

Election times: Harnessing the power of new media

International Media Conference by the
International Institute for Journalism in cooperation
with Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung





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How digital media affect political transparency

Editorial by Astrid Kohl

This is the age of the Web 2.0 – a term on the tip of everyone’s tongue that stands less for specific technologies or innovation than it does for the question of how we will converse with one another in future.



Astrid Kohl is head of the International Institute for Journalism (IIJ) of InWent – Capacity Building International, Germany. The international media conference on elections in the era of digital media was the second conference in a row the IIJ hosted in cooperation with the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

The issue here is interactive and multimedia communication. We blog and twitter, read messages on our mobile phones and send messages to all corners of the globe from same. We display our photos on Flickr, collect fans on Facebook and watch ourselves and the world on YouTube. All these activities are unconstrained by time and space, and it makes no difference whether we are journalists, politicians, business people, or from some other field entirely.

This power of the new media to flout the classic, hierarchical models of communication and information is palpable everywhere – in developed countries and

in developing and transition countries alike. The growing radius of new media is particularly noticeable in politically sensitive times, in times of election campaigns and elections.

The e-campaign of Barack Obama was ubiquitous. And we all clearly remember the unrest at the elections in Kenya in December 2007 during which 600 blogs and websites, dealing with the post-election violence, sprang up like mushrooms. At the most recent regional parliamentary elections in Germany, we observed attempts to use the internet and social networks. Whether at the elections in Nigeria

in 2007, in Ghana in December of last year, the upcoming elections in Afghanistan, South Africa or the German parliamentary elections, no one, neither the media nor the politicians, neither election observers nor various sections of the electorate want or can even do without the new, the digital media.

But what influence do the new media really have on election results? What is their true contribution? Do they provide information, analyse different views and explain the background, the story behind the facts? Do they help reach those groups in the society who no longer feel that traditional media speak to them? Do they contribute to arousing enthusiasm for politics, political and social life? And can they, in countries where the independent media are restricted, provide a voice to those who refuse to fall silent?

It is a great pleasure for InWent’s International Institute for Journalism to be hosting a conference together with the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) that will address all these questions. We are looking forward to all the contributions showing different trends and ongoing developments in the field of new media and their impact on civil society.

Freedom of choice requires freedom of information

Dr Roland Gerschermann, Managing Director of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung GmbH, Germany

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Guests. It is a pleasure to welcome you at the Berlin office of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Germany's leading quality daily. As you will imagine, the Frankfurter Allgemeine has a keen interest in international affairs. To my knowledge, there is no other newspaper in the world with so many foreign correspondents on its staff as we have: a total of 45. Of course, the Frankfurter Allgemeine is interested in domestic affairs, too.

2009 is what Germans call a "super election year". It started with parliamentary elections in Hesse, the state in which Frankfurt is the largest city. The people of four other states will vote for their state legislatures this year, too. On top of that, there will be elections for the European Parliament in June and for the Bundestag, our national parliament, in September.

These events will no doubt keep our journalists busy. Our reporters will observe campaign efforts, analyse the votes cast and assess the coalitions parties will form on the basis of the results. An election at the state level normally stays in the headlines for two to three months – and in the run-up to the national polls, things will get even more exciting because every single little aspect may give us a clue about who will lead the country over the next four years.

Transparency, no fraud: elections in Germany

For obvious reasons, we know that our readers are interested in elections. But at the Frankfurter Allgemeine, we also know that we are lucky. We plan our election coverage without worrying about how to deal with violence – because election-related violence has never occurred in the Federal Republic. We also plan our election coverage without concern for fraud – because we know the process will be transparent and clean. Anybody who wishes to do so can walk into a polling station at election night and see what is going on. Some of our colleagues do so – on their own time. We don't assign them to do so because nobody thinks there is a story to be reported out there.

When the Frankfurter Allgemeine and InWEnt's International Institute for Journalism organised a similar symposium last year, our topic was press freedom and online media. I vividly recall



There is no ideal nation that ensures a democratic, stable and peaceful society, said **Dr Roland Gerschermann** in his welcome address. It's the institutions and the trust they inspire that provide for democracy, freedom and transparency.

Charles Onyango-Obbo of the Nairobi-based Nation Media Group, telling us about websites spreading ethnic hatred in Kenya after that country's last presidential election. As you all know, of course, the election results in Kenya at the end of December 2007 were close – and they sparked violence.

Supporters of opposition candidate Raila Odinga immediately accused President Mwai Kibaki of having rigged the elections. Riots ensued, pitting various ethnic groups against one another. Tensions were compounded by the fact that Odinga belongs to one ethnic group – the Luo – and Kibaki to another – the Kikuyu. More than 1,000 people were killed and some 300,000 displaced after the election.

Today, Kenya is run by a coalition government with Odinga serving as prime minister and Kibaki having stayed on as presi-

dent. The coalition looks stable for the time being, but it is certainly troubled.

Democracies need institutions that can be trusted

In comparison Germany – though suffering under its own kind of grand coalition – seems like heaven. But we are well aware that it was not always like this. German statehood was desperately fragile in the 1920s and 1930s. The Second World War which followed at the end of the 1930s resulted in the after-effects of a Nazi dictatorship and a communist regime that ran East Germany for decades. Our history teaches us that it is not some kind of ideal nation that ensures a democratic, stable and peaceful society. What really matters are institutions and the trust they inspire, and these issues are regularly discussed in view of development in D+C, Development

and Cooperation, a monthly published by the Frankfurter Allgemeine's corporate sibling the Frankfurter Societät on behalf of InWEnt.

Freedom of choice is impossible without freedom of information. Constitutional rule is unviable without an informed and inspired public. A responsible administration is inconceivable without a strong legislature and an independent judiciary.

In Germany today, we are in the happy situation of being able to rely on a set of mutually reinforcing institutions – and, of course, media coverage of elections is an important element of this system. I hope that our meeting here can contribute to media in other, currently more troubled countries eventually playing a similar role as the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and other German media do in service of a democratic, stable and peaceful society.

Closing the digital divide is the imperative

Opening address by Erich Stather, State Secretary of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

Dear Dr Gerschermann, Ms Kohl, Ladies and Gentlemen. Since the successful internet campaign of Barack Obama, digital media have been of increasing interest in political circles. In Germany as well – especially in the light of the upcoming parliamentary elections. Around 70 MPs currently twitter and blog. Chancellor Angela Merkel has a profile on Facebook and has been uploading weekly video messages on the web since 2006. Searching for Frank-Walter Steinmeier on YouTube brings up an impressive 611 video results.

Democracy is the continuous process of free political discussion and clarification. Digital media expand the range of avenues for this discussion enormously by adding communication pathways and facilitating the dissemination of information. And they increasingly provide a platform for political discussion and opinion making. These are some of the ways they can definitely promote participation, transparency and democracy. But a word of caution before we succumb to general euphoria: The focus here is on “can”. Why?

First of all, digital media clearly have a positive influence on democracy in industrialised countries. But they are not a pan-

acea against disenchantment with politics and a guarantee for increased participation any more than they are a secret weapon for candidates.

Secondly, undemocratic countries all around the world censor digital media. They are controlled and used for propaganda and intimidation. There can be no illusion of promoting transparency or democracy through the digital media here.

Thirdly, the power of digital media can only be used to political effect if wide segments of the population have access to the internet and mobile communications. This is not the case in most developing countries.



State Secretary **Erich Stather** addressed the opportunities as well as the challenges of digital media which go hand in hand – not least during election times.

The limits of digital media

Information brokering and self-presentation on websites and via email is indispensable for politics in industrial countries. Political parties take their competition to the internet to ensure they reach the greatest number of users. This is appropriate and important for democracy. But the information transmitted in this fashion is identical to that we garner from newspapers, books or television. This process does not necessarily entail changes to the culture of politics, decreased disenchantment with politics or an increase in voter participation.

The internet is also a playground for anti-democracy groups who have, quite rightly, been denied a place in other mass

media. A free society has to endure this to a certain extent, and it is a sign of strength. But whether society is further strengthened by this process is open to debate.

Digital media can truly make a qualitative difference when they link information, analysis and interactive participation, when they offer political enlightenment beyond mere self-promotion on posters, in spots and panel discussions. The sites abgeordnetenwatch.de or wahlomat.de are good examples. They deal with political content, help users find their way in the political landscape and facilitate direct contact to politicians. But even here is a downside: Such sites simply attract and inform generally well-educated social classes who are already interested in politics. I would also

like to explore a different question: do digital media have any special qualities that could be used to increase the political participation of those with lower levels of education and a disinterest in politics? Campaigning on the net and on the Web 2.0 in particular creates contact with social networks that one would not meet on the campaign trail through the pedestrian malls. Barack Obama is reported to have contacted 30 per cent of all US citizens digitally. That is an enormous achievement, but what would have happened had his political message not been the right one? People who use the internet for mere mindless chatter soon find themselves subjected to a backlash of scorn. The new media hit back with all their might.



As in 2008, the pros and cons of digital media and the use of new technologies to strengthen democratic institutions attracted a lot of journalists from countries all over the world.

This means that a political message must first have substance before the digital media are of any great assistance in spreading it. By substance I mean a true understanding of people's real problems, good ideas for solutions and credibility. No medium can relieve political parties and politicians of this responsibility.

Digital media in unstable democracies

Let's look beyond the borders of OECD countries to where democracies and countries are taking form, as is the case in many developing countries. And to where illegitimate and authoritarian regimes of widely differing provenance are in power. Here the political culture of those in power determines if the media are allowed to promote participation, freedom and truth or if they do the opposite as part of the repression machinery.

The danger of misuse of the media by governments is notorious. Propaganda, censorship, intimidation: All take place in the new media. Reporters without borders for example currently lists 68 imprisoned internet dissidents worldwide. China is an infamous example. The Chinese govern-

ment employs around 30,000 civil servants on their internet police force. Critical and oppositional hits are blocked on search engines and most links on political topics lead to government pages.

The feeling of being under observation and self-censorship are worse than the censorship and propaganda that can be circumvented using technology. Woes betide a user if internet police officers Jingjing and Chacha – cartoon figures in manga style – appear on the monitor. They show that the government is watching. But it is not my intention to focus solely on the negatives. Thanks to the internet more debates are taking place in China than ever before. Even if most are controlled, it is still a gain in freedom felt by those involved.

The basic principle here is that independent media are indispensable in developing countries. They bring transparency and accountability on the part of the government and the participation of even disadvantaged segments of the population. Which is why development policy sees strengthening freedom of information and the independent media as a key component for promoting democracy. The Federal Ministry of

Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is working accordingly. In addition to German political foundations, we support the development and establishment of media in our partner countries. The Deutsche Welle, Germany's international broadcaster, trains journalists for radio and television while InWent's International Institute for Journalism does the same for print and online media.

New media can also contribute to increasing the transparency of the political and administrative process. This is why we support our democratic partners in areas

Access to digital media is still the exception in developing countries

like e-government and corruption prevention. One example is the Whistleblower site of the Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission supported by the BMZ. This internet application allows anyone to report corrupt behaviour anonymously and gives the commission the chance to investigate the case in anonymous dialogue.

Closing the digital gap

Whenever we talk about the power of digital media, political transparency or the internet, we make one central assumption: a high percentage of the general population has access to digital media. Access and use of digital media are the exception, though, rather than the rule in developing and transition countries. Mobile communications are experiencing a high rate of growth, but in sub-Saharan Africa 44 per cent of the population still had no access in 2006. Rural populations there are even further behind. 55 per cent have no access

to any form of telecommunication service, neither mobile nor conventional. A mere 7 per cent of rural households have a private line. Everyone else has to use public establishments. In contrast there are 112 mobile phones for every 100 EU inhabitants. The gap in access to the internet is even more dramatic: In all of Africa only 5.6 per cent of the population enjoy the privilege of going online – a privilege reserved for the top echelons of society.

What conclusions can we draw from this? Two in my opinion. First of all: We have to close the digital gap between industrialised and developing countries, between the poor and the rich. We live in a digital age and those who want to participate in globalisation need access to information and communication technologies. They are increasingly a prerequisite for political and economic participation. There is a good reason the Millennium Declaration lists figures on telephone lines and

personal computers per thousand people under the “Expansion of a global development partnership” heading. This is why the BMZ supports our partner countries in providing access to new media for the rural population in particular. There are a number of different approaches including advising on infrastructure and legal framework conditions of the telephone market, and public private partnership projects. Secondly: The political role of the media in European countries or in the USA cannot simply be transferred to developing and transition countries. A concentration of political information and discussions on the internet in the latter offers less the chance of inclusion as it does the danger of exclusion. Too many people cannot participate due to their financial situation, position in society or geographic location. In Ethiopia, for example, only around 0.4 per cent of the population can join the discussion. Even in an anchor country such as South Africa it is only 9.4 per cent.

I’m looking forward to this event; I’m looking forward to the discussions to come, and to your contributions. Thank you very much.

From ballot casters to collaborators

Keynote by Nancy Scola, associated editor at techpresident.com

Guten Morgen. I apologise, that is all the German I know. It's a real pleasure to be here. Mr State Secretary, Managing Director, Mrs Kohl. Thank you so much for having me here to discuss the state of digital media and elections. It is a real honor.

If you'll indulge me, I'm going to start with a brief story. In July, 2003, Vice President Dick Cheney was the guest of honor at a fancy suit-and-tie South Carolina fundraiser attended by wealthy Republican donors. Tickets to the event were expensive – two thousand U.S. dollars. But that gave contributors a chance to socialise with the second most powerful man in America. That same weekend, former Vermont Governor Howard Dean, campaigning for the Democratic nomination, was also holding a fundraiser. His event wasn't quite so formal. It involved Dean sitting at his desk eating a three-dollar turkey sandwich from a local deli, and supporters logging onto his website to send in money.

What's amazing is what shook out. Cheney raised about two hundred and fifty thousand dollars from one hundred and twenty-five high-dollar donors. Not bad. But nearly ten thousand different people sent Dean contributions that day. They were mostly small amounts of money – ten dollars, fifty dollars, one hundred dollars. It added up, though, to a total of more than half a million dollars.

To put it another way, the governor of a U.S. state one-fifth the population of Berlin raised double what the Vice President of the United States raised that day. And he did it by tapping the web's ability to connect together large numbers of people effortlessly. That humble turkey sandwich marked the moment when many of us in the United States began to suspect that a



Nancy Scola is a journalist, blogger, and editor whose work focuses on the intersections of technology, politics, and culture, all very broadly defined. Above that, she teaches new media and politics at New York University.

Since the very successful Obama campaign digital media and their impact on elections have much been talked about.

With respect to the president's most effective way at conduction a direct and unmediated relationship with voters Nancy Scola raised the question about what the role of journalists might be in the years to come.

Whoever has ambitions in online journalism has a lot to learn from the Obama campaign. Though that campaign was neither the beginning of the story on the internet's impact on politics, nor it's end.

network of citizens could meaningfully shift the balance of power between the people and the American political establishment.

I'm here today to describe what's happened since, to sketch for you the role of the internet in the 2008 U.S. presidential election through the lens of the remarkable campaign of Barack Obama. Now, the Obama campaign is by no means the beginning and the end of the internet and politics in the United States. But it is, to my mind, a powerful lens through which to consider this intersection of politics and new media for two reasons.

First, because the Obama campaign was extraordinarily masterful at navigating the rapidly evolving new media landscape. And in that success there are simply wonderful lessons for those of us with ambitions in online journalism.

And second, that an American president was so remarkably effective at conducting a direct, unmediated relationship with voters raises serious questions about what the role of journalists, in the United States at least, will be in the months and years to come.

The people's influence in the digital era

Now, before I get into the details of the internet's imprint on the 2008 campaign, I can't resist sharing a word on technical nuts and bolts. Computer hardware is, in a real way, the hero – or villain, depending on your own perspective – of this shift. First, the internet in the United States is simply

faster than ever before. In 1999, when I was working as a researcher in Washington DC just out of graduate school if I wanted to use the internet I had to physically move a 56-kilobyte-per-second telephone line from my colleague's computer to my own.

Ten years later, I have much faster internet access on the cell phone I carry around in my pocket. Second, digital storage is simply cheaper today. My iPod can hold 10,000 songs, or just about every feature length film that has won a "Best Picture" Oscar since 1930. That's rather amazing.

Finally, to end my preamble, a brief note on the political context to situate us in the historical moment. The administration of George W. Bush, from 2001 to 2009, was, by most measures, extremely insular. For example, legendary White House reporter Helen Thomas once asked White House spokesperson Dana Perino whether the American people should be able to make their opinions heard on the war in Iraq. Said Perino: "You had input. The American people have input every four years, and that's the way our system is set up." So, many Americans were reacting against that closedness when the '08 election rolled around.

The Obama campaign – some lessons to learn

Okay, let's get started. Barack Obama's campaign is often discussed as if it were the direct descendent of Howard Dean's 2004 run. From many perspectives, that's no doubt true; in fact, internet staffers from the Dean campaign directed Obama's new media operations. But that's a somewhat confused way of looking at the evolution from Dean to Obama, and the distinction is important.

Here's why: Dean's internet model was a loose federation of volunteer groups, only lightly tethered to the campaign headquarters in Burlington, Vermont. But the Obama model was to use the internet to build a top-down organization that equipped volunteers to act as surrogates for the campaign, though with direction from campaign headquarters in Chicago.

Just to finish up the Howard Dean story, Dean placed a disappointing third in the Iowa caucuses in 2003. Attempting to cheer up staffers on the evening of the caucuses, Dean let out a spirited roar. The press latched on to the footage of what quickly became known as the "Dean scream." That video clip was played seemingly endlessly in the days after the caucus. In fact, a study later found that amongst the major TV networks alone, in just four days the clip had been played 633 times. CNN, the leading cable news network, later issued an apology for having replayed the video so aggressively. But mortal damage had been done. Shortly after, Dean dropped out of the presidential campaign. The lesson for Dean staffers? A loose citizen-driven confederation wasn't enough to stand up to the powerful traditional forces behind American presidential races – including the media.

The Obama campaign, then, set out to tap the power of the internet to knit together supporters into a powerful, locally-based network – effectively an unpaid extension of the campaign itself. There is no doubt, however, that they were insistent upon controlling their message and their candidate's image at the same time. Where CNN had helped to tear down Howard Dean, they sought, in effect, to become their own version of CNN. They set out to become more than a presidential campaign. Their ambition was to become a professional news media organisation.



Before coming up with the famous "O" logo for the Obama campaign which is shown here at the right hand side of the bottom line, the graphic designers tried out different approaches – and discarded all of them. This slide was taken from Nancy Scola's keynote presentation.

Professionalism made the Obama campaign so successful

Let's highlight some of how they did that. First, the Obama campaign staffed up with deliberation. Talented content creators were lured in-house to create a new media division within the campaign that eventually numbered over one hundred people. Those writers and visual artists were experienced professionals in their fields: the official campaign blogger had previously been a features writer at *The Nation*, the U.S.'s leading progressive magazine. Their in-house video director had in fact been a CNN documentary producer assigned to cover the 2004 race. In addition, top-flight graphic designers were tasked with creating a brand image that would cast Obama as a new kind of politician.

Now let's talk content: American politics is increasingly being waged via video. During the 2008 race, a full 35 per cent of Americans reported that they watch online political videos – a tripling of that statistic since 2004. It was typical at campaign forums and events to see a half-dozen Obama campaign videographers capturing the action from a number of angles, while Hillary Clinton was attended to by a lone staffer toting a single camera. Dozens of staffers would stay up late into the night encoding video and pushing it live online – often before local news stations had a chance to post their footage. Much of the video footage that the campaign produced was entirely candidate-centric: videos of Obama eating an ice cream cone or addressing his staff or dancing on a television talk show.

New media and technology turned the Obama campaign into a source for civic education

But the campaign was also a source for civic education in the way that a local newspaper might have been in the past. Videos explained to first-time Iowa caucus goers how the Byzantine caucus process work and taught Florida voters which forms of identification were now required under changes in voter laws. Those videos echoed throughout the internet. Once they were posted, they were emailed out to the 13 million or so Americans on the campaign's email list. And they were pushed out to dozens of political bloggers, who embedded them on their blogs – acting, in effect, as surrogates for the campaign. Before the dawn of the age of internet abundance – before free and simple web video services like YouTube – that content would have sat unused in a campaign archive somewhere. That,

or the campaign would have had to raise large sums of money to put it on TV as advertisements. Considering how much of American politics gets waged on YouTube today, it's a bit mind-blowing to consider that YouTube was only launched in February 2005 – a full year after Howard Dean screamed and dropped out of the race.

Tapping the internet's bounty

Creativity bloomed inside the Obama campaign. But it was mirrored by a flourishing of creativity from outside the campaign. And the campaign was no sealed bubble. Art in favour of the candidate was eagerly adopted by the campaign. Pop singer Will.i.am of the Black Eyed Peas produced a

short music video of him and other celebrities singing the words of an Obama speech, with the chorus of the campaign's inclusive slogan, "Yes We Can." The Obama campaign pounced on the latter video, setting up a tool on its website to make it simple to email it around.

Similarly, California street artist Shepard Fairey is well known for his iconic poster of Obama.

But what's less well known is that dozens of lesser-known artists were asked by the campaign to create artwork that was then sold in their online store. It happened almost completely under the radar of the press, and it brought millions of dollars into the campaign coffers. This was classic Obama – tapping the internet's bounty.

What's remarkable in retrospect is that despite the increasing centrality of video to American politics, both Hillary Clinton and John McCain let Obama romp freely in that space. Over the course of the presidential election, Hillary Clinton posted just 92 video clips, and John McCain uploaded some 300 or so. By contrast, Barack Obama shared more than 1,800 videos clips. They were watched more than 21 million times.

The campaign was not a sealed bubble. Instead the campaign's strategists adopted input from well and lesser known artists to everyone's profit.

YouTube might have a reputation as a young person's tool, but the numbers really don't seem to bear that out in this case: the average viewer of an Obama video was between the ages of 45 and 55.

Revolutionary MyBO

Remember that at the start of this contest, "President Hillary Clinton" seemed all but inevitable. Barack Obama was an improbable president. But savvy use of the internet helped to erase her institutional advantages almost immediately. Clinton didn't move much past the idea that the internet was yet another broadcast medium for her to push her political message. And John McCain largely ignored technology altogether, preferring to run his campaign with a small circle of advisors and a handful of contacts in the mainstream press.

But perhaps most central to this discussion, though, is MyBarackObama.com, launched by the campaign at the very start of the race. MyBO, as it became known, was the campaign's version of the enormously popular social-networking site Facebook. It was, in fact, directed by Chris Hughes, the 25-year-old Facebook co-founder.

But it is critically important that MyBO was never meant to focus on online socialising. Inside the campaign it was known as a mobilisation network, and the goal was to integrate online and offline action to one end – to win the election. It was architected so that anyone with any degree of interest in the campaign would have an entry point into it. For example, a busy college student in Los Angeles could quickly find out where the next Obama rally would be held in her city. A harried mother of three in Ohio could easily find out about Obama's stance on reforming the education system. Niche groups like Idaho Veterans for Obama were seeded throughout the system.

Social networking on MyBO turned interested citizens into political activists

The campaign scaled it up so that all fifty U.S. states and seven U.S. territories had their own MyBO hubs.

What made MyBO revolutionary, though, was this: it equipped anyone able to log onto the site with all the tools to self-organise, online and off. With it you could turn yourself from interested citizen into political activist. On MyBO, you could set up your own online fundraising drive for Obama, start a virtual volunteer group with like-minded individuals from across the country, blog for Obama, or download a guide that would tell you step-by-step how to host flesh-and-blood events in your community.

In the latter stages of the campaign, Obama peeled back the curtain on the campaign even further by launching a programme called Neighbour-to-Neighbour.

Log on to MyBO, type in your address, and out popped the actual full names, home telephone numbers, and street addresses of your neighbours who were undecided voters. With two or three clicks, you could even call them through the website's phone-banking tools – saving yourself the cost of a phone call. Promising contacts were invited in for in-person training.

Being everywhere at the same time

That's MyBO, but if there is one word to describe the Obama approach to the internet, it might be "ubiquity." They were everywhere anyone might be. The campaign indeed had a presence on nearly every external social network on the internet, no matter how miniscule the fan base – from BlackPlanet to the religion site FaithBase to the senior-citizen-site Eons to Disaboom, a

So much had already been said about the Obama campaign. But Nancy Scola made away with the prejudice that the Obama campaign was a so-called grassroots campaign, a bottom-up movement. Instead, she told the audience, Obama's strategists did something completely new: They equipped volunteers to act according to their directions, coming directly from the headquarters in Chicago.



site for people with disabilities. It cost the campaign nothing but a few staff hours to plant flags on these sites. But it showed that Obama abided by the internet ethos of “go to where your people are – don’t make them come to you.”

Obama supporters were certainly organising themselves in large numbers on big-name social-networking sites. Indeed, the phenomenal growth of the “One Million Strong for Barack Obama” Facebook group in January 2007 drew mainstream attention to Obama’s popularity amongst young people in the very earliest stages of his campaign. But creating this social network in-house gave the campaign something incredibly valuable in the new media ecosystem: metrics. Metrics on simple traffic, fundraising, distribution of interest. Those metrics were often astronomical.

Volunteers created more than 2 million profiles on MyBO. Volunteers made more than 9 million calls through Neighbour-to-Neighbour. Volunteers planned more than 200,000 offline events. There’s the number that you hear most often: more than half a billion dollars was raised online, often in small chunks of one hundred dollars or less. But importantly, supporters wrote more than 400,000 blog posts – including some personal stories that the campaign would push out as press stories.

What Obama’s new-media approach accomplished – what had never been done before in American politics – was that it equipped volunteers with the tools and information they needed to comfortably act as surrogates and proxies on the campaign’s behalf. Online volunteer organising meant that the campaign could simply

parachute into places like Texas or Indiana or Maryland when those states become politically viable – and find a ready, willing, and able network of volunteers waiting for them. These web-based social tools were also used inside the campaign as a real-time dashboard of exactly that: how people were organising themselves.

Of course, as a semi-open platform and network, the campaign’s social media tools exposed Obama to challenges. And so it wasn’t all that surprising when, last July, a loosely-organized network of people came together on MyBO to protest Senator Obama’s stance on a controversial piece of surveillance legislation. The group quickly grew to 23,000 people – putting it at the top of the MyBO leaderboard. The press noticed. And the campaign practically had to respond. After all, it’s Barack Obama’s face at the top of the website. He responded directly to the group on the network. In a 900-word blog post, he wrote: “Some of you may decide that my position is a deal breaker. That’s ok.” He then tasked two senior policy aides to stay and engage in the blog discussion created by the many thousands of comments that poured in in response. His willingness to converse directly with the people he sought to lead seemed to have neutralized the issue. Their opposition died down.

Even the iPhone application was built by a group of volunteers. It gave one-click access to videos and other multimedia, it organised the contacts in the iPhone's address book and even told its owner whom to contact with which respective message – a message, of course, in favour of Obama.



On the mobile front

Next up: mobile. The Obama campaign sought to master many mediums, and that included cell phones. The political uses of text messaging are still in their infancy in the United States, especially when we look at case studies from Ukraine or the Philippines where text helped to bring down governments. That said, the campaign did seek to dominate on the mobile front – accruing more than a million cell phone numbers, texting supporters regularly, and famously routing around the press by texting out the announcement of Joe Biden's selection as Obama's running mate to that list first. The campaign also used texts internally to send their 25,000 field organisers words of encouragement and updates on the campaign's progress.

Also on the mobile front, the Obama campaign tasked a group of volunteers to build an iPhone application that gave one-click mobile access to videos, policy papers, and more. And it did something else remarkable. It organised the contacts in your address book by battleground state – letting me know, for example, that I should really be harassing my friend Vicky, who lives in the swing state of Virginia, to go out and vote for Obama. About 50,000 volunteer-to-volunteer calls were generated by the tool. Not an extraordinary number, but they came at little cost to the campaign.

At nearly the same time that Obama was changing how campaigns use new media, the online political media landscape was drastically changing in the United States. Professional blogger-slash-journalists ana-

lysed the daily ins-and-outs of campaigns in a higher resolution than had ever happened before. Much-read writers like Ben Smith of Politico and Mark Halperin of Time Magazine and Marc Ambinder of the Atlantic work under the mantra of “win the morning, win the afternoon” – producing a news cycle in the United States that can last mere minutes. Whereas the campaign of John Kerry, the 2004 Democratic nominee, refused to respond to attacks on his war record, Obama developed a rapid response operation that embraced the same metabolism as those bloggers. A website called Fight the Smears made easily Googleable the Obama take on the most prevalent rumors about him – for example, that he was not born in the United States. As each accusation popped up in the press or in the blogosphere, a volunteer-organised Obama Rapid Response Group would rebut the charges online and off – sometimes armed with source material from the campaign, like his birth certificate.

New media is mass media

In fact, it was a blogger in that rapid response group that prompted the New York Times' Bill Kristol to offer a correction after the blogger dug up a schedule showing that Obama hadn't attended a particularly fiery church service with his controversial pastor Reverend Jeremiah Wright, as Kristol had reported.

The Reverend Jeremiah Wright was key to one of the most critical moments of the Obama campaign, a moment that brought together so many of the new media aspects we've discussed that it's worth focusing on. On March 18, just before Obama claimed the democratic nomination, he gave a speech on the state of race in the United



While it is true that the Obama campaign – like all social networks – was democratising, it also was, as Nancy said, a very controlled space. Controlled by the candidate, which was exactly the reason why she called for independent media and their journalists to help filter all that information and make sense of the new media landscape.

States called “A More Perfect Union.” It ran live on CNN to an audience of perhaps half a million people. In the pre-broadband internet era, that might have been where it ended. But the Obama campaign quickly put the full 37-minute speech up on YouTube. That speech, a somewhat academic address longer than a sitcom television show, was watched from beginning to end more than 1.2 million times on the first day alone. The campaign sent a link out to bloggers, who reposted it. Their readers watched it and emailed it to their friends. It reverberated out throughout the internet, pushing back against the race politics that, for a time, looked like a serious threat to the Obama candidacy. It was, in total, viewed more than 5.2 million times. It was nearly impossible to miss.

What the brave new digital world really needs

The Obama campaign was, as I’ve argued, a revolution in new media and politics in the United States. But it was only a partial one. The Obama campaign engaged a great many Americans in the democratic experiment in meaningful way, and that, I believe, is a net positive. But like Facebook or MySpace or Wikipedia, the Obama campaign was both democratising and a controlled space at the very same time.

As more and more candidates and politicians and campaigns no doubt embrace the Obama approach to new media, Americans will be flooded with information. Our new media ecosystem is already filled to the brim with it. In the past, the relationship between candidates and citizens was clear.

You supported a candidate or you didn’t. You campaigned for or against him or her. Now Americans are sometimes supporters, sometimes collaborators, sometimes adversaries – and sometimes all three in the span of a single day. That’s confusing, and we don’t have the filters in place to make sense of all that information and our changing relationships.

In closing, I believe that the kind of new politics brought about by the Obama campaign actually deepened the need for journalists. As ever more digital information becomes available and the power dynamic between politicians and those they lead gets more complex, it is, I believe, the press’ calling to serve the public by helping them to make sense of this rapidly evolving new media landscape.

Africa rules okay – a short message on African elections and new media

Keynote by Prof Harry Dugmore, MTN Chair of Media and Mobile Communication at the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, South Africa

As Africa is about to leapfrog the digital divide hope is rising that new media along with new technologies, better connections and affordable services will help Africa's people to strengthen their democratic institutions. Though the elections in Zimbabwe were a severe throwback the "pluralistic public space" developing through the use of new media is going to secure a better future for Africa, says Harry Dugmore.

Good morning. Mr State Secretary, Dr Gerschermann, Ms Kohl, and to those of you who have joined us here today: thank you for being here. It is a great honour for me to share with you some perspectives on digital media and democracy in Africa, with a particular focus on recent African elections.

There is so much happening that is hopeful, and so many in Africa who are hoping the power of new technology will allow the African continent to leapfrog the digital divide which is, in truth, more a technological chasm than just a mere divide. I'll share with you today why there is this hope in Africa, and why all countries in Africa need to ensure that these new technologies promote greater transparency and accountability in government, enlarge the public sphere, or give more Africans a voice and the power that comes with being heard.

There are 53 countries in Africa, all very different from each other, sharing, very often, nothing more than common geography. And with more than 1,000 languages currently spoken and very uneven development since de-colonization, it is hard to speak of 'Africa' in anything but the broadest terms. So while I will be referring to the African continent in exactly these broad terms, I'll also try and be specific and talk about specific countries where I can and, in particular, the two countries that I'm focusing on today. So, with that in mind, let me start off by telling you about the very different stories of two recent African elections.

Harry Dugmore had some interesting stories to tell about two completely different African elections. In Ghana as well as in Zimbabwe independent monitors used cell phones and SMS services to send the results from different polling stations directly to their headquarters, thus verifying official tallies. It was the use of the new media which secured democracy at least in Ghana.



A story of two elections

The first election I want to tell you about is also one of the most recent: The Ghanaian presidential election in December 2008. For Ghanaians, this was a very different election. Ghana was the first African country to gain independence, in 1957 led by the visionary Kwame Nkrumah, but it only 'returned' to democracy 15 years or so ago, after a series of coups and disgraces, as have occurred far too often in Africa. In the most recent presidential elections on December 7, which were very peaceful and well conducted elections, no candidate received the necessary 50 per cent of the vote. So a run-off was held, between just the two top candidates on December 28. Less than 1 per cent of the vote would separate them at the end of this run-off, and this is why the story is so remarkable.

The two candidates left in the running were John Atta Mills and Nana Akufo-

Addo, both political veterans. With only two candidates left in the race, the whole process became, as you can imagine, a lot more intense and tense. What made this election so different was the widespread use of digital media, and of cell phones in particular. This included the candidates and their parties having good websites, able to deliver some sophisticated multimedia, SMS-based campaigning and fund-raising conducted over cell phones, and cell phone-based systems for monitoring. It also included, for the first time, the twittering of results. Some of these elements had never happened in Ghana before, and in fact had made only partial appearances elsewhere in Africa before. For the Ghanaian elite, and those with access to the internet (and for a watching world), this was the first Ghanaian election that offered a real choice of websites, opportunities for citizen blogging and other interactive online resources.

Moreover, what might be a first for an African election: this election offered live coverage, especially on election day and for the communicating of the results via social networking and micro-blogging sites like Twitter. Both candidates in the run-off had Facebook pages – not with a lot of followers for sure, but with well designed pages, part of a new 'electronic arsenal' of democracy.

Remarkable was the first widespread use of SMS-based campaigning and SMS-based fund-raising for parties. As in many countries, Ghanaian law forbids campaigning two days prior to the elections. This calms things down, and voters can think more clearly about their choice. And, indeed, all campaigning on the 'old media' – print, radio, TV – stopped completely 48 hours before the polls opened. But no one thought about 'new media'. How do you stop a Facebook page? Can you stop SMS campaigns, which exploded in the last two days?



Every journalist has heard about the elections in Zimbabwe and how Mugabe and his henchmen responded to the opposition's victory. But it was Harry Dugmore who showed a very clear picture of the dimension digital media, especially cell phones and SMS, played prior to and during the elections.

New media watchdogs for transparency

After the election the two main candidates, John Atta Mills and Nana Akufo-Addo, were separated by just 40,000 votes. The country was tense as the results were announced. There were some hiccups and one particular small area had to vote on its own a few days later due to irregularities. Finally John Atta Mills, defeated twice before in previous presidential elections, won. What happened then? All in all both parties accepted the result. Why?

Part of the reason is that an NGO coalition called CODEO put 4,000 monitors in place to do general observation. Amongst them were 1,000 special monitors trained to do what is called "parallel vote tabulation". How did this work? Well, there were 4,000 monitors who used SMS to send the information to a central point. Everyone working on the election – officials,

police and members of parties – knew there were extra eyes on us, and that there were extra fingers tapping out news about our performance. These observers reported on things like "did the polling booth open on time", "was there a good availability of voting materials", and "is the conduct of polling officers 'neutral' and cordial". In addition, when the polls closed that night, every station had to do a preliminary count and say what the preliminary result for that polling booth was. As there were 23,000 polling stations, counting at each station was usually quick. So CODEO could SMS the results to their tabulation headquarters very quickly. After the election closed, CODEO didn't publish their results. They did something very clever: they put out 'interim statement' saying by their count the voting was close and was separated by less than 1 per cent! Only after the official results were released did CODEO release their results, which were almost identical. In this way, the NGO-generated results were used to verify official tallies, not to pre-empt the official tallies.

Cell phone-based election monitoring can help protect the people's will

As Kojo Asante, CODEO's project manager says: "Cell phone-based election monitoring adds a new level of protection of the people's will". I think that statement captures it very well. This was a very public monitoring campaign. People knew that CODEO was doing serious monitoring and had a credible result tabulated from its own sources, albeit in a smallish sample of polling booths. This, I think, made a great deal of difference in Ghana. The story of the Ghanaian election in December 2008 is one where 'new' media started to come to the fore, although it must be pointed out that there is another story, a story I'm not telling today in the fullness that it deserves, and that is about how some of the real power of the new media came from interacting closely with the 'old media', particularly local radio stations. For now let me just point out that in these Ghanaian elections the new and the old media reinforced rather than replaced each other.

Zimbabwean traditional media was completely dominated by Mugabe and his government. It was up to the opposition to find innovative ways to keep ahead of the Zimbabwean terror regime. Hundreds of websites and weblogs, cell phones and SMS messages kept the information flowing.

Digital media in Zimbabwe's elections

Now we turn to another 2008 election in Africa that probably had the whole world watching and hoping even more, and the whole of Africa desperately hoping – that of Zimbabwe. We are all mostly familiar with the situation in Zimbabwe: the highest inflation rate in the history of the world, surpassing that of Weimar Germany, and the lowest life expectancy for just about any nation in the world: 37 years for men and 34 years for women. It is and remains – even after the so-called 'unity government' – a terribly repressive police state.

What was the role of new media and digital media in Zimbabwe's two elections, the general election in March and the run-off in June?

As in Ghana, this election was also different for Zimbabweans in terms of the use of technology. Old media in Zimbabwe was and is totally dominated by the state. Radio, TV and newspapers are almost totally controlled. Even opposition election posters are torn down by state officials and often have to be replaced daily. In such a repressive situation, it is no wonder that the opposition, especially those in exile, sets up dozen



The place was packed. Around 150 guests followed Harry Dugmore’s keynote and the following discussion. With more smart phones and other portable digital devices the impact of new media on societies at large and elections in particular gets more and more important.

of websites and innovative ways of using technology and new techniques to keep ahead of the Zimbabwean regime in terms of information flow.

What was amazing is that many well-constructed websites were created to keep people informed. This was probably a more important role; more important than mak-

The websites that were created prior to the elections in Zimbabwe were more about community and solidarity rather than just raising votes. Twitter was also intensively used for gathering external support for the MDC.

ing an internal case to voters. I’ve got no doubt that in a free and fair election, the MDC would receive in excess of 60 per cent of the votes in Zimbabwe. And if the Zimbabwean diaspora were allowed to vote, all of those forced into exile, the MDC would receive more than 70 per cent of the overall vote. But these websites were and are more

about ‘community’ and creating a sense of solidarity rather than just votes. These websites were used more to raise money and support from outside of Zimbabwe. Again for the first time, Twitter became a useful tool, though only partly for the election and for actual voting and more for gathering external support, keeping the

exile movement going and raising much-needed funds.

All parties used SMS a great deal. Mugabe’s ZANU-PF SMS allowed people to download ring tones and screen savers with photos of tractors and harvesters. Why anyone would want a tractor on their cell phone is not very clear to me, but ring tones with messages like “give land to the people”, “President Mugabe, the revolutionary and visionary leader” and “Zimbabwe will never be a colony again” were sent out in large numbers by Mugabe’s ZANU-PF party. SMS was also used by ‘citizen journalists’ to avoid government censorship. In short bursts, these messages kept people informed. They also spread rumours, gossip and deliberate misinformation. But more importantly it got people to the polls: in spite of facing violence, Zimbabweans queued to vote!

It was remarkable that both parties which ran in the Ghana elections accepted the results. This was not least due to the “parallel vote tabulation”, explained Harry Dugmore, and it’s 4,000 monitors who used SMS to send the results and the overall performance of the elections to their headquarters.



New media democracy vs. traditional terror

Despite the dire situation, with all the odds against it, it was clear within hours of the election polling that Mugabe had lost, and lost heavily, and that his party, ZANU-PF, had lost badly, too. But the official election results were delayed for more than a month. Six weeks later it was announced that almost 48 per cent had voted for Tsvangirai, and just over 42 per cent for Mugabe. With all Mugabe’s power, and despite controlling the media for 28 years and allowing no credible observers to oversee this election, he still lost. Why did Mugabe do so badly? After all, he had been rigging elections for 20 years! The answer has connections to Ghana. In the first presidential election in Zimbabwe, every polling station completed a ‘preliminary count’ immediately after poll closing and before sending the ballots to the capital for ‘verification’ and ‘final tabulation’ – which in Zimbabwe means cheating and stealing. Like in Ghana, each polling booth’s ‘preliminary count’

had to be publicly announced. Like in Ghana, NGOs and the MDC opposition used SMS and MMS – photos and videos – to send in tallies from most of the 11,000 plus polling stations. By that night, they had tabulated not a sample, but all the results they could get, counting the vast majority of polling stations. The MDC announced 50.2 per cent for Tsvangirai, an NGO group doing a similar exercise to that of Ghana counted 49.4 per cent based on a sample of polling stations.

The Mugabe regime responded savagely. It unleashed a campaign of terror, of raw violence, of torture and disappearances which saw thousands detained and more than 100 MDC supporters killed. Tens of thousands of homes were burned, and tens of thousands of people, particularly teachers who had helped with the election and were seen as organic leaders within their

As in Ghana, NGOs monitored the elections in Zimbabwe, as did the opposition party MDC. They all sent in tallies from almost all of the polling stations. Weeks later, Mugabe called for another election – this time banning election-monitoring and the publication of allegedly ‘preliminary results’.

communities, were arrested, beaten, tortured or killed.

The regime called for another election, based on the fiction that 50 per cent was not obtained by anyone in the first election. But the rules would be different. To no one’s surprise the regime banned the publication of ‘preliminary results’ at polling stations entirely. Mugabe’s regime also detained NGO members and banned election-monitoring NGOs from using SMS and MMS! It even banned MDC observers inside 10,000 of the 11,000 polling booths. And it banned MDC rallies.

There was much violence during the run-off. It was so bad that Morgan Tsvangirai pulled out of the run-off election a week before, saying there is way too much violence, even by Mugabe’s terrible standards. The election went ahead – at the end Mugabe won 85 per cent of the vote in the run-off election.

Digital media outbreak all over Africa

Despite everything, in March 2009, Robert Mugabe is still the president of Zimbabwe. He has been in power since 1980. People are still fleeing and dying young. The use of new media was innovative, exciting and powerful, and in truth, had the cell phone tallies not been there, I think Mugabe would have easily won even the first election instead of been defeated so comprehensively.

What are we to make of all of this? Here is the conundrum:

There is no doubt that African countries are becoming more democratic. At the same time, internet connections are growing at 135 per cent per year across the continent, admittedly from a low base, but this is the fastest growth rate in the world right now. Even more importantly, cell phone ownership and use are soaring. Is there a link between connectivity and democracy, between new media and participation? The answer is “of course there is a link”. But let me cite some data for a moment.

Whereas being online is still an elite activity, in almost all of Africa cell phones are changing everything! Almost one half of all African now have cell phones, and by 2012, it is predicted that almost two-thirds of adults in Africa will have them. Mobile phones now represent around 90 per cent of all telephone lines in Africa. The subscriber base is still growing at around 50 per cent per year, but the growth curves

African countries are becoming more democratic. At the same time internet connectivity and the use of cell phones are soaring. There is definitely a link between the rise of new technology and public participation. With time and more bandwidth to come media diversity is going to convert Africa into a pluralistic public space.

At the moment, Africa is poorly connected to the information super-highway

are beginning to flatten in the continent's more mature markets, forcing operators to compete more aggressively on price, quality of service and by introducing new services. However, enormous further potential remains, with overall market penetration at little more than 30 per cent for the continent as a whole.

In terms of the internet, Africa is poorly connected to the rest of the world. This means the new technology has a long way to go to reach its potential in Africa. But this year, 2009, all this is starting to change.

African connectivity is going to improve by 400 times by the end of 2012, and even this year it will take a giant leap. So let me talk about “the link” and let me draw some conclusions and observations

and briefly make reference to some other elections, including those in South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria.

Matthias Spielkamp and Werner D'Inka are following Harry Dugmore intensively. That there is hope for Africa in terms of democracy and transparency not least through the social network capacity of new technology is really good news!



Across Africa, even in desperate situations like Zimbabwe and in exemplary democracies like Ghana, the use of SMS and MMS in elections is growing. This 'media' blogging is taking off everywhere, albeit restricted by bandwidth and connectivity issues. There is evidence of blogging surges during elections in most African countries. Twitter is breaking out all over Africa! Social networks, such as Facebook and Mixxit, accessed mostly on cell phones, are exploding and playing a key role in politics and in elections. However, there is very little 'media density' in most African countries and not much media diversity. Digital media provides an opportunity to change this fast!

Technology as a public space expander

But there are even bigger changes taking place. The first is the shift from identity-based politics to issue-based politics. This is a complex area, but here is my proposition: As democracies mature, more people are likely to vote for issues. As democracies mature, the size of the group of voters who vote based on what they think the best solutions are grows. Maybe this group never becomes a very large group anywhere in the world, but it grows.

All over the world technology is helping to increase this group of voters. This is true in Africa; we see opposition parties winning elections, coming to power and then disappointing the electorate. Then new parties come along with new ideas and come to power. It doesn't happen often, but the fact that it is happening at all is great news for Africa.

This exchange of ideas takes place in what we can theorize as a public space, and as connectivity grows, there is no doubt this

public space grows. Of course you have to take literacy for things that are written into account, but then there are podcasts and audio and video and voice. I see technology as a public space 'expander': its additional marginal costs are often close to zero, much like radio and TV, but not like print, so a good website can reach more and more people at only the cost of additional bandwidth.

One day very soon, all cell phones will be smart phones. This will in fact probably happen even in Africa within half a decade: by the Millennium Development Goal deadline in 2015, it will be hard to find a cell phone that can't access the web. Put all this together, and you have a wonderful, mutually reinforcing convergence: the devices (smart phones connected to fast internet), the flowering of a more vigorous and more pluralistic public space all in turn creating conditions to enlarge the number of 'issue' voters and shrink the number of 'identity' voters. As this virtuous cycle expands, this is going to be very good for Africa.



The atrium of Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung's Berlin office

Elections are a precondition for a democratic system – with elections playing a most crucial role



Election times: harnessing the power of new media

The digital media's impact on political transparency

While elections do not equal democracy, they are a necessary precondition for democratic functioning. Transitions to democracy are promoted by competition from an opposition party and increasing pressure that forces rulers to compromise. Hence, one of the key functions of democratic elections is to clarify where the dividing lines between competing political forces lie. Citizens are offered a choice on how to resolve their most urgent problems in society. The media play a crucial role in this process.

At the centre of the digital revolution, the internet spurs the empowerment of the individual. It has the ability to deliver breaking news as television or radio do, but with the kind of detail that is found in print. The reach of the World Wide Web and thus access to the international knowledge society are further extended by mobile phones used both as a reporting device and an information tool. This is of particular relevance in developing countries where growth trends for mobile phones have exceeded all expectations. For this reason, more and more online media players offer mobile editions that avoid the constraints of desktop web access in less developed regions.

The web is not just a tool for the media, though. Politicians use it in the battle for the electorate and cannot help but rethink every assumption about running a campaign: how to reach different segments of voters, how to raise money, and how to interact with the public. In a non-democratic regime the state uses the digital media to spread propaganda. At the same time it has to counter the challenges posed by the internet. That is to say, the internet is not only a tool for media and politicians but also for the voters.

The rise of citizen journalism, the influence of the blogosphere on shaping public opinion, the growing importance of podcasting and video as well as the increasing popularity of online social networking sites cannot be ignored by politicians in the developed or in the developing world. Meanwhile the media must identify strategies on how to deal with this emerging micro-publishing movement which makes the media more democratic and ensures a broad plurality and diversity of views. The aim of this conference is to promote exchange between international media experts on these global phenomena.

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It's new, and it's a movement: new media reinforce empowerment and democracy

The transcript of the panel discussion

MATTHIAS: Dele, we heard two very different keynotes about campaigning and using online technologies in campaigns, in the United States and then in African countries. You run your own company and publication in Nigeria, the website is called 234next.com and you do not only publish that website but you are also on Twitter and Facebook and you even put out a print publication. I think I'm not really far off if I say that the most recent Nigerian elections were more than flawed. What do you think your role can be in making the next elections look more like what happened in Ghana than what happened in Zimbabwe?

DELE: We're building a mobile platform that, in addition to many other things, we expect will empower citizens to be able to do their own monitoring and send us information from every polling booth. Obviously, we will have done some level of coaching about how this needs to be done. But if in every village and every polling booth throughout the very large and diverse country of 150 million people you have voters being able to report directly to us so that we can serve as a clearing house, then we can empower them to introduce some level of transparency and accountability into the system. Another layer of what we could do is working with civil society groups to empower them to get news out so that it becomes impossible to write the kind of funny numbers we've seen in Nigerian elections. Nigerian politicians have become rather adept at rigging. What is happening now is that technology is leaping ahead of their ability to keep things down. They went from simply adding zeros to election results to just writing numbers that didn't exist at all. So the actual voting is no longer important in this system. What we're going to try and do over the next two years – because the next election is in two years time – is to prepare our news organisation as an empowering tool for the public to be able to do this monitoring themselves. We're obviously not going to be having 10,000 reporters covering polling booths but there will be citizens everywhere where there are polling booths, so we have leverage in that.



Matthias Spielkamp, the panel's host, is a freelance journalist who writes for national German papers, online magazines and weeklies. He has been teaching online journalism and multimedia for a couple of years at the IJ and other places. Matthias is a founding member of the internet portal 'iRights.info – copyright in the digital world' which won the Grimme Online Award in 2006, Germany's most prestigious award for online journalism.

MATTHIAS: Nigeria has, compared to other African countries, very high internet penetration, but it is still at 10 per cent. What can you achieve with that kind of internet penetration? Or do you see it coming up very quickly now?

DELE: Well, it will come up very quickly. What you see right now is that people access the internet mainly from two sources: while at work where they're guaranteed electricity and a computer and at internet cafes which are quite prevalent in metropolitan areas. Because Nigeria has horrific infrastructure challenges, lack of public power supply being number one among them, it has held back people's ability to access the internet. But we're just going beyond that because what you find is as soon as you remove the government from a certain sector in Nigeria then good things begin to happen. Just as an example: the national telephone company for the first 45 years of independence was able to build 400,000 telephone lines, and within seven years since they deregulated the sector you have about 70 million people with cell phones. We're going very heavily down the cell phone route as a means of communicating with people and making things better. The internet by itself remains a powerful tool that you can also connect to the cell phone in very radical ways. But until the infrastructure issues and challenges that hold down internet penetration are resolved, we will lean very heavily in the direction of the cell phone.



Dele Olojede is the founder of Timbuktu Media, which is building a platform-agnostic information company in Nigeria and the rest of Africa, including newspapers and digital products. The only African to win the Pulitzer Prize and a former foreign editor with New York Newsday, he is a frequent public speaker on governance issues and the forces driving change in Africa in the 21st century. Dele Olojede was bureau chief for New York Newsday in Johannesburg, in Beijing, and at the United Nations.

MATTHIAS: Faizullah, let's talk about Pakistan. Many people here knew about the chief justice being removed from office. Afterwards there were a lot of weblogs springing up and people starting to use these new media. Of course this took on a very different and even bigger dynamic after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. So it seems that during the months following first the removal of the chief justice and then the assassination, it was like a crash course in new media for people in Pakistan. Is that an adequate description and where does that bring us today in this respect in Pakistan?

FAIZULLAH: Exactly. These two incidents when the chief justice was removed by Pervez Musharraf, the military ruler, and when Benazir Bhutto was assassinated, it provided a rehearsal time for the new media to emerge, to publicise so that they can work effectively during the elections. When the chief justice was removed, he was wholeheartedly supported by the private media. Naturally what happens in developing countries, the authorities clamp down on independent media. So many channels were blocked from transmission; mainstream media were under tremendous pressure not to support this chief justice. There were a few sections in society

who were ingenious enough that they took to blogging, SMS and Facebook, etc. Within no time people started to see that there is new media which exist in this society and which cannot be easily controlled by the government. It was initiated by university students. At Lahore University of Management Sciences, students launched an e-newspaper named Emergency. It was a sort of interactive newspaper with blogging, with web-casting. The mainstream media drew its strength from these new digital media. Whatever was censored by the mainstream media was carried by the digital media. Whatever the mainstream media couldn't publish or couldn't broadcast, it gave to the new media. Ary One World is a popular television network in Pakistan. When their transmission was blocked they posted live transmissions on YouTube. Then they teamed up with international organisations like CNN and the BBC. CNN and the BBC would broadcast or telecast their transmissions with their own systems. When the elections came, the new digital media had already gained its own space and it was very effective in controlling rigging of the elections and in pinpointing the flaws in the electoral systems.

MATTHIAS: Is there anything comparable to what we heard about Ghana and Zimbabwe that people actually monitored the election process?

FAIZULLAH: Yes. There was a network of different agencies with the name of FAFEN, Fair and Free Elections Network. It was a collaboration of several NGOs. They engaged more than 20,000 civil society workers. They gave them mobile phone sets and they were disseminated into areas where election rigging was expected. These more than 20,000 civil society workers went to particular polling stations to monitor the whole process. They would report to their headquarters, to FAFEN, via an SMS service to say if the election was fair or what was not fair. There were even some private organisations that were not attached to FAFEN who did something marvellous on their own. They went to polling stations with concealed mobile phone cameras and recorded the whole procedure of rigging taking place in one particular city, Karachi. They posted that video on YouTube and sent that clip to iReport at CNN. A Pakistani cable television downloaded that video from YouTube and ran it on the mainstream media in Pakistan. The new media were used in a fairly innovative way in Pakistan and it owes its existence and its success to three events in Pakistan. One is the imposition of a state of emergency when mainstream media got under pressure. Then there was the assassination of Benazir Bhutto when again mainstream media were under pressure and then there were the elections themselves. During all these three critical moments, media became something hydra-headed: if suppressed over here, it emerged over there in another shape.



Faizullah Jan is lecturer at the Department of Journalism & Mass Communication (JMC), University of Peshawar, North West Frontier Province (NWFP), Pakistan. Before joining the JMC he worked six years with The Frontier Post, an English daily, as a member of the editorial board. He is also a regular trainer of journalists, especially those working in conflict zones like the tribal areas of Pakistan.

SMS usage drove the change in Malaysia

MATTHIAS: You said that the TV stations were under pressure so they put the video on YouTube or on CNN's user-generated content place. But what about accessibility in Pakistan to these kinds of media? Is that easy?

FAIZULLAH: Yes. More than 17 per cent of the population in Pakistan have access to the internet. There is a domino effect of these events: a person who has access to the internet watches something on the internet. She or he can record that clip on a mobile phone with a camera and then share that video clip through a network with other mobile users. All the 17 per cent of the citizens with access to the internet are connected in so many different ways with a lot of other people. For example, when the chief justice was sacked, he addressed a bar council by mobile phone. He was under house arrest, so from his house he addressed a bar council. The bar council people placed their mobile phones in front of the mike of a loud-speaker. Others held up their mobile phones in front of the loud-speaker so that their colleagues in other cities and in some cases their colleagues across the world could hear live the speech of the chief justice of Pakistan. This was quite an innovation.

MATTHIAS: Premesh, in Malaysia in 2008, for the first time since 1969 the coalition did not win a two thirds super-majority in the parliament that enables them to change the constitution in your country. That's, of course, a major change even though it has been a democracy for quite some time. What did social networks do to achieve that?

PREMESH: There is a great use of Facebook and My Space and other types of social networks playing their role. Social networks were part of a broader use of the internet. In the 2008 elections the younger voters, especially under 30, were really swinging against the government for the first time, and especially electoral seats in urban areas were falling to the opposition. So very clearly there was a correlation between internet use and changes in voting patterns. The use of SMS was very strong. Though the social network phenomena is catching on in Malaysia and we will see a much stronger use

of social networks in the next three or four years, what really drove the change was more the use of SMS, the use of internet media and also the use of putting videos from the web onto video CDs and using the video CD in rural areas so people could actually see what was going on.



Premesh Chandran is the co-founder and chief executive officer of Malaysiakini.com, the leading independent news media organisation in Malaysia. He is also an advisor to the Southeast Asian Centre for E-media, a non-profit division of Malaysiakini that aims to assist online media in the region. Premesh has previously worked as a journalist and a labour researcher.

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MATTHIAS: There is this very peculiar situation in Malaysia where print publications, TV broadcasting, radio broadcasting are censored, but internet portals are not. This gives the internet publications headway against all the other publications, not so much because they can publish things that the others cannot publish, but because they are just much quicker. You've been benefiting from this regulation for quite some time but you also told me that during the elections last year a lot more internet publications sprang up in Malaysia. Was that a big factor in what happened?



Widely distributed digital media can be used to empower people

PREMESH: Yes, I think that as the internet grows there have been more internet publications. The traditional media are owned and regulated by the government. So they tend to follow the government line. The internet instead has become the main area of debate whether during election time or non-election time. If you don't read the internet you really don't know what is happening in the country. There is a lot of pressure for traditional media and also for the political parties to compete for this online space. When the prime minister of Malaysia was asked after losing such a big majority what had happened, he said his biggest mistake was to underestimate the power of the internet. The first thing the political parties tried after the election was to have a greater presence. They set up their own websites and invested something like 20 million dollars to have cyber-troopers to put their view out into the internet space. Of course, it didn't work. They just reproduced on the internet what they had already said in the mainstream media. In the next few months we are going to have a new prime minister who has sworn to recapture the media space. We are in for some turbulent times in Malaysia.

MATTHIAS: Well, we'll be curious to see what 'recapturing the media space' means in that case. Werner, the first German news magazine opened up shop on the internet 15 years ago. That's a very long time and we know that the internet infrastructure in Germany is almost perfect. We have broadband access everywhere, SMS is widely used, we have mobile phones, smart phones, UMTS service and so on and so forth. But when it comes to elections, German politicians seem to be very slow to grasp this and put the internet and these technologies to their use. What is the reason for that?

WERNER: Just the other day I remembered that in the late 60s or early 70s of the past century politicians in Germany started what was then called 'canvassing'. They went from door to door, said 'Hello, my name is so and so, I'm the candidate of this or that party, how are you doing? What can I do for you? What are your problems?' The communication between politicians and the electorate without the interference of the media has existed much longer than the new media. Of course, it's a crucial difference between literally knocking on doors and using Google Earth as Barack Obama did. In terms of using such new technologies and new means for direct communication between politicians and the electorate, Germany is a developing country. Maybe one reason is that in Germany the traditional media are at a relatively high level. Just some weeks ago, when we had regional elections in the state of Hesse, it was the first time that I received a SMS from the leader of the Liberal Party saying – just as in Ghana – please go to the poll, please vote for the Liberal Party and please ask ten friends or relatives to do so. It was the first time ever! I just looked up some figures whilst preparing for our discussion. There are 50 videos on the YouTube channel run by the Conservative Party in Germany, the party of the chancellor, with less than 100,000 users. The Facebook group of this same party hasn't gained more than 500 members which is very low, especially when compared to the US. In Germany the use of new media technologies is very low when compared to other countries.



MATTHIAS: But what do you think is the reason? Do you think that the politicians themselves don't think it is a worthwhile exercise to use this mode? Do they think that the voters are not interested? Because from my perspective and that of the people I am surrounded by, I think people are interested in using these new technologies. So again, it seems like there is a lack of competence. Is there?

WERNER: I agree, yes, I think it is the case and I think Barack Obama's campaign will make them rethink the whole subject. This year alone with four or five elections coming up these new technologies will be used more and more. I am convinced of it.

DELE: It would seem more likely that this will happen when a dark horse candidate using all these tools suddenly emerges and becomes very successful politically with the voters. This will be the key galvanising factor for the more traditional candidates and parties to switch to the new age. Unless you are threatened, you tend to just keep doing the same thing you've been doing.

MATTHIAS: Nancy brings us back to the Obama campaign. I'd like to quote something that I read in a book about that campaign. It says that Obama and Clinton both

used Twitter but when you signed up to follow their messages only Obama repaid the favour by signing up to follow your messages, as well. One blogger said it's a small thing but it's an important gesture because it shows that Obama understood the etiquette of social media. I can fully agree up to here. But then the blogger said that Clinton is basically using Twitter as another broadcasting medium, but Obama is using it as a tool for connecting with people on an individual level. We all know that politics is symbolic but this seems to go a little too far for me because no one could have the impression that Obama or his staffers are following these people's messages when they have a million followers or something like that. Are they creating expectations that they will never possibly be able to meet in saying things like that?



Werner D'Inka is a journalist and joined the Board of Editors-in-Chief of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung in 2005. He supports the IJ as a trainer and guest-speaker sharing his experience in media ethics and media management with young journalists from all over the world. He is also the honorary director of the Free Russian German Institute for Journalism in Rostov-on-the-Don in South Russia and reads lectures at various German universities.



Nancy Scola is editor with the award-winning online publication *techPresident*, where she authors *The Daily Digest*, a widely-read newsletter analysing how

technology is transforming American politics. Nancy also serves as an editor for the Personal Democracy Forum, *techPresident*'s parent organisation and host to a popular conference on participatory politics held in New York City each summer. As an independent journalist, Nancy covers the intersection of technology and culture for publications including *Science Progress*, *Columbia Journalism Review* and *Politics Magazine*. She teaches new media and politics at New York University.

NANCY: Absolutely. With some of these things like Facebook, like mybarackobama.com, you weren't connecting to Barack Obama necessarily. It's a fool's proposition to think you are actually engaging with the leading candidate for the election of the President of the United States. It's connecting with other people that are using these tools. But with something like Twitter, it's a very different mechanism. With Twitter you are connecting to the one central figure. I think it's worth noting that Barack Obama's considered not a very successful 'twitterer'. It's not a medium he has mastered very well. He's posted very few times compared to some other politicians. Since the election he has posted maybe four times. It's clearly not one of the mediums that he has really embraced.

What is really interesting is what some other politicians were doing with these tools. When Barack Obama gave his first address to the Joint Houses of Congress a number of Congress people were actually posting on Twitter with their Blackberries from the House floor. Fairly non-substantive stuff. You know, people were posting things like 'I'm sitting next to Joe, he looks nice tonight', that sort of thing. A lot of commentators were up in arms about it because they thought it was a trivial use of the technology. But you learn to walk before you learn to run. A lot of politicians are learning to walk and Twitter is a very safe space where they can do that. Some of us are very encouraging to those folks not because they are per-

forming very well using these new tools but because they have to start somewhere.

I think when you talk about why politicians in Germany are not engaging with these tools in the same way that Barack Obama did, I think it is really important to keep in mind the match between Barack Obama's political ideology, the way he approaches politics, and the tools.

In some ways it was the perfect marriage. Here was a community organiser who believes in distributed power to some extent, believes in approaching problems from a sort of grass-roots perspective, handed a set of tools that are built on those premises. When we ask 'Why isn't Hillary Clinton more social on the internet?' maybe the answer is that this isn't how Hillary Clinton is going to use the internet. Just because Barack Obama did it, it's not necessarily the way it is going to be used moving forward.

MATTHIAS: Which directly brings me to Christoph. You know, when I looked at Thorsten Schäfer-Gümbel's Twitter 'tweets' – he's a politician in Germany who ran for the position of president of the state of Hesse – that was interesting because he sort of made a fool out of himself in the minds of many people but still some said 'You know, it's a good thing that he is starting to try it'. You have an academic standpoint and look at numbers as well. What is changing in competence when it comes to the internet and in politics as an effect of that?

CHRISTOPH: It's not all stone-age what German politicians are doing when it comes to the usage of the internet. We had that short, hot summer in 2005 when suddenly a remarkable number of weblogs and podcasts took off during the Bundestag election. But they were just taken down again the day after or the week after the election.

Then we had Angela Merkel's video podcast which resembles to a large extent the video podcasts Barack Obama is doing in the White House right now. And it is still considered that he has reinvented the whole usage of the internet as a means of communication for politicians as a sitting president. We need a more differentiated view of those phenomena. I'm glad you mentioned Thorsten Schäfer-Gümbel. I don't think he made a fool of himself when using Twitter. In comparison to Barack Obama I would say he embraced this medium a lot more just to send messages on his day-to-day routines as a politician. He has gained a remarkable number of followers. He is now struggling to keep them following him. That's why he started to intensify his Twitter use more in a private perspective in just the last couple of days.




Christoph Bieber is assistant professor at the Institute for Political Science at the University of Gießen. He is also a member of the university's Centre for Media and Interactivity. Christoph Bieber is considered to be a pioneer in studying the use of the internet as a tool in election campaigns. Since 2000 he has been a member of the editorial board of PoliNet which is the umbrella organisation of the politik-digital online platform. Christoph Bieber runs his own weblog where he discusses current affairs, election campaigns and the attempt to get the new media involved.

We do have a good infrastructure, but we don't have a good infrastructure when it comes to the blogosphere. It is not a very healthy habitat here in Germany. Maybe Twitter will do some reverse engineering here. A lot of people will start maintaining Twitter accounts. But they will soon realise that they can't say all the things they want to say in 140 characters. Perhaps they will start opening or even reopening their websites – there might be a second spring of the blogosphere in Germany this year.

Another aspect you have to bear in mind when talking about the political use of the internet in Germany is the enormous amount of time Barack Obama, John McCain and Hillary Clinton had in their two year long campaign for the White House. We will have a very short period of campaigning in Germany which will be condensed into maybe six or eight weeks this summer. This will be the core time for setting up 'new media' for campaigning. You just can't get half of the success that Obama had. His MySpace and Facebook accounts started on a very tiny scale in terms of numbers and he's gained followers and friends on Facebook – I think about three million – since the day he was elected. So he had about two years to gather those two million friends and we simply don't have the time. Thorsten Schäfer-Gümbel had exactly 71 days of campaigning left when he set up his digital profile.

MATTHIAS: So there's something to look forward to this summer. The IJ invited some alumni over, people who have participated in courses in the past at the IJ. The first one I'd like to address is Ahmad Nawid from Kunduz in Afghanistan. Nawid, in an analysis you wrote for the IJ, you said that there are several online outlets providing news in your country, but online penetration is just very low at approximately 1.5 per cent and that the bandwidth and quality of internet connections is pretty bad. At the same time you say that SMS services are not widely adopted because there is a law that prohibits companies from offering these services. However, this law is going to fall in a couple of months or weeks. Will SMS already play a major role in the upcoming elections in Afghanistan?



NAWID: Our election is going to be in August. There are two telephone companies in Afghanistan at the moment with an SMS service. Already SMS messages are distributed on a daily basis telling us 'Please vote, register yourself for the voting'. The idea to start these SMS alerts came from news agencies in Afghanistan. One of the news agencies, Pajhwok, even started an SMS programme

and invested a lot of money. But their initiative was blocked by the ministry, which said that there is still no law for this kind of SMS service, and they cannot start to work until the law will have been passed in parliament. The head of the agency is afraid that this will only happen after the elections.

Mobile phones are the only device which can be used to ensure transparency in the elections in Afghanistan

FAIZULLAH: There are two mobile companies in Afghanistan which use mobile phones as social tools. One company, for example, sends out SMS weather forecasts and product prices. Another one deals with institutional micro-finance information. The United Nations are already using SMS to inform NGO workers about the security situation in Afghanistan. Mobile phone penetration in Afghanistan right now is 19 per cent, which is far more than television. So mobile phones are the only devices which can be used in the upcoming elections in Afghanistan to ensure transparency and to mobilise people to vote.

MAN IN AUDIENCE: I'm Thomas Wiegard from Germany, I'm with Focus Magazine but also blog and twitter and do all the stuff you do on Facebook. Politicians who run for elections need to be TV personalities to be successful. Do they now need to be a web personality to succeed? And is there a difference between different countries?



Though internet penetration in Germany is very high the media experts on the panel said that Germany was unlikely to expect web-based campaigning in 2009. That's different in developing countries. In Pakistan, for example, especially the penetration and the use of mobile phones are going to change the role of new media and their impact on society profoundly.

CHRISTOPH: I think for Germany it's easy. We won't have a really web-based campaign this summer so TV will be the dominant medium. The TV debates will be the key media events this year. You can craft a very nice and very elaborate web-personality using Facebook or Twitter or any other platform, but this won't be more important than your TV personality, at least this year.

MAN IN AUDIENCE: I have a question regarding the framework of conditions in different countries, for example in Pakistan and Malaysia. How is the internet and access to new forms of media going to affect the next elections?

FAIZULLAH: Even during the recent elections, there were some politicians who were running as independent candidates who made good use of mobile phones. For example, prior to the elections some politicians would send SMS messages to their electorate asking them to vote for them. Such small gestures have a rolling effect in societies like ours. You convince one person and in fact you convince a whole community, you convince a whole family. The projection for Pakistan is that by 2011 three quarters of the people in Pakistan will

have mobile phones. And 60 per cent of people will have television sets of their own. In five years time, when the next elections are due, the new media are going to have a very profound role to play.

PREMESH: A key indicator is how to combine the traditional media with the online media. Singapore, for example, is very close to Malaysia, and in Singapore the traditional media is also very controlled. Internet media are practically completely controlled. Last time the votes for the opposition increased. The leaders in Singapore are very scared that this vote will still increase – and for the first time you see things changing in Singapore. New technology will definitely have a growing effect on the political system.




The question how digital media influence democratic institution building in developing regions such as Africa was one of the hottest issues of the panel discussion.

MAN IN AUDIENCE: I'm Joseph Kafumbe from Uganda. I'm training with the IJ in multimedia and online journalism. My question goes to Professor Harry Dugmore. In your keynote you told us that Africa is likely to have more democracy due to new media. But don't you think that those in power will be trying to hinder companies from developing better access to the internet in order to prevent people from getting better informed?

HARRY: It's a good question and it's a very difficult question to answer in an African context. Because when one looks at infrastructure like roads and ports and airports you would say, well why are so many of these things underdeveloped? Is that an attempt to hold people back? And the answer is no, it's about incompetence and corruption in particular. Where the state has monopolised telecoms since independence, like in South Africa, technological innovation has been stymied by the monopoly, particularly the internet. Only with liberalisation and by allowing more companies and allowing competition – as we've seen now in Kenya and we've seen in Nigeria – the infrastructure starts to roll out very quickly. Even in places like Somalia where the state is effectively not functioning – there are no

institutes of the state at all and things have failed – the cell phones are working. Why? Because usually that is in private hands. Zimbabwe is a failing state; everything is crumbling, the healthcare, the schools. But cell phones are working really well. What is a worry is that it is quite easy to turn off the tap. In Ethiopia you had a contested election four or five years ago. The opposition used SMS wonderfully well to mobilise. The government just banned, stopped, said to the telephone companies 'OK, you can make calls but no more SMS'. So for three years in Ethiopia, no one could send or receive an SMS. Technically you can turn off the SMS but not turn off the calls, and calls were quite expensive. Of course, the power elites in Africa are threatened by the ability of people to do cell phone monitoring which is why Mugabe banned it in the second election; he banned the ability of people to push news around. But they also see the power of the new media for their own elite. And that's the worry. Just like with the old media, the power elites, the hundred or two hundred or five hundred families in one particular country that dominate politics are really starting to see what a powerful medium this is. Even Mugabe offered the Zanu PF song as a ring-tone. You will see the ruling elites trying to monopolise new media.



DELE: I'm not as concerned as Harry that there will be a big roll back from the political or other elites in these African countries. All around the continent there are at least five or eight Sat 3 cable projects being laid along the coastline to improve broadband connectivity with the rest of the world. They are all in private hands and it is extremely difficult for a government who wants to turn off the tap. I think what you have instead is the threat of states failing and becoming a hindrance to the orderly development of these things rather than the states stopping them from growing.

Matthias: Let's turn a little more to the question of what role journalists have in that. The question is always: What is mobile reporting in contrast to traditional reporting? We have advanced technology, we can record from the scene with video and audio, which a couple of years ago was possible only with enormous sums

of money with an infrastructure that was very expensive. Now we can do that. Werner, your paper does not make too much use of the new possibilities. Is there a journalistic reason for that? Do you think that it is overrated? Do you think that it is not as important as it seems?

WERNER: Difficult question. In my opinion there is no crucial difference between traditional reporting and mobile reporting. Journalism has developed over centuries a set of professional standards that are still valid in these modern times. Standards such as fact-checking, separation between comment and facts, factual reporting, separation between public affairs and personal or individual interests. I think there is nothing new with respect to that in this new world.

Infrastructure might
be a bigger issue
for the development
of new media than
government
restrictions



Still, there are discussions about quality control and standards in the era of citizen journalism

MATTHIAS: But as we have heard before, technology does change things and the way things are done. The opportunity to send videos and audios directly from the scene, is that not something new in your opinion?

WERNER: No it isn't, it isn't. I think there is no difference between sending a correspondent to China and relying on what he sends us back and a mobile reporter if the professional standards of traditional journalism are maintained. I think this is the crucial point.

MATTHIAS: Dele, you were a bureau chief of New York Newsday for a long time. You have founded a company which makes use of these things which we now call 'mobile reporting'. You have video on your site, your editors use Twitter. What do you think are the chances with that?

DELE: There is a tension we see constantly in the newsroom about this, how you filter things, how you control such things – you know, between quality control and standards. One of my desk editors said 'I don't want any blog posts online that haven't passed through me directly'. We said, OK, let's give that a try. But then things sat on that desk for two weeks which defeated the whole purpose of being able to blog constantly. But what we are careful to do is to pay more attention to news in the quality control process. I have allowed a

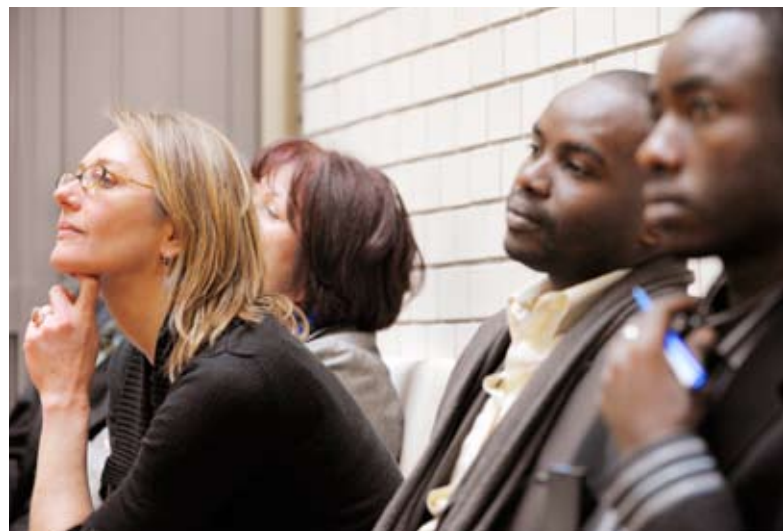
little bit of a frontier mentality to develop with regards to the bloggers. We're removing more constraints from bloggers and just letting them do their thing. We say that this is just someone's opinion so long as it doesn't violate certain standards of taste and decency and so on. We just concentrate our efforts on facts that we present to the public behind which we put our names. For the bloggers we put a disclaimer: this is this person's opinion, we do not necessarily share it. But we stand behind our news when we say that Minister X is stealing money from the public treasury. We guarantee that we've checked those facts. When someone is blogging you're on your own, mainly.

MATTHIAS: I would like to turn to another of the IJ alumni in this case, Kent Mensah, who is a web-editor for africanews.com in their office in Ghana. Kent told us that during the counting of the results at the polling stations, reporters used their mobile phones to broadcast live the results from all the 230 constituencies. In effect, the media had the results in hand before the collation sheets were even faxed to the headquarters of the Electoral Commission in Accra for certification. It can't be speed alone that makes this development important. What is it?


KENT MENSAH: In Ghana, most politicians and political party agencies or agents at polling stations ended up manipulating electoral

figures in the past. So the media decided this time in light of the upcoming elections to coach a lot of citizens, most of them student journalists, in reporting on their own. The affluent media houses being understaffed when it comes to professional journalists coached them to be at the polling station. They equipped them with mobile phones, or with cameras, or even with laptops with GPRS wireless-enabled equipment. Then they went to the polling stations in the rural areas where they were reporting directly to the media houses. Every polling station declared their results publicly after the election. When polling station A declared its results, there was a reporter who directly called into the radio station or TV station to tell them the results of this particular polling station. At the end of the day, in about five or six hours, most of the results from most of the 230 constituencies had arrived at radio stations or media houses, wherever in Ghana. But the Electoral Commission was handicapped because it did not have the equipment to station their people in all the polling stations. They were relying on faxes, they were also relying on outdated communication systems. So they had to wait. The result sheet had to be sent from a polling centre to a collating station where it took a long time. By the time the electoral officials had got to the collation centres, the media already had the results. The beauty of the whole thing was that we had CODEO, the Coalition of Domestic Electoral Observers. The CODEO people were not journalists, they were citizens, but professionally trained to look at certain indicators to determine if the elections went transparent. We wanted to avoid the situation where the media would be the electoral commissioner when there is an official Electoral Commission. So we kept our results or we said 'These are the projections that we have, let's wait until the Electoral Commission announces their results'. And when it came, it was so perfect. What the media had and what the Electoral Commission had was absolutely correct.

In Ghana, citizens were trained to check if the elections went transparent. They worked on behalf of media companies though the media didn't function as electoral commissioner. It functioned as an independent verifying board, approving the results published by the official Electoral Commission.



The Ghana election were used as a role model to show that new media, new journalists and new citizens helped democracy having it's way. New digital devices might even be a means to overcome fraud and sustain the freedom of choice – not only in Africa.



MATTHIAS: Nancy said that if politicians start to talk to voters directly, it can also be a very dangerous situation for journalism. Now we have examples here of how technology can make journalism a lot stronger than it was before. Is this technological development making journalism weaker than before?

FAIZULLAH: There is an interesting situation in Pakistan where new technology has given rise to a new journalism in Pakistan which is called 'citizen journalism'. A powerful publishing house which owns an English-only cable television service asked the public on television to send in compelling pictures, compelling movies or compelling messages. If it was interesting enough they would telecast it on their television service. Many people grabbed a digital camera, went out and made videos and pictures and sent them to the television service. This is a new sort of journalism emerging

Citizen journalism covers stories ignored by the mainstream media

in Pakistan, so-called citizen journalism. Citizen journalism covers topics which are ignored by the mainstream media. The main question is whether this is going to be a threat to traditional journalism or not. If every citizen becomes a journalist, then what will happen to professional journalists?

DELE: Is that really a problem? People are sharing information, they've always done that. It should be encouraged. If a leader organises millions of people who believe in his programme and he asks them to help him sell it to the rest of the country – that is democracy in action. If someone doesn't like that, they should out-organise him and put an alternative before the public. Citizen journalists will give you all sorts of stuff, much of it raw and unchecked, and therefore potentially unreliable. There will never be a shortage of the need for credible information on which you can base your

actions and decisions. So professional journalists, traditional journalists as we call them, will continue to be in high demand. I think the real question we face is how they will make money, rather than whether they are needed. They are needed.

CHRISTOPH: I wouldn't agree totally with Dele. I think what we see and what might be some kind of an overlooked phenomenon of these changes in journalism is something you might call 'incumbent' journalism. Everyone talks about citizen journalism when someone is doing some kind of reporting. But when professionally trained journalists join the campaigns and do their professional journalistic work from inside the campaign, I'm not sure if that is a threat to journalism and to the development and the structure of the public's view. So I wouldn't be too optimistic that every well-done act of journalism is really only good for the community.



It seems to be complicated to transfer the Obama campaign's transparency and assumed grassroots democracy into the Obama presidency. At least whitehouse.gov is still missing the same kind of social web feeling mybarackobama.com had, said Karsten Wenzlaff.

MAN IN AUDIENCE: My name is Timothy Munuku from Nairobi in Kenya. I started a newspaper but I'm currently a student at the IJ. We have talked so much about the beauty of the new media. But in Kenya, the same new media were used to spark violence. In Rwanda it was the radio which was used to incite people to violence, and I'm sure we will see people sending hate messages via SMS on their mobile phones. Don't you think that politicians might misuse the new media to even restrain democracy?

NANCY: I think that the Kenyan example is a great one. After the elections there were some SMS messages that went around encouraging violence, inciting violence and all that sort of thing which does have echoes of what happened in Rwanda in terms of how public radio was used to promote violence in that case. But not all of new media is the same. Mobile phones and SMS are still a uni-directional means of communicating, as radio was. The internet can provide better checks on that sort of communication, so if people are promoting violence there are opportunities to push back on that because it is more of an open forum. I still have reservations about relying so much on one-directional technology.

HARRY: Just to echo what Nancy has said, particularly with the uni-directional nature of cell phones and SMS: in a volatile situation it is quite easy to stoke rumours. We have seen this in a variety of contexts around the world in terms of people just sending messages on SMS phones and on websites in terms of particular financial stocks and then the stock moves and they make money or the

stock goes down. Likewise you can start rumours as has happened in some African countries and elsewhere in the world, that some candidate is ill. Technology is not neutral. Old media, new media are not. Just because something is new doesn't mean that it is necessarily a force for good. I agree with Nancy that the internet is in a sense more mediated and there is the opportunity for correction. But Dele also mentioned that one still needs credible sources of information. The point that you are making about the role of journalism – that is why what is happening in America is problematic. One does want to retain the power with the new media in the ability of media to give a credible voice, and you need a multiplicity of voices to do that. So media checks on each other. CNN says, 'No, Fox is wrong' and Fox says 'No, the BBC is wrong' and The Standard in Ghana says, you know, 'This is...' and you can then sort of make up your mind. The problem in Africa is the very low level of media density and diversity. In America you are going from a city having three papers to having two papers to having no papers. This is tragic. Of course, it is now all online. We need the multiplicity of voices and the media density, in Africa and elsewhere.


MAN IN AUDIENCE: My name is Karsten Wenzlaff from the German publishing house Vorwärts-Verlag which is also affiliated with the German Labour Party. I worked for the Obama campaign in fall. Nancy, I would like you to comment briefly on whitehouse.gov and how it tries to be transparent to some extent but still doesn't manage the same kind of social web feeling as mybarackobama.com had.



Nancy Scola raised the question which bothers many Americans of how the open spirit of Obama's election campaign could be moved – as promised – into the governing stage.

NANCY: This is the big question that is being asked now in what we call 'open government' circles in the United States. Which is: how can we take some of what we learned and some of what we excelled at during the election and move that over into the governing stage? Which in some ways is a very different proposition: between organising in and around an election, which has a set end and one particular goal, and then reaching a consensus and participation around pieces of legislation, or how we are going to approach the major problems, the very major problems facing the United States right now. It's a subject worthy of another conference. But just to touch on some of the places to look for some of these answers: despite the many problems facing the United States in some ways, one of the good things is that we are architected towards openness in that our laws are set up to encourage people to participate in democracy. So we have Freedom of Information Act laws that are very strong, open data laws that are very strong. What people are pushing for now are ways to get that information out of the government in a meaningful way. We have a major spending bill, an 800 billion dollar spending bill that was just pushed through Congress which is going to fundamentally re-architect American society in the many years

going forward. So people want to understand where that money is going: is it creating jobs, is it being wasted? There was a big push to get that data out of the government in a timely way, in a structured way, and in a clean data format so that then people could use it to analyse, to make visualisations, to make charts, to write newspaper stories – hopefully, if there are any newspaper reporters left by that point. But we need a structured press! Citizen journalists are great at writing stories about what is happening in their communities, about what is happening in local government. But the kind of really resource-intensive work is what's going to be needed in the United States. We need this sort of mass data processing to help us understand the state we are in.



MATTHIAS: Christoph, is there anything that you can say about the information from the public coming to politicians?

CHRISTOPH: I think it is a very crucial point for designing a government and there have been lots of efforts to develop similar programmes to do that during the last five or ten years even in Germany. I'd like to see something like that in Germany, maybe abwrackpraemie.de. Maybe this is the first step to get people more involved in government processes. It is much easier to get people involved during a campaign. But the very important task is to keep the connections after the election. You can see that in the Hesse election just a couple of months ago. We had the public attention on all the problems within this little state in Germany, but you see almost nothing going on on a broader stage, what is happening there. So we do have another rupture in these two sides of political use of the internet. The bright side is the use during the campaign and the darker side is the use after the election. I'm not sure how we can solve that problem and I think we do need more than one conference to talk about that!

KARSTEN: Premesh, how will the new government in Malaysia include Web 2.0 applications in governing, in promoting their policy goals to the people and including the people in formulating these policies?


PREMESH: The framework that political parties and the government operate on is still very much power-centric and top-down. They are using a lot of the new media to reach out, but they don't want to give too much power to the people or to become too 2.0 where the people can actually start pushing back. Even with the alternative parties you notice this. They want alternative media to reach out to people because they can't go to traditional media, but they are not prepared to listen in return and act on this. So the whole idea of power and being power-centric still dominates. I think it is going to take at least another generation, another five or ten years, before a new form of governance, a new paradigm or idea of what governance is about emerges with this whole Web 2.0 decentralised process that we are experiencing.

Politics 2.0 means
that people can
actually push back



In 2009, Germany might be a good example to have a very close look on the impact of new media on politics and elections. It might be worth to compare new media usage in an industrialised country to the usage in development countries – like Ghana, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan and so on.

There is a difference mode of delivery and



MATTHIAS: OK, thank you very much. Well time is almost up unfortunately and I apologise for not being able to take more questions from the audience but it is a big panel and I think there were very many interesting points made and questions raised. For the last round I have just one unfinished sentence that I would like to ask each of the panel members to finish. And that is: 'Traditional journalism has a substantial role in future election coverage if...' I would like to start with you, Premesh. How would you finish that sentence?

PREMESH: ... they really compete to combine speed with credibility. I think the traditional media are foregoing speed and that is where the blogs and everybody else has an edge on them and they are suffering from that. They need to be both credible and fast in their information to remain relevant.

CHRISTOPH: Traditional journalism will succeed when it pays attention and respect to the new traditions of journalistic activities such

as mobile reporting and the use of user-generated content and citizen journalism or 'incumbent' journalism.

DELE: Traditional journalism will flourish if it manages to understand that there is a difference between the mode of delivery and the information itself. Traditional journalism has a key role and it must continue to play it. We need to understand that a platform issue is different from the information being presented on that platform.

WERNER: Traditional journalism has a substantial role in future election coverage if it continues to ask the sceptical questions and to be our civic alarm system in society.

FAIZULLAH: In Pakistan we have seen a fusion of the old and new media whenever there is a crisis or whenever there are elections. So the traditional media and the new media have a very symbiotic relationship. They complement each other; they draw strength from each other. Traditional media has to harness the new digital media and put it to professional journalism use in future elections.

NANCY: Traditional journalism will flourish or at least survive in the United States in terms of election coverage if they step down off the mountain top on which they have been perched through the years. And they will flourish if they realise that what had been a broadcast system is now a conversation.

MATTHIAS: Thank you very much to everyone on the panel. Time is up. That was a very interesting discussion and good-bye to everybody.

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the information itself



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The International Institute for Journalism (IJ) of InWEnt – Capacity Building International, Germany, was founded in 1962 in order to give young, up-and-coming journalists from developing and transitional countries the opportunity to enhance their knowledge in the media business. The IJ offers advanced training and dialogue for print and news agency journalists as well as for online journalists.

The aim of the IJ programme is to strengthen freedom of expression and press freedom in the partner countries of the German development cooperation and thus improve the conditions for democratisation and economic and social development. In this capacity, the IJ represents a key pillar in the media development work of the Federal Government of Germany and particularly of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

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