resources like educational skills and socio-economic status, and motivational factors like political interest, information, and confidence, in explaining who participates' (Norris, 2002b: 19).

While these three approaches are analytically distinct with respect to object of inquiry, methodology and heuristic logics, they chart the historical evolution of Internet technologies, contents and audiences. Over three decades of existence, the Internet has evolved from punch-card, mainframe machines connected through dedicated lines, to command-line, monochrome screen computers connected via 14.4 baud lines to thumb controlled, multimedia, wireless gadgets, prevalent today. In other words, the three approaches assume different configurations of new media protocols, different Internets. Since its creation in 1969, these Internet bundles have come to represent distinct cultural institutions, present at the time/space of the construction of the economic, the social and the political (Agre, 1999). The Internet medium was and still is the message, in that different Internet bundles have different politics, economics and socionomics (Kling, 1999; Pool, 1983) In turn, these have shaped theorisation. Today's Internet, it is claimed, is a 'general purpose technology' (Lovell & Ure, 2002), a bundle of underlying ICTs in a single cultural artefact that exists, socially and politically, independent of its carriers, layers and protocols. Nonetheless, its evolution has engendered analytically different answers to the persistent question: 'what is the democratic value of the technology?' The next section examines macro answers to this question.

2.3 The democratic Internet

The first approach to electronic democracy is systemic in focus and largely theoretical. It considers the Internet in its entirety, as a system of signs articulated over several domains: structure of the network, technical characteristics of the medium, circulation of information (Agre, 1998). At the end of the twentieth century, we lived through a historical interval 'characterised by the transformation of our "material" culture by the works of a new technological paradigm organised around information technologies' (Castells, 2000: 28). The transformation of society come through the evolution of technological innovation and diffusion, occupational structure, the basis of economic value, information flows and in the expansion of symbols and signs as markers of modernity (Webster, 2002). According to Castells and Webster, knowledge, traditionally defined as locally structured patterns of meaningful information (see for instance Geertz, 1983), becomes in post-print culture 'more dynamic and adaptive to rapidly changing social and technological environments ... characterised more by fluidity than immutability' (Cropf, 1994: 4). New media lead 'towards growing decentralisation and toward fragmentation of the audience ... a system that is coming to have technical characteristics that [are] conducive to freedom' (Pool, 1983: 5). The degrees of freedom new media afford force a turbulent shift from traditional society, as technologies, rules about their use and the nature of the entities that make the rules are under consistent strain (Braman, 1994: 358). A reversal is taking place between the 'laws' of old

and new media, intended both as regulatory regimes and rules of order (Dutton, 1996; Lessig, 1999; Lessig & Resnick, 1999).

Theoretical knowledge, decentralisation, freedom and new rules of order are also the general starting point for the discussion of electronic democracy. 'Much as 'information society' implies a rupture with industrial capitalism and a new social formation, electronic democracy suggests new citizenship practices. Whether such a break exists is an open question' (Friedland, 1996: 185). Macro theorists start from the assumption that in as much as theoretical knowledge is socially decentralised there exists the possibility of new citizenship practices, hence electronic democracy. As Pool argued, 'freedom is fostered when the means of communication are dispersed, decentralised, and easily available, as are printing presses or microcomputers' (Pool, 1983: 5). New media contribute to the redistribution of knowledge and 'soft' power in a society with a communication system that is 'in transit' (Nye, 1999), whose 'fundamental laws are usually not well understood' (Pool, 1983: 6). Where the question is asked whether 'the transformation of the physical, public space of mass communication into the private, electronically based encounter through ... personal computers will alter our social ethos' (Willson-Quayle, 1997: 231), new media offers a solution to the mass media failure to articulate availability of theoretical knowledge into political, 'pragmatic knowledge'. New media may thus provides a solution to the 'paradox of mass politics' described by Russell Neuman. The paradox is based on the observation that no change in citizens' political sophistication and trust in democratic institutions has followed the largely increased availability of formal education and political information in the polity (see also Dalton, 1988; Inglehart, 1999; Neuman, 1986). In as much as the paradox rests on the mass-media, as Dalton suggests, and on the difficulty of articulation of systemic abundance into personal gain, new media may provide a solution.

Evidence seems to support this thesis, as Internet 'users' are moving toward the centre stage of the 'information revolution'. As predicted by Lievrouw, the shift is from a media environment that is 'informing', based on information consumption of traditional media to one that is 'involving', based on information seeking and communication in interactive environments (Lievrouw, 1994). Berkeley economists estimated that the world's total yearly production of information increases exponentially (Lyman & Varian, 2000). Three main trends emerge from the study. The first is the 'paucity of print', as paper information ranks well below magnetic and film supports. Second is the 'dominance of digital' content, as most of the available information was 'born' digital. The third, remarkable trend is the 'democratisation of data' as individuals create and store increasingly more unique information (Lyman & Varian, 2000). Of course, new media dynamics are much more complex than a transition from a *push* to a *pull* mode of information exchange. Unlike television and radio, the Internet conveys via a single channel the message and the

tool for message production, enabling a multiplicity of 'communicative actions' and 'active communications', which reach beyond the boundaries set by the 'transmission model', and favour the articulation of societal knowledge. In this respect, it has been argued that ICTs are ambiguous technologies (Bellamy & Taylor, 1998), and that the Internet has a 'vulnerable' political potential (Blumler & Coleman, 2001). Not only ICTs are malleable technologies, they also enable multiple uses and a multiplicity of user behaviours. As Lovelock and Ure have noted (2002), new ICTs have reached the status of 'general-purpose technologies' which can be put to a multiplicity of uses (cf. Agre, 1998).

2.4 Political characteristics of the Internet

Hans Enzensberger and Ithiel Pool, two acute analysts of information technologies, arrived at similar conclusions on the role of the new media from very distant political economies. Critical of industrial media development, Enzensberger detailed the characteristics of the new emancipatory media: decentralised control, every receiver as a potential transmitter, interaction of communicators, a political learning process, social control of the media and media production, and a mobilising potential (Enzensberger, 1970).²⁰ An advocate of media market freedom and competition, Pool praised the new electronic media as they 'allow for more knowledge, easier access, and freer speech than were ever enjoyed before' (Pool, 1983: 251). In other words, the Internet favours the decentralisation of information and communication from traditional mass media 'centrality'. The domain of institutional politics is yet another realm where these decentralising dynamics unfold (Keohane & Nye, 1999; Sassen, 2000).

In a classic study, political scientists Abramson, Arterton and Orren identified six characteristics of ICTs that make them relevant to the political process. The first concerns both the increased quality and availability of political information to citizens and policy makers. Secondly ICTs enable greater control over information by the receivers. Thirdly, time and space are lesser constraints upon information and communication than they used to be. In fourth place, ICTs make narrowcasting increasingly convenient. Then, they favour the decentralisation of use and to some extent production of content, although ownership may remain largely concentrated in the hands of the few. Finally, and most importantly, communication processes are truly interactive (1988: 32-66). These characteristics, it is argued, directly impact on the nature of democracy in advanced industrial democracies. Hiltz and Turoff first noted, in 1978, the importance of ICTs in de-centralising patterns of organisational communication.

If you change the communications structure of an organization, you inevitably change also the nature of the decision-making process within it and the kinds of decisions that

²⁰ Cf. Street (1992: 177-197).

are likely to result. Ultimately, you change the form of the organization itself (Hiltz & Turoff, 1993: 41)

Equally, changes in the communications system affect democracy as social organisation, because 'if the structure of communication changes what is communicated, then theories of democracy cannot afford to overlook this process' (Street, 1992: 173). 'The telecommunication revolution and microcomputer technology now provide the potential for the development of decentralised social structures more in line with our concepts of individual freedom' (see also Gore, 1994; Triebwasser, 1997). In rejecting Russell Neuman's pessimism about the 'mass audience', Aikens argued that the Internet favours the translation of the social into the public domain. 'A new public has already emerged as a result of computer mediated communication, [and] this public is beginning to recognise itself' (Aikens, 1996: 5), which might constitute the cornerstone of a revitalised democracy. The effects of new media characteristics on the political process contribute to an agenda of claims on the 'development of a new variety of democracy'.

The Information Superhighway has provided an electronic landscape for a reinvented civil society. The Internet's unregulated cyberspace and the multiplication of channels will allow information to bypass the state. Democratic participation will be enhanced through interactivity. Moreover, global communication, in which all citizens access the same informational resources, may be realized. Thus, the technological revolution encourages freedoms of belief, conscience, speech, movement, association, and identity. But will proliferating channels and the Internet actually increase political information to empower citizens? (Wheeler, 1996: 518)

Even more recently, the consequences of the Internet for democracy were summarised as follows:

- Interactivity, as users may communicate on a many-to-many reciprocal basis.
- Global networks, as communication is not fettered by nation-state boundaries.
- Free speech, as net users may express their opinions with limited state censorship.
- Free associations, as users may join virtual communities of common interest.
- Construction and dissemination of information free from official review or sanction.
- Challenge to official perspectives, as state/professional information can be challenged
- Breakdown of nation state identity, as users begin to adopt global and local identities. (Hague & Loader, 1999: 6)

Therefore, the democratising potential of the Internet lies not only with the decentralisation of production of 'other' knowledge, but also with the connection of different social-knowledge groupings to central information and to each other, effectively decentralising dialogue along with knowledge (Cropf, 1994: 2). Stephen Barnett argued that traditional media have failed to improve on the four main components of the polity: a knowledgeable citizenry, rational debate, representation and participation. Thus 'infinite information' is a remedy to lack of political sophistication; distributed communication can favour rational debate, narrow-casting and 'pull' dynamics can favour citizen political

participation, while universal access might improve representation circuits (Barnett, 1997). Damian Tambini identified pointedly the techno-political dynamics at work. According to Tambini, new media provide 'channels of access to the main transaction of democracy: information provision, preference measurement (voting), deliberation, and will formation / group organisation' (1999: 306 ff.). In terms of information, new media make available to individual citizens cost-effective, customisable, searchable information. This responds to the need of socially multi-semantic information for the functioning of multicultural, affluent consumer societies where the 'public' is negotiated rather than set. This, in turn, represents a possible solution to the problem of complexity of modern polities. Secondly, new media can be used to measure citizen preferences to an unprecedented extent, and not only to modernise and enhance the existing polling techniques of elections, polls and referenda. The public can agree democratically on referenda question wording prior to the election, and be involved interactively in the many phases of the electoral process, rather than endure Rousseau's curse to be sovereign on Election Day only. In addition, the use of conditional response, natural language and preference-degree techniques could enhance the measurement of citizen preferences. Thirdly, new media offer a discursive space for citizen deliberation on common issues, a point of encounter between citizens, elected officials and civil servants for the informed discussion of civic issues. Lastly, new media allow for the precipitation of common will, organisational structure and group identity around shared political interests. ICTs in fact reduce the costs of mobilisation; enhance network logistics and organising, and allows for the articulation of non-mainstream political views.

2.5 Archetypes of e-democracy

Most macro works, however, draw on political theory to formulate internally coherent, self-sufficient archetypes of electronic democracy: online direct democracy, or teledemocracy, virtual communities and online deliberation. According to this set of views, cyberspace is where geographic and institutional boundaries can be reconfigured, 'diasporic utopias' eventually flourish (Pavlik, 1994) and, importantly, the problems of scale in democracy can eventually be met (Saco, 2002). Archetypes of electronic democracy thus examine the transformation of the political fabric via ICTs in relation with 'new' centres: the citizen, the community and social discourse. Tele-democrats underline the importance of individuals vis-à-vis the establishment, as new media foster a more direct link between the citizens and government. Communitarians stress the importance of new media in creating and sustaining community bonds, which in turn are the cornerstone of an empowered public. Theorists of deliberative democracy claim that new media favour the formation of deliberative settings that resemble a Habermasian public sphere. Common to the three approaches is that all assume that new media hold a potential to weaken traditional political hierarchies and restructure the representative nexus. Of course, there are both areas of

overlap and residuals from the encounter of the three archetypes, while at the same time they do not exhaust all possible e-democracy positions.²¹ However, they embrace a great part of early electronic democracy theorisation. The division proposed here builds on the distinctions between representative, plebiscitary and deliberative democracy suggested by Barber (1998a); between communitarian, liberal-individualistic and deliberative approaches to electronic democracy proposed by Dahlberg (2001a); and between teledemocracy, cyber democracy and electronic democratisation proposed by Hagen (1997a; , 1997b).²²

2.5.1 *Teledemocracy*

The teledemocracy movement started approximately twenty years ago, aiming at achieving more and more direct citizen participation via ‘new communication technologies’. In subsequent stages, teledemocracy was used to refer to radio (talk-back and call-ins), telephone (teleconferencing), television (interactive and cable) and eventually computer-assisted democracy (Donk & Tops, 1995; Laudon, 1977). The approach developed through a long phase of experimentation with combinations old and new media to link citizens to decision-makers (Arterton, 1987; Arterton, Lazarus, Griffen, & Andres, 1984; Becker, 1981; Dutton, 1992; also, Fishkin, 1992). *Qube*, for instance, was a commercial cable television system that operated between the early 1970s and the mid-1980s in Columbus Ohio. Subscribers could respond via a remote control to questions – including public issues – which were raised in a variety of TV programmes (Becker, 1981). Teledemocracy had strong backing both in political circles and in political theory circles concerned with direct democracy. Teledemocracy was promoted by key American leaders, including Ross Perot,²³ Newt Gingrich and, to a lesser extent, Bill Clinton, and championed both by industry pundits (e.g. Alvin Toffler, John Naisbitt, Esther Dyson) and by academics engaged with teledemocracy experiments, most notably Ted Becker, Amitai Etzioni and Benjamin Barber (Becker, 1981, , 2001; Becker & Scarce, 1987).

The tenets of the teledemocratic vision are straightforward, and encapsulated in Becker’s dictum: ‘power back to the people’ (Becker, 1981). ICTs, it is claimed, lead to a democratic revolution through the direct empowerment of the individual vis-à-vis institutions. This vision is based on a libertarian, marketplace conception of the political process, where fixed preferences are expressed freely – according to the freedom of information principle – and negotiated in the political marketplace of ideas in as ‘fair and

²¹ For instance cyber-libertarianism (see Angell, 2000).

²² Dahlberg’s camps overarch the entire spectrum of electronic democracy. Barber’s work unfolds around the same areas from an institutional viewpoint, while Hagen devotes more attention to different technical arrangements.

²³ Perot, presidential candidate in the 1992 US election, proposed the Electronic Town Hall as a way of linking citizens to decision-makers. His idea received wide resonance in the press and political science circles. Scott London compiled an exhaustive bibliography on the reception of his proposal (London, 1994).

efficient way as possible' (London, 1995). Teledemocracy is the use of ICTs to 'promote, improve, and expand a. direct, pure democratic forms such as town meetings, initiative and referendums; b. the citizen informational and feedback functions of indirect democratic forms such as republics' (Becker & Scarce, 1987: 264). Teledemocracy also entails the possibility of immediate – instantaneous and direct – decisions on issues, rather than the ponderous process of selection of representatives and articulation of preference to the political system (Becker, 1981). Thus, advances in telecommunication provide a solution to the problems of size, time, knowledge and access that had marred the possibility of direct democracy in mass, industrial democracy (Street, 1997: 164-166). New media make possible the realisation of democracy by all at all times. According to Becker, it permits 'much higher levels of democracy at greater distances and includes much greater numbers of citizens than ever before possible' (Becker, 2001: 39). Above all, ICTs make it possible to generate political outputs that better respond to citizen's preferences by improving civic education, open access to government information, and the possibility to conduct 'electronic town meetings' (Barber, 1984: 273-307).

In other words, ICTs provide a technical fix for the techno-political difficulties of direct and quasi-direct democracy (Budge, 1996).²⁴ In the teledemocratic model, new media remove the cost barrier, set on both sides of the 'rationally ignorant' citizen. On the one hand, the cost of gathering and processing political information using new media is marginal; on the other, new media promote greater accountability of the political process, by applying pressure on policymakers due to increased transparency and potential access to politically sensitive information.²⁵ This vision is sometimes pushed to its institutional and technical edge. Smith argued that ICTs make it possible to dispense with the complexities of the electoral process, and the application of ICTs power to a 'structurally antiquated' system of political communications. He suggests a compelling scenario where

each voter/citizen would have access to an interactive public affairs system which would allow individuals to read all government documents and reports from a central videotext computer; to enter any written expressions of fact or opinion into the system for reading by other citizens, record and transmit their opinions on videotape for storage in central public affairs videotape data bank; and to select and play video presentations from other citizens and officials entered in the same manner. ... The proposed system would eliminate any need for a legislative branch of government (S. A. Smith, 1984)

Teledemocracy, especially of the 'revolutionary' kind, attracted wide criticism. Lipow and Seyd contended that 'techno-populism' represents a conscious politics or ideology of anti-partyism, especially strong in the United States (Lipow & Seyd, 1995), which threatens

²⁴ Quasi-direct where policy proposals need to be preliminarily ratified by a popular referendum before they are passed onto representative bodies for further discussion and promulgation.

²⁵ The Internet discloses an unprecedented amount of information about political leaders to 'lay' citizens.

rather than reinforces party democracy. It has also been suggested that the 'direct democracy' model proposed by teledemocrats might degenerate in two forms of plebiscitarianism: government by the uninformed majority to the detriment of politically relevant minorities (e.g. Abramson, Arterton, & Orren, 1988), and manipulation of the majority by a resource-rich, technologically aware elite (Laudon, 1977). It was argued that teledemocracy is never representative of the general population. Fishkin examined 'America on the Line', one of the largest experiments in teledemocracy, where 300,000 listeners registered their opinions after George Bush's State of the Unions address (Fishkin, 1992). He found that the respondents of this self-selected telephone sample are not representative of the public, represented by a random postal sample, in terms of socio-demographic traits, political attitudes and, most importantly, opinion on the Presidential address. Hence, 'results presented on the broadcast as the voice of the people' (p. 15) were in fact the voice of an interested minority based on 'instantaneous, off-the-cuff responses of millions of ordinary citizens ... a kind of plebiscitary democracy' (Fishkin, 1992: 15) that eludes informed, prolonged and face-to-face debate. While new media offer the potential to analyse and manage societal complexities to an unprecedented degree according to general principles of rationalism, efficiency and efficacy, democracy as a social process remains very much undefined: its aims and means are open-ended and negotiable, its outcomes by definition complexly uncertain (Zolo, 1992).

2.5.2 *Virtual community*

Whereas teledemocracy is underpinned by concrete experimentation with cable interactive television, virtual community builds on a 'mythical' past of local engagement via alternative media such as local 'free radio', the community TV movement and local radical press of the 60s and 70s (Loader & Keeble, 2003; Tehranian, 1990). In general, virtual community describes the collective use of the Internet by variously dispersed communities such as city dwellers, members of trans-national social movements, chat-room participants and professional networks. More precisely, virtual community refers to 'social aggregations that emerge from the [Internet] when enough people carry on those public discussion long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace' (Rheingold, 1994: 5). According to Smith, the three central elements of the definition are network-shaped aggregation, a critical number of participants and sustained interpersonal relations (M. A. Smith, 1992: 2,12). Therefore, whereas teledemocracy proceeds from the availability of information in a polity that enables perfect political competition, virtual community is concerned with the possibility of the formation of a collective, and ensuing collective action from a dispersed set of individual aims. On the one hand, communitarians argue, new media will dispense with the spatial and temporal limitations of real life, making

proximity available for the creation of stronger community. On the other, the interactive, 'many-to-many', reciprocal nature of the Internet provides a powerful incentive for the creation of collective goods, as it enables collective action (Rheingold, 1994: Ch. 9). The Internet helps establish links, bonds and bridges between / within communities (Norris, 2002a), engendering the creation of trust, norms and reciprocity in turn favourable to the transformation of the personal into the collective (Wellman, Quan Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001), and ultimately the social into the political (Fernback, 1997; M. A. Smith, 1992). The provision of selective electronic incentives, as individuals discover common interests and opinions with online community frequentation might thus provide a solution to the paradox of 'collective action' within the analytical boundaries of limited contextuality and the small-scale proportions of the communities concerned.

Scholars of online community examine networking groups bound by specific geographical or functional referents. These include political communities as diverse as local residents (e.g. Tambini, 1999), neighbourhoods (e.g. Wellman, 2001), and advocacy, public interest and journalism networks (Friedland, 1996). These networking practices, afferent to the broader idea of community networking, are designed to 'explore the potential transforming qualities of the new ICTs for community development, economic regeneration, democratic renewal and social support' (Loader & Keeble, 2003: 5). Overall, communitarian theorisation on electronic democracy coincides with the study of the development, structure and democratic benefits of space-bound community networks.

2.5.2.1 Community networks and electronic democracy²⁶

Whilst different in many respects, early community networks had in common a structure based on point-to-point connectivity, text-based interfaces and the availability of public access points. Above this baseline, networks varied relative to various criteria concerning their genesis, functions, structure and funding (Guthrie & Dutton, 1992; also see Law & Keltner, 1995). In terms of ethics community networks of the 70s and the 80s represent a continuation of free radio, community TV and neighbourhood press initiatives of the previous decades, the 'continuation of the idea of using new media to provide local content, often made by citizens themselves, to (re)create a social link and to offer a place for free expression (van Bastelaer & Lobet-Maris, 1998: 5). The common principle is that 'only local political, civic, business, and education leaders working in cooperation can bring people and technology together in time to capture the competitive and civic advantages that the telecommunication revolution makes available' (A. Coe, 2000: 9). Since 1995, the expansion of Internet access, the advent of the web and the graphical browsers and the establishment of integrated community technology centres updated the point-to-point text-

²⁶ Various terms are used, sometimes interchangeably: networked communities, smart communities, virtual communities, civic networking and wired cities.

based protocols and the public access point model (see Abbate, 1999: Ch. 6; see Quaterman, 1994).²⁷ However, although traditional ‘community networking’ and recent ‘community informatics’ have different historical and epistemological nuances, they broadly cover the same conceptual domain, a ‘practice associated with the use and adoption of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet to influence the social, cultural and economic development of community structures and developments’ (The Encyclopaedia of Community, quoted in Loader & Keeble, 2003: 23).

A number of empirical studies examines the socio-political importance of community networks. An influential RAND report described ‘the context of increasing numbers of “civic networks” emerging nationwide’ as a potential counterpoint to the inequality of network access in the United States, in four complementary manners, regardless of user socio-demographic background (Anderson, Bikson, Law, & Mitchell, 1995). Community networks enhance social integration by supporting interpersonal relationship and local community building. They serve an important information resource function, as individuals and groups can access, manipulate and distribute information relatively cheaply. They facilitate the formation and restructuring of public interest organisations, which in turn benefit society. Finally, they promote greater efficiency and increased responsiveness of government institutions (Law & Keltner, 1995). According to their administrators, the political benefits being realised through the networks include access to previously unavailable government information; improved access to government; educational benefits and computer literacy; direct electronic access to public officials; and the creation of a new sense of community (Molz, 1994: 62-63). In addition to these benefits, Cathy Bryan and colleagues argue that community networks will:

1. Make it easy for citizens to respond and participate.
 2. Favour new organizational possibilities through publishing and discussion groups.
 3. Create a new anarchic political community undermining territorial and sectional interests.
 4. Challenge received wisdom through active discovery of information and interactivity.
 5. Remove distorting filters from mediators-elimination of media bias.
 6. Increase efficiency of service provision.
- (Bryan, Tsagarousianou, & Tambini, 1998)

A review of about 1600 academic sources, aimed at discovering the import of new media for economic, social and democratic regeneration in community settings identified civic participation as a key area (Loader & Keeble, 2003: 7, 14-17). This was confirmed by a review of 30 evaluation projects aimed at assessing the benefits 94 community networks and 170 technology centres against a range of political, social and economic indicators (O’Neil, 2002)., Theories for measuring the impacts of these projects fall in one or more of five areas:

²⁷ This roughly coincides with the launch of the NII in the US and the invention of the Mosaic browser.

- Strong democracy: increasing democratic participation via the association of citizens.
 - Social capital: social networks, norms and trust facilitate coordination and cooperation.
 - Individual empowerment: participation opportunities in a digitised society (access and skills).
 - Sense of community: community involvement and commitment to geographic communities.
 - Economic development: use of ICTs to encourage economic activity.
- (O'Neil, 2002: 78-79)

Overall, 21 % of the studies are concerned with strong democracy, 29 % with social capital and 49 % with empowerment. Additionally, 32 % deal with sense of community, and 39 % with economic development.²⁸

In summary, the communitarian project emphasises a democratic decentralisation via ICTs based on locality. While there are differences between individual projects that are related to different aims and resources (Molz, 1994; Tsagarousianou, Tambini, & Bryan, 1998), common points can be discerned. The benefits of new media encompass the increase in education and availability of civic information, and public knowledge as a result; improved accountability of public officials through interactive, citizen-initiated dialogues; the acquisition by citizens of new media skills; and the creation of more integrated local communities because of sustained networking and the reinvigoration of non-profit agencies. Finally, a public-ownership, public-use ethos characterises the community networking movement (Calabrese & Borchert, 1996: 260), associated with the 'working with' paradigm, shared by 'ingenuous individual visionaries' at the service of underserved communities and their agents (Molz, 1994: 60). Community networking underscores the importance of 'working on the network' and 'free' software, and the pivotal role of computer professionals – most notably Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility, but also smaller expert groups such as the WebGirrrls and the Electrohippies – groups of apocalyptic rather than integrated intellectuals (Eco, 1994) for the making, or rather the hacking, of communitarian electronic democracy. 'Their understanding of these critical technologies compels them to accept greater responsibility and their engagement with the world should be raised – as concerned citizens – to greater levels of visibility and appreciation and practice' (Schuler, 2001: 54).

2.5.3 Online deliberation

The starting point of the deliberative camp is John Mill's idea of 'government by discussion', whereby people come together, online, as a public. Online deliberation defines 'any practice of interactive communication in which actors in a democracy seek to affect the decisions of one another by influencing beliefs about politically relevant facts, values, concepts, or interests' (Applbaum, 1999: 26). Common interest – that is a commonly shared conception of the public good – is formed anew at the time of deliberation, as it neither derives from the negotiation of individual interests nor is it generated through societal

²⁸ Computed from table 1, pp. 85-87 and table 2, pp. 89-91.

networks. Rather, collective choice depends on a transparent process of rational deliberations taking place in public. Unlike representative democracy, where the central motif is informational transparency, the question being ‘what can we know?’, the issue of ‘conversation transparency – what can we see and say for ourselves – is the essence of [deliberative] enquiry’ (Noveck, 1999: 1).

The deliberative perspective is as old as the teledemocratic and communitarian positions, and it shares their portrayal of new media – then cable teleconferencing – as a tool for enhanced tele-access. Discursive spaces were built into early teledemocratic experiments (see Arterton, Lazarus, Griffen, & Andres, 1984) and community networks (e.g. Tambini, 1999). But whereas the teledemocratic aim was to count heads, and the aim of community networkers was to create political links, the remit of the deliberative camp is to ‘hearing voices’ (Arterton, Lazarus, Griffen, & Andres, 1984; London, 1994). The rhetorical loci of teledemocrats and virtual communitarians were the Town Hall and the community, the locus of online deliberation is the public square (Bentivegna, 1998). Applbaum argued that online deliberation is the best expression of the democratic characteristics of ICTs.

If the Internet were asked to facilitate only voting, it would not need to be interactive. If we were expected to provide for merely bargaining, it would need to be interactive only to the extent necessary for conducting negotiations. Democracy, properly understood, requires technologies that support forms accessible to citizens of different perspectives and opportunities for active and regular interchange, all governed by norms of mutual respect and openness (Applbaum, 1999: 31).

As Fishkin put it, ‘if the technology can be harnessed to return deliberation to the mass public, then a qualitatively new kind of democracy may be possible’ (Fishkin, 2000: 24).

The study of online deliberation has described a parabolic trajectory. It started in the 80s as the study of deliberation (Arterton, 1987; Arterton, Lazarus, Griffen, & Andres, 1984; Fishkin, 1992), continued as the study of the public sphere in the 90s (e.g. Dahlberg, 2001a; e.g. Fang, 1995; Ó Baoill, 2000; Schneider, 1997), recently to return to the analysis of deliberation (Fishkin, 1999, , 2000; Iyengar, Luskin, & Fishkin, 2003)

Nonetheless, normative and procedural models of democracy have prevailed in informing empirical research (e.g. Dahlberg, 2001b; e.g. Fang, 1995; Ó Baoill, 2000; Schneider, 1996, , 1997). Habermas’s theory of the public sphere is a common starting point for the examination of the deliberative value of new media, as it provides a broad ‘model of idealised public debate’ (Ó Baoill, 2000: 1).²⁹ Online discursive spaces, it is claimed, are the modern locus of ‘intelligent criticism of publicly discussed affairs’ (Habermas, 1992: 98), which are separated from the influences of other spheres such as the state, the economy and the church. Online fora ‘reflect citizens’ increasing propensity and capacity to organize, debate and act within a political “cybersphere” and without the goal of engaging with

²⁹ All studies reviewed include at least a cursory assessment of the debate on the Habermasian public sphere, e.g. Bentivegna (1998); Dahlberg (2001a, 2001b); Papacharissi (2002).

government' (OECD, 2001: 59). In *The power elite*, Mill formulated four conditions for the coalescence of sound 'public opinion': a balance between those who talk and those who listen; the diffuse, immediate possibility to reply to others' opinions; that opinions can be acted upon; and that public opinion be free from authorities' control (Mill, 1956).³⁰

As well, these discursive spaces are beyond the boundaries of purely private domains, such as the 'intimate sphere', the 'free flow of commodity relations' and the 'sphere of moral and religious conscience' (Benhabib, cited in Ó Baoill, 2000: 3).³¹ Cyberspace thus is the twenty-first century equivalent of nineteenth century literary groups meeting in coffee houses and salons that, according to Habermas' account, were functional to the development of political discussion groups. With the evolution of the Internet from bulletin boards and USENET groups to newspapers' talk-back boards, Google discussion groups, alternative media portals, and more recently weblogs, numerous spaces for online deliberation have become readily available (Coleman & Gøtze, 2001, Ch. 4). Research has focussed on as different referents as the Minnesota e-democracy experiment (Dahlberg, 2001b), a single website such as Slashdot (Ó Baoill, 2000), the election to the ICANN board (Fishkin, 1999); all messages from one-year discussion on the alt.abortion USENET group (Schneider, 1996, , 1997); and a cross-section of posts to USENET political groups (Bentivegna, 1998; K. A. Hill & Hughes, 1997) and web-based political fora (Tsaliki, 2002).³² A number of criteria have been proposed to distinguish different types of online discussion and their potential to fulfil the ideal. A line is drawn between regimes of generic but unregulated conversation, based on the principle of anonymity vs. regimes of specific but regulated discussion founded on participants' accountability (e.g. Fishkin, 1999; Noveck, 1999). According to Papacharissi,

[a] new public space is not synonymous with a new public sphere. As public space, the internet provides yet another forum for political deliberation. As public sphere, the internet could facilitate discussion that promotes a democratic exchange of ideas and opinions. A virtual space enhances discussion; a virtual sphere enhances democracy. (Papacharissi, 2002: 11)

Similarly, Schneider refers to Habermas's distinction between the informal and the formal public sphere (Schneider, 1997: 40-41). The former consists of the 'third places, 'free spaces' and contexts of micro-mobilization 'which represent the primary opportunity of citizens to converse with other citizens' . The latter identifies decision-oriented deliberation in institutional settings, structures to 'generate cooperative solutions to political questions': One may think of a number of intermediate positions between the 'informal' and the

³⁰ Habermas quotes Mill's conditions in the conclusions to the 'The structural transformation of the public sphere'.

³¹ However, this separation is controversial, and accounts for most of the criticism of the Internet as a system separated from commercial, governmental and even religious influences.

³² For yet different units see Benson (1996), R. Davis (1999) and Wilhelm (1999; , 2000).

'formal' value of the Internet for public deliberation. Firstly, at the baseline, the Internet allows for a more equal distribution of speech rights (Noveck, 1999). Thompson argues that five basic rules constitute a 'Bill of Cyber Rights'. Fora should be open to all, surfing should be participatory, interactions should be sustained, posting should be civil, and downloading should be transparent (Thompson, 1999: 42). 'The cultural informality and personal invisibility of online discursive space [allows] the conversational whispers of conventionally private conversation to enter the public debate' (Coleman & Götze, 2001: 16; cf. Witschge, 2002). Hence, new media may resolve the conundrum posed by Eliasoph as to the avoidance of 'loud' political discussion by citizens while informal political discussion thrives (Eliasoph, 1998). Stromer-Galley found that 'there are indeed new voices in the public sphere, people who ... avoid political conversation offline but appreciate and enjoy it online' (Stromer-Galley, 2002: 199). The increased willingness to engage is largely due to anonymity and the lack of verbal cues in online discussion (Garramone, Harris, & Anderson, 1986; Garramone, Harris, & Pizante, 1986).

Secondly, deliberation entails more than a free flow or exchange of general political ideas (Papacharissi, 2002). As anonymity described above as a virtue, makes all equal but all equally unaccountable (Noveck, 1999), citizens should be mutually accountable within electronic fora, even where this exposes citizens to controversy. Exposure to disagreement, and the ensuing accountability of one's opinions, is an essential part of deliberative democracy (Witschge, 2002), as participants need to 'test [their] opinions in a systematic way' (Tsaliki, 2002: 110). Tsaliki found that online fora promote interactive communication, diversity of opinions and publics, and moderate levels of substantiated arguments (rationality) (Tsaliki, 2002). However, people also aired their views 'without being particularly interested in listening to what others had to say'. Online debate tend to structure along existing political fractures, eschewing the breadth of analysis and range of positions envisaged by deliberative theory (K. A. Hill & Hughes, 1997, , 1998). This, in turn, may undermine 'the ability of the Internet to generate dialogue and thus enhance democracy' (Tsaliki, 2002: 107).

Thirdly, and related to the above, unregulated online deliberation may have negative civic externalities: a cacophony of voices, anonymity and lack of accountability and incivility (Barber, Mattson, & Peterson, 1997; see Dutton, 1996, for empirical corroboration). It may thus be requested that the discussion conform to procedural criteria of rationality and deliberativeness, respectively drawn from public sphere and deliberative theory. Most literature agrees on three similar discursive elements of online deliberation: discussion diversity, rationality, and transparency (Schneider, 1997; cf. Witschge, 2002) (Ó Baoill, 2000: 4). Coleman and Götze's conditions of online public deliberation (Coleman & Götze, 2001: 6) cover much of the ground common:

- access to balanced information;
- an open agenda;
- time to consider issues expansively;
- freedom from manipulation or coercion;
- a rule-based framework for discussion;
- participation by an inclusive sample of citizens;
- scope for free interaction between participants;
- recognition of differences between participants, but rejection of status-based prejudice.

Finally, it may be required that online discussion is formally linked to an institutional forum, legislative or governmental, where policy decision can be improved and validated by citizens' input. In such a view, online deliberation is a form of institutional design that attends to a polity's democratic needs. Most notably, the idea of online policy deliberation is associated with Fishkin's experimentation with 'Deliberation Day' – a national holiday when citizens would meet locally to deliberate on issues in small groups, given time, information, equal access to the floor and regulated by civil rules of discussion (Ackerman & Fishkin, 2002). Citizens may be randomly allocated to electronic discussion groups to debate issues, regardless of where they live. Information about topical issues would be cheap to access remotely from all locations. A continuing online deliberation could take place periodically over weeks or even months. Membership of the panel would entail ongoing deliberation in addition to questionnaire responses. Ironically, a fully-formed formal model of online deliberation can be more democratically utopian than any of the informal models (Fishkin, 2000: 23-34).³³

2.6 Macro obstacles to e-democracy

Despite a largely positive outlook, not all macro accounts are equally sanguine about the democratic nature of the Internet. Ironically, doubts descend from the increased availability of online information, the expansion of the user base across diverse social strata and the prevalence of user-friendly interfaces. Questions are asked about the nature of the new public and the audibility of preferences through the fragmentation associated with the new media channels, due to

their speed, their reductive simplicity and tendency to (digital) polarization, the solitariness of their user-interface, their bias towards images over text, their point-to-point, lateral immediacy and consequent resistance to hierarchical mediation, their partiality to raw data rather than informed knowledge, and their inclination to audience-segmentation rather than to a single, integrated community of users/viewers (Barber, 1998b: ¶ 20)

³³ However, even formal models of deliberation have limitations. The generality of issues under discussion cannot be assessed a priori, and consensus is hard to achieve on controversial issues involving participants' world views (Ó Baoill, 2000). Although online deliberation can be initiated by citizens and conducted on issues of their choice (Gallagher, 1997), policy consultation by legislative and executive branches is far more common (Coleman & Götze, 2001; OECD, 2001; Shulman, Schlosberg, Zvestoski, & Courard-Hauri, 2003). In addition, online discussion is often steered by elites and is effectively unable to influence policy formulation (Jankowski & van Selm, 2001).

While new media may lead to the expansion of the sphere of freedom of expression, users' empowerment and information abundance, in the ways anticipated by Arterton, Pool, Enzensberger and archetypes of e-democracy, it may also reinforce trends of commercialisation / commodification of culture and augment the amount and pervasiveness of unreliable, low-grade information available to users. To the increase of Internet access across different social strata and of the consumption and production of online information does not necessarily correspond a narrowing of the 'real' digital divide between digital citizens and digital consumers (Gandy, 2002). Two interdependent modes of development of the information society have been envisaged: the 'consumer' model, and the 'civic' model (Calabrese & Borchert, 1996). The emancipatory, civic potential of the Internet, it is argued, will be the preserve of the higher classes, as broadband and interactivity will stratify to 'overlay social stratification upon market segmentation' (p. 252). A class of cosmopolitan, technical-professional intelligentsia – a 'new class of information elite' (Luke, 1991) – will engage disproportionately more than other classes in online political transactions. Wage earners, precariously employed and unemployed will be locked in the slow lanes of the superhighway, engaging in games, shopping and routine forms of telework – the consumer model (Calabrese & Borchert, 1996: 253). More precisely, there are four obstacles to the attainment of an online civic commons (Blumler & Coleman, 2001), which are relative to the *public goodness* of the Internet:

- (1) the antecedent resources one needs to bring to the table in order to participate in political activities via, say, a computer terminal, (2) the opportunity to access or to be included in a particular online political exchange, (3) the ability to deliberate on substantive policy issues by subjecting one's ideas to public scrutiny, and (4) the design or architecture of a network or forum in which new information and communication technologies induce universal, deliberative and robust political dialogue (Wilhelm, 2000: 9)

The first two issues, dealing with access resources and the distribution of online political opportunities, are discussed at length within micro analytical frameworks (Chapters 3). The last two issues, concerning the quality of online communications and the political economy of the network, have attracted significant interest from macro theorists since the privatisation of the Internet.

Commercialisation and privatisation of the Internet commenced in the 90s, relatively late in the evolution of the medium. Between 1969 and 1990, the US National Science Foundation's 'Acceptable Usage Policy for the Internet' proscribed any use of the Internet for profit. The Internet was inherently a public good, in that it allowed non-rival consumption and non-excludable benefits, albeit one accessible by a very limited public. After 1990, the Internet became officially on sale and for sales. However, the first few years of privatisation (until circa 1995) witnessed a quiet transition from public to private ownership, amidst the rhetoric of the US National Information Infrastructure, discussed

above, and the EU Information Society response in the liberal-flavoured Bangeman report (Goodwin & Spittle, 2002).

With the expansion of the user base, number of hosts and terabyte exchanged, the Internet has become increasingly privatised – run and controlled by market players rather than the US government – and commodified, i.e. used to allocate values according to market logics rather than social logics. After an initial phase of libertarian euphoria, the pressure on key players to reap a profit from the growing Internet audience increased. As for television and the press before, the enlargement of the audience corresponded to the commercialisation and trivialisation of the content (Bollier, 1999; Dahlberg, 2002; Postman, 1985). The competition for ‘mouse tracks’ had two detrimental effects on the unfolding of a shared social narrative online. If one considers the Internet as Evans has suggested, as the interplay of social voices, commercialisation leads to either social silence or monologues, to a

conflict between monoglossia or ‘oracles’ and the interplay of voices ... On this view, oracularization can take two forms: either that of an encompassing master language or that of a plurality of exclusive communities (heteroglossia without dialogue). The Internet involves both types of oracularization. (Evans, 2000: 14)

In other words, the standardisation of the Internet implies an increasingly homogeneous audience, users-customers who are captured by increasingly sectarian communities of use and consumption.

Regarding the former, it has been argued that the trivialisation of media content is due to the interplay of supply and demand, a growing request for lower ‘quality’ content which is satisfied by a market under increasing financial pressure, mediated by the advertising logic (Dahlberg, 2002). In as much as information is produced, consumed and exchanged as a commodity, the Internet moves further away from the prospects of a free marketplace of political ideas, a renewed community or a global agora (Calabrese & Borchert, 1996; Gandy, 2002). Commercialisation negatively affects the visibility of the town hall, the community and the public square in cyberspace; online commons are opaque, lost in the noise of online news, sport, casinos and porn sites (Noveck, 1999). The plenitude of digitalised information also creates a credibility paradox, as socially valuable content is diluted or obscured in the tide of infotainment / commercial content. Rather than putting a premium on the production of information, abundance discounts its low marginal cost of production. Increasingly, ‘information power flows to those who can edit and credibly validate information to sort out what is both correct and important’ (Keohane & Nye, 1999: 208). The structure of information and the very nature of the space of communication available to new users – who are unknowingly closing the divide – are thus substantially different from the views of early adopters.

Regarding the latter, some argue that culture-creating industries will respond to the Internet challenge with increased investment in marketing and production, a vigorous

support for the redefinition of Internet structure along purely commercial lines, and proceed to the segmentation of the Internet audience using interactive technologies. These strategies, in turn, can lead to the ‘balkanisation’ of cyberspace, that is the formation of factions along social fractures (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, & Robinson, 2001: 327). Others argued that ICTs might further favour the development of socio-spatial and cultural ‘enclaves’ (Calhoun, 1998), foster political monocultures enclosed by digital ‘walled gardens’ (Wilhelm, 2000: esp. Ch. 6), fragmented communities of use and political sense-making of the tide of information, as citizens avoid political confrontation online (Sunstein, 2001). There is the risk of self selection and the clustering of like-minded individuals around topics of interest to specific constituencies (Papacharissi, 2002; Sunstein, 2001; Witschge, 2002); and the voice of organised groups might be perceived as louder than the voice of the non-organised constituencies (Fishkin, 2000). Calhoun asks directly whether, unlike traditional media, the centralised ‘corporate structure behind computers and the Internet ... can be abetted by the experience of decentralisation among everyday users’ of new media (Calhoun, 1998: 382). His analysis points toward the centralisation of information, communication and ultimately knowledge around segmented communities, as he doubts that new media can provide a shared ground for dialogue and discussion on the public good across the boundaries of existing political communities (Calhoun, 1998: 392). The trivialisation of content, commercial colonisation and cultural segmentation of a shared space point to citizens becoming customers of public and corporate EDS, rather than participating in the making of the heralded ‘social intelligence’. Critical analysis, Agre argues, ‘provide[s] an emphatic counterpoint to the romantic millennialism that portrays the Internet as the end of politics and the guarantor of decentralization. It is neither’ (Agre, 1998: p. 7).

2.7 The normalisation critique

From 1997, attention shifted to what has been defined as the ‘normalisation backlash’, following research that was empirical rather than normative. ‘Normalisation’ defines a set of studies produced between 1998 and 2001, departing from a number of observations about the evolution of the Internet from its idyllic early days which were first proposed by Resnick (1997), and later adopted and expanded upon by Barber (1998a; , 1998b), Davis (1999) and Margolis and Resnick (2000). The basic idea is that the Internet ‘has not become the locus of a new politics that spills out of the computer screen and revitalizes citizenship and democracy. If anything, ordinary politics in all its complexity and vitality has invaded and captured Cyberspace’ (Resnick, 1997: ¶ 3)

First, the evolution of ICTs from the early days ushered in an era of unthinking vision, which buries away the olden-day empowered individuals, communities, spheres. The early Internet, based on command-line programming, required specific skills to access and operate. It was the very capacity of the user to control both the code used to access the

Internet and the text produced via this interaction which was seen by many macro theories as empowering. Starting in 1992, new media technologies have grown evermore user-friendly, with more advanced graphical user interfaces (GUI), the introduction of the Web browser in 1994; the wider availability of push-button e-mail software rather than telnet-based mailers; the embedding of command based transmission protocols (telnet, ftp) in HTML spaces; easier, cheaper, faster and more reliable Internet access from home; and wider ICTs access and training provided in the workplace and educational institutions. Starting in 1995, online content including political content, increasingly build on the power of the image rather than text (Barber, 1998b: ¶ 27-34; Resnick, 1997: ¶ 5). As the ‘multimedia phenomenon of linked Web sites where search engines, advertisements, commerce and entertainment existed alongside the traditional text-based Net of old’ (Resnick, 1997: ¶ 13), Internet 2.0 begun to supplant Internet 1.0 (Meikle, 2002). All these changes dramatically facilitated the electronic exchange; new interfaces did not require, though they did not consent either, a large degree of user control in order to access evermore integrates texts, images and sounds. What is perceived, very accurately, as increased freedom of action for the ordinary user also entails a loss of user control over the online experience. As Resnick notes,

while movement within a site appears to be totally free, there are only various degrees of structured freedom. Web sites are intended to present coherent positions, and to inform, influence and persuade those who log onto them. (Resnick, 1997: ¶ 4)

In other words, radical potential resides in radical technologies, and both the Web and e-mail have come to convey, as both tools and spaces, rather conventional reconstructions of conventional politics. Historically, normalisation follows the ‘institutionalisation’ of previously spontaneous, new media experiments (van Lieshout, 2001) and the commercialisation of hitherto public efforts of electronic democracy. Once the technologies are established, it is argued, they largely follow the direction traced by their institutional controllers. Users of the Internet 2.0 dramatically increased. As this happened, the Net begun to reproduce society at large rather than a savvy elite. While early users were mainly from a University research milieu (Abbate, 1999), commercialisation and the technical changes it brought implied an expansion of the user base to wider sections of the population. As a result, online ethics – the code of behaviour informing the use of new media – have changed, mainly from share to sell, on the one hand; produce to consume on the other.

[A] new generation introduced to the world only via the new technologies, the values and frameworks that conditioned and tempered those who invented the technologies will be absent. For the second generation of users, this can be corrupting in ways invisible to the pioneers and inventors (Barber, 1998b: ¶ 9)

Based on these conditions, traditional political actors begun in 1995 to ‘colonise’ cyberspace to an unprecedented degree (Davis, 1999). As Resnick noted, ‘the World Wide Web has transformed Cyberspace, creating new opportunities for the politically skilled and

sophisticated' (Resnick, 1997: ¶ 7). Although in 1997 the majority of political websites were created by individual volunteers, the most important, most visited sites were already sponsored, designed and paid for by political organizations and professionals (Resnick, 1997: ¶ 4). Political, economic, social and recreational life on the Net for the mass public is increasingly designed and guided by Web professionals for ordinary users rather than by peers for peers (Resnick, 1997: ¶ 17).

Most normalisation works examine a particular aspect of such Internet politics, related to political parties, governments, legislatures, NGOs and other campaigns. The *modus cognoscendi* is empirical, inductive and aimed at limited generalisations. Middle-range theories are mainly drawn from political science, communication studies, administration science, political communication and social action studies. As a reflection of this complexity, normalisation works do not sum up to an organic conceptualisation of electronic democracy. Although most works speak to each other and to previous research, the approach derives more from inductive empirical work than is guided by an organic research agenda. In the next two sections I examine the main common groups of most normalisation studies, before I consider more specifically three of these limited settings: online institutions, online electoral campaigns and online political parties, for their prominence within the normalisation field.

2.8 The theoretical common ground of normalisation

Four main theoretical components are shared by most normalisation studies. First, the statement of the prominence of politics over technology. Secondly, the limited attention devoted to intra-net politics and Internet policy. Thirdly, a 'so what' posture, denying the radical potential of the medium. Fourthly, and related to that, the staging of a utopian / dystopian dispute.

Firstly, normalisation states that little will change in politics with the introduction of ICTs, as information and communication are moulded into existing patterns. Normalisation scholars 'do not foresee the Internet playing a large role in mainstream politics for some time to come' (Bucy & Gregson, 1999). Hill and Hughes bluntly argued that 'the contemporary explosion of electronic communication in *not* a paradigm shift. Rather, people are merely moving their age-old patterns of interaction in a new realm' (K. A. Hill & Hughes, 1997: 25). Margolis and colleagues speculate on the normalisation/equalisation trends of the Internet, showing how the medium has changed over time and how UK and US parties are slowly adapting to the new technology (Margolis, Resnick, & Wolfe, 1999). Change is rooted in the extant political process, rather than in new media dynamics.

The key to developing a robust technopolitics is articulation, the mediation of technopolitics with real problems and struggles, rather than self contained reflections, on the internal politics of the Internet, ... it makes possible a refocusing of politics on everyday life ... to expand the field and domain of politics. (Kellner, 1999: 109)

Secondly, and related to that, normalisation concentrates on the limited domain of the 'political uses of the Net'. There are three different forms of Internet politics.

Politics within the Net encompasses the political life of cyber-communities and other identifiable online groups that regulate their own affairs and settle dispute among themselves. Politics that affects the Net refers to the host of public policy issues and actions taken by governments that arise from the fact that the Internet is both a new form of mass communication and a vehicle for commerce. Political uses of the Net include the activities of ordinary citizens, political activists, organised interests, political parties, and governments to achieve political goals having little or nothing to do with the Internet per se. (Margolis & Resnick, 2000: 8)

Both 'politics within the Net' and 'politics that affect the Net' are concerned with regulatory issues: the former with the social relations and the structures of power characterising online social spaces, as users act and interact to create autonomous techno-social milieus. The latter is concerned with the political economy of Internet structure and content, and the ways in which problems arising from unequal distribution of digital goods (both hardware and software) can be regulated. There is a difference between

political actors who use the Internet and new technologies to promote specific political goals and struggles, thus articulating a relation between the cybersphere and social life, and those who limit their politics to cyberspace itself. Such cyberpolitics either focus narrowly on the politics of technology and the Internet, or make Internet discussion an end in itself, cut-off from real life political movements and struggles (Kellner, 1999: 104; see also Rice, 1984)

Normalisation restrains the policy side of the systemic perspective, and the intra-net politics of the early models (see also Klein, 1999).

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Thirdly, a 'so what' position means a suspension of normative judgement and the strict reliance on available data. This posture, Barber argued, may be advantageous in times of technological and social turmoil. Three different scenarios for electronic democracy are unequally likely to materialise.

[The] Pangloss scenario, ... simply a projection of current attitudes and trends; the Pandora scenario, which looks at the worst possible case in terms of the inherent dangers of technological determinism; and the Jeffersonian scenario, which seeks out the affirmative uses of the new technology in the nurturing of modern democratic life ... We can aspire to hope and we should cultivate caution, but it is, of course, complacency that is most likely to attend and determine our actual future. (Barber, 1998a: 576)³⁴

The normalisers' assumption, grounded on the permanence of social institutions, is that the Pangloss scenario is the most likely to materialise. A theme crossing normalisation literature is the perceived cleavage between utopian and dystopian early accounts of e-democracy. Corrado and Firestone frame the debate in terms of attitudes between optimists

³⁴ Barber uses *Pangloss* 'rather fancifully' to indicate by ironic twist the 'penchant of the future mongers for Panglossian parody' (p. 576)

and pessimists (1996: 2-3). Hague and Loader consider the dispute as an ideological clash between libertarian utopians and techno phobic dystopians (1999). Tumber and Bromley identify an empowering / controlling debate of Foucauldian flavour (1998). Kees Brants (1996) mentions the Big Brother state and a novel agora (Bentivegna, 1998; Donk, Snellen, & Tops, 1995). The debate, according to Frissen, 'is being conducted in ambiguous terms of opportunity or threat, evolution or revolution, autonomy or control; it is still unresolved and will doubtless continue to be so for a long time' (Frissen, 1999). As Bellamy and Taylor noted, 'taking polarised positions on the impact of ICT is misguided [because] the intensity of anonymous debate offers a restricted form of debate ... The intellectual fashion of the utopians and dystopians should now be deemed *démodé*' (1998: 32). Normalisation studies indeed reject the Jeffersonian and Pandora scenarios, and most similar constructs, and work within the realm of the existing techno-political arrangements to determine the import of the Internet.

2.9 The empirical core of normalisation

2.9.1 *Electoral campaigns online*

Online elections are a relatively established phenomenon in cyberspace. In 1992, the idea of the Electronic Town Hall Meeting proposed by independent presidential candidate Ross Perot attracted wide media attention (Nimmo, 1994). For the first recorded time in 1992, bulletin boards were used by campaigns and citizens respectively to disseminate and collate information on candidates, issues, the electoral race (Hacker, Howl, Scott, & Steiner, 1996; also see Sakkas, 1993). A 'non-partisan service operated at MIT to make campaign information available, facilitate electronic discussion of the issues ... as a component of a presidential campaign' (Loeb & Mallery, 1994) attracted about 21,000 messages from 1,400 people, from Boston to California to Australia in the first eight days. Also, about 200 people volunteered for one of these campaigns (K. D. Campbell, 1992). Since, online elections have spread from the US to other countries, including Britain, Australia, Germany, Italy and France, Japan, South Korea (Gibson, 2004; Ward, Lusoli, & Gibson, 2003). In Britain, the Internet played a very limited role in the 1997 general election (Gibson & Ward, 1997), and increased at the 2001 general election (Auty & Cowen, 2001), where one in four candidates had an election website (Ward & Gibson, 2001: 195).

Arguably, the impact of new media on the electoral process is much broader than just the candidates' campaigns (Lusoli, 2004). Local and national parties, interest groups, traditional and online media, pressure groups and educational groups contribute to increasingly sophisticated online campaigns (Davis, 1999: Ch. 4). Especially, the import of the Internet for political campaigns is amplified by the changes it enables in media reporting, along with how the campaign is fought (Pavlik, 2001). Innovations in both traditional media,

witness the increasingly importance of the web for 'war room' practices, and new media, such as citizen online journalism and recently blogging, affect the communication of the campaigns. Also, news media online coverage is ever more crucial at the consumption end, as citizens pay more attention to secondary, online media coverage than directly to primary campaign information available on candidates' sites (Pew, 2003; Stromer-Galley, Foot, Schneider, & Larsen, 2001). Online portals such as Yahoo!, AOL and MSN 'have the capacity to serve as gatekeepers of political information, facilitators of political research, and matchmakers for people with similar political interests and views – and played those roles in descending order' (Cornfield, Rainie, & Horrigan, 2003: 4). Furthermore, ICTs support the no-profit and government agencies in 'getting out the vote' of disenfranchised segments of the electorate. In the US, the Web, White and Blue effort, which aimed at bringing more young voters to the polls (Lupia & Baird, 2003). Similarly in the UK, the web was a central component to the Electoral Commission strategy to reach young non voters at the 2004 European Parliament Elections (Hall, 2004). However, most attention has been devoted to candidates' electoral campaigns. A seminal study of online campaigns identified four specific areas of future application of new media (Corrado & Firestone, 1996). First, new media reconnect the citizenry by re-establishing the voter-candidate link. Second, they improve voter information, as better quality, diverse and neutral information is available online. Third, new media increase candidates' access to the electoral arena. The low cost of online campaign activism allows resource-poor candidates to run for elections and gain visibility. Fourth, new media expand voter alternatives and increases civic participation. Indeed, the bulk of research has so far examined three main aspects of online campaign dynamics: the potential of new media for 'outsider' candidates; the possibility of engaging rather than informing citizens qua interactivity; and the possibility of reaching out to non-traditional audiences via campaign websites and e-mail lists.

Firstly, the main thrust of the literature is whether new media help candidates to contest elections. Specifically, whether the Internet increases resource-poor, female, third party and challenger candidates' chances of electoral success. Browning reports that third-party, Libertarian candidate Harry Browne was a 'clear winner on the Net', in a majority of online polls – despite the lack of attention from mainstream media (Browning, 1997). Successful challengers at the 2000 US election had an Internet edge over their incumbent opponents. Three in four 'employed a superior web strategy' and all 'provided Internet users with the ability to volunteer with their campaigns online' (Fielding & Duritz, 2001: 36). Female candidates benefit from the total control they can exert on website presentation of their image and contents, as compared to video presentation (Banwart & Kaid, 2002). As differences in presentation style between female and male candidate even out on the web, 'female candidates may have found ground that provides an equal level on which to present

the image of a political leader' (Banwart & Kaid, 2002: 23; see also Greer & LaPointe, 2001). However, most evidence exists that online campaigns have increasingly come to reflect the assets and disparities of the real world. While challengers have used the Web to subvert mass media neglect, website adoption is also a function of campaign spending, thus favouring wealthy challengers over challengers in general (D'Alessio, 2000). Stromer-Galley and colleagues found that 'while in the 1998 cycle, challengers were more likely than incumbents to have campaign web sites ... [the] gap was significantly closed, and in the case of the Senate, reversed, in the 2000 cycle' (Stromer-Galley, Foot, Schneider, & Larsen, 2001). Mainstream candidates – from mainstream parties – outperform 'minority' opponents and outsiders in terms of site presence and sophistication, in a range of countries and electoral occasions (Bentivegna, 2002; Davis, 1999; Greer & LaPointe, 2001; Margolis & Resnick, 2000).

Secondly, new media enable more interactive campaigns, which *involve* rather than solely *inform* activists and voters (Lievrouw, 1994). Of course, new media complement rather than displace traditional campaign tactics. 'The value political Web sites add to the campaign is their speed and the interactivity of the Internet' (Boogers & Voerman, 2002b: 10). Greer and LaPointe confirm that 'the wildcard in this whole equation is interactivity. As interactivity evolves, it is sure to deviate from the traditional path of campaign communication development' (2001: 30). Research shows that interactivity matters: it influences participants' perception of the candidates as well as their levels of agreement with their policy positions (Sundar, Kalyanaraman, & Brown, 2003). Internet interactivity also enables the qualitative redefinition of political communications from vertical to horizontal: dynamics of co-production that challenge producers' control over political messages; the carnivalesque release of creative energies and dissident thought; and two-steps mobilization, whereby citizens activate other citizens (Schneider & Foot, 2002).³⁵ Clearly, there are two aspects of interactivity: the supply of interactivity on candidates' sites, and the demand for interactive, engaging features on the part of the users (Schneider & Foot, 2002). In the first respect, most analyses agree that online campaigns are not yet truly interactive, and that website interactivity can be fabricated to have the citizens-consumer visit for as long and as frequently as possible (Harpham, 1999). However, the number of candidates offering interactivity and the modes of interactivity available (e-mail feedback, online discussion boards, blogs) has expanded over time in a range of OECD countries (Auty & Cowen, 2000; Bentivegna, 2002; Gibson & Ward, 1997; Greer & LaPointe, 2001; Kamarck, 1999; Ward & Gibson, 2003). Evidence is equally mixed regarding the demand for increased interaction

³⁵ Subversion of media messages and online irreverence found fertile ground in the US (Cornfield, Rainie, & Horrigan, 2003), the UK (Coleman & Hall, 2001) and Italy (Bentivegna, 2002: 8-9). This might be due to the fact that a tiny minority of campaign sites offer 'jokes' and 'humour' (Harpham, 1999: 15).

and participation by campaign website users. Early research on the use of bulletin boards in the 1992 US Presidential campaign indicates that voters wanted to express opinions online, to state facts about one's life and voting intentions and to post information about the candidates (Hacker, Howl, Scott, & Steiner, 1996). A decade later, during the 2002 US election, 'ordinary citizens' responded to the lack of interactivity and top-down nature of candidates' websites by 'forwarding campaign e-mail less often than jokes about the campaigns' (Cornfield, Rainie, & Horrigan, 2003: 3). A Dutch survey found that campaign sites visitors' main aims were to gather information on candidates and issues, rather than interact with the campaign (Boogers & Voerman, 2002b). On the other hand, however, a study of the 2000 US election found a broader range of motivations for engagement with online campaigns, including control over the experience, interaction with the campaign and a positive appreciation of 'creative elements that foster a sense of fun' (Stromer-Galley, Foot, Schneider, & Larsen, 2001: 27-30).

Thirdly, the point is made that additional people can be reached via electronic means. Exploratory evidence from the 1994 US congressional election suggests that online campaigns bulletin boards reached a minority of affluent, male, educated, politically sophisticated citizens. These fora complemented rather than displaced traditional strategies of political news gathering, and had a small but significant effect on the vote decision (Sadow, 1995). The following US elections, the 1996 presidential contest was the first to attract millions of citizens looking for information on candidates and results (Browning, 1997: 53). Comparative survey research on the 1998 and 2000 US elections found 'a sizeable exodus from newspapers to the Internet as the primary source of election information for WWB.org [Web White Blue] users ... a sizeable portion of the WWB.org user population have substituted the Internet for newspapers as one of its two main election news sources' (Lupia & Baird, 2003: ¶ 23). (also see Lupia, 2002: 69). In a Pew study of the 2002 US presidential election, a increase of 39 % is reported in the US 'political news seeker' population, from 33m in 2000 to 46m in 2002. This is mainly due to technical reasons such as the maturation of users, the spread of broadband, and big news stories, rather than political supply- or demand-side explanations (Cornfield, Rainie, & Horrigan, 2003: 13 fw.). Drawing on a survey of campaign site visitors, Boogers and Voerman found that the less engaged in politics are less attracted to campaign websites, although 'political Web sites are successful in reaching young people, a group which is usually less politically active but which uses the Internet more intensively' (Boogers & Voerman, 2002b: 9).

2.9.2 *Political parties*³⁶

Political parties have embraced new media in increasing numbers. In 2000 there were 1250 parties online worldwide, spread over 179 countries, of which 488 were electoral parties (Norris, 2001a). Globally, the existence of party websites is a function of technological diffusion and of socio-economic development (Norris, 2001a: 164-167). At country level, there are two aspects of the advent of new media for parties.³⁷ Firstly, new media has important implications for inter-party competition, i.e. the electoral struggle for the capture and articulation of voter preferences around programmatic platforms. Secondly, new media hold a potential for the renaissance of the declining aggregation of interests within and around the party, and the development of more robust intra-party democracy.

To date, research on new media impact on parties has focused on 'external' functions: the use of ICTs as transformational of electoral campaigns, the structure and functions of national party sites, and the impact of ICTs on party information and communication efficiency. Pippa Norris identified four core research areas: the type of parties which are currently online and what explains their digital rise, ICTs impact on party competition, and the consequences of digital parties for civic engagement (Norris, 2001b: 2). In a recent review, Rachel Gibson and colleagues grouped studies of parties and elections in two main areas: (1) parties' style of campaigning, and particularly how the Internet relates to broader shifts towards more professionalized techniques; (2) inter-party competition, particularly the degree to which smaller parties use the Web to raise their public profile and gain greater media exposure (Gibson, Margolis, Resnick, & Ward, 2003: 48).

In other words, research has focused primarily on inter-party, production, and top-down aspects of website management chiefly in times of elections. In this light, new ICTs may enable different political actors differentially, either by levelling or by further tilting the political playing field, respectively benefiting minor and main parties (Gibson & Ward, 2000; Margolis, Resnick, & Wolfe, 1999). To date, evidence is inconclusive as to whether new media reinforce established political interests (Davis, 1999; Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Margolis, Resnick, & Wolfe, 1999) or effectively change nothing, as computers are routinely employed by most parties in the conduct of local campaigns according to established campaign strategies (Denver, Hands, Fisher, & McAllister, 2002). Whether ICTs can instead help minor, non institutional parties gain visibility, especially in 'porous' multi-party systems (Auty & Nicholas, 1998; Copsey, 2003; Margolis, Resnick, & Wolfe, 1999), which would be unthinkable through traditional media circuits (Norris, 2001a), or give voice to a plurality of ideological positions, across a range of democratic and less-democratic countries

³⁶ A shorter version of this review of online parties was published in Lusoli and Ward (2004).

³⁷ The discussion is based on advanced industrial democracies. Research on parties' use of the Internet is more common in Europe than in the US, according to their relative importance in the electoral circuit. Scanty research exists for authoritarian states and consolidating democracies.

(Norris, 2001a). Some argue that new media are eroding traditional representative organisations, such as parties, by creating additional channels of direct communication between the government and the governed (Budge, 1996). Overall, it might be fair to say that the Internet has favoured, to some extent even accelerated inter-party pluralism (Bimber, 1998b). However, it has failed to attract the critical mass required to sustain claims of inter-party levelling, even though sizeable numbers can be reached in exceptional circumstances (Boogers & Voerman, 2002a). As Norris has argued,

party websites are likely to have greater impact on pluralism than on directly widening participation among disaffected groups, because these resources mainly reach citizens drawn from social and political groups which are already most likely to be politically active, interested, and engaged. (Norris, 2001c: 9)

Much less attention has been devoted to the 'internal' side of the party organisation, i.e. the importance of new media for intra-party, aggregation functions and organisational development. In a seminal paper, Margetts examined the organisational incentives driving parties' adoption of new media in times of steadily declining membership, increasingly volatility in party allegiance, raise of single-issue activity and increasing Internet use (Margetts, 2001). In combination with low start-up cost, competition and the 'nodality' of the Internet (the capacity to enable networking), this might lead to the rise of the 'cyber party'. The cyber party may in turn provide a response to the crisis of modern parties in four key respects: leadership recruitment, interest aggregation and articulation, as a point of reference, and by providing clearer direction to government. Margetts found evidence in 2000 that British parties were in fact moving in that direction.³⁸ Later research by Lusoli and Ward further examined the articulation and aggregation functions of the e-mail membership lists of two Britain parties at the forefront of new media innovation (Lusoli & Ward, 2004). They found that the Liberal Democrats list was oriented towards campaign, articulation functions, while the Labour party list aimed at fostering a sense of 'community, thus favouring interest aggregation (and reference according to Margetts's categories). Recent work based on social network analysis of hyperlinks from and to Australian party websites also aimed at gauging Internet 'nodality' for political parties. Australian political parties are building varied and large web networks and do more to reach the outside world than it does to reach them. Overall, external partners are mostly Australian and no-profit in nature. However while left-wing and right-wing parties connect to a similar extent, parties of the left are at the centre of domestic, no-profit networks (Ackland & Gibson, 2004). However, no systematic research has so far assessed the overall import of the Internet for parties as multi-level organisations that span internal and external networks. Only limited research data has been gathered on the use of new media by the party rank-and-file (e.g. Cross, 1998; Lusoli &

³⁸ The recent implementation of this notion by the Conservative party in the UK (the *Direct* system), announced at the 2004 party conference, generated a considerable degree of media attention.

Ward, 2004; Pedersen & Saglie, 2003; Ward, Lusoli, & Gibson, 2003), party sub-groups and activists (Gibson & Ward, 1999a; Kitcat, 2003; Lusoli, Ward, & Gibson, 2003), party website visitors (Boogers & Voerman, 2002a, , 2002b) and the wider electorate (Gibson, Lusoli, & Ward, 2002a; Hindman, 2002).

2.10 Conclusions

This chapter reviewed a wide range of macro and meso accounts of the democratic potential of 'older' new media and the Internet. E-democracy theorisation followed the evolution of new media from Pool's golden era of 'technologies of freedom' to the global Internet of the present day. Overall, macro accounts of e-democracy uphold the decentralising potential of the Internet in various domains of political communications as a crucial democratising feature. Most accounts agree on the capacity of the Internet to democratise based on the extent and quality of political information available, the speed and interactivity of the internet exchange, the power of many-to-many communication and the distributed production and control of contents. Whereas early studies were concerned with the import of new media for the political communication system of the polity, later works examined the transformation of political transactions by electronic means in relation with the individual, the community and social discourse. Three e-democracy archetypes were formulated that are based on the capacity of the Internet to enable direct, community and deliberative democracy. However, some scholars contested the systemic potential of the Internet on the grounds of restricted ownership, commercialisation, commodification and segmentation of political communications brought about by the new media.

The review of the implications of new media for the political process provides solid ground from which to depart for the assessment of meso approaches. Meso scholars are mainly concerned with how some traditional political brokers use the Internet and how they shape the structure of political opportunities. The *normalisation* thesis had a considerable impact on the framing of the e-democracy question at meso level. Drawing on the recent evolution of the Internet in terms of usability, contents and user base, the normalisation thesis comprises studies of representative institutions, elections and political parties that restrict the e-democracy enquiry in three key respects: a sceptical posture vis-a-vis the utopian/dystopian debate, the statement of the primacy of politics over technology and the study of 'politics on the Net' as a main concern. A number of points emerged from the review concerning the capacity of the Internet to deliver on the democracy account. Firstly, traditional institutions are crucial in the process of negotiation of the political values of the Net. Where left untapped, online activism could materialise in a e-democracy scenarios where the user it not necessarily empowered. Secondly, while early evidence suggests an opening of the electoral field and increased choice for citizens, more recently major parties,

incumbents and traditional institutions brought larger resources to bear online.³⁹ Thirdly, evidence is mixed concerning the capacity of online campaigns to involve more people in more engaging ways. Increasing numbers of citizens use an increasing range of online resources as a source of electoral information. However, the URLs of traditional purveyors of the 'message' are still at the top of citizens' bookmarks during election. Although there are exceptions, citizens rate political information higher than political exchange and interactivity. The bottleneck lies here with the lack of demand rather than with the scarcity of supply of online political interactivity (e.g. see Lusoli & Ward, 2004). Fourthly, evidence from parties largely supports this view. The bulk of meso studies examines the electoral, external uses of new media. Although the electoral websphere allows a plurality of party positions, it is increasingly dominated by large, mainstream parties. Furthermore, parties have so far failed to mobilise online significant numbers of supporters and potential voters. Finally, evidence suggests that normalisations' strict reliance on middle-range theories and data and the suspension of normative judgement avoided the utopian / dystopian debate; ironically, however, it might have framed the debate in a way conducive to its resilience.

³⁹ However, the 2004 US presidential election, not reviewed here, witnessed a renewed online struggle between a firebrand challenger (Howard Dean) and incumbent (George W. Bush). Albeit at a distance, the online battle was fought on the respective websites as well as on the online 'horizontal' turfs of Meetup.org, Moveon.org and the increasing number of election blogs.

Chapter 3 - Micro approaches to e-democracy

What people really do when linked up to the Internet needs further and much more refined research ... Inequality is not only a matter of inadequate supply of content or not having access to Internet, [it] has to be conceptualized as structural and must be studied with a focus on social processes of mediation ... And even if there is a decided increase in overall Internet use, we still lack empirical studies demonstrating how and for what purposes people use the Internet.

Bonfadelli, 2002

3.1 Introduction

A third stream of work examines directly the role of the citizen in the online political realm. The approach is individualistic – inductive, concerned with citizens’ use of the Internet to participate in the political process, and the impact of the Internet on individual levels of participation. Micro studies examine the importance of Internet access and use as a solution for declining levels of political engagement in advanced democracies. ‘Micro’ refers here to citizens’ engagement in online political behaviour within contexts such as election campaigns party politics, and general political behaviours, such as online discussion. In this chapter I discuss the importance of studying the user in order to reach valid conclusion on the political and democratic value of new media (section 3.2). I then explore the micro field and highlight the state of the research on citizens and the Internet at the time of writing (3.3). In the same section I critique the strength and weaknesses of micro approaches to electronic democracy. In section 3.4 I advance a framework for the interpretation of exiting micro evidence, based on the assessment of the resources, uses and effect of the political Internet. Sections 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7 review the micro literature in depth, highlighting respectively users’ socio-demographic profiles and other predictors of Internet political use, different types of online political engagement and the motivations of specialised online activities, and the externalities of Internet resources, access and uses for citizen engagement in different political contexts.

3.2 Why study the user

The main theoretical assumption of micro studies is the emancipation from the problematics of the political economy of the network, to focus directly on actual Internet access and use. To understand the democratic potential of the Internet, it is argued, one needs to suspend judgement about the linkages between privatisation, ownership and convergence, and to bracket the control-interactivity debate (Friedland, 1996: 185-187). Regardless of who owns and controls new media, a range of Internet tools and contents are increasingly available to users that can be used in democratic ways.

As networks become structurally decentralised, even wider publics gain access to them in ways that lead to an increase in the rate and density of public exchange. This, in turn, threatens to undermine the control of information as a discreet, privatised commodity. (Friedland, 1996: 187)

As for the theorisation on e-democracy archetypes and for the normalisation turn, the change in perspective follows the changing techno-social connotations of the Internet. Since around 1999 the Internet has reached the status of a general-purpose technology that amounts to more than the sum of the constituting parts of the network, and embraces the domains of uses mediated by the technology (Lovelock & Ure, 2002). The Internet is increasingly used to perform multiple actions in multiple contexts of adoption: the workplace, the household, public space, commercial access points. Notwithstanding the structural limitation imposed on the civic model by the rigidities of the architectural layers of the Internet and by the online structure for political action (Schneider & Foot, 2002), the net result of evolution is more favourable to the users than the critical discourse / political economy analysis (see p. 50) and normalisation scholars suggest. The study of the political ‘users’ of the Internet is a useful starting point for the assessment of democratic nature of new media. Paraphrasing the argument proposed by Livingstone (1999), there are three reasons why the audience is crucial for the understanding of new media for online engagement. First, the ‘implied audience’ plays an important role in early speculation on new media, which starts less from theory than a variety of public imaginations about this audience. Equally, the ‘user’ is unspecified in macro and meso accounts, and inscribed, in turn, in technological and institutional designs of electronic democracy (see Woolgar, 1991).

In speaking about the user, it seems as if no user at all is identified. It is the ideal-typical format of the user that is configured by the system, not any specific user with any specific characteristics. What counts is whether the device works, irrespective of the user who wants the device to work for him or her (van Lieshout, 2001: 135)

The empirical identification of the ‘real’ Internet audience therefore helps specify the ‘demand’ assumptions of the electronic democracy discourse, as normalisation scholars have done for the supply side. Second, because new media explode the old media centralisation, the identification of the new audience(s) becomes relevant to political theory, as it directly addresses theories of the ‘paradox of mass politics’ (Neuman, 1986) and of mass media-induced civic malaise (Norris, 2000b). Third, ‘a key consequence of new media technologies is the transformation of the audience itself’ (p. 64) into plural, active audiences who are producers and more efficient brokers of media power. A shift has occurred between the ‘informing’ and the ‘performing’ potential of the media (Lievrouw, 1994).⁴⁰ This might correspond to a shift from ‘what’s happening’ to ‘where am I?’ asked by a confused audience. In political terms, it might even become ‘what am I doing?’ or, even more

⁴⁰ The definition of ‘those who use the Internet’ is semantically problematic, as they are neither properly audiences in the traditional sense nor simply defined as ‘users’ (Lievrouw, 2002).

radically ‘where do I belong?’ It is the consequences of micro negotiations within social, economic and political contexts that should drive the research agenda on the information society, economy, and politics (Johnson & Kaye, 2003: 27-28).

3.3 Existing surveys of online political engagement

Reports of the lack of research on electronic democracy at citizen level are somewhat exaggerated. I examine 44 micro studies, based on 35 datasets over a ten-year period, which constitute the great part of existing evidence at the time of writing. It is however true that evidence is scarcer for countries other than the US, which account for 37 studies and 29 datasets. Large national surveys are widely prevalent, with a small proportion of smaller, ad-hoc samples from discrete research projects. In the US, data is drawn from the National Election Studies, the Pew Internet and American Life Project and the General Social Survey 2000 computer supplement. Data is also available from discrete national components of the World Internet Project, from the National Geographic’s 2000 and 2001 Internet surveys, and from the EU Eurobarometer. In Britain, the Hansard Society routinely commissions data on the Internet and politics from MORI and Yougov.com. As well, the British Social Attitudes survey included an ESRC-funded ‘Internet and politics’ module in 2003 and 2005 (forthcoming). Surveys on political uses of the Internet are predominantly cross-sectional, with a small minority of time-series, panel and longitudinal studies. Most attention is devoted here to national-level, behaviour modelling studies, both explanatory and predictive, based on a range of variables; less to studies comparing frequencies and single-factor studies. Finally, although a growing body of literature examines citizens’ attitudes to electronic democracy and online political transactions, this work only reviews behavioural studies, for reasons of consistence and convenience.⁴¹ The full list of surveys examined, countries, dates and modes of administration is reported in Appendix 7 – Data sources of micro studies, p. 259. This chapter proceeds in a different way from the previous, in that it surveys a large range of empirical studies in order to identify the democratic potential of the Internet. This encompassing approach descends form and attends to the fragmentation of the e-democracy enquiry, evident in four main respects: the lack of integration of online politics in traditional social surveys; the lack of clear and consistent theoretical articulation between online politics and e-democracy; the local heuristic value of cross-sectional surveys and the relative methodological insulation of online politics surveys. All of which, obviously, hinder the formulation, testing, replication and falsification of clear e-democracy hypotheses.

Firstly, despite the increasing prevalence of specialist surveys, traditional social surveys seldom ask questions about online engagement. The ‘the public square’ is not included in the

⁴¹ According to attitudinal data citizens have a glowing view of the democratic potential of the Internet in such diverse countries as China (Liang, 2003), Japan (NTT, 2002), Italy (SDA, 2001), Slovenia (Oblak, 2002a), the UK (Coleman, 2001), and a wide range of other countries (Gaskell, Allum, & Stares, 2003; Hart & Teeter, 2003b).

list of topoi available to respondent to describe the Internet, alongside the post office, a library, a shopping centre, a school, an entertainment place, a bank (Liang, 2003). Online political activities are a marginal addition to recent election surveys including the British Election Study 2005, the panel component of the 2004 American National Election Study and the 2004 Australian Election Study. 'Contacting public administration' was the only political activity included in the first wave of the Oxford Internet Survey (OII, 2003). Only variables for 'visiting government websites' and 'visiting party websites' were included in the British Life and Internet Project survey based on a sample of newspaper readers (Gunter, Russell, Withey, & Nicholas, 2003). In Eurobarometer and other standing cross-national surveys questions are asked about contacting public administrations online, not about participation activities such as contacting legislators, campaign activities or political discussion (European Commission, 2002a, , 2002b; Hart & Teeter, 2003a). Although the formal modelling of online political engagement has developed over time from occasional, descriptive and anecdotic to consistent, increasingly sophisticated and predictive, it has yet to enter the mainstream of social survey research.

Secondly, whereas e-democracy claims are bluntly stated in system accounts, finely articulated by archetype scholars, and vigorously shaken by 'normalisation' studies, micro studies draw an empirical line between citizen participation and electronic democracy. It was claimed in 1999 that the micro link between the Internet and democracy is under-theorised, despite the wide academic currency of economic and sociological theories of participation (R. Brown & Svennevig, 1999). A number of recent studies, however, suggest a line of argument consistent with 'civic malaise' theories that sets a broad commons agenda for the approach, or at least for the studies reviewed. Questions are asked about the use of the Internet to 'rejuvenate modern liberal democracy to establish a more citizen-based politics' (Gibson & Ward, 1999b: 20); to reinvigorate declining civil society and social capital and in turn democracy (Harwood & Lay, 2001); to allow citizens to 'fully' participate to the decision-making process (NTT, 2002). Does the Internet widen citizen participation in the political process? Can it reach out to those who did not participate before its advent? In a scenario of widespread distrust and declining citizen involvement, can the Internet democratise? En reverse: does the Internet pose a risk of de-politicisation and depersonalisation; most importantly, does the Internet reinforce the existing stratification of participation (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003)? Ultimately, does it reinforce the gulf between the haves and the have-nots?

Thirdly, survey research has great heuristic power because large numbers and statistical controls consent to draw generalisations on electronic democracy valid both for and across polities. However, micro studies may as well flatten complex theories of electronic democracy on discrete measures of citizen participation, and draw conclusions independent

of the structure of online participation opportunities, the state of the 'political' technology, and supply dynamics in the marketplace of civic engagement, described by macro and meso accounts. Perhaps ungenerously, Jennings and Zeitner list three shortcomings of current surveys. Firstly, the inclusion of a limited range of engagement indicators provides a questionable basis for generalisation. Secondly, the failure to examine generational differences as opposed to life-cycle difference. Thirdly, the prevalence of cross-sectional design hinders the scrutiny of causality (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003: 312-313). In other words, the parsimony, elegance and vigour of micro theories are its Achilles's heel. Although this wide generalisation is qualified in the next few sections, it is difficult to overestimate the power of simple generalisations based on survey evidence.

Fourthly, the studies reviewed vary considerably with respect to target population, sampling technique, questions asked and modelling choices. One cannot overestimate Norman Nie's concerns about the use of data in studies of Internet and society:

I cannot emphasize enough the necessity of using parallel measures and replicating systematic multivariate analyses on each of the data sets. Such a data confrontation would move the debate from competing press releases to a scholarly exchange that would actually advance our understanding of the ways in which the Internet affects human interaction. (Nie, 2001: 421)

As was noted, populations range from US voters to UK newspaper readers, from large numbers of users reached online to small numbers of participants in quasi-experiments. The choice of different sample designs (random, one-stage-stratified, quota-stratified) and administration techniques (RDD CATI, postal, in-home CAPI) in connection with different populations complicates the comparison of results and ensuing claims. Question wording varies starkly due to topic, sample design and administration. Finally, a range of statistical and modelling techniques are used to analyse data and to draw conclusions on the import of the Internet on individual engagement. Occasionally, different conclusions are reached from the same dataset. Therefore, the systematic review of a large number of accounts may shed light on competing, theoretically significant aspects of the currently latent link between Internet use and access and democracy. The review identifies common threads in the micro evidence that restore the complexity of online politics with respect to the context of online action. Furthermore, evidence is organised in a way that is conducive to albeit limited comparability of the results.

3.4 Resources, uses and effects of the political Internet

Here, I distinguish between three ways to examine the relation between the Internet and public engagement, respectively concerned with Internet *resources*, *uses* and *effects*. The partition descends from three established lines of research into mass political communication in post-industrial societies (Norris, 2000b). Each is characterised by a distinctive research focus and modelling strategy – dependent variables, independent variables, control factors

and unit of context – with respect to the relation between the Internet and the political process, thus shedding light on complementary facets of online political engagement.

Resources studies (section 3.5) examine users' socio-demographic profiles and the predictors of Internet political use. These studies model Internet use, Internet political use and socio-economic resources horizontally and examine how they correlate. Resources studies can be divided in two main streams. A number of studies observe the levels of traditional participation of Internet users and non-users, in order to draw inferences as to the potential of the Internet for mobilization. Such studies are premised on the observation that Internet users largely have those SES and political traits usually associated with political participation – education, political interest and relative wealth. Bonchek argued that the transactions costs of online political information are marginally decreasing but socially stratified (1995). Bimber elaborates on increasing vs. decreasing returns on the individual's existing stocks of political information (2003). Norris adopts the Irvine School's framework mobilisation vs. reinforcement of existing political communication resources (1999, 2000a). In a different vein, a stream of research is concerned with the role of the Internet in generating social capital and, in turn, with the relation of online-generated social capital and participation. Social capital models allow the identification of factors that, under certain circumstances, can lead to increased citizen participation. The relation between the Internet and participation is thus dependent on the working of socio-demographic variables in the first instance, on measures of 'online' social capital in the second. Do citizens possess human, social and political resources that favour both online and offline participation? How are resources conducive to online participation acquired?

Uses studies (section 3.6) are concerned with different types of online political engagement. They examine online political activities such as contacting, information seeking, protesting and regress them on offline activities, skills, motivations and socio-demographics. Uses studies follow from the critical notion that 'the media' do not 'cause' social and political behaviours. Rather, users' political interests influence the choice of specific media, genres and channels that fulfil specific needs and expectations. In a uses perspective, 'research linking traditional and new media use with civic engagement can be organized around key motives underlying patterns of consumption', especially information and surveillance and entertainment / diversion (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001: 470).⁴² In most uses studies, specific online modes of activity, such as discussion, contacting and information seeking are inductively generated and modelled as dependent variables in multivariate models. Offline participation and media use are constructed as independents, whereas skills, resources and socio-demographic indicators are entered as controls. A *uses*

⁴² Only a few scholars examined the 'gratifications' traditionally associated with political media 'uses'. See note 35, p. 59, about online subversion of media messages.

approach is also adopted to examine the use of political websites at specific time such as elections (e.g. Kaye & Johnson, 2002), where contextual cues derived by media genre and content analysis can be triangulated (Boogers & Voerman, 2003). Overall, uses studies underline the complexity of online behaviours, political and otherwise, and the importance of endogenous motivations for the consumption of online politics. Do citizens engage in politics directly online and how (discussion, campaigning, contacting)? What skills / motivations are conducive to online engagement?

Effects studies (section 3.7) examine the outcomes of Internet access and use for offline participation. Effects studies of the political Internet are accurately described by the central tenets of media effects studies. Paraphrasing a classic definition with respect to new media, effects studies entail: (1) the creation of explicit and verifiable hypotheses about online user behaviour; (2) the idea that the Internet actually exerts influence on social and political behaviour; (3) a belief that Internet influence is either due to online contents or to the Internet-as-medium; (4) a broad understanding and operationalisation of what constitutes Internet causality (McLeod, Kosicki, & Pan, 1991). Effect studies model offline participation – mostly voting, but also contacting and campaigning – as dependent variable and indicators of Internet access, use and political use as predictors, while traditional SES, political knowledge and trust are included as controls of offline engagement (and online engagement in 2SLS models). Institutional effects, such as voting turnout, contacting official and interaction with government are prominent. A number of studies are concerned with citizens' Internet use at time of elections, and the possible consequences of the medium and the message on the outcomes of electoral campaigns. Do citizens engage in online activities that lead them to do politics offline (attend events, talk, vote)?

The following sections review each approach separately. Section 3.5 deals in details with the stratification of resources conducive to online engagement; sections 3.6 and 3.7 consider uses studies and effects studies. Ultimately, the three approaches shed light on complementary aspects of the individual online experience. They arrive at different conclusion on the role of the citizen in relation with online participation and in the making of electronic democracy, as a third significant pole alongside technologies and political intermediaries. Of course, *resources*, *uses* and *effects* studies also touch upon common themes such as user skills, social location, and traditional forms of political engagement, creating a degree of redundancy. I will capitalise on such redundancy in the conclusions.

3.5 The resources of online participation

There is widespread consensus that individual resources matter for online participation. A wide range of evidence stress the importance of individual resources for the societal stratification of access, online political information, knowledge and engagement. Concerning access, Pippa Norris traced the social and political contours of the 'online community' in a

range of European countries (Norris, 1999a).⁴³ In 1999, European users were significantly more likely to be young males, college-educated, from high socio-economic backgrounds. Controlling for SES, users display higher levels of political efficacy, trust in government institutions and satisfaction with democracy – albeit also some suspicion of EU institutions and politics. Both general SES and specific political resources are thus related to Internet use. Somewhat alarmingly, the resource gap between the information-rich and the information-poor substantially widened in Europe between 1996 and 1999. In Britain, Internet users were predominantly male, university educated, and from AB-C1 social grades, and engaged in conventional politics (R. Brown & Svennevig, 1999). A later study of the 2001 general election found that Liberal Democrat voters were more likely than Labour voters and much more likely than Conservative voters to use the Internet, partly due to socio-demographics – young age, male gender and university education (Coleman & Hall, 2001). In the same vein, a Japanese study identified a sizeable group of citizens who do not participate but have an interest in politics, named ‘potential participators’.⁴⁴ Potential participators are

white collar, university graduate urban residents in their forties, and also have a high rate of internet usage. Also, 20-25% of the potential group of citizen participation, approximately twice the overall average, indicated intentions to participate by communicating with government through the internet. A higher percentage of the potential group of citizen participation believes that computerization will stimulate public participation by citizens, than in the general average. We believe this indicates that the key to discovering and activating this group will be ICT (NTT, 2002: 4)

An critical political mindset may thus be a significant additional resource required to participate online. Italian users, for instance, are significantly more likely to be ‘progressive’ than non-users (as opposed to ‘conservative’), although somewhat more disenchanted with the trappings of institutional politics (SDA, 2001: 2). Hindman examined the relationship between Internet political activities and political attitudes (Hindman, 2002). American liberals are more likely than moderates and conservatives to engage in political web activity such as looking for information and visiting government sites, and are also more likely to report that the Internet helped inform their views. In general, Internet users are slightly more likely to be independent or support the Liberal Democrats and SNP than to support Labour and the Conservatives (R. Brown & Svennevig, 1999: 14; Coleman, 2001: 3).

Directly in connection with online political activity, Wilhelm first suggested that factors other than economic inequality are pivotal (Wilhelm, 1997). The importance of income as a predictor of online engagement decreases as one proceeds from mere ownership of computers to active Internet use. Internet political use is predicted by a ‘resource model of

⁴³ Results based on EB 51.

⁴⁴ Topf describes this as the ‘political detachment’ group, including those who are interested in politics but do not actually participate (Topf, 1995).

technological access', in turn dependent on family structure, education, professional background and ethnicity (Wilhelm, 1997: 520). Income remains, of course, a necessary condition for hardware access. However, education and occupational variables are strong and significant in all models: computer ownership, modem ownership, Internet use and propensity to use the Internet for government transactions and voting. Internet 'capabilities' based on education and occupation provide a more precise explanation than financial endowment closer up to actual participation behaviour (Wilhelm, 1997: 526-527). Similarly to Wilhelm, Bonfadelli examined 'knowledge gaps' with respect to the Internet, and the stratification of resources subsumed to different layers of access and use of new media (Bonfadelli, 2002). While access to the Internet is hindered by financial resources, lack of basic computer skills and lack of user friendliness (and connected technological fears and negative attitudes), the gaps in the way the Internet is used are mostly education-based. Specifically, education is the key predictor for civic uses. Pew data confirm that the resources underpinning online participation are akin to traditional predictors of offline participation. University education and Internet skills are strong and significant predictors of online contacting and campaign behaviour. Moreover, young people, especially females, are less likely to use the Internet in overtly political ways and to use websites for electoral information (Larsen & Rainie, 2002). Jensen obtained similar responses from a survey of Minnesota e-democracy members (Jensen, 2003). Active participants had more 'locational' resources, especially education, than the reference population. As he puts it, the 'gladiators' now have yet another medium for political involvement and influence. Because online participation does not replace traditional political activities, 'the online political field can be regarded as a subfield within the general political field' (Jensen, 2003:19). In sum, traditional SES, especially education, male gender and political attitudes and orientations are strongly correlated with Internet use and political engagement.

3.5.1 Dynamics of resource generation

It is unclear whether the results for gender, education and political orientations and Internet access will extend to those sections of the polity not currently online. In as much as resources are crucial in stratifying of the digital polity it is important to see whether and how online participation resources build over time. Especially, how these develop in the young age groups. In a study of UK households, Livingstone and colleagues examined children's use of the Internet for social, civic and political activities. Specifically, they asked about Internet to communicate, to establish peer-to-peer connections, to seek information, for interactivity, for the creation of a webpage / web content and for visiting civic / political websites (Livingstone, Bober, & Helsper, 2004). A pyramid of uses exists that has a relatively large base of general interactive uses, a smaller middle section of civic information

uses and a narrow spike of civic interactive use. The relations between SES, Internet use, interactive use of websites and visiting civic sites are then path-analysed.⁴⁵ Middle-class, older children use the Internet more interactively than working class children do, while those who use the Internet more often and have higher self-efficacy interact even more. 'If working class children were to gain in self-efficacy, this would help them 'catch up' in relation to interacting with websites, but not enough to overcome the class difference' (Livingstone, Bober, & Helsper, 2004: 12). Furthermore, visiting civic sites is explained by socio-demographic, as girls, middle-class children and older children visit a larger range of civic sites. However, Internet experience does not increase children's exposure to the 'civic Internet', leaving little hope for online political socialisation of groups traditionally less likely to participate. Cluster analysis identifies three groups according to the patterns of Internet use: 'disengaged', 'interactors' and 'civic minded', with strikingly different social profiles, consistent with path-analysis results. Hence, there are two divides: one of interactivity that can be bridged online by fostering children's IT skills and mentoring; the second is truly a civic divide, which requires acting on the root causes of inequality. A study of American children and their parents' Internet activity found similar results (Owen, 2003). Online activities were assigned to five categories that are variously conducive to political engagement in later life: information dissemination, communication, information seeking, non political activities, and passing time. Overall, time spent online was a significant predictor of all 'pre-political' informational behaviours, while family income was not significant. However, older (14-17 years old), female respondents whose parent attained higher education are more likely to specifically use the Internet for news / information (Owen, 2003: 27). Strikingly, the same pattern of stratification during young age holds for older Internet users. A longitudinal study examines the relation between political attitudes and behaviours of prospective Internet users – 15 years before adoption – to 'demonstrate the degree to which ultimate Internet users already differed from nonusers with respect to civic engagement' (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003: 318). Those who adopt the Internet in their fifties were engaged thirty-five years olds, as use at t1 (1997) is strongly correlated with all measures of civic engagement at t0 (1982) – print media attentiveness, political involvement, political knowledge and volunteerism. Interestingly, 50 years olds who currently use the Internet to follow public affairs were the most engaged of the sample both in 1982 and in 1997. In short, Internet use for politics is function of political engagement, past and present. Jennings's results complement Owen's and Livingstone's finding about younger cohorts. Overall, these studies suggest that political resource building starts from a relatively young age. If one can infer from 2004 to 2020 as Jennings and Zeitner do from 1982 to

⁴⁵ Based on N = 975 children aged 12-19 years old who use the Internet at least weekly.

1997, young people using the Internet today to access civic sites will be tomorrow's participators. It is however unclear whether today's Internet use – vis-à-vis 1984's traditional media use – will change the way they will participate.

3.5.2 Social capital and resource generation

One theoretical construct employed to link individual resources and political engagement is 'social capital'. There is an expanding literature on social capital, social networks, trust and the Internet (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). I examine here those studies that include an explicit measure of political engagement. These are largely inconclusive. Drawing on an extensive research on trust and social ties, Eric Uslaner encapsulates this indefiniteness

The Internet is not reservoir of social capital ... there is little evidence that the Internet will create new communities to make up for the decline in civic engagement that has occurred over the past four decades in the United States. Yet, there is even less evidence that the Internet is pushing people away from traditional social ties or making them less trusting' (Uslaner, 2004: 22).

To test this proposition, Harwood and Lay examine the effects of Internet access and use on social capital and political capital (Harwood & Lay, 2001). Specifically, they expect that the creation of 'weak ties' favoured by Internet discussion will reduce social capital and in turn political capital. Social and political capital are thus regressed on online discussion, everyday activities and SES. As expected, online discussion negatively predicts social capital. This, the authors argue, is due to the nature of online discussion which favours monologue over dialogue, to the transient nature of online interaction, and to the time-displacement effect of 'being alone online'.⁴⁶ However, political capital is unrelated to online discussion, after controlling for SES. Drawing on the same dataset, McIntosh and Harwood examine the relation between 'sense of online community' and social and political attitudes in more depth (McIntosh & Harwood, 2002). Citizens lacking of social trust, especially at local level, report significantly higher levels of perceived online community. Although 'alienation from community leadership' is a strong predictor, political trust is unrelated to sense of online community. In a way, the Internet may be a 'safety Net' for the alienated: 'digital community, if it serves to connect the otherwise disconnected, rather than deepening the ties of the already fully embedded, has great potential to enrich American civic life' (McIntosh & Harwood, 2002: 28). Focusing on Internet users only, Wellman and colleagues test three competing hypotheses regarding the relation between Internet use, social capital and political capital.: increase (high Internet use associated with more offline personal, social and political activities), decrease (high Internet use associated with less offline activity), and

⁴⁶ The model is however under-specified. Internet access is not controlled for; multicollinearity is not assessed between online discussion and socio-demographics; 'online discussion' does not measure what it purports in terms of theory – weak online links – thus inflating the error term.

supplement (Internet use is independent of offline activities) (Wellman, Quan Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001). First, results strongly support supplementation, as heavy Internet users are as socially connected as light Internet users. Consistent with other resources studies, Internet use is strongly related to political engagement and SES predictors. However, contrary to McIntosh's findings, offline participation and frequency of Internet use positively predict online political discussion. Although reaching different conclusions, both sets of results point toward a segmentation of the online experience in the different domains of the social and the political.

Rachel Gibson and colleagues offer a rapprochement of social and political capital, based on evidence from four English-speaking democracies – Australia, Canada, the UK and the US (Gibson, Howard, & Ward, 2000). In a structural equations model, a 8-point scale of participation is the dependent variable, social capital is constructed as a multi-modal independent variable (civic engagement, social connectedness and community support), and Internet use is modelled as a moderating variable (three groups: online socialisers, online utilitarians, and recreational users). The baseline finding, as in McIntosh and Wellman, is an ambiguous relation between the Internet, social capital and political capital. Internet use per se has little explanatory power. Frequency of use predicts social capital in Canada and the US, but is negatively related to political participation. No relationships were found between Internet use and social and political behaviour in the UK and Australia. However, specific Internet uses make a difference. In the UK, online socialising has a strong correlation with social capital. In Australia, online utilitarianism has a strong correlation. In Canada, both online socialising and utilitarian Internet uses are linked to higher levels of social capital; while in the US all modes of Internet use are correlated to social capital the correlation is stronger for utilitarians. However, while utilitarian Internet use is consistently linked to increases in social capital, utilitarians are also more likely to be older, employed and more highly educated than socialisers and recreational users. Thus, utilitarians have higher 'individual capital', in turn predictive of social capital. On the other hand, the positive relationship for socialisers indicates that Internet use may actually counterbalance the effects of low stocks of individual capital among this group, as McIntosh also suggests.⁴⁷ As length of Internet use loads strongly and positively on the utilitarian factor, users begin with recreational and social uses and make more utilitarian uses of the medium over time; this may in turn yield positive social capital effects in the long run.

Overall, therefore, although online discussion and socialisation may engender trust and reduce alienation and create social capital, it is irrelevant for political engagement. The

⁴⁷ However, given the unstable nature of social engagement on Internet, online socialising may generate only limited stocks of social capital.

'political' appears to follow endogenous, powerful dynamics of stratification and ultimately reinforcement.

Internet use increases participatory capital ... Although future research will have to specify the causal sequence, we suspect a positive feedback effect. Rather than distinct online and offline spheres, people are using whatever means are appropriate and available at the moment to participate in organizations and politics. People already participating offline will use the Internet to augment and extend their participation. People already participating online will get more involved in person with organizations and politics. (Wellman, Quan Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001: 453)

In different ways, uses and effects studies disentangle this relationship.

3.6 Uses studies: the complexity of the online political experience

A seminal analysis of the of online political activity and news consumption by Americans reveals some facets of this complexity (Norris, 1999b). First, increasing numbers of citizens engage in increasingly sophisticated online information seeking. However, traditional producers such as the CNN, the CBS and broadsheet papers remain well in the loop of production and delivery of digital political information. Second, 'net activism'—online discussion, contacting and election information – loads on a single behavioural dimension, distinct from Internet use for general news, entertainment, financial transactions. This confirms Norris's earlier identification of four dimensions of Internet use: for e-mail and informational purposes, to purchase good and as a source of financial and travel information, to discuss views or express opinions in bulletin boards, newsgroups, and chat rooms; and to play games and be entertained (Norris & Jones, 1998). Third, online hard news users are traditional participators: male, high-income and with high levels of formal education, but unexpectedly young. Fourth, net activists have significantly higher levels of media attentiveness and political knowledge and a higher propensity to vote. The online realm portrayed by Norris is thus a specialised fringe of the traditional political world, inhabited by active and purposeful information seekers. A first stream of work examines the motivations of different modes of online political engagement.

3.6.1 *Why people use the electoral Internet*

Firstly, uses studies are concerned with individual motivations for engaging in online activities. Elections generated most of the available literature. A survey of the online seeking behaviour of Americans in 1996 and 2000 campaigns shows that people go to different information watering holes for different information needs (Pew, 2000). However, traditional media websites dominate. About four in five users visited local and national online news sites, notably CNN.com, vis-à-vis one in five visiting party, candidate and other campaign sites. Convenience is the main reason to get online election news, rather than a desire to tap new or different information sources. Finally, experienced and male users were more likely to have visited major news organizations websites, while newcomers and women split their

custom more equably, also visiting AOL's news channel for campaign news. These results are confirmed by a study of American voters' political attitudes and uses of the Net (DOP, 1999). Overall, two in three online voters reported that the Net is a good or excellent channel of electoral information. Online voters looked for specific information online: candidates' issues, biographies and voting records and information on community problems. They were less interested in information about campaign finance, events, opinion polls, and pressure group positions. However, *attentive* voters were significantly more interested in this in-depth information (DOP, 1999: ¶ 16). A survey from the Online Publishers Association also found that voters and national news-sites visitors are significantly more likely to engage in online campaign activities than non-voters: to donate money, to volunteer for campaign, to provide e-mail address for info and to research candidates' positions (OPA, 2003). Using focus groups to explore citizens' expectations and preferences as concerns online campaigns, Stromer-Galley and colleagues found similar results. When visiting candidates' websites users value in-depth, detailed and comparative information; ease of use and navigation; control over the experience; interaction with the campaign, and creative, fun elements (Stromer-Galley, Foot, Schneider, & Larsen, 2001). Furthermore, voters' actual experience of the electoral Internet decreases down the institutional pecking order: the presidency (attracting 74 % of online voters), senators and governors (68 %), congress (63 %), major and city council (52 %), local office (42 %) (DOP, 1999). As well, information on frontrunners and celebrities is most sought after online, vis-à-vis challengers and party candidates (see section 2.9.3, p. 61). Finally, in line with the findings of resources studies, the DOP found that attentive voters, politically independent, college-educated males were significantly more likely to have used the Net.

3.6.2 The motives of online discussion, information seeking and contacting

Kaye and Johnson examined the relation between citizens' political self-efficacy and their motivations for using the political Web. They identify four functional uses of online political information: guidance, information seeking / surveillance, entertainment and social utility (Kaye & Johnson, 2002). Self-efficacy, interest in politics and the lack of trust in government affect all uses except entertainment. In particular, self-efficacy increased respondents' likelihood to use the web for guidance and surveillance. Surprisingly, education is a negative predictor of online political information seeking, which contradicts resources results reported above. Controlling for motivations therefore lessens the overarching influence of education. Muhlberger and Shane surveyed Pittsburgh residents' Internet use to get news and information about current events, to express opinions about social and political issues and to contact organisations and public officials about these issues (Muhlberger & Shane, 2001). Each activity was regressed on Internet skills, political trust, perceived quality

of online information and concerns about personal privacy on the Internet.⁴⁸ Demographics account for little of the variance in all models (1.7 % to 5 %), while education and Internet skills (~10 %) contribute most of the explanatory power. Different modes of online activity rest on different combinations of general and specific predictors. Skills are the strongest predictor of political information seeking, followed by the perceived quality of online information. Online discussion is positively related to political interest and negatively related to avoidance of conflict: people who discuss politics online seem to enjoy controversy. Online contacting depends on home access to the Internet, in addition to political interest and knowledge. Muhlberger then further examined the import of demographics, access, motivations and skills on political discussion offline and online (Muhlberger, 2004). Education, political interest and propensity toward controversy predict political discussion in general. Web access and use, followed by motivation to discuss politics and demographics explain online discussion. As for Kaye and Johnson, high income and education appear to depress online discussion rather than boost it when motivations are controlled for. In conclusion, this ‘might imply that online discussion is more public, more inclusive of strangers, and perhaps more discomfoting than discussion generally’ (Muhlberger, 2002: 26). The potentially unsavoury taste of online debate may also help to explain the results for propensity to discussing online in range of European countries. A seminal study examined the factors influencing Europeans’ propensity to discuss politics online with a politician (Gibson & Ward, 1999b). Propensity was highest in Greece (59 %) and Portugal (53 %), the most recent member democracies before enlargement, and lowest in the Netherlands (23 %), and old consociative democracy. This clearly depends on political culture: political debate is open and controversial in the former countries and somewhat suppressed in the latter (Witschge, 2004). At micro level in all countries, frequency of offline political discussion is the most consistent predictor. The study also reveals the profile of online discussants – male, young, professional status and politically radical – which tallies the profile of potential political protestors in Europe from the classic *Political Action* study (Barnes & Kaase, 1979b). As well, in many EU countries, online discussants are often ideological hard-liners, who are willing and capable of engaging in a controversial debate (Gibson & Ward, 1999b: 32). Finally, the recipient of or interlocutor in online political communication – i.e. ‘whom one is talking to’ – does also make a difference to online talk. Bimber examined the importance of the Internet as a means to contact one’s representative about a ‘personalised’ issue in relation with different institutions: the White House, the Congress, State legislatures (Bimber, 1999). Once again young, male respondents who were somewhat politically engaged were more likely to contact online. Older respondents of both sexes and the very

⁴⁸ Internet users only, N = 366.

politically engaged contacted instead by phone and letter. Furthermore, online contacting depends more upon the visibility of a specific institution in cyberspace (e.g. higher for the White House) than on traditional reasons of institutional proximity. Finally, a linear regression for the frequency of contacting (contactors only) showed that politically engaged, male citizens use the Internet to keep the channel of communication open with their representatives (Bimber, 1999: 424).

How lasting these trends will be remains an open question. Bimber maintains that age and proximity correlations are transient, resting on a particular phase of Internet development, while political connectedness and gender are closely intertwined with new media in general, and expectedly more durable in shaping online engagement. Obviously the 'gendering' of ICTs is a serious obstacle to the even fruition of the political Internet by male and female members of the polity; also, online proximity has increased and will increase as more local institutions set foot in cyberspace over time (Ward, Gibson, & Lusoli, 2005). However, the relation between age and political connectedness and online politics is more nuanced. A number of studies suggest the opposite conclusion that a radical potential of the Internet lies precisely with the young being engaged in technically and politically sophisticated forms of online engagement, vis-à-vis an ageing population of older users who just extends their existing activities to the new digital terrain. In other words, that Internet skills and resources conducive to political participation, are learnt in young age and with time spent online.

3.6.3 *Length of use, Internet skills and online engagement*

A number of studies examine the importance of Internet skills in the context of different online activities. Krueger directly compares the resources required to participate online and offline (Krueger, 2002). Resources are measured by the availability of time, finance, civic skills and Internet skills, and modelled using a two-stages-least-square procedure aimed to ascertain causality. He finds that online and offline participation depend on different resources. Whereas civic skills, political interest and slightly older age predict offline participation, online participation is predicted by political interest, male sex, free time and, chiefly, Internet skills. Unlike civic skills, Internet skills are independent of income and positively albeit weakly related to lower social grade, therefore leaving hope further online engagement in the future as the new generation comes of age. However, Internet skills also increase with length and frequency of Internet use, which are function of free time and are higher for highly educated males. Krueger concludes that 'although older individuals tend to participate in traditional political activities more than younger individuals ... younger individuals disproportionately have the raw materials needed to participate online if they are motivated to do so' (Krueger, 2002: 493). Other studies confirm this point. A study of the

1996 US election found that time spent online increases the likelihood of engaging in online political information seeking and online political contacts, mainly by e-mail (J. E. Katz & Rice, 2002: 143).⁴⁹ This was confirmed by Survey 2000 data. High levels of political participation are associated with longer experience of the Internet, at least a two-year period, controlling for socio-demographics (Witte & Howard, 1999). Tolbert and Mossberger examined the importance of computer competence and information literacy⁵⁰ for online political information seeking (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2003). Both proved strong and significant predictors, along with education, young age and male sex, thus confirming other studies. In the Muhlberger study reported above, Internet skills, length and frequency of Internet use are strongly correlated and predict online discussion; in fact, online discussion is independent of skills controlling for usage (Muhlberger, 2002).

3.6.4 Young age and 'hard' Internet uses

Young age emerges as an important predictor of 'hard' Internet uses⁵¹ from a number of studies. Shah and colleagues regressed online behaviours – information surveillance and exchange vis-à-vis entertainment and diversion – onto different endowments in terms of engagement, media attentiveness, socio-demographics and social capital (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001). Along with the effects of education and income, they find that 'individuals who use the Internet for ... information exchange are more active in civic life. In fact, the size of this relationship exceeds the predictive power of any other media variable' (p. 484). Distinctions can also be drawn for different Internet uses. While chat-room attendance is negatively related to civic engagement, information exchange has a strong and positive correlation. Moreover, coefficients are twice as large for the 'generation x' – Americans who were born after 1963 – as for any other age group. Finally, and interestingly, online information seeking is 'far more selective than are the audiences of traditional print and broad-cast media', and strongly correlated with income, education and young age (p. 495). Similarly, Bimber compared different media as sources of electoral information in the US and assessed citizens' attention to campaigns across media (Bimber, 2003: 217-218).⁵² Beside familiar education, age and race differences between television and press news gathering, he found that online political news were accessed by young, interested citizens who are less likely to trust other news media. Shah and colleagues further examine specific Internet uses in relation with civic engagement and trust (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). Four modes of Internet usage were extracted with no significant cross-loadings: product consumption, information exchange, financial management and social recreation (also see

⁴⁹ However, available measures of political reading, TV watching and existing participation were not included as predictors of online engagement.

⁵⁰ The ability to use technology to locate information.

⁵¹ Similar to press and television 'hard' news.

⁵² N = 518 for the Internet campaign information logistic regression.

Norris & Jones, 1998). At zero-order, Internet use is correlated to civic engagement and trust, hence confirming resources studies' results. However, a hierarchical regression reveals the importance of specific uses for specific dependent variables, specifically of 'information exchange' for both civic engagement and trust (p. 150).⁵³ Other Internet uses are instead unconnected with engagement and trust. Finally, online information exchange is especially important for the 'Generation X', while it makes little difference to other generational categories, who rely on traditional resources.

Other studies confirm the connection between Internet 'hard' uses and young age. Diana Owen found that the Internet was the political tool of choice of the young for a range of activities during the 2000 US campaign. Younger citizens were more likely to visit candidates' websites, to engage in some form of online electoral campaign, and to be influenced by online information to vote for or against a candidate (Owen, 2003).⁵⁴ The fact that respondents of different ages reported similar reasons why they sought online information, mainly related to convenience, underscores young persons' greater aptness at using the Internet for information seeking. A scale of online election activities was then regressed on age, SES, frequency of Internet use and the reasons to go online. Male, frequent users, who sought information out of interest, exclusivity and added-value – but not convenience – engaged in more online campaign activities. Online electoral engagement is thus a specialised activity that attracts participants with high pre-existing levels of political engagement. Owen's results are echoed in the work of Jennings and Zeitner (2003), the parents-and-children study mentioned above. The authors interrogate the predictors of Internet access and political use by different cohorts of the same families. They found that different generations are placed differently on the digital ladder.

The break between Internet use and non-use, while important for both generations, appears to be somewhat more crucial for the older generation. By contrast, the break between political use and non-political use appears to be somewhat more critical for the younger generation. In some respects, then, the associations being forged between political use of the Internet and political attentiveness are stronger in the two newer cohorts (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003: 328).

That is to say: online youth are less engaged in politics than their online parents; however, they are more specialised seekers and users of online political information, born out of greater political attentiveness. Overall, the evidence reviewed suggests that selective exposure to the Internet, Internet political information, online political engagement – 'hard uses' of the political Internet – are strongly related to young age.

⁵³ However, the multicollinearity between Internet adoption and usages and SES and the design collinearity between Internet adoption and Internet uses are not addressed.

⁵⁴ Based on Pew's '2000 Campaign and the Internet', see appendix 7.

3.7 The search for effects at individual level

Paolino and Shaw provide a fascinating account of citizens' use of the Internet in the context of an electoral campaign from the perspective of the candidate (Paolino & Shaw, 2003). They assess the extent to which votes can be extracted from the electorate by means of the Internet, and what type of candidate may reap a dividend from the digital divide. Consistent with resources and uses studies, they find that Internet access and visiting campaign sites are the preserve of already engaged citizens – white, male, educated, high income. Moreover, users from different backgrounds visit different candidates' sites and audiences for frontrunner candidates' sites are larger in absolute terms. Therefore campaign websites – especially challengers' websites – have little power to mobilise disenfranchised categories, effectively preaching to the converted. Not a promising start for effect scholars. On the other hand, however, citizens are persuaded that the Internet matters for their vote choice. In a study of the 2002 election more than half of the respondents (especially young females) claimed that the information they sought online during the campaign made them want to vote for or against a specific candidate (Owen, 2003). In Britain, a minority of Internet users went online during the 2001 general election, as 18 % gathered information, 5 % exchanged e-mail and a negligible proportion engaged in more active online political behaviours. Young users looked for more information on party positions online, and were significantly more likely to report the Internet as a 'fairly important' influence on how to vote – 17 % vis-à-vis an average 6 % (Coleman & Hall, 2001: 23). Recent evidence partly confirms this finding (Lusoli & Ward, 2005) Effects study set to explore the electoral nexus by modelling voting on Internet access and uses.

3.7.1 Internet effects on voting behaviour

Data from the 1996 US election suggests no effects of the Internet. Gwinn Wilkins found no relation between use of the Internet for political information and the likelihood of voting at elections (Gwinn Wilkins, 2000). Specifically, a participation scale consisting of party belonging and voting activity is unrelated to the use of the Internet to retrieve political information relevant to the election.⁵⁵ Bruce Bimber failed to reject the same null hypothesis using different data (Bimber, 2001). Bimber then analysed data from the 1998 and 2000 US elections to predict a wider range of electoral campaign activities (Bimber, 2003: 208-213). Voting, displaying a campaign message, attending a campaign event, campaign work and donations were regressed on a number of factors: SES, political interest, self-efficacy, interpersonal trust and Internet use for political information. Again consistent with Gwinn Wilkins's results, he found no relation in 1998 between online political information and any

⁵⁵ However, the model does not control for computer ownership and use. In 1996 US, computer ownership was predicted by income and education, which might have subtracted explanatory power from use of computers for political information.

form of electoral participation except for 'donate' – which he finds puzzling. In the 2000 presidential election however, online political information correlated with voting and attending a campaign event. Bimber argued that the Internet played a more important role in the 2000 US election because it was actively used by campaigns to mobilise supporters, to solicit financial donations and to 'get out the vote'. To be sure, Bimber advises that Internet effects are very small, as they explain 1 % of the overall variance.⁵⁶ Similarly, Park modelled voting on age, education, party affiliation, level of political information, trust, efficacy and Internet use (H. L. Park, 2002). At zero order, Internet users display higher levels of education, political information, party independence and political efficacy; this confirms resources studies' point that users hold greater amounts of the resources needed to participate. Nonetheless, the Internet is only marginally related to the likelihood of voting. Two further results suggest caution in establishing a causal relation. Firstly, Internet use and voting are unrelated for younger citizens, while they are strongly related for older, engaged citizens. Secondly, a strong and significant correlation exists between the level of political information and voting for Internet users. Both findings make an Internet effect on citizens' decisions to vote implausible.

However, Tolbert and McNeal arrive at opposite conclusions from the same data (Tolbert & McNeal, 2001, , 2003).⁵⁷ Respondents who accessed online political news were significantly more likely to have voted in the 1996 and 2000 US presidential elections, by an average of 12 % and 7.5 % respectively. By using a two-stage multivariate regression, voting increased after controlling for socio-demographic factors, partisanship, attitudes, and traditional media use. In addition, citizens seeking political information online were more likely to talk about the campaign, to display buttons or signs, to work for a party or candidate, to attend rallies and to donate. This was confirmed in a later study (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2003). A two-stage regression model shows that Internet access, Internet literacy and access to online political information positively predict voting behaviour, along with SES factors. However, consistent with Park's findings, while young people are more likely to use online information – function of greater access and IT skills – this does not seem to predict final voting behaviour, which follows 'offline' age dynamics.

3.7.2 Internet effects on non-voting activities

Other studies examined Internet effects beyond voting behaviour. Using data from the 1996 US election, Katz and Rice explored measures of online activity, traditional engagement and media use (J. E. Katz & Rice, 2002, Ch. 7). Factor analysis returned single items of political engagement, reading and TV watching, and two items of online

⁵⁶ Due to the nature of ANES data, 'online political information' is dichotomous and does not differentiate e-mail and the web data.

⁵⁷ The difference between the studies depends on modelling, OLS vs. 2SLS.

participation: online political browsing (information seeking) and online political interaction, which mainly involves exchanging political e-mails.⁵⁸ Surprisingly, neither SES nor Internet uses were significant predictors of voting and political engagement, accounting together for 2 % of the total variance. Results from a longitudinal study are even more remarkable (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003: 322-325). A multivariate regression models the effects of Internet access and political uses on various measures of political activism, including media attentiveness, engagement and volunteerism. Controls are included for pre-existing political activism (measured 15 years before), gender, higher education and family and life cycle indicators. Effects of Internet access are strong as concerns media attentiveness and organisational membership. Those who have adopted the Internet are also likely to have become more involved in organisational politics and increased their news consumption. Even discounting life-cycle effects, it seems that organisational activation and Internet access proceed in parallel. Strikingly, however, Internet political use unrelated to indicators of political engagement, suggesting no effects. In other words, 50 years olds who have become more active in the last 15 years are average Internet users for politics; symmetrically, 50 years olds who have adopted (or used) the Internet for political purposes have a long term interest in politics rather than a recent one. 'Employing the Internet for political purposes does not, at this stage, enhance levels of civic engagement after taking into account prior levels of engagement and key social characteristics' (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003: 325). Finally, a study of New York residents asks whether the Internet can increase citizens' levels of political information, efficacy, engagement in general and forum participation (Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002). These dependents are regressed on SES, on four functional categories of traditional media use and on three Internet uses: entertainment, non-political information seeking and political information seeking. None of the Internet uses influences forum and traditional participation, while newspaper use and socio-demographics explain most of the variance. Internet entertainment reduces political efficacy and knowledge as much as TV entertainment, while hard news use and SES increase efficacy. Conversely, 'hard' Internet information has no effect on political efficacy and knowledge. In summary, 'the role of the Internet in promoting active and informed citizenry is minimal' (Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002: 69). Finally, effects were examined regarding e-government activities. In a seminal study of users of White House documents, Bonchek and colleagues found that

As a result of using the Web and the Net, 37% of individual respondents report that they have become more connected with people like themselves, 62% find government to be more personal and accessible, 61% have become more aware of issues that affect them, and 43% have become more involved in issues that affect them. Half of the individuals have sent e-mail to the White House, and 68% redistribute documents on-line. (Bonchek, Hurwitz, & Mallery, 1996: ¶ 18)

⁵⁸ Computed for users only, N = 549.

Interestingly, some of those who engage in online contacting, organising online petitions and coordinating political activities do not participate in the same activities offline. Online political activity, the authors conclude, is a new and distinctive form of participation for some users, as the Internet redirects the flow of political information away from the press as a mediator, and toward individual re-broadcasting, based on a peer-to-peer logic rather than on a hierarchical logic.

3.8 Conclusions from the micro review

The systematic review of more than forty micro studies identified the ‘vital resources’, ‘hard uses’ and ‘soft effects’ of the Internet with respect to political engagement. It thus illuminates complementary aspects of the latent link between Internet access and use and democracy. Specifically:

1. There is overwhelming evidence of social stratification of Internet access and political use [3.5].
2. The resources required for Internet social and political uses are generated in young age [3.5.1].
3. Online ‘social capital’ has no explanatory power for citizen participation, both offline and online [3.5.2].
4. Online activities are functionally different; specifically, online politics is different in many respects from online social behaviour [3.5.2 and 3.6].
5. Use of the Internet for electoral information is stratified and has simple motivations, mainly convenience [3.6.1].
6. Other online political activities have similar general motivations but different topical motivations [3.6.3.2].
7. Internet skills are important for Internet political uses; they have a moderating effect on the overall importance of education; they are different from offline participation skills [3.6.3].
8. There is a strong relation between young age and ‘hard’ Internet uses [3.6.4].
9. Internet access has no effects on voting behaviour; Internet political use has a small effect on voting behaviour; correlations have grown stronger over time in the US [3.7.1].
10. Internet access and political use have no overall effects on citizens participation controlling for existing behaviours; they have some marginal effects for the already engaged [3.7.2].

Furthermore, the review identifies a number of threads that restore the complexity of online politics with respect to the context of online action. The review shows that macro

theorists' optimism regarding the democratic potential of the Internet may be misplaced. Resources studies suggest that young, educated citizens and citizens with pre-existing political behaviours are more likely to adopt the Internet for political purposes. This amounts to a stratification of the online political space, the 'real digital divide' anticipated by Gandy (2002). Ironically, financial resources are increasingly insignificant over time and along the logical path of Internet access, use, interactive use and political use. Throwing money at the digital divide, for instance by giving every citizen a laptop, would not significantly improve their chances to engage online. Furthermore, the new social dynamics generated by Internet use and online interaction do not boost citizens' willingness and capacity to use the Internet for political purposes. The 'information society' and the 'information polity' have different morphologies. Resources studies also confirm that there are increasing returns on individual stocks of political resources (therefore reinforcement), although Internet skills, time spent online, early social uses of the Internet and an independent, non-aligned political mindset provide a balancing effects to stratification.

Uses studies take forward the modelling of online participation to encompass resources, specialised Internet uses and feedback effects of the virtual on the real. Bruce Bimber, who has worked over the years on resources, mobilisation and Internet use in different contexts, recommends a multidimensional view of online political phenomena.

The message here is clear: as the Internet has evolved to become a rich and varied environment for communication and information, Internet use has become a multidimensional phenomenon best treated as a set of variables involving related but often quite divergent activities. Analyses of Internet use in politics must be designed with this in mind (Bimber, 2003: 213)

Uses studies reveal the dimensional complexity of Internet engagement. Online contacting, political discussion, information seeking and civic activism constitute specialised modes of digital engagement. Furthermore, uses studies address some of the points raised by macro theorists regarding the decentralisation of political communication qua new media. Different motivations are found underpinning the resources that so powerfully explain Internet use for guidance, surveillance, interaction and social utility. Uses studies find a strong positive correlation between specific 'political' uses and related measures of offline participation. Conversely, 'social' uses of the Net are unrelated to any indicators of offline engagement. The different modes are explored with respect to topical resources. Self-efficacy, lack of trust in institutional politics and political interest all predict an increased likelihood of online political surveillance. Political interest and controversy seeking predict online political discussion, while online contacting heavily depends on knowledge, interest and a measure of radicalism. Additionally, uses studies confirm the importance of Internet length of use and skills for all forms of online engagement, especially for interactive online engagement: discussion and contacting. These, it was suggested, can be learnt. Furthermore, confirming

the results of resources studies, young age is strongly related to online information seeking and information exchange. The Internet is the political tool of choice of the younger generation, while older generations largely rely on traditional media. It is however unclear whether online political information and interaction will ever reach levels comparable to current engagement via traditional means, so that the Internet keeps its promise for younger generations. This, in turn, will depend on the reasons why young people use the Internet rather than other media for political aims. Convenience – in terms of speed and ease of delivery – stands out as the principle motivation, followed by the sophistication of online sources and by the campaign opportunities they offer. Finally, the complex structure of Internet opportunities described by meso studies is reflected by patterns of online consumption. Overall, citizens visit the websites of well-established and perceivably unbiased sources to satisfy their political information needs. However, while newcomers are more hesitant to leave the information cocoon provided by online portals and ISPs, educated, experienced male users access sophisticated information from a different range of sources. Therefore, the review suggested a ‘hard uses’ scenario, whereby the selective fruition of online political opportunities furthers the stratification of online political opportunities described by resource studies. However, the fruition of these opportunities by young people, the importance of learnable Internet skills, the convenience of online media and the preference for widely available ‘unbiased’ online source may all redress the ‘hard uses’ imbalance.

Moving from ‘uses’ to ‘effects’ there is a remarkable drop in correlation coefficients and measures of statistical significance. Effects studies examine the externalities of Internet access and use on offline political participation – voting, contacting elected officials and the government. Specifically, effects studies directly ask whether the Internet strengthens democracy by electronically enfranchising the currently disengaged. Results clearly indicate that online campaigns are ‘preaching to the converted’ as politically disenfranchised Internet users are no more likely to participate offline. This common theme however hides a number of differences. Firstly, whereas most studies record negligible effects of the Internet on the likelihood of voting in 1996 and 1998, later works increasingly found small but significant effects of the Internet – especially online campaign information – on citizens’ voting behaviour. Interestingly, voting effects studies imply a reversal of the normalisation thesis. In the early days, users were already interested in politics and likely vote regardless of the Internet. As the Internet base expands however, there is an increased albeit limited potential for political enfranchisement. Secondly, the Internet has no significant consequences for various political activities outside voting. On the contrary, the only observable effects are recorded for the those who are active today or were active in the past (if we generalise from a single longitudinal study). Moreover, in line with uses results, when effects are found they

are linked to specialised online behaviours rather than to mere Internet use. The task of reconstructing causality by logical inference is thus impervious, to say the least. A positive correlation between online political information and offline engagement 'would not show causation, since other factors might still contribute to both Internet use and engagement, but it would be suggestive. At the very least, [it] would indicate that use of the Internet is connected to participation-related factors not identified here and in most standard models of engagement' (Bimber, 2003: 208). In a number of studies political interest appears to fit Bimber's description.

3.9 Conclusions: toward the empirical definition of e-democracy

The review of macro, meso and micro studies helped generate a more complex, alternative narrative to the prevalent e-democracy discourse. Each approach articulates a set of claims about the Internet's capacity to enhance democracy that have theoretical and empirical boundaries, thus limiting the e-democracy discourse. Somewhat reductively, there are three main set of questions regarding the empirical definition of e-democracy.

1. The structure of political inequality online. Does the Internet increase or reduce citizens' access to political engagement opportunities and the decision-making circuit? How do the resources, uses and effects of the Internet make a difference to democracy?
2. The institutional contexts of online action. What are the agencies, if any, that mediate citizen online engagement? Does the Internet assist any of the e-democracy visions?
3. The political quality of the technology, at the interface between institutions and citizens. What, if any, is the political value of the technology?

In this section I review the main nodes of the narrative, in order to set the foundation for the empirical investigation of e-democracy that is the main aim of this dissertation. Macro scholars argued that the Internet bundle has the potential to decentralise political communication in many realms of social life: social production, free speech, global networks, free association and equal voice. Individuals and small groups occupy the centre stage of the revolution, as political power is decentralised along with political communications and knowledge. Decentralised political knowledge and power can thus be reconstructed in politically significant new ways. The three e-democracy archetypes coincide with as many patterns of democratic decentralisation. Teledemocracy envisages citizens 'taking the power back' via new media, thus bypassing (or short-circuiting) the representative nexus. Proponents of teledemocracy argue that the increased ubiquity of politically new media foreshadows a solution to the problems of size, time, knowledge and

access that marred the possibility of direct democracy in mass industrial society. Virtual communitarians are rather concerned with the possibility of the formation of a collective. They argue that ICTs help bridge and bond dispersed communities, which in turn may favour the precipitation of collective action from a spatially and temporally dispersed set of individual aims. According to the proponents of online deliberative democracy, the solution of the problem of modern democracy is dependent on a process of rational deliberations taking place in the public domain. The Internet, it is claimed, provides the tools required for enhanced deliberation on an increasingly complex sets of issues. Although theoretically fertile, however, the macro approach to the political nature of new media flattens micro, meso and macro-level perspectives. On the one hand, it largely ignores institutional agency; on the other, it embeds individual agency in the new media artefact. Regardless of the model endorsed – direct, communitarian or deliberative – the user is inscribed in the new technology, while no room is left for the mediation, transmission or socialisation of the political potential of the Net. Although it is possible to envisage a McLuhanistic process of inscription of the user in the use at any time a message is communicated via any medium, the removal of intermediaries is extraordinarily convenient in the case of new media. The Internet-as-medium is a global network free from control and with intrinsically decentring characteristics: accessible, digitalised, compressible, infinitely reproducible, fractal, costless, space-less, timeless. All thinkable buffers between man and man and man and mediating machinery are removed. Macro theories of e-democracy in fact merge citizens, technologies and institutions; barriers are eliminated, and citizens fully participate in the making of decision – be it direct, communitarian or deliberative.

Normalisation theorists helped articulate e-democracy at the meso-political level. They insist that Internet commercialisation and the expansion of the user base determined a change in the ethics and in the pragmatics of online engagement. Whereas in the early days a minority of critical users, academics and enlightened policymakers could theorise and pursue ‘pure’ visions of democracy, the colonisation of cyberspace by mainstream political actors watered down the radical nature of the Internet. Above this bottom line, the meso field generates a variety of positions from the analysis of different agencies – institutions, political parties and electoral campaigns. These can be encapsulated in three main findings: 1. the importance of mediating structures for online political engagement, 2. the levelling (or otherwise) of the playing field for non mainstream agents and 3. the lack of citizen concern for online interactivity. Increasingly more sophisticated agents target increasingly more specific messages to increasingly inactive users, as a new ethics of vertical co-optation replaces the original ethics of horizontal co-operation. Overall, it is claimed that intermediaries and elites are crucial in implementing the e-democracy agenda. However, as Livingstone predicted, the healthy scepticism of the normalisers sounds dystopian or

backward looking, as they portray a 'politics as usual' scenario for cyberspace where the radical potential of new media is largely suppressed. In fact, despite a forceful and well-aimed critique, normalisation scholars fail to address the powerful charge that democracy comes with the network, rather than qua the network. Partly, this is due to the insistence on the Schumpeterian electoral circuit, which exhausts the radical potential of the Internet. The 'powers that web' have colonised the online political experience by offering co-optation rather than cooperation opportunities via the Internet. Partly, the failure descends from the insistence of meso theorists on the dispute utopian / dystopian, whereas macro theorists had articulated largely positive claims. While normalisation successfully challenge technological determinism, the critique is not as piquant concerning the largely glowing view of the 'technological fix' advanced by macro theorists and policymaker alike.

Micro studies examine citizens' behaviour, testing both macro claims of ICTs embedded-ness and meso claims of 'politics as usual'. Micro studies generate usable knowledge on the resources, uses and effects of the political Internet. The large majority of studies cast a long shadow of doubt on the possibility of electronic democracy, as Internet access and use is unevenly stratified across age, class, gender, education, income and political interest. Therefore the digital divide is truly a political divide, as social groups that are less likely to participate are also less likely to use the Internet. Other studies however strike a more positive note by noting that different resources underpin online and offline participation, thus leaving some hope for increased participation via new media. The micro review drew attention to the complexity of online political behaviour. Functionally different online political activities such as information seeking, monitoring and communication depend on specialised Internet skills, political attitudes and pre-existing behaviours and specific socio-demographics, thus pointing at reinforcement. However, general precursors of Internet access such as general education and income are lesser predictor of online activities once people are online, while Internet use (skills, frequency) and topical motivations become more important. Young people are also more likely than adults to participate online, as they possess the skills required to digitally engage notwithstanding the evidence on socio-technical stratification. This may moderate the effects of stratification and reinforcement and open the opportunity for digital mobilizations. Other studies assess Internet effects on offline political participation, mainly but not limited to voting. Internet users are slightly more likely to vote than non-users (*ceteris paribus*) but are otherwise as involved as non-users in other political contacting, discussing politics and political campaigning. Once again, observable effects derive from specific online behaviours rather than from Internet use per se, and are most discernible amongst younger cohorts. Such specialised services, including electoral information, have become increasingly important for a growing number of western citizens over time. Overall, micro studies provide relatively value-neutral evidence of

Internet's failure to enhance civic participation, although progressive elements such as Internet skills and political uses by younger cohorts mitigate reinforcement. However, micro studies may have missed the most radical democratic potential of the Internet by paying limited attention to the opportunities offered by the intermediaries identified in normalisation studies (mobilisation), and to the importance of novel digital skills for online engagement. Only the latest micro studies in fact begin to interrogate the political novelty of new media (e.g. Livingstone, 2004; e.g. Livingstone, Bober, & Helsper, 2004).

Chapter 4 - Political participation

The opportunities of new technologies have widened the scope and modes of participation once again. ... To find a fruitful conceptualisation for political participation – avoiding the correct, but useless conclusion that participation can be everything – seems to be one of the most crucial challenges for the further development of democratic decision-making procedures in modern societies.

Jan Van Deth, 2002

4.1 Introduction

In the first section of this chapter, I introduce the concept of ‘political participation’ as a heuristic toolbox for the adjudication between, and hopefully integration of, electronic democracy claims. The principal components of the theory of participation are then discussed, first in respect with political science approaches to the study of political behaviour and empirical democratic theory; then, their suitability is discussed for the study of electronic democracy. The study of electronic democracy can thus be described as the study of how the Internet is used by individuals for political aims, which takes into account macro claims about the value of technologies and the importance of extant political practices predicated upon the Internet by *normalisation* theories. A useful model for the study of electronic democracy is as much readily available as neglected: the theory of political participation.⁵⁹ The theory of participation provides useful tools for the rapprochement of online participation behaviours and the idea of electronic democracy, through the assessment of the democratic potential of ICTs in multiple contexts of engagement, which encompass technologies, agencies and agents.

4.2 The theory of participation

This section broadly traces the evolution of the theory of participation, as ‘the analysis of [its] historical emergence is indispensable in order to arrive at a classification capable of expressing the meaning of the ideological and political debate in which this concept is commonly used. The lack of ‘historical reconstruction’ has hampered the efforts towards a ‘rational reconstruction’” (Pizzorno, 1970: 57). Participation is a modern formal concept in political science, introduced in the United States in the 50s within the behavioural field to indicate individual citizens’ involvement in the affairs of the polity, most notably voting. A theory of participation emerged in the 70s from the continued work of Sidney Verba and colleagues, and was subsequently developed in different directions by numerous scholars (Barnes & Kaase, 1979b; Parry, Moyser, & Day, 1992; Pattie, Seyd, & Whiteley, 2003;

⁵⁹ Participation denotes here both the act of engaging in political activities and its conceptual referent.

Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).⁶⁰ The theory is empirical and explanatory, rather than speculative and predictive. It maintains that it is possible to determine the degree and nature of democracy – both in a given polity and across polities – according to the differential analysis of individual levels and styles of political engagement. The theory has become the dominant paradigm for the study of citizen engagement,⁶¹ and an important strand within empirical democratic theory.

Broadly speaking, political participation describes a single individual's act of taking part in decisions that affect the life of the polity the individual belongs to (Parry, 1972; Salisbury, 1975; van Deth, 2001). The first use of the concept to define individual political action can be traced back to 1954; before then different 'proper names' were used to define citizen participation, such as voting (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; A. Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960) and different variations on the theme of 'public opinion' (Lasswell, 1952; Lippmann, 1922).⁶² Whereas the concept of participation was deeply rooted and analytically undistinguished in earlier philosophical theories of democracy (Parry, 1972), it first underwent analytical treatment in the 50s. The evolution and operationalisation of 'participation' proceeded alongside the behavioural revolution, culminating in the publication of Verba and Nie's work in 1971 and 1972, which set participation apart for empirical analysis, making its relations clear with other constructs of political science, such as power, political system and, importantly, democracy. The evolution of the empirical and theoretical understanding of participation in the 1970s marks the rapprochement of empirical evidence of citizen engagement with democratic theory.

The evolution of the theory followed the historical progress of the *repertoire* of mass political action in western polities, which expanded incrementally from voting in the late 1940s, to personal contacting and election campaigning in the 1950s, to protest action, social movement activity in the 1970, eventually leading to social participation and civic voluntarism in the 1990s (Dalton, 1988; van Deth, 2001).⁶³ The conceptual expansion of the

⁶⁰ Verba provides a theoretical introduction to the modes of participation (1967). Verba, Nie & Kim formalise the concept for cross-national research (1971). Verba & Nie set the general model for future research (1972). Verba et al. review and critique the 1972 work and the reactions it generated (1973). Verba et al. adapt the framework for cross-national research, with an emphasis on groups (1978). Verba, Schlozman & Brady recast the SES model in a 'resource' perspective (1995). Finally, Verba expands on the relation between participatory equality and democracy (2003). 'Verba and colleagues' is used here in relation to the theory of participation in general.

⁶¹ See the reviews of Dalton (1988), Leighley (1995) and Brady (1999). Dalton examines the concept in relation to democratic theory (see also Kavanagh, 1972 and Pizzorno, 1970). Leighley considers the importance of the concept in modern political science, as compared to voting studies and rational choice models of citizen behaviour (see Whiteley, 1995). Brady reviews in detail the methodology of the *participation* approach, which covers six major studies and three thematic areas.

⁶² The review of JSTOR, ZETOC and older paper-based reference sources marks 1954 as the first record of the term in a title/abstract in English.

⁶³ Although, it will be argued, mass anti-system behaviours have been excluded from the participation continuum (Pizzorno, 1970).

term, and the articulation of the theory of participation resulted from the expansion of both the extent and the repertoire of citizen participation following WWII more than from a shift in research focus (van Deth, 2001). Evidence suggests that the tools used to measure participation – questionnaires, probes, samples – changed more gradually, lagging behind actual forms of participation over the same period (Baumgartner & Walker, 1988; Brady, 1998).⁶⁴

4.2.1 *The definition of participation*

In most European languages, participation means ‘to take part in’, or ‘having a share with others in some action’ (Parry, 1972). Above this baseline, a number of definitions have been proposed which expand / contract different aspects of the participatory act, emphasising now the subject, the process or the object of participation.⁶⁵ Parry notes that political participation refers to the process of ‘taking part in the formulation, passage or implementation of public policies’ (Parry, 1972). In their landmark study of participation in Britain, Parry and colleagues use the same formula to stress the dynamic aspect of the political transaction, as ‘action by citizens which is aimed at influencing decisions which are ... ultimately taken by public representatives and officials’ (Parry, Moyser & Day, 1992: 16). Margaret Conway emphasises the input side of such engagement, the ‘activities of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government authorities, or the policies of government. These activities may be supportive of existing policies, authorities, or structure, or they may seek to change any or all of these’ (Conway, 1971: 4). In the same vein, Kaase and Marsh emphasise citizens’ intentions, defining participation as ‘all voluntary activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and / or the actions they take’ (1979: 42). Finally, Milbrath and Goel identify the nature of the target, as they define participation a ‘behaviour which affects or is intended to affect the decisional outcomes of government’, as opposed to a church or a corporation (Milbrath & Goel, 1977: 2).

Thus defined, participation is the straightforward process of *citizens taking part in the binding decisions of their polity*. The common understanding and acceptance of participation today has four main features:

1. It refers to people in their role as citizens and not as politicians or civil servants.
2. It is understood as an activity (‘action’) – simply watching television or claiming to be curious about politics does not constitute participation.

⁶⁴ Russell Dalton provides a more critical assessment of the value of the methodology of early studies of participation (1988: 24-27), as does Burstein (1972).

⁶⁵ Underlining on this page is used to highlight the distinctiveness of each position.

3. The activities of citizens defined as political participation should be voluntary and not ordered by the ruling class or obliged under some law or rule. As such, it refers to actions that aim to influence how the political system allocates values.
4. It concerns government and politics in a broad sense ('political system') and is restricted neither to specific phases (such as parliamentary decision-making), nor to specific levels or areas (such as national elections or contacts with officials).
(cf. Brady, 1999: 737; van Deth, 2001: 5)

However, all four elements highlight substantial problems related more to the nature of the *political* than to *participation* (Brady, 1998: 378 fw). Where are the boundaries to be traced between private and public engagement? How purposeful should an action be to be considered as 'political'? Is compulsory voting not a legitimate form of participation? And, finally, do the family, workplace, church, social associations embed differential relations of power, which can be thought of as participation? (Parry, 1972). The nature of the *political* is elusive of empirical political science, prone to the speculations of political philosophy on the nature of individuals, processes and institutions.

4.2.2 *Nomological vs. empirical approaches to participation*

There are two main ways to analyse participation, that are connected respectively to the European and the American schools of political studies. Drawing on historical analysis and political philosophy, the first school addresses the question of where the boundaries lie between the social, the political and the economic. In order to delimit political participation, Parry notes, the political scientist must turn political philosopher and 'ask where for him lie the limits of what is politics' (Parry, 1972: 17). Before the behavioural revolution, research on political participation was inscribed in traditional approaches to the political enquiry. 'Traditional political science has been institutional in focus and eclectic in approach. Most of the work that has been done by political scientists falls into one of the four categories which we may term historical, analytic, prescriptive and descriptive-taxonomic' (Kirkpatrick, 1962: 6). The political philosophy underpinning democratic theory has always been concerned with the idea of *popular* participation, expressed in holistic-legalistic formulas such as popular will, dwelling now on arguments about resistance to illegitimate government, then about the fulfilment of human capacity (Parry, 1972: 19-31). However, both the principles of *autonomy* (Held, 1996, Ch. 9) and *self-development* (Thompson, 1970, Ch. 3) have 'to be linked to a diversity of conditions of enactment, that is, institutional and organisational requirements, if [they are] to be fully entrenched in political life ... none of the leading traditions of modern democratic thought can fully grasp these conditions' (Held, 1996: 296-

297).⁶⁶ Without such empirical referents, the problem of participation in democratic theory is both fascinating and intractable. Moreover, Thompson notes, proceeding top-down from democratic theory to participation evidence is hugely problematic, in three respects. First, some of the ideals of democratic theory cannot be tested. Second, evidence is inconclusive when dealing with radical change, that is change that transforms the very nature of the political system. Third, judgements of value cannot be incorporated in empirical models (Thompson, 1970). This is not to argue that any such attempts are not worthwhile. A number of works try to make sense of the existing empirical studies to corroborate different versions of democratic theory (Friedman, 1972; Lijphart, 1972; Pateman, 1970; Thompson, 1970). Theorists of participatory democracy have updated citizenship theories according to the requirements of mass society – most notably Benjamin Barber (1988) – while recent empirical evidence is brought to bear on late-modern theories of democracy, with insightful results (Beck, 1997; Offe, 1996).

A more fruitful solution to the problem of the ‘political’ nature of participation followed from the ‘behavioural revolution’ originating in the United States. While in the European tradition, a large part of social life is seen *sub specie politica*, and analysed accordingly,⁶⁷ ‘empirical research of the American kind limits political analysis to a precise but narrow field’ (Pizzorno 1970: 57). The study of participation in the behavioural tradition subsequently proceeded to 1) the narrow operationalisation of political participation as set of individual political activities, 2) the articulation of activities into more sophisticated modes of action, and 3) the formulation of limited theories of participation. The empirical study of mass participation thus entailed first a reduction of conceptual arbitrariness (1940s and 50s), the enhancement of the conceptual tools employed (1960s) and, eventually, the articulation of theory – or theories of participation around empirical evidence (1970s).⁶⁸

Within the behavioural tradition, the participation debate concerns denotation: what participation defines and describes, the conceptual domain it occupies (Milbrath, 1965: 56).⁶⁹

⁶⁶ The proliferation of the attributes of democracy responds to an increasingly complex political reality (Collier & Levitsky, 1997; Sartori, 1965). Robert Dahl provided a classical analysis of the debate (Dahl, 1989). For an overview as articulated as political reality see Held (Held, 1996, esp. Ch. 9-10).

⁶⁷ ‘It might be claimed that any conduct which has some political effect should be regarded as political participation ... anything from giving birth to Hitler to attending a cabinet meeting would count as political participation’ (Parry, 1972: 6).

⁶⁸ According to Imre Lakatos, this process is characteristic of mature science, which ‘consists of research programmes in which not only novel facts but, in an important sense, also novel auxiliary theories, are anticipated; mature science – unlike pedestrian trial-and-error – has ‘heuristic power’ (Lakatos, 1978: 88).

⁶⁹ E.g. Berelson et al. (1954), Lane (1959), Campbell et al. (1960), Almond & Verba (1963). A wealth of smaller-scale studies was also produced in the same period (see Milbrath & Goel, 1977). Although these works differ as to scope of enquiry, definition of participation and aims, all endorse the four main tenets of behaviouralism. They 1) Reject political institutions as the basic unit for research and

Table 4-1. Typology of political participation

Nature of ends	Nature of political interests	
	<i>Autonomous</i>	<i>Dependent</i>
<i>Negotiable</i>	Political profession	Civic participation
<i>Non negotiable</i>	Social movement	Subculture

Source

Pizzorno, 1970: 59

Early empirical studies of participation reduced the complexity of political behaviour by two complementary strategies, one which is concerned with voting (Kirkpatrick, 1962: 15-18), the other with political personality (Kirkpatrick, 1962: 18-22). On the one hand, a wealth of studies emerged about relatively ‘simple’ and accessible activities (in terms of data), specifically voting behaviour, and its institutional co-ordinates – party systems, locality and constitutions (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; A. Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960). Individual action was counted as participation in as much as it unfolded within the polity, which exists where human relationships of influence become ‘stable and repetitive’ (Dahl, 1963). On the other hand, a line was drawn as to what participation represents for the individual involved, the ‘psychological characteristics of the *homo politicus*: attitudes, beliefs, predispositions, personality factors’ (Dahl, 1961a: 769). The study of participation concerns the study of participatory types, ‘political personality’ and political socialisation at different stages of citizens’ lives (Adorno, 1950; Milbrath, 1965: 73-89 for a review). What was proclaimed as the behavioural revolution ‘generated remarkably little analysis of actual behaviour. The overwhelming bulk of behavioral research examined attitudes’ (Salisbury, 1975: 323), specifically whether the ‘average citizen’ stood up to the standards set by normative democratic theory (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; for a review see Kavanagh, 1969: 105-120; Milbrath, 1965).⁷⁰ Participation thus occupies a cross-section of the polity that is limited by the nature of personal involvement, on the one hand; by the institutional boundaries of participation, on the other.

Italian political scientist Alessandro Pizzorno offered a useful typology of political participation research before the 1970s (Table 4-1). According to Pizzorno, political participation can be categorised using two criteria: the nature of the ends of participation, and the nature of political interest. On the first dimension, ends can be either negotiable or

identify the behaviour of individuals in political situations as the basic unit of analysis; 2) emphasises the unity of political science with the social sciences as behavioural sciences; 3) Advocate the utilization of development of more precise techniques for observing, classifying, and measuring data and urge the use of statistical or quantitative formulations wherever possible; 4) Define the construction of systematic, empirical theory as a primary goal (Kirkpatrick, 1962: 12).

⁷⁰ Both processes of reduction effectively distance the ‘political’ from the idea of ‘power’, through the formalisation of acts and their precedents within the political system.

non-negotiable within the existing political system.⁷¹ The second dimension refers to the nature of the political interests, which can be dependent or autonomous. 'Dependent' means reliant on a source external to the political realm (participation 'due to'); 'autonomous' means that political interests are formed in the process of the creation of communal political links (participation 'in order to'). Behavioural studies of participation, Pizzorno argues, tend to concentrate on the 'civic participation' area,⁷² where aims are negotiable, and the individual enters the political process due to exogenous motivations.

Within this area of participation, early behavioural studies gauged citizen engagement over a continuum apathy / activity with respect to voting, or more often non-voting. The *average* citizen, the American Voter, is the focus of increasingly sophisticated empirical research (Dalton, 1988: 15-21), clearly associated with elitist theories of democracy, rather than, more positively, classical and citizenship theories of democracy (Dalton, 1988: 21-31; see also Friedman, 1972; Kavanagh, 1969). By focusing on factors such as alienation – powerlessness, normlessness, social isolation – and non-voting, that is on the negative, they implicitly supported the assumptions of elitist democrats about participation (Dalton, 1988). The behavioural stance in political science favoured the revision of positive/normative models of democracy, and the reliance on empirical evidence for the construction of democratic theory (Kavanagh, 1969; Thompson, 1970).

It has been argued that the restriction of the scope and aims of participation responds to a specific need of integration and stability of western polities, especially the American polity. Pizzorno asked the (rhetorical) question why all empirical evidence about political participation produced up to 1970 concerns the intensity of the individual's level of obligation and involvement rather than the objective effects of a certain act of participation.

Political participation is implicitly seen as a factor of integration at two different levels:
a) the integration of the political system – participation meaning consensus, b) integration of the individual personality – public activity is considered to have a balancing effect. According to this approach, political participation is the crucial point where factors of system and personal integration meet. (1970: 31)

The importance of *participation* is a 'reflection and a response to economic, social and political tendencies which [were] at work in many advanced industrial societies of the time: it reflects the dissatisfactions and offers a solution to the tensions' (Arblaster, 1972: 41). In the case of Britain, 'ideas of participation have formed part of the *Zeitgeist* since the 1960s ... participation was on the agenda' (Parry, Moyser, & Day, 1992: 25, 27). Although behaviouralism provides the necessary element of integration between macro-elitist theories of stable democracy (e.g. Eckstein, 1961), and seminal theories of citizen inputs (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954), the emphasis it placed on individual psychology (along the

⁷¹ For example, abortion was a non-negotiable issue in Italy until the 70s.

⁷² After Almond and Verba's *Civic Culture* (Almond & Verba, 1963).

lines of political apathy) and institutional participation (voting or a single additive participation scale) hindered the full articulation of a theory. Pizzorno argued that ‘the limitation of its scope and the insufficiency of the conceptual tools employed [by political participation literature] are striking’ (1970: 57). Fragments in search of a unity, as Robert Dahl famously put it (1961a).

4.3 The theory of participation: main elements⁷³

Drawing on this background, the work of Verba and Nie is original in a number of respects. The work of Verba and Nie builds on the behavioural tradition, and represents the most accomplished attempt to provide the conceptual tools necessary to explain the *how* and *why* of citizen participation in advanced industrial democracies.⁷⁴ The overcoming of behaviouralism is linked to five interrelated conceptualisations, which are empirically operational in the framework of their model.

1. a multivariate relation between participation and democracy
2. the instrumentality of political action in the participation paradigm;
3. a socio-economic status theoretical baseline underpinning the structure of political equality;
4. the ‘modes’ of political participation as settings of meaningful political action;
5. the ‘dimensions’, or styles of political participation as the basic elements for the construction of individual action repertoires.

First, the importance attributed to instrumental participation, and the full emancipation of empirical participation theory from the strictures of the developmental perspective. Second, the idea that the resulting patterns of participation can be directly used to interpret democracy. Third, the idea that socio-economic status (SES) is but a baseline for further analysis of individual group resources. Fourth, the idea that different combination of SES and additional resources shape different *modes* of participation which are not necessarily related. Finally, the consequent idea that modes differ across a range of indicators, or *dimensions* of participation.

4.3.1 Participation and democracy

The link between political participation and democracy is a long-standing theme in political science. Democracy is defined here procedurally, as a way the polity arrives at decisions binding citizens’ behaviour, which fulfils the ‘government by the people’ requirement. Different theories of democracy describe, or more often prescribe *a way* of arriving at common decisions, ruling out alternative procedures, modes and participants – other theories of democracy. As Verba and Nie aptly put it, ‘if democracy is interpreted as

⁷³ This section represents an analysis, not a summary, of the theory of participation based on the work of Verba and colleagues. Any misrepresentation or misinterpretation is the author’s own.

⁷⁴ Their works looms large in all subsequent studies and reviews of citizen politics. Among the empirical studies Parry, Moyser and Day (1992), Dalton (1988) and Norris (2002) acknowledge a debt to the work of Verba and Nie. Major reviews of political participation feature prominently the work of Verba and colleagues (Brady, 1998; Leighley, 1995; Salisbury, 1975).

rule by the people, then the question of who participates in political decisions becomes the question of the nature of democracy in a society' (Verba & Nie, 1972: 1). 'Patterns' of participation, inscribed in such modes and procedures play a different role in each democratic theory which is consistent with their different assumptions. I consider here specifically three traditional democratic models: classical, revisionist and pluralist denominations of the democratic doctrine. These, according to Salisbury, coincide with three main lines of intellectual usage and research on *political participation* (1975: 325-327). The relationship of *participation* and *democracy* is evident in all three theories of democracy, with crucial differences in sign and value.

The works of Pateman (1970: Chapter 1) and Conway (1991: 2-13) provide a convenient starting point for the exploration of this relationship between participation and democracy. Both authors distinguish between two main perspectives. On the one hand, there are classical theories of democracy. According to this quite heterogeneous set of views political participation is *conditio sine qua non* of a functioning democracy. The basic assumption of this school is that the higher the rates of participation in a polity, the more democratic the polity is. The roots of this school can be traced back to Pericles, passing through Rousseau, de Tocqueville and Mill, and arriving at a rejuvenated participatory tradition set in an industrial (Pateman, 1970) or late-industrial society (Barber, 1984). In this model, the demands on the social body's political will and rationality, elites' integrity and procedural fairness are relatively high. Citizens are assumed and expected to be knowledgeable, motivated and interested in the running of the polity (Almond & Verba, 1963, Ch. 1); elites are assumed to respect the popular will, and to articulate political participation in decision-making. Assisting this process, rules have to guarantee both the inclusiveness of the political system and the political equality of participants throughout decision-making. According to the classical theory, participation is a 'solvent of social conflict', strongly emphasised in the works of JS Mills, Rousseau and American republican thought. Participation is the process of learning democracy, learning to identify personal need with social needs, personal good with social good. This view assumes small homogeneous communities in condition of quasi-political-equality.

The second position is commonly referred to as revisionist or elitist theory of democracy – due to the centrality attributed to elites in democratic processes. Revisionist democracy is premised on the dichotomy rulers-ruled, where participation is relegated to a controlling role at times of elections.⁷⁵ Democratic stability, rather than political

⁷⁵ There is an interesting similarity between revisionist democracy and the realistic-legalistic formulation of democracy at the start of the century in continental Europe. On the one hand, elections were taken to be the 'civilised' counterpart of war, or revolution, where 'heads are counted rather than cut'. On the other hand, political participation was seen as a balancing factor despotic authority, a

participation or political change, is the main concern of the approach. In opposition to classical democratic theorists, revisionists 'argue that low levels of political participation and interest actually contribute to governmental stability' (Conway, 1991: 2), hence yielding a stable and functioning democracy (Eckstein, 1961). The main concerns of elitist democratic theorist is to 'sterilise' mass participation after the second world war, for two main 'laudable reasons': the discrepancy between the requirements of normative citizenship theory of participation and low levels of participation in the west; and the high levels of participation in autocratic regimes, especially Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia (Friedman, 1972: I-3 to I-13). There are four main reasons why mass participation is not the best mechanism for setting social policies, negative in respect with classical approaches. First, participation is infrequent and unevenly distributed in the population. This is due to 'certain organisational constraints and psychological factors operating in large groups' (Kavanagh, 1969: 104). Second, citizens cannot be assumed to be the best judges of their interests, if they can be supposed to know them at all (Verba & Nie, 1972: 3-5). Third, extensive (and compulsory) political participation is inimical to individual liberty, and freedom to choose. Finally, public participation runs counter the principles of policy efficiency (Parry, 1972). Therefore, low levels of participation actually facilitate the running of the polity from the top, as elites can pursue the polity's best interests free from pressures from below. In addition, the lack of engagement might be interpreted as sign of satisfaction with how the polity is run, and preserving individual *liberty*.⁷⁶ Joseph Schumpeter is arguably the leading theorist of this position (Schumpeter, 1978), which counts influential supporters such as Lippmann (1922) and Lasswell (1950).⁷⁷ Within the revisionist field, participation is crucial with respect to the legitimacy of the political system. Participation is a legitimising act, in that it corroborates at regular intervals the decision taken by the elite on behalf of the people. This concept is similar to Easton's notion of diffuse support, while empirical research focuses on the related theme of system stability and personal integration (Pizzorno, 1970).

The third position is the pluralist approach, which builds on the work of pluralist democratic theorists – notably Robert Dahl – and the late work of neo-realists such as Sartori (Pateman, 1970). Pluralists insist on the importance of quasi-institutional mediators and regulatory regimes to transform low levels of engagement into workable democratic polities. Rules and procedures of democracy are meant to mediate the gap between micro- and macro-political structures, functioning as institutional mediators – both in terms of agency

modern version of the Lockean right to rebel to unjust rule. See Parry (1972) and Schwartz (1984) for interesting historical accounts on the early evolution of the concept.

⁷⁶ Similarly, Thompson mentions four negative consequences of mass participation: instability, incompetence, dissatisfaction and authoritarianism (Thompson, 1970).

⁷⁷ As was noted above (p. 99) revisionist assumptions found application and empirical backing in early behavioural studies (Kavanagh, 1969: 105-121).

(classical pluralists) and regimes and procedures (neo-pluralists). A paradox is left unresolved by the linear 'elite vs. governed' model shared by classical and revisionist theorists, which rests on three empirical anomalies. First, what has been articulated as 'the paradox of mass politics' (Neuman, 1986), the view that democratic stability unaffected by average levels of political interest and engagement of its citizens.⁷⁸ Secondly, there are instable democracies where citizen participation is scanty, e.g. former Communist states. Thirdly, there are stable democracies that enjoy relatively high levels of public participation (e.g. the Nordic countries).⁷⁹

In the pluralist formulation, participation is seen as overtly instrumental (cf. Parry, 1972), a struggle of the many for political influence, in the case of scarcity and uneven distribution of resources and benefits (Salisbury, 1970). As it were, the twofold belief that political participation is either a 'necessary evil' or 'necessary good' is divested of its normative value. Participation is *necessary* for the functioning of representative democracy, primarily because 'participation is viewed as maintaining open access to the system' (Conway, 1991: 3). According to Rokkan, pluralist empirical studies on political participation have formed two consolidated lines of enquiry. First, the 'historical comparison of the processes of decision-making which led to the expansion of the electorate and the standardization of registration and voting procedures'; second, the 'statistical comparison of trends in political reactions of the masses of lower class citizens and of women after their entry into the electorate'. However, Rokkan argued, a third, burgeoning mode of study of political participation run along the lines of the aggregation and articulation of mass pressures through an array of mediators, not solely institutional (Rokkan, 1970: 30). The main epistemological novelty of the pluralist position is the articulation of the concept of participation over different tiers of a plural system.

The work of Verba on participation belongs in the third camp, directly addressing Robert Dahl's plea for the 'positive' understanding of democracy: 'instead of seeking to explain why citizens are not interested, concerned and active, the task is to explain why a few citizens are' (Dahl, quoted in Parry, Moyser, & Day, 1992: 8). If *polyarchy*, as Dahl had it, is about the encounter of high levels of political mobilisation and a high degree of liberalisation, the division of intellectual work between Rokkan and Verba is evident. The former is concerned with in the 'structurally set restraints' of participation, and the positive overcoming of institutional thresholds of representative democracy (Rokkan, 1970: 18). The latter is interested in the *participation input*, defined as the 'set of pressures that derive from

⁷⁸ Rather, it results from the stratification of three differently engaged publics around differential sets of issues (Neuman, 1986: 186 fw).

⁷⁹ The last aspect of the paradox yielded a fruitful rethinking of democratic theory at the end of the 60s (Rokkan, 1970); the second, especially with respect to emergent democracies from the cold war, is shaping the current debate (Mouffe, 1993; Offe, 1996).

the participatory activities of citizens who are not part of the official structure' (Verba & Nie, 1972: 8). In this respect, the work on participation fills empirical and theoretical gaps identified by Rokkan: the need for *micro-political* accounts of political participation – the micro-micro nexus, and its relation with the existing political structure – micro-macro relations (Rokkan, 1970: 14-18).

To deal with the 'macro' questions about democratic politics, we shall have to raise some 'micro' questions about the behaviour of citizens and the sources of that behaviour ... our problem links micro- and macropolitics, for it deals with one of the most crucial questions of the relationship of the citizen with the state: how are the preferences of the citizens of a society aggregated into a social choice? (Verba & Nie, 1972: 6).

Participation and democracy become in this way intertwined, as the answer to the question 'who participates?' becomes intimately related to democracy' (Verba & Nie, 1972: 1).⁸⁰ Thus defined, participation is a concept perfectly consistent with pluralist theories of democracy (Held, 1996: 199-232).

It should be noted however that the work of Verba and colleagues is neither the first nor the only 'measurement' of democracy from a micro perspective. In principle at least, all behavioural studies, most notably election studies, aimed at tracing a line between citizen engagement and the quality of democracy. Devine claimed that 'democracy is scientifically demonstrable in twentieth century America' (1970: 1). He adopted Almond's concept of the 'attentive public' – composed of political information seeking, interest in politics and campaigns and engagement in political discussion – as middle-level operationalisation of democracy, and tests the relation between levels of attentiveness and public policy outputs (Devine, 1970: 33-34, 46-56). Although the direction and directness of causality are ambiguous, he found that the more attentive the public, the more specific policies – foreign aid, civil rights and medical care – are responsive to citizens' preferences (pp. 117-118). Friedman proposed four scales for the measurement of democracy according to the style of citizen participation. Democracy (as opposed to totalitarianism) can be measured empirically by the degrees of co-operation, persistence in activity, visibility of participation and universality of the aims it requires of citizens (Friedman, 1972: II-5).

I share however Arend Lijphart's objection that these attempts are only a first essential step for the development of empirical democratic theory. More questions should be asked about the context of the relationship, the nature of the indicators employed to relate citizens and government and the generalizability of theories generated in such a way (Lijphart, 1972: 421-422). I also share with qualification David Held's point that 'the pluralist emphasis on

⁸⁰ Following this assumption to its logical conclusion, Parry and his colleagues conclude that 'Britain in the 1980s is not a democracy, where widespread citizen participation is the norm' (Parry, Moysers, & Day, 1992: 47). The idea retains wide currency today: 'the extent to which people are engaged with politics is of critical importance and is a key indicator of the health of our democratic society' (The Electoral Commission & Hansard Society, 2004: 7).

the ‘empirical’ nature of democracy compounds a difficulty in democratic thought ... the ideal and methods of democracy become, by default, the ideal and methods of the existing democratic systems’ (1996: 209, 210-214). The qualifications concern the range of empirical findings supporting Lijphart and Held’s claims, which stops short of Verba and colleagues’ participation studies. As Held concedes, the pluralist doctrine has evolved considerably since the early days (1996: 214). It is argued here that the theory of participation has fared much better, if not succeeded, where early behavioural studies of participation failed, in arriving a ‘neutral’ statements on democracy.

4.3.2 *Instrumental participation*

It was argued that behaviouralism limits participation in two respects, by examining ‘simple’ institutional forms of action, especially voting, and political personality. These two areas mirror a debate between instrumental and developmental theorists of participation that predates behaviouralism.⁸¹ These opposing traditions build on two main presuppositions of citizenship: autonomy – whereby the citizen is the best judge of her own interests – and improvability, which states that individuals can fulfil their political potential as citizens (Thompson, 1970). An instrumental political act, based on the citizen’s autonomy, is behaviour aimed at a specific political outcome, that is the conformation of polity rules to the *nomos* of the individual; a symbolic act, part of a wider humanist project, fulfils an individual’s expressive need (Conway, 1991).⁸² Hence, “instrumental’ theories treat political participation as a means to some more restricted end, such as the better defence of individual and group interests. ‘Developmental’ theories see political participation as an essential part of the development of human capacities. Participation comes to be almost, if not quite, an end in itself’ (Parry, 1972: 18-19). *Instrumental* participation is therefore oriented towards the fulfilment of physical and security needs, however increasingly sophisticated in times of reflexive modernity (Beck, 1997). *Symbolic* (expressive) participation fulfils belonging/ness, self-esteem and self-actualisation needs, performed via existing political symbols transcending the individual.⁸³

⁸¹ Parry (1972; Parry, 1994) and Schwartz (1984) review the debate from Aristotle to the 20th century. Thompson is concerned with 20th century theorists (1970). Held provides an assessment of participation within different sub-models of democracy (1996: 21-34, 197, 204, 209-10, 228).

⁸² Of course such partition is not neat. Political acts can be either/or and both/and instrumental and expressive.

⁸³ Conway adopts Edelman’s idea that participation without power is *symbolic* participation, based on political man’s hopes and fears. ‘In their obsession with the state, men are of course obsessed with themselves. ... Political forms thus come to symbolize what large masses of men need to believe about the state to reassure themselves. It is the needs, the hopes, and the anxieties of men that determine the meanings’ (Edelman, 1962: 12). It is remarkable how modern the concept of *anxiety* is. It resounds in the work of Bauman about fear as the driving force of political change in late-modernity (1999: 47, 63, 175), and in Mouffe’s re-discovery of Carl Schmitt’s dyad *freund – feind*, after the end of cold-war ‘frightful certainties’ (1999: esp. Ch. 2, 9).

Furthermore, instrumental and developmental theories are grounded in different philosophical traditions. Instrumental theories are based in doctrines about resistance to the illegitimate exercise of power. Political participation is considered as the most effective defence against tyranny, to counter the effects of bureaucracy and centralisation, both attributes of societal modernisation.

The object of political institutions and political action was to prevent despotism which consisted in the concentration of absolute power. Institutions were needed which would divide power, ensure that it was wielded impartially and which would permit and encourage the people to forestall any arbitrary encroachments on their freedom. (Parry, 1972: 22)

Four principles of instrumental theories, 'though combining to form a way of thinking about participation are, however, consistent with a number of contrasting emphases as to the scope and extent of the participation recommended':

- the individual is the best judge of his interest.
 - quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus approbetur.⁸⁴
 - all men have the (natural) right to participate in politics in order to defend their interests.
 - governments which fail to accord to these principles are declared not legitimate.
- (Parry, 1972: 23)

In the developmental approach political participation is 'fundamental to the development of the individual and the preservation of the memory of an individual's life ... we do not become responsible adults and develop our full potential unless we speak and act publicly *and* take responsibility for our actions' (Beam & Simpson, 1984: 12-13). According to this view, participation should not be confined to national-level institutional channels of political influence, but has to involve local, non-institutional self-government, where the knowledge of citizens is greater, and where aims are in direct reach of participants. Participation should be extended to the work-place, where many of the decisions which affect the individual are taken, thus 'extending the boundary of the political by widening the scope of publicly accountable participation'. (Parry, 1972: 30) Formerly private areas are made public, as decision in these settings affect individuals' *life chances* more than government decisions. The developmental perspective, touching upon all areas of human development, thus gives the widest definition of participation, one that places high expectations on the capacity and willingness of individuals to live 'politically'. The human being must be a participant, sharing deeds and speech with the wider public in order to fully express herself as such.

To live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an 'objective' relationship with them that comes from being related to and separated from the through the intermediary

⁸⁴ Approximately, 'what affects all, by all shall be agreed'.

of a common world of things, to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself (Arendt, 1959).

The behavioural revolution, it was argued, radically undercut citizens' autonomy, through the concern with 'dependent' civic attitudes, political personality and types, while studies of 'autonomous' behaviour examined limited aspects of an increasingly complex polity, namely voting and campaign behaviour. Autonomy, as it were, was confined to the rational calculus of voting. Verba and Nie take the behavioural revolution a step further by restoring autonomy to its central place. Participation is 'an instrumental act by which citizens influence the government' (Verba & Nie, 1972: 5), 'a flow of influence upward from the masses' (Verba & Nie, 1972: 3). Participation is 'the key instrumental political act by citizens in a democracy [which] conveys to political leaders their needs, problems and preferences, and place pressure on such leaders to act in ways that are responsive' (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978). 'Instrumentality', Verba argued, is the most important innovation brought about by the study of participation (Verba, 1967). However, instrumentality is set in the theory of participation at the level of the action, rather than at the level of the actor. Instrumentalism can be discussed on two grounds. The first concerns the aims of the actor involved, who is supposed to engage in political action to reach an overtly political objective or benefit, which might be personal or collective. Hence autonomy. The second concerns the action itself, and can be articulated on three increasingly general postulates: 1) that the individual has a choice between alternatives at the time of action – the reality of participation; 2) that her action is to some extent effective, otherwise she would not engage in political activities (Parry, 1972); 3) and that the field of decidable has to be under citizens' control.⁸⁵

Verba and Nie shy away from the individual calculus of voting and campaigning, and their motivations, and focus on actions which are overtly available, might be effective and are under citizens' direct control. Only those political activities which, from the outside (ostensively), appear as being aimed at an institution are counted, thus making un-tested assumptions on the aims of the individual. Inductively therefore, 'the individual who has no chance to participate is, in some sense, not a full citizen' (Verba, 1967). Instrumentality is assumed unquestioned, descending (dependent) from their extant behaviour, rather than, as Pizzorno had it, autonomous (Table 4-1, p. 102). As Verba notes, 'we expect individuals to have some autonomy and control over their own fate'. Hence, potentially expressive individual activities are considered as instrumental where they falls in one of the

⁸⁵ Bachrach and Baratz first examined 'non-decision' and the grey area surrounding visible, institutional politics (1962). In short, they argue, attention should be paid to unspoken assumptions and to the options that are routinely and tacitly ruled out in every decisional process.

'instrumental' categories.⁸⁶ In other words, instrumentality is taken out of individuals' hands (and heads), and set as a condition for participation, which validates democracy. Instrumentality thus concerns more the justification than the motive of participation, one which is superimposed by the researcher (Parry, Moysen, & Day, 1992).

As a result, the boundaries of citizen participation are set by the dual exclusion of political support and political protest. The *instrumental* study of citizen participation rules out ceremonial or support participation, where citizens 'take part' by

expressing support for the government, by marching in parades, by working hard in developmental projects, by participating in youth groups organized by the government, or by voting in ceremonial elections ... it does not involve support for a pre-existing unified national interest but is part of a process by which the national interest or interests are created (Verba & Nie, 1972: 2).

Symmetrically, political protest is also excluded. Whilst the importance of protest in the spectrum of political participation is acknowledged, writing about it would be 'writing another book' (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978). By means of a strictly instrumental view, and assuming the political autonomy of the citizen, the theory of participation rules out support and protest, the developmental component of participation, defined as both filling and fulfilling activity. In other words, participation is the value-neutral interface that transforms the social in the democratic within the boundaries of the political system, the buffer between socio-economic forces, and their causes, and political choices. 'Participation is not committed to any social goals but is a technique for setting goals, choosing priorities, and deciding what resources to commit to goal attainment' (Verba & Nie, 1972: 4).

4.3.3 *The socio-economic model*

The empirical core of the theory of participation is the reliance on a 'standard socio-economic model' of participation (SES). SES models are based on the intuitive idea that citizens from higher socio-economic backgrounds – education, social class, income, etc – participate in politics more frequently than citizens from lower backgrounds. The *centrality* model (as it was known between the 1940s and the 1960s) predicted that individual political participation be strongly related, in a bivariate fashion, to individual SES characteristics – social status or grade, income, education, professional background.⁸⁷ Those bivariates are disposed symmetrically on a centre-periphery scheme, composed of 'inner circle, surrounded by concentric circles which fade out gradually into the disinterested or uninterested rank and file' (Lippmann, 1922: 228). In the centrality model, 'the higher the social position of an individual, the more he participates in politics ... the fact that these [socio-graphic] variables

⁸⁶ Motivations, the *why* of participation, Leighley notes, remains to be explained in the work of Verba and colleagues. Although progress was made in the Civic Voluntarism Model to explain participation (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995), *why* citizens *decide* to participate remains unaddressed.

⁸⁷ Erbe (1964), Milbrath (1965: 114-128) and Nie, Powell & Prewitt (1969) provide exhaustive reviews of participation studies based on the centrality model.

evolve similarly in relation to a series of phenomena, the most important of which is political participation, makes it possible to systematise them in a more general 'centre-periphery' dimension which thus has a much higher predictive value than the individual variables' (Pizzorno, 1970: 50).

However the centrality model does not offer very sophisticated tools to assess such complexity. Partly, shortcomings are due to poor theorisation. Nie, Powell and Prewitt point at the low levels of existing generalisations – 'the better educated citizens talk about politics more regularly', and stress the need of systematic and comprehensive theory (see also Erbe, 1964; , 1969: 362). Although the variables involved are by then well known – income, education, involvement in voluntary organizations, media use, feelings of political efficacy etc – a multivariate approach, which includes a wider range and combination of explanatory factors, is not modelled. Partly, the behavioural methodology has not lived up to early expectations. Burstein reviewed a number of attempts that went 'beyond bivariate correlations to formulate theories of participation; but such attempts have usually been verbal formulations, and hence provocative but imprecise (see Lipset 1960; Lane 1959; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960)' (1972: 1087). As Erbe noted, 'apparently, none of the investigators who have discovered any two of these relationships analyzed the partial associations with the third' (Erbe, 1964: 199). The imperfection of methodologies used – large measurement errors, inaccurate wording and format, weak operationalisation of theory – made it 'inevitable that early empirical studies would reach negative conclusions about the public's political sophistication' (Dalton, 1988). Early behavioural participation moulded citizens into 'narrative types' based on descriptive and univariate data, according to their stance towards the political system, reflected in a quantum of participation: *homo civicus* vis-a-vis *homo politicus* (Dahl, 1961b: 223-228), apolitical, political, power seeker and the powerful (Dahl, 1963), apathetic, spectator and gladiator (Milbrath, 1965), subject, parochial and participant (Almond & Verba, 1963). Ironically, behavioural studies reflect trends of typification that are found at work in the mass society of reference at about the same time (e.g. Eco, 1964: 187-216).

Verba et al. adopt the centrality model with qualification as they note, 'some other factors may accelerate the working of the model' (Verba & Nie, 1972: 136). In their earliest work, standard SES are a condition and predictor of civic orientation – involvement, efficacy, skills – which finally predict the overall political engagement. Three main factors reside between SES and political participation that have an effect on civic orientation: social environment; resources and skills and psychological characteristics (p. 133). In addition, time is an important variable, as 'the model seems compatible with a gradual learning model of political activity. The longer one is exposed to politics, the more likely one is to participate' (Verba & Nie, 1972: 148). In the 1978 comparative study of seven nations,

greater attention is devoted to ‘group-level processes of political mobilisation: ‘organization – and we might add ideology – is the weapon of the weak’ (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978: 14-15). In the Civic Voluntarism Model, individual resources, recruitment networks and psychological engagement are then given equal prominence and treated independently (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995: Ch. 12).

The SES model is thus an explanatory base from which to depart in order to find the ‘additional factors’ that shape participation. ‘We are interested in these additional social circumstances, attitudes, and social and political structures because they modify the working of the socio-economic model’ (Verba & Nie, 1972: 14). These forces can re-equilibrate, augment the skew (accelerate) or have spurious effects on the SES model. ‘Accelerating’ factors have been modelled differently in the various streams of a larger, more generally conceived theory of participation which includes social capital explanations and rational choice explanations (cf. Putnam, 2000; Whiteley, 1995). Although the SES baseline model retains much of its heuristic value by explaining most of the variance (Pattie, Seyd, & Whiteley, 2002, , 2003), recent studies have identified a growing number of ‘additional factors’:

Civic engagement is multi-causal. No single explanatory framework fully accounts for it. All those we looked at here play some part in influencing levels of activism. Access to resources, positive evaluations of the benefits of involvement, involvement in associational life and informal networks ... and mobilisation all seem to be important correlates of most types of civic activism. (Pattie, Seyd, & Whiteley, 2003: 465)

Therefore, Verba and colleagues set the foundations for subsequent studies to consider citizen engagement as a complex, multi-causal activity resting on the political inequality of SES distribution. The contribution of the theory goes beyond an SES baseline, however sophisticated, and escapes the pitfalls of typification by the theorisation and empirical testing of modes of participation.

4.3.4 The modes of participation

Political participation was defined in section 4.2.1 as citizens’ attempts to influence policy. Early studies of participation share three general assumptions about the nature of such attempts. First, individual citizens engage in political acts of varying difficulty, which can be disposed over a single quantitative dimension. Second, these acts are largely cumulative, as higher-intensity engagement builds on lower-level activities. Third, SES variables correlate with participation thus defined (i.e. the centrality model described above). While participation was initially identified with voting behaviour (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; A. Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960), Robert Lane and Lester

Milbrath expanded the participation repertoire.⁸⁸ Lane first included election campaign activities beyond voting, such as working in elections, fundraising, belonging to an organised group, contacting and writing letters to public officials (1959: 43). Milbrath further expanded the list to include a wide range of political behaviours enacted in the context of electoral campaigns:

- contact public official or political leader
 - initiate political discussion
 - hold public or party office, or be a candidate
 - attend a caucus or strategy meeting
 - be an active member in a political party
 - contribute time to a campaign
 - wear a campaign button / put on bumper sticker
 - attend political meeting or rally
 - give money to a party / candidate
 - persuade other to vote for a candidate
- (Milbrath, 1965: 18)

Verba et al. introduce two elements of novelty. The first is the theoretical proposition (Verba, 1967) and subsequent empirical analysis of *modes* of participation (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1971). Participation acts, it is argued, are not unrelated from each other, but fall in discrete and distinct modes of activity. Using factor and dimensional analysis, the repertoire of political participation was found to load on four main factors, or modes: voting, campaign participation, communal activity and individual contacting of officials (Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1971; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Participation is organised in patterns, which are determinative of and determined by the institutional rules and institutional arrangements of participation. This has evident consequences for empirical democratic theory, for the new formalisation supports the idea of a pluralist and engaged citizenry. As Verba and Nie put it, by ‘interpreting simple frequency distributions [previous studies] may have seriously underestimated the amount of political participation in America and its degree of dispersion’ (1972: 40).

Moreover, modes of participation are relatively unrelated to each other. Milbrath and Lane proposed two different models, or patterns of citizens’ participation in the political process. The former argues that citizens participate according to three participatory roles: the gladiatorial, the spectator and the apathetic. Types differ on the *quantity* and *quality* of participation they entail. The two parameters are in fact intertwined: ‘easier’ acts are engaged in more often by larger numbers, while ‘difficult’ acts are performed less often and by a smaller subset of citizens (Milbrath, 1965). Following a similar line of reasoning, Lane identified a cumulative list of participatory activities, where higher-order activities are

⁸⁸ Today, voting is one of the three main research streams on participation (Leighley, 1995: 181 fw.). For a detailed account on the evolution of political participation measures see Brady (1998). For a critical account of the same transition see Baumgartner & Walker (1985).

subordinate to lower-order ones. 'There is a 'latent structure' pattern in most populations such that those who perform certain less frequent political acts are *almost certain* to perform *all* the more frequent acts' (Lane, 1959: 94). Both provide evidence for the idea that participatory activities are inter-correlated and hierarchically disposed. By using more advanced statistical techniques, Verba and colleagues demonstrate otherwise.

Acts of political participation are ... much more correlated and concentrated than chance would predict, but much more widely distributed than the assumption of full cumulation would lead us to believe ... the distribution [seems] not quite so concentrated, and the cumulative structure not quite so pronounced as has been previously believed (Verba & Nie, 1972: 40).

Although different modes may co-vary, correlation coefficients suggest a 'considerable amount of independence among the modes', and between the modes and a general 'participation index' (Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978). Verba et al. find the same four modes of action across seven nations (1978: 317-330), while a number of other studies corroborate these results (1978: 331-339). Working on a wide cross-national sample, Barnes and colleagues also include 'expressive' alongside 'instrumental' modes of participation, what was termed a 'hedonistic' mode of participation (Barnes & Kaase, 1979b: 538-555). Parry, Moyser and Day applied the model to UK data and found six main modes of actions: voting, party campaigning, contacting, collective action, direct action and political violence (Parry, Moyser, & Day, 1992).⁸⁹ Verba, Schlozman, & Brady found four modes which are just slightly different from the original formulation: voting, campaign, contact and community – rather than the former 'communal activity' (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).⁹⁰ Finally, in a recent study of civic engagement in the UK, Pattie and colleagues found three main modes of participation: individualistic activism; contact activism; and collective activism (Pattie, Seyd, & Whiteley, 2003). By reinstating the theoretical sophistication ruled out in the early behavioural scheme, modes thus represent an indispensable tool to systematise the expanding engagement repertoire in advanced industrial societies (Norris, 2002b: Ch. 10).

4.3.5 *The dimensions of participation*

The idea of dimensions of participation 'derive[s] from some general consideration of the problems associated with participation' (Verba & Nie, 1972: 47). They denote the range, sphere or field of action within which the political actor engages in modes of participation. In essence, 'political acts differ in what *they can get to citizens* ... in what *they get the citizens into* [and] in what *it takes to get into them*' (Verba & Nie, 1972: 45). Various

⁸⁹ 'Political violence' was excluded from subsequent analysis as only 0.3 % of respondent claimed they 'might resort to physical force'.

⁹⁰ In all studies reviewed, the use of modes does not preclude the elaboration of a single scale of political participation, built as a weighted, standardised scale derived by linear transformation of the modes' factor loadings (Verba & Nie, 1972: 356-357).

defined – aspect, style, sub-dimension – the idea of dimension and a qualitative typology of political participation predate Verba and Nie. Parry argued that participation is composed of three primary inter-related aspects: ‘firstly, the ‘mode’ of participation, secondly, the ‘intensity’ of participation and, thirdly, the ‘quality’ of participation’. Familiarly, intensity pertains to who participates and with what frequency, ‘the proportion of the population that takes part in political activity’ (Parry, 1972: 11). Quality is instead assessed on two dimensions: effectiveness / ineffectiveness, and reality of participation: the control of the citizens on the agenda (p. 12). Parry also insists that the ‘quality’ of participation associated with certain ‘modes’ of participation has led to doubts about ‘the very appropriateness to modern democracies of terms like participation and participant’ (Parry, 1972: 5). Milbrath went further to describe several ‘sub-dimensions’ of participation,⁹¹ notably:

- Overt – Covert, according to the visibility of the action;
- Approaching – Avoiding, relative to the orientation toward the object of participation,⁹²
- Episodic – Continuous, according to the duration of the act;
- Verbal – Non verbal, whether participation is mainly action or communication;
- Social – Non social, concerning the degree of social interaction participation entails.

(Milbrath, 1965)

Similarly, Friedman suggests the idea of style of participation. Where democracy is ‘an activity which helps the majority formulate and express its will’, participation in the ideal democracy must have four qualities: ‘1. it must be group-oriented, 2. it must be activist, 3. it must be carried out in the open, and 4. it must have the general interest in mind’ (Friedman, 1972: II-5). Empirically, four continua are constructed that measure co-operation, persistence in activity, visibility of participation and universality of the aims (pp. II-6 to II-9). Following the logics of pattern matching, where individuals score high values on the qualitative indicators, participation has the potential to lead to democracy; where the scores are lower than the theoretical average, the outcome may well be totalitarianism. Thus defined, the quality of participation supplements the amount of participation in determining the democratic quality of a political system, starting from citizen activity. Similarly, Verba and Nie (1972: 47-55, 73) list five qualitative aspects of political participation:

- 1) amount of initiative required to engage in a political act;
- 2) the amount of conflict the act entails;
- 3) the scope of the outcome, whether individual or collective;

⁹¹ The list reports only the dimensions related to actions, not the psychological orientations of participators: the expressive-instrumental aspect, and the autonomous-compliant aspect.

⁹² As in the case of boycotts of companies and products for political reasons.

Table 4-2. Modes and dimensions of participation

Dimensions	Modes			
	<i>Voting</i>	<i>Campaign activity</i>	<i>Cooperative activity</i>	<i>Particularized contacts</i>
<i>Conflict</i>	Conflictual		Usually non conflictual	Non-conflictual
<i>Scope of outcome</i>	Collective			Particular
<i>Initiative required</i>	Little	Some	Some or a lot	A lot
<i>Pressure</i>	High	High	Low to high	Low
<i>Information</i>	Low	Low to high	High	High
<i>Cooperation</i>	Little	Some or much	Some or much	Little

Source

Verba & Nie, 1972: 48, 50, 73; Verba et al., 1978: 55

- 4) type of influence on policymakers: pressure and / or information to legislators;
- 5) group dynamics, based on the degree of cooperation.

(Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978: 55)

The five dimensions crossed are then crossed with the modes of participation, to create a grid of participation (Table 4-2, above). Dimensions consent the qualitative integration of otherwise irreconcilable forms of activity, and allow for a more precise contextual assessment of individual participation in different modal environments. However, it was argued, dimensions are only sketched in the work of Verba et al., and receive only brief discussion, since data are not ‘brought to bear’ (Leighley, 1995; also see Salisbury, 1975: 330).

One critique levelled to the participation approach is in fact that it pays less attention to the context where participation takes place (Parry, Moyser, & Day, 1992: 10). The answer to the questions central to political science, including participation, ‘requires knowledge about *men and institutions*. A *both ... and* approach to whether the basic units of research and theory should be individuals, groups, or institutions is apt to prove more fruitful than an *either ... or* approach – at least for the foreseeable future’ (Kirkpatrick, 1962: 27).

People’s subjective perceptions and responses in opinion surveys may not be seen as capable of accurately capturing all their political experiences, or as necessarily decisive or authoritative indicators of the character of those experiences. Many political experiences build up bit by bit over long tie periods or across different contexts, all the while generating adaptive responses as they do so (Dunleavy & Margetts, 1994: 157).

The response is an ‘experiential approach’ to the measurement of democracy that examines behaviour at a more disaggregated level, where citizen’s experiences of the conditions and consequences of their actions can be better appraised. In other words, within larger units of reference, as the nation state, there are smaller experiential contexts in which citizens interact with other citizens and with institutions.

It is within these contextual spaces that democracy, or different models of democracy, can be tested. The critique is well-aimed. The theory of participation aims to explain political behaviour in large-scale systemic contexts – the regional, national, and cross-national. Verba and colleagues ‘are interested in the ‘authoritative allocation of values in a society’, to use David Easton’s term, and in the fundamental political question of what determines that allocation’ (Verba & Nie, 1972: 8). However, the model does not dispense with the context of participation (Verba & Nie, 1972, Ch, 14; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978: Ch. 2). The modes of participation constitute spaces of action, where participants engage in dimensionally different behaviours. Different modes of participation can be seen, and are effectively, different political fields where the relations, resources and aims of political actors can be examined. These spaces are qualitatively different from each other, on a number of dimensions, and allow participants a different degree of freedom of manoeuvre, and different configurations of action.

Along with the modes and dimensions, there are different methods to account for context in participation survey studies. First, extensive background information is provided on the country or setting under scrutiny. Parry and colleagues provide a comprehensive context of participation in Britain so that the study becomes, as it were, a large-scale case study (Parry, Moyser, & Day, 1992: 23-35). Verba and Nie draw on an extensive set of literature to place *Participation in America* in context (Verba & Nie, 1972: Ch. 3). A second, more expensive solution is provided by a smaller-n, cross-national research design. The 1978 study, *Participation and political equality*, lies at the intersection between larger macro studies of the relation between participation and SES, and a more qualitative enterprise, the ‘close configurative case, where national differences can be brought to bear’ (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978). Third, the factors sitting between SES and participation can be further explored. The evolution of the SES model in ‘resource’ models (including social capital models) can be seen a strategy to account for the contextual influence of trust, networks and expressive incentives. In the Civic Voluntarism Model for instance, time, household income and civic skill are used as first order predictors of the engagement second-step instrument (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

4.4 Participation and the study of electronic democracy

Thinking conceptually, the study of participation has moved from the examination of its justifications (pre-behavioural tradition), to the survey of its meaning for individuals and polity (behavioural turn), eventually to the sophisticated modelling of its ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ with Verba, Nie and the many scholars who have later adopted the same approach. The traditional definition of participation spanned a wide domain: from the local to the national, civic education to self-development, instrumental and expressive, from Marxism to the liberal democratic experience: conflict, groups, institutions and political behaviour. This

complexity, it was argued, hindered the full analytical development of the concept. The American behaviouralists proceeded to the methodological deconstruction of the term along two main lines: individual psychology and limited involvement. On the grounds of citizen apathy and authoritarian attitudes, theorists of elitist democracy used the empirical evidence generated by early participation studies to corroborate normative models of democratic stability. Comprising numerous elements of novelty, a theory of participation grew out of the behavioural model and its dependent stance relative to elitist democratic theory. Participation is today a complex cultural artefact.⁹³ Although its assumptions are firmly grounded in political and democratic theory, the relevance of the theory is heuristic and empirical. First, democracy and participation bear a linear yet multivariate relation, where democracy is the dependent variable. Second, socio-economic status is a heuristic baseline, a conceptual proxy for the working of social psychological dynamics (Verba & Nie, 1972), group dynamics (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978) and individual and collective resources other than SES (Pattie, Seyd, & Whiteley, 2003; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Third, citizens' autonomous political behaviour is an undisputed tenet in the participation model. Fourth, participation is largely a multi-modal activity. Fifth, the modes of participation are qualitatively different from each other, varying on different dimensions. Finally, the combination modes-dimensions provides a valuable contextual element for the development of lower level – or middle-range – theories of political behaviour.

I argue in his section that the theory of participation meets the needs of the e-democracy enquiry. The elements of the theory are useful to illuminate the field of electronic democracy, to limit its denotation to facilitate understanding, and to specify its connotation in order to check the electronic democracy discourse. Although the idea is neither new (Arterton, Lazarus, Griffen, & Andres, 1984), nor unusual (witness the recent wealth of micro studies), a theory of electronic participation – i.e. the application of the participation tenets to online engagement – have not been pursued systematically. This is somewhat surprising, as the theory negatively limits and positively structures electronic democracy in a way conducive to empirical understanding. Theoretically, participation underscores the importance of autonomous and instrumental online behaviour, thus limiting the expressive political potential of the Internet. It rules out online support, the admittedly huge potential of the Internet for support and common grief, for instance following the World Trade Centre attack or the 2005 tsunami wave in Southeast Asia. Equally, it rules out online protest and violence, cyber-terrorism and fringe political uses of the Internet. However, and consistently with the tenets of macro and micro studies, the theory extends the understanding of online democracy beyond the ballot box (e-voting) and the town hall (e-government).

⁹³ 'Political participation is wonderfully well suited as a central theme for postbehavioural political science' (Salisbury, 1975: 324)

Empirically, the theory helps structure the understanding of electronic democracy. First, it helps to assess the multi-layered structure of online political inequality, based on the SES baseline and ‘additional factors’. Does the Internet increase or reduce citizens’ access to political engagement opportunities and the decision-making circuit? Second, the modes help illuminate the institutional contexts of online action. What are the online structures for political action, if any, that mediate citizen online engagement? Does the Internet assist any of the models of democracy envisioned by democratic theorists? Third, the dimensions help assess the political quality of the technology, at the interface between institutions and citizens. What, if any, is the political value of the technology?

4.4.1 *The autonomous citizen and self-representation: voice and (in)equality*

The theory of participation suggests that the relationship between online politics and electronic democracy is linear – the more information equality, the fairer is the distribution of actual voice rights across multiple modal platforms, the more robust is electronic democracy. This is true in as much as the Internet is inherently different from traditional media in allowing for the active self-representation of the users. The high degree of user control and interactivity of communication make it possible for citizens to modify the representative nexus online. ‘Representation’ has two main meanings in democratic theory: representation as iconically showing public opinion or the will of the people (à la Burke), typical of classical and revisionist visions of democracy. Alternatively, representation refers to the self-representation of interests, in the sense of pluralist aggregation and articulation of political and economic positions vis-à-vis institutions, where citizens are the best judges of their interests. Ironically, the first is referred to as ‘virtual’ representation, while the latter is commonly defined direct representation (Pitkin, 1967).

Crucially, the Internet allows rather for the latter, ‘phonetic’ than the former, ‘iconic’ mode of representation of interests. The digitalisation of the political link is not just about the iconic, fair representation of the people’s voice, but also about the tone, pitch, intensity of autonomous citizens’ voice in the democratic choir.⁹⁴ Macro theorists agreed that the Internet is rather an ‘involving’ than an ‘informing’ technology (Lievrouw, 1994). This falls visibly beyond the conceptual boundaries of iconic, perfunctory representation.⁹⁵ This is claim neither that these are the only characteristics of the Internet, or that press, radio or television do not allow for ‘phonetic’ representation. As to the former point, one should always ask how new new media are. Normalisation scholars have argued that the Internet is increasingly shaped by the forces underpinning the evolution of traditional media: corporate interest, political hegemony and the advertising logic. As the structure and content of the Internet are changing, users are increasingly transformed into an audience (Roscoe, 1999),

⁹⁴ To paraphrase the famous dictum by Schattsneider.

⁹⁵ Oblak rehearses this argument *en reverse* (2002b).

dialogue turned into monologues, commons fragmented into enclaves (Sunstein, 2001). The Internet not only provides opportunities for peer-to-peer dialogue, but also a huge potential for mediated quasi-interaction (Oblak, 2002b), 'iconic' representation in the terms proposed above. The Internet supplies plenty of the expressive incentives required to cement otherwise explosive social and cultural groups in search of an identity (K. A. Hill & Hughes, 1998). This, it can be claimed, amounts to a degree of 'iconic' representation,⁹⁶ as symbolic rather than material forces underpin the enabling power of the Internet, ironically leaving the autonomous individual yet again dispossessed of autonomous spaces of media agency (e.g. see Bucy & Gregson, 2001).

However, it has been argued that these spaces are intertwined with socio-political dynamics other than those unfolding around traditional cleavages. New autonomous media spaces are less functional to the coalescing of groups around traditional identities – and cleavages, one might add (Bennett, 2003a) – than to the forging of new, more fluid political allegiances, movements, tactics which disown traditional iconic representation in favour of performance (Bennett, 2003b). The possibility of forming, formulating, expressing and promoting one's preferences online – what was defined as 'phonetic' representation – is widely prevalent over iconic representation. As Brunsting and Postmes note,

The Internet offers a clear potential for activism – especially in the sense of providing a platform for mass communication and mobilization by informative means. At the same time, our results showed that online action might be driven somewhat more strongly by cognitive calculations than by movement identification (Brunsting & Postmes, 2002: 550)

As concerns the second caveat, the press, TV and radio have been discussed as important involving and empowering tools. Traditional media formats are functional to the coalescence of active publics around specific issues, both in times of routine and in times of crisis. Research literature supporting 'audience activity' is vast. Livingstone has argued that 'public debate, previously managed elsewhere, occurs increasingly within a media context both tailored to, and simultaneously transformational of, the conventions of public discourse', the television-studio political debate, (1996: 264). Coleman has convincingly argued for the democratic function of public radio programming especially in contested public spaces, as is the case of Northern Ireland (Coleman, 1996). Overall, 'the adequacy of an approach that completely ignores the active role of the audience has been questioned ... and the changes brought about by an often larger and more diversified public have been ignored' (Bentivegna, 1998). Propositional, agenda-setting and user-control predicated upon the Internet are implicit in the concept of 'audience activity', and represent the very progressive element of 'old' media. In an influential study on political talk, Gamson insisted that

⁹⁶ For the contrary view see Mughan and Swarts (1997)

people are not so passive, ... not so dumb, and [they] negotiate with media messages in complicated ways that vary from issue to issue ... I do not deny the handicaps or argue that people are well served by the mass media in their efforts to make sense of the world ... Yet people read media messages in complicated and sometimes unpredictable ways, and draw heavily on other resources as well in constructing meanings (Gamson, 1992: 5,7)

However significant, audience attentiveness and activity, selective or aberrant readings, active and alternative media practices, and both social and semiotic resistance to press and broadcast hegemonic media texts can only be 'pushed that far' (Livingstone, 1998). Traditional media, especially broadcast media, do not match the enabling, active opportunities the Internet provides for citizen political action. Broadcast media

neither create nor serve publics in which directly interpersonal discourse readily shapes the social appropriation of news or other information. They are in too large a degree one-way means of communication; they reach people for the most part in spatially and socially dispersed, privatised settings. They provide an informational environment but do not foster public discourse. A key question is whether computer-mediated communication will do this (Calhoun, 1998: 386)

In a new media framework, the autonomous individual is set at the centre of a network of socio-political relations: horizontal (citizen-to-citizen), diagonal (citizen through organisations) and vertical (citizen to institutions) which he can actively pursue using the Internet. Internet audiences are composed of individuals who actively use the Internet to fulfil overt needs through largely goal-directed action (Kaye & Johnson, 2002: 56).

If one accepts that the Internet elicits phonetic self-representation, which according to the theory of participation allows for the pluralist reconstruction of democracy qua the autonomous behaviour of citizens, how is the process enacted in practice? Does the Internet in fact increase, decrease or have no effect on citizen autonomous participation, hence on democracy? Who are those voicing their preferences online, whose interests are represented, whose voices are, ultimately, heard? The review of micro literature has shown how online participation is unequally accessible to citizens: the Internet does increase societal gaps, both in terms of Internet access and political use. This first gap (the digital divide) is an important determinant of political inequality, as citizens from higher SES tend to use the Internet more, more frequently and more intensely. Hence, the digital divide is truly a political divide, as the physical, social and psychological availability of the Internet, and the skewed distribution of citizenship opportunities, reinforces the patterns of political inequality predicted by SES models. Once online, users have a 'choice' between engaging and not engaging in online participation, which generates a 'real digital divide' (Gandy, 2002) between information elites and information deprived, citizens and consumers (Calabrese & Borchert, 1996; Luke, 1991). By using a modified participation models which includes baseline SES, mobilisation incentives, computer skills and traditional patterns of political engagement, it is possible to examine the online distribution of political opportunities, and discern whether the Internet, as adopted by citizens for political purposes, alters the traditional structure of political

(in)equality. Controlling for the effect of SES resources at two different levels, therefore *ceteris paribus*, Internet skills, online mobilisation stimuli and self-efficacy – the ‘additional factors’ described by Verba and Nie – can be used to account for the remaining variance. Theoretically, there are three broad alternatives once people from different backgrounds are online. Either SES variables lose none of their predictive power, in which case one may conclude that the Internet reinforces the structure of political inequality. SES can otherwise retain part of their value, while the ‘accelerating factors’ have a moderate explanatory power. In this case, results depend on the balance of the additional factors: political interest and knowledge, existing patterns of engagement, mobilisation and ICTs skills. Finally, SES might disappear from the explanatory model, leaving the additional factors to explain the variance. In this case, the consequence of the Internet for electronic democracy would depend entirely on the additional techno-political factors. This is what I set to investigate.

4.4.2 Modes and dimensions of electronic democracy

The theory of participation, it was argued, goes beyond the assumption of autonomy and the adoption of a SES model to examine the relation between the structure of political equality and democracy. One still needs to assess how citizens use the technology to do politics, and what is the added value, if any, of the Internet to the unfolding of democratic processes. Recursively, this addresses the question asked above about the political novelty of new media. According to meso theorists of electronic democracy, important mediators such as institutions, parties, pressure groups and electoral campaigns shape online political spaces. As they use the Internet to further their political aims, intermediaries shape how citizens avail themselves of the structure of political opportunities: online legislatures and political parties’ websites, online fora and institutional online deliberation, online political campaigns voter education and information (Norris, 2000). Such limited political settings provided the natural units of reference to test visions, models and the effects of the Internet on the development of democracy.

According to the theory of participation, a variable number of modes constitute the setting of political participation in a polity. Traditionally, these have included voting, electoral campaign activities, individualised contacting, community / communal activity and consumption-related engagement. The modes were described as structured contexts wherein participation takes place. Accordingly, one would expect that online participation is also a multimodal rather than a uni-modal phenomenon, disposed over partially overlapping albeit non-coincident spheres of online action. Uses studies of electronic democracy endorsed a multi-modal understanding of such online opportunities, as they envisaged that citizens would engage in online actions which are readily available and in which they have some interest. Moreover, one might expect that the modes of online participation be differentially

Table 4-3. Dimensions of Internet participation

Individual dimensions

Duration : Internet participation is sustained over time rather than occur one-off

Access – reach : The Internet favours a more equal access to the floor rather than unequal voice

Costs : Participation is less costly for participants

Initiative : The Internet lowers the threshold as to the initiative required to participate

Diversity : The Internet favours diverse forms of participation through the same medium

Speed : The Internet makes participation faster

Group dimensions

Co-operation / defection : The Internet elicits co-operation

Scope: The Internet favours the articulation of common rather than personal concerns

Effectiveness : Internet participation has an effect on policy rather than being 'just' talk

Agenda setting : the participation agenda is set autonomously, rather than determined from outside

Interactivity : Internet participation is interactive (non-automatic turn taking and recursivity)

Conflict – agreement: The Internet favours agreement rather than conflict behaviours

shaped by factors similar to those shaping offline modes of participation: different socio-economic backgrounds, skills, pre-existing patterns of engagement and mobilisation.

If the former is true, e-democracy should be articulated online over different empirical models, making available a variety of democratic opportunities to citizens online. This dissertation treats this statement as an open question: what are the modes of online participation and do they support any of the proposed models and archetypes of electronic democracy? Further to this, the participation model also sheds light on whether and how political intermediaries (political journalists, pressure groups, political parties and the government) shape participation opportunities available online, thus creating differential structures for political action (Foot & Schneider, 2002). Macro theories uphold the capacity of individuals to escape from traditional patterns of aggregation and articulation of interest using the Internet. Conversely, meso theorists assume that the political potential of the Internet is mediated by established political players and expect that citizens will conform to opportunities provided through institutional mediators. The central question thus becomes, are there any new pattern of engagement, are citizens keeping to traditional forms of engagement, or moving toward more distributed forms of politics and media agency? What is the role of different mediators in the construction of different modes of online participation? Lastly, the style of Internet participation can be examined within these limited settings, in order to test the electronic democracy claims advanced by systems accounts. The political traits predicated upon the Internet included the decentralised control of the medium, that every receiver was a potential transmitter, the interaction of communicators, a political learning process, the social control of the media and media production, and a mobilising potential (e.g. Enzensberger, 1970). These, in turn, would allow for the coalescence of social intelligence from information dispersions and fragmentation, and the emergence of settings

where decisions could be collectively made with a minimum of social friction. The concept of dimensions, as presented in the theory of participation, provide a comprehensive framework for the assessment of the techno-political qualities of the Internet, and describe the extent of individual and collective political agency by electronic means (Table 4-3, above). Varying on several qualitative dimensions, online participation can be used to test the conflicting claims of macro and the meso camps. Is Internet participation sustained over time, interactive and co-operative? Does it engender more equal access to the floor rather than unequal voice, is it faster, cheaper and easier to get into than traditional politics? Does Internet participation favour the articulation of common concerns, is it conducive to the formulation of an independent agenda that can be effectively pursued? Ultimately: what is the political value of the Internet at the interface between citizens and institutions, and how does it matter for democracy?

4.5 Conclusions

It was argued in this chapter that the theory of participation evolved from behavioural studies of voting, setting the concept free from political philosophy for subsequent theory articulation. Lane, Milbrath and then Verba and Nie were the first to formulate a theory of participation based on the 'centrality model'. The work of Verba and colleagues represents a first, successful and sophisticated attempt at developing a comprehensive theory of participation, mainly thanks to innovative modelling, to the use of advanced statistics and to the solution of a number of theoretical nodes constraining the development of empirical democratic theory. In so doing, they contributed a powerful tool for the measurement of democracy in mass society. Specifically, the modes and dimensions represent a significant departure from the understanding of political engagement in the centrality model. The baseline theory of participation has stood the test of time and was consistently improved and corroborated over the last thirty years (Pattie, Seyd, & Whiteley, 2003). The heuristic scheme of the theory of participation can be applied to the realm of online politics, to proceed to the 'reconstruction from below' of the concept of electronic democracy that accounts for citizens' behaviours (the micro perspective), institutional settings and intermediaries (the meso perspective) and the political technology (macro perspective). I demonstrated that the theory of participation meets directly the need of integration of the e-democracy enquiry. The elements of the theory, described above, are useful to illuminate the field of electronic democracy, to limit its denotation to facilitate understanding, and to specify its connotation in order to check the electronic democracy discourse. It was argued that the democratic potential of the Internet should be interpreted through the theory of participation in three key respects. Firstly, what are the consequences of the Internet for the structure of political equality in Britain? Does the Internet increase or reduce citizen access to political information and the decision-making circuit? Secondly, what are the institutional

contexts of online action? What are the factors, if any, that mediate – accelerate, skew, shape – citizen online engagement? What are the modes and models of the British online political environment? Does the way citizens use the Internet suggest any of the models of democracy envisioned by democratic theorists is likely to materialise? Lastly, what is the political dimensionality of the technology, at the interface between institutions and citizens? What, if any, is the political value of the technology? These, in turn, and the key research questions of this thesis. The next chapter reviews the logical sequence and the empirical evidence used in order to answer these questions.

Chapter 5 - A methodology for online participation

Having stressed the importance of a multidimensional view of participation, what can be said of the dimensions? Ought we to investigate the empirical merits of the rival shopping lists, or is it more useful to try to think through more fully the conceptual foundations first? One can surely offer no pat answer to that question without extraordinary arrogance...

Robert Salisbury, 1975

5.1 Introduction

I discuss In this chapter the research design for the study of e-democracy qua online political participation. Research design is intended here as ‘the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions ... In this sense, a research design deals with a *logical* problem and not a *logistical* problem’ (Yin, 1994: 19, 20). The logical problem underpinning the thesis is the articulation of e-democracy at the individual level through the theory of participation. The design therefore requires the framing of the political value of the Internet for citizens engaged in a range of political transactions within various institutional settings through the lenses of ‘modes’ and ‘dimensions’ of participation Furthermore, the design needs to address the consequences of such modally and dimensionally diverse online activities for the overall structure of political equality, online and offline. Finally, the design needs to cater for the meso camp’s claims about the importance of intermediaries for the fulfilment of the Internet’s democratic potential.

This logical sequence of articulation proceeds here in two steps. The first step is based on the collection and analysis of data about online participation from a nationally representative sample of British residents, where questions are asked about citizens’ modes of involvement in offline and online politics, how the two interact, and the role of political organisations in shaping online participatory opportunities (section 5.2.1). Survey data is analysed in relation with the structure of online political equality – who participates in the online public space and whether participation opportunities are evenly distributed across Britain (section 5.2). Then, online participation is examined with respect to the modes of participation, i.e. whether online participation responds to traditional participation dynamics, and whether and how online and offline practices are related (section 5.3). The second step is based on a case study component (section 5.4). Three early cases of online participation in limited settings are examined which reflect the modal and dimensional characteristics of online participation (section 5.5). In the limited contexts of party membership, a deliberative forum and organisational mobilisation questions are asked concerning the dimensionality of online engagement – interactivity, speed, low-cost, co-operation – and the political value of new media for the participants.

5.2 The survey component

There is wide agreement on the appropriateness of the nationally representative survey as an instrument to gauge the extent and nature of political participation in a polity. Survey methodology is the principal, and in many cases sole mode of inquiry employed by participation scholars. Verba argued that ‘the study of political participation and the sample survey are closely linked. The latter is the main method by which the former has been studied. ... Surveys give the researcher access to ‘the public’, an otherwise broad, amorphous, and hard-to-deal-with phenomenon.’ (Verba, 1996: 1). According to Parry,

The survey is probably the most appropriate instrument to uncover the extent of political participation amongst the people of Britain and to understand why some are more active than others ... what is needed, in short, is systematic information about ordinary individuals from all walks of life. This is where the tried and tested means of a sample survey come into their own (Parry, Moyser, & Day, 1992: 31)

It is not incidental that Verba and colleagues (1972, 1978, 1995) and a number of scholars working within the participation tradition (Barnes & Kaase 1978, Dalton, 1988, Parry et al. 1992, Pattie et al. 2003) have used the national opinion survey as a standard tool for measuring participation. In an extensive review of participation surveys, Brady identified three main lines of enquiry. Questions are asked about political activities, about the institutional settings of participation (especially its organisational correlates) and about the problems, issues and needs that motivate participation (1999). The first mode of enquiry is predominant, as ‘even when the other two methods are used, respondents are usually asked direct questions about political participation in the context of their institutional affiliation or their enumeration of problems and needs’ (1999: 743). As an analytical consequence, participation surveys are usually concerned with three simple elements: how much participation, by whom and in what ways (Brady, 1999).

The reliance on empirical, quantitative measures and their operationalisation, and the lack of theoretical sophistication of the theories of participation was noted from the 1970s (Pizzorno, 1970). Participation, it was argued, implies theoretical reductionism in favour of discrete and measurable individual behaviours, which is linked back to democratic theory via statistical modelling of the concepts of voice, equality, modes and dimensions. This is not to claim that theories of participation are a-theoretical. While the study of participation is eminently empirical, theoretical sophistication rests on data analysis and a complex explanatory apparatus rather than on a rich theoretical framework. Theories of participation are only as good as the underlying statistical modelling and modes of data analysis and presentation (Pattie, Seyd, & Whiteley, 2003). While Verba and colleagues first succeeded in finding a balance between the theoretical and the empirical elements of the theory of participation, the latest applications of the theory provide explanations that are much closer to participants’ everyday life and experiences (Pattie, Seyd, & Whiteley, 2003; Verba,

Schlozman, & Brady, 1995: 10-15, 21-23). Although less ambitiously, finding such balance is also the aim of this study.

5.2.1 Survey design and questions

In order to assess the structure of political inequality online, survey data was collected on the political uses of the Internet in Britain. The survey was conducted within the 'Internet, political organisations and participation project', funded under the ESRC 'Democracy and Participation' Programme, and directed by Rachel K. Gibson and Stephen Ward at the University of Salford (Award no. L215252036).⁹⁷ The data were gathered on behalf of the project by NOP International Research. Respondents were selected according to a random location method, with 175 sampling points selected randomly in mainland Britain. Quotas derived from the Census 2001 were set for interviewers in terms of age and sex within working status, to ensure maximum representativeness. Computer-aided personal interviews (CAPI) were then conducted face-to-face by fully trained and supervised market-research interviewers. A total of 1972 respondents aged 15 or above were interviewed in-home between 9th and 14th May 2002. The survey questionnaire comprised six sets of questions (Appendix 1, p. 240), which aimed at gathering information on the following areas.

5.2.1.1 Demographics

Basic demographics including gender, age, social grade and educational attainment (questions D1 to D4). Age is divided in 6 standard age categories, based on the Census. Social class is based on the head of the household's last occupation, according to the 'social grade' scale of the Market Research Society (also used in the UK Census). A: Higher managerial, administrative or professional, B: Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional, C1: Supervisory, clerical, junior administrative or professional, C2: Skilled manual workers, D: Semi and unskilled manual workers, E: State pensioners, widows, lowest grade workers.⁹⁸ Terminal Education Age (TEA) records the age at which the respondent left full-time education. As was argued in Chapter 4, the SES model builds on the prominence of socio-demographic traits to predict participation. Data was also gathered on residence, using the Census standard region categorisation.

5.2.1.2 Internet use

The first question asked whether respondents used the Internet and where applicable when they started using it (Q1). The categorisation provided significant signposts of Internet evolution, as documented in Chapters 2 and 3. Four categories were used to cover the last two years (2001 – 2002); one measure identified 'between 3-5 years' users, back to the introduction of the web browser; the category '6-10 years' captured the users of the first commercialised version of the Internet; and 'more than 10 years' provides information on the

⁹⁷ The specific terms of this author's involvement are detailed in Appendix 6.

⁹⁸ A Goldthorpe scale would have been a better but more expensive option.

minority of users who went online before commercialisation. Q2 then asked how frequently respondents accessed the Internet from different locations: the household, the workplace, a commercial space and a public space. Finally, measures were included for the amount of time spent online in the average week (D5) and for the basic Internet activities performed while online (Q3): accessing the WWW, sending/receiving personal and professional e-mails, and using chat rooms and instant messaging. These modes of use also indicate different Internet skills and abilities.

5.2.1.3 Offline political participation

Eight yes/no questions were asked regarding whether respondents had voted, discussed politics with friends/family, contacted an elected official, engaged in strike activity, donated money to a political cause, attended a rally, joined a political organisation, or actively campaigned for a political organisation (Q9). Items were drawn from previous studies of political participation in Britain, especially the British Election Study. A question was asked about political party support, from a list based on the 2002 UK State of Parties (Q14). Respondents were also able to designate a party not included in the list.

5.2.1.4 Online political behaviour

Questions were asked about 13 different forms of online political activity, drawn from various micro sources and informed by non-survey studies of online engagement to ensure sufficient modal and dimensional variance among the alternatives (Chapters 2 and 3). Specifically, activities were chosen that broadly mapped the modes of engagement derived from the theory of participation: campaign activities; contacting activities; collective activities and organisational activities. Activities also vary on a number of qualitative dimensions relevant to the study of electronic democracy derived from macro approaches to electronic democracy (see Table 4-3, p. 125). The list included: looking for political information on the web, visiting a political organisation's website, signing an online petition, sending an e-mail to a politician, sending an e-mail postcard, signing up for an e-news bulletin (Q7). A dichotomous response was preferred to a categorical / frequency response due to the limited extent of online activities reported in previous surveys, to the analytical clarity it affords for infrequent behaviours (see Brady, 1999), and due to cost. A question was then asked of users who reported no online engagement as to why that was the case. Possible responses included lack of time, low political interest, lack of awareness, preference for offline forms of political action and saturation (Q8).

5.2.1.5 Organisational contacting

Yes/no questions were asked about whether an individual had ever visited the website of a range of political organisations or contacted them via e-mail (Q10). The list of organisations included single-issue protest campaigns, charity and pressure groups, political parties, anti-capitalist groups, independent media organisations and mainstream news

organisations. Two questions then examine the importance of the Internet vis-à-vis traditional means of communication and pre-existing political engagement. Q11 asks Internet users who contacted organisations online whether they would have done so by traditional means, e.g. letter and telephone; Q12 asks whether online contact made the respondents more interested in and / or more involved with the organisation contacted online.

5.2.1.6 Online political stimuli and response

This set of questions examined the supply-side of online participation opportunities. Q13 asks about the respondent's awareness of a range of political campaigns, including FaxYourMP, PayupTony.com, Buynothingday, Globalise Resistance or other campaigns wholly virtual or with an online presence. Q4 asked whether individuals had ever received any online political messages such as news bulletins, postcards or news articles directly from organisations or via friends (Q5). Finally, Q6 asked about the respondent's usual reaction to online political messages, on a scale of increasing responsiveness: react, ignore, read, and respond. Although logically two distinct questions might have been asked about the attitudes toward and actual reaction to unsolicited messages, cost considerations advised to collapse the two categories in a single, theoretically significant 'activation scale'.

5.3 Dimensional analysis and case component

The first component of the examination of the dimensions of online participation is drawn from the survey, which asked questions about the nature of individual theoretically significant dimensions of online engagement (see Table 4-3, p. 125). Table 5-1 below reports the dimensional co-ordinates of different activities surveyed in the questionnaire (Q7). The intervals (scales) measure the degree to which the Internet may affect the quality of participation on theoretically significant dimensions: cooperation, scope, effect, agenda setting, interaction, duration, access, initiative and speed. A dimensional score of one, nil or minus-one was attributed to each online participation activity. One and minus-one indicate that the individual performs an online activity that loads on the dimensional poles of participation, while zero indicates that the activity is dimensionally neutral. Although mathematically equivalent (and easier to implement) the alternative was ruled out to attribute positive values ranging from '1' to '3' to different activities. The middle value '2' would have been logically different from the '0', which indicates action absence or neutrality on the dimensional scale rather than equidistance from the extremes. Using this device, all activities could therefore be computed. Resulting scales range from a theoretical extreme (e.g. individual) to the other (e.g. collective) with the neutral point, the zero of the scale, situated in-between. Scales gauging the dimensionality of online participation were computed for online participants only, that is those respondent who reported at least one online participation activity (n = 143). In other words, they measure extant rather than potential

participation. More detail about different scales is provided in Chapter 8, where dimensional results are reported.

Table 5-1. Dimensionality of online participation activities

	Co-operation	Scope	Effect	Agenda setting	Interact	Duration	Access	Initiative	Speed
Looked for general political information	-	=	-	-	-	=	=	+	+
Visited a party site (or some other organisation)	-	+	-	-	-	-	=	+	+
Signed up for e-news bulletins	-	=	-	-	-	+	=	=	+
Discussed politics in a chat group	+	+	=	+	+	+	+	-	=
Joined e-mail lists or bulletin board about politics	+	+	=	+	+	+	+	-	-
Sent e-mail postcard or article to a third party	+	-	=	+	=	-	=	+	+
Downloaded software advertising an organisation	-	-	=	=	-	+	=	=	=
Downloaded leaflets or other material to distribute offline	=	=	=	-	-	-	=	+	+
Signed an online petition	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	+
Participated in an online Q&A with a political figure	-	-	+	=	+	-	+	+	-
Sent an e-mail to an elected local or national politician	-	-	+	+	=	=	=	+	+
Sent an e-mail to public services	-	-	+	+	=	=	=	+	+
Sent an e-mail to a political organisation	=	=	=	=	=	=	=	+	+
Donated funds online to a political cause	-	=	+	+	-	-	-	=	+
Signed up online as a volunteer to help with a political cause	+	+	+	+	+	+	=	=	-
Joined a political organisation online as a fully paid member	=	+	+	=	=	-	=	=	+
Interval (scale)	-8 to +5	-5 to +6	-3 to +7	-5 to +7	-6 to +5	-7 to +5	-1 to +4	-2 to +9	-3 to +11

Notes

'+' indicates a positive value (+1) on the dimensional scale.

'-' indicates a negative value (-1) on the dimensional scale.

'=' indicates a neutral value (0) on the dimensional scale.

Definitions:

Co-operation: activity elicits co-operation.

Scope: activity favours the articulation of common rather than personal concerns.

Effect : activity has an effect on policy rather than being 'just' talk.

Agenda setting : the participation agenda is set autonomously, rather than determined from outside.

Interact : activity is interactive.

Duration : activity is sustained over time rather than occur one-off.

Access – reach : activity favours a more equal access to the floor rather than unequal voice.

Initiative : activity lowers the threshold as to the initiative required to participate.

Speed : activity makes participation faster.

Peacefulness, diversity and cost were not included in the table as not included in dimensional analysis.

Before discussing the assessment of dimensionality through the case component, I need examine the limits to the possibility to measure the dimensionality of online participation using large scale survey evidence. The possibility of gauging the dimensionality of a single participatory act quantitatively rests, of course, on the capacity of the analyst of attribute values to activities. While this *etic* process of value definition was based as much as possible on the general episteme of participation theory and on specific knowledge derived from macro and micro studies, there is no final guarantee that this judgement corresponds to the intended aim of the respondents, or to their perceived dimensionality (the *emic*). In a critique of the epistemological implications of the theory of participation, Schwartz argued that participation is a subjective phenomenon, which is dependent on the world-view of the actor rather than the arbitrary choice of the analyst (Schwartz, 1984). Equally, this consideration applies to online participation, and is addressed at more length below. A number of more specific caveats should also be issued. Firstly, the peacefulness dimension was excluded as neither the survey nor the cases included measures of hacktivism / cyber-terrorism. As was noted, these behaviours are marginal to the theory of participation in both numerical and theoretical terms. Secondly, cost was set aside from dimensional analysis. The cost of online activities is marginal once the hardware, software and skills are acquired and, importantly, equal for all activities. Discounting for the structure of digital opportunities (analysed in Chapter 6),⁹⁹ there is no difference in monetary cost between online political transactions. Thirdly, effectiveness is defined here as potential effectiveness, i.e. the closeness of the action to the decision-making circuit. Finally, diversity of political action requires a relational measure because it is impossible to attribute to single actions. Analytically, diversity might be thought of as modal diversity, as such discussed in Chapter 7, or dimensional diversity, which is covered in Chapter 8. As a result, the potential of the Internet for diverse political action will be assessed in the conclusions, once the contours of each of the other dimensions have been delineated.

To overcome these limitations I adopt here a case approach. Despite their large heuristic power, large-scale surveys are less suitable to uncover important aspects of the dimensionality of political participation online. Firstly, it was argued above, the analyst should assess dimensionality of Internet participation within a closer context than a national opinion survey allows, where *etic* and *emic* can be made to converge. Secondly, some dimensions are inaccessible using the single participatory act as unit of coding, such as actual effectiveness, diverseness, and cost of discrete online activities. Thirdly, this is due to the exiguous extent of online political activity, which made probes statistically

⁹⁹ The conclusion will examine how lower-income and politically inactive citizens face increased costs, while politically connected, high-income citizens face decreasing costs (computer already at home, in the office, ease of library and commercial outlet access).

insignificant.¹⁰⁰ Largely, however, this depends on the very nature of survey research, as neither the temporal nor the contextual effects of the Internet can be considered. Both of which – Verba noted – ‘are serious limitations when one wants to study political participation from a macro-political perspective in an era of rapid political change’ (1972: 17). Participation surveys return an more accurate portrait of amount and modes of participation than of its institutional contexts and of the problems and needs driving engagement (Brady, 1999). It was argued that analysts should take into account the experiential importance of political choice, both in relation to the motives and the empirical referents of participation (Dunleavy & Margetts, 1994). Therefore, the dimensional implications of the Internet are better examined within limited contextual settings and modes, as political action unfolds within the boundaries of individuals’ experience of ‘phonetic’ representation. The ‘modes’ constitute different fields of online participation where ICTs are enacted politically. Within these contexts of action, the political dimensionality of the Internet can be assessed more in-depth. Therefore, this thesis employs case studies to integrate survey data in order to examine the dimensions of online participation.

5.3.1 Merits and limits of case research

In general, case analysis may be preferable to large-scale survey research for reasons of opportunity and adequacy. As concerns opportunity, ‘the decision to analyze only a few cases is strongly influenced by the types of political phenomena under study and how they are conceptualized’. While cases are suitable where there exist ‘relatively few instances of the phenomenon under consideration that exhibit the attributes of interest to the analyst ... some analysts believe that political phenomena in general are best understood through the careful examination of a small number of cases’ (Collier, 1993: 105). As concerns adequacy, the ‘sampling logic’ may falter and case research be advisable due to the low statistical incidence of phenomena, the existence of many contextual variables, and the availability of few contexts (Yin, 1994: 44-51). Randomization and non-randomization are in fact the two main procedures of conceptual ramification extinction, i.e. arriving at a limited number of plausible explanations for a phenomenon. On the one hand, ‘randomisation purports to control an infinite number of ‘rival hypotheses’ *without specifying what any of them are ...* but renders them implausible to a degree estimated by the statistical model’ (D. Campbell, 1994: x). In fact, this is the purpose of the survey component of this study. On the other hand, there is the experimental tradition, based on research conducted in physical science laboratories, where explanation follow the ‘experimental isolation’ of the factors under

¹⁰⁰ Only 17 % of British users are engaged in online political behaviours. The cost associated with the provision of a larger N (by over-sample or a further wave) was beyond the means available for the research.

study: pressure, temperature, density, etc. 'This older tradition controls for a relatively few but explicitly specified rival hypotheses. These are never controlled perfectly, but well enough to render them implausible'. The case study approach is rather 'more similar to the 'experimental isolation' paradigm than to the 'randomised assignment to treatments' model in that each rival hypothesis must be specified and specifically controlled for' (D. Campbell, 1994: x).

In a case study done by an alert social scientist who has thorough local acquaintance, the theory he uses to explain the focal differences also generates predictions or expectations on dozen of other aspects of the culture, and he does not retain the theory unless most of these are also confirmed. In some sense, he has tested the theory with degrees of freedom coming from the multiple implications of any one theory. The process is a kind of pattern matching in which there are many aspects of the pattern demanded by theory that are available for matching with his observations on the local setting (D. Campbell, 1975: 380).

Carefully controlled, critical case studies are thus related to the statistical problem of degrees of freedom to test the fit of hypotheses, and, in more general terms, 'as aspect of the principles of pattern matching and context dependence' (D. Campbell, 1975). The case study 'is conducted by giving special attention to totalising in the observation, reconstruction and analysis of the cases under study ... Accordingly, a case study is an in-depth study of the cases under consideration, and this depth has become another feature of the case study approach' (Hamel, Dufour, & Fortin, 1993: 1). Case study research hence responds to the needs of contextual political analysis, representativeness of the empirical evidence, in depth analysis of dense empirical evidence and application of a rigorous research routine to data collection and analysis (Yin, 1994).

However, there is widespread agreement that the case study is not always the silver bullet of small-N research. Campbell mentions four perils of model misspecification in case research: the flexible, post-hoc rationalization of data, over-interpretation, the capitalization of chance, and the exhaustion of the degrees of freedom (1975: 382). Others question the robustness of the comparison using small-N samples, a defining trait of case research. First, the lack of statistical or experimental control over the cases makes it difficult to rule out external factors and adjudicate between rival hypotheses. Second, the well-know problem of having more variables available than observation points due to the small N, which exhausts the degrees of freedom. Third, the lack or rigorous application of a research routine, at least as compared to the more established statistical and experimental research routines. Finally, the lack of representativeness, as conclusions from case-studies are problematic to generalise (Collier, 1993; Lijphart, 1971). In other words, as the *ceteris paribus* condition among the cases is the essence of the comparative logic in the nomothetic approach (Barnes & Kaase, 1979a), cases may not constitute structures the similarities of which can be neutralised.

Therefore, successful case research rests on the in-depth control of the case evidence, on the capacity to draw theoretically significant comparisons within and across the cases, and on the representativeness of the conclusions drawn from such cases. As Lasswell argued, ‘for anyone with a scientific approach to political phenomena the idea of an independent comparative method seems redundant. Isn’t the scientific approach unavoidably comparative, since “to do science” is to formulate and attempt to verify generalization by comparing all relevant data?’ (Lasswell, 1968: 3).

5.4 Case study and electronic democracy

It was noted in Chapters 2 and 3 how online participation is still very much ‘experimental’ on both the supply and the demand side. There exist two modes of implementation of new media projects, corresponding to different modes of social learning.¹⁰¹ The first approach

emphasizes the flexibility in design, the adaptability of both users and uses, and the explorative setting that is maintained all over the life cycle of the project (that has no perceived ending). That is why we label this mode the experimental/flexible/adaptable mode of social learning. Opposed to this mode, one finds the regulation/control mode, that presupposes central regulation of the developmental process by the designers, a clear separation between designers of new media and the users, a perspective on the added value of the project that is developed by the designers, and a deadline or finite life cycle for the entire project. (van Lieshout, 2001: 148).

While robust standards have been developed for assessing online businesses following the ‘fall of the dot-com’ in 2000, political organisations’ use of the Internet is still to a large extent in experimental, open-ended mode. The first instances of online politics in Britain – digital cities (Loader & Keeble, 2003), online consultations (Coleman, 2002) and political parties’ e-campaigns (Painter & Wardle, 2001) – were all experimental in nature. Of course, there are signs of increasing professionalisation of online electoral activities (Bowers-Brown & Gunter, 2002), especially in the United States – witness the George W. Bush and Howard Dean online campaigns in the 2004 Presidential election. However, the British information polity is still far from normalised, as only political parties have consistently adopted the Internet for political means, while pressure groups, trade unions and political protestors have lagged considerably behind (Ward, Gibson, & Lusoli, 2003).

Unsurprisingly, therefore, case studies were used in the past to assess new media’s democratic value. Macro approaches consistently draw on cases to test different visions and models of democracy. Specifically, e-democracy research concerning online communities and civic networks is primarily based on the in-depth study of variously successful experiments (Law & Keltner, 1995; Molz, 1994; O’Neil, 2002; Tsagarousianou, Tambini, & Bryan, 1998). Equally, research concerning direct and deliberative models of electronic democracy is usually based on case research (Arterton, Lazarus, Griffen, & Andres, 1984;

¹⁰¹ The gnoseology of the ‘social shaping’ ontology.

Becker, 1981; Bentivegna, 1998; Coleman, 2002). Meso research on both sides of the Atlantic has consistently drawn on the study of the adoption of ICTs by a limited number of political organizations (Bimber, 2003; McCaughey & Ayers, 2002; Ward, Gibson, & Lusoli, 2003). As concerns micro studies, Arterton and colleagues examined twenty projects in which elites encouraged citizens' political activity.

Analytically, these projects constitute various institutional arrangements containing political participation ... [w]e wish to examine the institutional context within which participant behaviour occurs. In the process, we may gain insights beyond the numerical instance of participation; we may be able to investigate the quality and effectiveness of citizen involvement (Arterton, Lazarus, Griffen, & Andres, 1984: 32)

In a similar fashion, this thesis relies on case research to refine the findings of survey research and to shed a sharper light on online engagement in different contexts of adoption. Specifically, following the previous general discussion of case research, the approach and the individual cases were chosen due to the low statistical incidence of online participation (as reported in the micro review), to the existence of many contextual variables determining the likelihood and nature of citizens' online engagement (as claimed in the macro and meso camps), to the limited availability of contexts where to analyse online engagement (as was claimed by normalisation scholars), which in turn is due to the largely experimental nature of online politics at the time of writing. In other words, the limited number of instances of electronic democracy, their modal and dimensional complexity, their 'experimental nature' and the choice to frame online politics along the lines of individual engagement within limited political settings suggest that a case approach is advisable. Therefore, three cases were selected that illuminate the dimensions of online participation, whether and how Internet's characteristics – speed, inter-connectivity, interactivity, low cost etc – interact with the SES model to produce novel modes of engagement. In the next section I briefly describe the cases and explain the rationale for their choice.

5.5 Cases and their selection

The principal case under scrutiny is 'Democracy Forum' (DF). DF is a group of 64 experts gathered online by the Hansard Society (HS) on behalf of the UK Parliament Administration Select Committee in November 1999. Setting a precedent for subsequent consultations, DF's results were formally fed into the Committee's enquiry in the modernisation of government. Seventy-five participants were invited to join DF, of whom fifty-five were male and twenty female. DF participants were interested parties in the construction of the e-democracy discourse in Britain (see Chapter 1), coming from a variety of occupational backgrounds related to ICTs. The majority were from community networks (24) and from local or central government (17) and the rest from the IT industry (9), the media (8), the academia (8) and charities (6). About three in four participants had

participated in similar online consultations before. In addition, three MPs sitting on the Committee were invited to join.

The second case is a study of how young Liberal Democrat (LD) party members use the Web and e-mail to keep in touch with the party and engage in online and offline political activities. The case is topical in a number of respects. As the policies of the Liberal Democrats are largely appealing to youth, they have the fastest growing youth membership of the three main parties. LD young activists in the sample are under-25s, largely students (63 %), with a small proportion of under-18s (10 %), who make at least daily use of the web (76 %), and e-mail (86 %). Three in four are males, a common cleavage for youth activism. They are already relatively active within the party, regardless of young age: 27 % report being political activist, and 56 % 'very interested in politics'. Geographically, the sample is well distributed across Britain.

The third case examines supporters engaging in online political activities on behalf of the charity Age Concern England (ACE). The case provides additional information on the motivations and response to stimuli of online participants coming from 'unconventional' backgrounds. Demographically, ACE activists are different from British users and radically different from LD members and DF experts. ACE respondents are considerably older, as 70 % are fifty years of age or above; gender is not an issue; they are from much lower income levels than the average Internet user and are either retired people, touched personally by ageing issues, or age care professional, likely in this case to hold a University degree. One in ten on the list also hold an official position with the ACE. However, it is difficult to define them as activists, given ACE terms of engagement in general and the relatively porous nature of the list under consideration in particular. While the vast majority considers themselves as 'averagely interested in politics', two respondents openly rejected the 'activist' label as inadequate to describe their engagement (ID 13 and 37).

The choice of the cases was dictated by the need to 'over sample' online political engagement in line with survey results, by their value as representative of wider Internet engagement modes, by the involvement of visible and proactive intermediaries in the process of online engagement, and, of course, by reasons of accessibility. Firstly, the case studies examine qualitatively and in detail online participation when and where it naturally occurs. Necessarily, this implies over sampling those who actually engage in those activities, the online activists. In other words, as online participation is a minority sport, one needs to look in grater depth as participation as it occurs. The case selected thus function as a magnifying lens for a range of individual online behaviours. Secondly, the cases chosen are metonymies of political engagement over the Internet in different contexts. The cases include a contextual dimension that loosely reflect the three modes of participation returned by the survey: information/discussion, contacting, and campaign (see later, Chapter 6). In fact, the cases

represent large, very different control groups of Internet political activists. This, in turn, expands the comparative ground of the study. Thirdly, the ‘neutral instigators’ (Arterton, Lazarus, Griffen, & Andres, 1984) of online engagement encompass the spectrum of traditional mobilising agencies: a charity, a quango and a political party. In the first case, the intermediary is an educational NGO providing a group of e-democracy experts on with a dialogue space directly aimed at informing policy-making. A main British party is the as intermediary in the second case, by providing an online structure for political action for young members and supporters. In the third case the intermediary is a charity that supports its work on social and digital inclusion, its charity workers and lay charity supporters by means of an e-activist network. Finally, the selection of the cases followed criteria of convenience as well as usefulness. The collection of empirical evidence – tool design and administration – was undertaken in co-operation with the political organisations involved, within the framework of two larger research projects the candidate was involved with (Appendix 6).

Furthermore, the cases provide insights into different facets of online engagement. Of the three case under scrutiny, DF represents the ‘expertise’ pole rather than the ‘experience’ pole of political engagement. DF was to a large extent a peer group, where no minority voices risked sidelining. DF hence provides a metonymy of the wider e-democracy debate. The LD case is highly theoretically significant as micro evidence suggest that young people with high levels of political interest who use the Internet frequently are much more likely to participate online (Owen, 2003; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). One can thus extract useful information from the case regarding the extent of youth online engagement, and cautiously expand on possible evolution in the near future. Finally, ACE provide vital insight in the motivation of online participation beyond SES. Activists’ motivation for online engagement in fact transcend traditional explanations, as respondents’ profiles and motives defy the socio-demographic cliché of either young or engaged participant.

A range of techniques were used to investigate the three cases that are discussed in the following three sections.

5.6 The DF consultation

The author gathered background information concerning the consultation, participated in the discussion in real-time and had access to debate scripts and website statistics shortly afterwards. Forum discussion was structure- and content-analysed, and a follow-up survey of participants was administered at its conclusion (respectively Appendices 2 and 3).

5.6.1 HS content analysis

The ostensive aim of content analysis is to examine rich data resources in a rigorous fashion, and to make clear the key characteristics and dimensions of online participation.

According to a naïve [sic] definition, content analysis is ‘systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods’ (Weber, 1990: 2). While content analysis is a systematic method suited to handling large data sets (Holsti, 1998), a ‘units and rules’ approach is common to a wide range of qualitative and quantitative methodologies for the study of conversation (Taylor & Cameron, 1987, esp. Ch. 1 and 8). As Heritage suggests, I ‘apply the acquired knowledge of conversational organisation specifically to those institutional interactions in order to show how these institutions were ‘talked into being’ (quoted in Have, 1999: 8). The interactional organisation of political activities via technologies, where the conversationalists (DF participants) retain substantial responsibilities, is the object under scrutiny. ‘Words used in talk are not studied as semantic units, but as products or objects which are designed and used in terms of the activities being negotiated in the talk: as requests, proposals, accusations, complaints and so on’ (Hutchby & Woofit, 1998: 14). A ‘unit and rules’ understanding of participation in DF informed the choice of analytical units and the nature of the codes.

5.6.2 Units of analysis

The choice of a theoretically significant coding unit is central to any analysis of content, political or otherwise. The unit of coding is the smallest, irreducible unit upon which codes are thrust, and subsequent analyses are based. The individual message, also called post, is an obvious coding unit for online conversations in newsgroups and Web fora. Participants post single messages and consider one message at a time. Almost uniformly, existing studies take the message as the unit of coding (K. A. Hill & Hughes, 1997, , 1998; Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1997). As this analysis is concerned with individual, relational political participation, the single message was a natural coding unit – it constituted the primary utterances with a political valence, or possibly intent. Message-as-unit also makes theoretical sense in relation to larger units of sampling and context (Krippendorff, 1980: 59-63). The thread, or topic, was selected as the primary context unit of analysis – as individual statements were intended by participants to contribute to specific topics, or semantically bounded units (although the boundaries resulted to be more porous than expected). Finally, the entire DF discussion provided a very ‘natural’ sampling unit. In practice, I coded single messages, indicated the thread they belong to with a unique identifying number and included specific codes for the relation of the post with the thread it belongs to.

5.6.3 Coding frame

The coding frame was based on a number studies on the content of messages posted to online conferences and was adapted to reflect this work’s concern with online participation and the specificities of DF. An important source was the coding frame for ProjectH

(Sudweeks, McLaughlin, & Rafaeli, 1998), although I have borrowed widely from other sources (Benson, 1996; Bentivegna, 1998; Garramone, Harris, & Anderson, 1986; Schneider, 1996, , 1997; Wilhelm, 1999).¹⁰² The coding frame includes four sets of codes that have different functions within the content design.

The *Structural* set comprise the codes necessary for a basic analysis of most communications: author, date and time of posting, topic of the thread and length of the message in words, and sex of the author. *Topic* indicates the thread to which the message belongs, and is bounded, at least in theory, by a single topic of discussion. As threads evolve over time, this code is useful to keep a track of variation. *Authcode* records the message author, which allows to track contribution frequencies, and to analyse posting behaviour. *Sex* allows for inter-gender comparison of data patterns. *Datetime* enables time-sensitive analysis, and can be included in the model for the explanation of readership of messages (see below code *Readtot*). The length of the message in *Words* indicates verbosity, and is used to explain the readership of messages.

The *Pattern* set refers to the interactions and the results of interactions in DF. This set provides information on how discussion evolved in the forum and how people interacted with each other. Furthermore, the set is used in connection with the *Information* set, to examine how structure and content of the discussion co-vary. First, I coded for messages being replies to other contributions (*Reply*), and conversely, that a message was replied by another message (*Replied*). Both codes indicate the active or reactive role of a participant in the development of the discussion. A value was included in *Reply* for messages initiating a new discussion, a 'seed', which is an indicator of leadership in discussion (K. A. Hill & Hughes, 1997; Wilhelm, 1999). Used in relation with *Readtot*, it also helps understand who follows that leadership. *Read* indicates the readership of messages, and is used in a variety of analysis at person, thread and discussion level. In addition to reply and replied, *Interaction* is a direct measure for the depth of interaction in message sequences, detecting chains of *recursive* rather than reactive messages (Rafaeli, 1988; Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1997).

The *Information* set determines the content of a message and/or exchange. *Fact* is coded when a message reports factual evidence (not common sense) from outside the forum. *Fact* is therefore valuable to test how much online discussion is nested in the wider discourse on electronic democracy. Similar to *Fact*, *Based* requires that participants report factual evidence to which they have contributed, showing the extent to which personal experience informs discussion (Bentivegna, 1998). Conversely, *Opinion* does not entail a factual basis, but characterises messages reporting an opinionated claim made by the participant (see

¹⁰² The simultaneous processes of coding, reading and reprocessing literature in function of my own research needs make it difficult to acknowledge specific codes. However, all sources used are referenced and every effort is made to acknowledge original codes and ideas.

Livingstone, 1996).¹⁰³ Finally, *Policy* and *Level* identify political opinions expressed by DF participants, in their advisory role. While *Policy* reports the expression of a policy statement, *Level* determines the suggested level/organ/mode of action to be taken. At the heart of this code lie different conceptions of electronic democracy – direct, communitarian or deliberative. Along with structure, this set is central to the aims of the enquiry.

The *Relational* set consists of codes describing relations between messages. *Agree* identifies agreement on opinions (not facts) between participants' contributions (Bales, 1951: 9). *Seek* identifies enquiries concerning facts and opinions made to other DF participants. Information seeking is an indicator of rationality of the debate and informed discussion and a potential predictor of interactivity. *Meta* identifies instances of meta-communication, defined as communication reflecting upon itself, thus measuring the self-reflexivity of communication. It includes the sub-codes *Suggform* and *Suggcont*. The former measures participants' feedback on the way the consultation is run. The latter is concerned with the process of autonomous agenda setting by participants, and the endogenous generation of discussion topics. Finally, *Commop* is a measure of the extent to which common opinion forms around issues. The code determines whether the particle 'we' appears in a message that is neither an impersonal nor a courtesy form.

5.6.4 Piloting and inter-coder reliability

On the day following the end of the discussion (29 December 1999), 48 discussion threads were retrieved from the server, which included 313 messages available for coding. After filtering the messages posted by mistake, duplicate messages and blank messages, DF included 300 valid messages in 45 threads. The coding frame was piloted in the week immediately following the election using the complete sample, and was refined into the coding tool eventually used for the coding (Appendix 2).¹⁰⁴ All the codes worked well in the pilot except one. Given the negligible number of off-topic messages, the variable *Lineapp*, measuring the appropriateness of the topic line to the message was dropped. To obviate, a value was included in the *Reply* code for messages just following in the thread. In order to test and optimise the reliability of the coding frame, a subset of messages were double-coded. The author worked as the first coder for the whole corpus, while a second coder (trained by the author for one and half hours) coded the control sample. Ninety-eight messages were selected for double coding in 15 randomly selected, entire threads, which

¹⁰³ The conceptual line dividing facts, opinions and personal experience is thin. Every effort was made to operationalise the concepts in unequivocal terms, and the coders discussed the meaning of these codes at length as a part of their training.

¹⁰⁴ Results from the pilot coding were used to draft a report of the DF consultation for submission to the PASC (*Minutes of evidence*, 2000b).

preserved the relations between messages – e.g. reply, interact, and relational codes.¹⁰⁵ This choice is consistent with the use of threads as unit of context for the coding, and the coders did not stop before having completed a thread.

Both coders kept a log file of issues encountered during coding. After 8 threads and 48 messages were coded by both coders, a one-hour revision session was held to compare notes and review progress. Codes resulted relatively unambiguous, and coding was performed without difficulty. High reliability scores for all variables, reported in the right-hand column of Appendix 2, confirm this impression. Both simple agreement (Holsti's formula) and Cohen's Kappa are reported for nominal variables. Acceptable reliability was set as either .75 Holsti's or .65 Kappa. Where variables did not reach acceptable levels codes were collapsed to the lower or to the higher logically contiguous category if multiple nominal, dropped if binary. ICR was then recalculated and variables included if the value reached acceptable levels.

5.6.5 *Post-consultation questionnaire*

A post-consultation questionnaire was administered by e-mail two weeks after the consultation (Appendix 3, p. 247). Ten questions were included about four main topics: participants experience with online fora (Q 5, 8), external efficacy (Q 6, 7), learning and cooperation (Q 2, 4, 10), and forum management (Q 1, 3, 9). The questions had dichotomous Yes / No categories, included a 'Don't know' option and elicited further comments. The cover e-mail and the questions encouraged respondents to provide additional open-ended comments on different aspects of the consultation. A reminder e-mail, with a copy of the questionnaire, was sent after two weeks. The final response rate was 41 %, and was skewed in favour of DF active participants (63 %).

5.7 Liberal Democrat young activists and Age Concern e-activists network

The second case study examines the way in which Liberal Democrat (LD) party members aged twenty-five or below use the Internet and e-mail to keep in touch with the party and engage in political activities. The case features a survey of young members and supporters subscribed to the party e-mailing list, which taps information about online behaviours, party activism and the modes and dimensions of online party engagement (N = 288, March 2002). The questionnaire was co-designed by the author with Dr. Stephen Ward at the University of Salford, agreed with the Liberal Democrat web manager and endorsed by the party.¹⁰⁶ The questionnaire was administered online using HTML text, PHP submission

¹⁰⁵ The percentage of messages to re-code was determined using the formula proposed by Riffe, Lacy and Fico which takes into account expected (acceptable) inter-coder agreement and confidence intervals (1998: 122-127). The expected agreement for DF was 85 % at $p = .05$. The formula also adjusts the distortion effects of small samples of modest size populations – 300 messages in the case of DF.

¹⁰⁶ The specific terms of this author's involvement are detailed in Appendix 6.

scripts and a javascript verification mechanism (covering questions about Internet use and demographic variables). The tool was active for three weeks, from 26 February to 18 March 2002. Procedurally, the Liberal Democrat HQ sent a 'cover' e-mail to the subscribers to the LD e-mail list, which featured a link to the online questionnaire. The list included approximately 9,000 party members. The e-mail generated 2590 page impressions and 2230 submissions; these were screened for duplicates by crossing IP, Host, date-time stamp of submission and a battery of 10 randomly selected variables. The screening returned 2116 valid questionnaires, 288 of which were from young supporters aged 25 or below. The overall response rate was approximately 23 %, comparatively high for online surveys.¹⁰⁷ The questionnaire included four sets of questions (Appendix 4 – Liberal Democrats online survey questionnaire, p. 248). Questions probed respondents' use of the Internet for general political activities (Q1 to Q3); use of the Internet and other media for party-related political activities (Q 4 to Q10); political attitudes, political behaviours and party political behaviours (Q11 to Q15); socio-demographic factors. Specifically to the aims of this work, four questions ask about members' perceptions and use of the party website, in order to assess the first virtual port of call for young members' activism (Q4 to Q6, and Q8). Two questions asked directly about the import of the Internet for members' level of activism and communications (Q7 and Q9). One question asked about traditional media vs. Internet use for a range of party activities (Q10). Finally, controls for traditional political interest and engagement were included to contextualise Internet and Internet-induced activities in the broader framework of members' political activism (Q11 to Q15).

The third case study examines the e-activists network of the charity Age Concern England (ACE), a mailing list of supporters engaging in online political activities on behalf of the organisation. An online survey of the list (N = 268) was active for three weeks between 24 April and 10 May 2002; it collected information on the motivations of participants and their response to stimuli coming from the organisation. The questionnaire was designed by the author, agreed with the ACE webmaster and endorsed by the organisation. It was administered online following analogous procedures to the LD case. The survey generated 112 page impressions, and 55 completed questionnaires. The overall response rate was 21 %, comparatively high for online surveys. The questionnaire asked four sets of questions (Appendix 5 – Age Concern England online survey questionnaire, p. 253). Questions asked about respondents' use of the Internet for general political activities (Q1 to

¹⁰⁷ Response rates for online survey normally range from 5% to 20%, depending on topic and mode of administration (see <http://www.websm.org>). The response rate for the target category cannot be computed because the LD did not know or wish to disclose the demographic profile of the list. A recent postal survey suggests that only 2 % of LD membership are below 25 years of age (Whiteley & Seyd, 1998b). As the present survey suggests that 14 % of members belong to that age category, the list provides an over sample of young party members.

Q3); use of the Internet and other media for organisation-related political activities (Q 4 and Q5); modes of online engagement in the e-activist network (Q6 to Q11); political attitudes, behaviours, and organisational behaviours (Q11 to Q16); and standard socio-demographic traits. Specifically, two questions ask about members' perceptions and use of the ACE website (Q4 and Q5). Two questions ask about motivations for joining and (Q7 and Q8). Two questions asked directly about length of membership and activities engaged in electronically (Q6 and Q9), while two questions asked about the importance of ACE support and encouragement for their online activity (Q 10 to Q11). Finally, a range of controls was included for traditional political interest and engagement in addition to standard demographics (Q12 to Q16).

5.8 Conclusions

In this chapter, I discussed the articulation of the e-democracy question through the lens of the theory of participation. The logical problem underpinning the thesis is the articulation of e-democracy at the individual level to provide empirical answers to thesis's three research questions:

1. The structure of political inequality online. Does the Internet increase or reduce citizens' access to political engagement opportunities and the decision-making circuit?
2. The institutional contexts of online action. What are the agencies, if any, that mediate citizen online engagement, and how does this matter?
3. The political quality of the technology, at the interface between institutions and citizens. What, if any, is the political value of the technology?

This logical sequence of research design was articulated here in two steps. The answer to the first two questions is provided through the collection and analysis of data about online participation from a nationally representative sample of British residents. Overall, survey data on online participation and contacting, on stimuli to online action and on a range of traditional predictors of online and offline participation drawn from the literature review and from the theory of participation allows to frame the political value of the Internet for citizens engaged in a range of political transactions through the lenses of the structure of political equality, and through modal and dimensional analysis of online participation activities. Analysis of survey data using the heuristic toolbox, modelling and techniques of the theory of participation (Chapters 6 and 7) shed further light on the consequences of such modally and dimensionally diverse online activities for the overall structure of political equality, online and offline. Finally, the survey directly accounts for the meso camp's claims about the importance of intermediaries for the fulfilment of the Internet's democratic potential. Questions are asked about the role of political organisations in shaping online participatory opportunities and in providing stimuli to online action. Regarding specifically the third

question, about the political dimensionality of the Internet, the thesis relies on a case study approach. It was argued that case research helps refine the findings of survey research and to shed a sharper light on online engagement in different contexts of adoption. Firstly, it was argued, cases permit to examine the dimensionality of Internet participation within a closer context than a national opinion survey allows, where *etic* and *emic* can converge. Secondly, some dimensions are inaccessible using the single participatory act as unit of coding, such as potential effectiveness, diverseness, and cost of discrete online activities. Thirdly, cases help to assess the many contextual variables determining the likelihood and nature of citizens' online engagement (as claimed in the macro and meso camps). Finally, the small extent of online political activity (as reported in the micro review and in Chapter 6) makes probes statistically insignificant and over-sampling too costly. Under such circumstance, the choice of the specific cases was dictated by the need to 'over sample' online political engagement in line with survey results, by the cases' value as representative of wider modes of Internet engagement defined by meso scholars, by the involvement of visible and proactive intermediaries in the process of online engagement, and, of course, by obvious reasons of accessibility. Citizens engagement qua the Internet is examined in the contexts of party membership, of a deliberative forum and of organisational mobilisation by a charity. Using a range of research methods and techniques, questions are asked concerning the 'quality' of the technology – interactivity, speed, low-cost, co-operation – and the political value of new media for the participants.

Chapter 6 - Results: the structure of online political inequality

All, however, is not lost. One advantage of the digital divide debate has been to highlight, for those prepared to look, the range of ways in which significant inequalities are reproduced through media access and use. There is a political link here, although one not yet fully developed, between these insights and a separate debate about where, if anywhere, democracy is heading: the question, in other words, of what quantity and quality of online access and use I or you need to have a chance of participating as a citizen.

Nick Couldry, 2004

6.1 Introduction

It was argued that this work makes inferences from the empirical to the theoretical layer, using the bridging concept of political participation to systematise online activities, in order to arrive, possibly, at conclusions on electronic democracy. This chapter reports the results of the survey component concerning the structure of online political participation in Britain. In the first section, I report headline results regarding patterns of Internet access and use in Britain, and the socio-demographic and political characteristics of the Internet audience. In the second section, I examine the nature of the online public space by discussing frequencies of online political activities, online contacting and responses to online political stimuli. In the third section, I draw on nested tables to highlight the predictors of online political engagement and on regression analysis to explore the structure of political equality as reproduced in cyberspace. In the last section, I consider the future of online participation Britain based on current trends of online engagement. Overall, the chapter directly addresses the first research question of the thesis, concerning the structure of online political opportunities in Britain.

6.2 The British Internet audience: technical, social and political profiles

The overall picture of the British Internet audience is that of a young, expanding and politically interested constituency. According to the survey, 49% of British population is currently using the Internet. This figure is consistent with government data on Internet access in Britain for the same period,¹⁰⁸ and places Britain near the top end of Internet penetration in Europe. Respondents differ as to when they started using the technology, the bulk of current users having started 3-5 years ago (38 % of respondents). One in twenty respondents is a recent Internet recruit having joined in the last few months, while one in five has started using the Internet less than one year ago. Although small numbers on the tail of the distribution do not consent to generalise, there is evidence that the marginal (yearly) increase in Internet penetration rate is stable – 20 % increase for the ‘last few months’, 17 % for the

¹⁰⁸ OFTEL (April 2002) <http://www.oftel.co.uk/publications/research/2002/q8intr0402.htm>. Office for National Statistics (July 2002), <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/intacc0702.pdf>.

'last six months' and 16 % for the 'last year'. About half of the respondents (48%) spend four or more hours per week online. More intensive use of the Internet, however, is found for those with a longer online experience. About 52% of those who have been online for at least three years are classified as heavy users (4+ hours a week), compared with 34 % of those who started to use the Internet in the last year. Therefore, there is a significant habituation process, whereby users spend more time on the Internet as they go along ($\gamma = 0.34$, sig. $p < 0.001$).¹⁰⁹

Overall, access from home is both more widespread than access from work – 40 % vis-à-vis 19 % – and more frequent, as one in three accesses the Internet daily from home vs. one in five from work. Access from public places (8 %) is twice as large as access from Internet cafes. As to usage patterns, data contradicts the prevalent assumption that e-mail is the most common form of Internet use. Eighty percent of the respondents reported using e-mail – both personal and work-related – vis-à-vis 85 % of people who have accessed the Web. Personal e-mail is much more prominent than work-related e-mail, approximately two to one. The use of Intranets – 25 % of Internet users – reflects the increasing spread of network technology in the workplace, while the use of instant messaging – again 25 % of Internet users – is mainly limited to younger respondents (15-34 YO, sig. $p < 0.001$) and experienced users. Overall then, results suggest that the household rather than the workplace is the place where the Internet is most commonly consumed.¹¹⁰

6.2.1 Social and digital divide

As found in micro resources studies (section 3.5, p. 75), gender, age, education and social grade are related to Internet access (Table 6-1, below.). Specifically: young, male, educated respondents and respondents from AB and C1 social grades are significantly more likely to be online than their social counterparts (all sig. $p < .001$). The correlation is relatively weak for gender, strong for age and very strong for education and social class. Regarding age, Internet access drops sharply above the 54 years of age mark. Access is instead progressively unequal concerning social grade, as access differentials increase significantly down the social ladder – 1.14 (AB/C1) 1.46 (C1/C2) 1.65 (C2/DE). Data also confirms resources studies' overwhelming evidence that education is a crucial predictor of Internet use. Only 5 % from the lowest educational category are online vis-à-vis 81 % from

¹⁰⁹ Standard statistical notation is used throughout. [p] is a measure of statistical significance for strength of correlations, importance of differences and more generally when two or more groups are compared. It indicates the probability that a result is due to chance: the higher the [p] the higher the likelihood that the result reported is due to chance. There is widespread consensus among social scientists that $p = 0.05$ is the maximum acceptable significance for large datasets, above which one should distrust the result (difference, correlation etc).

¹¹⁰ However, data does specify whether the household or the workplace is best predictor of Internet adoption. It may be possible that the Internet is first encountered and learnt to use in the workplace and later adopted at home.

Table 6-1. Internet use by age, gender, social grade and education¹¹¹

		Internet use		N
		% of category uses the Net	% of Internet users belongs to the category	
Gender	Male	56 %	56 %	540
	Female	42 %	44 %	420
Age	15-24	73 %	22 %	213
	25-34	66 %	25 %	239
	35-44	60 %	23 %	222
	45-54	52 %	17 %	165
	55-64	32 %	8 %	80
	65 +	11 %	4 %	40
Social grade	AB	72 %	27 %	256
	C1	63 %	37 %	358
	C2	43 %	19 %	182
	DE	26 %	17 %	163
Education	Student status	91 %	13 %	127
	19+	81 %	28 %	271
	17-18	65 %	21 %	205
	15-16	36 %	36 %	345
	13-14	5 %	1 %	11

Notes

N = 960 Internet users.

the highest category and 91 % for current student. Although students represent only 6.5 % of the population, they constitute the 13 % of Internet users. Similarly to the effect of social grade, differentials between contiguous educational categories show a decreasing progression – 7.2 to 1.8 to 1.3., This indicates that up the education scale additional years of schooling make a decreasing difference to Internet access. Overall, the digital divide in Britain rests on educational and social grade differences, especially at the bottom of the education and social scales.

On the other hand, however, the inequality of access to the Internet by different social categories is progressively decreasing over time, in many respects. Cross-analysis of access rates and dates of first access suggests that all ‘excluded’ categories are filling the gap. The access rate of female and respondents from low social grade is growing faster than access rates of males and high social grade respondents. Data suggests that a reversion of exclusionary trends started in Britain approximately one year ago (circa 2001) for DE and C2 categories and between one and two years ago for female respondents. Additionally, it was noted, people in education are more likely to have Internet access.

¹¹¹ A similar table is included in the survey report by Gibson, Lusoli and Ward (2002b).

Table 6-2. Political activity by Internet use

Political activities	Internet use		Difference
	Yes	No	
Engaged in some political activity	70 %	62 %	+ 8
Voted	62 %	57 %	+ 5 *
Discussed politics with friends / family	51 %	33 %	+ 18 *
Contacted a politician / elected official	18 %	10 %	+ 8 **
Engaged in strike activity	9 %	7 %	+ 2
Donated money to a political cause / organisation	8 %	3 %	+ 5 **
Attended a political rally	7 %	2 %	+ 5 **
Joined a political organisation	7 %	2 %	+ 5 ***
Actively campaigned to an organisation	7 %	2 %	+ 5 ***
	N = 959	N = 1007	

Notes

* = sig. $p < 0.05$, ** = sig. $p < 0.01$, *** = sig. $p \leq 0.001$.

Given a socially progressive schooling system, this should help predict a rapid narrowing of the digital divide in the future. More dubious are the signs of a digital emancipation of older people – the two 55 + years old categories – apparent only in the last few months. Overall, therefore, survey evidence indicates that a digital funnel (rather than a digital divide) is the resultant of co-occurring divides; the funnel’s diameter is enlarging with time, allowing increasingly more people into cyberspace.

6.2.2 The political Internet

Moving from socio-demographics to political traits, Table 6-2 highlights the reported level of political activity of Internet users and non-users. One of the main findings from the micro review was that Internet users are unusually politically active (see p. 76). The survey indicates that Internet users are indeed more politically active than non-users, especially in terms of political discussion (+18 %), particularised contacting (+8 %) and activities related to political organisations. Even excluding voting, more than half of the Internet population is engaged in some form of politics. To ascertain the relative importance of traditional SES predictors of political participation (see section 4.3.3 The socio-economic model, p. 112), ‘effects ’ modelling was used to regress political activities onto Internet use and SES predictors of political participation (Table 6-3, below). This helps ascertain whether the zero-order correlations reported above hold in *ceteris paribus* conditions. Results show that Internet use has a strong and positive ‘effect’ on voting, discussing politics and on overall political activity. Other things being equal, Internet users are 20 % more likely to vote than non-users, 17 % more likely to discuss politics and 20 % more likely to engage in any other political activity. In addition, longer length of Internet use corresponds to higher levels of political discussion – a further 3 % increase. Controls have the expected sign and strength: overall participation and voting increases considerably with age and social class; females are

Table 6-3. Predictors of offline political participation

	Vote	Discuss	Overall
Internet use	*** 2.68	*** 3.26	*** 2.99
Length of Internet use		* 1.13	
Gender (female)	* 1.24		
Age	*** 1.37	** 1.11	*** 1.28
Social grade (lowest)	** 0.86	*** 0.82	** 0.87
15-16 years in education			
17-18 years in education		* 1.16	
19 + years in education		* 1.13	
Student status	* 0.56		
Constant	** 0.16	* 0.21	*** 2.99
Correctly classified	66.6 %	62.8 %	69.1 %

Notes

Results reported are logistic regression Exp (B).

* = sig. $p < 0.05$, ** = sig. $p < 0.01$, *** = sig. $p \leq 0.001$. N = 1972

slightly more likely to vote, while respondent from higher formal education are more likely to discuss politics. Strikingly, SES controls do not seem to subtract significance to the relation between Internet use and political engagement.

Overall, therefore, the results suggest that the Internet is a truly hyper-political space, populated in great part by people who – *ceteris paribus* – are more likely to be politically active than the average citizen. However, this statement needs an additional word of caution and explanation. Firstly, the interaction between Internet use and education partly accounts for the high coefficient for the former and the low coefficient for the latter. Further analysis of competing models alternatively including / excluding these factors suggests that Internet use subtracts from the importance of the education in explaining traditional participation.¹¹² Education in fact predicts Internet use more than it explains participation, once social grade is controlled for. As a result, the Internet use coefficient may overestimate its actual relation to political engagement. In other words, the hyper-political potential described above may, in fact, be a potential, the realisations of which largely rests on the interplay between education, Internet use and social grade. Secondly, the length of Internet use successfully predicts higher levels of engagement in politics, which indicates a ongoing process of techno-political learning. In addition, the higher keyboard and literacy skills required for accessing the Internet version 1.0 (as was noted in Chapter 2) partly accounts for the difference. In summary: the ‘normalisation’ of British cyberspace is to-date an ongoing process, possibly slower than predicted by meso theorists.

¹¹² Analogous to the effects of multicollinearity in linear regression.

Table 6-4. Levels of engagement in online participation¹¹³

		Percent
<i>Individual – direct</i>	Look for political information in general	7.9 %
	Visit the site of any political organisation	4.9 %
	Sign an online petition	4.0 %
<i>Contacting</i>	Send an e-mail to an elected politician	3.9 %
	Send an e-mail postcard / newspaper article to a friend	3.8 %
	Send an e-mail to a public service	3.5 %
	Sign-up for e-news bulletin	2.6 %
	Send an e-mail to a political organisation	2.1 %
<i>Interactive – discursive</i>	Discuss politics in a chat group	2.0 %
	Download software advertising a political organisation	1.6 %
	Download leaflets / other material to distribute offline	1.5 %
	Discuss politics in a mailing list / bulletin board	1.1 %
<i>Organisational</i>	Join a political organisation online as a full-paid member	0.8 %
	Watch or participate in a political online Q&A session	0.6 %
	Donate funds online	0.4 %
	Sign up online as a volunteer for a political cause	0.4 %
	Engage in some online political activity	16.8%

Notes

N = 959 Internet users.

Despite these caveats, it remains largely unexplained why politically active citizens should be using the Internet even slightly more than less concerned citizens in all logistic model tested. Patterns of party affiliation do not help disentangle the puzzle because users and non-users tend to support the same parties (result not reported in the table). There is a small difference between users and non-users concerning support for Labour and Conservatives (- 4%), a small edge for the Liberal Democrats online (+ 2%), and a substantial difference with respect to support for no political party (+ 6%). These results probably depend on the young age profile and high educational attainment of users, as was found in the micro review (see section 3.5, p. 76). Overall, then, the results from both socio-demographic and political trait analysis point to a very interesting Internet political audience, especially for political organisations able and willing to use the Internet for campaigning and recruitment purposes.

6.3 Online participation and contacting

Having examined the digital divide and the political nature of cyberspace, I now examine directly online political participation. The survey questionnaire includes two measures for active online political involvement (see section 5.2.1.4, p. 131, and Appendix 1). The first comprises a range of online political behaviours, while the second measures

¹¹³ See note 111.

online organisational contacting. The first, apparent result is that online participation is very uncommon on both counts. Concerning the former, only about 17 % of Internet users have ever engaged in one or more forms of online participation during the last year (Table 6-4, above). Online participation activities cluster in four broad groups: individual-direct (such as looking for information online and visiting websites), contacting (sending emails to a range of recipients), interactive-discursive (online discussion, downloading material) and organisational (joining, donating online). As predicted by most uses studies, individual - direct forms of online participation of action are most common types: looking for information, visiting the website of a political organisation and signing an online petition (all above 4 %). Contacting by e-mail a range of organisations for political reasons (politicians, organisation, friends) is the second largest set of online activist; most of these activities are engaged in by approximately 3 % of Internet users. More interactive and technically sophisticated forms of engagement, such as discussing political issues in chat rooms and mailing lists and downloading software fall in a 1-2 % bracket. Finally, activities that involve a financial dimension – donating online and joining an organisation online – sit at the bottom of the frequency table. These are engaged in by less than 1 % of users. The overall figure for online participation (17 %) decreases to 9 % if one excluded Internet use to access political news. Overall, therefore, online participation in Britain is limited in scope and nature. Although there is no previous comparable data, online participation in Britain is lower than online participation in the US at a similar point of Internet diffusion (Lusoli, Gibson, & Ward, 2002).

Respondents were then asked about whether they had visited the website of or e-mailed any political organisation from a list of available options (see section 5.2.1.5, p. 131). Figures for online contacting are low: only one in four users (26 %) have ever contacted an organisation online. Results are low even for news organisations, as a similar proportion reports to have visited a mainstream media sites for political information. Excluding the media, charities and pressure groups (7 % of users) fare relatively better than political parties (4 %), while non-conventional political causes lag considerably behind, close to total oblivion (1 %). Confirming some meso claims concerning the 'pluralist' model of electronic democracy (Donk & Tops, 1995: 16-31), pressure groups and charities are thus attracting the largest online audiences in Britain. As regards political parties, which are reportedly ahead of the online political game (Lusoli, Ward, & Gibson, 2002), and are reported to be on the rise in meso accounts (see section 2.9.4, p. 65) the low result may depend on seasonality. The survey was conducted one year after the general elections, a period of re-organisation and possibly the least significant moment of parties' life in the electoral cycle. Finally, the combined audience for protest and alternative media sites (3 %) is smaller than one might expect given the increasing academic attention to alternative new media (McCaughy &

Ayers, 2002; Meikle, 2002). This partly depends on the low visibility of non-conventional politics on the Internet (see later discussion, Table 6-6). Overall, notwithstanding the high levels of traditional political engagement of Internet users, reported in the previous section, users participate online only to a limited extent.

6.3.1.1 Online stimuli and reactions

Vis-à-vis such limited online engagement, the (effects) question arise: does the Internet matter for citizen engagement? I begin in this section to examine this question by looking at self-reported indicators of response to online stimuli and at the consequences of online contacting. It was suggested in Chapter 2 (p. 61) that one of the most innovative applications of the Internet for political organisations is to contact individually large numbers of supporters and voters. Unlike TV, where political message are broadcast to all to engage the interested few, the Internet allows for the targeting (narrowcasting) of specific messages to smaller audience. This includes sending blanket e-mails as well as less intrusive methods such as encouraging people to sign up for e-news updates or getting sympathisers to send e-petitions and postcards on to their friends and colleagues. Surprisingly, therefore, about 4 in 5 online respondents have never received any such political stimulus, either solicited or unsolicited. When they have, it was principally subscription-based material, such as political e-news (8%) and, less often, political material from parties, friends or charities (around 5%). Concerning the minority who have actually received some form of online political stimulus, half of the time e-politics came from friends and colleagues rather than directly political organisations. On average, recipients have received two political stimuli each. Even in mid-2002, that is before the 'spam' explosion of 2003, this strikingly contrasted with the large amount of unsolicited commercial e-mails and pop-ups that users encounters daily.¹¹⁴ This is even more striking because the reactions to online stimuli are warmer than one would expect. While just over a quarter of recipients ignore these messages (29%) almost as many will occasionally read them without responding (24%), and 40 % actually respond other than to express irritation. One in two recipients actually respond to election-related e-mails.. Although organisations tend to be the most common sources of these political messages (52%), personal contacts are the key to ensuring that political messages are both read and responded to. 87% of respondents who receive political messages from friends or acquaintances read them, with 47% responding. Overall, these results suggest that an ethical distance may exist between commercial and political online content, as the latter is effectively kept in higher regard by recipients than the standard unsolicited e-mail. Also, results point to the importance of users in spreading the political message online, as was suggested by some meso accounts (Painter & Wardle, 2001).

¹¹⁴ The 'spam' situation is so alarming that the UK Parliament All-party Internet Group set up a Parliamentary Inquiry (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmparty/memi252.htm>).

Table 6-5. Involvement with political organisations after online contact

	Less likely to become involved	No difference to level of interest	More likely to want to find out more	More likely to become actively involved	Actually became more involved	DK
Mainstream news organisation	2 %	68 %	22 %	4 %	2 %	2 %
Charity or pressure group		46 %	35 %	8 %	8 %	3 %
Political party	5 %	39 %	37 %	8 %	5 %	5 %
Alternative / independent media organisation		36 %	36 %	12 %	4 %	12 %
Anti-capitalist group / network		33 %	50 %	17 %		
Single issue protest campaign		30 %	40 %	20 %	10 %	

Notes

N = 252 users who contacted an organisation online.

Source

Q12. After visiting or having had communication with an organisation online which of the following best describes how you felt about that organisation? (single response)

The effectiveness of Internet in keeping people connected with organisations once they have made first contact was also gauged (Table 6-5). Overall, results suggest that contacting an organisation online has little consequence for people's subsequent interest and involvement (63 % of online contactors). One in four reports an increased willingness to find out more about the organisation, while a minority reports a increased likelihood to become more involved (5%). Only a very few respondents claimed that online contact actually made a difference to their involvement, either in the negative or in the positive. The average however hides some differences between different types of organisations (Table 6-5). Clearly, contacting news media organisations online either makes no difference to the level of interest (68 %) or just helps people to find out more (22 %). However, making contact online with single-issue protest campaigns and anti-capitalist groups makes respondents more likely to become actively involved with the cause (24 %) or to want to find out more (43 %). Parties, charities and pressure groups are rather better at generating further interest (36 %) than at igniting political action (12 %). In a similar line, the survey asked whether online contactors would have contacted the organisation using traditional methods. Remarkably, two in three respondents claimed that they would not have made contact offline. The Internet enables organisations to reach a group of citizens, about 18 % of all Internet users, who would not contact them offline. Again, there are differences among types of organisations. Media organisations show the largest add-on effect, as 70 % of respondents claim they would not have made contact offline. Conversely, figures for online contacting of single-issue protest campaigns suggest media stratification rather than displacement (or supplementation). 'Radical' users largely use new digital tools to replicate their traditional

Table 6-6. Awareness of political campaigns online

Virtual campaigns heard about	Internet use	
	Yes	No
Mayday Monopoly	7 %	1 %
Globalise Resistance	6 %	2 %
Other political campaign	4 %	–
Fax Your MP	3 %	1 %
Buy Nothing Day	3 %	–
PayupTony.com	2 %	1 %
Not heard about any campaign	81 %	81 %
Don't know	4 %	15 %
	N = 959	N = 1007

contacting behaviours. Once again, political parties and pressure groups show a balance between the two effects.

In this framework, anti-capitalist movements and environmental networks using of the Internet are hardly reaping any rewards. Only 15% of online users report ever having heard of any of any virtual campaigns – i.e. campaigns organised mainly on the Internet – such as the May Day anti-capitalist protests in London or the ‘Fax Your MP’ website that has run since 2000 (see Table 6-6). This compares with 4% of those without access to the Internet who report being aware of cyber campaigning. More recent efforts by students to coordinate protest against the imposition of university top-up fees through the PayupTony.com site are also failing to penetrate the consciousness of the online population with just 2% of Internet users saying that they have heard of the group. Yet again, the average hides a substantial difference between Internet users and non-users: whereas users are more aware of online campaigns, non-users virtually ignore their existence, probably due to scanty coverage in traditional press or a lack of attention to the Internet on respondents’ part.

Overall, therefore, traditional media agencies reach online a wider audience that is however more difficult to mobilise, cognitively or behaviourally. Conversely, more radical organisations are reaching out to the converted, who are however more likely to sustain their activism electronically. Interestingly, alternative media organisations, as well as established mediators such as parties and pressure groups sit on the fence, as they reach a slightly wider audience with some chance to further engage them in the organisations’ political activity.

6.4 The online structure of political inequality

Once people are online, a second-order access barrier exists that has been defined a ‘real digital divide’ (Gandy, 2002). This leads those who are more engaged offline to reproduce their political behaviour via the new means, as predicted by uses studies (see section 3.5, p. 75). In the first stage, I argued above, the economy of Internet access makes it likely that the socio-political characteristics of users are skewed. This is due more to the distribution of

Table 6-7. Socio demographic profile of different Internet groups¹¹⁵

		All respondents	Internet users	Online activists
Gender	<i>Male</i>	49%	56%	66%
	<i>Female</i>	51%	44%	34%
Age	<i>15-24</i>	15%	22%	30%
	<i>25-34</i>	18%	25%	28%
	<i>35-44</i>	19%	23%	23%
	<i>45-54</i>	16%	17%	11%
	<i>55-64</i>	13%	8%	7%
	<i>65 +</i>	19%	4%	1%
Social grade	<i>AB</i>	18%	27%	30%
	<i>C1</i>	29%	37%	43%
	<i>C2</i>	21%	19%	11%
	<i>DE</i>	32%	17%	16%
Terminal education age	<i>13-14</i>	11%	1%	1%
	<i>15-16</i>	49%	36%	21%
	<i>17-18</i>	16%	21%	21%
	<i>19+</i>	17%	28%	37%
	<i>Students</i>	7%	13%	21%
Totals		N = 1972	N = 959	N = 162

access to technology in society than to political dynamics. However, SES factors may not exhaust their explanatory power at the first step of the model, causing unequal access. Once the individual has gained access at home, work or at a public place doing politics online depends on political choice. However, according to the theory of participation political choices are in turn linked to age, education and social status and a range of ‘accelerating factors’ such as motivations, mobilisation and resources. This section examines the process of political choice and its consequences for the structure of political equality qua the Internet. Table 6-7 reports the socio-demographic profiles of the total sample, of Internet users and of online political activists.

First, I compare the SES characteristics of online political activists with the overall sample. As was noted, Internet users are more ‘political’ than the overall sample due to demographics: male gender, high formal education and AB-C1 social grade. As well, a reinforcing effect is at work here, in that high SES users also tend to use the Internet in a much more ‘political’ way than users from other backgrounds. Online participants are more likely to be males (+ 17 %), from high social grade (+ 15 %) and to have higher levels of formal education (+ 20 %).

As predicted by most micro studies, however, there is the exception of youth. Respondents up to 34 years of age constitute only one third of the entire sample but account

¹¹⁵ A similar table is reported in Gibson et al. (2002a).

for two thirds of all online participation. Overall, the Internet reflects political inequality rather than level the playing field, with the notable exception of age. However, discounting for the effect of Internet access – by comparing Internet users and online participants (groups two and three in Table 6-7) – online political inequality appears more related to citizens' educational attainment and age than to social grade and gender. In other words, inequality related to social grade dims once people gain access to the Internet, while gender, age and education, in different ways, predict whether a person is likely to engage in online participation activities. In other words, if the Internet restricts the participation funnel, this is more due to a difference in access than to specific characteristics of the medium. The results reported in Table 6-7 suggest that younger citizens, citizens still in education and those with a higher educational achievement engage most in politics online. Unlike for access, however, differentials suggest that higher education encourage online participation more than lower education restricts it. Largely due to access inequality, and partly due to the stratification of resources associated with online politics, the Internet appears to increase political inequality in Britain. However, in the terms proposed by Bimber (see p. 84), online political inequality caused by social grade may be durable, while that caused by gender, age and education may be transient. The next section examines in greater detail the relation between SES and online participation using multiple logistic regression.

6.4.1 Towards proper modelling of online inequality

Table 6-8 and Table 6-9¹¹⁶ report the results of eight logistic regression models, concerning various types of political participation. Table 6-8 presents the results of regressions for four basic types of political activity – voting, discussing politics, contacting and involvement in a political organisation – as predicted by standard SES. Table 6-9 presents the results of regressions for engagement in online participation and online contacting. Both are modelled hierarchically, first with demographic variables alone as predictors (SES model) and then with a range of theoretically significant controls including offline political activity variables, whether or not the individual ever received political e-stimuli, and the length, frequency and intensity of Internet use (complete model). Examined comparatively, the tables offer a direct assessment of the importance of SES for offline and online engagement. This complements the results reported in Table 6-7 under *ceteribus paribus* conditions.

¹¹⁶ A table including Table 6-8 and Table 6-9 is reported in Gibson et al. (2002a).

Table 6-8. Predictors of offline participation

		Vote	Discuss	Contact	Organisational
Gender	Female	1.2	* .79	.81	** .63
Age	15-25	*** .19	.68	** .23	*** .20
	26-35	.73		.60	
	36-45				
	46-55			1.4	
	56-65			** 2.1	1.5
Social grade	AB	** 1.7	*** 2.2	*** 2.5	* 1.7
	C1	*** 2.0	*** 1.8	* 1.6	
	C2	1.3	** 1.5	* 1.6	
Education	17-18		* 1.7		
	19 +		** 1.9	1.9	** 2.7
	Student				* 3.2
Constant		1.3	*** .45	*** .10	*** .88
% correctly classified		67.4	62.7	86.3	89.5
N			1972		

Notes

Figures reported are Exp(B). Only coefficients significant at $p < 0.20$ are reported.

* = sig. $p < 0.05$, ** = sig. $p < 0.01$, *** = sig. $p < 0.001$. N = 1972

Education is measured by terminal education age's five categories. The bottom category (13-14) was set as reference; the first intermediate category (15-16) yielded non-significant results and was omitted.

Dependents

Vote: respondent has ever voted in a local, general or European election.

Discuss: respondent has ever discussed politics with friends/family.

Contact: respondent has ever contacted a politician or government official.

Organisational: respondent has ever engaged in organisational politics, including joining a political organisation and actively campaigning for a political organisation.

Overall, online participation considerably differs from offline participation. First, while social grade is the strongest predictor of traditional participation – particularly more activist forms such as discussing politics (AB: 2.2 ***) and contacting politicians (AB: 2.5 ***) – it makes a negligible difference to online participation. Equally, formal education plays a major role in the process of offline political socialisation, especially for organisational activities (19+: 2.7 ***) but has no influence on online participation. Second, gender is much more important for online contacting (.51 ***) and for online participation (.60 ***) than for all forms of offline participation, except for organisational activities (.63 ***). In other words, online participation are more gender-biased than traditional participation. Thirdly, young age negatively influences voting (15-25: .19 ***), organisations behaviours (15-25: .20 ***) and contacting (15-25: .23 ***) but is positive online (15-25: 5.2 *). Not only new media balance the negative age bias of participation: it tilts the playing field in favour of younger participants. Young people from different backgrounds are likely to engage in

Table 6-9. Predictors of online participation and contacting

		Online contact SES	Online contact complete	Online participation SES	Online participation complete
Gender	Female	** .51	* .59	** .60	.78
Age	15-25			* 5.2	* 9.1
	26-35			* 4.9	* 6.3
	36-45			* 4.6	* 5.3
	46-55				3.1
	56-65			3.2	
Social grade	AB	** 3.4			
	C1	* 2.2			
	C2			.58	* .44
Education	17-18				
	19 +				
	Student				
Length of Internet use (five steps)			1.2		** 1.3
Vote (Yes)					
Discuss politics (Yes)			*** 3.5		*** 2.3
Contact (Yes)			1.6		** 2.2
Organisational involvement (0-4)			*** 4.3		*** 2.8
Received newspaper article by e-mail (Yes)					* 2.7
Received e-mail petition (Yes)			** 3.6		* 2.7
Received e-news update / information bulletin (Yes)			*** 4.4		
Received election related material by e-mail (Yes)					* 3.1
Constant		.00	.00	* .04	** .01
% correctly classified		88.0	90.4	83.2	86.3

Notes

Figures reported are Exp(B). Only coefficients significant at $p < 0.20$ are reported (excluding constant).

* = sig. $p < 0.05$, ** = sig. $p < 0.01$, *** = sig. $p < 0.001$. N = 922

Education is measured by terminal education age's five categories. The bottom category (13-14) was set as reference; the first intermediate category (15-16) yielded non-significant results and was omitted.

Grey background marks the variables entered in each model.

Dependents

Online participation: respondent has engaged in one or more online participation activity. Q7. Have you ever engaged in any of the following forms of online political activity or not? (multiple response)

Online contact: respondent has contacted a political organisation online. Q10. Have you ever visited any website or e-mailed any of the organisations on this card or not? (multiple response)

online politics although they do to a very limited extent 'in real life'. Overall, the analysis suggests that online participation and offline participation draw on different SES resources (as suggested by Krueger, 2002). Of course, however, this is mitigated by unequal access to the Internet, described in the previous sections.

Table 6-9 helps to fine-tune the difference between offline and online activity. One immediately obvious result is the inadequacy of baseline SES models to explain online participation and contact, and the overall importance of offline participation, Internet skills

and young age. The increase of cases correctly classified by complete models with respect to SES models is 21 % for online contact and 29 % for online participation (both ***). In other words, complete models explain considerably more variance than baseline models, hence they better describe reality. Three factors included in the complete models account for the additional variance. Firstly, it is evident that offline political engagement provides a significant amount of explanatory power for both online participation and contacting – a finding that corroborates results for a range of uses studies (see sections 3.6.1 and 3.6.2). Specifically, discussing politics offline produces a 17 % increase in the chances of online contact, and an 11 % increase in online participation. Even more remarkable, each increment on the scale of offline organisational activity (0-4) yields a 22 % increase in online contacting and a 16 % increase in the chances of engaging in online participation. These are remarkable increases – the reader may remember that the probabilities for online contacting and online participation were 30 % and 18 % respectively. In other words, although participation rests on a more egalitarian SES basis once people are online, it draws on pre-existing patterns of engagement, in turn based on social inequality. Secondly, e-stimuli increase the likelihood of online participation. The reception of online campaign material increases the likelihood of online participation by 18 %. The reception of e-petitions (+ 18 %) and e-news political updates (+ 22 %) also increase respondents' likelihood to contact organisations online. Of all e-stimuli considered, only receiving an e-mail postcard has no relation with online participation and contacting (not reported in the table). However, the interpretation of causality is much more problematic regarding e-stimuli. A virtuous circle may exist between contacting organisations online and receiving political material by e-mail. Of course, an e-stimulus received from the organisation according to its membership database or from a friend can be the cause of a subsequent online contact. But equally, upon visiting an organisation's website, respondents can sign up for e-news bulletins or enter their e-mail details for navigation profiling. This is increasingly more frequent, as political e-news and party bulletins tend to embed links in e-mail text, prompting users to visit the organisations' site (Painter & Wardle, 2001). The causal relation may thus run in both directions, due to the interactive nature of the Internet. Both explanations are equally satisfactory, and further statistical controls suggest that neither should be dismissed.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Removing e-stimuli from the model alters the coefficients reported marginally, while it brings none of the non-significant predictors to the foreground. The only measurable effect is an inflation of the log odds of traditional political activities, mainly organisational involvement. This is a further indication of the 'traditional' nature of online contacting, which follows offline rather than online dynamics. In addition, where one enters the e-stimuli received from friends or others only (not from organisations) the average coefficient for e-stimuli is a considerable 3.02. This suggests the existence of a general 'political network' effects, which includes both the organisation and the circle of friends and acquaintances that gravitate around a political organisation.

Thirdly, young age and length of Internet use matter for online participation but are irrelevant for online contacting. While age has no effect on online contacting, it yields a 44 % (15-25 YO) and 35 % (26-35 YO) increase in the respondents' likelihood of engaging in online participation. Length of Internet use is also positively related to online participation. The effect is relatively small, as a point increase in the length scale (1-5) yields a 3 % increase in online participation. On the aggregate, respondents with 6+ years of Internet use are almost twice as likely as newcomers to engage in online participation. In other words, the longer one uses the Net, the more she is likely to engage in online political activities. This suggests that online political action requires a process a techno-political learning on the part of the user, which is easier for younger user than for older user. Overall, therefore, young age, pre-existing political activity and e-stimuli, rather than social grade, education and gender – predict online participation. Offline political engagement is especially important for online contacting, while young citizens tend to engage with different, more active forms of online politics.

6.4.2 *Online participation in perspective: a glance at the future*

The differences between offline participation and online participation on one hand, online participation and online contacting on the other suggest a further refinement of current theories of online participation. Crossing offline and online participation yields four possible results as to the political 'effects' of the Internet (Table 6-10).¹¹⁸ First, a disengagement category, whereby respondents report neither offline nor online participation. Second, an inert potential category, where respondents engage in traditional participation but eschew online participation. Third, a reinforcement category, where respondents replicate their existing political behaviour on to the Net. Finally, a radical potential category, where new people access the political circuit through the Internet. Results show a sizeable prevalence of inert potential respondents, corresponding to more than half of the British population. One in four are totally disengaged from the political process; one in six continue their online behaviours onto the net, while a small minority (3 %) falls in the radical potential category. Overall, therefore, a minority supplements their offline activities using the Internet and an even smaller group participate solely online. However, further analysis of online-only activists tells a tenuously more encouraging story regarding the democratic potential of the Internet. Online-only activists tend to be ICTs late-comers, from lower social grade and, in the main, students. Also, young people's rates of online participation far outstrip their inclination to engage in traditional forms of politics. While only 10 % of those aged 15-24 years of age have engaged in any form of offline political activity, three times as many have participated on the Internet.

¹¹⁸ The typology is conceptually akin Topf's typology of political interest and actual behaviour (1995), to define the participation *potential*.

Table 6-10. Four scenarios of Internet political effects

		Online participation	
		No	Yes
Offline participation	No	Disengagement 28 %	Radical potential 3 %
	Yes	Inert potential 55 %	Reinforcement 14 %

Furthermore, while Table 6-10 describes well the existing situation statically, it is more difficult to read it dynamically. In other words, under what conditions can the disengaged be persuaded to enter the political process via electronic means? To clarify this issue, a question was asked in the survey about the main reason why respondents did not engage in online politics. Most Internet users report the lack of political interest as the reason for their online political inertia (44 %). This in line with the overarching effect of interest as a mediating factor between socio-demographics and online engagement found in a number of effects studies (see p. 93). In the majority of studies, political interest is function of resources, in turn deriving from education, political socialisation and personal circumstances. It is doubtful that young (15-34 years old), female respondents who overall participate less can be lured into online participation, regardless of the dimensional benefits on offer. A smaller contingent of respondents choose the sole reliance on offline politics (17 %) and the preference for face-to-face interaction (11 %) as reasons for non-engagement online. The former group participate offline by contacting politicians, they deviate in other respects from the traditional profile of the participator: significantly older, leaning toward the Conservative party and living in the south of the country. Surprisingly, while they do not participate online, they use the Internet for accessing the news. Finally, respondents who prefer face-to-face politics are as likely as others to receive online political stimuli and messages, but significantly more likely to either ignore them or to delete without reading ($\eta^2 = .20^*$, $n = 71$). Conversely, younger respondent (15-24 years old) do not see participation as a necessarily face-to-face endeavour, while at the same time make great use of chat-rooms – the very icon of virtuality. Although they are not averse to online politics, they do not engage.¹¹⁹ The implications for the structure of political equality remain therefore to be seen in the long run, as and if more people with a ‘virtual’ mindset replace the ‘old hands’ in the political arena.

¹¹⁹ These findings confirm recent results about young people’s Internet engagement in Britain (Livingstone & Bober, 2004).

Table 6-11. Major reason of disengagement from online political activity

	No online participation	
	Participate offline	Don't participate offline
Not really interested in politics in general	42 %	48 %
Interested in politics, but get enough offline	22 %	5 %
Politics should take place face-to-face	13 %	6 %
Not enough time	8 %	8 %
Not aware of the opportunity	7 %	4 %
Other reason	5 %	11 %
Don't know	2 %	27 %
	N = 534	N = 268

There are also significant differences between the two groups identified in Table 6-10 who do not participate online regarding the reasons why that is the case. Those who engage in neither offline nor online participation (the *Disengaged*) report a lack of interest in politics (48 %), and a large proportion of DK and ‘other reasons’ (38 %) as the most important reasons for their lack of online engagement (Table 6-11). Surprisingly, a great number of traditional participators also indicate lack of political interest as a main reason for opting out of online politics (42 %). However, they may also think that online participation is ‘a step too far’: 22 % report that enough politics is consumed offline and 13 % state a preference for face-to-face politics. Therefore, while online participation is seen to require ‘additional’ political interest by those already engaged in the political circuit, it is very much an unknown quantity to the disengaged. Overall, responses from the ‘wrong side of the political divide’ suggest that a large portion of respondents are not interested in politics per se, a considerable proportion consider online politics as an additional burden, while a considerable minority – mainly the totally disengaged – have little clue as to the potential of the Internet for participation. Apparently, therefore, there is little hope for further engagement of large numbers via electronic means, especially in the case of the *disengaged* group.

Finally, a simple simulation was run to address the question: if the people who do not use the Internet today gained access, would they participate online? On average, current Internet users have a .17 probability to engage online. However, some groups of users are more likely to participate online than other groups. Expected probabilities from different categories of users were then applied to non-users belonging to the same category, to understand what would happen if, ‘tomorrow’, all British citizens were endowed with Internet access. Results are presented in Table 6-12.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Necessarily, the simulation suffers from several degrees of under specification, mostly concerning motivations. First, it extrapolates from existing users and assumes that the excluded would behave like their include peers once online. However, some non-users may be uninterested in politics *in a*

Table 6-12. Predicted participation probability of non-users

		Internet users (n=959)		Non-users (n= 1007)	
		Current probability	Current contribution	Potential contribution	Overall potential probability
Sex	Male	.20	10.2	8.4	.16
	Female	.13	6.4	7.5	
Age	15-24	.23	5.1	1.8	.12
	25-34	.19	4.6	2.3	
	35-44	.17	4.1	2.6	
	45-54	.11	1.8	1.6	
	55-64	.13	1.2	2.2	
	65 +	.05	0.2	1.7	
Social grade	AB	.19	4.8	1.9	.15
	C1	.20	7	4	
	C2	.09	1.7	2.2	
	DE	.16	3.4	7.4	
Education	13-14	.08	0.1	1.6	.11
	15-16	.10	3.8	6.2	
	17-18	.16	3.5	1.8	
	19 +	.22	5.9	1.3	
	Student	.26	3.1	0.3	
Voted	No	.12	4.6	5.2	.15
	Yes	.18	11.2	10.3	
Discussed politics	No	.08	4.1	5.4	.13
	Yes	.23	11.3	7.6	
Contacted a politician / elected official	No	.12	10.0	10.8	.14
	Yes	.32	5.4	3.2	
Campaign - organisation activity	0	.12	10.4	11.2	.13
	1	.30	2.1	1.5	
	2	.42	0.8	0.4	
	3	.47	0.9	0	
	4	.63	1.9	0	

Notes

Potential contribution is obtained by multiplying the proportion of each group (e.g. female) within categories (e.g. gender) by the predicted probability that this group will participate.

different way from users, disengagement vs. apathy, or cynicism. There is ample literature to support the distinction between different socio-psychological parameters of non-engagement. Second, there are issues with self-exclusions: some non-users simply do not want to use or may even be afraid of the Internet. Third, some measures not tapped by the survey might explain why some people are online that are unrelated to SES, for instance family structure. Fourth, on the positive side, there is the issue of some people adopting the Internet to do politics, who might be very different from the currently offline (and from users as well). The simulation underestimates this small but theoretically significant effect. Finally, the simulation does not have a dynamic, time dimension. Even if all had access, it would take some time for them to acquire the skills required to participate online. Given the many limitations, a multivariate simulation was not run (in that case, total direct effects might be assessed by hierarchically removing 'suspect' variables from a probit model).

Overall, online participation in absolute terms would increase, almost double, as more people would participate who would not have done so without access the technology. This, predictably, descends from the removal of first-step inequality described above as the main obstacle to online political equality. Other results are less encouraging. While newcomers would participate, on average, to a lesser degree than existing users, categories excluded from online participation by the lack of access would not hugely benefit from access to participate more online. Specifically, people from lower educational backgrounds, who participate less offline, would contribute little additional online participation where given access. Even people from lower social grades, to-date the most digitally excluded, would participate online just below the current average (.15). Furthermore, providing Internet access to older people would relatively depress rather than boost online participation (.11). Therefore, although universal access would increase online participation in aggregate, it would fail to address the differentials in online participation resting on social inequality. If anything, universal access would lead to a better representation of different categories, a strongly desirable aim, but a diminished proportion of users doing online politics.

6.5 Conclusions

Survey results return a clear impression of the British political Internet. This is articulated at different levels. Firstly, Internet access remains the preserve of a growing yet limited segment of the British public. The Internet is accessed in the household rather than in the workplace, and is used somewhat conservatively in terms of applications. However, users learn Internet skills as they go, regardless of socio-demographic factors. This may counterbalance the claim originating in the normalisation camp that the Internet 2 is less participatory precisely because it demeans the competences required to access the medium. If resources build up with online frequentation, then in the long run more users will be able to better control their online experience. Overall, I found a digital funnel rather than a digital divide regarding the inequality of Internet access across society. Citizens who are young, male, educated and from higher social grade are more likely to access the Internet in Britain. Young age and higher education are especially powerfully predictors. Data also suggests that the funnel is enlarging in Britain. The gender divide is virtually closed, and the social grade divide is beginning to decrease. Old age, however, is still an issue. Overall, we assist to the democratisation of Internet access in Britain, a process than is however slower than normalisation scholars and critical macro scholars have predicted.

Secondly, the Internet is properly a political space, as users are significantly more interested in politics than non-users even when controlling for traditional predictors of participation. Again, the normalisation of the *political* Internet, if taking place at all, is a slow process in Britain. However, this promising political space is colonised neither by users nor by political actors in a convincing manner. On the one hand, online political participation

is a limited phenomenon, as only one in three British Internet users has ever engaged in online politics, including looking for political information. This excluded, only 18 % of users have ever used the Internet to participate. Online contacting of organisations is slightly more popular (26 % of users), but again this includes accessing media websites. Both results points at issues of opacity of political organisation and politics in general on the Internet, vis-à-vis commercial content. This is especially true of single-issue protest networks, which struggle for recognition online. In fact, political organisations – especially smaller, protest and progressive organisations – are not making the most of the new tool in reaching out to citizens. Online political stimuli are a rarity, although recipients are not averse to receiving unsolicited online political messages and despite the moderately positive consequences of online contacting on recipients' future behaviours. Political organisations – either through inertia or through fear of provoking a negative response – have not exploited the opportunities the Internet offers to target people directly with political messages. Such reluctance is misplaced because a significant minority of recipients of such information do read such information and occasionally follow it up. The overall picture is that of a largely untapped potential of citizens who might get involved online, but are currently opting out.

Thirdly, the online political structure is largely inegalitarian, as people from selected backgrounds engage in online politics. Patterns of political activity of users and non-users suggest that the Internet effectively increases political inequality, as those who participate offline do so more consistently online. The structure of political inequality rests on two nested levels. At the first level, most of the inequality is due to the unequal access to the Internet rather than to actual behaviours, or lack thereof, once people are online. That is, online political inequality is shaped by the unequal distribution of the Internet in society, according to gender, social grade and education. At the second level, once people are online, pre-existing political behaviours are transferred onto the new medium to a very large extent. The resources of online and offline participation, it was found, are different. Young age, pre-existing political activity, the reception of e-stimuli and Internet skills, rather than social grade, education and gender – predict online participation. In other words, online participation is largely self-selecting. On the other hand, however, three radical potential elements mitigate reinforcement. The first is the young age of online participation; the second is the lack of relevance of SES factors once online; the third is an interesting trend of techno-political learning by which those who are online for longer do engage in online politics more frequently and consistently.

Finally, the chapter examined the future developments of the structure of online political inequality, inferring from present conditions (with all necessary caveats). A simulation looking at the first-level of online political inequality suggested that although universal access would increase online participation in aggregate, it would fail to address the

differentials in online participation resting on social inequality. If anything, universal access would lead to a more democratic representation of different categories, especially the traditionally disengaged, therefore a strongly desirable aim, but a diminished proportion of users doing online politics. Furthermore, cross tabulation of online and offline participation suggested that reinforcement is more prevalent than the radical potential. However, young people participate more online than offline, and there remains a large section of the public that can be mobilised by electronic means. Unfortunately, political interest is a key mediating factor for the transition from offline to online participation. Looking at the reasons for lack of online engagement, a large portion of respondents are just not interested in politics per se, a considerable proportion consider online politics as an additional burden, while a considerable minority – mainly the totally disengaged – have little clue as to the potential of the Internet for participation. Apparently, therefore, there is little hope for further engagement of large numbers via electronic means.

Chapter 7 - Results: the modes and dimensions of e-democracy

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the modal and dimensional analysis of electronic democracy beyond the discussion of the structure of the political Internet presented in Chapter 6. This analysis demonstrated that the Internet largely reproduces and in some respects amplifies the structure of political inequality in Britain. A ‘radical potential’ was also found, albeit concerning only a small number of formerly disengaged participants. This chapter examines how and why those who participate online do so, and appraises the features of online communication that both explain and motivate Internet use for political purposes. In short, this chapter addresses question concerning the structure of online political opportunities and the political quality of the technology derived from meso and macro accounts (see Chapter 2), respectively the second and the third research questions of this thesis. To do so, I examine the modes and dimensions of online engagement as they were defined in the theory of participation (Chapter 4) and operationalised in the methodology (Chapter 5). In the first section I examine the morphology of the online structure of political opportunities through the lens of modes of participation. Modal results are pattern-matched with the e-democracy visions - direct, deliberative and communitarian (section 2.5, p. 40) - and with patterns of citizen engagement identified by normalisation theorists – institutional, electoral and party-related (section 2.9, p. 57). In the second section survey results are examined regarding dimensionality at aggregate level. Three dimensional poles of online engagement are empirically identified: expediency, synergy and efficacy. In the two final sections these poles are discussed in relation to the underlying modes and offline engagement.

7.2 The morphology of the online political space

Meso accounts of e-democracy showed that the Internet has a stratified, complex morphology (section 2.9, p. 57). Participation opportunities, it was argued, are shaped by third-party mediators of the online political exchange. In the previous chapter I found that parties and other political groups are not exploiting the lost cost, immediacy and interactivity of the Internet to reach out to British citizens (section 6.3.1.1, p. 158). Moving from the

Table 7-1. Factor analysis of online political engagement

	Campaign	Contact	Organised	Information - discussion
Sign-up for e-news bulletin	.75			
Download a political organisation's software	.67			
Download leaflets / material to distribute offline	.64			
Send e-mail postcard / paper article to a friend	.63			
Sign an online petition	.40			
Send an e-mail to an elected politician		.79		
Send an e-mail to a public service		.73		
Send an e-mail to a political organisation		.48		
Watch or participate in an online Q&A session		.43		
Donate funds online			.77	
Sign up online as a volunteer for a political cause			.77	
Join a political organisation online			.70	
Look for political information in general				.60
Visit the site of any political organisation				.59
Discuss politics in a chat group				.57
Discuss politics in a mailing list / bulletin board				.55

Notes

Loadings are the results of a Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation.

Eigenvalue ≥ 1 for inclusion in the table. The factors extracted account for 56 % of variance.

tactical to the strategic level, in the framework of the theory of participation, survey data is used here to identify the modes of online political engagement, should any exist. Evidence presented in section 6.2.2 revealed the prevalence of individual-direct and contacting activities over interactive and discursive modes of online engagement. I test here whether there are structured modes of citizens' online engagement and, in this case, who is engaging in what modes.

Using factor analysis, a number of modes of online participation were detected (Table 7-1).¹²¹ Online participation behaviours cluster around four theoretically significant factors: information seeking / discussion behaviours, campaigning behaviours, contacting behaviours and organizational behaviours.¹²² The information-discussion factor includes items related to information gathering and dissemination: looking for political information, visiting the website of a political organisation, discussing politics in a chat group or in a mailing list. Interestingly, the common loading of information and discussion items suggests that the

¹²¹ Factor analysis was conducted and mode scales obtained following the procedure used by Verba and Nie (1972: 355-356, 379-389) and Parry, Moyser and Day (1992: 50-57, notes). The only difference in the treatment of data is factor rotation, as I used the Varimax method with Kaiser normalization (cf. Parry, Moyser, & Day, 1992: 59-62). Also see Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2003: 448-450). Contact items were not included in the factor analysis because online participation already includes items for online organisational contacting and e-mailing a political organisation.

¹²² In a recent study of civic engagement in the UK (*Citizen Audit*), Pattie and colleagues found three main modes of participation, very similar to the modes found here: individualistic activism; contact activism; and collective activism (Pattie, Seyd, & Whiteley, 2003).

availability of increased political information online may foster horizontal discussion rather than campaign activities or direct contact between citizens and politicians. The campaign factor comprises both online-only activities, such as signing up for an e-mail bulleting and forwarding online material to friends, and activities that may have offline consequences, for instance downloading leaflets and signing online petitions. Interestingly, therefore, there seems to be little difference between the endogenous value of Internet participation and its possible offline externalities. This further suggests that 'online' and 'offline' political engagement are very much intertwined. In a 'uses perspective (see section 3.6.2, p. 82) this means that online campaigning is not as specialised a media activity as it may appear. From an 'effects' point of view, the consequences of online campaign activity are more difficult to assess, as they are built into online engagement. In other words, Internet political uses may, per se, constitute Internet effects. Or, looking at the same issue from a different angle, online campaigns may constitute a hybrid, new mode of activism. This issue is pursued further in the next section and in the next chapter (section 8.2, p. 190). The contacting factor includes sending emails to a large range of recipients, including politicians, civil servants and public organisation. Also, it includes participation in an online political Q&A session, where question can be asked. However, factor loadings are higher for traditional, 'personalised' contacting politicians than for 'mediated' contacting of organisations and other Q&A mediators. Finally, the organisational factor builds on donating to, volunteering for and joining a political organisation via the Internet.

Furthermore, as was suggested above (see Table 6-2, p. 154), numbers of participants vary across the modes and are very small for some activities. Only 10 % of all Internet users engage in information - discussion; 8 % in online campaigning, while 6 % engage in some form of online contacting. Less than 1 % engage in online organisational activities. There is a degree of overlap between different activities. The factors extracted explain about 56 % of the total variance and there are small but significant inter-group correlations. Factor analysis thus confirms the hypothesis of a stratified political space, relatively divided in specific modes of activity. The morphology of online citizens engagement is consistent with the structure of online political opportunities discussed by normalisation scholars in the context of elections and party activities (2.9.3 and 2.9.4, pp. 61-65). That is, political information is relatively widespread and sought after. The same is true for opportunities for political campaigning and contacting, while interactive, organisational activities are much less prevalent (Lusoli, Ward, & Gibson, 2002; Ward, Gibson, & Lusoli, 2003).

7.3 The offline predictors of online modes of engagement

To test whether the modes of online participation bear any resemblance with offline participation, a set of multiple regression were modelled with modal scales as dependent

Table 7-2. Predictors of the modes of online participation

	Info / discussion	Campaign	Contacting
Vote (Yes)		-.08 *	
Discuss (Yes)	.09 **		
Contact (Yes)	.07 *		.17 ***
Campaign activity (scale)	.35 ***	.29 ***	.29 ***
Gender (female)	-.09 **		-.06 *
Age	-.14 ***	-.08 *	-.08 *
Length of Internet use	.06 *		.08 **
E-stimuli from friends (Yes)	.14 ***		.07 *
R ²	.23 (8df, ***)	.12 (8df, ***)	.19 (8df, ***)

Notes

Coefficient reported are standardized Betas.

* = sig. p < 0.05, ** = sig. p < 0.01, *** = sig. p < 0.001.

Social grade and *Education* were omitted, having non-significant correlations with all dependent variables.

variables.¹²³ The three scales of online participation were regressed on offline forms of participation, on a set of Internet use variables and on political stimuli, controlling for standard SES. Indeed, we expect SES to play a marginal role as suggested by the review of uses studies (section 3.6.3, p. 84). Results are found in Table 7-2 (below).

Firstly, all modes build on general offline resources. In terms of general resources, all modes rest on pre-existing organisational / campaign experience (also see Table 6-9. Predictors of online participation, p. 164). A one-point increase in the offline campaign scale (range: 0-4) increases the chances of being engaged in online politics by approximately 30 %. Also, all modes of online engagement are more widespread among younger cohorts. However, younger people tend to use the Internet for information/discussion (-.14***) slightly more than for campaign activities and to contact politicians (-.08*). Secondly, the analysis also confirms that modes of online action build on specific online and offline resources. As was suspected, contacting offline has the strongest influence on online contacting (.17 **), a moderate effect on online information - discussion (.07 *) and no effect on online campaigning. Similarly, offline discussion predicts online information - discussion (.09 **) but fails to predict campaign and contacting activities. Online modes also differ with respect to socio-demographic of participants. Strikingly, voting negatively influences online campaigning, and has not effects on information – discussion and online contacting. Online engagement in Britain thus seems farther removed from the traditional representative circuit than effects studies have suggested (section 3.7.1 Internet effects on voting behaviour, p. 87).

¹²³ Given the exiguous number of participants in organizational online activity this mode was dropped from the analysis (see Parry, Moyser, & Day, 1992).

Finally, the length of Internet use and the reception of e-stimuli from friends¹²⁴ appear to influence respondents' chances to engage in online information seeking – discussion behaviours, and to contact politicians. Obviously, online stimuli are particularly important for information – discussion (.14 **). Strikingly, however, time online is unrelated to the online campaign mode of activity. The possible mixing of online and offline strategies in online campaigns, reported above, thus rests solidly on offline factors.

Finally, as for the online participation complete model, traditional SES predictors of participation have no effects on all modes of online activity. Education and social grade are unrelated to all modes of online action at zero-order. However, male users are more likely than female users to engage in information seeking / political discussion online. This again suggests that different modes of online participation are shaped by similar exogenous dynamics of political specialisation, and possibly reinforcement. Online modes are indifferent to general enablers such as formal education and social position unless mediated by the increased willingness and ability to engage in politics – by whatever means, not only electronic. In turn, however, this gives currency to the idea that political mediators are crucial for the mobilisation of citizens, online or otherwise, by providing information, discussion, contacting and campaigns opportunities and stimuli.

7.4 Dimensions of participation: survey perspective

Having examined the modes of online participation I now deal with the dimensionality of online engagement. I argued in Chapter 6 that online participation activities can be placed on a continuum, ranging from common to uncommon, according to perceived difficulty or cost of the action in terms of engagement (see Table 6-4, p. 156). Individual-direct activities, such as looking for information and visiting political websites are most common. Contacting activities in relation to a broad range of correspondents are slightly less frequent. Interactive-discursive activities, such as discussion, as well as organisational activities (e.g. joining and donating online) are extremely rare. While this broad categorisation is intuitively appealing, this section looks in more depth at the dimensions subsumed to online political action. In Chapter 6 nine dimensional scales were derived from the theory of participation and applied to online phenomena (see section 5.3, p. 132). Discrete behaviours were coded one, minus-one and zero according to their potential to respectively enhance, depress or have no effects on specific dimensions of online engagement. The resulting scales thus measure the degree to which extant Internet engagement affects the quality of participation on theoretically significant dimensions: co-operation, scope, effect, agenda setting, interaction, duration, access, initiative and speed. All scales range from a theoretical extreme (e.g. individual) to the other (e.g. collective), with the neutral point, the zero of the scale, situated in-between.

¹²⁴ To avoid circularity stimuli from organisations were non included. Also see note 117, p. 161.

Table 7-3. Descriptive statistics of dimensional scales

	Mean	Min	Max
<i>Initiative</i>	1.01	-.61	4.84
<i>Speed</i>	1.21	.00	5.73
<i>Duration</i>	-.52	-3.21	1.07
<i>Cooperation</i>	-.52	-3.48	1.39
<i>Interaction</i>	-.52	-3.55	1.77
<i>Scope</i>	.01	-2.52	3.35
<i>Access</i>	.64	-1.43	4.29
<i>Effectiveness</i>	-.10	-1.76	3.52
<i>Agenda setting</i>	-.31	-2.57	2.57

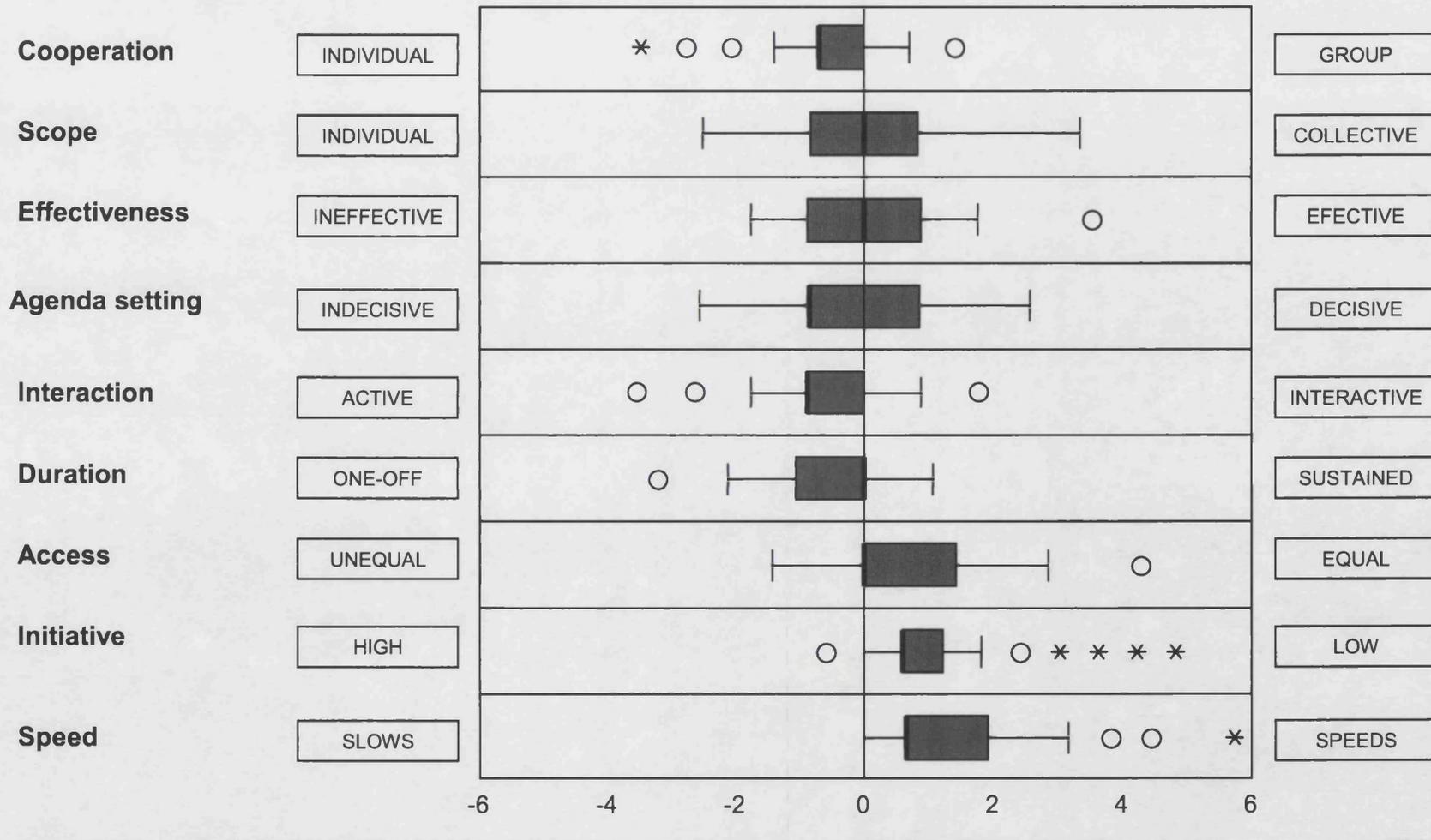
Notes

N = 143, SD = 1.

The distributions obtained from dimensional coding were standardised, with SD = 1 and mean = 0, following a common procedure in participation studies.¹²⁵ However, the mean of the distribution was set at the neutral value for each of the scales – the value theoretically taken by an individual who engages in no online participation. This has the graphical advantage of making the scales comparable, as it sets the reference line, the ‘zero’ of the distribution, at the same level, and leaves the mean free to float above or below the neutral point. In practice, the reference line in Figure 7-1 (below) represents the theoretical case in which an individual engages in no participation, and is common to each scale. The mean of each dimensional distribution is marked with a bold line in the boxplot and thin lines marks lower and upper quartiles. Stars (extreme values) and round spots (outliers) identify individuals who are unusually high/low on a dimensional scale (e.g. individuals who engage only in co-operative activities). While this device eases interpretation, as both the theoretical neutral points and scale distribution marks are clearly visible, it also removes the competing advantage of setting positive values for cases above the mean and, vice versa, negative values for values below the mean. Table 7-3 (above) reports basic distribution indicators for each standardised scale. Although figure and table are based on the same data, the boxplot displays more intuitively the direction of dimensionality, while the table provides exact decimal values for mean, maximum and minimum values of the dimensional scale.

¹²⁵ In participation studies, however, behavioural scales are usually standardised with SD = 100 (Parry, Moyser, & Day, 1992: 55-57; Verba & Nie, 1972: 128; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978: 63).

Figure 7-1. Boxplot distributions of dimensions of online engagement



Notes

N = 143, SD = 1.

Key

○ = Distribution outlier

* = Distribution extreme value

Definitions:

Co-operation: online engagement can be individual or co-operative.

Scope: online engagement can articulate personal concerns or common concerns.

Effectiveness : online engagement can be 'just' talk or have an effect on policy.

Agenda setting : online engagement's agenda can be determined from outside or set autonomously.

Interaction : online engagement can be active or interactive.

Duration : online engagement may occur one-off or be sustained over time.

Access: online engagement can be unequally or equally available to all.

Initiative : online engagement requires low or high user initiative.

Speed : online engagement can slow or speed political activities.

Overall, three dimensions have higher than neutral means, which means that they tilt toward one dimensional pole. The scales for speed ($\mu = 1.21$) and initiative ($\mu = 1.01$) are the most developed. Their means are above the respective neutral values and a consistent proportion of online participants engage in actions that expedite and ease the political process. While speed is distributed well above the mean, indicating widespread popularity of fast online participation, initiative has a lower mean but is contracted between the second and third quartiles, with a few additional extremes. This suggests that lesser numbers take a combination of initiative-reducing activities. Finally, the distribution of 'access' has a lower mean ($\mu = .64$), and most of the cases are distributed between the first and third quartile, as a relatively large number of users make the most of easily accessible online engagement. A second group of dimensions – scope, agenda setting and effectiveness – is characterised by a more balanced distribution around the neutral point. This may be a reflection of the relative infrequency and largely neutral values of online behaviours underlying the scale. Scope has an almost symmetric distribution ($\mu = .01$), as people lean equally toward collective and personal outcomes by means of electronic participation. Equally, effectiveness is largely neutral ($\mu = -.10$) and symmetric. Finally, while agenda setting ($\mu = -.31$) is slightly skewed, the distribution remains largely symmetric (negligible kurtosis). Altogether, these results suggest that online action is at least as important per se as because of its intended or potential outcomes. In other words, obtaining results is not an obvious driver of online action. A third group of dimensional distributions – co-operation, interaction and duration – all have negative distributions. Notably, the three dimensions share a common, negative mean value below the neutral point ($\mu = -.52$). Co-operation is possibly the most negative, as the second and third quartiles fall fully in the negative camp and negative extremes and outliers punctuate the distribution. Co-operative online activity, on the other tail, is the preserve of a limited number of individuals. The same largely goes for interaction, which was defined as the capacity of the Internet to ignite recursive communications (or not, as it turned out). The distribution has a longer, negative tail stretching towards active rather than interactive activities. Finally, duration is negative but relatively more balanced, as the body of the distribution, between first and third quartiles, lays between minus one and the theoretical zero, with fewer respondents engaged in one-off activities and relatively more in sustained transactions.

In summary, therefore, the Internet enables quicker and more sporadic, rather than protracted political communications and actions: online participants engage in activities which speed up political engagement, as concerns both one-off and continued transactions. Consistently, citizens also engage in activities requiring a lower degree of initiative, i.e. allowing the user to access the political circuit more readily. Equally, individual activities appear to be preferred to collectivist online endeavours in two inter-related respects. On the

Table 7-4 Dimensional poles of online political engagement

	Expediency	Synergy	Efficacy
Duration	-.736		
Initiative	.983		
Speed	.930		
Co-operation		.596	
Scope		.747	
Interaction		.633	
Access		.824	
Effectiveness			.870
Agenda			.847
Variance explained	35 %	24 %	25 %

Notes

PCA with Varimax rotation. Eigenvalue ≥ 1 for inclusion.

Overall variance explained: 84 %. N = 143.

one hand, non-interactive activities are preferred to interactive activities – aimed either at other participants or at political institutions; on the other hand, one-person activities are favoured over co-operative online activities. Additionally, there is a balance between activities aiming at collective and individualised political outcomes. This might reflect a preference for activities which are widely available on the Internet, rather than more insider types of politics – suggested by a higher than average access score. Finally, self-fulfilling online political activities are more popular than activities either directed to affect an outcome, or to set the agenda for attaining one. In the wider context of the theory of participation, one might conclude that online political activities are very easy to get into and get citizens into a largely solitary pursuit of indistinctly individual or general objectives, which eventually get them very limited outcomes. Overall, Britons show a rather hesitant faith in the democratic potential of the Internet.

7.4.1 Dimensional poles of online engagement

The analysis above suggests that seemingly distinct characteristics of the Internet for political participation are somewhat related to each other. Exploratory factor analysis identified three factors underlying the structure of online political engagement as measured by dimensional scaling (Table 7-4). The most prominent dimensional factor was labelled *expediency*, as it encompasses one-off, low-cost and fast political transactions. The second factor, *synergy*, refers to the capacity of the Internet to sustain co-operative, interactive group action by equals, aimed at a collective outcome. The third factor is *efficacy*. Activities cluster according to whether they can affect political change or continuity, and/or set the agenda for decision. The three factors fit the underlying dimensional structure of online participation

well, as they account for about 85 % of the variance and have limited cross-loadings. All signs are in the expected direction.

Unsurprisingly, most dimensions load on specific poles, as similar behaviours are coded on similar dimensions. Indeed, people engage in specific modes of action – online campaign, contact and information, which in fact consist of sets of interrelated online political activities. However, although it was expected that the dimensional constructs would largely fit the data, thus explaining a large portion of the variance, there is no specific reason why certain dimensions of online participation should load strongly on any theoretically specific factors, with very limited cross loadings. If, for instance, sending an e-mail to a politician is a very similar to sending an e-mail to the media, there is no a priori reason why people should engage in both and neglect, for example, signing an online petition. On the contrary; the modes of participation as applied to online engagement predicts that people engage in actions belonging to the same repertoire, or mode, regardless of the medium. That was one of the findings of modal analysis presented above. If however, as indeed is the case, one also finds internally consistent and mutually orthogonal ‘new media’ repertoires (Internet political dimensions as they were defined more precisely), this provides currency for the idea of theoretically significant trends of media-dependence, as macro theory strongly claimed (see section 2.4, p. 38). Of course, this statement will be accurately qualified and contextualised in the following sections.

7.4.2 Dimensions of participation and radical potential

It is therefore interesting to trace the dimensional contours of the ‘radical potential’, i.e. to ask about the salience of dimensions and dimensional poles for the small group of individuals who participate solely online, identified in Chapter 7 (see esp. p. 167). This may further identify differences between online and offline engagement and reveal the political novelty of new media. Ladders were constructed for the three dimensional factors, as arithmetic sums of the underlying factors weighted by the respective factor loadings. Dimensional differences were then tested between the two groups of online participants identified in Chapter 7 – radical potential participants, those who participate online only, and reinforcement participants, those who participate both online and offline.

Results show three general trends (Table 7-5, below). First, reinforcement Internet is largely embedded in expediency, as people who engage offline in a range of activities use the Internet to perform expedient online activities. This is true across the spectrum of conventional participation: voting, discussion and organisational activities are positively related to highly expedient online political activities. Secondly, efficacious and synergetic online activity are unrelated to both radical potential and reinforcement. Thirdly, however, those who do not discuss politics, contact politicians or engage in organisational activities

Table 7-5. Dimensionality of Internet radical potential

	Offline activities				Overall
	Voting	Discussion	Contact	Organisational	
Expediency	+ †	+ **	+ ***	+ **	+ **
Synergy					
Efficacy					
Initiative	+ †	+ ***	+ ***	+ **	+ ***
Speed		+ ***	+ ***	+ **	+ ***
Duration		- †	- †	- **	
Co-operation	+ *	- **	- **	- **	- *
Interaction			- †	- *	
Access		+ **		+ **	
Scope					
Effectiveness					
Agenda setting					

Notes

+ / - sign indicates a positive / negative correlation.

Only significant results (two-tailed) are reported.

† = $p < 0.10$, * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$ and *** = $p < 0.001$. N = 143.

Independent samples t-tests are reported for dichotomous offline participation behaviours – voting, discussing politics, contacting, overall political activity. Pearson's r for the 4-point scale of organisational activity.

are more likely than participants to engage in co-operative, interactive online activities. In other words, the small 'radical potential' of the Internet to engage the disengaged is related to its many-to-many, interactive characteristics. This leads to the suggestive conclusion that the political novelty of new media lies with sustained interactivity and co-operation, as proposed by macro theorists of electronic democracy since the 70s.

In order to investigate this point further, the propositions generated above on the positive link of young age, length of Internet use and reception of e-stimuli with different modes of online engagement were tested for dimensions as well. One may reasonably expect that young people who have been online for longer and are embedded in a network of electronic relations may engage in innovative forms of online engagement, more so than traditional participators. Results, however, are mixed. Firstly, young people are as likely as older people to engage in co-operative and efficacious activities.¹²⁶ Student status is negatively related to efficacy in general (-.14 †) and to potentially effective actions in particular (-.16 †). In addition, students are less likely to engage in interactive political engagement (-.15 †). Conversely, middle-aged people (.18 *) especially from high educational backgrounds (.26 **) make the most of Internet political expediency, engaging in less sustained (.21 *), immediate (.25 **) engagement. Secondly, the reception of e-stimuli is strongly related to expediency (.35 ***), but considerably less so to synergy (.20

¹²⁶ Coefficients reported are Pearson's R for scale variables; t-tests for scale by binary; and Spearman's Rho for ordinal variables.

*)). In particular, the reception of numerous e-stimuli is related to one-off rather than sustained online engagement (.22 **), low initiative (.33 ***) and rapid activities (.38 ***). Online participation thus appears to provide the on-off political channel theorised by meso theorists rather than the 24/7 tools envisaged by some macro theorists. In terms of synergy, then, e-stimuli are related to a greater equality of access to the floor (.42 ***), i.e. readily available engagement. Finally, general rather than specific aims are related to the reception of to e-stimuli (.15 †).

As in Chapter 7, it is difficult to identify how causality runs between e-stimuli and 'autonomous' online engagement, as the former may well be a consequence of the latter. In the contexts of dimensionality, however, this points to a crucial trait of the Internet: the blurring of the lines between the consumption and the production of political contents online. This follows directly from macro theorisation of the current Internet as a medium of choice and a general purpose technology. The architecture of the information exchange is symmetric, as requests for information are sent to a server, and content produced at the point of delivery, effectively on demand. With the recent diffusion of dynamic content management, increasingly embedded in database-driven websites and portals, the user literally generates information according to customised parameters.¹²⁷ These transactions are increasingly enhanced by the conveyance protocol, with the widespread introduction of different generation of XML. Upon subscription to a political news bulletin, such as iBBC news, political information and engagement opportunities of the user's liking – alerts, petitions and real-life events – are customised and sent to users at a time of their liking. We can define this as a 'virtual' circle of online participation as opposed to the 'virtuous' circle of offline participation (e.g. Norris, 2000b), as it is based on decreasing rather than increasing costs and commitment, stemming from expedient rather than sustained online action. However, as in the case of Bimber's particularized contactors (Bimber, 1999), the channel is there to be activated in case of need. On the basis of the evidence examined, Internet technical practices, as embedded in a techno-political bundle with a web front, and actually experienced by British users, signal a change in the production/consumption of contents, toward a less sustained, faster and overall more expedient exchange.

Finally, and somewhat surprisingly, the length of Internet use is unrelated to any of the dimensions. Whereas length and intensity of Internet use were robust predictors of general online engagement, they hardly matter for the nature of online engagement. Therefore, while

¹²⁷ For instance, The Public Whip website parses voting data from House of Commons electoral divisions and makes them searchable on the web according to MP, party and other parameters (<http://www.publicwhip.co.uk>). On the Polidex website MPs are traded as stock exchange commodities, their price varying daily according to their performance on a range of indicators (<http://www.polidex.co.uk>). Other similar examples include co-authored political blogs, WIKIs and other collective monitoring exercises.

online engagement in general is 'learnt' online with practice, different ways of using the Internet for politics either come 'naturally' (half-full scenario), are not enhanced by practice (half-empty scenario) or more likely a combination of the two. As survey data does not consent in depth probing, further research will have to clarify this crucial point. Overall, expediency emerges from further analysis of extant behaviours as the most prominent political characteristic of the current Internet in the experience of British citizens, with very little to signal a change in the near future.

7.5 Conclusions

In this chapter I looked at the modes and dimensions of online participation with the aim to answer central questions regarding the structure of the political Internet and the political quality of the technology. First, it was found that the political Internet is a stratified political space, relatively divided in specific modes of activity that reflect the cleavages existing in 'real life'. Three main modes of civic engagement are constructed by British users: campaign activities, information-discussion activities, and contacting activities. The morphology of online citizens engagement is consistent with the structure of online political opportunities discussed by normalisation scholars in the context of elections and party activities (2.9.3 and 2.9.4, pp. 61-65). That is, political information is relatively widespread and sought after. The same is true for opportunities for political campaigning and contacting, while interactive, organisational activities are much less prevalent (Lusoli, Ward, & Gibson, 2002; Ward, Gibson, & Lusoli, 2003). The modes also have a close link with the offline political field as was suggested by the review of uses studies (section 3.6.3, p. 84). Firstly, all modes build on general offline resources. In terms of general resources, all modes rest on pre-existing organisational / campaign experience. Secondly, modes of online action build on specific online and offline resources. As was suspected: contacting offline has the strongest influence on online contacting, offline discussion predicts online information – discussion. Thirdly, the length of Internet use and the reception of e-stimuli influence respondents' chances to engage in online information seeking – discussion behaviours, and to contact politicians. Finally, as for the online participation complete model, traditional SES predictors of participation have no effects on all modes of online activity, except for gender. In conclusion, different modes of online participation are shaped by similar exogenous dynamics of political specialisation, and possibly reinforcement. Online modes are indifferent to general enablers such as formal education and social position unless mediated by the increased willingness and ability to engage in politics – by whatever means, not only electronic. In turn, however, this gives currency to the idea that political mediators are crucial for the mobilisation of citizens, online or otherwise, by providing information, discussion, contacting and campaigns opportunities and stimuli.

Dimensional survey analysis strongly supports the argument proposed by 'uses' theorists and suggested by modal analysis. People engage in activities not only pertaining to the same field of political activity – campaign, discussion and information – but which are similar with respect to the repertoire of media action. The political Internet is a multi-dimensional space. In addition, results suggest that there are three such repertoires of media action that are relatively orthogonal and independent, labelled here as expedient actions, synergetic actions and efficacious actions. The constructs touch at the core of system claims on the nature of electronic democracy, as citizens in fact use new media in politically distinct ways, dependent on the medium as well as on the mode of action. Perhaps to the dismay of system theorists, Britons engage in high-speed, low initiative and low cost activities that are expedient rather than synergetic or (at least potentially) efficacious activities. Those who participate offline engage online in expedient actions, hence providing strong currency for the normalisation thesis of 'politics as usual': online politics is the continuation of traditional politics by more expedient electronic means. The electronic circuit of techno-political learning and socialisation, postulated by macro theorists as a blurring of lines between producers and consumers of political information, thus seems an interrupted one – youth's greater predisposition towards virtuality is yet an untapped resource. Finally, the aims of online action – whether self-directed or aimed at tangible political outcomes – remain unclear at this stage. However, not all is lost. A small group of citizens participating solely online engage in sustained, interactive and co-operative activities, thus actually confirming system theorist prediction of a radical political potential of new media: some people in fact make time especially for online politics, however small the numbers, and are apparently unrelated to offline participation. Furthermore, the embedding of the Internet in existing patterns of engagement suggested the existence of a 'virtual' circle of online participation similar to the 'virtuous' circle of offline participation (e.g. Norris, 2000b). However, unlike Norris's circle, the virtual circle is based on decreasing rather than increasing costs and commitment, stemming from expedient rather than sustained online action. The Internet techno-political bundle, in the experience of British users, signals a change in the production/consumption of contents toward a less sustained, faster and overall more expedient exchange.

Chapter 8 - Results: case analysis of dimensionality

I urge the Parliament and the Hansard Society to commit their combined resources to a series of experiments (local, regional and national) in online deliberative democracy as soon as possible. ... these experiments would represent innovations in citizen participation that would significantly inform future planning in 'e-democracy' ... the time to do these experiments is NOW so that both Parliament and Government can obtain much needed experience BEFORE our society becomes fully immersed in the digital age.

[Democracy Forum, Message 298]

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I evidence is marshalled from the cases to demonstrate the extent to which different facets of online political communication are enhanced – or otherwise – by electronic means. It was suggested in Chapter 5 (see section 5.4, p.139) that the purpose of case studies in this dissertation is to better specify and control for rival hypotheses that elude the statistical controls of modal and dimensional analysis, provided in Chapter 6 and 7. Specifically, the micro review (Chapter 3) concluded that survey data is inconclusive as to the democratization potential of the Internet. Rapidly decreasing 'transformation' returns on the technology are found as one proceeds from resources, to uses and finally to effects. In other words, as modelling becomes more stringent the 'radical potential' of the Internet is squeezed further: through the heavy filter of resources, then further qualified and restricted by uses motivations, to effect very limited outcomes. This was confirmed by the survey analysis proposed in Chapters 6 and 7.

Although dimensional analysis provides a broad overview of dimensionality of online participation, the numbers are too small to arrive at firm conclusion for hypotheses pertaining to efficacy and synergy. Using large-scale survey data, it is hard to adjudicate whether the political characteristics of the Internet are important ex-ante, in-flux or ex-post. In other words, one cannot ascertain whether these characteristics played a role in getting citizens to use them in the first place, whether they became important once citizens were involved whether they participated regardless of these dimensions, according to existing patterns of online engagement, and finally, whether they are functional to citizens' aims. Fundamentally, 'political acts differ in what *they can get to citizens* ... in what they *get the citizens into* [and] in what *it takes to get into them*' (Verba & Nie, 1972: 45). , Under these circumstance, it was argued (see section 5.3.1, p. 137), analysis of activists' online activities in limited contexts allow for closer pattern matching analysis of dimensions in small-dimensional spaces (D. Campbell, 1975: 382).

Table 8-1. Access to and usefulness of features on LD party website

	Usefulness Mean	Usefulness SD	Access
Information on policy	4.36	1.27	93 %
Membership application / renewal	4.22	1.70	68 %
Information on online campaigns	3.80	1.34	74 %
Information on current events	3.77	1.29	83 %
Information on party structure	3.75	1.28	77 %
Newsletter	3.72	1.45	69 %
Feedback (e-mail feedback, surveys, polls)	3.67	1.43	61 %
Links to other sites	3.43	1.41	62 %
Commercial services endorsed by the LD	2.91	1.36	48 %

Notes

N = 288. Usefulness is measured on a 0-6 scale.

Source

Q 6. How useful are the following services available on Liberal Democrats website?
Please indicate their usefulness using the following scale where 0 = completely useless, 6 = very useful.

The next section of this chapter (section 8.2) uses evidence from the LD and ACE cases to shed more light on the capacity of the internet to expedite the political exchange for those that actually use it quite regularly in their interactions with traditional intermediaries. In section 8.3 I use evidence from the HS case to explore the ways in which the internet can enhance co-operation, interaction and other synergetic activities. Section 8.4 pursues answers regarding the 'elusive' efficacy (see section 7.4.1, p. 182), that is whether the Internet actually makes a difference, and if that is a reason why online activists may be using it. In the last section (8.5) conclusions are drawn as to the importance of immediacy, synergy and efficacy in the economy of this work, whilst considering the role of mediators in the techno-political domain and the meaning of Internet political dimensionality for electronic democracy in Britain.

8.2 Expediency: initiative, speed and duration

In discussing the initiative dimension of online political engagement, the empirical question is asked: do Internet users engage in online activities that speed-up and lower the effort of conventional participation? Primarily, survey analysis suggested that citizens use the Internet for one-off, low-cost and fast political engagement. Evidence from LD young members and ACE activists suggests a cautiously positive answer. I consider here two main indicators of expediency. A first, immediate indicator is young members' access to different features on the party website, and their perceived usefulness. These indicate the extent to which youth use the web as an electronic proxy for a range of party activities – usually carried out using traditional means of communication (Table 8-1, above). Results point to the electronic lowering of transaction costs for core party activities. Party members mainly use

Table 8-2. Effects of LD party e-mails and website

	E-mail		Web	
	N	%	N	%
Join the LD	14	4.9	126	43.8
Attend a local branch meeting	24	8.3	9	3.1
Contact other members	47	16.3	23	8.0
Volunteer some time / work	35	12.2	25	8.7
Attend a rally or demonstration	22	7.6	11	3.8
Write to the media	19	6.6	13	4.5
Participate in a specific campaign	40	13.9	22	7.6
Vote in a party ballot / election	26	9.0	32	11.1
Contact the party with view / comments	41	14.2	31	10.8

Notes

N = 288

Source

Q 7. Has the use of the Liberal Democrats website or e-mail information from the Liberal Democrats ever led you to undertake any of the following activities ...

the website to gather information on party policies – 93 % access, and a 4.4 average on a 0-6 usefulness scale. A large proportion also access the site to manage party membership (68 %) and rated the service as extremely useful ($\mu = 4.2$, $SD = 1.7$). On the other hand however, members also avail features such as information on online campaigns (74 %, $\mu = 3.8$) which might be conducive to further their online participation with the party rather than just reduce their costs; or, to a lesser extent, formal feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, discussion and polls (61 %, $\mu = 3.7$), which allows them to have their voice heard. Results from the same question asked of ACE activists records the highest values for information about online campaigns ($\mu = 4.6$, $SD = 1.5$) and information on ACE policy ($\mu = 4.5$, $SD = 1.5$). In-between there is a vast array of general political information: information on current events, party structure, and the party newsletter. This confirms results from the national survey. Finally, commercial services endorsed by both ACE ($\mu = 3.1$, $SD = 2.1$) and the LD ($\mu = 2.9$, $SD = 1.4$) and provided online are hardly a hit with supporters, who frequently dismiss them in open-ended comments.

The picture is further entangled when one looks at a second indicator, the extent and nature of activities engaged in as a consequence of e-mails from the LD party and access to the party website (Table 8-2, above). Overall, engagement stemming from opportunities supplied online by the party is relatively common among young party activists: 33 % of respondents claim that e-mails from the party led them to engage in some form of party political behaviour. As concerns the import of the web, responses record much lower figures, ranging from 4 % for attending a local branch to 11 % for contacting the party with their

Table 8-3. Predictors of online e-mail activation of LD members

Traditional media used to keep in touch with the party: letter	.23	***
Frequency of use of the Internet to read news	.14	*
Active involvement with LD	.20	**
White background (Yes)	-.13	*
Student status (Yes)	-.08	
Constant		*
<hr/>		
R square = .19 (5df)	***	

Notes

Results reported are standardised beta coefficients. N = 288

views or comments. With one notable exception: 44 % of young members claimed that a visit to the LD website led them to join the party. The majority went on to use the site directly to join (38 %) which points to greatly reduced transaction costs for a core organisational activity. In contrast, a small minority of members (6 %) have later joined the party using traditional channels. In this case, one may rather think of a small potential of the Internet to get the party message across traditional media boundaries. In both instances, it may be argued, the web also provides for long-term, sustained political interactions, in as much as it attracts and retains youth to party activity, notably a 'durable', often lifetime form of democratic engagement.¹²⁸

Evidence from the ACE case supports this view. When they are asked how they first got to know about the organisation's e-campaign group, the great majority (73 %) mentions a visit to the organisation website (Q 7). Only one in ten mentions a friend or acquaintance, as many as those who mention an e-mail from the organisation. Interestingly, those who mention the website do not actually use the web more frequently than others, nor do they visit the website more frequently: the website responds to an immediate need or disposition of the user to engage, rather than build up engagement with frequentation. Notably, young activists seem to capitalise most on reduced transaction costs, both inbound and outbound. One ACE activist, young, female professional, noted that she 'wanted to get involved with campaigning for Age Concern and found it a simple way to do it' (Author ID 14). Another male, young professional working in the field of elderly care joined 'in order to keep up-to-date with ACE campaigning activities and in order to try and engage older people and carers with the e-campaigning network' (Author ID 8).

Results from e-mail point to very different conclusions (Table 8-2, p. 191). Party e-mails from the LD appear to provide incentives for both high initiative and continual activities, such as contacting other members, volunteering work for the party and getting

¹²⁸ The literature on the role of parties in democratic socialisation spans a century; Lawson provides a modern introduction (Lawson, 1980). For UK parties, see the continued work of Whiteley and Seyd (Whiteley & Seyd, 1998a; Whiteley, Seyd, & Richardson, 1994)

Table 8-4. Online engagement of ACE activists

	Never	Once	Occasionally	Often	Regularly
E-mail to friend	27	13	22	18	20
Taking part in online poll	29	11	42	15	4
E-mail to politician	45	11	27	15	2
E-mail to the media	51	11	31	5	2
Taking part in online debate	75	7	15	4	
Taking part in a phone in	80	9	11		

Source

Q 9. How often, if ever, have you engaged in the following e-campaign activities?

involved in campaign activities. Consistently with the findings of other studies, e-mail functions properly as an active organisational tool, while the web is a better tool for routine organisational activities (Lusoli & Ward, 2004; Ward, Lusoli, & Gibson, 2003). An e-mail activation scale was constructed to assess the predictors of sustained 'high political potential', and was regressed on SES, media-related and political indicators (Table 8-3).¹²⁹ E-mails from the party activate those young members who are already well disposed towards active party involvement, who keep in touch with the party using traditional media, and use the Internet frequently for news and information. In addition, young professionals from ethnic minorities are more likely to respond to e-mail solicitations. Overall the model suggests that the 'high potential' identified above works in the contexts of existing political behaviours, as traditional activity is further sustained and extended by electronic mail.

To further probe the duration of electronic commitment, and start to examine more directly the synergy and efficacy dimensions, questions were asked of ACE activists concerning the length of electronic engagement with the association (Q 6), the frequency and the nature of online activities (Q 9), and their relation with offline engagement (Q 15). Overall, engagement in the e-campaign network is substantial. Although the network is largely experimental, some 38 % of campaigners have been involved online for a year or more. Again, there are mixed results (Table 8-4, below). On the one hand, activity tends to construct an irregular rather than systematic pattern of engagement, as most respondents engage either 'occasionally' or 'never' in some form of online activity. On the other hand however, online commitment builds up over time (Rho, .27 **), as more systematic and more initiative-costly online activity increase with length of 'membership' of the group.

By far, the most frequent activity is e-mailing friends about the activities of the ACE, a low-cost, informal activity – 60 % at least 'occasionally' and only 27 % 'never'. Online

¹²⁹ Latent class analysis returned a single underlying dimension. The scale was composed of all e-mail induced behaviour except joining ($\alpha = .79$, $\mu = .88$, $SD = 1.5$, $n = 288$). Only predictors significant at zero-order were included. Frequency of traditional media use is measured on a 0-4 additive scale. Frequency of Internet use to read news is on a 0-5 scale. Party activity is on a 0-4 scale including campaign activity and attendance of meetings, rallies and events.

polls, a fast and one-off electronic activity increasingly prevalent on media and political sites, were also relatively popular with members – 42 % polled in occasionally, 19 % at least often. Sending e-mails directly to the media and politicians was relatively less common, involving one in two members at least once, as they implied a possibly greater editing effort. Finally, (short) duration is the discriminant dimension, as only one in four has ever engaged in some form of protracted online debate. This is comparable to the low levels recorded for a traditional media control variable, taking part in a phone in. It is also intriguing that online discussion is only marginally more appealing for young supporters than a very traditional mode of political expression (Φ , .04). Secondly, no significant correlations were found between discrete activities and a scale of e-activity,¹³⁰ and either the importance attributed to central co-ordination (Q 10), or the number of alerts received from ACE that were eventually followed up (Q 11). Somewhat surprisingly, this suggests that respondents are at least to some degree self-starters, who take the electronic initiative independent of group co-ordination in general, discrete stimuli in particular. This confirms what was found above; that online activism is a solitary rather than cooperative, or at least co-ordinated endeavour.

These results also suggest that online engagement with the ACE, unlike general online engagement, is considerably homogeneous.¹³¹ Participants engage in similar activities and, symmetrically, activities engaged in are relatively similar to each other: they are visibly aimed at influencing decision-makers and setting the media agenda. In this case, electronic mail offers a single rather than multiple platform for engagement, which is deeply rooted in offline campaign activity. The overall scale is related to reading literature about ACE (t-test, **), and offline campaign activity (t-test, **). However, it is unrelated to social and official activities, such as talking to friends, visiting ACE office, donate money or even hold official positions.

The ACE and LD cases thus provide a number of leads as concerns the expediency of the online political transaction. Firstly, there remains an ambiguity in the capacities of the Internet (especially the web) to reduce transaction cost for routine organisational activities and to offer a platform for further, sustained engagement with the organisation. Organisational websites serve as an easy entry point to the political circuit but also, to a lesser degree, as a mechanism to hook-in participants once they have joined. Secondly, e-mail is a straightforward campaigns tool offered by the organisations and willingly taken up by participants, especially to complement existing campaign activities by a small proportion of already engaged activists. Thirdly, online engagement is better described as an occasional rather than sustained activity, albeit one that builds up over time and online frequentation.

¹³⁰ A single additive scale underpins all activities ($\alpha = .72$, $\mu = 6.3$, $SD = 4.3$, $n = 55$).

¹³¹ This may be due to the relative homogeneity of the group, and is certainly a function of the self-selection of respondents, discussed in the methodology.

Equally, simple one-off activities are more popular than more interactive or demanding activities. Fourthly, and related to the latter, results from both ACE and LD suggest that online activists are largely self-starters, engaged in individual rather than collective, or at least co-ordinated activity. In the next section, I further examine the *interaction* and *co-operation* dimensions of the online exchange. The last section, on the efficacy of the Internet, will explore some of the online activists' motivations.

8.3 Synergy: access, interaction, co-operation

Synergy was defined as the capacity of the Internet to sustain co-operative, interactive group action by equals, aimed at a collective scope. The survey suggested that citizens shy away from synergetic activities in favour of individual activities. Results from the ACE and the LD reported in the previous section further specify the contours of individual versus collective online endeavours. While the ACE e-activist network is a campaign tool by design, the prevalence of expediency is more surprising in the case of young Liberal Democrats, who can avail a range of electronic opportunities within and across the communication boundaries of the party.¹³² The Hansard Society case provides a useful counterpoint, as the forum was designed to 'over sample' the synergetic characteristics of the Internet. According to DF terms of engagement, set by the PASC:

the emphasis is upon getting relatively small numbers of citizens to think about their experiences and priorities, to look at the problems of providing public services, and to frame their own suggestions and recommendations for policy-makers to consider. In short, people are asked to deliberate, listen to evidence, and get involved in a far more extended way with the issues under consideration (PASC, 2001: ¶ 7).

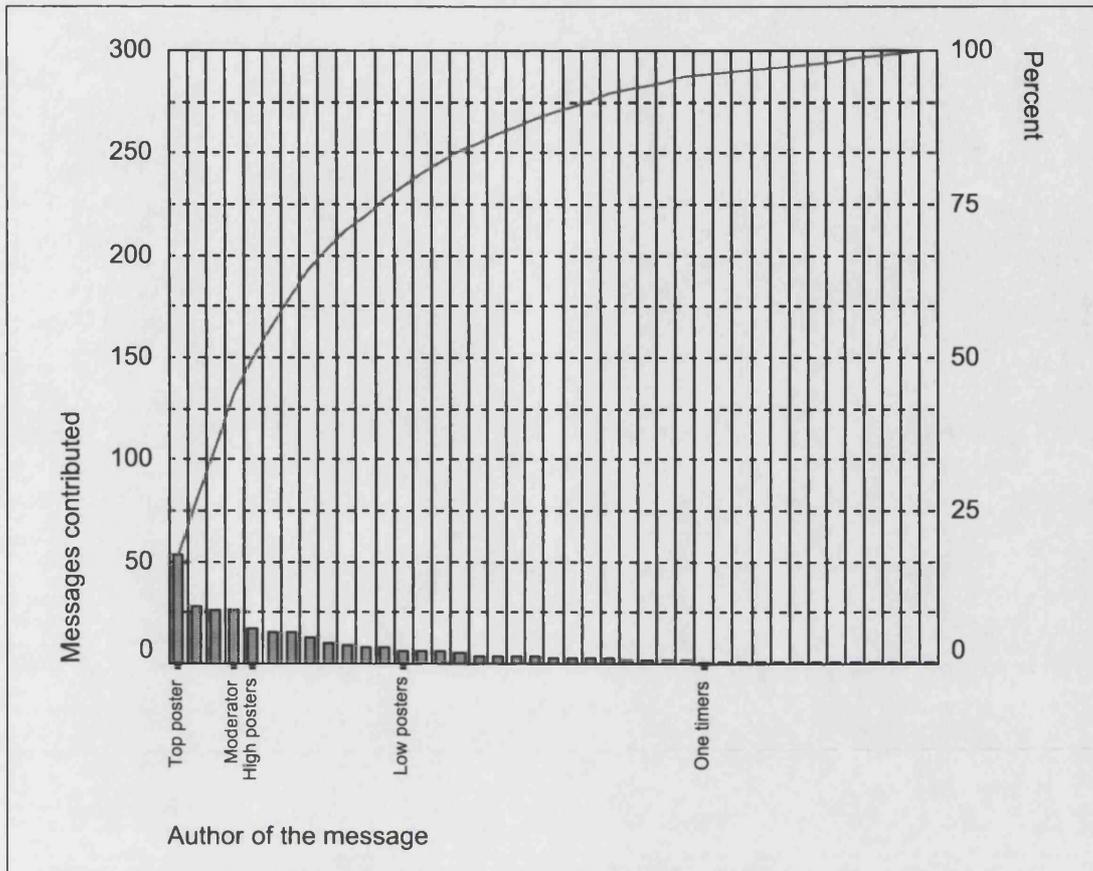
In the following three sections, material from the HS case is marshalled to shed light on access, interactivity and co-operation. Where relevant, mention will be made of other dimensional poles.

8.3.1 Access to the DF

The HS invited citizen-experts to contribute their experiences and expertise over about a month, aided by an expert moderator who fostered discussion among participants. The discussion lasted five weeks, totalling 58,000 words across 43 topics, contributed by 41 participants. Fifty-one questions were formulated, which received an average of two answers each. We can take an instance of traditional examination of witnesses by the PASC as a term of comparison. 'Electronic democracy' – the subject matter of DF – was considered by the PASC in the morning session held on 11 January 2000. Three PASC Committee members examined two expert witnesses for about one hour, formally asking 47 questions, and receiving an equal number of answers, which produced approximately 12,000 words

¹³² The comparative study of online party members in Britain highlights significantly different aims as concerns internal, aggregation functions vis-à-vis external, articulation functions. Whereas LD online members are more concerned with campaigning, the Labour party e-news list has a 'political community' connotation (Lusoli & Ward, 2004).

Figure 8-1. Concentration of message distribution



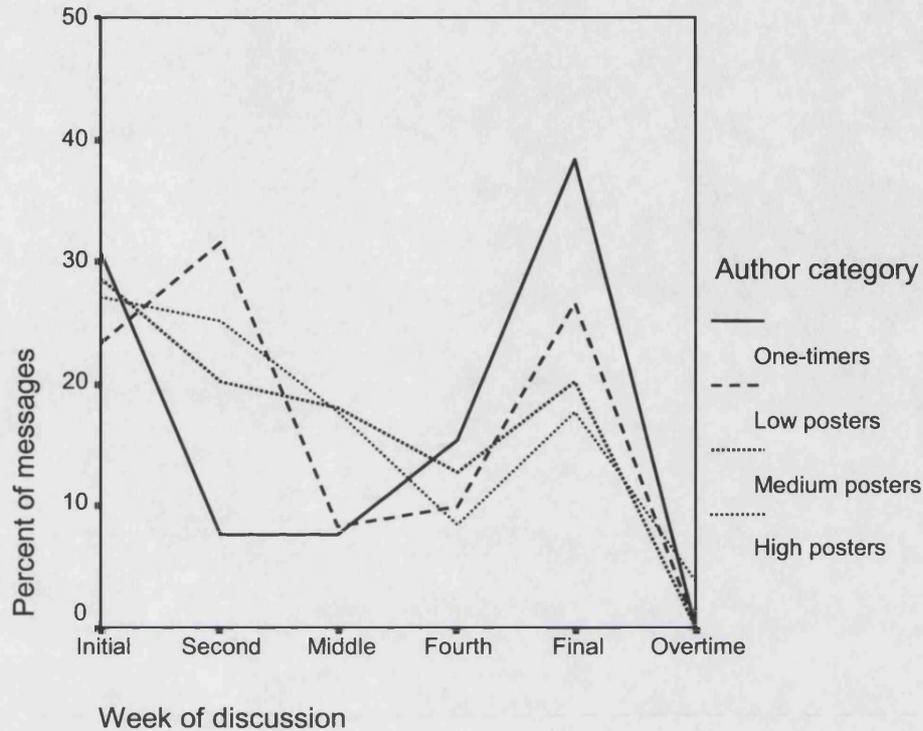
(*Minutes of evidence*, 2000a; , *Minutes of evidence*, 2000c; , *Minutes of evidence*, 2000d). It is apparent how the number of interested parties, respective opinions and time available for the consultation is substantially extended by electronic means. Against this background are examined the dynamics of access to the DF floor, interaction in the forum and co-operation between participants. Content analysis was employed to examine the distribution of access in DF: participants' access frequency to DF, rate of posting, date of posting (see section 5.6.3, p. 143).¹³³ Although equal access was in-built, a small number of contributors dominated discussion, while the majority of participants were largely silent (Figure 8-1. Concentration of message distribution).

Specifically, one participant posted 53 messages, 13 contributors posted one message, while 34 participants posted no messages at all. The three most active participants, respectively posting 53, 28 and 26 messages, contributed one third of DF messages and 39 %

¹³³ A variable for 'categories of posters' was created which has four entries: one-time posters, low posters ($1 < n \leq 8$), medium posters ($8 < n \leq 20$) and large posters ($n > 20$). Categories were adjudicated using percentiles. Two groups are clearly distinct regardless of percentile boundaries: people posting a single message and a group composed of just three authors contributing over 25 messages. The number of in-between categories ranged from one to three. Inspection of cumulative frequency distributions endorsed the adoption of two in-between categories, named 'low posters' and 'medium posters'.

of words. The cumulative frequency distribution – the curve in Figure 8-1 – indicates a very unequal distribution of speech in the forum, even where considering contributors only. Consistently with the findings of the early literature on online discussion, especially in political newsgroups, a small minority contributed the bulk of the debate (Bentivegna 1998, Hill and Hughes 1998). Ironically, the long duration of the consultation favoured unequal rather than equal access to the floor, as most one-timers contributed either in the opening or the closing week; middle weeks were largely the preserve of serial posters (Figure 8-2, below). A gender gap also widened as discussion progressed. Female participants constituted 27 % of invited experts; however, they constituted 25 % of those who accessed DF at all in the course of the consultation; 23 % of those who posted at least one message; and their joint contributions totalled 18 % of all messages posted to DF. It is difficult to explain these decreasing rates of female participation as a direct consequence of forum dynamics. It will be shown that women's contributions were both read and replied to as frequently as their gender counterpart. Furthermore, the moderator instigated equal participation, and was responded to equally by male and female contributors. Whatever the cause, this reinforces the impression that access to the forum was all but unequal, which begs the question: when it comes to interaction, was DF participation equally inegalitarian?

Figure 8-2. Contribution over time by category of poster



8.3.2 Interaction in the DF

Pattern indicators included in the coding frame gauge the interactivity of the DF exchange (see p. 143). These include the position of the message in the exchange, the extent to which participants built upon each other's contributions, and the extent to which participants responded to each other. In the first respect, messages contribute to a fairly balanced and overall topical exchange, as 15 % were initiating a new topic (seed), 65 % were direct replies, and 16 % followed the moderator's instigation. Only 4 % of the total messages were 'following in the thread' – that is virtually isolated: neither touching upon existing contributions nor planting a seed for discussion. Out of all possible second (to n-th) messages, three in four were replies, far exceeding replies to moderator's prompts (19 %) and messages standing alone (6 %). In other words, the discussion was highly focused, and participants posted relevant contributions, at least procedurally. This trend finds limited support in data for interactivity in DF, as 16 % only of total messages posted were coded as interactive.¹³⁴ This underscores a degree of interconnectedness among participants, which makes for a complex pattern of discussion. However, participants were far happier to

¹³⁴ According to the definition of interactivity, the first two messages in a thread cannot be interactive. The denominator was thus the number of (at least) three-message chains, $n = 209$. Thirty-three messages posted to three-message chains were interactive (16 %).

respond on a range of subjects than to go on to engage in more sustained, topically bounded argumentation.

Secondly, readership of messages was very high in DF. On the average, every message was read 37 times (SD 22), ranging from a minimum of five times, to a maximum of 115. On average, every message posted was read by one in two participants. Despite the high variance, the distribution of readership is reasonably uniform. The range was 110, with 9 extreme values, all of them on the right tail of the distribution and no outliers. Interestingly, message readership declined over the life of the consultation; the decline was particularly steep after the first week, and in the last week of the consultation. Messages posted earlier were much more likely to be read than messages posted later in the discussion.¹³⁵ But except time, what makes an electronic message more likely to be read? Among the possible causes of readership, data is available on message authorship, gender of the author, topic of discussion, nature of the message (seed, reply) and length of the contribution.

These characteristics of the message immediately appear when the forum is accessed and a thread is clicked on for displaying. A linear regression was modelled to explain readership (Table 8-5, below). The model includes the predictors mentioned above, plus two variables that could have exerted a 'drag' influence on the readership of messages: the number of messages that were already present in the thread when the message was posted, and the number of messages posted on the day in which our analytical unit was posted.

¹³⁵ Even excluding the messages contributed in the last three days, the readership of which was measured shortly after they were posted.

Table 8-5. Readership predictors

	<i>Beta</i>	
Date of posting	-.81	***
Weekend dummy	-.04	
Seed message	.11	**
Follows moderator	.08	
Follows in the thread	-.04	
Topics		
No. 1	.14	***
No. 2	-.11	**
No. 4	.09	**
No. 9	-.10	**
No. 13	.10	**
No. 18	-.13	***
No. 20	-.13	**
No. 21	-.12	**
Authors		
ID 9	.07	*
ID 23	.10	**
ID 26	.06	*
ID 32	.06	*
Existing (a)	-.07	
Posted (b)	-.10	
Constant	68.4	***

Notes

N = 275. Only significant Topic and Author dummies are reported.

* p. < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 *** p. ≤ 0.001

The model fits the data extremely well – $R^2 = .88$, $F(275, 90 \text{ df}) = 14.5$ ***. Coefficients for the main variables fulfil our expectations as regards both sign and (to a lesser extent) strength of the relationship. As expected, the date of posting has a strong association with readership: a message posted a day later was read on average 0.8 times less. Having controlled for ‘existing’ and ‘posted’ this is not due to the decreasing number of messages posted over time. To put it plainly, readership has decreased over time due to factors at personal and Forum level. Firstly, some topics attracted significantly more attention, while other significantly less, possibly due to the issue at hand. Secondly, certain authors were read much more often than others, as is the case for most literary genres. Thirdly, seed messages were read more often, thus practically setting the agenda for the discussion.¹³⁶ The possibility to create new threads therefore conferred greater currency to

¹³⁶ ‘Reply’ was set as contrast category. The decision is neutral with respect to coefficients and significance measures (Hardy, 1993).

Table 8-6. Replied to predictors

	<i>Beta</i>
Readership	0.15 **
Length of message in words	0.13 *
Author 24 (yes)	- 0.12 *
Author 26 (yes)	0.16 **
Author 27 (yes)	- 0.12 *
Author 40 (yes)	- 0.11 *
Seed	0.34 ***
<hr/>	
$r^2 = 0.22$	

Notes

N = 275. Only significant coefficients are reported.

* p. < 0.05 ** p. < 0.01 *** p. ≤ 0.001.

any participant's ideas. One can retrace here a plausible train of action: participants may have started by reading all the messages that were posted, and gradually began to select a narrower range of persons and topics to follow – specifically new topics. Implications can be drawn as regards the independent importance of seeds in steering discussion and setting the agenda for DF conversation. This hold true regardless of the author. Once a participant – any participant – gets not only the floor, but also for once claims the pulpit, the attention of listeners increases. Overall then, the sooner one climbs, the louder the voice.

Finally, one indicator measured whether a message was replied, and the number of times it was. Overall, 171 messages were replied to, amounting to the 57 % of the total. A number of messages were replied to more than once, for an average of 1.4 replies per replied message.¹³⁷ Similarly to readership, response was regressed on a number of theoretically significant predictors.

- Readership of messages, on the assumption that frequently read messages are likely to be replied more often.
- Dummy variables for authors, to understand whether any participants are replied more often than others.
- Message length, to see whether verbose messages are replied more/less frequently.
- Nature of the message – seed, reply or follow in the thread.
- Content of the message – fact, opinion, policy statement.¹³⁸

While it was relatively easy to explain why messages were read, it is more complicated to explain participants' decision to respond. This is reflected in a much lesser model fit, a modest $R^2 = .22$ (Table 8-6, above). Overall, readership was as important as expected – messages were replied 1.5 times more often for every ten additional readers. As well, some authors were more popular than others, being replied more frequently. However, the nature

¹³⁷ *Replied* is an asymmetric equivalent of *Reply*. Although messages can *reply* to more than one message, the coding scheme reports the prevailing mode (reference, directly) but not the number. This number is tapped by the *Replied* code, which however does not report the mode.

¹³⁸ *Topic* of discussion was not included for three main reasons: it was barely significant at zero-order level; it would almost certainly generate collinearity with readership; it would introduce an additional, large set of dummies, difficult to manage (Hardy, 1993).

of the message produced more replies than authorship and readership. Seed messages were in fact replied to much more often than other messages. This may mean that participants enjoyed new topics of discussion, to break the boundaries of ongoing discourse or to add their thoughts on a broader range of subjects. This however means, as was noted above, that participants also shied away, to some extent, from sustained discussion.

Length of message was equally important, as longer messages were replied more often than shorter messages. Finally, one might have expected that the decision to respond to a specific message would depend on its content. However, tests for formal message content – whether a message reported a fact, opinion or a specific topic of discussion – were largely negative. There is no easy way to measure whether the decision to reply depends on sympathy with a certain argument or topic. Judging from replies only (as there is no way to judge from non-replies)¹³⁹ there is an evident in-built ‘sympathy bias’, as the response necessarily impinges, either negatively (disagreement) or positively (agreement) on the topic of the message. Overall, it may be fair to say that DF was perhaps more ‘responsive’ than interactive, and that personal – readership, authorship, topicality – and structural factors – data of posting, position of the message in the exchange – were equally important in determining the shape of the online exchange. In addition, overall responsiveness of participants may be seen to mitigate the access inequality highlighted in the previous section.

8.3.3 Co-operation in DF

The complex structure of the DF interchange indicates a significant degree of co-operation between participants in the pursuit of forum aims. On the one hand, participants consistently introduced new topics for discussion, thus taking the communication initiative; on the other, they also welcomed – in as much as readership and response is an indicator of appreciation – new seeds of discussion. Largely, participants touched upon common topics they helped define, a clear sign of agenda setting. A set of codes, gauging elicitation of feedback, agreement and formation of common opinion, and three questions included in the post-consultation survey (see section 5.6.5, p. 146) broaden the analysis of co-operation in DF.¹⁴⁰

Eliciting facts and opinions from participants was a function institutionally demanded to the DF expert moderator, as is generally the case in computer-mediated discussion (Franz & Larson, 2002). As there was no obvious need for participants to ask questions, information seeking (the *Seek* code, p. 145) can balance the institutional role of the moderator with the other, lesser pragmatic arrangements for the management of the discussion. Overall,

¹³⁹ This touches upon the interesting issues of conflict-avoidance in online exchanges (Stromer-Galley, 2002; Witschge, 2004).

¹⁴⁰ Results for *Agreement* are not reported as ICR values are lower than acceptable, at $K = .41$, and $SA = .69$.

approximately one in five messages included a request for facts or opinions from other participants, with a marked difference between the moderator (75 %) and other participants (12 %). While the moderator posted enquiries over the entire course of the debate, other posters tended to concentrate their enquiries in the first and in the last week of the discussion (Somers's $d = -.06 *$). Information-seeking behaviour is otherwise well distributed. Although some posters enquired more often than average (e.g. IDs 6, 15 and 22), no statistically significant relation emerged between frequency of contribution and enquiries. Information seeking was also evenly distributed across message type, as seed messages do not carry more enquiries than, for instance, replies. However, there is a clear and significant relation between the type of messages the moderator posts and information seeking (Cramer's $v = .52 **$). Moderator's seeds are always enquiries, vis-à-vis one in five for other participants. Overall, one might conclude that the moderator carried the burden of the fact-finding exercise, whereas participants joined in sporadically.

On the demand side, messages seeking information were responded to as often as other messages. One would have expected that in DF – where experts converse among themselves and, although indirectly, counsel politicians – they would have replied to other participants' queries for opinion and information. This was not the case: 46 % of the queries got a response, vis-à-vis 43 % of standard, non-query messages. With the exception of the moderator, who is frequently replied to when enquiring (88 %), other categories of participants have a much lower reply to information seeking ratio. Even frequent posters perform poorly in this fashion; although they scored higher than other posters, their ratio was only 57 %. Hence, defection was as least as frequent as co-operation in DF.

In terms of common opinion, one in eight messages and approximately one in three participants used 'we'. This suggests than even those who use 'we' do so on an ad hoc basis rather than systematically. Frequency of contribution is strongly related to 'we': one-timers never use 'we', low posters include it every twenty messages, medium posters every six, while frequent posters use 'we' every five messages ($\gamma = .38 **$). This relation becomes even clearer when drawing on data aggregated by message author ($n = 41$), and across the ratio of 'we' messages contributed with the total number of messages contributed. Participants who post frequently are much more likely to use 'we' than other posters, and, conversely, one-timers are much less likely (Pearson's $0.50 ***$). Intriguingly, no significant correlation was found between individual authors and use of 'we'. This implies that the relation is structural, not determined by the 'abuse' of *we* by any one participant.¹⁴¹ Intriguing also is the fact that there is a significant relation between the nature of the message and the message containing 'we' (Cramer's $V = 0.18 *$), as seed (12 %) and reply messages (16 %) tend to include

¹⁴¹ Results do not change dramatically by excluding one-timers, who never post 'we' messages (Pearson's $0.38 *$, $n = 28$).

common opinion more often than messages which are a direct response to a moderator's stimulus (2 %). This is consistent with the role of the moderator in DF, whose mandate was not community building but eliciting facts and opinions from the pool of experts. Finally, *common opinion* tends to coincide with the expression of a personal opinion ($n = 274$, $\phi = 0.14$ *). Participants using 'we' do not provide more facts, or personal experience – they might just be adding strength to their own opinions. This suggests that if a 'community' is building up in the forum, it is neither an explicitly policy-oriented community, nor an experience-based community.

Finally, did respondents' own assessment of the experience match these results? In order to triangulate, three questions enquired about different aspects of DF co-operation. Namely, whether participants had made new contacts as a result of the consultation (Q 4); whether they had learned anything new from other contributors (Q 2); whether they could recall an issue about which they had changed their mind as a result of the discussion (Q 10). The vast majority of participants (80 %) reported learning from other discussants. However, only a minority (22 %) made new contacts, possibly indicating that the experts knew each other to some degree. Finally, one in five claimed that they changed their minds on an issue because of the discussion. In the views of participants then, the DF had a significant importance in informing views; however, it had a smaller (though non-trivial) impact on experts' address books, and their substantial understanding of issues.

The analysis of expediency from the LD and ACE cases, reported in the previous section, suggested that action is valued more than interaction between online participants, and that individual action prevailed on co-ordinated action. This section turned to the DF to examine this issue further, in a context potentially more conducive than party and campaign milieus to equal access, interaction and co-operation. Results from the DF are however mixed. Firstly, access is all but unequal to DF, as a minority of participants supplies most of the contents, a majority of one-timers contributes far less, and a number of invited participants did not bother to log on. However, apparent exclusion is interpreted by participants as self-exclusion, linked to their capacity to 'make time' for the consultation. While expediency was described above as possibly the most important political trait of the Internet, and the DF was designed as easily accessible in a variety of ways, this has not helped overcome real-life constraint of busy professionals. Secondly, patterns of DF discussion return the strong impression of far-from-disengaged participants. Participants read each other's contributions eagerly, responded and planted seeds for further discussion very frequently, and, to a lesser extent, also interacted, that is built upon other participants contributions. Thirdly, a well-rehearsed argument in a clear voice matters, in that it fosters further interaction, but not formally or in terms of the specific provision of facts, opinions, and personal experiences. What rather matters is authorship, that is reputation that is built in

the course of the exchange; the topicality of the contribution, that is the capacity to deal with issues at the core of the debate; timeliness, that is posting at the very beginning of the debate, or at the inception of a discrete exchange. Moreover, related to the latter is 'placeliness', i.e. the capacity to plant new seeds for discussion – which are read and responded to rather regularly. Fourthly, the moderator carries the weight of the consultation fact-finding, opinion-stirring, co-operation-poking endeavour, and is occasionally assisted by willing participants. Excluding the moderator's prompts, enquiries fell largely flat on the floor. Defection was as frequent as co-operation. Although a more common feeling developed with frequentation, the 'community' in the making was hardly a community of experience. Recipients seemed happy with this way to proceed, as most found they learned from the exercise, occasionally making new friends and changing their minds.

8.4 Efficacy: agenda setting and effectiveness

Finally, questions were asked regarding the effectiveness of online engagement, and the extent to which new media can be used to set autonomous, citizen-based political agendas. Dimensional analysis of survey data largely reflected the scant popular engagement in electronic activities closer to the decision-making circuit: contacting politicians and the government using e-mail, and active organisational politics. Oddly for analytical purposes, the efficacy dimensional pole was rather flat. Activities are engaged in which are neither potentially effective nor ineffective; that neither set the agenda, nor follow it. In citizens' online experience, effectiveness and agenda setting are neither significantly related nor unrelated to traditional participation. Rather than ostensive effectiveness, citizens' belief in the capacity of the Internet to effect political change might lie at the heart of the issue; more accurately, citizens' belief in their own capacity to set the agenda and effect change by electronic means. To this purpose, evidence from ACE and HS will try to highlight what online participants make of the effectiveness and agenda setting capabilities of the tools they are using. 'Make of' was willingly used here to denote both 'think of' and 'make use of', as limited engagement with online technologies for efficacious action blurs the lie between the potential and the actual.

Firstly, ACE activists were interrogated as to the 'reasons why' they engaged electronically. One open-ended question was included in the questionnaire that asked respondents to expand specifically on motivations (Q 8). ACE activists offer five relatively homogeneous sets of reasons for online engagement: campaign purposes, information purposes, work-related and personal concerns and 'voice' related reasons. Consistent with previous ACE results, 'campaign' is a recurrent reason to join the e-campaigner network. As one respondent shortly put it, 'cause!' (ID 45), that is campaign work 'to remove unjust practices / structures for the elderly' (ID 7). For most participants, online activity is an obvious extension of campaign commitment, albeit one which possibly comes at a lower

cost. Given more available time, one respondent said, 'I would prefer to play a more active part than e-campaigning presumably allows' (ID 3). Directly in relation with campaign commitment is the need for information that is current, useful and up-to-date (e.g. IDs: 31, 43, 52). Work-related motivations are also relatively common, mainly for professions concerned with the age-care issue. Finally, personal concerns and especially next-of-kin care are additional important drivers. As one campaigner summarised it, 'she thought it might be of use to know what is happening for older people with interests for my mother and myself not long to enter this age group' (ID 47). These four motives possibly exhaust the intended aims of the e-campaigning network. What were defined above as 'voice' motives deserve more space, as they touch at the core of the Internet's capacity for 'phonetic' representation and engagement, discussed in Chapter 7. In the ACE context, electronic engagement is sometimes linked to statements on the deprivation of voice, and social powerlessness: the idea that 'older aged members of the public are under advantaged' (ID 9), and that 'pensioners in this country get a raw deal' (ID 26). Both are related, according to one activist, to the 'way older people are regarded as worthless and/or irrelevant and/or powerless and/or ludicrous, by political parties, "popular" culture and media, alike' (ID 33). Some thus see the e-campaigning network as an empowering tool, for one an 'opportunity to comment / add voice to initiatives in which I have interest' (ID 11). Alternatively, in stronger tones, the network helps them 'to have a voice, old is not done with we still have a voice' (ID 35). According to most respondents, this voice is best heard if coming at unison through a common carrier: 'it is only by making yourself heard through pressure groups that improvements are made' (ID 26). Although the expression of 'voice' is only one of the complex reasons why people engage electronically, building on motivations derived from personal and working life, it is nevertheless significant that it should be mentioned at all.

The HS case provides additional insight into effectiveness and agenda setting. While discussing interactivity, it was noted how seed messages were read and replied to more often than other messages, de facto setting the agenda for the discussion. A content code examined directly the extent to which participants offered overt policy advice (the *policy* code, see p. 145), and three questions in the post-consultation questionnaire asked about the perceived efficacy of their involvement (Qs 1, 6-8). Results from the content analysis are somewhat surprising. DF was set up to provide the PASC with policy advice as regards electronic democracy, and, by extension, suggest possible ways to foster democracy via ICT. It is therefore striking that suggestions of policy are few and far between in the course of the discussion. Only one message in four included an identifiable statement of policy, and fifteen active posters over 40 did not post any policy advice, three in five considering the number of potential participants. Sheer frequencies therefore suggest that participants did not fully avail the possibility of directly formulating policy advice to the PASC. This was underlined by an

Table 8-7. Predictors of policy advice

Seed	1.07	*
Follows moderator stimulus	1.26	**
Date (in days)	1.04	**
Topic 9	1.65	*
Topic 11	1.18	*
Topic 18	2.16	**
Topic 41	2.62	*
Author 31	2.00	*
Author 32	2.96	*
Constant	-2.60	***

Notes

* = p. < 0.05 ** = p. < 0.01

equally intriguing fait. At the beginning of the discussion, Dr. Tony Wright, MP, then Chairman of the PASC, posted a message to stress the interest of the Committee in the outcomes of the consultation, assuring DF participants that ‘members of the committee will be watching your deliberations with much interest’.¹⁴² The message was one of the very few in DF to remain un-responded.

A somewhat different picture however emerges from closer inspection of the data. I modelled the provision of policy statements on a range of predictors now familiar to the reader: date of posting, topic of the message, author of the message, and nature of the message – all of which had significant zero-correlations with policy (Table 8-7, above).¹⁴³ A first trend emerges from the model that is related to the nature of the messages. Seed messages are quite likely to advance suggestions of policy, which reinforces the leading role of seed – read more and responded to more – and points to the actual opportunity for participants to exert influence through direct agenda setting. The other category of message positively related to suggestion of policy is ‘follows moderator stimulus’ – that is direct responses to the moderator’s prompts. Again, this corroborates previous findings on the role of the moderator in the discussion, who does not just provide a regulatory and content framework for discussion, but has the dual role to sustain the generation of new topics, and to finalise discussion in terms of policy advice. This policy-steering role was assisted by a number of participants willing to discuss the results of DF discussion and their presentation. Following a prolonged exchange, the moderator stepped back and let the participants discuss

¹⁴² Posted to DF on 26 November, Topic 16. The message does not have an identification number because it was excluded from coding and statistical analysis.

¹⁴³ The model was obtained by backward logistic regression (Wald method), using different thresholds for the exclusion of variables (78% of cases correctly classified, Model χ^2 (274, 9) = 54.7 ***). The interim models were not significantly different.

at length how policy advice should be channelled to the PASC, and the best way to 'wrap up' discussion for presentation (topic 38).

Secondly, contrary to the decreasing trend of posting and readership over time, policy advice materialised at the end of the discussion. Overall, there was a daily 4 % increase in the odds of reading a policy statement. A possible interpretation is that participants waited until the end of the discussion to offer advice, which indicates a both rational and strategic behaviour on the part of the participants. Rational because to listen to other participants' ideas and proposals before expressing deliberative thoughts is held as a rational behaviour by any formal models of deliberation reviewed in Chapter 2, section 3.4. In addition, 'having the last word' and building on the assertions of other participants may be seen as an advantage in terms of visibility and consideration, which counterbalances the apparent carelessness indicated by the scarcity of policy statements.

Furthermore, additional in-depth analysis of policy statements identified a very interesting core group of 'tactical message'. It was noted above how 'we' is often used to give support to personal opinions rather than facts or personal experience. The same happens with policy statements including 'we'. Ten messages compound this group which are structurally homogeneous in a number of respects beyond the inclusion of 'policy statement' and 'we' (IDs: 11, 22, 53, 64, 81, 83, 86, 125, 134 and 163). Firstly, these messages are all well placed; they are either physical replies – eight, of which four are interactive messages – or seed messages, in two instances. Secondly, they are internally influential messages, as nine over ten were coded as 'replied to', with a 'replied to' rate of 1.6 replies per message, as high a ratio as the moderator's. Thirdly, they are informative messages: six messages over ten report personal experience, while the average is one in four. Fourthly, they are assertive messages, as they all state an opinion, coded nine times over ten as a main feature of the message. The fifth point is that they are significantly longer messages, recording 270 words vs. the average 194. Finally, in terms of topic, all messages offer policy suggestions in relation to the issue of access to technologies, from different perspectives. Four messages belong to Topic 11, titled 'Access', whilst the remaining six messages were posted in different threads. Message 64 is somewhat the leading voice of this choir, defining ICTs as a public utility that, not unlike TV, should be in every new household and estate development. Messages 81, 143 and, to some extent 53 stress the importance of real-life communities in mediating access to e-government services. Message 86 raises the issue of connecting rural communities and disadvantaged communities. Message 134 indicates the importance of attracting people, specifically young people to public online spaces, such as libraries. Messages 22, 11 and 134 (again) stress the importance of political culture, and technical knowledge of political intermediaries such as councillors and MPs, for the development of democratic access to ICT, and ultimately, electronic democracy. These messages thus seem

to possess all the characteristics one might expect from tactical, potentially effective communications, overtly aimed at influencing policy via the DF. Policy messages containing 'we' tend to be content-rich, situated messages, and tend to share a common concern with access to ICT, be it physical, social or political. It is also striking that an issue that emerged as one of the crucial theoretical drivers of Chapter 7 should also be the object of overt and sustained lobby within DF.

Finally, the post-consultation survey asked questions about participants' overall assessment of DF usefulness. Specifically, questions asked whether respondents found DF a worthwhile exercise (Q 1); whether they thought that PASC members were interested in what was said during the consultation (Q 6); whether, on the other hand, they thought that the consultation provided the PASC with good evidence (Q 7) and finally, whether they would be interested in participating in another online consultation (Q 8). Participants' assessment of DF efficacy was overwhelmingly positive. The majority found the exercise worthwhile (87 %), and would participate in another online parliamentary enquiry (97 %), while only 77 % had been involved in a consultation before. Therefore, from the participants' perspective, DF was a rewarding experience. On the other hand however, there remain 28 experts who have neither posted to DF nor responded to the questionnaire. Although access data shows that 21 of them were 'lurking' – that is accessed the forum at least once, without posting – there remains a cluster of people who did not take part in any available form. As concerns specifically efficacy, results are equally positive. A large proportion suspended the judgement, as they claimed they did not know whether the consultation provided useful evidence for the PASC (42 %), and an even larger proportion did not know whether committee members would be interested (65 %). Excluding *don't knows* however, sense of efficacy was a positive 8-to-1 for the quality of evidence (52 % positive, 6 % negative), and 10-to-1 for the idea that PASC members were actually interested in what was being discussed.

Therefore, while survey results are unclear regarding citizen engagement in potentially effective and agenda setting activities using the Internet, which is partly due to the infrequency of online participation, results from the limited contexts of the ACE and HS cases provide a clearer and more positive outlook. While political users at large, even offline campaigners, may be content with the political expediency and to some extent the synergy of the medium, respondents who are directly committed to online campaigns realise the efficacy and agenda setting gains to be made using the Internet. But could they think otherwise? People with a higher sense of self-efficacy and goal-efficacy are indeed more likely to participate, both online and offline (Brunsting & Postmes, 2002). Results here suggest that the efficacy of the Internet does not reside in the online campaigner's belief in the efficacy of their online action. Rather it depends on the weight of the online variable in

their overall calculus (the actual choice of effective, strategic behaviours) and on the intensity of belief in the technology. Three main trends were noted above. Firstly, results from the ACE case suggest that the Internet is used as a 'voice' campaign tool, as a response to personal and work needs, by means of which participants respond to a perceived powerlessness, rooted in traditional media and culture. While the evidence supporting such a conclusion is hardly a solid base to expand more fully, it nevertheless provides interesting currency for the idea that new media 'effectiveness' consists in its giving the user, or a group of users as it happens, a louder channel than is traditionally available. Secondly, HS participants seem to have made the most of the opportunity to both affect the outcomes of the consultation, and to set its agenda. On the one hand, not all voices were heard in terms of policy, as some participants were more proactive in taking the policy initiative, while others were silent. The moderator did a good job at eliciting advice from unlikely proponents. On the other hand however, 'spontaneous' suggestions of policy and agenda setting were carefully placed, spatially and temporally, within the DF. Furthermore, a number of participants pushed the Internet 'access' agenda in a measured, stringent and overall strategic way. Thirdly, and finally, responses from both the HS and ACE testify to the difficulty to see the outcomes of online engagement as a direct result of their efforts. However, it is equally striking that virtually no respondents thought that online activism was a waste of time. Of course, one might claim that those who in fact held this view simply did not 'make time' to participate, as participants suggested. One cannot easily dismiss this interpretation. Along with the fact that some HS members did not participate at all, it casts a shadow of doubt on the overall positive assessment proposed here as concerns efficacy and agenda setting.

8.5 Conclusions

I concluded in Chapter 7 that people engage online in activities that are modally and dimensionally similar, that is pertaining to the same field of political activity (campaign, discussion and information) and similar with respect to the repertoire of media action. The political Internet is a multi-dimensional space, thus confirming Internet 'uses' results from the literature review (3.6, Uses studies: the complexity of the online political experience, p. 81). I noted the prevalence of expedience and the limited extent of synergy and effectiveness. However, a small 'radical potential' was also found. The potential rests on online-only activities engaged in by unlikely offline participants; this potential is largely synergetic. The analysis of dimensionality in the context of the cases conducted in this chapter suggests that dimensionality is more nuanced than these generalisations suggest, in many respects. Firstly, regarding expediency, even the online engagement of online activists is better described as an occasional rather than sustained activity, albeit one that builds up over time and online frequentation. Equally, simple one-off activities are more popular than more interactive or demanding activities. Secondly, and related to the latter, results from

both ACE and LD suggest that online activists are largely self-starters, engaged in individual rather than collective, or at least co-ordinated, activity. Thirdly, e-mail is a straightforward campaign tool offered by organisations and willingly taken up by participants, especially by a small proportion of already engaged activists to complement existing campaign activities. Fourthly, there remains an ambiguity concerning the capacity of the Internet to reduce transaction costs for routine organisational activities and to offer a platform for further, sustained engagement with the organisation. Organisational websites are an easy entry point to the political circuit but also, to a lesser degree, a mechanism to hook-in participants once they have joined. As online engagement increases over time (see p. 166), websites may engender more sustained political engagement, contrary to the received wisdom that e-mail is the most powerful political tool. Ironically, however, the DF case demonstrated that online activities assuming sustained commitment – in terms of time and interaction – also generate increased inequality by further limiting the pool of participants, who are far happier to respond quickly than to interact over time.

Results for the role of mediators are also mixed. Dimensional analysis from the survey suggests that the supply of engagement opportunities by parties, political organisations and the media favour expedient rather than synergetic online behaviours. This was confirmed by previous results, reported above. However, expedience has different consequences in the three contexts. It meant that LD and ACE activists were able to campaign more and more effectively on behalf of the intermediary, and that the Public Administration Committee could tap into a vast reservoir of intelligence – all at a fraction of the cost, time and effort than is traditionally possible. More of the same, one may argue. On the other hand, however, participants appeared to take the initiative and, to some degree, take rather than follow the online lead. Although the moderator in DF fostered discussion and increased responsiveness, participants were happy to plant their own seeds, set the agenda and wrap up discussion. In ACE and LD, participants were to some degree self-starters, learning online politics as they went rather than following, from the inception, the organisational leads. Overall, it seems that both the organisations and individuals were tailoring ICTs to their own agendas, very much consistent with the precepts of normalisation studies. Although the Internet may not fulfil the high hopes of macro theorists regarding increased and sustained engagement, it appears to cater well for the core business of political organisations and their members.

Concerning synergy, the analysis of expediency from the LD and ACE cases, reported above, suggested that action is valued more than interaction between online participants, and that individual action prevailed on co-ordinated action. Nonetheless, direct probing using DF evidence yields mixed results concerning synergy. Concerning equal access, as documented in Chapter 6 and 7, a minority of participants supply most contents, a majority of one-timers contributes far less, and a number of invited participants did not bother to log in. However,

this apparent inequality in access is interpreted by participants as the incapacity to 'make time' for the consultation, once again pointing out the importance of expediency for the synergetic online exchange. Secondly, DF participants were far-from-disengaged from each other. Participants read each other's contributions eagerly, responded and frequently planted seeds for further discussion. To a lesser extent, they also interacted. Thirdly, the quality of contribution, timeliness and reputation matter greatly in the online exchange as they elicit greater response and interactivity. Interactive online participation, the DF showed, builds on other participants' initiative, on reputation, on the timeliness and 'placeliness' of the exchange, and on the relevance of the exchange to the concerned parties. Although this conclusion is hardly earth shattering, it emphasises the fundamental importance of expediency for synergy. Although a warmer tone developed with frequentation, DF was hardly a community of experience. Recipients seemed happy with this way to proceed, as most found they learned from the exercise, occasionally making new friends and changing their minds.

Finally, it was argued in Chapter 7 that it is complicated to draw clear conclusions from the survey as concerns *efficacy*, given the small numbers involved and the lack of significance of the underlying indicators. As was noted, the efficacy dimensional pole was flat. Evidence from the cases provides a more positive outlook. The analysis suggests that the efficacy of the Internet does not reside in the online campaigner's belief in the efficacy of their online action. Rather it depends on the weight of the online variable in their overall calculus (the actual choice of effective, strategic behaviours) and on the intensity of belief in the technology. First, along with expedient, personal and contextual motivations, ACE participants consistently claimed that the Internet helps them to have a 'voice', and this is one of the main reasons for being active online. Although this is external rather than internal efficacy, it points to a belief of the Internet's potential to express participants' views, if not to effect change. Evidence from the HS case also revealed participants' clear intention to put across their views to the Public Administration Committee in a strategic fashion, posting opinionated advice in the final week, supported by personal experience, writing longer than average contributions about issues crucial to the aims of the consultation – namely public access to the Internet. In addition, participants' post-hoc assessment of DF usefulness was overwhelmingly positive in a number of respects, including efficacy.

Chapter 9 - Conclusions

This chapter draws conclusions with respect to the e-democracy discourse, to the three research questions under scrutiny and, more broadly, to the general concerns guiding this work. In the first section I state the importance of this work in relation to the e-democracy discourse in Britain, drawing on the empirical evidence presented in Chapters 6, 7, and 8. In the second section, I answer the three main research questions of this thesis:

1. The structure of online political equality. Does the Internet increase or reduce citizens' access to political information and to the decision-making circuit?
2. The institutional contexts of online action. What are the actors and factors, if any, which mediate citizens' online engagement?
3. The political nature of the Internet, at the interface between institutions and citizens. What, if any, is the political quality of the technology?

The third section revisits the main positions articulated by macro, meso and micro studies in the light of the evidence presented here. The fourth section examines the positive and negative limits of the participation approach as applied to e-democracy, and presents the long list of additional questions in search of an answer generated by this work. The last section suggests some possible directions for future work on the theory and the practice of e-democracy.

9.1 Contribution of the thesis to the e-democracy debate

I argued in Chapter 1 that a discourse of e-democracy frames the way political change via new technology is viewed in Britain. The discourse revolves around notions of rupture with the past (the information technology revolution) and, crucially for this work, a strong element of popular empowerment. The discourse is promoted by left-wing political entrepreneurs in tacit alliance with the new media industry amid academic quiescence. Democratic regeneration, it is argued by the Prime Minister, among others, is a natural consequence of new media access and use, as it can be used to empower people, engage with the public and democratise media access. The results of this thesis speak to this discourse by setting the agenda on the notion of democratic equality, by focusing directly on the political structure of the information polity, and by restoring a critical perspective on new media

hype. As for the 'revolution', if any has occurred, it is not a political revolution. Citizens and political organisations are reluctant to 'do politics online', compared to the prevalence of other online transactions. Even where citizens transact politically online, transactions are characterised by expediency rather than by synergy. The internet empowers a limited number of isolated individuals rather than creating the novel agora envisaged by Gore. As regards directly the rhetoric of expanded participation: can the Internet, unlike traditional media, reconnect citizens? The answer is a resounding no. Regardless of whether the 'crisis of democracy' is framed as a crisis of trust and lack of deference (attitudinal), a crisis of engagement (behavioural), or a paradox of mass democracy based on decreasing civic returns on education, results suggests that the Internet alone cannot reconnect, empower or ultimately democratise. The Internet is a hyper-political technology, it has a decentralising power, and allows for user self-representation; a radical potential was also found that leaves some hope for the future. However, the evidence reviewed suggests that the Internet contributes to further political disempowerment of the disengaged (based on the social shaping of the technology) and to the reinforcement of political inequality for the engaged elites (the real digital divide).

9.1.1 Q1: The structure of online political inequality

If one agrees that the equal distribution of voice rights is a desirable aim of political democracy, then the Internet has had a small, negative impact on British democracy so far. On the count of political equality, it can be claimed that the Internet is 'bad' for democracy. Not only has the digital divide disenfranchised large sections from lower social and educational backgrounds. Internet use also further empowers those already engaged in politics. Although the digital divide is rapidly disappearing, it is uncertain whether those who currently do not participate would do so given Internet access. Ironically, 'throwing money' at the digital divide may not alter dramatically the existing structure of digital political inequality. Once people are online, inequality rests on privilege rather than exclusion, as online activity relies on existing participation habits, especially organisational politics and propensity to discuss. All however is not lost. I found that young users and long-term users are more likely to use the Internet politically, other things being equal. This was interpreted as a progressive, balancing element to the aggravation of political inequality by digital means. Among this pool of 'new media' participants, there is a small proportion who 'do politics' solely online. However small, the capacity of the Internet to directly socialise new people outside traditional circuits of political recruitment was defined as a 'radical potential', in fact a democratic potential of the Internet to lure new voices into the political process. The potential is small as compared to the reinforcement potential, i.e. the continuation of political activity by digital means. In addition, the radical potential is marginal as compared to the

'inert potential', comprising those citizens who currently do not use the Internet for political aims. The examination of motivations for the lack of Internet use for politics (see section 6.4.2, p. 168) demonstrated two interesting points. Firstly, online activity requires a higher stock of 'political interest' than traditional participation, for both those who already participate and for those who do not. Secondly, the currently disengaged do not perceive Internet participation as an open option. This finding, linked with simulation results that current non-users are likely to participate less than current users leaves little hope for a reversal of the situation, and the capacity of the Internet to reduce rather than increase political inequality in Britain. The key issue facing policymakers and scholars is the capacity (and willingness) of institutions and gatekeepers to use the Internet to generate political interest and to 'convert' increased political knowledge into political trust and engagement, rather than simply providing more information to increasingly uninterested citizens.

9.1.2 Q2: *The institutional contexts of online action*

However, it was found, political organisations are the missing link in the process of electronic democratization (see Hacker, 1996). The political 'normalisation' of cyberspace is a slower process than was predicted by meso theorists. Traditional political agencies may have colonised the Internet, but has anyone noticed? Although cyberspace is a truly political space – populated by citizens who are more engaged in politics than average – active online politics remains a minority sport, largely engaged in by offline activists. Citizens engage online in information/discussion activities the most, followed by online campaign activities, contacting activities and, only marginally, organisational activities. The three main modes of online action build on four similar pillars: the overall importance of offline campaign activities; the importance of offline modes of action conducive to respective online engagement (e.g. offline discussion for online discussion), relatively young age, the length of Internet use and stimuli received from friends and organisations. Online activity is thus solidly nested in existing political practices and repertoires, not an undifferentiated, single mode of action dependent on the technology.

Furthermore, results for online organisational contacting are about as low as figures for direct online activity, and are concentrated on traditional media organisations. Neither traditional nor alternative political agencies (such as protest and issue networks) are reaping a digital dividend, as only a minority of users is aware of their presence in cyberspace. Given the very small numbers receiving such online stimuli, this may rest on the unwillingness of political mediators, old and new, to send unsolicited messages to potential activists and supporters. This strategy may be ill-conceived, as most citizens respond favourably – or at least not unfavourably – to unsolicited political messages. In addition, online communications have 'effects' on citizens' subsequent political behaviours. Most of those

who used the Internet to contact an organisation reported that they would not have done so by traditional means and that the online exchange in some way (which was however not probed) sparked further interest and in some cases the willingness to take further political action. Overall, therefore, it may be fair to say that the normalisation of cyberspace consists in an increasing prevalence of non-political contents, as claimed by macro and meso theorists (which was however not tested in this work), rather than in the tilting of the balance in favour of either established political actors or more marginal political voices. This claim was tested and dismissed on the ground that different mediators are doing equally bad in terms of digital mobilization.

9.1.3 Q3: The political value of the Internet

Finally, the political nature of the Internet was explored on a range of dimensions derived from theory. Survey respondents and case respondents alike made the most of the speed, low initiative and relative ease of access to the political circuit offered by the Internet. Conversely, they eschewed interactive, sustained and co-operative online activities, and were ambivalent regarding the enhanced scope, agenda setting and efficacy dimensions of new media. Therefore, the political potential of the Internet resides with a homogeneous set of dimensions defined here as *expediency*, which describes the capacity of the Internet to expedite and ease political transactions. *Synergy*, the dimensional pole underpinned by interactive and cooperative activities was not very popular, while *efficacy*, the last dimensional pole returned by the analysis, was largely flat. The same was confirmed at case level, as young Liberal Democrats, ACE activists and Hansard Society experts made the most of the potential of the Internet to campaign, ‘voice’ and lobby in their own time and right, rather than to engage with the organisation and their peers on a more sustained, community-like basis, or to engage in online debate and deliberation. In the terms of the theory of participation, online activity is very easy to get into, attracting citizens into a largely solitary pursuit of indistinctly individual or general objectives that eventually lead to limited outcomes. Furthermore, the analysis of dimensionality suggested a number of additional points. Firstly, the small ‘radical potential’ described above is largely linked to the ‘synergetic’ dimension of Internet action: those who do not participate offline engage online in co-operative, interactive and sustained activity. Conversely, ‘reinforcement’ is strongly underpinned by the expedient nature of the Internet, chiefly low initiative and speed. In other words: offline activity is supplemented by less intense but potentially more efficient digital tools. Secondly, the potential of the Internet for political mobilisation, including e-stimuli from organisations and peers, rests on (and in turn contribute to) expediency rather than on synergy. The Internet provides an on-off political channel rather than the 24/7 tools envisaged by some system theorists. However, when the channel is activated, generally by

citizens own initiative (but also dependent on the interlocutor's reputation, the timeliness of stimulus, the availability of time, and the 'institutional location' of the stimulus – defined above 'placeliness'), it may become efficient in generating bouts of political activity (tactical or discursive). This 'virtual' circle of online participation, as opposed to the more stable 'virtuous circle' theorised for traditional political communications, is based on reduced rather than enhanced commitment enabled by the expediency of the Internet. Finally, although it was unclear whether the Internet actually enhances *efficacy*, citizens' highly value the opportunity the Internet offers to 'have a voice' and to provide an input to campaigns and policy-making. LibDem young members, ACE activists and DF experts truly believe that through the political use of the Internet they have a powerful, albeit unperfected, electronic 'voice'. This voice requires a common carrier to be fed effectively to the political circuit. Notably, participation in the context of a co-ordinated effort may augment the object-oriented self-efficacy of participants, as predicted by some micro accounts (Brunsting & Postmes, 2002). Therefore, expediency is a significant political resource that political organisations and institutions might tap into to increase citizens' sense of political efficacy. British political parties, for instance, appear to believe that a traditional model of member recruitment, socialisation and retention is inadequate for modern times, and that ICTs can favour the transition to members' and citizens' self-representation.¹⁴⁴

9.2 The individual and the political Internet

A number of conclusions were also drawn with respect to the main position found in the literature reviewed. Overall, this study provides support for Sonia Livingstone's claim that we must study the user in order to gain an explicit understanding of new media audiences. The online political audience is small, politically interested, relying on the new medium to extend largely pre-existing political behaviours, based on the understanding that Internet activity is to be to some extent efficacious, along with expedient. Having said that, there is also a small contingent of people who defy the expedient logic of the online political exchange and harness the synergetic potential of the new medium. In addition, this audience is younger than traditional political audiences and it learns politics online as it goes. Finally, this audience is plural, as different groups of people do politically different things through the same medium.

The analysis confirmed the importance of 'resources' and 'uses' for the understanding of this audience. Firstly, the evidence supports resources results concerning the social stratification of the political Internet as younger, male, formally educated citizens use the Internet more for political aims. As suggested by the 'uses literature' there are increasing

¹⁴⁴ Witness the campaign-oriented Liberal Democrats mailing lists, Labour e-news used for election purposes and the introduction of Conservative Direct, an Internet-enabled system for virtual subscription management.

returns on stocks of political interest and engagement, and on young age and Internet skills. Secondly, Internet political activity draws on expediency, thus confirming the conclusions of uses studies that convenience is a main driver, and the insistence on user motivations that are endogenous to the Internet technology bundle. Third, activities 'requiring' time and increased interaction are engaged in by a restricted number of participants who tend to participate online only. Hence, as suggested by resources scholars, online and offline politics are based on different resources. Fourthly, information / discussion is a prominent cluster of online activity, as reported in most uses studies. However, only a minority of the micro studies reviewed examines other facets such as online contacting and campaign activities. While increasing attention is devoted to the issue of online campaigns in limited contexts (Pickerill, 2004), this study suggests that the study of online campaigns is a worthwhile concern for large-scale survey researchers as well. On the other hand, however, this caution may not be misplaced. As the 'radical' potential is smaller than the 'reinforcement' potential and the 'inert potential', it is difficult to assess how online activism spills over offline, especially because traditional mediators seem unwilling (or unable) to mobilise citizens electronically.

In terms of effects, a positive, strong correlation exists between Internet use and offline activities, which is however difficult to explain, other than to say that Internet users are 'more political' than non-users, even when controlling for socio-demographics. I offer two tentative, complementary accounts of this correlation, both of which are related to dynamics of Internet adoption rather than to Internet direct 'effects'.¹⁴⁵ Firstly, educated people are much more likely to use the Internet, but only 'relatively' more likely to engage in politics. However, Internet access and use may depend less on years of formal schooling than on 'education' broadly defined, e.g. ICTs skills of parents with children of school age, access and ICTs socialisation at work (for graduate jobs), and the social stratification of ICTs access, whereby different social strata acquire different technological bundles. In other words, some people who are slightly more active than average (partly due to education) are much more likely to have Internet access, for a number of positive externalities associated with education. Symmetrically, most people who are politically disengaged have no chance of accessing a computer and the Internet for the reasons reported above (and possibly others). This explanation – a 'general education effect' – should account for some of the variance, due to the large numbers involved. Secondly, data suggests that a number of high-intensity participants (highly educated, with higher levels of political interest) enjoy even greater levels of Internet access than the middle-class citizen described above. Activists may be gaining access to the Internet 'in order to' use the Internet for political reasons, the

¹⁴⁵ In fact, the factors that Bimber argues research has yet to identify (2003: 207-208).

autonomous political behaviour predicated by Pizzorno (see section 4.2.2, p. 102). Furthermore, these educated, high-intensity activists have been online for a longer time and had the time to acquire the necessary skills and resources to do even more politics using the Internet. We might call this a 'specific education effect', which should account for at least some of the correlation between Internet use and political involvement. While giving wireless laptops to the digitally excluded would not increase the chance that they used it for political activities, investing in 'general' ICTs education (ICTs education in the workplace, bring-home ICTs for children from deprived backgrounds, extension of public-service obligations for ICTs producers) and 'specific' ICTs education (e.g. the creation of online public spaces) might yield better results, thus helping to narrow the real digital divide, and to mitigate the current Internet-enabled political inequality in Britain.

Finally, analysis suggested that Internet 'effects' are limited to particular online actions rather than to general Internet use (see section 3.7.1 and 3.7.2, p. 87). Users claimed that the Internet made them want to find out more about specific organisations after visiting their websites. LD respondents claimed that e-mail communication from the party made them more likely to engage in campaign activity on behalf of the party. HS participants responded far more frequently to the moderator than to other participants. In the case of e-stimuli more generally, it was difficult to disentangle the effect from the context where the stimulus was produced and consumed; in fact, it was difficult to discern production from consumption of online political stimuli, except in the case of e-stimuli received from friends. These have a higher likelihood to be read and responded. In all these cases, therefore, specific stimuli made people more likely to engage.

9.3 'Normalisation' and the meso agenda

Overall, the small numbers engaged in both online participation and online contacting suggest caution in generalising about the capacity of mediators to engage citizens using new media. The Internet 2.0 certainly witnessed an increase in the numbers of British users, and the 'beginning of the end' of the digital divide. However, it has not ushered in the new age of online mass communications that was expected by the normalisation school after the Internet's 'coming of age'. Interestingly, there is no sign of the predicted 'colonisation' of the political cyberspace by traditional agencies, at least judging by the levels of online contacting, participation, reception of electronic stimuli by citizens and case-study activists alike. A minority of users actually contacts organisations online. Users report negligible online 'organisational' activities, in comparison with more widespread contacting, campaign and information-discussion activities. A minority of users have ever received any political stimuli, of which a small proportion were from political organisations. This starkly contrasts with the deluge of unsolicited e-mail the average user receives from virtually any other purveyor of information and products. Finally, protest networks and alternative media are

not reaping a digital dividend, to judge from the scant levels of recognition of different 'protest' brands, and from the equally negligible levels of online contacting. The Internet is neither 'the weapon of the poor' nor the crucial resource for outsiders predicted by some meso literature, in as much as protest and alternative groups require a critical mass of citizen support or recognition to operate. Survey evidence from Britain therefore contradicts a growing body of evidence on the importance of the Internet of micro-mobilisation in more fluid political cultures (Bimber, 2003; Pickerill, 2004).

However, a number of observations point to a better balance for organisations. Firstly, the Internet matters, as most of those who contacted organisations online would not have contacted them otherwise. Furthermore, some wanted to find out more or get more involved as a result. Secondly, and related to that, results are more optimistic as concerns online campaign activities, which are best served through electronic media. Information about campaigns provided on political organisations' websites and e-mail bulletins are widely popular. Such 'online campaigns' are sporadic rather than sustained over time, and entail individualised rather than orchestrated action. Online activists seem suspended between the belief that the Internet gives them a voice, and trust in the political expediency of the medium, and the realisation that traditional political activity remains crucial. Based on the results, one may argue that increased political interest is required to fuel online participation, which is not self-generating; traditionally, political interest rests on issue salience, political socialisation and mobilisation, and self-efficacy. Furthermore, online campaign activities fostered by political organisations preach to the converted for the most part, rather than reaching out to the disengaged. Expediency might have the effect of further polarising political inequality between the limitedly active and the very active (or the hyper-activists). If this is the case, one might as well doubt that British political organisations are taking the right steps to connect citizens digitally, that is to foster self-efficacy for Internet users, and political interest for both users and non-users. Thirdly, and related to this point, although the audience for the websites of the political organisations surveyed is limited (especially for parties and pressure groups), the web is important for attracting new members, and for other institutional functions once website visitors are signed up as supporters. Providing a stable platform, a signpost in cyberspace, political organisations' websites are ideally placed to perform the aggregation / reference function that is crucial to modern political organisations in times of decreasing engagement. The evidence from mid-2002 is that traditional mediators, with the exception perhaps of traditional media organisations, have not realised the Internet's potential for such functions. Overall, therefore, the blame should not be placed entirely on organisations for not providing online opportunities. The organisations considered as cases certainly did. They were traditional political gatekeeper willing to engage with new media and engage people through new media. Their role was pivotal in the

design, setting up and management of the 'online structures for political actions' (Schneider & Foot, 2002), thus transforming diffuse interests in participatory activity and translating these into political meanings. However, leadership is required within organisations to embrace ICTs as an engagement tool that cannot be taken for granted (Lusoli, Ward, & Gibson, 2002; Ward, Gibson, & Lusoli, 2003). Although online 'moderation' and 'house-keeping' (the management of online interaction by the institutional mediators) is required to sustain members and supporters' action, even where organisations in fact provide plenty of incentives and stimuli for activists to participate, this may be unrewarding. Evidence from the cases suggested that even among activists, there is limited demand for more engaging and interactive features.

9.4 The internet and the wider polity

Overall, the idea of 'self-representation' – the capacity of the Internet to elicit 'phonetic' rather than 'iconic' representation (discussed in Chapter 5) – is further supported by data from the survey and from the cases. The 'radical potential' of the Internet to reinforce citizenship is too small to generalise, while political organisations have not proved particularly skilled at either mobilising (pluralism), let alone 'manipulate' citizens electronically. In a broad sense, the Internet appears to augment the degrees of citizen's freedom of media action, and to some extent decentralise the communication exchange from the producers to the consumers, which according to Ithiel Pool signals a more open, democratic society. Although only a minority of users currently engage in online activities, the channel is open to further use. In addition, the structure of online political activity suggests that the Internet is in fact employed for a multiplicity of political uses: information, discussion, campaign and contacting. It is, in other words, both informing and involving. In order to speak to the e-democracy archetypes (teledemocracy, online community and deliberation) it is fruitful to consider the assumptions of each archetype. It emerged from the cases and from the survey that using the Internet for self-representation (information and campaign) prevailed on a cooperation/sharing uses and on discursive/deliberative uses. Online action, it was argued, is a largely solitary pursuit of indifferently individual/collective ends. This is as much at odds with the sharing ethos of virtual communitarians as with the discursive ethos of virtual deliberationists. Surprisingly, it resounds more with teledemocrats' rational and self-representing citizen. Current e-democracy in Britain builds on information, contacting and campaign dynamics sustained by the political expediency of the Internet, rather than co-operation, interaction and duration of the online effort connected with synergy. It is true, on the grounds of the small radical potential, that those who engage in online participation only (drawing on synergy) are more available than traditional participants to liaise, interact and network using new media, thus supporting the prospect of increased collective action. As Margolis and Resnick argued, 'Intra-net politics' is much

more radical (and democratic) than 'politics on the Net'. However, online deliberation and online community are clearly subordinated to the prevalence of expediency, both for the average citizen and for those who participated in experiments potentially more conducive to community building and deliberation.

9.5 The theory of participation and online engagement

The contribution of this work rests as much on the novelty of the data collected and in this study's research design, as on the interpretive lens proposed. The thesis is quantitative and concerned with citizens. This responded directly to the prominence of 'citizen empowerment' in the e-democracy discourse. This work therefore advances a theoretical framework for the understanding of e-democracy that draws on the theory of participation. Arterton and colleagues argued two decades ago that voice and equality are inextricably linked to any realistic assessment of the democratic value of communications technologies, old and new. This work demonstrates that the core elements of the theory of participation provide a parsimonious, powerful framework for the operationalisation of the e-democracy discourse into manageable analytical and epistemic units. The relation between online participation and electronic democracy is indeed multivariate (and multi-level); it builds on different modes of online engagement in the online sphere, largely resting on autonomous political behaviour, which are in turn dependent on the underlying social stratification of ICTs resources. Moreover, citizens engage in dimensionally distinct forms of online behaviour, favouring expediency over interaction and effectiveness, much to the chagrin of proponents of strong or participatory democracy. As predicted by Verba and colleagues, the theory of participation is an ideal explanatory base from which to depart in order to find the additional factors that 'accelerate' the working of the SES model in the online domain; as such, it provides a useful stepping stone

There are, of course, a number of themes and hypothesis related to e-democracy that this study could not address. Partly, this is due to the decision to frame the evidence through the lens of participation, which largely excludes institutional and protest political activities. This work does not touch upon e-government, i.e. the delivery of government services through digital means or, where e-government is defined more broadly to include citizen participation, it does miss the registration of citizens' preferences on regulatory matters. Although only a minority of British citizens has so far participated in online consultations run by the government and by the Parliament, and electronic pre-legislative scrutiny is not yet on the government table, increasing numbers transact with the government online, giving currency to a 'consumer' model of e-democracy that was not assessed here. Further studies will have to assess the consequences of online government transactions for citizen trust and self-efficacy and citizenship more generally, in the public administration tradition set by Laudon, Danziger, Donk, Tops, Snellen, and Bellamy, to mention a few.

Equally, the frame and tools of the theory of participation are less suitable to address directly the issues of online conflict (or avoidance thereof) and network agency. As concerns the former, it is an open question whether the Internet favours or discourages contention and attrition political tactics (Ayres, 1999), although the choice to include no behavioural indicators for online protest activity was largely supported by the lack of awareness among the British public (see Table 6-6, p. 160). The importance of network agency was persuasively foreshadowed by recent accounts of Internet-enabled political mobilisation, especially in the United States (Bimber, 2003; McCaughey & Ayers, 2002). There is evidence that protest and issue movements, as for instance *moveon.org*, have successfully harnessed the networking and interactivity characteristics of the medium to tap into the vast reservoir of fluid political allegiance dispersed in the polity, managing to mobilise large numbers of supporters around changing issue platforms (Bennett, 2003a). It may well be that the most 'radical' characteristics of the Internet, summarised here as *synergy* and *efficacy*, emerge (and are hence measurable) in times of political crisis such as elections and / or during the 'euphoric' phase preceding the institutionalisation of political movements in established political interest groups or parties (Panebianco, 1988).

However, it was argued that the narrow framing of participation permit conclusions about citizens' instrumental, autonomous inputs to the decision-making circuit, to have their voice and preferences considered by decision-makers. This was largely achieved in this work, within the limits of survey and case methodology. Cross-sectional research and case studies necessarily provide a snapshot of the state of electronic democracy in Britain, which is limited in context, space and time. As concerns the case component, all examples chosen are by design over-samples of online political activity in different settings. Although the Hansard Society has moved on to organise another seven online consultations, Age Concern to institutionalise the e-activist network experiment and the Liberal Democrats to expand the numbers on the list considerably (by approximately five thousand members), online politics has yet to enter the British mainstream.¹⁴⁶ Those cases indicate the potential rather than the realisation of democracy by electronic means, as they dwell on a number of enabling conditions that are uncommon in digital Britain.

As concerns the public opinion survey, more contextual data is required, through over-samples of theoretically significant groups (young people, radical potential participants and disengaged participants) and through systematic, offline-administered membership surveys of organisations offering online opportunities. This would allow for in-depth probing of elusive dimensions of online participation such as *synergy* and *efficacy*, and for the exploration of the motives of new media adoption required to disentangle the education-

¹⁴⁶ See for instance recent studies by Ward and colleagues (Ward, Gibson, & Lusoli, 2005) and Norris, Curtice and Bromley (A. Park, Curtice, Thomson, Bromley, & Phillips, 2004).

access conundrum. Secondly, time-serialisation of indicators of social and political uses of the Internet is required, in order to examine the same set of research questions over time, which is a crucial factor at this stage of Internet development, in transition between 'old' new media and 'new' new media. This is routinely done by the Pew Internet and American Life Project in the United States, but to the best of this author's knowledge has no equivalent elsewhere, and certainly not in Britain. The tracking of the repertoire of new media action could then be linked to broader time-series trends in societal development (through the ONS, the ESS, the EB and the WSS) to assess the relative importance of different clusters of online activity over time, in relation with British material culture. Thirdly, further research will have to enlarge the focus on more than one advanced industrial democracy in order to fully grasp the consequences of online political transactions, among citizens and political institutions (Kluver, 2003; Livingstone, 2003). This was a natural development for the theory of participation, and would provide the necessary data on 'political culture' and media regimes required to adjudicate between alternative explanations with respect to the online structure for online action in different countries. Lastly, longitudinal, multi-wave designs are necessary to disentangle causes and effects of the online exchange, and causes and effects between online and offline participation. While it was possible (although not unproblematic) to make assumptions on the precedence of traditional over online participation in mid-2002, this will be increasingly challenging in the future, as more people (especially young people) first encounter politics on the web, and as online and offline repertoires will be further integrated (at least on the supply side, if political organisations are to benefit fully from the political potential of ICTs). One might expect a growth in the circulation of political messages on the net over the next few years, as traditional political organising by parties, trade unions and NGOs will rely ever more on the Internet for the dissemination of campaign messages and the organisation of supporters (witness the Howard Dean campaign in the 2004 US primaries). Under such circumstances of increased online socialisation and mobilisation, plus the continuing appeal of Internet political expediency, the 'primacy of the offline' will be increasingly open to debate, and research. A final caveat concerns the persistence of the e-democracy discourse in advanced industrial democracies. The e-democracy rhetorical tide might as well ebb in the future. The discourse around the digital divide, Couldry noted, was related to the 'possibilities for market growth: short-term political pain for long-term economic gain' (Couldry, 2004). As political side-effects of the Internet emerged, in the shape of fragmented globalisation and its anti-globalisation backlash, the role of new media in supporting the no-global movement (Bennett, 2003a, , 2003b), and international terrorism (Vegh, 2003), the talk on the digital divide decreased (Couldry, 2004), and with it the rhetoric of electronic democracy, at least in the United States. It remains unclear whether the decline is a short or a long-term trend.

9.6 E-democracy: what should be done?

Where does this leave us, and what should be done? A number of further, more refined hypotheses and possible lines of investigation emerged in the course of this enquiry, which this study (as well as the micro, meso and system works reviewed) could not directly address. This work follows a shift currently occurring from the study of 'resources' to integrated modelling of the relation between new media use and political engagement in terms of citizens, institutions and technologies. As the Internet 'comes of age' – by which is generally meant the near-universal expansion of Internet use – one should expect *resources*, *effects* and *uses* models to converge. Firstly, more research should be devoted to the Internet-specific resources required to participate online (Krueger, 2002), to new media social and political literacy of young people (Livingstone, Bober, & Helsper, 2004) and adults (Livingstone, 2004), and in general to techno-political exchanges in specific contexts where 'autonomous' and 'dependent' explanations can be made to converge (Stromer-Galley & Foot, 2002). Insights from resources studies should be incorporated in more sophisticated modelling studies, where inferences valid for the entire polity can be made cross-sectionally and longitudinally. Secondly, the focus of effects studies should move from simple Internet access and use to the study of contextualised effects of specialised information seeking, communication, political interaction behaviour, and the integration between the fruition of new and traditional media. That is, we can expect a process of effects internalisation, with more attention devoted to uses. Thirdly, and most interestingly, uses studies will have to account for the externalisation of consequences of a medium increasingly integrated in citizens' everyday lives. In other words, new media does affect the fabric of socio-political life extending outside the realm described by the fulfilment of needs and motivations, to include occasion, pleasure-seeking and performance. Although the direction of causality will have to be negotiated theoretically in each individual instance, there is an urgent need of integrated modelling of the 'radical' potential described by system theorists, enacted (or not) at the interface between the politically real and virtual, old and new media, and its consequences for democracy.

Finally, research should explore in more depth the dimensional nature of online political engagement, specifically in three directions: behavioural, attitudinal and motivational. This work has just begun to explore the complexity of expediency, synergy and efficacy. A wider repertoire of online actions should be considered which spans protest and support activities, in times of crisis as well as routine. In addition, it may be worth asking users about their attitudes towards and perceptions of new media dimensions and dimensional poles thus generated, in the context of their wider media diet. In particular, following the example of Brunsting and Postmes (2002), research should discern between internal and external efficacy with respect to new media for politics. Do people believe that the Internet is

expedient, efficacious and allows for enhanced synergy? Does this matter for democracy? Finally, and most importantly, questions should be asked about the motivations for the adoption and use of ICTs for social and political activities, to further explore the autonomous / dependent nature of new media activity. Importantly, these three sets of question attributes should be operationalised in those institutional contexts currently neglected by most research, identified above: online media and political news, online campaigns and online delivery of government services. Such developments in the collection and analysis of data on new media and citizen engagement would consent to specify and test more complete, sophisticated and robust models of online participation. These, this author believes, might assist the much-required rapprochement of system, meso and micro accounts of electronic democracy, which would provide the heuristic power required to challenge (and hopefully better inform) the prevalent discourse on e-democracy. Starting, perhaps, with the uneasy but legitimate question: is the Internet bad for British democracy?

This thesis does not want to make specific policy recommendations, as more evidence is required (discussed above) before we draw firm conclusions about digital Britain. However, it points to two urgent needs that must be addressed in order to advance a critical of e-democracy agenda. The first need is to challenge the framing of the digital divide in merely economic terms. ICTs do have economic consequences, but it requires overt policy steering to level the political playing field. If, as it was argued, throwing money at the digital divide is not an effective solution, what is? Second, as concerns the 'real digital divide', the critical question should begin to be asked in academic and policy circles alike: is the Internet bad for democracy? This study asserts that an uncritical discourse that 'portrays the Internet as the end of politics and the guarantor of decentralization' is both delusive and misplaced (Agre, 1998: 7). Alternatively, and possibly worse, it may be self-interested. As evidence suggests that the Internet exacerbates the malapportionment of voice rights, academics should begin to ask: how do we ensure that digitally excluded voices are heard? Moreover, can we redress the negative consequences of ICTs for democracy by harnessing the 'radical potential' of the Internet? In both respects, the role of the government is pivotal. The Internet reinforces the structure of political inequality in 2002 Britain, and this should be a concern for policymakers and those institutions, such as the Electoral Commission and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, which are by statute concerned with the health of democracy in Britain. Of course, the UK government and Parliament are active on a number of fronts to reduce the digital divide through community technology centres and digital TV, to foster ICTs adoption at an early stage of the education curriculum, and to reconnect with the public through e-government and e-democracy initiatives. All these initiative are necessary and commendable to reduce digital inequality per se.

However, political engagement and electronic democratisation are not a side effect of the increased digitalisation of social life. The dissertation has highlighted four critical areas of new media policy where action should be taken if the democratic potential of the Internet is to be enacted. The first is the need for policies that tackle the ‘general’ and ‘specific’ education effects described above. As for the former, action is needed to connect citizens from disengaged backgrounds who do not come across the Internet at school, at work or socially. As for the latter, institutions need to engage with citizens, both online and offline, more than they are currently doing, as increased online engagement rests on external citizen efficacy and increased levels of political interest. The second point is that the ‘radical potential’ of the Internet needs fostering, by encouraging online synergetic and co-operative behaviours. The case could be made for peer-to-peer networks, the creation of incentives for digital producers to sign up for *Creative Commons* share-alike agreements and, crucially, overt institutional support for the open-source software movement. Thirdly, and related to the first two points, policy must encourage the development of ICTs in-house capabilities at local and central levels of government (or where government spending has positive externalities), as this may favour the creation and spill over of ICTs skills which are increasingly central to government ‘re-invention’ and, crucially, to e-democracy. The ‘neutral instigators’ examined in this work heavily rely on highly IT-skilled personnel, often on a voluntary or semi-voluntary basis. The investment in open-source software and skills would be a first step in the right direction. Finally, and most importantly, Internet policy should enable rather than depress civic organisations’ capacity to ‘reach out’ and mobilise electronically, by creating a specific regulatory regime for non-profit, charities and public-interest organisation – the online civic commons advocated by Blumler and Coleman (2001). Under such a regime it should be easier for organisations to send unsolicited e-mails to citizens, to acquire rights for government-sponsored share-ware, and for citizens to find civic information and organisations more easily.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Survey questionnaire

- D1** Age (15-24) / (25-34) / (35-44) / (45-54) / (55-64) / (65+)
- D2** Sex M / F
- D3** Social grade AB – C1 – C2 – DE
- D4** Standard Region North / Yorkshire & Humberside / East Midlands / East Anglia / South East / South West / Wales / West Midland / North West / Scotland / North / Midlands / South
- D5** Internet Usage Heavy (4+ hours per week) / Medium (1-3 hours) / Light (less than 1 hour)
- D6** Terminal education age (13-14) / (15-16) / (17-18) / (19+)
- Q1** If you use the Internet, can you tell me when you first started using the Internet? (single response)

In the last few months	01
About 6 months ago	02
About 1 year ago	03
Between 1 to 2 years ago	04
Between 3 – 5 years ago	05
Between 6 – 10 years ago	06
More than 10 years ago	07
Don't know when	08
Don't use the Internet	09

- Q2.** On this card are some places where you might use the Internet. Can you tell me for each how often, if at all, do you access the Internet from ...? (single response per item)

	Daily	Several times per week	Weekly	Several times per month	Once every few months	Never
Home	01	02	03	04	05	06
Work	01	02	03	04	05	06
Using a friend/family member's account	01	02	03	04	05	06
Public access point	01	02	03	04	05	06
Internet café	01	02	03	04	05	06
Other	01	02	03	04	05	06

- Q3.** Which of the following applications do you use the Internet for? (multiple response)

To access the Worldwide Web/WWW	01
To send personal E-mails	02
To send professional/work e-mails	03
To visit chat rooms	04
Instant messaging	05
To access an Intranet or other closed access system	06
Other reason	07
Don't know	08

Q4. Political organisations such as parties and lobby groups make use of the Internet to provide information about themselves and the issues they are concerned about. Thinking about the time that you have been online, have you ever received any of the following regarding a POLITICAL ORGANISATION OR CAMPAIGN or not? (multiple response)

E-mail postcard	01
E-mail newspaper article	02
E-mail petition	03
News update or information bulletin	04
Election related material	05
Request for financial donations to aid refugee/worthy cause	06
None of these	07
Don't know	08

Q5. When you have received political messages and/or information online, where do they mainly come from... (single response)

A friend/acquaintance	01
The organisation itself	02
A person you don't know/anonymous source	03
Other source	04
Don't know	05

Q6. When you have received political messages and information online how do you normally react? (single response)

Ignore it	01
Occasionally read them but do not respond	02
Occasionally read them and sometimes respond	03
Generally read them but do not respond	04
Generally read them and sometimes respond	05
Always read them and always respond	06
Contact sender to request removal from list/express irritation	07
None of these	08
Don't know	09

Q7. Have you ever engaged in any of the following forms of online political activity or not? (multiple)

Looked for political information in general	01
Visited a party web site or some other kind of political organisation	02
Signed up for e-news bulletins	03
Discussed politics in a chat group	04
Joined e-mail discussion lists about politics or contributed to political bulletin board	05
Sent an e-mail postcard or newspaper article to a friend/acquaintance/colleague	06
Downloaded software (screensaver, banners etc.) advertising a political organisation	07
Downloaded leaflets or promotion material to distribute offline	08
Signed an online petition	09
Participated (either actively or passively) in an online question and answer session with a political official or figure	10
Sent an e-mail to an elected local or national politician	11
Sent an e-mail to public services at the local or national level	12
Sent an e-mail to a political organisation such as a party or pressure group	13
Donated funds online to a political cause	14
Signed up online as a volunteer to help with a political cause	15

	Actually joined a political organisation online as a fully paid member	16
	None of these	17
Q8.	Which of the reasons on this card best describes why you have not engaged in any online political activities? (single response)	
	Did not realise the opportunities were available	01
	Not really interested in politics in general	02
	Am interested in politics but have enough of it in the non-Internet or offline world	03
	Politics is an activity that should take place in a face-to-face or more personal way	04
	Not enough time	05
	Other reason	06
	Don't know	07
Q9.	Have you ever engaged in the following forms of OFFLINE or more traditional types of political activity or not? (multiple response)	
	Voted in a local council election, the general election or European elections	01
	Discussed politics with friends/family	02
	Contacted a politician or government official	03
	Donated money to a political cause or organisation	04
	Attended a political rally	05
	Joined a political organisation such as a party or pressure group	06
	Engaged in strike activity	07
	Actively campaigned for a political organisation (distributed leaflets, worked for a candidate)	08
	None of these	09
Q10.	Have you ever visited any website or e-mailed any of the organisations on this card or not? (multiple response)	
	A political party	01
	A charity or pressure group such as Friends of the Earth, CND, Trade Union	02
	A mainstream news organisation – BBC, The Guardian, The Times	03
	An independent/alternative news organisation, e.g. IndyMedia	04
	An anti-capitalist protest group/network e.g. Wombles, Reclaim the Streets	05
	A single issue protest campaign, e.g. Stop Esso	06
	None of these	07
	Don't know	08
Q11.	You say that you have visited an organisations' web site or used the Internet to contact them. Would you have done this by other means, such as writing or telephoning the organisation, or researching them in a library if the online method had not been available?	
	Yes	01
	No	02
	Don't know	03
Q12.	After visiting or having had communication with an organisation online which of the following best describes how you felt about that organisation? (single response)	
	It made me less likely to become involved	01
	It made no difference to my level of interest	02
	It made me more likely to want to find out more	03

It made me more likely to become actively involved	04
I actually became more involved	05
Don't know	06

Q13. As the Internet has become more popular there have been a number of political campaigns that have started or gained publicity based around use of e-mail or on the WWW. Thinking back over the past year or so have you heard about any of the following such Internet based campaigns? (multiple response)

MayDay Monopoly	01
Payuptony.com	02
Buy nothing day	03
Fax Your MP	04
Globalise Resistance	05
Other political campaign	06
No, not heard about any political campaigns on the WWW	07
Don't know	08

Q14. Generally speaking, which political party, if any do you support? (single response)

Labour	01
Conservative	02
Liberal Democrats	03
Scottish National Party (SNP)	04
Plaid Cymru	05
Green Party	06
Other Party (specify)	07
No particular party	08
Don't know	09
Refused	10

Appendix 2 – Hansard Society content analysis coding frame

Variable label, operative definition, values, type of variable and ICR values (where applicable), are reported in the tables below. ‘SA’ refers to scores obtain through the Hoslti’s formula. ‘K’ is Cohen’s Kappa. ‘R’ is Pearson’s.

Structural codes		
<i>Label</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>ICR measure</i>
Topic	Unique number of the topic the message belongs to.	Nominal
Authcode	Author of the message (anonymised, conversion table with the author).	Nominal
Sex	Sex of the author. 0 = Female 1 = Male	Nominal
Datetime	Date and time of message posting.	Date
Words	Message length: number of words excluding automatic signatures but including the name of the author.	Scale
Pattern codes		
<i>Name</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>ICR measure</i>
Read	Number of times message was read at 28/12/1999.	Scale
Reply	Position of the message in the discussion. 0 = Message is a seed, first message in a thread. 1 = Message is a direct reply to another message: the author refers explicitly to a preceding message by mentioning it 2 = Message includes reference to other message(s) without being a direct reply 3 = Message follows moderator’s stimulus 4 = Message just follows in the thread	All nominal ‘1’ and ‘2’ collapsed K = .70 SA = .85
Replied	The message is replied by another message. 0 = No 1 = Message is directly replied by another message: the message is referred to explicitly in a following message(s) 2 = Reference to the message is included in following message(s) without being directly replied	All nominal ‘1’ and ‘2’ collapsed K = .75 SA = .86
RepliedN 1	Number of the times message is replied in mode 1	Scale R = .626 **
RepliedN 2	Number of the times message is replied in mode 2	Scale R = .318 **
Both collapsed: R = .637 **		
Interact	Message contains reference, directly or indirectly, to the manner in which a previous message/s relates to those preceding it/them: the current message should say something about how two or more earlier messages related to each other. 0 = No 1 = Yes	Nominal K = .90 SA = .98

Information codes

<i>Name</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>ICR measure</i>
Fact	Message reports a fact (non personal). 0 = No 1 = Yes, not a main item 2 = Yes, a main item	Nominal '1' and '2' collapsed K = .62 SA = .86
Based	Message reports personal empirical experience from outside the Forum. 0 = No 1 = Yes, not a main item 2 = Yes, a main item	Nominal '1' and '2' collapsed K = .78 SA = .89
Opinion	Message states (or contain a statement of) an opinion by the author. 0 = No 1 = Yes, not a main item of content 2 = Yes, a main item of content	Nominal '1' and '2' collapsed K = .65 SA = .84
Policy	Message includes statement(s) of policy, i.e. it prompts for policymaking. 0 = No 1 = Yes	Nominal K = .68 SA = .85
Level	Message identifies level of policymaking, actor or action level. 0 = No statement(s) 1 = Community level 2 = Local Authority 3 = Central Government 4 = Parliament 5 = Multi level 6 = Other (private NGOs) or loosely defined	Nominal K = .49 SA = .76

Relational codes

<i>Name</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>ICR measure</i>
Seek	Message includes evidence of information seeking in the form of queries, open-ended remarks and the like. 0 = No 1 = Fact 2 = Opinion 3 = Both	Nominal '1' and '3', '1' and '2' collapsed K = .60 SA = .87

Agree	<p>Message includes indications of agreement with another person or statement previously appearing on this list</p> <p>0 = Primarily strong agreement 1 = Primarily mild agreement 2 = No indication, only citation or otherwise neutral reference 3 = Both agreement and disagreement, and ironic agreement 4 = Primarily mild disagreement 5 = Primarily strong disagreement</p>	<p>Nominal</p> <p>'0' and '1', '2' and '3', '4' and '5' collapsed</p> <p>K = .41 SA = .69</p> <p>Dropped</p>
Commop	<p>Message includes the use of first person plural: 'we' or 'us' to refer to others in the Forum in addition to the author. Neither impersonal nor courtesy 'we' are counted.</p> <p>0 = No 1 = Yes</p>	<p>Nominal</p> <p>K = .52 SA = .87</p>
Meta	<p>The message contains meta-communication: content is about the communication itself, or the Forum.</p> <p>0 = No 1 = Yes, but it's not a main item of content 2 = Yes, it is a main item of content</p>	<p>Nominal</p> <p>'1' and '2' collapsed</p> <p>K = .60 SA = .85</p>
Suggform	<p>Message contains suggestions for the improvement of the debate format.</p> <p>0 = No 1 = Yes</p>	<p>Nominal</p> <p>K = .69 SA = .94</p>
Suggcont	<p>Message contains suggestions for the improvement of the debate content.</p> <p>0 = No 1 = Yes</p>	<p>Nominal</p> <p>K = .65 SA = .91</p>

Appendix 3 – Hansard Society questionnaire

COMMONS PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE ONLINE INQUIRY

POST-CONSULTATION SURVEY

In November and December of last year, you participated in the first ever online parliamentary inquiry. The purpose of this survey is to find out what your views of this new democratic exercise. Please answer the following questions and do feel free to include your own additional comments: they will be read carefully and taken into account when the evaluation of the exercise is produced.

When answering the questions, do not print out this survey, but write directly on this page, using the keyboard letter **x** to indicate a Yes or a No to the answers. If you have comments to add to any of the questions, please do so at the bottom of the survey. When the survey is completed, please forward your reply to the Hansard Society. If any questions, contact us at edemocracy@lse.ac.uk

1. Did you find this a worthwhile exercise?

Yes – No – Don't know.

2. Did you learn anything from other contributors?

Yes – No – Don't know.

3. Did you gain any new knowledge from the background information provided on the web site?

Yes – No – Don't know.

4. Did you make any new contacts as a result of the consultation?

Yes – No

5. Have you participated in other online discussions/consultations?

Yes – No

6. Do you think that the Commons Public Administration committee members were interested in what was said during this online consultation?

Yes – No – Don't know.

7. Do you think that this consultation provided good evidence to the select committee?

Yes – No – Don't know.

8. Would you participate in another online parliamentary inquiry?

Yes – No – Don't know.

9. Could the discussion have been improved?

Yes – No – Don't know. (Please comment below)

10. Can you give an example of one issue about which changed your mind as a result of this discussion?

Yes – No (Please comment below)

If you want to elaborate on any of the questions, please do so here (space provided)

Appendix 4 – Liberal Democrats online survey questionnaire

The survey was administered online. A word processor version is reproduced below, which preserves questions, categories, values and questionnaire structure; HTML and other scripting was removed. The original HTML questionnaire is found online at <http://www.lusoli.info>.

Q1 How often do you use the Internet (includes the web, e-mail and Intranets):

	Never	Once a month or less	Once a week	Every other day	Daily	Many times a day
a. the web (not e-mail)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
b. e-mail	<input type="checkbox"/>					
c. closed Internet communication network (e.g. Cix, Intranet, Extranet)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
d. other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Q2 Where do you use the Internet?

	Never	Once a month or less	Once a week	Every other day	Daily	Many times a day
a. at home	<input type="checkbox"/>					
b. at work	<input type="checkbox"/>					
c. in a free, public place (e.g. library)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
d. at an Internet Café (e.g. easyeverything)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
e. other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Q3 Do you ever use the Internet - Web, e-mail and Intranets - to get political information or to keep in touch with political life - political news, political parties, government, trade unions, pressure groups, etc.?

- Never
 Sometimes (please specify below)

Q 3.1 How often do you use the Internet - Web, e-mail and Intranets - to get political information or to keep in touch with political life?

	Never	Once	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Every week	A few times a week	Daily
a. parliament / MP	<input type="checkbox"/>						
b. government department	<input type="checkbox"/>						
c. local council	<input type="checkbox"/>						
d. political party (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
e. trade union / professional association (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
f. pressure group (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
g. news (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
h. other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>						

Q4 Have you ever accessed the Liberal Democrats Website? If so, how often?

- Never
- Once
- Not regularly, in relation with specific events (please specify below)
- Once a month or less
- A few times a month
- A few times a week
- Daily

Q5 What do you think of the overall quality of the Liberal Democrats website?

- Very good
- Good
- Average
- Poor
- Very poor
- Don't know

Q6 How useful are the following services available on Liberal Democrats website? Please indicate their usefulness using the following scale where 0 = completely useless, 6 = very useful.

	Never accessed	Completely useless	1	2	3	4	5	Very Useful
Information on current events	<input type="checkbox"/>							
Information on LD policy	<input type="checkbox"/>							
Information on the LD structure	<input type="checkbox"/>							
Information on Worldwide news	<input type="checkbox"/>							
Information on Online Campaigns	<input type="checkbox"/>							
Newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/>							
Membership application / renewal	<input type="checkbox"/>							
Commercial services endorsed by the LD	<input type="checkbox"/>							
Online feedback e.g. survey, polls.	<input type="checkbox"/>							
Links to other sites	<input type="checkbox"/>							
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>							

Additional comments:

Q7 Has use of the Liberal Democrats website or e-mail information from the Liberal Democrats ever led you to undertake any of the following activities:

	Website	E-mail
a. join Liberal Democrats	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. join other organisations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. attend a local branch meeting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. contact other members	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. volunteer some time / work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. attend a rally or demonstration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. write to the media	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. participate in a specific campaign	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. vote in a Party ballot / election	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. contact the party with your views/comments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
k. other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PLEASE GO TO Q9 BELOW

Q8 What are the reasons why you have never used the Liberal Democrats website? 0 indicates that the reason is not important, 6 that the reason is very important.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
a. I did not know Liberal Democrats had a site	<input type="checkbox"/>						
b. lack of time	<input type="checkbox"/>						
c. I prefer using traditional media	<input type="checkbox"/>						
d. cost of using the Internet at home	<input type="checkbox"/>						
e. no Internet access at work	<input type="checkbox"/>						
f. other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>						

Q9 How comfortable do you feel / would you feel using the Internet/e-mail rather than traditional means of communication to keep in touch with the Liberal Democrats? 0 means much less comfortable using the Internet/e-mail, 6 means much more comfortable using the Internet/e-mail.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Don't know
a. membership renewal	<input type="checkbox"/>							
b. receive newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/>							
c. meet other members	<input type="checkbox"/>							
d. join specific campaigns	<input type="checkbox"/>							
e. discuss issues	<input type="checkbox"/>							
f. contact the association	<input type="checkbox"/>							
g. vote on organisational policy issues	<input type="checkbox"/>							
h. vote to elect officials	<input type="checkbox"/>							
i. Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>							

Q10 What traditional means of communication do you use to keep / get in touch with the Liberal Democrats?

	Never	Did once	Occasionally	Often	On a regular basis
a. letter	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. fax	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. telephone	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. visit the Party's offices / branches	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. face to face meetings /events	<input type="checkbox"/>				
f. membership application / renewal	<input type="checkbox"/>				
g. financial donations	<input type="checkbox"/>				
h. receive print material from the Party	<input type="checkbox"/>				
i. other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Q11 In political matters, people talk of "the left" and "the right." How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking?

- 0 - LEFT
- 1
- 2
- 3 - CENTRE
- 4
- 5
- 6 - RIGHT

Q12 In general, I would define myself as:

- A political Activist
- Very Interested In Politics
- Averagely Interested In Politics
- Not Much Interested In Politics
- Not At All Interested In Politics
- Not Sure /Don't Know
- Would Rather Not Say

Q12.1 Approximately, how many hours a week do you devote to political activities?

----- Hours

Q13 For how long have you been a member of Liberal Democrats?

- 1-6 months Approximately 1 year 2-3 years 4-5 years 6 years or more
- Other (please specify)

Q14 How would you describe your involvement with the Liberal Democrats? How much effort does this require in the average month?

- I hold an official position _____ Hours
- I meet with other members _____ Hours
- I volunteer clerical work for Liberal Democrats _____ Hours
- I attend rallies / political events _____ Hours
- I attend fairs / social events _____ Hours
- I talk to friends and colleagues about Liberal Democrats _____ Hours
- I visit the Party's offices _____ Hours
- I actively campaign for Liberal Democrats _____ Hours
- I read the Party's literature _____ Hours
- I donate money to the Party _____ Hours
- Other (please specify) _____ Hours

Q15 Are you a member of any other political organisation - political party, pressure group, or other political group?

- No
- Other political party (please specify)
- Pressure group (please specify)
- Other political group (please specify)
- Don't know / Not sure
- Would rather not say

Personal details

Please answer the questions below. Be assured that your details will be treated as confidential and anonymous.

Gender

Categories: male, female, would rather not say

Age

Categories: below 18, 18 to 25, 26-35, 36-49, 50-69, Above 70, would rather not say.

Income per year

Categories: Less than £ 5,000, £ 5,000 to £ 9,999, £ 10,000 to £ 14,999, £ 15,000 to £ 24,999, £ 25,000 to £ 34,999, £ 35,000 to £ 49,999, £ 50,000 or more, would rather not say.

Education

Categories: No Qualifications, GCSE - O levels, A levels, Undergraduate degree (e.g. BA), Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA), PhD, don't know, would rather not say, Other (please specify).

Ethnic origin

Categories: White – Caucasian, Asian - Asian British, Black - Black British, Chinese, Mixed (please specify), Other (please specify), Would rather not say.

Region of residence

Categories: England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Other (please specify).

Occupation

Categories: Professional or higher technical work, Manager or Senior Administrator, Clerical, Sales or Services, Small Business Owner, Foreman or Supervisor of Other Workers, Skilled Manual Work, Semi-Skilled or Unskilled Manual Work, Student, Retired, Would rather not say, Other (please specify).

Appendix 5 – Age Concern England online survey questionnaire

The survey was administered online. A word processor version is reproduced below, which preserves questions, categories, values and questionnaire structure. The original HTML questionnaire is found online at <http://www.lusoli.info>.

Q1 How often do you use the Internet (includes the web, e-mail and Intranets):

	Never	Once a month or less	Once a week	Every other day	Daily	Many times a day
a. the web (not e-mail)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
b. e-mail	<input type="checkbox"/>					
c. closed Internet communication network (e.g. Intranet, Extranet)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
d. other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Q2 Where do you use the Internet?

	Never	Once a month or less	Once a week	Every other day	Daily	Many times a day
a. at home	<input type="checkbox"/>					
b. at work	<input type="checkbox"/>					
c. in a free, public place (e.g. library)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
d. at an Internet Café (e.g. easyeverything)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
e. at an UKonline Centre	<input type="checkbox"/>					
f. at an Age Concern IT Centre	<input type="checkbox"/>					
g. other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Q 3 How often do you use the Internet - Web, e-mail and Intranets - to get political information or to keep in touch with political life?

	Never	Once	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Every week	A few times a week	Daily
a. parliament / MP	<input type="checkbox"/>						
b. government department	<input type="checkbox"/>						
c. local council	<input type="checkbox"/>						
d. political party (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
e. trade union / professional association (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
f. pressure group (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
g. news (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
h. other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>						

Q4 How often do you access the Age Concern Website?

- I have visited it once
- Not regularly, in relation with specific events (please specify below)
- Once a month or less
- A few times a month
- A few times a week
- Daily
- Many times a day

Q5 How useful are the following services available on Age Concern website? Please indicate their usefulness using the following scale where 0 = completely useless, 6 = very useful.

	Never accessed	Completely useless	1	2	3	4	5	Very Useful
a. Information on current events	<input type="checkbox"/>							
b. Information on Age Concern policy	<input type="checkbox"/>							
c. Information on Age Concern structure	<input type="checkbox"/>							
d. Information on Online Campaigns	<input type="checkbox"/>							
e. Newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/>							
f. Online shop	<input type="checkbox"/>							
g. Online feedback e.g. e-mail, survey, polls	<input type="checkbox"/>							
h. Links to other sites	<input type="checkbox"/>							
k. Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>							

Q6 For how long have you been an e-campaigner?

- 1 month
- 2-3 months
- 4-6 months
- 7-9 months
- Approximately 1 year
- Approximately 2 years

Q7 How did you first get to know about the e-campaigning network? (please select one)

- A close friend
- An acquaintance
- A visit to the Age Concern website
- An e-mail from Age Concern
- A poster, leaflet, other printed format
- Other (please specify)

Q8 Why did you join the e-campaigning network?

Q9 How often, if ever, have you engaged in the following e-campaign activities?

	Never	Did once	Occasionally	Often	On a regular basis
a. sending an e-mail to a politician	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. sending an e-mail to the media	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. sending an e-mail to a friend	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. taking part in an online debate	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. taking part in an online poll	<input type="checkbox"/>				
f. taking part in a phone in	<input type="checkbox"/>				
g. other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Q10 How important is Age Concern co-ordination - updates, news, alerts - for your participation in e-campaigning activities?

- Very important Fairly important Not very important Not at all important

Q11 How many Age Concern updates / alerts / news do you approximately follow up?

- The odd one One in ten One in five One in three Every other Every item

Q12 In political matters, people talk of "the left" and "the right." How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking?

- 0 - LEFT
 1
 2
 3 - CENTRE
 4
 5
 6 - RIGHT

Q13 In general, I would define myself as:

- a political activist
 very interested in politics
 averagely interested in politics
 not much interested in politics
 not at all interested in politics
 not sure /don't know
 would rather not say

Q13.1 Approximately, how many hours a week do you devote to political activities?

___ Hours

Q14 For how long have you active with Age Concern?

- 1-6 months Approximately 1 year 2-3 years 4-5 years 6 years or more Other (please specify)

Q15 How would you describe your involvement with Age Concern? How much effort does this require in the average month?

- I engage in online campaign activities _____ Hours
 I hold an official position _____ Hours
 I meet with other members _____ Hours
 I volunteer clerical work for Age Concern _____ Hours
 I attend rallies / political events _____ Hours
 I attend fairs / social events _____ Hours
 I talk to friends and colleagues about Age Concern _____ Hours
 I visit Age Concern's offices _____ Hours
 I actively campaign for Age Concern _____ Hours
 I read Age Concern's literature _____ Hours
 I donate money to Age Concern _____ Pounds
 Other (please specify) _____ Hours

Q16 Are you a member of any other political organisation - political party, pressure group, or other political group?

- No
- Political party (please specify)
- Pressure group (please specify)
- Trade Union (please specify)
- Other political group (please specify)
- Don't know / Not sure
- Would rather not say

Personal details

Please answer the questions below. Be assured that your details will be treated as confidential and anonymous.

Gender

Categories: male, female, would rather not say

Age

Categories: below 18, 18 to 25, 26-35, 36-49, 50-69, Above 70, would rather not say.

Income per year

Categories: Less than £ 5,000, £ 5,000 to £ 9,999, £ 10,000 to £ 14,999, £ 15,000 to £ 24,999, £ 25,000 to £ 34,999, £ 35,000 to £ 49,999, £ 50,000 or more, would rather not say.

Education

Categories: No Qualifications, GCSE - O levels, A levels, Undergraduate degree (e.g. BA), Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA), PhD, don't know, would rather not say, Other (please specify).

Ethnic origin

Categories: White – British, White – Irish, White – Other, Black – British, Black – Caribbean, Black – African, Black – Other, Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, Chinese, Other (please specify), Would rather not say.

Region of residence

Categories: England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, USA, Other (please specify).

Occupation

Categories: Professional or higher technical work, Manager or Senior Administrator, Clerical, Sales or Services, Small Business Owner, Foreman or Supervisor of Other Workers, Skilled Manual Work, Semi-Skilled or Unskilled Manual Work, Student, Retired, Would rather not say, Other (please specify).

Appendix 6 – Declaration of originality and involvement in joint research work

The author hereby declares that the dissertation conforms to the regulations of the University of London as concerns originality. Specifically, all critical assumptions, analyses, interpretation and reporting of results offered in this dissertation are the author's own and sole work. The overall framing, statistical elaboration and analysis, and interpretation of the analysis and models proposed in this dissertation are sole and original work of this author. Narrative analysis, text and descriptions accompanying the dissertation's tables and figures, and conclusions drawn from such analyses are the author's own and sole work. To allow the full auditing of this statement, this author's involvement in research tools design, data collection and the dissemination of results reported in the dissertation is specified below.

[Schedule 1] Involvement in joint research work, Project 1

The author was involved in joint research work in the framework of the research project 'Internet, participation and political organisations' (<http://www.ipop.org.uk>) funded under the ESRC Democracy and Participation Programme (Grant L215252036). The project was directed by the principal applicants Dr. Rachel K. Gibson and Dr. Stephen Ward, while the author worked as research officer on the project between August 2001 and December 2003. The author contributed to the development of the public opinion questionnaire as part of a research team comprising the principal applicants. Specifically, the author undertook the survey review and literature review preliminary to the preparation of the questionnaire, between September and December 2001, and was involved between January 2002 and April 2002 in the co-operative process of definition of questionnaire structure, questions ordering and wording. Liberal Democrat survey data was collected with the help of the Liberal Democrats Webmaster – Dr. Mark Pack – with party approval, in the framework of the ESRC project described above. The questionnaire was co-designed by Dr. Stephen Ward, the author and the Liberal Democrats Webmaster. Age Concern England survey data was collected with the co-operation of the organisation; the members' questionnaire was designed by the author and revised by the Head of Campaigns at ACE, Emma Aldridge, in the framework of the ESRC research project. All data from the ESRC project were deposited with the UK Data Archive in November 2003 (<http://www.data-archive.ac.uk>) and are available for academic use; copyright of deposited data jointly rests with the grant's principal investigators, Dr. Rachel K. Gibson and Dr. Stephen Ward, the present author and the University of Salford. Results from joint ESRC work are marked with a note to the text including full details of the publication and page number, and are referenced in the bibliography. Specifically:

- A paper based on survey results was presented at the 2002 APSA conference (Gibson, Lusoli, & Ward, 2002a). The paper was accepted for publication by the British Journal of Politics and International Relations.
- Results based on the full LD sample were published in the Information Polity (Ward, Lusoli, & Gibson, 2003).
- A paper comparing the LD complete survey with a separate Labour Party survey was presented at the 2003 APSA conference (Lusoli & Ward, 2003), and published in the British Journal of Politics and International Relations (Lusoli & Ward, 2004).
- Parts of Chapter 2 and Chapter 5 of a proposed co-authored book by the principal applicants and the candidate (Gibson, Lusoli, & Ward, 2006) will be based on Chapter 4 and Chapter 7 respectively of this dissertation. A note will be included in the book that makes the candidate's contribution explicit.

I certify that this [schedule 1] is a true record of Wainer Lusoli's contribution to our joint work.

Dr. Stephen Ward

[Schedule 2] Involvement in joint research work, Project 2

Data from the principal case [DemocracyForum] were collected in co-operation with the Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government. The author designed the content analysis framework autonomously; the case's final questionnaire was co-authored by the author and Emilie Norman at the Hansard Society. Frequencies from the content analysis of the Hansard Society consultation were drafted and presented by Prof. Stephen Coleman to the Public Administration Select Committee, in a Memorandum as well as during a witness question session (Minutes of evidence, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c). The overall framing, analysis, and interpretations of the HS evidence proposed here are sole and original work of this author.

I certify that this [schedule 2] is a true record of Wainer Lusoli's contribution to our joint work.

Prof. Stephen Coleman

I certify that this [schedule 1 and schedule 2] is a true record of the candidate's joint research activities over the course of his doctoral work.

Dr Margaret Scammell

Appendix 7 – Data sources of micro studies

Work	Data specifications
(Bimber, 1998a)	Author's online survey, July 1996 – August 1997. N = 5560; also see (Bimber 1999).
(Bimber, 1999)	Author's online survey, July 1996 – August 1997. N = 13,122, weighted by age, gender and education of Internet users from the author's US national RDD conducted in the same period (N = 730).
(Bimber, 2003)	ANES 1998 and 2000.
(Bonchek, Hurwitz, & Mallery, 1996)	Authors' online survey of White House document users, open sample, January 1996. Base N = 18000, screening N = 1472, final N = 1071. 79% returned by e-mail, 21% by web.
(Bonfadelli, 2002)	WEMF (AG für Werbemedienforschung), 'MA Net' representative sample of 10,000 Swiss residents, telephone interviews, for Internet access in 1999 and 2000. For Internet use and activities, 'MA Comis' survey of Swiss computer users who use the Internet at least several times per month at home, 1999 (n = 853) and 2000 (n = 1757), out of a representative sample of n = 2000 computers users.
(Coleman & Hall, 2001)	MORI's General Public Omnibus Survey, N = 1999 adults, face-to-face home interviews, 21-26 June 2001(post-election). At this time point, Internet access is comparable to American access in the 1998 election at about one in three adults (18+).
(DOP, 1999)	Survey of US Internet users who are registered and intend to vote in the 2000 election, N = 1205 RDD CATI, November 1999.
(Gwinn Wilkins, 2000)	Author's survey of N = 257 US citizens resident in Texas, RDD. Response rate: 41 %.
(H. L. Park, 2002)	ANES 1996 and 2000.
(Harwood & Lay, 2001)	Social Capital Benchmark Survey, RDD, N = 3003 US adults, July-November 2000. Political capital is composed of political efficacy, interest in politics and trust in local and national government.
(Hindman, 2002)	General Social Survey (GSS) 2000 Computer supplement.
(J. E. Katz & Rice, 2002)	Author's survey, November 1996. US post-election RDD, N = 577, and a US RDD of Internet users, N = 450. Adult Internet users only, N = 405.
(Jennings & Zeitner, 2003)	University of Michigan's long-term socialization project survey. Longitudinal survey, initial 1965 sample: N = 1669 high school seniors (18 YO) from stratified sample of US schools. Response rate: 86 %. 1997 wave: face-to-face and telephone interviews, N = 953, retention rate: 56 %. For children: self-completion questionnaire, 1997, N = 321 (19-24 YO) and N = 315 (24 + YO).

Work	Data specifications
(Jensen, 2003)	Author's survey of Minnesota e-democracy participants. Proportional random sample of 50 % of the subscribers, N = 242, 33 % response rate.
(Kaye & Johnson, 2002)	Authors' online survey of N = 308 politically interested users, October-November 1996.
(Krueger, 2002)	Centre for Survey Research Analysis RDD, N = 646 Internet users (70 % of total sample), April 2002. CATI.
(Larsen & Rainie, 2002)	Princeton Survey Research Associates, RDD telephone interviews, 3-31 January 2002; N = 2391 US adults, 18 and older – n = 1451 Internet users.
(Livingstone, Bober, & Helsper, 2004).	Authors' survey of N = 1511 children (9-19 years old) and N = 906 parents, 12 January – 7 March 2004. Conducted by BMRB, random location sample, CAPI in-home for children; self-completed paper questionnaire for parents. Results reported here are based on children using the Internet at least once a week.
(McIntosh & Harwood, 2002)	See (Harwood & Lay, 2001)
(Muhlberger & Shane, 2001)	Carnegie Mellon University survey, 2000 (dates not specified), N = 524 Pittsburgh adult residents, postal, stratified by gender, age, estimated household income, and geographical location; response rate = 61 %.
(Muhlberger, 2004)	See (Muhlberger & Shane, 2001)
(Neuman, 1999)	ANES 1996
(Norris & Jones, 1998)	See (Norris, 1999b)
(Norris, 1999a)	EB 44.2 spring 1996; EB 47.0 spring 1997; EB 50.1 fall 1998; EB 51.0 spring 1999.
(Norris, 1999b)	The Pew Research Center Technology Online Survey, N = 1993 Internet user drawn from a representative phone survey (total N = 3184), 6-10 November 1998.
(NTT, 2002)	Stratified two-stages random sample of 2,036 respondents (68 % response rate) of 18-75 YO Japanese citizens self-administered in May 2002.
(OPA, 2003)	CSRA survey, N = 642 American adult Internet users, RDD CATI, 14 April –28 May 2003. Voter n = 496, non-voter n = 114.
(Owen, 2003)	Pew 'Parents, kids and the Internet', October 2000, N = 754 children (12-17 year old) who go online paired with one parent.
(Owen, 2003)	Pew 'Parents, kids and the Internet', October 2000, N = 754 children (12-17 year old) who go online paired with one parent. Also see (Pew, 2000)
(Paolino & Shaw, 2003)	ICPSR study no. 2850. Marketwatch survey, N = 1652, September 29 - October 3, 1999.

Work	Data specifications
(Pew, 2000)	Pew Research Centre for the People & the Press, '2000 Campaign and the Internet'. US nationwide sample, N = 8378 adults, October 10 – November 26, 2000, CATI. N = 4186 Internet users, N = 1435 online news consumers.
(R. Brown & Svennevig, 1999)	Futura.com project, University of Leeds (http://www.leeds.ac.uk/ics/res-cent.htm). Longitudinal survey of UK adults (base N = 6918), August 1998 wave, random sample, postal, N = 3185, weighted results.
(Gibson & Ward, 1999b)	EB 46.1, October-November 1996, N = 17,187.
(Gibson, Howard, & Ward, 2000)	See (Wellman, Quan Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001). Australia (n = 804), Canada (n = 2215), the UK (n = 733), and the United States (n = 16,088). Reference N = 23,886, total N = 19,880.
(Riedel et al., 2003)	authors' postal survey of two Minnesota communities, Grand Rapids (N = 401 and N = 269) and Detroit Lakes (N = 404 and N = 301) and other two control community, in 1997 and 1999. Total sample N = 1870 is used in the analysis.
(Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002)	authors' survey of N = 468 residents of Tompkins County, at the 1999 New York election. RDD, 42 % response rate.
(SDA, 2001)	WIP Italian component. RDD sample of Italian residents, N = 1006, December 2001, CATI.
(Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001) (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001)	DDB Life Style Study survey, 1998 and 1999 waves. Total N = 6738 US adults. N = 5000 postal panel, stratified quota sampling adjusted for race, gender, and marital status within household income, population density, age, and household size. N = 3350 in 1998, N = 3388 in 1999.
(Stromer-Galley, Foot, Schneider, & Larsen, 2001)	13 in-home two-hours focus groups (n = 78), New Hampshire (US) in January 2000.
(Tolbert & McNeal, 2001, , 2003)	ANES 1996 and 2000.
(Tolbert & Mossberger, 2003)	Kent State University's survey of N = 1837 US adults, composed from high poverty U.S. census tracts and a control group; RDD, CATI, July 2001.
(Uslaner, 2004)	Pew Internet and American Life Project Trust and Privacy survey; RDD, CATI, N = 2117 US adults, 19 May –21 June 2000.
(Welch & Hinnant, 2003)	Hart/Teeter survey for the US Council for Excellence in Government. N = 806 US adults, RDD stratified by geographic area, over-sample of n = 155 Internet users, 12-19 November 2001.
(Wellman, Quan Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001)	National Geographic 'Survey 2000', online non-representative sample, N = 39211 North-Americans, September-November 1998.
(West, 2004)	Hart/Teeter survey, N = 1003 US adults, RDD stratified by geographical location, over sample n = 200 frequent Internet users, 14-16 August 2000.

Work	Data specifications
(Wilhelm, 1997)	US Current Population Survey (CPS), November 1994. Approximate N = 157,000 (56,100 household sampling points)
(Witte & Howard, 1999)	See (Wellman, Quan Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001)

Note: Data specification is not reported for major studies such as the ANES, EB and GSS.

Acronyms, shorthand and glossary

ACE	Age Concern England. Registered charity concerned with older people's issues. http://www.ace.org.uk
BBS	Bulletin Board System. Dial-up message board, hosted on remote computer or server.
Blog	Shorthand for WebLog, a highly recursive form of diary posted to the Web (→). Blogs allow for user comments, back-tracking and syndication.
DF	Democracy Forum – online consultation on electronic democracy. First consultation run by the HS (→).
E-mail	(also e-mail). Protocol which allows for the distribution of messages over a TCP-IP (→) connection. By extension, also refers to the message transmitted.
GUI	Graphical User Interface. Software protocol which allows for the graphical visualisation and management of information (as opposed to command-line based).
HS	Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government. Non-partisan quango concerned with representation and citizen participation in the UK. http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk
HTML	Programming language which embeds hyper-links (→) and objects in linear texts, thus connecting them across the Internet (→).
Hyper-link	(also link) Main system of navigation of the Internet (→). Based on an embedded point-and-click, graphical referring system.
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies. Includes personal computers, servers, telephones, mobile phones, satellites, portable computing devices etc.
Internet	Network of ICTs (→) networks.
Internet access	Individual availability of access to the Internet (→). Includes household, access, workplace access, public shared access and commercial shared access.
LD	Liberal Democrats, UK's third party in terms of representative elected to the HoC (→). http://www.libdems.org.uk
Non-user	Person who does not use the Internet, regardless of Internet access.
PASC	The UK House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee. http://www.parliament.uk/commons/selcom/pubahome.htm
SES	Socio-Economic Status. Explanatory model based on economic, social and status indicators to predict participation.
TCP-IP	Transfer Control Protocol – Internet Protocol. Addressing and routing protocols that allow computers and servers running different operating systems to exchange information. The very foundations of the Internet (→).
URL	Unique Resource Locator. Unique identifier of files and documents available on the Internet. Usually begins with http, ftp, telnet, or any other

	file transfer protocol.
User	Person who has utilizes the Internet.
WWW	World Wide Web. Also called the Web Net, is the hyper-linked (→) ensemble of texts available on the Internet.

Page numbers and other position markers are sometimes missing from online sources, which makes quoting and referencing complicated. Where text was divided in blocks, paragraph numbers (¶) have been used to mark quotations. In addition, online resources' URLs (→) are occasionally unstable. I have amended the 'APA Published' referencing style to include URL, download date, editor information and other relevant information where available. Electronic or paper copies of material no longer online are available on request from the author (w.lusoli@lse.ac.uk).

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