The Subultern and Alternative Public Sphere: Exploring New Pathways Women Use to Engage Information Technology in Kenya

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Women have had to turn to alternative spaces, because the mainstream is closed. Within these spaces.... you find that women speak, because it is less official, not formal...the absence of men opens the space here for women to communicate freely.  

ABSTRACT
The impact of new media on the public sphere in Kenya has generated interesting reflections over the last decades. The rise of modern media is seen as playing a significant role in the emergence of ideas, identities, and discourses that continue to shape women’s identities. The advent of the internet in particular has raised academic concern of its potential for democratic communications, an ideal diminishing in the mainstream media. The reviving discourses on the public sphere have drawn attention of how the alternative media could mobilize civil participation by use of the Internet. A turn from technological determination to elaborative analysis of social context and actors has emerged, when diversity of online media is recognized. This paper discusses the public sphere in Kenya from the perspective of women's uses of information and communication technologies. I argue that the sociopolitical transformations unfolding as a result of globalisation in Kenya are not taking place in the absence of women's contribution and participation. Drawing on examples from Kenya, I demonstrate how women are shaping, impacting, and redefining the public sphere by producing alternative discourses and images about womanhood, citizenship, and political participation in their societies particularly how they strategically use old and new media to participate in the production and dissemination of alternative knowledge and the creation of transgressive spaces and when they traverse these spaces they do so constructively or positively while men I argue do the opposite.

INTRODUCTION
In the night of December 2007, the Election Commission of Kenya declared Mwai Kibaki to be the winner of the country’s election, the count of which was considered by both national and international observers as flawed, possibly rigged. On January 22, 2008 international reports began to appear, claiming that media, and particularly local vernacular radio stations in Kenya, were responsible for fanning ethnic hatred and fuelling violence. The reports echoed previous such allegations, including around the 2005 referendum campaign in Kenya. While the mainstream media has been praised for trying to calm the situation, people within and outside the media argue that it has failed to live up to professional and ethical

1 Patricia A. Made, Women, Creating Spaces of their own
standards and has contributed to the crisis.\textsuperscript{2} The role of the media and communication in democratic governance is the subject of increasing attention from international development actors. The situation in Kenya has potentially profound implications for and lessons relevant to many other countries. More interestingly, it should be observed, while media was used to fuel violence as others have claimed, it should be known that same media was used to promote peace and reconciliation among Kenyans. This brings critical issue of academic concern. How do Kenyans use communication gadgets? Are there gender differences in such use? This paper argues that women use the internet and mobile phones especially during recent post election violence to promote peace and offer prayers, while men used the same avenues to promote hate and violence. Internet and mobile phones presents alternative spaces where women can traverse and communicate freely and constructively.

Not long ago, in her seminal work on \textit{psychological theory and women's development}, Carol Gilligan argued that ‘to have a voice is to be human but to have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act’.\textsuperscript{3} Even within emerging democracies in the region, the spaces for women’s voices are still limited and silenced in both perilous and pernicious ways. And since women comprise about 50% of the population in Kenya, their restricted voices are a threat to real democratic change since the right to communicate is central to meaningful democratic participation in all spheres of society, especially in the public space:

\begin{quote}
\textit{It is now widely accepted that the respect for the right to freedom of expression is central to democracy and sustainable development. Conversely it is clear that the violations of the right to freedom of expression in a particular country or region are an important ‘early warning’ indicator of potentially more serious conflict and violations of human rights in the future.}\textsuperscript{4}
\end{quote}

The restriction on women’s right to communicate, to speak, is intricately linked to their inability to exercise and claim their other rights. Without the power of a voice that is listened to, women are kept within the confines of the second-class citizenship status that they endure in many countries within the region. ‘Women need to be able to speak on public issues in

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{2}] The Kenyan 2007 elections and their aftermath: the role of media and communication, BBC Policy Briefing 1, 2008
\item[\textsuperscript{3}] Carol Gilligan, \textit{In A Different Voice}, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1982, 1993, p.8
\end{itemize}
public spaces. But the public is formal, official and established according to male rules and norms, which make this space uncomfortable for women. Women fear that when they speak their words and issues will be trivialized, or they fear a backlash which comes in various ways to send the message that if women speak in the public ‘this is wrong’. One of the largest public spaces where everyone should have the right to speak and communicate is what I refer here as an alternative sphere. But global monitoring and research studies continuously show that women’s access to expression in and through the media is low.\(^5\)

Although the Internet and cell phones have frequently been characterized as male-dominated terrains, recent evidence particularly from researches based on 2007 general election in Kenya indicates that the gender gap particularly in internet use is rapidly diminishing. Women are catching up to men in most measures of online life. Men like the internet for the experiences it offers, while women like it for the human connections it promotes. In Kenya, there is also a rapidly growth in public Internet access centers such as Internet kiosks, cybercafes and internet services in hotels, schools, business centers, police stations and clinics. The public access service is common since institutions and individuals can share the cost of equipment and access amongst a larger number of users. Organizations such as the Kenya Information Society (KIS) have set-up community access centers for marginalised communities especially women based on the same principle. Africa Online, the largest ISP in the continent, offers similar services through the e-Touch franchise programme in which local stores are provided with computers to offer email and Internet access. A recent report indicates that:

*More than men, women are enthusiastic online communicators, and they use email in a more robust way. Women are more likely than men to use email to write to friends and family about a variety of topics: sharing news and worries, planning events, forwarding jokes and funny stories. Women are more likely to feel satisfied with the role email plays in their lives, especially when it comes to nurturing their relationships. And women include a wider range of topics and activities in their personal emails. Men use email more than women to communicate with various kinds of organizations.*\(^6\)


Critical question is therefore, if more females are using the Internet, then what specific applications do they prefer and do they differ from those of males? This paper presents results from a survey assessing gender differences in specific uses of the Internet. The ethnological survey was conducted in cyber cafes in Nakuru Town. Numerous gender differences in preferences for specific Internet applications emerged. Results showed that males use the Internet mainly for purposes related to entertainment and leisure, these includes pornography, incitement, and hate messages whereas women use it primarily for interpersonal communication and educational assistance. Whereby they engage in spiritual matters such as sending moral email ‘fowards’ etc

It will be recalled that the relationship between women and the public sphere is recognised as a site of critical inquiry and contestation in the struggle for women’s empowerment. The public sphere is not only a discursive location that is historically constructed. It also comprises sets of physical spaces which reveal differences in representation at various levels. While new modes of participatory governance emphasize the importance of the public sphere as a space for democratic deliberation, it remains to be seen whether they also empower women to raise issues of particular interest to themselves.

In view of this gender difference, it is not surprising that women's discourse tends to be more tentative and socially oriented in contrast to men who tend to be more categorical. Furthermore, women show a proclivity to highlight cooperation in their discourse while men tend to be competitive. As a result, men's conversation often has a hidden agenda of achieving and maintaining social standing. For men, discourse tends to be a struggle to preserve independence. By contrast, women's communication is inclined toward seeking and confirming intimacy, support, and consensus. As the report previously discussed holds:

*Women are more likely to see the vast array of online information as a “glut” and to penetrate deeper into areas where they have the greatest interest, including health and religion. Women tend to treat information gathering online as a more textured and interactive process – one that includes gathering and exchanging information through support groups and personal email exchanges.*

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9 Fallows, How Men and women use internet, p.5
These differences are also evident in problem solving communications where men tend to use discourse to solve the problem while women use it to show empathy solidarity, and mutual support.\textsuperscript{10} Such gender-based distinctions have been supported by many case studies by Johnson\textsuperscript{11} and Tannen\textsuperscript{12} While there is a debate about whether oral differences are biological in origin there is little doubt that girls learn to speak sooner than boys. Current research relates gender variation in language development to linguistic environments that socialize children into gender roles\textsuperscript{13}. Indeed, many languages force a gender distinction that socializes gender roles.\textsuperscript{14} Even in languages where there is no gender distinction, boys and girls grow up in different unisex cultures, usually playing in same-sex groups. This directly affects learned discourse patterns because boys tend to play hierarchically-structured outside games with rules, boasts, and winners and losers while girls tend to play indoor games, without orders or winners and losers\textsuperscript{15}.

Finally, research on social stereotypes has shown that feminine behavior is often stereo- typed as being tactful, gentle, loquacious, and aware of the feelings of others. While masculine behavior is stereotyped as aggressive, independent, unemotional, logical, and competitive\textsuperscript{16} feminine stereotypes, it is claimed, are associated with "a people-centered approach".\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, gender traits are attributed by Hofstede to his MAS cultural dimension, where men are "assertive" and women "nurturing" \textsuperscript{18} it will be seen that such attributes are critical and useful when trying to examine gender behaviour in the recent electoral violence in Kenya.

\section*{THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE}

Theorizing about how the Internet is changing society as we know it has become a hot topic of sociological debate and research. In conjunction with its macroscale change potential, the Internet has generated sociological speculation over transformations it may unleash at

\textsuperscript{10} Coates, p. 16
\textsuperscript{12} Tannen, D. Gender and Discourse, Oxford University Press, New York, 1994.
\textsuperscript{13} Coates, p. 20
\textsuperscript{14} Adler, M. K. Sex Differences in Human Speech, Helmut Buske Verlag, Hamburg, 1978.
\textsuperscript{16} Doyle, J. A. Sex and Gender: The Human Experience, Dubuque, IA, 1985.
\textsuperscript{18} Hofstede, G. Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work Related Values, Sage, London, 1980.
society's microlevel. In particular, scholars theorize the way Internet use impacts how we come to understand the self-how we experience our identities in a disembodied form. And, while some view with excitement its potential for liberation, others see interactions with and in cyberspace as exacerbating already existing relations of oppression. One axis of power that has come under considerable scrutiny is gender.

The sheer size of the Internet lends credence to contradictory arguments: It may, simultaneously, support the position of defenders of the Enlightenment, such as Jürgen Habermas, who claim that it best approximates an ideal-speech situation of unfettered discourse, the public sphere in which social life is constructed and reproduced and through which truth is constructed in the absence of communication barriers. Conversely, the bewildering cacophony of voices and perspectives exemplifies Jean-Francois Lyotard's notion of mutually unintelligible electronic communities in a postmodern age. Following Henri Lefebvre, the Internet is both a representational space and a representation of space: Because all representations reflect vested interests, there can be no value-free, apolitical discourse, electronic or otherwise. Despite manifest discrepancies in access to the Net, its very size and popularity have made cyberactivism an essential part of progressive (and reactionary) politics in the 1990s.

Social psychologist David Schnarch reports that sex is the most popular topic searched on the World Wide Web. Clearly, society at large is keenly interested in this subject. Sandra R. Leiblum asserts that the Internet can play a positive role in improving the quality of sex lives. Sexism in cyberspace manifests itself in multiple ways. The fact that the Internet was originally designed by the DOD and was male-dominated from its inception means that the few activities that take place were structured primarily by men. Not surprisingly, most Internet subscribers are men, resulting in a male-dominated cyberculture. Kimberly J. Cook

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and Phoebe M. Stambaugh\textsuperscript{24} state that the problem for women is that men got there first; thus cyberspace reflects male socialization and interests.

Nevertheless, a growing number of complaints about the hostile climate for women and unwanted sexual advances and sexual harassment has been reported by institutions supporting Internet access. And, in gender-balanced and, even in female-dominated discussion groups, men reproduce sexual inequality by engaging in dominant conversational styles, leaving far more and far longer messages. Yet, conversely, women use the Internet to resist sexism and empower themselves by creating a sense of community. Women tap into its many e-mail discussion lists to exchange information and give and receive support. Moreover, the Web is replete with e-zines written by young women about issues of importance to them.

**THE ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN KENYA AND GENDER DEFERENCES IN INTERNET AND MOBILE USE**

**DAMNING MESSAGES VS MESSAGES OF HOPE**

Knowledge and power are inseparable, as theorists such as Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault have long pointed out. Use of the Internet for electronic surveillance and monitoring is well documented\textsuperscript{25} Some governments have come to fear the Net for its emancipatory capabilities. The Chinese government, for example, was stung by students' use of faxes and e-mail during the 1989 Tienanmen Square massacre. It was especially aggrieved at their use of a network-ChinaNet -based at Stanford University, so it began in early 1996 to limit access to Internet nodes.\textsuperscript{26} This episode had similar parallels in the Kenyan experience as it unfolded on the eve of the 2007 elections. Sms and emails were used extensively to fuel animosity and divide ethnic groups. In my analysis of texts and messages in Nakuru cyber, 60% of such messages were forwarded by men. Examples of such is quoted below:

\begin{quote}
Railas adventures led to many innocent deaths in the 1982 coup attempt A Nationalist......with no national constituency He wants to destroy the Nairobi Stock Exchange Calls every small investor a drug dealer and He has branded a large
\end{quote}


section of Kenyans "enemies" and Has what it takes to destroy Kenyans to the Congo or Rwanda like country Join other Kenyan's in rejecting this great destructive man. Forward this to 1,000,000 people

Such messages it can be argued, served to illustrate the extent to which citizens, not just voters, perceived the December elections not just as a means to changing a government but, even more critically, as an important way of engaging with the discursive of nationhood. But why is it that men forward such messages of hate? Consider the following text:

Reasons why I will not vote for Raila Odinga: All tribes other than the Luo circumcise their males as mark of transition from boyhood to manhood. The Luo initiate by removing the six upper teeth. This guy is uncut (by his own admission) and has all his 32 teeth. Raila is a tribalist and hates all Kikuyus passionately. Raila is denying, without being accused at least publicly that he hates Kikuyus. His earlier comments tell a different story. Remember the comment he made that Uhuru was the only good Kikuyu when they were both in ODM? Raila is accusing PNU of creating Raila phobia among the Kikuyu. Raila is creating Kikuyu phobia among everyone else as did Moi throughout his rule. (Circulated in Kikuyu dialect).

In a related but different context, an informant stated that the outbreak of violence in several part of the Rift Valley province on December 30th happened spontaneously because it was coordinated via sms. Whether or not this was the case, this case serves to illustrate the efficacy of sms as a tool for mobilization. Text above also shows that correspondents are aware their playful engagement with words is also a serious critique of democratic practice.

Metaphor and euphemism are another critical structural element that is extensively applied in email and sms-lore. For our purposes, it is significant that these metaphors render the competition for power in terms of sexuality. The texts below are taken perceived to have been forwarded by men and they satirize PNU’s (Kazi iendelee) and ODM-K’s ‘Wiper’ slogan—the latter is derived from the practice of crowds waving back to preachers at Christian rallies:

Campaign can b fun! At dawn when ODM is already out, PNU men can still be heard from their bedrooms whispering; PANUA KAZI IENDELEE while ODM-K men r still being told; niko wet, NIPATIE WIPER.
In colloquial Kiswahili, *kazi* means sex, and the suggestion then is that ODM men (predominantly Luo) are better than those in the other parties because they finish ‘working’ on their women early. The play between the acronym PNU and the Kiswahili ‘panua’[open] is aimed at depicting the mainly Gikuyu men in that party as ineffectual lovers who have to plead for sex from their women (“open so we can continue with the job”). On the other hand, the males in ODM-K (perceived to be a party for the Akamba) are ridiculed for going to bed with women who have been ‘worked’ to exhaustion which is an allusion of the stereotype of the Akamba as promiscuous. Texts have a direct bearing on this perception: “Under Kalonzo’s government, sex will be legalized and free”; “With Ngilu in, the pentagon becomes sexagon. No wonder they have been singing ‘*bado matombano’*[Kiswahili: intercourse has not begun]”. Similar wordplay is noticeable in the following variant of text:

*Why you should be in ODM. ODM women scream YAWA,YAWA,YAWA in praise of Nyundo while men in PNU are busy telling their wives to  PANUA PANUA ili kazi iendelee. Women in ODM-K are so wet that their men keep asking WAPI WIPPER!!!!*

In another text, similar sexists messages are fowadred: *Desperate 4 votes from sex workers, Kibaki has now declared Koinange street a full district, ati ndio kazi iendelee…) It alludes to the practice of illicit sex; voters are likened to prostitutes through the invocation of Koinange Street while the reference to voters being ‘screwed’ (which reference ‘intercourse’ in above) indicates an awareness on the writer’s part that politicians are deceitful lot out to take advantage of voters. The extensive use of sexual metaphor might be accounted for if we consider the fact that Kenyan politics is predominantly a masculine space.27 It is thus common linguistic practice to figure political opponents as subdued, conquered females as a means of claiming one’s ‘superior’ masculinity and hence power.28

In the above text for instance, Kibaki’s vote seeking, by its linguistic *faux pas*, is likened to a desire to penetrate both female and male voters. The reality of voters “being screwed” by politicians is all too common and Kenyans are thus being cautioned about the danger of falling for contestants’ tricks during the elections.

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BLOGS vs SMS AS ALTERNATIVE SPHERES: WOMEN AND MESSAGES OF HOPE

Unlike sms which could be used by anyone in Kenya so long as they had a phone, use of the internet was somewhat limited in the sense that it requires much more sophisticated infrastructure (power, a computer, phone line and internet connection) and computer literacy. As such, urban residents used cyberspace interaction more than those in rural areas. However, this is not to underestimate the potency of the messages that were circulated through the internet. Like, sms, cyberspace-based discussions were also fed on rumor and information from the press. Two main forms of engagement were utilized. First there were mass e-mails that would be authored and then be endlessly edited as appropriate before being forwarded by both known and anonymous correspondents; here we have only used selected texts as the number is overwhelming. Then there are the ‘ethnic’ websites in which Kenyans debate and (re)define their identities in relation to specific questions (culture, politics, economics amongst others. See Odhiambo, 2007).

Popular sites include: www.jaluo.com (the subject of Odhiambo’s analysis), www.kikuyu.com, kalenjin.com, kisii.com. While some discussion sites are named to obscure an ethnic component amongst others) discussions therein nevertheless often entail recourse to ethnic othering. Even the ethnically marked sites are not mere platforms for the expression of a cultural imaginary. These sorts of ideas are woven back and forth between chatrooms, e-mail, sms and eventually everyday conversation. This is the manner in which for instance the “emptying” of the Gikuyu from the Rift Valley (“there is nary any Kikuyu in any other province”) and that survivors be confined to Central and Eastern provinces was celebrated and ironed out into a ‘logical’ proposition.29

Stories about the power and utility of the internet abound. Many analysts assert that the impact of the internet in developed countries is, or will be, as significant as the volume and variety of information that one finds in cyber-space. With regard to developing countries many maintain the internet based technologies are sine qua non for rapid political, social, and economic development. For example Randy Bush, a prominent internet development specialist, accepts what he calls the apple pie assumptions. He believes that the internet is inherently good, and that policies that promote both internet connectivity and use, can and

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29 E-mail ‘discussion’ circulated by some US-based Kenyan scholars.
will promote development and improve the quality of human life developing countries. Other users, analysts, and policy makers seem to concur. Consider just a few examples of the impact of the Internet on journalism and free press, democracy and freedom, and economic development or email forwards that majority of women use in communication of promoting peace, harmony, understanding of good relationships and so on.

In 2007, it seems from the selected cyber cafes in Nakuru that, more women than men send and receive email, and they use it in a richer and more engaging way. Women are more likely than men to use email to write to friends and family about a variety of topics, from sharing news and worries to planning events to forward jokes and funny stories. Men and women both appreciate email for its efficiencies and convenience, but women are more likely to feel satisfied with the role of email in their lives, especially when it comes to nurturing their relationships. Take a look at this:

_A Friend Is Like A GoodBra... Hard to Find, Supportive, Comfortable Always Lifts You Up  Never Lets You Down or Leaves You Hanging And Is Always Close To Your Heart!!! Share this with a friend! I DID_

Or this one titled ‘Long live Bachelors’

_Every man should get married some time; after all, happiness is not the only thing in life !! –Anonymous, Bachelors should be heavily taxed. It is not fair that some men should be happier than others. I don't worry about terrorism. I was married for two years. _-Sam Kinison_

The many progressive uses of the Internet include the dissemination of documents, graphics, and frequently asked questions (FAQs) for teaching; announcements of conferences; communication among like-minded people via the Usenet or listservs; e-mail petitions; software that can be downloaded; and information about potential resources, events, and problems pertaining to action. Countless groups use the Net for their own political interests and agendas: civil and human rights advocates, sustainable-development activists, antiracist and antisexist organizations, gay and lesbian rights groups, religious movements, supporters

of ethnic or national identities and causes, anarchists, socialists and social democrats, Marxists of many stripes, youth movements, militia watchdogs, antihistorical revisionists, peace and disarmament par-ties, nonviolent-action supporters and pacifists, and animal-rights spokespeople.

Women like other marginalized people who are unable to express their needs and identities in the so-called real world, can share interests and experiences in interactive discussion forums (chat rooms), forming classic "communities without propinquities," spaces of shared interest without physical proximity. On a more macabre note, the Internet has facilitated the efforts of such groups to discuss freely different issues touching on economic justice and an antipathy to discrimination based on race, sex, age, religion, or sexual preference.

While it is true to say that e-mails were more limited than sms in terms of penetration, it is also correct to argue that their content was more virulent. This might be due to the fact that unlike text messages that can only take up a limited number of characters, they afford correspondents enough space to vent pent-up emotions. Usually writing an e-mail takes more time and it is therefore assumed that the words that are committed to print are the product of deeper reflection than is the case with sms that are often composed and sent on the spur of the moment. E-mail messages before the elections were mainly propagandistic with writers pitching for their preferred presidential candidates by drawing out ‘proof” and equally vilifying the other contestants for the top seat. Writers were still hopeful that their man would win. However, there is a conspicuous shift in tone in post-election e-mails. Interestingly here we find that such hoe messages were forwarded by women. Apart from the two main sms messages carried by Safaricom and Kencel service providers:

From Safaricom: *In the interest of peace, we appeal to Kenyans to embrace each other in the spirit of patriotism, and exercise restraint to restore calm to our nation.*

From Celtel: *The Government of Kenya advises you not to take part in any unlawful assembly that may result in violence!*

The rest were perceived by my respondents as female communicators and the following were such messages:

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Today is a day 4 prayers 4 those who are suffering, 4 those planning more atrocities to freeze n c the face of God in those they treat as enemies, 4 us to repent coz our sins have brought a curse upon us n our families.

HIGH ALERT! Let us form a Prayer chain today at 9.30 am praying for peace in the country & surely peace will prevail. Kindly pass this 2 as many people as u can.

For Jaramogi loved Kenyans that he gave his only son Raila that whosoever believe in him shall live in eternal life of happiness.

At the same time, not only were women engaging in political messages but also on other matters that they considered crucial to their existence. Examples of messages such as this one, is used to reinforce social cohesion and ironically show the damning effects of a marital relationship:

Every man should get married some time; after all, happiness is not the only thing in life !! –Anonymous, Bachelors should be heavily taxed. It is not fair that some men should be happier than others. I don't worry about terrorism. I was married for two years. -

Or another example of what is dubbed as ‘romance mathematics’ just shows how women can use such spaces to reflect on certain puzzles in their lives:

Smart = an + smart = oman = romance
Smart man + = dumb woman = affair
Dumb man + = smart woman = marriage
Dumb man + = umb woman = pregnancy

or sometimes to spread messages on happiness and showing the unique place of a woman in a marital relationship. Consider the following messages forwarded by women:

A woman worries about the future until she gets a husband.

A man never worries about the future until he gets a wife.

A successful man is one who makes more money than his wife can spend. A successful woman is one who can find such a man.

To be happy with a man, you must understand him a lot and love him a little. To be happy with a woman, you must love her a lot and not try to understand her at all.
The above brief samples suggest the vast possibilities of the Internet, ranging from the profound to the trivial. Indeed, the veritable glut of information, and corresponding overload, of such resources presents a distinct danger. Web sites offer a bewildering, confusing array of insights and contradictory claims. What seems to be lacking on the Net is knowledge, not data. Knowledge entails a critical capacity to make judgments and is required if one is to make sense out of competing claims and organize and understand the flood of facts. A more pressing danger is that of preaching to the converted: If Internet users are, by and large, above average in income, better educated than the norm, and better informed than the public at large, they are often already sympathetic to positions advocated at a site. Those who need information the most—the poor and relatively disenfranchised—will have the least access to it. In sum therefore, in emailers’ working life, women are more likely than men to value the positive effects of email for improving relationships, from expanding their circle of colleagues to encouraging teamwork. Women also value email for a kind of positive, water-cooler effect, which lightens the atmosphere of office life.

This result tallies with those Pewey cited above, of which suggest that women place a higher value than men on what email does for the relationships within the group:

- Women send and receive email more than men. Some 94% of online women and 88% of online men use email.
- Women do more in personal emails with friends and family. More women than men write emails about news, worries, advice and planning. Women are more likely than men to value their email with friends, family, and work colleagues. Women say email improves relationship with friends, family, and colleagues more than men do, and that it improves the work climate as well.

**OTHER SPACES**

But in addition to trying to gain greater access and the right to communicate in and through the media, internet, and mobile phones, in order to participate in the public discourse on political, economic, social and development issues, women activists have often created their own spaces to exercise their right to communicate.\(^{31}\) These spaces range from the creation of newsletters and publications within the women’s civil society movement; creative

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uses of ICTs when accessibility is easy; as well as media located closer to the communities where women live. ‘Community radio, for example, has been one medium where women have exercised their right to communicate, to talk freely and even speak in their own language.

The *maendeleo ya wanawake* organisation MYWO now in existence for some 19 years, initiated one of the most successful media for development programmes, which empowered rural women to use their right to communicate. MYWO provided the women in the clubs with cassettes and recorders to speak on tape about the issues they strongly wanted to convey to public officials and to get answers. Women radio producers collected the tapes, sought out the appropriate officials to listen to what the women had to say, and then put together programmes, which aired at times known by the clubs so that they could listen for a response or reaction. This organisation provided the means for rural women, especially, to express themselves on issues and by exercising their right to speak the women became empowered to become participants in the decision-making process on issues that affected their lives.\(^{32}\)

Through the creation of alternative spaces such as ones mentioned, women are empowered to know that they have the right and the obligation to communicate. These spaces empowered women to challenge the status quo because they also were given information which helped them to gain various types of knowledge to do more for themselves. They shared information among themselves in the clubs across the different provinces.\(^{33}\) Over time, these women began to address the institutions that worked against women and that wanted to stifle their voices. These spaces sought to remove the rural woman from the domestic sphere and to put her as an active participant and player in the public space.’ and enabled rural women to also set the agenda on the issues they wanted to speak on. ‘Women participating in the local radio programmes see themselves not just as recipients of information but as responsible for what was happening in their communities and the nation. They give their personal opinions on national issues.’

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\(^{33}\) Chatting up change: how IT can work for gender justice’, Colleen Lowe Morna in Amalungelo, Volume 8, January-February, 2005, p. 17
CONCLUSION

The Internet does not necessarily serve either hegemonic or counterhegemonic purposes; it can and does serve both. Like the workplace, household, state, and other social arenas, cyberspace is a contested terrain, a battleground of discourses. The degree to which gendered difference is employed, depends largely, of course, on their technological sophistication. Indeed, the constraints to cyberactivism are largely those that hobble other political involvement: commitment, time, money, expertise. The Internet obviously does not guarantee the emergence of counterhegemonic discourses, but it does facilitate the opening of discursive spaces within which they may be formulated and conveyed. Castells notes that "it is in the realm of symbolic politics, and in the development of issue-oriented mobilizations by groups and individuals outside the mainstream political system that new electronic communication may have the most dramatic effects". 34

A likely difficulty in Internet activism is that the audience of users, a preselected elite in terms of income, race, gender, and class, may already be sympathetic to such messages. Indeed, those who may benefit the most from counterhegemonic uses of the Net may have the least access to it. A cyberpolitical danger is that it may become an ineffectual substitute for politics in the real world. This interrogation reveals some of the complex challenges of using the net and cellphones. Perhaps nowhere else are these dilemmas played out with more tension than in the fractured identities that citizens construct around the dual question of ethnic and civic nationhood. We see for example Diaspora Kenyans often consciously invoking their ethnic identities in internet discussions. Inevitably, a lot of the discussion going on in popular sites before the elections seems to have been forged to have been calculated in a somewhat misguided manner solidify the fortunes of ethnic groups within the larger political contests. But again, regardless of how Kenyans –men and women -understand democracy, it might just become necessary to look for a way of dealing with the fact that ethnicity is part of Kenyan heritage and that it needs to be addressed not by means of abstract argumentation but within the reality of the country’s politics.

In conclusion, in the election year, women were less likely than men to cite use of internet especially email’s negative effects. Women were less likely to say email makes it too easy for outsiders to reach them and makes them too accessible to others inside the company.

34 Castells, p. 352.
Men and women were equally likely to consider email at work to be a source of stress, gossip, misunderstanding, and to say they can’t get away from it. Overall, more women, 20%, than men, 15%, give email in the workplace the highest praise, saying they “can’t live without it.”

<table>
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<tr>
<th>How men and women value their email in the workplace</th>
<th>% of online men</th>
<th>% of online women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work emailers</strong></td>
<td>55*</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Email most effective to …</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edit documents</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make appointments</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask questions</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise problem with boss</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deal with sensitive issues</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Email’s positive impact …</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps me stay current with events</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand my contacts at work</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saves time</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps me be available to coworkers</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves teamwork</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides moments of relief</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberates me from office</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Email’s negative impact …</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes me too accessible inside work</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too accessible to outsiders</td>
<td>20*</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adds new stress</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is distracting</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t get away from work</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Encourages gossip</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes misunderstandings</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project April-May 2002. Margin of error is ±3%. (*) indicates statistically significant difference.

In 2007, significantly more women than men were bothered by some harms they feared might come from unsolicited emails, including possible damage to computers and concern that their privacy might have been compromised. When I asked about half of both men and women said they were confident that the things they did online were private and not used without their permission. They worried equally about most things: hackers getting personal credit card information (just over 40%) and someone learning personal things from what they have done online (just over 30%); and less than 20% about downloading viruses, others tracking their web site visits, that their email would be read by unintended recipients. (see above table in comparison to this fact).
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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