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Bring Back the Signal: An Evaluation of the Existence of a Digital Public Sphere in the South African Mediascape.



By

Nkululeko Sibiya, student 9905018F,

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

Masters in Media Studies.

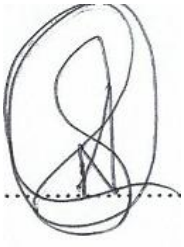
Supervisor: Dr. Cobus van Staden

2017

Plagiarism Declaration

I, Nkululeko Sibiya (Student Number: 9905018F), declare that this thesis is my own original unaided work. Where other people's works have been used, this has been fully acknowledged. This thesis is being submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements of the award of the Degree of Masters in Media Studies in the Faculty of Humanities, at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination, or to any other university.

Signed



……

Nkululeko Sibiya

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Centurion, February 2017
Nkululeko Sibiya

Abstract

On the 12th of February 2015, in an unprecedented move, members of the media in South Africa (SA) protested in Parliament and chanted "bring back the signal", waving their smartphones in the air after discovering that a signal jamming device had been activated to disrupt cell phone signals in the National Assembly. Their protest denied President Jacob Zuma the opportunity to deliver his State of the Nation Address (SONA) until the signal and connection to the internet had been restored. It was the first time in the History of democratic SA the SONA was disrupted. The presence as well as the rapid spread and use of new media technologies in the SA mediascape has led scholars like Yu-Shan Wu to question the nature of their use and impact on government policy decisions. This study contributes to such work as well as long standing debates about the role of new media technologies in advancing democratic ideals in emerging democracies and the internet's role as a public sphere. It does this by using a case study research method focusing on SONA 2015 to evaluate whether the South African digital space constitutes a digital public sphere. This paper concludes that indeed the South African digital space does constitute a form of digital public sphere. This sphere is largely operated and structured by news media organisations that use their websites, social media and various online platforms to engender it.

Key Words

New media, internet, democracy, public sphere, deliberation, digital public sphere SONA 2015.

ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
ANN7	Africa News Network 7
COPE	Congress of the People
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DA	Democratic Alliance
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
eNCA	eNews Channel Africa
EWN	Eye Witness News
FF	Freedom Front Plus
GCIS	Government Communication and Information System
MP's	Members of Parliament
NCOP	National Council of Provinces
SABC News	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SACP	South African Communist Party
SANEF	South African National Editors Forum
SONA	State of the Nation Address
TV	Television

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Chapter 1: Introduction:

This paper will evaluate the existence of a digital *public sphere* in the South African mediascape using the events of the State of the Nation Address (SONA) of 2015 as a case study, as well as highlight the challenges that such technologies bring for established social institutions like Parliament. It will be argued that the advent and subsequent proliferation of smartphones in the South African mediascape, coupled with the growth and use of social media platforms on the internet as well as online news reporting, has had profound implications for institutions and practices of democracy. As a dominant public sphere and a space where the events in question took place, Parliament is used as an example of a democratic institution that is negotiating challenges brought by new media technologies. It is further argued that these technologies have engendered a digital public sphere, albeit not in the Habermasian sense. While the traditional model of the Habermasian public sphere is discussed, the paper uses Rauchfleisch and Kovic's (2016: 1) hierarchical model of generalized functions of the public sphere to evaluate the South African digital mediascape. This digital sphere in question is in a state of development and morphs into different states from time to time, with varying impacts and consequences.

This study seeks to contribute to the understanding of new media technologies and their role in the engendering of a digital public sphere as well as document the challenges that these technologies bring for democratic institutions like Parliament through an analysis of the events and the role played by various stakeholders during SONA 2015, on the 12th of February. The SONA 2015 is used as a case study because the events of this day will arguably be remembered as a watershed moment which, according to the media and various sectors of society, saw the culmination of all the mounting threats to freedom of expression play out and become a significant issue in the public sphere. Activists, various proponents in academia as well as those in the media sector have been warning about a rise in threats to media freedom, waged by the South African government led by the African National Congress (ANC).

The SONA is an address by the President of South Africa to the nation and marks the official opening of Parliament. The occasion is used to outline the government's policy objectives as well as deliverables for the year ahead. The SONA lays the foundation for Government action. It is claimed by Parliament that by being aware of government's activities, all citizens can be involved and take part in improving the lives of South Africans. The SONA 2015 is pivotal as a case study because of a number of events that took place right through the day on the 12th of February 2015. These events allow one the opportunity to assess the context within which the digital/new media technologies in question were used, thus also capturing the political atmosphere that prevailed leading up to President Jacob Zuma's address to the nation. It is important to note that these events are not just isolated to the day in question, but are all inextricably linked to media revelations about the exorbitant expenditure on security upgrades at President Zuma's private residence in eNkandla, Kwa Zulu-Natal.

These revelations were followed by Public Protector Thuli Madonsela's investigations and report, which concluded that President Zuma had to pay back a portion of the R246 million spent for upgrades at his home. Parliament tried to dismiss the report through several ad-hoc committees which used the African National Congress's majority in parliament to veto any arguments from opposition parties. This culminated in the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) staging a protest in the National Assembly on the 21st of August 2014, where they demanded that President Zuma tell the South African public when he was going to pay back the money. The President abandoned the question and answer session, and the EFF was ordered out of Parliament by Speaker Baleka Mbete (Loggenberg, 2014). The EFF subsequently intensified its 'pay back the money' campaign and launched an online countdown clock to the SONA 2015 on their website, threatening to disrupt the event if Parliament refused to set up a special sitting for the President to answer questions (Essop, 2015). Journalists like Ranjeni Munusamy (2015), argue that people should not have been surprised by scenes of chaos and violence because the EFF had announced its intention to disrupt in advance.

As mentioned earlier, the SONA 2015 is of importance because on the 12th of February 2015, several noteworthy events took place several hours before the President could address the nation. Firstly, the estranged leader of the EFF, Andile Mngxitama decided to host a press conference, against his party's wishes, with an intention to explain to the media why some of the EFF's Members of Parliament could not sing 'pay back the money'. Several members of the EFF disrupted this press conference, assaulted and chased Mngxitama down the streets of

Cape Town. Twitter was abuzz with reports of this incident, with posts of photos of Mngxitama being whisked away by his supporters. Mngxitama later tweeted; "I'm alive. The press briefing shall happen today" and "Thanks to those fighters who protected me against the uninformed fighters (Business Day, 2015)." This is one of those events that highlight the shortcomings of the democratic practice in South Africa, where the freedom of speech is under attack not only form government, but from various stakeholders in society. In another part of Cape Town, some members of the Democratic Alliance (DA) were assaulted and arrested by police during protests. Photos and tweets about the arrests were all over social networks. It would seem members of the public and those from various political parties found a voice online when they were denied their right to speak or protest. In Parliament itself, staff members belonging to the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu) went on a strike demanding a 13th cheque (Munusamy, 2015). In his account of the day's events, Mail & Guardian contributor Richard Calland (2015) submits that the atmosphere that surrounded this SONA was tense and hostile, as opposed to all other SONA's before it, which exhibited excitement and a celebratory mood.

Roughly an hour before the President could deliver his speech; some journalists initiated a protest in the press gallery of the National Assembly after discovering that a jamming device was installed to scramble cellphone signals and block all communications within the National Assembly, resulting in them not being able to file their stories and communicate over the internet (SAPA, 2015). They chanted, "bring back the signal, bring back the signal," while waving their cellphones at an electronic black box, which they believed to be the jamming device. Members Parliament (MPs) from opposition parties, the DA and Economic EFF, joined in the chanting, also holding up and waving their cellphones. The DA Chief Whip John Steenhuisen and the Freedom Front's (FF) Corné Mulder rose on a 'point of order' to submit that the jamming was a violation of the Constitution and the right to freedom of speech. They contended that the freedom of the Press and the right to receive and disseminate information was being violated. This prompted the Speaker of Parliament to request for the Parliamentary officials to investigate and get the jamming device switched off. Eventually, after about twenty minutes or so, the signal was restored. The fact that journalists and MP's halted the President's SONA and insisted that no speech be delivered until access to the internet was restored, is of paramount importance. This is because it points to the significance of the internet in the South African mediascape, and it is vital for media scholars to understand the nature of this significance. The first question it raises is whether the South

African internet or digital space constitutes a digital public sphere? The second question to be answered is; besides chanting bring back the signal, what did members of the media do when they discovered that there was no signal in the National Assembly? This question is asked because protest is usually used as a last option when people feel they are not being heard.

Just as President Zuma began to deliver his speech, the EFF's Secretary General Godrich Gardee rose on a point of privilege, asking when the President was going to pay back the money. The Speaker tried in vain to deter EFF MP's from asking the question, arguing that the SONA was a special sitting, and not a question and answer session. Eventually, after some verbal 'sparring', the Speaker ruled that EFF leader Julius Malema, as well as his Deputy Floyd Shivambu and EFF national spokesperson Mbuyiseni Ndlozi were out of order, and asked the Sergeant at Arms to remove them. When security personnel tried to remove EFF MP's, fist fights broke out as they were dragged out of the National Assembly. At this point, opposition MP's and members of the media used their cell phones to record what was happening. What is of significance is that footage of the EFF's removal was not shown on TV as the Parliamentary cameras were focused on the Speaker as well as her assistant, the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) Thandi Modise. The live feed was interrupted several times during the EFF's protest, with the screen going blank for a few seconds at a time. The audio also kept muting form time to time, and in essence those watching the live feed on the country's 24 hour news channels ANN7, SABC News and eNCA could not fully hear or see the events unfolding in Parliament .

It would seem many South Africans went online in order to get information about what was actually happening in Parliament. eNCA (2015) reports that the events around SONA saw South Africans use not only TV, but their phones and computers to access information about what was happening, with Twitter averaging thirty tweets per second. Interestingly, within minutes eNCA broadcast footage of the EFF's forceful removal, recorded from a smartphone. Such an occurrence points to the important role played by new media technologies and serious failures in attempts by the South African Parliament to censor events that were occurring during SONA 2015. The third question that this work will explore is; how were digital or new media technologies used to cover or report on the SONA? After the EFF were removed and calm restored, the President tried to resume his speech, however the leader of the DA Mmusi Maimane rose on a point of order and demanded to know the identity of the security personnel that had entered the chamber, as police were not allowed. When he and his

party failed to get a satisfactory answer, they staged a walk-out. The controversy resulted in various sectors and institutions of society releasing statements expressing their views about what had transpired. The Speaker of Parliament and members of government held press conferences addressing the issue, and the South African National Editor's Forum (SANEF) released several statements calling for investigations into the matter. This gives rise to the fourth question; Based on the views expressed in the media by Parliament, various politicians, civil society organisations as well as members of the media, was the internet signal deliberately turned off and how did they feel about the disruptions at SONA 2015? Asking such a question provides the opportunity to evaluate the openness of the South African mediascape and gauge threats to media freedom, especially with new media technologies in use.

Of critical importance is the fact that Primedia Broadcasting, SANEF, the Right2Know Campaign as well as the Open Democracy Advice Centre took Parliament to court on grounds that there were serious violations of media freedom (EWN, 2015). This gives rise to the fifth question; how did the judiciary deal with the matter and what considerations did they make in relation to new media technologies? This question is important because it allows for an opportunity to evaluate how the Judiciary (not only as a member of the public sphere, but as its regulator as well), the media as well as civil society interpret and understand the mediascape in which they are operating in.

It also affords us an opportunity to evaluate media policy in Parliament against the prevailing mediascape, which is saturated with digital media and is characterized by media convergence. A converged mediascape demands that we understand how institutions as well as individuals use new media technologies to participate in the public sphere. The emergence and vibrancy of platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and the role of mainstream online news suppliers need to be considered and evaluated against a public sphere which has thus far been characterised by traditional mass media. This will also shed some light on the nature of the relationship between the media and Parliament, as well as understand how these different stakeholders understand and feel about the mediascape they are engaged in. The broadcasters that will be used for analysis are Africa News Network 7 (ANN7), Enews Channel Africa (eNCA) as well as the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) News. This is because, while it was on these broadcast channels that people experienced the censorship of the EFF's removal from the National Assembly, these broadcasters reacted and used new

media technologies differently in response to the crisis. Television is also regarded as the most advanced tool of mass media technologies in terms of broadcast. It thus represents an interesting component of the old or mass media public sphere. The point of contact between mass media and the digital sphere offers a golden opportunity to explore and evaluate current theories of new media technologies and the digital public sphere. The other media organisations that will be used are those that took Parliament to court. These include Primedia Broadcasting, SANEF, the Right2Know Campaign as well as the Open Democracy Advice Centre.

The arguments presented in this paper will be supported by first considering and reviewing literature that has been produced on the subject of the public sphere, including its digital manifestations, as well as literature on democracy. The second phase will entail the presentation of the theoretical and conceptual frame work which will consider not only Habermas, but other scholars like Seyla Benhabib as well. As mentioned above the paper adopts a case study research method using SONA 2015 as its object of study. Statements as well as news articles from the above mentioned broadcasters are analysed using narrative analysis. Findings from three interviews conducted with TV News Anchor Iman Rappetti, SABC CEO Jimi Matthews, and the editor-in-chief of The New Age and ANN7 Moegsien Williams will be synthesized with findings from the narrative analysis to formulate a discussion of the outcomes as well as the conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Defining new media and its manifestations in society?

The best point of departure for this literature review is to explore various conceptions of what constitutes new media technologies, and why they matter. The term 'new media' does not constitute a solid or coherent entity as different sections of society have used it in a variety of ways and contexts (Lister et al 2003: 9). This work adopts Bekker's (2012:17) view of the media as referring to communication media, the institutions, as well as organisations in which people work. This includes the cultural products and texts they produce as well as the distribution technologies used to disseminate texts. This means all aspects of the media are studied, not just at the point of production, but the wider processes through which media texts are distributed, received and consumed by audiences, this includes ownership and regulation. From this perspective, the media is understood as a fully social institution (Lister et al 2003: 10). On the contrary new media suggest something that has just emerged, that is unsettled and which little is known about. The new or emergent mediascape has fostered a set of complex interactions between established media forms, policy and new technological possibilities.

The term new media captures a sense that the world media began to transform greatly (from the 1980's onwards), ushering a difference that was not restricted to any one sector or element of the world. This is not to say technologies like television, printing and radio have been stagnant and not evolving and developing technologically, institutionally and culturally. The change seen from the eighties was not only confined to the media, there were other wider kinds of significant cultural and social change. New media are associated with the following kinds of change; (1) a shift from *modernity to post modernity*, where the period from the 1960's onwards is identified as a period of deep cultural and structural changes in societies as well as economies. (2) *Intensifying Processes of globalisation*, where national borders are dissolving in terms of trade, cultures, corporate organisation, as well as identities and beliefs. (3) *A replacement (in the West) of an industrial age of manufacturing by a post industrial*

information age, this speaks to a shift in the production of material goods to service and information industries which optimise the uses of new media. (4) *A decentring of established and centralised geopolitical orders,* this talks to the continuous weakening of mechanisms of power and control from Western colonial centres, which is made possible by networks of new communications media that is dispersed and transgresses boundaries. (5) As well as the shift from *analogue* to *digital transmission and storing of information.* A digital media process is one where all input data are converted into numbers, that is ones' and zero's (data) and in terms of communications and representational media this data takes the form of qualities such as light, sound or represented space which have already been coded into a cultural form such as written text or videos (analogues). Once processed and stored as numbers these can be output in that form from online sources, memory drives, digital disks to be consumed as screen displays, or can be output as hard copy.

It is argued that the mechanisms of power and control that are being challenged are not only those of the centres, but of the satellite states and their institutions. New media denote a sense of new times, and are seen as some kind of epoch-making phenomena; a new *technoculture* characterised by sweeping social, cultural and technological changes (Lister et al 2003: 11 - 15). Gurevitch et al (2009: 164) assert that the internet has encroached on the landscape which has up to this point been dominated by television, and this to them represents the most significant change. This shift is evidenced by the dropping newspaper readership numbers as well as declining television audience numbers. Instead of reading these changes as a process where analogue media like TV and print are being displaced, Gurevitch et al argue that these changes must be seen as a reconfiguration of the media ecology which is recasting roles and relationships within a continuously evolving mediascape. They further assert that as technologies that allow citizens to interact with the media, generate their own content and produce alternative networks for disseminating information become more affordable, more citizens gain access to them, and they destroy the gate-keeping monopoly that has hitherto been enjoyed by editors and broadcasters. This implies a movement of audiences from being passive to being active participants in public communication (Gurevitch et all 2009: 167).

Writing for the Government Communication and Information System(GCIS) in *Media Landscape 2012: Reflections on South Africa's Media Environment,* Koos Bekker (2012: 17), the chief executive of Naspers argued and cautioned that the internet had greatly changed the way content and information are exchanged. He warned the newspaper industry to adapt to

new media technologies or face imminent extinction, especially in an environment where there is a decline in newspaper circulation, and the penetration of broadband is being improved, with mobile phone technologies being more accessible to the general population. Of importance is that Bekker says once the penetration of these technologies reach peak, the way of the world and of doing business will be markedly transformed, including within the media environment. He says information is increasingly becoming the driving force of human development , and South Africa will have no choice but to make the transition to the new world. What Bekker is saying in nothing new and is not unique to South Africa. Marshall McLuhan made many predictions in his seminal publication in 1964, *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man,* including that the Internet would become a Global Village, making people and societies more interconnected than television (Logan 2010: 45). While McLuhan was not talking of new media as we know it today, he hinted at major disruptions, and new social configurations that were to come.

For example, Cremedas and Lysak (2011: 41) conducted a nationwide Web-based survey of ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox television (TV) stations that present local news in their quest to examine the state of online news production at local TV stations. Their findings reveal that the news rooms at these broadcasters have been transformed by new media technologies which have engendered new cultures. For example it was found that all those that work in the news room are expected to contribute towards web products, with the highest expectations placed on journalists. When hiring staff, these broadcasters prefer to hire people that possess and exhibit competency in web skills. This indicates that the internet has become one of the central tools in the production of news, with staff resources dedicated to the maintenance of websites, which has become a big priority. Presence on the web is however not easy, evidenced by the fact that these TV stations have to perform balancing acts; on the one hand they have to maintain a constant supply of content into the continuous web news cycle, and on the other have to meet already existing demands of producing high quality newscasts in a competitive atmosphere. This is evidence of this new era or entrance into a new *technoculture* that is resulting in massive social, cultural and technological change and Parliament is not exempt.

Ideologically the ‘new’ in new media refers to the ‘most recent’ which equals something better. From this perspective anything that is ‘new’ is cutting edge, and involves it is a forward thinking people. Hence such media are attractive to people like journalists and the

trend setters in society. This view is rooted in modernist belief in social progress delivered by technology. Attached to this progress are claims and hopes that new media will raise productivity, educational opportunities as well as unlock new communicative frontiers. The ideological movement that is advancing this narrative of progress in Western societies is powerful, and is subscribed to by corporations who produce and distribute both media hardware and software, entrepreneurs, media commentators, journalists, scholars and cultural activists. This excitement and promotion of new media is not ideologically neutral, since it cannot be dissociated from neo-liberal forms of production which have been at the forefront of globalisation since the 1980's (Lister et al 2003: 12). These narratives of 'progress' have also taken root

Not all technologies are progressive of course; one does not have to discuss the destructive nature of nuclear bombs, or mechanisation technologies that render whole populations unemployed and destitute, of course depending on which side of the fence you are standing (Radebe, 2012). Scholars like O'Gorman (2016: 2) point to the fact the arrival of the new is not always associated with progress as humans have found new ways of oppressing their fellow men , as well as new ways of nullifying their best achievements. Lister et al (2003: 12) take new media to refer to *new textual experiences*, where new genre, textual form and patterns of consumption are emerging. It refers to *new ways of representing the world* where media offer new experiences and representational possibilities. They talk to *new relationships between subjects and media technologies,* where subjects are users and consumers who are forced to restructure the way they receive and use image and communication media in their lives. These media denote *new patterns of organisation and production* and this speaks to wider realignments in media culture, access, economy, ownership, regulation and control. It is these new patterns which have seen the South African Parliament struggle to navigate a transformed mediascape as it continues to be guided by policy from an era gone by. This is especially important for Parliament in that audiences have moved from being largely passive and have become more active participants in public communication. These changes are occurring alongside the presence of professional media producers who are largely focused on traditional mass media audience. This means these professionals can no longer operate in exclusive professional domains (Gurevitch et al 2009: 168).

New media should not be thought of as an entirely clear break from the old, there are some continuities and discontinuities. Bekker (2012: 17) notes that when a new distribution technology comes onto the market, like the internet, it does not necessarily replace its predecessor, as distribution technologies can and do exist side by side (that is with print, radio and television). Gurevitch et al (2009: 169), also assert that mass media forms of political communication persist, with television remaining as a dominant locus for media events. There are five key terms in the discourse about new media and these are; *digitality, interactivity, hypertexuality, virtuality, and dispersal* (Lister et al 2003: 13). These concepts help pin down certain experiential characteristics of new media and the ways in which they have been developed. This approach is preferred because it addresses both the technological and social factors, and how they interact with each other. New media are also referred to as digital media. Digital media are forms of media text that unite and integrate data, text, sound as well as images of all kinds through the use of computers (Flew 2005: 10). Digital media technologies do not represent an entire break with traditional analogue media, and can in some way be seen as a continuation and extension of a principle already in place, that is, the conversion from physical artefacts to signal. The significance in the change however lies in the nature and scale of this extension. Martinez and Alonso (2015: 87) say the following;

> One of the consequences of digitilistion, whether text, audio, video or images, or across the change of analogical content into a set of binary digits or directly by the digital capture of information, has enabled content to be seen and consumed across different digital devices, bringing about a technological and multiplatform convergence. This has propelled a transition of the mass communication media which ultimately has become integrated into the internet while in turn converting it into a media container.

This change also means that texts can be accessed in non-liner ways at incredibly high speeds, and can be manipulated far more easily than analogue forms. This is experienced as a qualitative change in the production, form, reception and use of media (Lister et al 2003: 16).

The crux of this research lies in these qualities as they represent a significantly transformed mediascape, such that it can be termed as a 'new' mediascape. Flew (2003:10-11) notes that digital media are *manipulable*, meaning digital information is easily changeable and adaptable at every stage of its creation. Digital technologies have not only destabilised the traditional roles of traditional analogue political communication, they have also augmented the communicative balance of power by reconfiguring access to services, information, people

and technology in a manner that significantly alters social, economic as well as organizational relationships. These technologies have broadened access in such a way that extensive choice of media platforms, content as well channels is provided, resulting in new patterns of media use which have distinct socio-cultural advantages for some sections of the population (Gurevitch et all 2009: 168 -169). For example, Martinez and Alonso (2015: 96 -97) in their work found that Madrid university students constituted different types prosumers who produce content for social media networks as well as virtual communities. While these students interact with established media, it was found they are more interested in receiving, producing as well as sharing media texts across social networks than directly from the online content of established media. Martinez and Alonso argue that this change in behaviour and use of communication media by Madrid students should be taken into account when devising appropriate strategies in relation to business models, communication and new media content.

So long as media texts stored in digital format (that is stored in computer memories and accessible via the internet) are not transformed into hardcopy, they will remain in a state of flux. These texts are free from authorial and physical limitation, any net user has the ability to interact with them, and transforming them into new texts, changing their circulation and distribution. This means the established differences between author and reader, creator and interpreter have become blurred and give way to a reading and writing continuum that extends from the builders of technology and networks to the final recipient each contributing to the others activity (Lister et al 2003: 17). According to Gurevitch et al (2009: 171), texts in digital format are never complete, which makes digital communication fundamentally different from broadcasting. It is clear that digitisation engenders conditions which allow for the inputting of enormous quantities of data, which can in turn be accessed at high speeds and with very high rates of change of that data, of course within the limits and constraints of the physical world.

Digital information can be shared between large numbers of users at the same time across enormous distances (Flew 2003:11). This means that the internet in conjunction with smartphones challenge the power of television in terms of the speed and reach of the distribution of content. This is because internet usage involves person-to-person communication, group communication as well as information provision and publishing on a global scale, through e-mail, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, chatrooms and the World Wide Web in general (Flew 2003:12). For instance Shaka Sisulu (2014: 85) points out that the

internet is accessed by 2.5 billion people across the globe and the majority of them use it on a daily basis. Given this information, it seems absurd that Parliament only invested its energies on censoring content meant for television, while completely ignoring the reality that the same content was available for mobile phones and other new media technologies present in Parliament. This is why there is a belief and feeling that the disruption of the cell phone signal was deliberate. The memes that were circulated by citizens during and after SONA 2015 are an example of digital content that is in constant flux and evidence of the change that has occurred in the South African mediascape. In terms of political communication, Gurevitch (2009: 171) notes that there has been a fundamental shift in the process of message circulation, where politicians are being forced to move from producing polished unidirectional texts, to producing content for interactive audiences who have the capacity to question, modify and redistribute any content they receive.

The significant increase in the opportunity to manipulate and intervene in content offered by digital media is often referred to as the interactive potential of new media. Just like the term 'new media', *interactivity* is a broad term that has become loaded with various meanings. However the term can be understood to be operating at two levels, one ideological and the other instrumental. Ideologically interactivity is seen as one of the key 'value-added' characteristics of new media. 'Old' analogue media are seen as offering largely passive consumption, while new media offer interactivity. This denotes a powerful sense of user engagement with media texts, individualised media use, and a more independent relation to sources of knowledge. Such ideas are heavily influenced by the popular discourse of neo-liberalism, which fundamentally sees the user as a consumer. Under neo-liberalism all kinds of experience are commoditised and the consumer is offered more and more finely tuned degrees of choice. This is understood to enhance people's ability to make individualised lifestyle choices from an endless list of possibilities offered by the market. This ideological perspective influences us to see interactivity as a method of maximising consumer choice in relation to media texts (Lister et al 2003: 20). Of course interactivity is not an entirely new thing as radio phone-ins and letters to the editor in print media have existed for a long time, however what is important is the fact that for digital technologies, interactivity is an integral component, and not just an add on (Gurevitch et al 2009: 171). This has seen media companies like Media24 make engagement with their audiences or members of the public an intrinsic part of their daily routines in what is described as an age of interactive news (Daniels 2014: 2).

Instrumentally, interactivity signifies the individual user's ability to directly intervene in the images and texts that they access and change them. The individual members of the new media 'audience' become users (produsers/prosumers) as opposed to mere viewers of media texts, evidenced by the work of Martinez and Alonso in Madrid. Lister et al (2003:21) say; "In interactive multimedia texts there is a sense in which it is necessary for the user actively to intervene as well as viewing or reading in order to produce meaning." This intervention can subsume various modes of engagement. For example, during the SONA 2016 people on Twitter were commenting and producing memes about all that was happening. The composition of these people is very interesting considering that it included people like Minister of Sports Mr. Fikile Mbalula who while following proceedings posted a meme poking fun at three MP's from the Congress of the People (Cope) who staged a walkout after party leader Mosiuoa Lekota accused President Zuma of breaking his oath of office and failing the country. This talks to Gurevitch's assertions about a change in political communication. Celebrities like Maps Maponyane, whose 'EFF' meme was shared hundreds of times, as well as media organisations, journalists and ordinary citizens took part in sharing these memes and participated in the event (Shange, 2016). Gurevitch et al (2009: 172) argue that while the style of public interest content is moving from professional forms that once dominated 'high politics', it cannot be ignored by political elites, who like Fikile Mbalula, increasingly engage in efforts to monitor blogs and news media, as well as control information and participate on social media platforms to make their presence felt.

According to Lister et al (2003: 19 -22) there are various forms of interactivity which include *hypertextual navigation, immersive navigation, registrational interactivity* as well as *interactive communications. Registrational interactivity* refers to how new media texts afford their users to 'write back into' the text, allowing them to add to the text by registering their own messages. At the root of this form of interactivity is the simple activity of registration, that is, sending off details of contact information to a website or typing in a credit card number. It also refers to any opportunity the user has to input into a text. The input or the writing back of users then becomes part of the text and can be made available to other users (Lister et al 2003:22). *Interactive communications* refers to the unprecedented opportunities, offered by computer-mediated communications for making connections between individuals, within organisations, and between individuals and organisations, as evidenced by the composition of the Twitterati mentioned above. Copeland (2011: 100) supports this view by

asserting that the inbuilt interactivity of social media has seen journalists use it not only to follow popular movements, but to also communicate with them directly as well as arrange interviews. This allows media organisations to constantly keep up with competition by inviting citizens to report events to them as they happen through social media. While much of this connectivity may be characterised by *registrational interactivity*, things change when we consider social media platforms like twitter, Facebook, Instagram and email. From a human communications perspective, we start seeing a much higher degree of reciprocity between participants. The degrees of interactivity can further be broken-down on the basis of the kinds of communication that occur in computer-mediated communications. Face-to-face communication is seen as the most interactive and thus a benchmark from which to classify communicative behaviours, and which all forms of mediated communication have to emulate.

All forms of communication are plagued by issues of how information or texts are interpreted by the receiver (users), and with interactivity, these problems are multiplied. This is based on the realisation that the meanings of texts will vary according to the background of its audiences and circumstances of reception. This means the producer of an interactive text never knows for sure which of the many versions of the text their reader will encounter (Lister et al 2003: 23). Parliament seems to assume that people react in the same way to the content it produces and that it has total control of that content. This is impossible in the prevailing mediascape. For example one of the popular pictures about #SONA 2016 that was circulating was of the President reading his speech, however, it was not a normal picture that was taken from the front or a side profile, this picture was taken from above, and it showed the president's head as well as the actual speech he was reading from. The meme ridiculed the large font that the president was using (Shange, 2016). This picture shows that Parliament cannot control how people interpret its content and no longer has the ability to control the footage being captured by its eight cameras as there are other cameras in the hands of those with smartphones. Ndhlovu's (2009: 45) work on the role of bloggers in Zimbabwe shows that even repressive governments cannot control or silence free and independent voices online, even when threatened with laws like the Interception of Communication Act (ICA).

Hypertext can be understood as a media text which is made up of discrete units of material in which each one carries multiple pathways to other units. The text is a web of connections which the user can explore using navigational tools of whatever application is being used. This means any part of a digitally encoded text can be accessed as easily as any other, more

or less instantaneously. Hence it can be argued that every part of the text can be equidistant from the reader (Lister et al 2003: 24). The World Wide Web can be understood as an electronic database of text, images, video as well as voice communication, which is the example of interactivity in new media technologies. Here each pattern of use guides the user down a distinctive pathway, creating a *hypertext,* that is , text made up of other text (Flew 2003:21). Hypertext can also be understood as an information management principle which suggests all kinds of non-linear, networked paradigms. In this context, the term hypertext begins to overlap with the idea of *hypermediacy*.

The term hypermedia is used to describe the effects of hypertextual methods of organisation on all media forms. It is argued that the logic of hypermediacy acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible in a heterogeneous space, where representation is conceived of not as a door through which to view the world, but as door itself. These doors open on to other representations and media texts. This can be seen in the different memes and comments that proliferated social media platforms as well as news media websites. Under the logic of hypermediacy the signs of mediation are multiplied, and in this way try to reproduce the rich "*sensorium* of human experience." Given this, some scholars validate hypermedia as somehow representing "the ultimate augmentation of human consciousness (Lister et al 2003: 26)." People are more engaged than ever before with each other and societal institutions. It is argued that knowledge that is constructed as *multilinear* as opposed to *monolinear*, threatens to overturn the organisation and management of knowledge as we have known it to date, as all existing knowledge systems are founded on *monolinearity* (Lister et al 2003: 27). The overturning of the organisation and management of information results in the overturning of how institutions like Parliament, the Judiciary, and the media are run.

The post-structural literary criticism pioneered by Barthes, Derrida and Foucault disrupted established notions of the book, as they argued that texts were not discrete but 'intertextual' in character and that all texts only make sense to the reader in relation to other texts, and are understood as part of a web of textuality. This implied that the reader as much as the author created meaning out of a myriad of possible ways of experiencing a text. This led to a number of scholars taking this approach with the hypertextual form, i.e. 'hypertext equals post structuralism on the computer screen'. Critics have however correctly pointed out that there are significant differences in the set of problems presented by a book versus the computer mediated hypertext. It has also been pointed out that the post-structuralist approach to

hypertext constructs the relationship between the reader and text in a way that excludes the system itself, the software and processing units of the computer. In this conceptualisation, the text-reader interface becomes the sight of interpretation, cognition and meaning production. However under hypertextual conditions the system itself becomes a determining agent in the outcomes of the text-reader meeting. Arseth (1997: 39 as cited in Lister at al 2003: 29) termed this 'cybertexuality', where the machine, the user and the text are all equally implicated in the production of meaning. If we look at the different points of entry into the production of texts and meaning, we begin to see the complexity that Parliament faced in its attempt to censor the SONA 2015. Parliament had shut only one door of many. In essence, virtually all those present in Parliament, the users ('produsers'), each have their own door, accessed through their Smartphones which link them to the internet and allow them to manipulate text at will.

New media deliver a dispersed media system. Both the production and distribution of new media is decentralised, highly individuated and is continuously weaving itself into the fabric of life, and thus into societal institutions. This is as a result of how people have used different technologies to change the manner in which media texts are produced and consumed. The period between 1980 and 2000 saw a shift in the way people consumed media texts; from a limited number of standardised texts to an enormous number of highly differentiated texts. Lister et al (2003: 30) argue that with the proliferation of new media and available media texts, the media audience has become fragmented and differentiated, and that this audience, although massive in terms of numbers, is no longer mass in terms of simultaneity, and uniformity of the message or texts it receives. This argument is however hard to sustain given the fact that technologies from the twentieth century like television and radio have not disappeared, but have integrated and converged with new media technologies. Thus some people still receive messages simultaneously, albeit through systems of individualised consumption. In fact it would seem that messages on mass media technologies and those on new media technologies reinforce each other to create a complex system of reception. For example Gus Silber (2012: 34) notes how the incident of the plane that crash landed on the Hudson River in New York was captured (image) and Tweeted by an ordinary man who happened to be on a ferry that had been redirected to the scene. Within seconds the man's tweet, which had a link to the picture of the aircraft, had been re-tweeted around the world. This while newspaper reporters, and TV crews were still trying to catch a glimpse of the sight. We find ourselves in a new mediascape which is different from the older one, which

was characterised by a limited number of TV stations, DVD players and a very limited use of computers as communication devices, and no mobile media. In this new mediascape 'National' newspapers are produced as geographically specific editions, the personal computer at home offers a vast array of communication and media consumption opportunities, mobile phones and ubiquitous computing, present a future in which there are no media free zones in life. (Lister et al 2003: 30).

Last but not least is the concept of *virtuality* or *the virtual.* Just like the other concepts virtuality does not have one concrete meaning as this term has been applied to several different forms of media and image technologies at the same time. 'The virtual' is frequently seen as a feature of postmodern cultures whereby many aspects of everyday experience are technologically inspired. Current literature about virtual reality talks to two major but intertwined points of reference; the immersive, interactive experiences made available by new forms of image and simulation technology, as well as the metaphorical places and spaces created by communications networks (Lister et al 2003:35). The former describes the experience of immersion in an environment constructed by digital video and graphics with which the user has some level of interaction; for example navigating spaces within a Play Station game. The latter meaning describes a space where participants in an online communication feel themselves to be. It is a space, for example, that comes into being when one is on the phone; not exactly where one's physical body happens to be sitting nor where the body of the respondent in that conversation is, but somewhere in between. Thus networked media enable forms of community that transcend geographical barriers to emerge (Flew 2003: 26). This talks to the need for institutions like the South African Parliament to be creative and take advantage of these virtual spaces by formalising them and establishing virtual parliament spaces. This would be a ground breaking move on the part of Parliament since its core objective is taking Parliament to the people.

Such spaces have provided users with opportunities to adopt markers of identity (gender, personality, physical attributes, and status) which may differ from their identities in the physical, everyday social world. They have also created the possibility of forming new kinds of association and community which are not reliant upon spatial location, and can transcend social, political as well as geographical boundaries and divisions (Lister et al 2003:36). For example it has been established that the internet enables international communication between non- governmental organisations, and allows for protests to be waged both locally

and internationally without the obstacles of bureaucracy and expensive resources. Activists from different parts of the globe share experiences and tactics to enhance campaigns in every locality. The internet serves as an organising tool and also represents an organizing model for a new type of political protest that is decentralised, international and combines varied in interest which interestingly work towards common targets (Fenton 2008: 234) The decentralised nature of the internet is seen as critical to democratic communications.

Bekker (2012: 17) argues that countries need to take up new media technologies such as the internet so that they can develop and prosper. Those that do not take these up, like South Africa, will fall behind. According to Bekker South Africa has fallen behind because the internet has only been embraced in word only and not in deed. He highlights the lack of investment in broadband infrastructure as well as the high cost of access. Bekker also points to the fact that South Africa has a poor regulatory system that has poorly managed the development of, and access to broadband internet. The South African government is a major stakeholder in the country's telecommunications space, and owns a majority stake in Telkom. Through this state-owned enterprise the government sought to maintain a monopoly over the internet and thus blocked private investors like Altech from laying their own network infrastructure. In 2007 Former Minister of Communications Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri declared that all cables landing in South Africa must be majority-owned by South African companies, effectively delaying the Seacom and EASSy cables from landing in the country. Telkom's state sanctioned monopoly in the telecommunications industry has resulted in a diminished quality and experience of the internet (Vermeulen, 2015). While the Seacom and EASSy cables finally landed on South Africa's shores in 2009 and 2010 respectively, Research ICT Africa (2012: 10) attributes problems plaguing the ICT sector to challenges in leadership, as well as a lack of institutional capacity in the Ministry of Communications.

Twentieth century mass media is characterised by standardisation of content, production and distribution process. These media also lean towards centralisation and in turn reflect, as well as create the possibility for control and regulation of media systems. This is used to professionalise communicative and creative processes, as well as for a clear distinction between producers and consumers. It is argued that Parliament has a higher propensity to constrict flows of information and censor debate, through the misinterpretation or use of policy (outdated). This also includes the judiciary and possibly some media organisations. Mass media are geared towards a distribution model of one to many, hence their

susceptibility to control. This is in stark contrast to dispersed media propelled by a computer server, which is a multiple input/output device that can receive and process large amounts of data, while at the same time making equally large amounts of data or content available for downloading. A server is a lot cheaper than a radio transmitter that can handle both radio and TV signals, and can be easily acquired by small- medium enterprises as well as households (Lister et al 2003: 31).

It is important to again note that the delineations between new and old media should not blind us to the continuities and links between new and old media. This is because networked media distribution could not exist without the technological infrastructure provided by existing media routes of transmission, that is, telephone networks to radio transmission and satellite communications. While mass media distribution systems are essential to new media, multimedia and computer-mediated communications networks have been able to configure themselves around this core to make possible new kinds of distribution that are subject to a far higher degree of audience differentiation and discrimination, and which are not necessarily centrally controlled and directed (Lister et al 2003: 31). Many users are able to access a myriad of media globally at different times using network based distribution. Consumers and users are seen to be able to customise their own media use to create highly individualised menus that serve specific needs. Interestingly, thinkers like Castells have argued that the multiplication of possible media choices should not be confused with the general democratisation of the media, citing the intensification of merger activities among media businesses as a big threat.

The threat in South Africa has come from both big media businesses as well as the political front. It is now known that companies like Naspers worked with the apartheid regime to control information and suppress dissent (Etheridge, 2015). There have also been recent threats from businesses in the information and communications technology sector. South Africa's two biggest cellular network operators Vodacom and MTN recently took on global players like Google, WhatsApp and Facebook in Parliament, demanding that free communication services by these organisations be regulated by government. This is because both MTN and Vodacom feel that these companies are eating away at their bottom line (Alfreds, 2016). Dr. Glenda Daniels is one of many scholars that have documented the ANC's, and by extension, the government's threat to media freedom. Daniels (2013:15) points out that media freedom has increasingly come under attack in South Africa, citing the

Secrecy Bill and the National Key Points Act (No 102 of 1980) as regulatory examples of this threat. Freedom of expression has also come under strain, especially in 2012 when the ANC mobilised its' supporters to march against newspaper publication City Press for publishing (both print and online) a copy of The Spear painting, which depicted President Zuma as a Lenin figure, with his penis in the open for all to see. The ANC felt the image robbed the President of his dignity and was offensive. The liberation movement called on people to boycott the newspaper if it did not remove the image from its website (Daniels 2013:19). The reaction of Parliament in response to the EFF's threat and subsequent interruption of the SONA 2015 was inspired by the institutions desire to protect its dignity.

New media have ushered in new production technologies which challenge the centralised methods of industrial organisation that had characterised mass media production sectors. These changes operate both within the professional audio visual industries as well as within the domestic and everyday spheres. (Lister et al 2003: 32). The dispersed and pervasive nature of new media technologies in the form of smartphones and tablets was starkly displayed at SONA 2015 with MP's, journalists, those in the public gallery taking pictures, videos, and posting online. The production of news or what is deemed newsworthy in Parliament no longer rests solely in the hands of the news media. Gus Silber (2013: 37) argues that the social media revolution has changed the way journalists' source, distribute and publish news. He notes that the power of Twitter lies in the way it has wrestled power away from the hands of media organisations, and spread it out among the crowd a little more evenly. All active users of Twitter can journal, report, publish, edit and distribute the news. These users enhance their posts of information with links to videos, pictures as well as other online content. On this platform, experts, academics, thought leaders, party representatives and most importantly, ordinary citizens, can all equally claim their say on the state of the nation and comment on what they think is wrong or right.

Silber argues that this is exactly what makes the social media platform a powerful, free and open platform for the sharing of information, as well as the healthy exchange of views between the citizenry and their government. Online platforms amplify democracy and are redrawing the rules of public engagement. The South African government however seems bewildered by these changes, as its voice is barely heard and is in the main muted. The government continues to engage the citizenry through old techniques like press releases long after an event has occurred. This is long after the issue has been dissected and debated on

news websites, Twitter, and other social media platforms (Silber 2012: 38). Most often than not, the government uses these press releases to rebuke the media. For example the day after the SONA 2015, Speaker of Parliament Baleka Mbete (2015) accused the media of biased reporting, saying that the media portrayed those who disrupted Parliamentary proceedings as heroes, while ridiculing and vilifying the Presiding Officers. Silber argues that such statements are anchored in the assumption that journalists still make and control the debate. He further asserts that this is an era gone by, as nowadays journalists are merely an active and involved part of the conversation, and that government should follow suit. This suggests that Parliament was supposed to join the live conversation on news websites, Twitter and other platforms and defend its position, instead of attempting to censor the EFF's removal and only engaging the day after with an official statement.

It must be said that governments are not the only ones who are uneasy about the internet. The media have shown signs of not accepting whole heartedly the new mediascape. For example Hindman and Thomas (2014: 546) say the following about the friction between old and new media;

> US newspaper editorials reinforced the distinction between old and new media by emphasizing the lack of discretion on the part of WikiLeaks. The contrast drawn here was between traditional journalism's emphasis on discretion, responsibility, and good judgement and WikiLeaks' aggressive, devil-may-care approach to the mass communication of information.

These editorials suggest that the old media are the true custodians and representatives of public opinion, while WikiLeaks and other new internet players lack ethics and the professionalism of the journalistic community. In South Africa there has been a concerted effort from established media to defend their territory and integrity against what they labelled as 'fake news' (eNCA 2017). While there should be concern about the existence of fake news websites, their emergence are an indication that the authority and secure place of traditional media as the fourth estate is being challenged.

The conjunction of computer based communications and existing broadcast technologies is creating new fluid areas of media production. This is a reality that media industries and all societal institutions now have to face daily. The traditional definitions as well as boundaries between different media processes are breaking down as craft media production skills and

technologies become more dispersed through the population. Silber (2012: 40) contends that Twitter is the only medium that can get government into close contact with a massive number of people at the same time, especially in a context where there are at least ten million users of smartphones which are equipped with cameras and internet activity. An overview of the *Social Media policy Guidelines* published by the department of Government Communications and Information System (GCIS) in 2011, one notices that government has recognised the existence and potential of new media technologies, even though its actions may suggest otherwise. The document states the following; "The guidelines focus on guidance in the use of social media within the South African government communications environment, in order to improve government transparency, participation and interaction with the public (GCIS 2011: 3)." Despite this acknowledgement, the GCIS acknowledges the difficulties in implementing a uniform strategy and level of engagement with the public due to the fact that government departments differ in their communication strategies, objectives, audience profiles, policies of using the internet as well as the availability of human and technical resources among other things (GCIS 2011: 4). The process of media production has diffused itself into everyday life, virtually enabling anyone with an online account to potentially publish (Lister et al 2003: 33). There has been a growth of a market for '*prosumer'* technologies that enable the user to be both consumer and producer, that are aimed at neither the professional nor the ordinary consumer, but to both. Desktop publishing and the internet have over the years increased access to production and distribution for all (Sardar and Van loon 2000: 5)

The characteristics discussed above should be seen as part of a dynamic matrix of qualities that define new media as different. These qualities are not uniform to all examples of new media and are found in different degrees and mixes. For example Africa has shown a tendency to bypass certain stages of technological development experienced by developed countries, and land at the forefront of technological innovation and use. Kenya, a leading country in the world in terms of mobile payments, is a typical example (Kgomoyeswana: 2013: 79). Africa's use and application of new media can be seen to challenge the traditional division between new and old media. This dynamic matrix has indeed altered our mediated experiences, especially because new media have become readily available. It is important to however note that these qualities are not just functions of technology; they are imbricated into the organisation of culture, leisure and work in the context of economic and social determinations that prevail. The dispersed nature of new media technologies also speaks to

regulation and not just about the difference between server technology and the radio transmitter. Virtuality speaks to various ways in which experiences of the self as well as identity are increasingly mediated in a virtual sphere. Hence it is also important to investigate how the Judiciary dealt with the matter.

The optimism expressed above shudders when one considers Copeland's (2011: 100) conclusion that, 'if Twitter is a representation of media democracy, then the celebrities have won'. This implies that ordinary citizens have little power to influence discourses that take place online. Copeland (2001: 99) also points to the fact that social media platforms are dominated by traditional media outlets that still hold the greatest influence. The argument put forward by Copeland is that media democratisation is largely happening at the level of transmission, and not at the communicative level. While Ndhlovu (2009: 45) celebrates the victories of independent bloggers in disseminating news, the scholar cautions that new media technologies remain in the hands of the elite. This suggests that if there is a virtual public sphere that exists, it remains exclusionary. The contradictory nature of new media technologies is evident in Paterson's work (2014: 1-6) where, while it is pointed out that internet based technologies have little impact in Africa except inside an urban middle class, it is also asserted that social media have established new information flows that have liberated neglected voices. It is further argued that in the African context, such technologies are a shared resource and thus many people become indirectly connected to the internet. Such contradictions arguably evidence the state of constant flux that new media technologies engender on any mediascape. As evident from the discussion above, newsrooms have not escaped the changes fostered by these technologies.

What's new with newsrooms?

One of the most important players in the acquiring and use of new media technologies are media organisations. In this part of the paper focus shifts to the changing newsroom, and as precautionary note to the reader, this section relies heavily on the work of Dr. Glenda Daniels. Sulcudean (2017: 109) argues that social media have become an essential part of the media process and that traditional press channels are connected to the flows of social networks where they source information and gauge the emotional pulse of society. Newsrooms in South Africa have been trying to implement the 'digital first' strategy, which

entails putting digital offerings ahead of traditional media (Daniels 2014: 28). This means that digitally-delivered news takes preference over traditional media like print. This is because audiences have become active recipients of news and engage with it, and also produce content. It was found that this strategy was uneven, disparate and characterised by a lack of revenue generation. While newsrooms are not digital first as yet, there has been increased experimentation since 2013 due to the pace in multimedia journalism strategies as well as accelerated integration with traditional media. These moves have largely been influenced by the fact that there has been an increase in the consumption of news, with young people receiving and consuming it through their mobile devices which connect them to the internet (Daniels 2014: 29). Contrary to popular belief that young people use Twitter to waste time, it was found that they are actually using it to access news. This is an indication of their interest and participation in the public sphere.

According to research mobile devices accounted for 40% unique browsers to news sites surveyed in 2014. The Times media group was growing digital but not at the expense of print because of the revenue it generates. This media organisation was using its social media strategy to drive traffic back to its traditional news platforms. The strategy applied by Eye Witness News (EWN) fuses radio broadcasting and digital publishing in order to disseminate information in real-time on all platforms. According to EWN online editor Sheldon Morais, the organisation develops different content types like videos, galleries and feature stories. He also asserts that radio and digital media complement each other well (Daniels 2014: 34). The SABC is also trying to keep abreast media convergence trends and has moved to becoming a content provider on a variety of online platforms. The public broadcaster operates radio, TV as well as online services which demand a multiplatform approach. According to digital news editor at the SABC, Izak Minnsar, this move was a work in progress of changing mindsets, re-engineering production processes, training journalists and adjusting newsroom workflows. Research indicates that South African online communities are growing in size, complexity and scale. Traditional media organisations have grown annual mobile audiences by an average of 14 %, and mobile users now make up more than 40% of most news organisations' digital audiences. Given the fact that digital-first journalism is still in its formation and experimental phase in South Africa (Daniels 2014: 38), it plausible to argue or infer that the digital public sphere is also still in its formation phase. And because online is not generating substantially sufficient revenue, it is possible that media organisations invest limited resources in engendering a digital public sphere (Daniels 2014: 39).

Research also indicates that the use of social media is now intrinsic to newsrooms across the globe, and South African news rooms are following suit (Daniels 2014: 41). The use of social media in South Africa has grown as a source of news, as another outlet for reporters and a space where newsrooms can market their stories and brands. Facebook is the leading social network with 9.4 million views, with Twitter boasting 5.5 million users. It was found that social networks are used on phones in South Africa, with 85% of Twitter and 87% of Facebook users accessing the sites via their phones. A shocking finding is that there had been a 170% increase in the interception of customer's data by the government and cellphone operators cannot reveal to their clients that this is happening. This seems to link back to the paranoia shown by the ANC in Parliament by trying to block cellphone signals. Research shows that by 2014 journalists at various media institutions were very active on social networks, especially Twitter. Newsrooms were developing social-media policies to regulate the space and the behaviour journalists on the platforms.

In 2013 SANEF held a discussion panel on social media and it was found that using social media was good for audience engagement, however regulation was required to standardise the manner in which journalists engaged users (Daniels 2014: 42). All of the editors surveyed in the discussions revealed that they supported the use of social media in their newsrooms. Newsrooms were encouraged to see social media as an addition to the feedback and engagement channels, both on an institutional and personal level. It was also asserted that newsrooms should professionally manage the content that goes online, especially because the personal and professional profiles of journalists collapse into each other, making it difficult to differentiate between personal tweets or journalists and media organisations themselves, regardless of disclaimers. The disruptions brought on by new media technologies are evident in the fact that the media agreed that they had to adjust the Press Code and other similar codes for other media, in order to accommodate social media content.

The top six news media organisations with the highest number of followers of on Twitter in 2014 were eNCA with 260 065, City press with 258 438, Mail & Guardian with 239 211, SABCNewsonline with 228 580, EWN with 222 044, and Times Live with 212 736. On checking Twitter I found that these numbers have changed drastically since then. In 2016 eNCA boasts 1.1 million followers, City Press with 831 000, the Mail & Guardian with 169 000 followers (decline), SABCNewsonline with 779 000, EWN with 644 000 and Times

Live boasting 750 000 followers. This indicates that in a space of two years there has been an exponential increase in the number of users following these media organisations online, which may compel media organisations to invest more resources on their digital offerings.

In terms of professional use of social media, it was found that some journalists use both Facebook and Twitter to report news, while others focused on one platform like Twitter. These media institutions also used additional social-media networks such YouTube and Instagram to disseminate news and interact with audiences (Daniels 2014: 44). It was found that all newsrooms used social media networks to break and share links to news stories. Editors viewed Twitter as a powerful and beneficial addition to the newsroom. Twitter was credited for boosting audience numbers, interaction and enhancing both personal and professional brands of journalists. Timothy Spira of eNCA acknowledged that publishing news online made them susceptible to errors, however he noted that they were now breaking news faster, able to listen to audiences, interact and have meaningful discussions with them (Daniels 2014: 45). Mapi Mahlangu of eNCA says both their TV and online teams were increasingly using Twitter to break the news cycle. Mahlangu added that their use of social media tools assisted them to become more aware of the needs and demands of audiences. It is important to note that by this, Mahlangu suggests that through these online platforms, they are able to engage their audiences, who in turn give feedback that help the institution change its behaviour and policies. The SABC was also using social media to redirect users to their main website as well as their current affairs show on radio. Social media has become part of journalists' daily deliverables and they used it to tweet news stories, promote programme content and interact with audiences.

It is clear that the transition to digital is not easy and is labour intensive, in the sense that journalists have had to be retrained and persuaded to adopt Twitter as the new frontier for journalists who want to build their brand (Daniels 2014: 47). Mahlangu noted that journalists have had to learn to multitask, while other editors felt that for social networks to work properly, a dedicated team was required to manage this space. It was also found that a number of journalists were just observes on Twitter and did not really engage audiences. This has prompted some editors to institute tweet quotas to encourage journalists to engage more with audiences. Spira of eNCA asserted that they were trying to change the mindset of staff that sees social media as extra work. In terms of policies and regulation, it was found that the arena of social media cannot be separated from the digital news space, and thus content

published on social media is treated in the same way by the law as that published on print and on websites of news organisations. Given the above, it follows that social media platforms constitute an extension of the mass media public sphere (Daniels 2014: 48).

It is claimed that the modes of communication in the South African mediascape have changed, evidenced by the breaking of news on Twitter first, and the coverage of high profile court cases on social networks. The law and codes of ethics have fallen far behind the changes brought by new media technologies. It is argued that this new matrix of engagements has resulted in gaps through which an increasing volume of unmediated news was passing. This is seen as an indication of more freedom of expression, however to some this environment is uncomfortable as it breaks with the past in a major way (Daniels 2014: 48). This could explain the paranoid fashion with which the ANC in Parliament seemed to act. It was also argued that there appeared to be no need for separate laws for social media. It will be argued that the events of SONA 2015 strongly suggest that there needs to be new laws created for social media. Editors expressed their view that there needed to be clarity and guidance for all stakeholders in society about when and how institutions like the National prosecuting Authority will intervene in social media communications (Daniels 2014: 49).

According to a study conducted by Peter Verweij and Elvira van Noordt, Twitter is characterised by openness and pluralism, it enhances the role of journalists in public debates and democratic decision making (Daniels 2014: 51). It was also found that the role of journalists had been extended to commentary, however it was also found that most journalists were still unable to use Twitter to its full potential. Journalists at EWN felt that Twitter had changed journalism practice in South Africa, in that it was immediate, accessible and exposed journalists to more people and sources of news. Interestingly they also noted that in today's mediascape, journalists were competing with ordinary citizens for breaking news (Daniels 2014: 54). This was also evident on the night of the SONA 2015 where footage of the removal of the EFF was not only circulated by journalists, but by MP's and ordinary citizens. EWN saw its presence on Twitter as an extension of their radio platform. The EWN Twitter account was used to cultivate and engage a community of people interested in news. It was also found that in some cases, journalists' followers increased in numbers at intervals where there was an active story with high public interest like the trial of Oscar Pistorius, and decreased once these stories had subsided (Daniels 2014: 55). Journalists were also held to account on this platform, evidenced by EWN's Barry Bateman's statement that; "I get a lot of

flack if I express an opinion." According to News24 editor, Adriaan Basson, Twitter has become an integral part of the newsroom and journalists who were not using it had become irrelevant (Daniels 2014:60). This would explain why journalists protested vehemently when they discovered that the cellphone signal was blocked. He used Twitter to get tip-offs for stories as well as engage in current affairs debates, and to interact with his audience to gauge their views and interests. While editors claimed that journalists used social media to interact and engage users, it is suggested that caution be exercised as this may be overstated (Daniels 2014: 61).

The social and cultural changes that have occurred in societies globally have largely been driven by technological developments. The modification and restructuring of news rooms that is being witnessed is the biggest indicator of changes in the structure of the public sphere. Virtually all sectors of society are in the process of learning new online communication skills and tools. Governments, media companies, civil society as well as ordinary citizens have found themselves having to learn these skills in order to advance their interests in society. The acceptance and uptake of new routines and cultures has not been smooth, with resistance being recorded in various forms in all quarters. The cold relations between established media, governments as well as WikiLeaks are a case in point. It is also evident that there are limits to the extent to which various organisations can immerse themselves and participate in the digital sphere as participation requires various resources, especially time and skills. Other limits are imposed by the infrastructure and the internet's technological design. The above discussion lays a good foundation for a discussion on the theoretical framework.

Chapter 3: Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This paper will use the Public Sphere theory as well as the Sociology of News Production as theoretical approaches. In his seminal work titled *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas sought to explain the emergence, the functioning and disintegration of a single bourgeois public sphere. At the core of the theory was the argument that there existed a space between the state and the citizens where conversations and debates about critical societal issues of common interest occurred. A space located in modern industrial societies which functions as a theatre of competing ideas, which are negotiated through deliberation to reach some form of consensus. The German theorist also took care to point out that the public sphere is not a place for market relations or a place of buying and selling. But a place where status (and thus power) could be bracketed or isolated from influencing discussions and their outcomes (Fraser 1992: 56-80). To fully grasp the importance of the public sphere as presented by Habermas, it is imperative that this paper discusses the theorist's conceptions of the historical development of the bourgeois public sphere.

According to Habermas, the modern public sphere owes its historical roots to ancient Greek societies through the domination of Western societies by the Roman Empire. Here readers are reminded of the Greek-City state where there was a separation of the sphere of the *polis* (political life) and the sphere of the *oikos* (household). Those accepted in the sphere of the *polis* were those who owned property, slaves and were masters of the *oikos.* Issues of the *oikos* were hidden from the public and operated under the shadow of the master's power, while issues in the sphere of the *polis* were brought into the light, recognised for their virtue and took shape (Habermas, 1989: 3-4). At the cost of over-simplifying and omitting a lot of detail from Habermas' historical account of the evolution of the public sphere (vis-a-vis the private sphere) through various epochs, his account ultimately shows that there have been various understandings and applications of public and private life, based on economic and political configurations. Habermas locates the modern public sphere in the 17th and 18th century Europe. This period can be understood to have been a period in a state of colossal

flux where Western societies transitioned from the "feudal systems of domination based on fiefs and manorial authority" into "private landed properties." Under feudal systems the private and the public did not have the same meanings as they did in ancient Greece, and the people who made up those societies were subjects as opposed to private citizens who could reason independently and express their opinions in public. In Germany this transition took place in the 18th century through the emancipation of peasants and households from their feudal commitments (Habermas, 1989: 3-5). The cradle of modernity was characterised by Enlightenment ideas, the rise of capitalism, and industrialisation. This period also saw the rise of the bourgeois (a group made up of officials who were administrators on behalf of the king or ruler; doctors; the clergy; entrepreneurs; and scholars among other persons of important status), a section of the society which wrestled and diminished the power of monarchs through private ownership of capital. They formed themselves into a sphere of private persons, coming together as a public to constitute a public sphere (in German, *Öffentlichkeit)*, a tool or mechanism usurped from public authorities, used to engage and challenge the same authorities through debates over general rules governing relations in the "sphere of commodity exchange and social labour (Habermas, 1989: 26-27)."

In asserting themselves as a public, the bourgeois had to form public venues (salons, coffee houses) and publications (journals, art), and through these instruments citizens found ways of exchanging information and ideas, forming consensus about what they wanted to change and have done in society. Ordinary citizens started participating in politics en-mass, engaging in public discussions about how the country should be run; signalling the advent of democracy. The power to take decisions shifted from the absolute rulers to the citizens (Habermas, 1989: 42 -43). This momentous political shift is one that has affected, and remains with society today. So, in order to understand contemporary liberal societies, or countries that espouse democratic values like South Africa, they have to be understood through the concept of the public sphere.

The public sphere as dealt with by Habermas has to do with the formation of public opinion and its implications on reputation, and how it is presented for judgement through the opinion of others (Habermas, 1989: 89). It is contended that the internet, specifically social media websites are the perfect ground for the formation of public opinion and institutions which want to maintain a good reputation as well as interact with the public, need to be on social media and actively engaged. In the English language, the term 'public sphere' was preceded

by the term ‘public spirit’; “the direct, undistorted sense for what was right and just, and the articulation of opinion into judgment through the public clash of arguments (Habermas, 1989: 94).” Again, at the cost of over simplifying complex processes and phenomena, Habermas detailed the demise and disintegration of the public sphere, a process linked to various other factors. In the main he blamed the disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere on the change of citizens’ attitudes and lack of political use of their leisure time, but more importantly, he also attributed it to the commercialized media, which opted to publish adverts and stories of spectacle over detailed, critical stories (Habermas, 1989: 160 - 163). It is interesting that today it would seem that people’s leisure time is infused with political engagement through social media platforms. To his credit, Habermas later reversed his negative view of modern society and its media, and instead asserted that in the modern world where societies are constituted of millions of people, media like newspapers, radio, periodicals, television and today the internet, are essential for the public sphere (McKee, 2005: 6).

While indispensible, Habermas’ concept of the public sphere has been shown to be lacking in a number of aspects by various scholars. Nancy Fraser is one of those scholars and in her 1992 critique of this theory revealed interesting facts about the character of the bourgeois public sphere. Fraser calls into question four central assumptions of Habermas’ conception of the public sphere and proposes the following; (1) she argues that the assumption that status and class differentials could be bracketed by participants is flawed and suggests that an ideal type public sphere requires a total elimination of social inequality. (2) She also disputes the assumption that a single comprehensive public sphere is preferable over multiple public spheres in competition with each other. In contrast she argues that in contemporary stratified societies, the ideal of participatory parity can be better realized through the existence of multiple public spheres. In this way she also argues for the possibility of uniting cultural diversity, social inequality and participatory democracy in contemporary societies (Fraser 1992: 70). (3) Fraser argues that the assumption that discourses in public spheres be limited only to the common interest or common good is flawed, since it is juxtaposed to some-‘indefinable’ -private interests. Who is to say what is private and public? In his translation of Hebarmas’ work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Thomas Burger exposes the complex nature and contested meaning of the word *Public*. Events and occasions are normally referred to as public when they are open to all people, as opposed to closed, exclusive or private affairs. People may speak of a public building; however, that building may not be accessible to all citizens or public traffic (Habermas 1989: 2). This encourages

one to consider whether some restrictions into public spaces (and discourses) are naturally occurring, necessary and not always enforced for sinister reasons.

It is important to contrast Habermas' conceptualisation of the public sphere, with Hannah Arendt's view of this space. Arendt's (1959: 24 -65) work in the *Human Condition* is significant in that, it alerts thinkers to the fact that the private and public realms have been understood and applied differently by humans since antiquity, as these two realms are also affected by the ever changing worldly contexts in which they exist. Arendt (1959: 25) attributes the emergence of the public and private realms to the "rise of the city-sate", which meant that every man possessed his private life as well as a "sort of second life, his *bios politicos."* The implication being that every citizen now belongs to two orders of existence, with a sharp distinction between what is his own (*idon)* and that which is communal (*koinon).* The latter is the realm of human affairs; it is the political realm (*polis)* where men (virtually all male) spend their lives in action and speech as equals. Interestingly the household, which represents the private realm, was the centre of harsh inequality, where freedom did not exist. The head of the household was only considered free if he was able to leave his household under the care of his slaves and enter the political realm (Arendt, 1959:31).

Arendt (1959:27) argues that;

> The distinction between a private and a public sphere of life corresponds to the household and the political realms, which have existed as distinct, separate entities at least since the rise of the ancient city-state; but the emergence of the social realm, which is neither private nor public, strictly speaking, is a relatively new phenomenon whose origin coincided with the emergence of the modern age and which found its political form in the nation-state

This means that the ancient explicit distinction between the private and the public spheres, along with their defining activities collapsed and the dividing entirely blurred. The emergence of the social form the hidden sphere of the home into the public sphere, for Arendt (1959:35) also means that it has changed the meaning of the two terms beyond recognition as well as their significance for the life of the individual and the citizen. My understanding of Arendt here is that the agenda or content of the public sphere seized to exclude all other matters which were considered unnecessary or irrelevant to politics. Thus in the modern age, everything is up for discussion so long as those of that society deem it fit. This is in contrast to Seyla Benhabib's (1992: 84) argument that the Arendtian model of the public sphere

restricts access to public space and sets the agenda for the public sphere. Perhaps this is because in her analysis Benhabib (1992:77) reads Arendt's concept of public space in the context of Arendt's theory of totalitarianism, where the term acquires a different focus than the one dominant in the *Human Condition.*

Benhabib (1992:77) contends that the term "agonistic space" best describes Arendt's conception of the public space in the Human Condition. According to this view, the public realm signifies a space of appearances in which "moral and political greatness, heroism, and pre-eminence are revealed, displayed, shared with others." It is a competitive space where individuals compete for recognition, superiority as well as acclaim. The term that describes the public space form Arendt's theory of totalitarianism is "associational space." This view suggests that a public space appears anywhere, whenever humans act together in concert (Benhabib 1992:78). It is a space not embedded in any institution or specific space, it is a space where freedom can appear. Thus the internet can become a public space or public sphere, so long as those who inhabit cyberspace act in concert in pursuit of a common goal. It is the associational view that corresponds with modern times, where the public space is porous with no restrictions both to entry and agenda of debate, which would be predefined by criteria of moral and political homogeneity (Benhabib 1992: 79). According to Benhabib (1992:78) these topographical locations become public spaces in that they become sites of power and common action "coordinated through speech and persuasion." It is asserted that Arendt implicitly encourages scholars to rethink and reformulate their conceptions of the public sphere against the prevailing practices in that society, because of the state of flux under which both the private and the public realm exist. This means that in our evaluation of the internet as a public sphere, we ought to render our theoretical or conceptual tools flexible and applicable to the historical changes that have taken place.

The internet is considered by theorists like Manuel Castells (2005:3-5) to be a revolutionary technology that has initiated a global structural transformation, which has resulted in the network society. This multidimensional process is also characterised technologies and systems that have the potential to allow virtually every human being to communicate and get connected, not just to other human beings, but to global institutions which are part of powerful global networks of capital, goods, labour, science and technology. While acknowledging that inequality denies the poor an opportunity to access the internet and participate meaningfully in this sphere, it is contended that for those who are connected and

participating on the internet, especially on Twitter, status is to a large extent obliterated. This is because one can follow any institution or person, and address them directly regardless of one's class and status in society. The concern of this paper is not with the achievement of the utopian position, but to interrogate how close the internet is to this position in South Africa. As Papacharissi (2002: 388) puts it, "Ultimately; it is the balance between utopian and dystopian visions that unveils the true nature of the internet as a public sphere."

The position that this work takes is that there can never be a single comprehensive public sphere and that it is in anyway undesirable. The presence of multiple public spheres in competition with each other in contemporary stratified societies allows for better participatory parity. The internet should be seen as one of these spheres, as it represents the best chance yet, of uniting cultural diversity, social inequality and participatory democracy. Indeed Fraser is correct to assert that discourses in the public sphere should not be predetermined and only limited to the common interest. If discourses are predetermined, the public sphere runs the risk of not only alienating certain sectors of society, but also runs the risk of being rigid and unable to deal with and absorb change. The Speaker of Parliament, Baleka Mbete (2015) argued that the main business of the day was the President's speech and nothing else, as the speech was to the benefit of all South Africans including those disrupting the proceedings. The speech in this context can be interpreted as the common good, especially from the Speaker's perspective. The EFF on the other hand sought to put an issue it considered vital and that it should be at the top of the agenda of the Parliamentary sphere. The public purse is a common good and its' embezzlement is also of common interest. The EFF argued that it was doing this because President Zuma had not answered their question in a previous question-and-answer session and wanted the President to account by answering the question at the SONA 2015.

Before the SONA of 2015 could take place, Mbete had told the Media that Parliament was prepared for whatever situation but was vague when she had to explain the exact security measures to be taken with regard to the EFF's threat. Interestingly she stressed that points of order were to be about 'privilege and procedure (Matya, 2015). In this way it can be argued that Parliament tried to limit the discourse or topics, to only what Parliament deemed to be the common interest (President's speech). While Judge Dlodlo ruled that the use of the signal jammer was purely a mistake, in this paper it is shown that many believe that it was a deliberate move by the government to silence dissenting voices. For example the ANC's

closest ally the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU, 2015) said the following about the jamming of the signal;

> The chaos started when it was discovered that internet coverage within the chamber had been scrambled, so that nobody could send out SMSs, tweets, photos etc. The SONA was changed from afternoons to evenings precisely so that more South Africans could watch it, yet here was an unconstitutional attempt to cut the flow of information from parliament to the people. Fortunately the measure was quickly reversed, but not before much angry controversy. Whoever is found to have been responsible for ordering this act must be identified, named and shamed and disciplined severely.

As noted earlier, the public sphere theory is discussed in relation to the concepts of public opinion, informed publics and publicity. The focus of this publicity is the public as a carrier of public opinion, which functions as a critical judge that makes the public character of proceedings (say a Parliamentary debate) meaningful (Habermas 1989: 2). By attempting to censor the removal of the EFF, and compounded by the use of the signal jammer, Parliament removed the meaningfulness of the proceedings. Firstly the attention of the audiences was redirected from the speech the moment it was discovered that all those in attendance could not communicate on or through the virtual sphere because of the signal jammer. The blocking of the live feed when the EFF was being removed sent an implicit message that the public does not have the ability to reason and rationally debate what is happening in Parliament. Parliament's attempt to be the sole judge of the EFF's conduct backfired as those in attendance reclaimed their right to make critical judgements about what was going on through their use of smart-phones and the internet. Coincidentally through these actions journalists, members of parliament and all those in attendance who used their smart-phones or tablets to record and distribute the information over the internet, immediately restored the meaningfulness of the proceedings as people started debating the merits and demerits of the actions of all those who were involved online. In this context the term online not only refers to social media, it also refers to news articles produced by media houses who also occupy social media platforms. This is why it is argued that the first court ruling on the matter is obsolete as shown by the minority judgement.

The assumption that a properly functioning democratic public sphere should be distinctly separate from the state is debunked by Fraser. She argues that Habermas promotes 'weak

publics' who are only engaged in the formation of public opinion and are devoid of any decision making. Sovereign parliaments are seen as 'strong publics' because their discourse combines both opinion forming and decision making that results in legally binding laws. The suggestion here is that weak public spheres must incorporate some members from (or links to) strong public spheres in order to ensure that public spheres do not just become opinion spheres devoid of any ability to affect laws (Fraser 1992:75). While Twitter hosts a diversity of powerful individuals as well as institutions, it cannot as yet be considered to be a strong public sphere as it has not been fully adopted by Parliament as a tool of proper political engagement with the public. Its strength should however not be underestimated especially when one considers that private businesses are more easily held accountable for their shoddy services by consumers. If one were to accept that there are a number of public spheres at any given time, that no public sphere will ever be universal and that not all people in society will be politically engaged, then platforms like Twitter have a good potential of becoming a strong public spheres because the powerful institutions and individuals who inhabit this space can affect policy and can speak for themselves. Parliament is one of those institutions and has 271 000 followers, while it follows a combination of 2046 institutions and individuals. The EFF has 117 000 followers, while the ANC and the DA have 275 000 and 196 000 followers respectively. The leader of the EFF Julius Malema has 1, 3 million followers on his personal Twitter account. With the growing importance these online spaces these numbers are bound to increase. If one considers Yu-Shan Wu's (2013: 77) article titled *Global Powers and Africa Programme,* one quickly notes that she is pessimistic about the potential of social media platforms impacting on politics in South Africa. In her comparison of China and South Africa in how they use social media, Yu-Shan Wu concludes that the South Africa's social media scene, unlike China's, is weak and does not have power to influence policy.

She advances the following reasons for her assertions; (1) the fairly recent uptake of social media by the South African public, (2) the lack of recognition by the national and political leadership, and (3) the larger context which affects the public's recognition. It is argued that things have changed drastically since 2013, and to her credit, Yu-Shan Wu conceded that conditions may change swiftly. There has been a major uptake and use of Twitter by South Africans indicated by the numbers above and the fact that traditional news broadcasts report on trending topics on this platform. While it has been slow, the recognition and uptake by government departments, including Parliament is steadily increasing. However due to the nature of government bureaucracy and the need to learn and understand new technologies, the

slow uptake is to some extent to be expected. If one considers that the DA has more presence and co-ordinated online strategies than the ANC, it may be the case that if DA were to replace the ANC as the government, we would witness an increased use of technology to engage the public in policy making decisions. This does not mean this change can exclusively be brought by the DA. If the ANC was to be taken over or led by people who are technologically inclined or those who warm up to the internet like former Minister Trevor Manuel, we would be likely to see social media platforms gain power in the public sphere. In relation to the third point Yu-Shan Wu asks the question that even if policy makers were more engaged online, would active be taken offline and vice-versa. The mobilisation of students across South Africa under the *#Feesmustfall* banner is an example of action being taken as will be discussed shortly.

There have been immense contributions from media scholars on the role of the internet in constituting a public sphere, and its impact of the traditional public sphere. For instance Greg Goldberg (2010:739) in his article, *Rethinking the public/virtual sphere: The problem with participation,* acknowledges the sizable amount of articles that have been published in *New Media and Society* with keywords that suggest the public sphere as a central theme. He points to Zizi Papacharissi's article, *The virtual sphere: The internet as public sphere,* as the most cited article in that journal. This literature review will depart from Papacharissi's article not only because of its popularity, but because of its historical context as well. From a 'new media' perspective, the year 2002 may be viewed as "prehistoric", solely because of the rate at which technology has advanced since the first decade of the new millennium. The paper will critically engage various conceptions of the digital public sphere advanced by various scholars.

Overall, scholarship in this area has been characterised by *cyber-optimists* on one side, and *cyber-pessimists* on the other. Individuals on the former side believe that the internet has features that promote the spread of democracy, with those on the latter side arguing that this technology consolidates authoritarianism and political repression (Soriano, 2013: 332). This topic has also seen a fair share of conflicts in terms of how to conceptualise the public sphere, whether to see it from a normative point of view, or to investigate what the sphere actually does. Papacharissi seems to take the middle ground. While she somewhat dismisses cyber determinists, she acknowledges the potential power of the internet. She argues that the internet and its surrounding technologies hold the potential of reviving the public sphere,

however some aspects of the technology simultaneously curtail and enhance that potential (Papacharissi 2002: 9). In the main she argues that internet based technologies introduce new information that would otherwise be unavailable to the political discourse, however information access inequalities as well as the illiteracy of users with regards to new media, hinder the representativeness of the public sphere. Papacharissi claims that internet based technologies enable discussion between people on a global scale, however these technologies simultaneously fragment political discourse. She points to the power of global capitalism which seems to be forcing internet based technologies to adapt to the prevailing political culture instead of engendering a new one. Papacharissi concludes by suggesting that the internet and new media technologies have only managed to create a new public space for politically oriented discussion, and not a public sphere, as this is not dependent on the technology alone. In the article in question, the author examines how political uses of the internet affect the public sphere. She investigates whether these technologies extend peoples' political capacity or limit democracy (Papacharissi 2002:10). While it is plausible that the creation of the public sphere is not only dependent the technology itself, this paper will argue that the internet and its technologies has engendered a rational public sphere albeit not a carbon copy of Habermas' public sphere.

Before discussing the differences between a public space and a public sphere, it is important to touch on the nature of the rhetoric of both cyber optimists as well as cyber pessimists. Optimists argue that new media technologies will deliver further democratization of the post-industrial society. Proponents of the cyber utopian vision like former United States Vice – President Al, Gore attribute the internet with the power to strengthen democracies, promote sustainable economic growth, and generate a feeling of belonging to one single human community. Gore has even claimed that the internet spreads participatory democracy as well as forges a new era of Athenian democracy (Soriano 2013: 333). This claim suggests that Gore sees the internet as having restored or in a process of restoring Habermas' traditional public sphere. Cyber-optimists assert that the internet and related technologies can expand avenues of self expression and encourage citizen activity. Online discourse is touted as that which will increase political participation and usher in a democratic utopia (Papacharissi 2002:10).

It is important to note that ideologically the 'new' in new media refers to the 'most recent' which equals better, where the 'new' is cutting edge, a place for the forward thinking people.

Hence such media are attractive to people like journalists and the trend setters in society. This view is rooted in modernist belief in social progress delivered by technology. Attached to this progress are claims and hopes that new media will raise productivity, educational opportunities as well as unlock new communicative frontiers. The ideological movement that is advancing this narrative of progress in Western societies is powerful, and is subscribed to by corporations who produce and distribute both media hardware and software, governments, entrepreneurs, media commentators and journalists, scholars and cultural activists to name a few. This excitement and promotion of new media is ideologically not neutral, since it cannot be dissociated from neo-liberal forms of production which have been at the forefront of globalisation since the 1980's (Lister et al 2003: 12). On the other hand cyber pessimists argue that the internet and new media technologies are not universally accessible and that they frequently induce fragmented, enraged and nonsensical discussion like flaming, instead of guaranteeing a revived public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002: 10). The vision about the pro-democratic nature of the internet has been challenged by sceptics on the basis that technology fails to support the democratisation process and possesses qualities that endow authoritarian regimes resources that propagate social control as well as the effective persecution of those challenging the status quo, thus fostering regression (Sotiano 2013: 334).

Writing for the New York Times, Lee Siegel (2011) argues that those like the author of *The Net Delusion: The dark Side of Internet Freedom*, Evgeny Morozov, convincingly argue that the Internet more often than not constricts or even abolishes freedom, interestingly all in the name of freedom. Authors in this block for instance claim that the internet creates an illusion about the existence wide-spread pro-democracy movements as being real. They argue that their existence only takes place only in the confines of the perceptions of those who irrationally trust in the liberating qualities of the internet. They note how some of the movements that challenge authoritarianism lack a genuine social base, like the protest movements against electoral fraud in Iran (Soriana 2013: 337). There are many more arguments in this regard which are advanced by sceptics, and these will be tackled through the course of that paper. However in the main, cyber-pessimists drive home the point that not all technologies are progressive. For example, one does not have to discuss the destructive nature of nuclear bombs, or mechanisation technologies that render whole populations unemployed and destitute. Both the optimists and sceptics present compelling arguments, however, this paper adopts Soriano's (2013: 334) position that asserts that both perspectives "...attribute a deterministic character to Internet that is not related to its neutral nature." The

impact or effects of the Internet on political processes, the public sphere or democracy need to be studied with the understanding that they depend on the context and on the agency and ability of the people involved who utilise this technology.

Public Sphere vs. Public Space

This brief discussion of the of the public sphere aims to provide an overview of the concept, as well as lay the foundation that will allow for a discussion on the various models and functions of the public sphere. Habermas (1984:49) (as cited in Lunt 2013) conceptualised the public sphere as follows;

> By the 'the public sphere' we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body.

When thinking about the public sphere, Papacharissi (2002: 10) envisions ancient Greek agoras where open debates of political thoughts, and ideas occurred. Habermas anchors the principles of the public sphere in the 17th and 18th centuries, and asserts that they involved an open discussion of all matters of general concern, the subjection of relevant issues of the public good to informed debate and scrutiny. Thus, the public sphere in presupposes freedom of speech and assembly, and to freely participate in political debate and policy formulation (Deane 2005: 178). According to this normative view of the public sphere, public opinion should be formed out of rational public debate, thus informed and logical discussion could lead to consensus and decision making. This then represents the best of the democratic tradition.

Rauchfleisch and Kovic (2016: 2) note that while the concept of the public sphere is widely recognised and written on, it remains difficult to clearly define as well as show its existence and operation empirically. The specific meaning of the concept is contested. Papacharissi (2002: 11) correctly notes that the conceptualisations of the public sphere were idealised, pointing to the arguments of various scholars like Lyotard, who argued that anarchy, individuality as well as disagreement as opposed to rational accord, lead to true democratic emancipation. She also discusses Nancy Fraser's well documented rejection of Habermas' public sphere, who argued that Habermas' public sphere functioned as an arena for privileged white men to practice their skills of governance, as it excluded women and non-propertied

people. Of critical importance is Fraser's claim that; in response to being excluded in contemporary American society, people like women and black Americans form counter-publics, resulting in the existence of multiple public spheres which are not equally powerful or articulate. These give voice to collective identities and interests; however a government or public realm that pays attention to all diverse views and voices has never existed. Of course these are not all the arguments made against the public sphere, however these objections are the reason why one is compelled to shy away from looking at the public sphere from a normative view, and rather look at what the public sphere is actually doing.

The idea of public participation in the public sphere is closely linked to democratic ideals that advocate for citizen participation in public affairs. Inquiry and communication are seen as the basis for a democratic society, where group deliberation is preferred over a single authority. Chapter 10 of the South African Constitution (1996: 99) demands that public administration be governed in accordance with democratic values and principles as enshrined in it, and that people's needs be responded to, and that the public must be encouraged to participate in policy making. The South African Parliament asserts the following on its website about participation;

> The constitution says that there must be public participation in what goes on in Parliament. After all, the word "Parliament" comes from the word meaning "to speak"....you, the voter, cast your vote for the political party you felt would best represent your views and concerns in Parliament and therefore your representatives have a duty to promote the policies you voted for. In doing so, they must act in a way that is transparent and accountable

Parliament advises that there are many ways to participate in Parliament, including through attending forums, committee meetings, through Parliamentary Democracy Offices, submissions, petitions, contact with one's representative in Parliament and monitoring the media. In terms of participating through the media, Parliament's website advises as follows;

> Keep yourself informed by using the media. In order to be able to influence decisions taken in Parliament and the provincial legislatures, you must keep yourself aware of what is going on in these institutions and in the broader society.
>
> Keep in touch by:

- Talking to people
- Reading newspapers

- Listening to news broadcasts on radio and TV
- Finding out about the work programme of Parliament.
- From time to time, certain committee hearings are advertised in newspapers. Another way of keeping informed about Parliament is by attending report back meetings held by members of parliament (MPs).

It is quite peculiar that while Parliament has a Twitter account, nothing is said on its website about following Parliament on that platform in order to know about its business. The only online engagement mentioned is through document downloads and watching the Parliament's YouTube Channel only. Peculiar in the sense that in this day in age more and more people use social media platforms to stay in touch, to talk to each other, read newspapers, listen to news broadcasts of both radio and TV. As early as 1997 some thinkers had already been arguing that cyberspace is promoted as the new public space constituted by the people, where they could realise progress, self-fulfilment and personal development. Papacharissi (2002: 11) argues that a new public space is not the same as a new public sphere. She asserts that as a public space, the internet provides another forum for political deliberation, while as a public sphere the internet may possibly facilitate discussion that encourages a democratic exchange of ideas and opinions. To Papacharissi a virtual space enhances discussion, while a virtual sphere enhances democracy.

In distinguishing between a public space and a public sphere, Papacharissi (2002: 12) discusses three factors which she believes help determine whether the internet can recreate Habermas' public sphere, cultivate a number of diverse public spheres or be simply consumed by a neoliberal commercial culture. These factors are; (1) information access, which includes the internet's ability to carry and transport information (2) the internet's ability to connect people from diverse backgrounds and provide a forum for political discussion, and (3) the impact of a capitalist economy. With regard to information access, Papacharissi (2002: 12-15) argues that while those who can access online information are equipped with additional tools to be more effective citizens and participate in the public sphere, the digital divide excludes those without access to computers and the internet. She further claims that access does not guarantee increased political activity or enlightened political discourse. Papacharissi also points to the fact that some research in America has found that political discussions in that cyberspace are dominated by an elite few, and conservative points of view dominate the space. She contends that access does not guarantee

a representative and robust public sphere. Her view is that the internet provides a space for political discussion but it is plagued by the inadequacies of the political system.

Of course things have changed drastically since 2002. Instead of needing computers to access the internet, nowadays people use smartphones to gain access. According to World Wide Worx research, the number of smartphone devices in South Africa stood 23.5-million at the end of 2015. It is estimated that there are almost 42-million cellphone users in South Africa. This is remarkable given that the population of the country is estimated 54-million. Smartphone penetration has grown rapidly in recent years, and as a percentage of total handset sales volumes in 2014, smartphones accounted for 57.7%. This grew to 72.8% of sales in 2015. Apps such as Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook are also driving the demand for smartphones (Steyn, 2016). These technologies are engendering an environment where there is an increased supply of content produced by ordinary citizens and that includes debate and conversation. Today smartphones host thirty eight percent of all media interactions. People who use the internet seem to find it accessible and relatively easy to use. It is estimated that five hundred million photos, and a hundred and forty four thousand video clips are shared on social media platforms daily. Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube are the three most visited sites after search engine Google, and these sites can at any time carry 'memes' and other content that can spread like wildfire or go viral in a matter of seconds from the time an event occurs. Sisulu (2014: 86) contends that this represents a "true explosion in the stimulation and expression of ideas." In South Africa it was estimated that Facebook had around 9.4 million users, while Twitter boasted five and half million users.

The digital divide may still be a reality in South Africa however one can argue that it is fast becoming a thing of the past especially with increasing government buy in and the establishment of WiFi hotspots in various cities and poor communities like in the City of Tshwane where free internet is provided across more than 780 WiFi internet zones, including open public spaces, educational institutions, schools, clinics and libraries. Users gain free internet access with 500 MB free data every day while also being able to make free calls, enjoying free chat and free movie streaming (City of Tshwane, 2016). Yu-Shan Wu (2013: 77) asserts that mobile technology access in South Africa is virtually hundred percent and has surpassed television access. She argues that internet connection on mobile phones has changed the profile of online users and has allowed for the access and participation of low

income users. She points to a report titled *The South African Media Landscape 2012 Study*, which found that the social networking gaps between age, as well as the urban-rural divide has significantly decreased, and that 73% of South African Internet users also use social media sites.

However, if universal access was never guaranteed in Habermas' public sphere, or any other conceptualization of it, why should it be a requirement for cyberspace? It is asserted that access should not be looked at solely through the lens of device ownership. Research in Africa has shown that even those who do not own devices actually gain access to mobile phones and the internet through relatives and friends who own these devices. Those who only own and access traditional media devices also gain access to debates and content on the internet via these traditional media devices who today continuously report on trends and happenings online. Indeed the internet may not guarantee increased political activity, however this paper argues that political activity (in the strict sense) should not be used as a factor in determining whether the internet is a public sphere or not. This is because 'political activity' is hard to define and impossible to measure. For instance the U.S. Department of Defense defines political activity as follows;

> The term "political activity" means doing something in active support of or opposition to a political party, a candidate for partisan political office (e.g., President, senator, representative, state or local legislature or office), or a partisan political group (e.g., "Historians for Smith") (http://www.dodea.edu/Offices/Counsel/pa.cf) .

The examples used to define political activity include; circulating a petition, using a computer to produce a broacher to support a candidate's campaign, sending e-mail invitations to campaign events to friends, and using the Internet to forward e-mail messages received from a partisan campaign or someone supporting a partisan candidate. How can these be empirically measured by researchers?

In its discussion of political activity, the Public Service Commission of Canada (2016) defines non-candidacy political activity using the following examples;

> Volunteering or fundraising for a candidate or a political party; Supporting or opposing a candidate or a political party by displaying political material such as a picture, sticker, badge or button, or placing a sign on the lawn; Attending events,

> meetings, conventions, rallies, or other political gatherings in support of, or in opposition to, a candidate or a political party; Developing promotional material such as writing campaign speeches, slogans and pamphlets for a candidate or a political party; Using blogs, social networking sites, a personal Web site or video sharing to express personal views in support of, or in opposition to, a candidate or a political party.

The events of SONA 2015 not only generated high television viewership numbers, but also generated massive activity online. A massive number of SONA-related posts were uploaded to social network sites, making SONA 2015 the most watched yet. It is argued that this SONA possibly drew the highest television ratings than any other political event in South Africa in 2015 and was possibly the most tweeted. It was reported that Hashtag Sona2015 (#2015) averaged about 30 tweets per second (eNCA, 2015). This would suggest increased political activity, however, political activity seems to be more a function of the topic at hand and how it affects the citizens, as opposed to the nature of the public sphere. If by enlightened political discourse Papacharissi means discourse that is tolerant, open minded and free thinking in the western liberal sense, we again revert back to the irresolvable issue of the 'correct standard' to use in determining how enlightened that discourse is. For example it is not incomprehensible to argue that South Africa's controversial politician and activist Andile Mngxitama (2016) sees the South African public sphere as intolerant of views of left leaning politicians who are asking for land. He sees the liberal media as selective in their reporting, and intolerant of the views of those who criticize white monopoly capital. Thus, Mngxitama sees the political discourse contained in the media or certain sections of it as unprogressive and intolerant. Consensus on what constitutes enlightened political discourse can never be reached and thus should not necessarily be used as a measure.

Papacharissi's argument that access does not guarantee a robust public sphere may be correct however we should take time to consider what is meant by robust public sphere. Scholars like Fraser (1992:75) have suggested that a strong public sphere is one where not only public opinion is generated, but one which also incorporates decision making. She sees Sovereign parliaments as 'strong publics' because their discourse combines both opinion forming and decision making that results in legally binding laws. The suggestion here is that weak public spheres must incorporate some members from (or links to) strong public spheres in order to

ensure that public spheres do not just become opinion spheres devoid of any ability to affect laws. Online platforms like Twitter and Blogging websites have to some extent restructured the hierarchies and structures of human relations, at least for those who are connected. Ordinary citizens, the media, members of Parliament along with powerful members of society as well as civil society institutions occupy the same discursive space, and it would seem that from time to time this space does influence decision making.

As mentioned earlier, the power and influence of the internet has never been more apparent than in the *#FeesMustFall* movement. Jacobs and Wasserman (2015), argue that, "the date Oct. 21, 2015, will be remembered as the day mainstream media became old in South Africa. It was the day the hashtags took control." When students from the University of Cape Town (UCT) marched to, and inside the grounds of Parliament demanding to see Minister of Education, the police responded by firing teargas and stun grenades, causing massive chaos and clashes. This happened while the Minister of Finance Nhlanhla Nene was delivering his mid-term budget speech inside. TV stations were forced to choose between covering the protests or the Minister's speech. Some, like the SABC chose to focus on the Minister, while others opted for a split screen and cover the protests as well. What is interesting is that TV did not matter anyway, as the protest that was happening outside was being live-tweeted. People around the city of Cape Town and the world over, were following the protests online as they happened. This was fuelled by the fact that initially, mainstream global news networks avoided the protests. These media struggled to keep up with the events and relied on twitter updates to keep their readers in the loop. The *#FeesMustFall* campaign was so powerful that it led to the government freezing fee increments, and saw UCT include the hashtag in a court interdict against protesting students (Jacobs and Wasserman 2015). This is strong evidence of cyberspace being a platform where opinions can be formed and decisions that influence policy taken, albeit not all the time. This may also serve as evidence that the internet not only provides a space for political discussion, but also challenges the inadequacies of the political system.

With regards to the internet's ability to connect people from diverse backgrounds and provide a forum for political discussion, Papacharissi (2002: 18) concludes that it is highly likely that the internet enhances the public sphere however it does so in a way that is different to our past experiences of the public discourse. Her assumption is that the internet may not become

a public sphere we expect, but it will become something radically different, that will enhance democracy and dialogue. She argues that the virtual sphere holds great promise as a political medium, especially with regard the restructuring of political processes and breathing new life into political rituals. She also notes that the internet, as well as related new media technologies invites political discussion and acts as a forum for it. Papacharissi however cautions that greater political discussion is not the only function of democracy, and suggests that the content, diversity and the impact of political discussion need to be considered carefully, before concluding whether online discourse enhances democracy.

Given examples like *#FeesMustFall* campaign, one is inclined to agree with Papacharissi that the internet does enhance the public sphere, and enhances dialogue and democracy. As a political medium, the virtual sphere has indeed augmented political rituals, evidenced by the presence of political parties and politicians on social media networks. In the build-up to the SONA 2015, the Presidency invited citizens on Twitter to provide suggestions on what the President should include in his speech to the nation. This is in contrast to Yu-Shan Wu's observations in 2013 that the South African government was not using the internet to influence policy. In her reasons of why South African online spaces were not yet influencing policy, Yu-Shan Wu (2013:78) also advanced the argument that there was a "lack of recognition by the national and political leadership." She notes that government had no social media strategies despite having a few politicians here and there on cyberspaces. She uses the government's limited response to complaints about corruption and job creation after the SONA 2013 as an example of this non acknowledgement of social networking sites, and argues that without some recognition of, and response to public concern, social media is unlikely to be seen as a space for negotiation. Given the government's pro-activeness in asking for suggestions for SONA 2015, it would seem there is some acknowledgement on its part.

Reporter William Saunderson-Meyer (2015) asserts that research showed that in the end, most of the responses the Presidency received suggested that the President resign and payback money for non-security upgrades to his home in eNkandla. This suggests that the internet allows for the formulation of public opinion. We may never know how much of the suggestions get taken up, but we do see evidence of the augmentation of political rituals. In her example of how politicians Jesse Ventura and John McCain benefited from their use of the internet, Papacharissi (2002:13) also notes that there is no guarantee that direct feedback

from citizens will eventually lead to policy formation, however the internet opens up additional channels of communication. Following the results of the 2016 municipal elections the EFF held an online referendum to hear from its members what they wanted done in relation to its negotiations with other political parties in hung municipalities.

While Papacharissi says the internet will not or may not become a public sphere as we have known it, she does not offer any insights into what the internet might be in the future. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the internet has been able to replicate media technologies like radio, television as well as newspapers, it is not inconceivable that the internet may be able to replicate the public sphere as we have known it and be more. With regards to content, Papacharissi (2002: 16) asserts that the virtual space does not guarantee democratic and rational discourse. She points to flaming and conflict beyond reasonable boundaries that is evident on various online platforms. This she argues does not ensure that people from different cultural backgrounds will be more understanding of each other and fosters miscommunication. The SONA 2015 events show that even in a public sphere like Parliament, flaming and conflict are a part of the public sphere. The 'hasty opinions' she argues are detrimental to democratic discourse, may actually at the same time be beneficial to the public sphere by serving as building blocks for more rational discourse as it allows for participants to announce their positions and how far they are willing to negotiate and compromise. These may also help identify those who cannot be reasoned with and remove them from the main public sphere. Conversations on the internet should not be conceptualised separately from offline conversations and activities, as these operate simultaneously and influence each other.

There have been many instances recently which show that flaming and racist conflicting on social media is being watched closely by various participants on social media platforms including government and civil society organisations. Models Tshidi Thamana and Jessica Leandra dos Santos were recently caught up in a heated twar which was sparked by the latter's racist remarks and use of the word kaffir, an offensive racial slur. Thamana responded by saying that she wished that all white people had been killed during the time of the ANC activist Peter Mokaba. They were both apprehended and were encouraged to apologise to each other. Real estate agent Penny Sparrow was recently find a R150 000 for her racist comments on Facebook (News24, 2016). Papacharissi (2002:16) also questions the impact of our words online. Given the consequences that have just been discussed and the

#FeesMustFall as examples among others, it is argued that our words online do have impact, however this does depend on the topic at hand, context as well as the agency and resolve of the participants. Indeed online anonymity can never replace face-to-face interaction; however it is argued that anonymity is just an illusion since laws like Rica have forced people to have their online identities linked to their offline identities in some way or the other. In this way people, even those using pseudonyms will be inclined to assess the impact and social value of their words.

With regard to diversity, this paper does not see fragmentation as detrimental to the internet's ability to be a public sphere. Like Papacharissi (2002:17), this paper accepts that as the virtual mass becomes subdivided into smaller discussion groups, the ideal of a public sphere that connects many people online may elude us; however it strongly supports the creation of smaller interest groups that foster the development of several online publics, which reflect the collective ideas of their members. Parliament itself does not discuss all issues in a single forum; sub-committees composed of different interest groups are formulated to discuss matter in smaller and more effective groups, so as to feed back into bigger platform of parliament.

Papacharissi (2002: 18) notes that the internet is a medium constructed in a capitalist era and thus is susceptible to the social and political issues of our world. She argues that these are the same forces that transformed the public sphere and tamed it. She points to the power of advertising revenue over programming and editorial independence. This may be true, however it has been shown that a total domination of cyberspace by commercial interest may never be possible, since even governments like China struggle to dominate and control all cyberspaces. For example, Yu-Shan Wu (2013:76) points out that online interaction is taking place even in less open democracies that have minimal spaces for political expression like Zimbabwe. Writing for the Government Communication and Information System(GCIS) in *Media Landscape 2012: Reflections on South Africa's Media Environment,* Koos Bekker, the chief executive of Naspers argued and cautioned that the internet had greatly changed the way content and information are exchanged. He warned the newspaper industry to adapt to new media technologies or face imminent extinction, especially in an environment where there is a decline in newspaper circulation, and the penetration of broadband is being improved, with mobile and smartphone technologies being more accessible to the general population. Of importance is that Bekker says once the penetration of these technologies

reach peak, the way of the world and of doing business will be markedly transformed, including within the media environment. He says information is increasingly becoming the driving force of human development , and South Africa will have no choice but to make the transition to the new world. What Bekker is saying in nothing new and is not unique to South Africa. Marshall McLuhan made many predictions in his seminal publication in 1964, *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man,* including that the Internet would become a Global Village, making people and societies more interconnected than television (Logan 2010: 45). While McLuhan was not talking of new media as we know it today, he hinted at major disruptions, and new social configurations that were to come. For example, the Executive Chairman of News Corp, Rupert Murdoch has been known for his fierce advocacy for *paywalls*; an issue that has seen media executives at loggerheads with each other. (Carr 2009). This is evidence of this new era or entrance into a new *technoculture* that is resulting in massive social, cultural and technological change and the commercial sector is not the only dominant player.

Papacharissi (2002: 22) concludes her argument by asserting that the most plausible way of perceiving the virtual sphere is of a sphere that consists of numerous culturally fragmented cyber-spheres that inhabit a common virtual public space. She claims that online political discussions do not, and will not sound different from face-to-face interactions, and that the widening gap between politicians, journalists and the public will not be bridged. The question to be asked is how different should the conversations online be, from offline ones in order to render the internet a public sphere? If Papacharissi is able to suggest that the internet may engender a sphere that is radically different from the public sphere as we have known it, how is she able to strongly conclude that online political discussion will never be different? It can be argued that social media platforms, in this case Twitter, shatter offline hierarchies and narrow the gap between journalists, politicians and the public. Papacharissi (2002: 23) correctly points out the power of the internet and its ability to connect people who would never be able to discuss political matters offline, and allow them to do so online. Ultimately, for Papacharissi the value of the virtual sphere is in the fact that it carries the hope, speculation and of realising the utopian public sphere. Of the utmost importance is that Papacharissi (2002: 24) concludes that political deliberation can indeed take place in cyberspace. She suggests that, what is now needed to move forward is to consider the greater impact of such political deliberation, so as to determine whether the internet can be a public virtual sphere.

Antje Gimmler (2001: 31) agrees with Papacharissi that contrary to the view of some critics, the internet can actually support and strengthen deliberative democracy. Gimmler argues that this is possible because the deliberative model of democracy places strong emphasis on raising both political and social issues within a sphere constituted of deliberating citizens. She asserts that internet technology supports equality of access to information as well as unrestricted means of access, which are fundamental to a "more ambitious practice of discourse." The internet is also seen as able to facilitate interaction, which is another prerequisite of democracy. It also encourages the exchange of information as well as goods and services. Gimmler (2001: 32) claims that information can be used more effectively over the web as it is easily obtained by users and can be made valid at very low costs. The fact of the low cost of internet information may be true in developed countries like Germany and the United Kingdom, however in South Africa the picture is a lot different, even compared to other African countries.

A survey by the South African Institute of Race Relations indicates that the average monthly cost of broadband in South Africa is ten times higher than in the United Kingdom. The broadband speed in that country is five times faster than South Africa's. On average the cost of broadband for a South African internet user is R337 a month, while in the UK the cost is R36 a month. In the UK and the US, the services are not only cheaper, they are faster and have more users (Stanlib 2016).Given that South Africa is still facing the challenges of inequality and poverty, where in 2015, 39% of black African people were unemployed, compared to 8.3% of white people (Africa Check, 2015), it would suggest that South Africa is a long way off in terms of achieving universal access to information, unlike in Germany where there is almost complete access to information (Gimmler, 2001:32). It would also mean that online technologies are only accessible to, and used by a small section of the population, which as per Papacharissi (2002: 14) contributes to a public sphere that is not different from the bourgeois public sphere which was exclusive, elitist, and far-off from being ideal.

However as mentioned earlier things are changing in South Africa and I have also argued that access must not be viewed from a device ownership perspective only. Gimmler argues that new media technologies offer possibilities that are fundamentally different to those offered by older forms like television and radio which are non-interactive forms of media. As an

example, she uses Germany's concept of *teledemocracy* which was designed in response to a lack of participation in the democratic process. Because it was based on these older forms of media, *teledemocracy* according to Gimmler could not provide the "demanding opinion- and will-formation that enable and produce informed decisions and votes." She argues that the internet, not only by itself, but along with the fundamental changes it has fostered on mass media, has engendered an environment where citizens can participate in the process of decision making and directly influence it.

It is important to note that a number of scholars, for their examples of success of online democracy and the public sphere, use examples like the Minnesota E-Democracy where public discourse is moderated, and the platform is planned and developed for direct politics or purely for politics. She argues that restricted access and moderation make for a quality debate. Such forums offer access to information about political parties, government administration as well as various civil society organisations (Gimmler 2001: 33). Papacharissi (2002: 15) points to groups such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation, Democracy Internet and the Democracy Resource Center as popular success stories. In 2011, former National Planning Minister Trevor Manuel conducted an online dialogue called the NPC Jam, which sought to solicit citizen's views on the country's policy for the future in a document titled vision 2030. This is the closest the country has ever seen in terms of planned and moderated online political engagement (Sikhakhane, 2011).

The NPC Jam ran for 4 days and within 17 hours of opening, more than 3000 comments had been posted on topics ranging from education, unemployment and economic growth. The National Planning Commission also employed social media platforms Twitter and Facebook to solicit South African's ideas on how to create a more prosperous future. This strongly suggests that social media platforms like Twitter do facilitate the public sphere. Manuel said the jam enabled the commission to get concentrated input within the shortest possible time. The IBM technology used for to facilitate the dialogue also enabled the commission to sort through submitted comments within a week, and allowed for a clear distillation of issues. In the beginning only 200 people logged on as many thought this initiative was a hoax, however as users realised they were really talking to the Minister and his colleagues, the discussions picked up. Within a 24 hour period there had been3 575 logins and 3 033 comments posted. It would seem that the use of technology depends on the will and enthusiasm of those initiating

its use. For example, while Manuel said that the online dialogue was very addictive, the then deputy chairperson of the commission Cyril Ramaphosa complained that the engagement seemed like a lot of work. The NPC was aware of the digital divide that exists in South Africa and to circumvent this issue and ensure the widest possible participation, the commission worked with both state and civil society institutions like Love Life to ensure that that those without computers or internet connectivity were able to participate in the online conversation. The dialogue was structured according to ten themes which ranged from citizenry, cohesion, inclusion, redress, and creating a united South Africa, to living a healthier life (South African Government 2011).

Gimmler (2003: 33) also advances the argument that the internet can be used in deliberative processes in the way that civil society organizations do. That is, by using the internet as a public platform to discuss issues of particular interest to them. She asserts that this is possible because the internet enables for news to be broadcast more quickly and economically, and operates with relative independence from mass media conventions, such as *framing* and *agenda setting*, which govern mass media. The internet allows people to set their own agendas, and allows equal access to all users, who also have the opportunity to create their own websites. She also argues that in its earlier developmental stages, the internet was anarchic, but has now fallen to pressures of commercial interests which have been increasingly asserting themselves. She points to online shopping as a phenomenon that will undergo extreme expansion in the future, and argue that such commercialization of the internet will be intrusive if it leads to the introduction of fees for accessing information and the limitation of information and interaction.

Such limitations are more palpable when one considers Jamie Bartlett's (2014) article titled *Soon, the internet will be impossible to control*, which appeared in the UK's Telegraph online. He argues that people have fooled themselves by letting themselves believe that Facebook and Twitter are some sort of digital commons. He asserts that this belief has been partly fostered by the fact these platforms are free of charge and partly because it is where the debates of the day are publicly held. He further asserts that this is exacerbated by the fact that social media has become part of our political as well as cultural infrastructure. This belief is dismissed as a fairytale by Bartlett, and argues that social media platforms are public in the same way as malls are, because cyberspace is private property. For example, he points to the fact that Facebook pays for and owns the thousands of servers that host its 1.35 billion users.

The company also owns and controls their content, and uses them for generating advertising revenue.

The restrictive nature of these platforms is also embedded in their terms and conditions of use. These forbid what is deemed illegal, violent, threatening or abusive material. To enforce these demands, it is estimated that Google has employed 100 000 content managers, whose job is to censor whatever that violates what is acceptable to owners and engineers tasked with running these systems. For example Facebook recently banned Nick Ut's Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of a naked girl fleeing napalm during the Vietnam War (Scott and Isaac, 2016). This drives home the assertion that the internet is subject to invisible political expediency and control. This is also as a result of the way the internet works, the American technology giants that dominate the internet are able to subtly influence what we encounter, who we meet, and what we buy online. Google's search algorithm is customised to one's personal search history, meaning when one is searching for information online, one ends up finding content that it 'thinks' one wants. Bartlett points to a study that reveals that if one tells one's friends on Facebook that one voted, they are 0.39 per cent more likely to vote too. Given that Facebook could, through its newsfeed algorithm, decide who gets to see one's declaration of civic duty, that power could affect and change the result of an election. Bartlett (2016) believes that these companies generally want to create a free public service; however they fail to uphold the principle of free expression. He argues that market forces and expediency have resulted in a public space that is monetised, controlled, censored and not really controlled by citizens.

While this may be true, it is also true that these companies, as well as governments do not have total control of cyberspace. For example, the 100 000 content managers Google employs cannot find every extremist post or content and remove it. The decisions that these companies have to make in relation to their standards and policies are also not easy or straight forward. For example, Facebook decided to ban Nick Ut's iconic picture because the company felt the picture violated its standards about nudity on its platform. After a Norwegian author had posted images about the atrocities of war and used the picture, Facebook removed it. This triggered a wave of protest against Facebook and its policy of censoring images. Following a report on this issue by Aftenposten, a Norwegian newspaper, thousands of people globally responded with an act of civil disobedience by posting Ut's picture on their Facebook pages, with some even daring the company to act. This put

Facebook under pressure, and within hours the company reinstated the image on its platform (Scott, 2016). This shows that citizens have power to influence the decisions of the companies. It is also a fact that commercial goods and services are never devoid of or isolated from politics. For example, Retail giant H&M found itself having to deal with a political and racially charged issue, because in its tweets, the company had insinuated that black models were not in line with a positive image they were trying to portray. This was in response to a tweet by a black customer who had expressed her disappointment at the lack of black models in their store, and advised the company to be more inclusive. This generated country-wide criticism despite its retraction and apology (Maune, 2015).

Because the internet's infrastructure is rhizomatically formed, and not organised hierarchically, plurality is maintained. For Gimmler (2001: 33) this is what distinguishes the internet from print and television media. She cautions that this design leaves the internet uncontrolled and thus susceptible to extreme left or right political groups. Unlike Bartlett, Gimmler believes the internet is an ideal medium for a pluralistic public realm that if supported, would allow even those in China and Iran to be heard and have free access to information. This work submits that the cyberspace should be studied or looked at as a living organism that is constantly evolving and is shaped by the interests of those participating in it. For instance Bartlett (2016) talks about a new way of running the internet that is currently under construction. A decentralised internet where no one is in control, where content cannot be manipulated and accounts cannot shut down. In this emerging form of the internet, transactions and engagements can happen directly between two participants, eliminating or bypassing service providers.

Gimmler (2001:22) arrives at these conclusions about the internet as a public sphere by basing her arguments on the model of deliberative democracy developed in the work of Jurgen Habermas and Seyla Benhabib. She argues that a model of deliberative democracy that is most suitable for giving the public a critical and active role in the political process is one which acknowledges both the functional and normative demands made on a modern pluralistic society. She further asserts that this model offers the greatest potential for using new media in a manner appropriate to democratic ideals. She combines this model with basic ideas of the concept of the public sphere, and uses that as a theoretical basis for assessing the ways in which internet use can change the public sphere of deliberative democracy. This

model is preferred for its consideration of the normative as well as the functional aspects of the public sphere.

Gimmler's (2001: 23) view is that Habermas' version of deliberative democracy has three crucial advantages which are; (1) *normativity*, as well as what she calls (2) *the advantage of pluralism* and (3) *The advantage of legitimation.* With regards to normativity, she argues that the foundations of deliberative democracy enable the legitimacy of a constitutional state and civil society to be justified. This justification results from a discursive practice that provides the frame work for resolving political conflicts rationally. Rational discourse combined with the unforced consent of all potential participants, produces the validity of the justification. These conditions, in the form of procedural rules, provide a secure discursive context for resolving conflicts and express the normative basis of deliberative democracy. Gimmler however does not accept Habermas' strong foundational claim concerning the conditions of rational discourse and the practical presuppositions of argumentation underlying it. The point she tries to drive home is that there is no plausible alternative model to rational and un-coerced discourse as the normative basis for democracy. Such discourse is characterised by equality among participants, the temporary suspension of structural power and domination, the complete disclosure of procedures, and the realisation of a context in which themes of discussion can be freely chosen.

With regards to *the advantage of pluralism*, this model takes into account that in pluralistic societies, the legal, moral and functional spheres are separate from one another, and the diversity of values, attitudes as well as forms of life that compose them are an established fact modern societies (Gimmler, 2001:24). In this context, a procedural version of the political process is preferred over a value-oriented version. It is only the procedural rules of the political process that can build a framework for the pluralism and diversity of modern societies. The public sphere is seen as playing an important role in pluralistic societies as it serves as an arena for expressing and constituting this diversity. In terms of *the advantage of legitimation,* Gimmler points to Habermas' version of deliberative democracy, where the institutionalised procedures of parliamentary decision making are connected with civil society and the public sphere. Thus, the legitimacy of the whole procedure relies on two forms of popular sovereignty; the constitutional democratic state, along with its parliamentary as well as the legal institutions on one side, and the public sphere of civil society on the other. Gimmler argues that with this two-track model of democracy, Habermas avoids both the

narrow version of the political process that is characteristic of liberalism, and the extreme demands that the radical approach to democracy often makes. She argues that this model recognises that the legitimacy and functional capacity of a pluralistic democracy can only be guaranteed by a combination of both spheres. Thus, neither citizen participation in all political decisions, nor the existence of representative democracy and the rule of law alone, can deliver the political process necessary to preserve a legitimate democratic society.

The concept of the public sphere therefore has a particular meaning in the deliberative democracy model, since it designates the public space in which citizens can discuss all issues they think are relevant. In this space disputes are resolved in a free and equal manner. This sphere fulfils its critical role in opposition to a public dominated by mass media or the state. According to Gimmler (2001:25) the theory of deliberative democracy fully captures the concept of the public sphere for the following reasons; "equal access to available resources; openness in pursuit of particular issues; the disclosure of the outer and the inner; and a public network of connected participants: all are distinctive features of the normative concept of a critical public sphere." Such a configuration results in its nature to reject organisation as a whole. In its ideal form, the critical public sphere can neither be tamed nor ordered. The critical public sphere is intertwined with the concept of publicity, whose principle underlies and guarantees the goal of self-enlightenment or of freedom and self actualisation.

Civil society is another important element in the model of deliberative democracy. Gimmler (2001:25) defines civil society as follows;

> ...as the totality of self-organized spheres of activity in the form of associations, organisations, cooperatives, and the like, in which members freely confer equal rights upon one another and though which a public, social and political realm is established. Citizen initiatives, round tables various societies, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and so on, all belong to the new political sphere to which the term civil society refers.

She argues that civil society and the public sphere do not coincide, but overlap to a significantly. In the main, the theory of deliberative democracy sees the political process as being composed of civil society together with the various institutions that constitute a parliamentary democracy. In terms of the events of SONA 2015, it would appear that the South African government temporarily 'forgot' that the media is one of those institutions that form part of parliamentary democracy, because through signal jamming, the media were

handicapped. This means that the whole political process of SONA 2015 could not begin, just as the event would not begin without a Speaker who will direct proceedings in Parliament.

The chanting of bring back the signal by journalists as well as politicians in the opposition benches, symbolises the fact that the media see themselves as a legitimate and necessary part of Parliament. This means that what is regarded as 'common good' results from the political process; it is an outcome of discourse and deliberation. The common good is constantly evolving and is contingent upon social processes and current discussions. It is not merely discovered, it has to be constantly achieved and created anew (Gimmler 2001:26). This supports this paper's assertion that the public sphere is 'alive' and constantly evolving. It can also be argued that the public sphere switches on and off from time to time, based on the context and the intensity of prevailing issues. Just as one can imagine 18th century salons closing down for business for the day, symbolising the 'switching off' of the public sphere. The court battle that ensued between Parliament and the media and civil society is an example of the constant battle to define the public good and recreate it.

While Gimmler's deliberative model is insightful, it is argued that it does not deeply engage the functional aspect of the concept of the public sphere. Rauchfleisch and Kovic (2016: 1) propose a hierarchical model of generalized functions of the public sphere. On a theoretical level these scholars interweave various strands of thought on the public sphere and construct a model that is more inclusive and less rigid than each of those strands on their own. They identify four generalized functions which are; identity building, agenda setting, control and criticism, as well as deliberation. They further argue that the internet does not contribute equally to these functions and evaluate the impact of the internet on each of these functions as a diminishing marginal utility. Rauchfleisch and Kovic (2016: 1-2) point to the internet's inherent technical properties such as interactivity, openness and the potential for equality as factors that lend themselves to reflections from a public sphere perspective. They contend that instead of being fixated on what the public sphere ought to do, it is more beneficial to consider the degree to which the empirical functions of the public sphere are realised. Such a perspective they argue, allows for a generalization that does not only apply in Western democracies.

Rauchfleisch and Kovic's (2016: 3) starting point is an understanding of the public sphere as a network of communication. They use Habermas' (1996:30, as cited in Rauchfleisch and Kovic) definition of the public sphere which states;

> The public sphere can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view (i.e., opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes); the streams of communication are, in the process filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinion.

From this definition they assert they are interested in communication and thus conceptualise the public sphere as a communicative, and not a geographical space. They also assert that the public sphere is not a sum of existing atomistic communication, but can be conceptualised as a network. They argue that when bundled into public opinions, public communications can have an impact. Interestingly these scholars do not accept Habermas' normative elaborations, and focus on what the public sphere actually does. They further argue that the four proposed functions have a "quasi-Maslowan" functional ordering because the higher functions are likely to be realised more frequently when the lower functions have been saturated. They assert that the higher functions integrate all the lower functions and add a new functional layer on top. This however does not mean that higher instances of higher functions can only occur when lower functions are permanently met. It is important to note that a higher function can only exhibit permanence when the lower functions exhibit permanence as well.

Rauchfleisch and Kovic (2016: 3) argue that the first and most basic function of the public sphere is to engender a sense of collective identity among a group of people. This is based on the idea that societal integration through collective identity building is the first step in creating any sort of body politic. They assert that the transformation of individuals into citizens happens through participating in the general will. They also declare that it is widely accepted that collective identity is socially constructed and that communication plays a critical role in creating any collective identity (Rauchfleisch and Kovic, 2016: 4). It is important to note that collective always has a demarcating aspect, that is, the group one feels to belong to is partly defined by not being part of another group. This means that where there is collective identity, there will be intergroup bias, whose possible consequences include nationalistic fervour and religious radicalisation. Thus collective identity is necessary for democracies, but it is at the same a potential threat. The phenomenon of 'Black Twitter' is an example of how identities are constructed and performed on social media networks. In South

Africa, Black Twitter is seen to be challenging "white mainstream hegemony" (Sosibo, 2015).

The internet is seen to have a potential impact on identity building however this impact is gauged to be only medium in scale because it is dependent on the availability of the internet. Rauchfleisch and Kovic (2016: 4) argue that if it is only a small fraction of people who have access to the internet and engage in online communication, it follows that a collective identity does not form. The emergence of online communities is seen as a response to a desire for community that has followed the collapse of traditional communities worldwide. Papacharissi also emphasizes identity building online. While the public sphere may be highly fragmented and far from ideal at this level (level 1), it can potentially help people cultivate a collective identity. It is argued by these thinkers that the identity building function is especially relevant in authoritarian countries.

Agenda-setting, which is a function on level 2, takes form or permanence when identity building reaches some level of permanence. When this happens Rauchfleisch and Kovic (2016: 4) argue that it becomes likelier that the political elites will be more receptive to public communication. This is when *agenda-setting* begins to take place. Agenda-setting is conceptualised from both the communication sciences perspective, as well as the abstract political sciences view. From a communications sciences perspective, the aim is to ascertain how the mass media agenda impacts important issues of ordinary people as well as, as well as those of the political system. From a political sciences perspective, the political elites receive stimuli from their surroundings. These stimuli can elicit responses if they pass a certain threshold. Thus public communication is a stimulus that is received by political elites, and is given a relatively high level of identity building. The stimulus can be so significant that the political elites are receptive of it. As a stimulus-response exchange between the political elites and the public, agenda-setting does not necessarily pertain to democracy, engaging in this form of agenda-setting can be fuelled by self-interest, with the goal of preserving power.

According to Rauchfleisch and Kovic, there is more research indicating that the internet can play a critical role for the agenda setting function in less democratic countries like China, where it has been found that online communication has the ability to disrupt classical flows of agenda setting. State media no longer hold the monopoly on setting the government agenda onto the public. The power of the internet has forced them to be more receptive to

online communication. It is further argued that the agenda-setting effect of online communication on state media is also likely to serve as a stimulus amplification that encourages political elites to respond to the public. This has also been observed in South Korea where the amplification effect is a lot stronger because of a less restricted media system than in China. It would follow that in South Africa the amplification effect will also be stronger since the mediascape in the country is one with very little restrictions. The potential impact of the internet on agenda-setting is regarded as high, since online communication can form into communication flows that either on their own or through amplification effects through mass media, draw responses from political elites.

Once the first two levels of functions attain relative permanence, agenda-setting evolves into another type of exchange which is *control and criticism*, a third level function. At this stage it is argued that the political elite are still receptive to stimuli from the public, and thus political accountability changes the nature of this process insofar as the public also reacts to the actions of the political elite, which births further stimuli that the elites are again receptive to. In short, a policy cycle commences, which functionally can be described as a principal-agent-relationship. The citizens (principal) are implicitly or explicitly giving the political elites (agent) a mandate. Thus the public sphere allows for the principal to monitor, and if necessary, correct the agent by giving stimuli feedback (Rauchfleisch and Kovic, 2016: 5). This level 3 function talks to issues of accountability. It is argued that even though the internet cannot engender the institutional preconditions essential for a policy cycle based on accountability, it can expand and accelerate existing processes. This is true if one considers Trevor Manuel's NPC Jam solicited engagement from the public online, and transformed those submissions from the public to be part of the vision 2030 policy document within a matter of two weeks. The impact of the internet on this function is seen as medium, reason being the institutional barrier required for control and criticism. In a situation where the institutional configuration allows for a control and criticism policy cycle, the internet can contribute by making the monitoring and feedback role of the public simpler and more immediate.

Deliberation is the highest level function of this model, and is realized when all other lower level functions achieve relative permanence. At this stage the public sphere is seen to be in such a good state that instances of rational disputes over validity claims can be realized (Rauchfleisch and Kovic, 2016: 5). Interestingly it is argued that the impact of the internet on

the deliberation function is low, because the prerequisites of deliberation are difficult to fulfil online as they are offline. Rauchfleisch and Kovic further argue that the demanding criteria of rational discourse are likely to be met by professional communication in the mass media than by ordinary citizen online communication, which they argue is characterised by a semi-private attitude toward the communication situation. This argument contradicts the claims made by both Papacharissi and Gimmler, that the internet can easily facilitate deliberation. Interestingly, Rauchfleisch and Kovic, (2016: 5) assert that potentially the internet represents an opportunity to engage in rational discussion because in principle the internet offers a communicative space that approaches an ideal speech situation; that is, a discursive setting in which anyone can question existing and introduce new validity claims.

It is this paper's view that Rauchfleisch and Kovic's view of ordinary citizens is elitist since they claim that these people do not have the ability to meet the criteria of rational discourse, as opposed to mass media professionals. If mass media professionals are also present on online spaces, and are connected to ordinary citizens, it should follow that ordinary citizens can be co-opted into deliberative discussions. One is compelled to ponder how these scholars would interpret online engagements of students across South Africa in the *#FeesMustFall* movement. It is contended that mass media, face-to-face and online engagement should not be separated, and seen as mutually affecting each other. For example not only did students debate their issues online, they also arranged face-to-face meetings online and deliberated on those issues there, and continued again online. Another example is related to the events of SONA 2015. While journalists took to social media to publicize what was happening in Parliament, as well as engage their colleagues, politicians and citizens, they mobilised and requested a face-to-face meeting with the State. Thus it would seem that the lower level functions can be realised not only for the benefit of online deliberation, but that of face-to-face interactions as well.

To arrive at this conclusion Rauchfleisch and Kovic (2016: 11) identify three groups of countries, and argue that the internet potentially contributes to the functions of the public sphere, but the results for the function of deliberation to which the internet potentially contributes is different for each group. They assert that their results do not correspond perfectly to the model of generalized functions of the public sphere. In their results, there is no fourth group where the internet could contribute to the function of deliberation. Interestingly, as a solution to move forward, they reject the removal of deliberation from the

generalized functions of the public sphere. They also reject the reworking of their data analysis in such a way that it results in four instead of three groups. These scholars rather propose the reassessment of the nature of deliberation and its relevance as a generalized function of the public sphere. They also reject the opinion that deliberation is obsolete or non-existent. Rauchfleisch and Kovic (2016:11) argue that because deliberation is a micro-level concept that stems from speech-act theory, it makes empirical research on deliberation a very demanding exercise that yields modest results at best. They assert that it is precisely because of macro-level variables, that countries where the internet can contribute to deliberation are not identified. They further argue that because deliberation dominates public sphere research and that it is viewed myopically, other functions of the public sphere receive too little attention. Rauchfleisch and Kovic contend that deliberation should not be viewed as a narrow, micro-level concept, but as a genuine macro-level concept in its own right

As a concept, deliberation is rather elusive, especially when one considers its prerequisites as advanced by democratic theorists. These preconditions would have to be achieved for deliberation to ensue. One of these demands is that there be mutual respect; meaning that citizens who deliberate must suspend their status and power, and address each other as equals. Their duty is to acknowledge this by presenting reasonable and morally justifiable arguments to each other (Sanders, 1997:1). It would be difficult to agree on a standard of what is acceptable and what is not. It is also reasonable to argue that citizens are human and will lose their temper from time to time, especially when handling tough issues like racism. At those times respect would seemingly be lost, and it might take a long time before one is able to see the other person's point of view and restart the deliberation process. The probability of meeting these standards online cannot be measured and should not be used as a strict measuring tool. Sanders (1997:2) also points out that forms of expression differ, and argues that those who are unable to articulate themselves according to some standard or what would be regarded as characteristically deliberative in Western political context, are more likely to be those who are already underrepresented in formal political institutions, as well as those who are structurally disadvantaged; that is women, children and black people.

A consideration of Sander's (1997:3) definition of deliberation further assists in illuminating some of the challenges of achieving deliberation online.

> ...deliberation is a process of political discussion that excludes no one. It improves all citizens intellectually, by heightening their ability to consider policy and political

problems; personally by allowing them to realise their untapped capacities for observation and judgement; and morally or civically, by teaching them about the political concerns of other citizens and by encouraging mutual respect.

As has been discussed in this paper earlier, free and equal access to the internet for all citizens has not been achieved in South Africa, however does this mean deliberation does not occur? It is argued that this requirement of total access should be viewed from a different perspective. Instead of universal access, theorists should assess whether representatives from each of the communities that constitute that country are represented. The question of whether using the internet is improving the people's ability to consider policy and political problems is a question that can satisfactorily be answered by them, and cannot be fully deduced from empirical evidence only. On the question of mutual respect, how would theorists interpret the issue of the models referred to earlier in this paper? Mutual respect seems to have been an outcome of deliberation or rather discussion and not the other way around.

In a book titled *Online Deliberation*: *Design, Research and Practice,* Editor Todd Davies (2009: 1-3), advances the following definition; *deliberation' denotes 'thoughtful, careful, or lengthy consideration' by individuals, and 'formal discussion and debate' in groups*. He then argues that while social media networks have a bearing on democracy, they do not facilitate the deliberation defined above. His work and that of his colleagues only focuses on work that is related to online deliberation tools and their use. Thus they are focused only on online communication that is reasoned, purposeful, and interactive. While this work is necessary and invaluable, this paper does not take this approach for the following reasons. It would seem there is an implicit assumption that all matters relating to policy and politics always require thoughtful and lengthy consideration, however this is not the case. Sometimes issues are straight forward and do not require complex debates. There also seems to be an assumption that politics cannot be discussed while shopping or doing other social activities. Ochs and Taylor (1992:301) in their work titled *Family Narrative as Political Activity*, show how dinner tables in American society turn into places of political activity.

Without getting lost in the philosophical labyrinth, it is safe to argue that if deliberation is viewed in its narrowest form, it would follow that deliberation cannot take place on the internet. However when one considers work that focuses on specific tools that facilitate deliberation, like Trevor Manuel's NPC Jam, it would follow that indeed deliberation can, and does take place online. Interestingly, in his work titled; *Types of Democratic*

Deliberation: The Limits of Citizen Participation? Rosenberg (2010), asserts that his research reveals that even in face-to-face situations where conditions are highly favourable to deliberation, participants rarely engaged each other in a manner assumed by liberal democratic theory, and never engaged each other in a more critical manner. This is also the finding of Sanders (1997: 2), who argues that research reveals that what happens when American citizens talk to each other is seldom deliberative and is not really democratic. While Todd (2009: 1-3), does not think deliberation can happen on social media networks, he acknowledges that these technologies and forms of communication appear to make deliberation online achievable and, possibly superior to offline deliberation in cases where information access, time demands, and other constraints limit deliberation's potential in face-to-face settings. However he further argues that deliberative activity of the kind defined above has been slow to gain traction on the Internet relative to communication that is more geared toward entertainment as well as personal, rather than collective needs. Given these contrasting viewpoints, it is argued that the internet should be seen as representing different modes at different times, depending on the context and the intentions of those using it. Thus the internet should be understood as both a public space and a public sphere, or as alternating between these two states. While deliberation is an elusive concept, it should not be abandoned as an element that is to determine the performance of the internet as a public sphere and its impact on democracy. Its normative conceptualisation should be relaxed or transformed to mirror how people really engage in face-to-face settings in democratic countries

Chapter 4: Research Methods

In investigating the existence and the impact of a virtual public sphere in South Africa the study adopted the *case study* research method, which is a preferred strategy when "how" and "why" questions are being posed, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. The case study can be used to contribute to our knowledge of group, individual, political, and social phenomena (Yin 2003: 3). In terms of design this case study focuses on the SONA 2015 event because of its richness with information as well as its potential to illuminate the manifestations of the digital public sphere phenomenon. Sampling is purposive and is aimed at insight about this phenomenon, and not empirical generalization. A qualitative research strategy is adopted in acknowledgement of the complex nature of the digital public sphere phenomenon. The case study will be explanatory in nature and explores cause-effect relationships, and how events happen.

Yin (2003: 13) technically defines a case study as an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially in cases where the boundaries between context and phenomenon are not explicit. Media cannot be studied without considering the context within which they exist and operate. This study firstly focused on online news reports of South Africa's 24-hour news channels ANN7, SABC News and eNCA because these channels have been the most significant addition to the country's news media offerings. For this research it is important to investigate how these stations covered the event, and how those who lead and work in these organisation view the events of the day in question, in particular their opinion of the internet and its role. ANN7 is of interest because it is part of The New Age media group which has openly declared its support for the ANC and its government. The public broadcaster on the other hand has been under heavy criticism from various sectors of society for being the mouthpiece of the ANC and being dysfunctional. eNCA broadcast the removal of the EFF from Parliament within minutes from the event happening and the station has also been accused of being anti ANC

(Mulaudzi 2016). Primedia(EWN) is another broadcaster that was focused on, primarily because it took Parliament to court. Another important consideration made was that these broadcasters not only report the issues, but through their opinion pieces they debate issues and they also report on what members of the public said on social media platforms.

To achieve this, articles about SONA 2015 were collected from the official websites of these broadcasters by simply typing in *'sona 2015'* into the search tab on these platforms. A total of 31 articles were collected from eNCA.com, 27 from the SABC.co.za, 35 from EWN.co.za, and only 1 from ANN7.com. Statements and/or articles about the events of SONA 2015 by SANEF, the Right2Know Campaign as well as ODAC, who represent a section of civil society voices that took direct action against parliament, were collected from their websites. A total of 9 statements were collected from sanef.org.za, 2 statements and 2 articles from R2K.org.za. From opendemocracy.org.za, 1 article and a statement by the Minister of State Security was collected. 1 Statement from Parliament.org.za, and one article explaining what the SONA 2015 is about.

The judgements related to CASE NO. 2749/2015 as well as CASE No. 784/2015 about the jamming of the signal and the censoring of the removal of the EFF were collected and analysed. These were selected in order to understand how the judiciary dealt with the matter, especially the considerations they made with regards to the presence and role of new media technologies, and whether these constitute a digital public sphere. Four semi-structured personal interviews were conducted, so as to be able to extract the point of view of the interviewees who were involved in the events of the day in question. There was also a need to allow one to go off on tangents in order to gain insight into what the interviewees saw as important and relevant. These respondents are Moegsien Williams the Editor-In-Chief of TNA Media, the Chief Executive Officer of the SABC Jimi Matthews, Iman Rappetti who works across print, radio as well as television and is a senior news anchor at eNCA.

In most instances respondents gave answers that opened new doors and illuminated new questions that needed to be asked, and semi-structured interviews allowed one to probe the answers of interviewees further. This flexibility was important in that it allowed one to follow the interviewee's lead in directing the interview at opportune places. Rich and detailed answers were able to be extracted from the respondents. There were no repeat interviews conducted as the need did not arise. Respondents were allowed to express themselves, deviate from and expand on the questions posed to them. Face-to-face interviews were prioritized in

an effort to create a situation where as a researcher one could easily probe deeper and read into the bodily language of respondents, through participant observation.

The interviews, news articles and statements yielded detailed narratives about what transpired on the on the day of the event in question, and these help answer the questions posed in this study. In the main, these questions are about the role of new media technologies and how they were used to cover SONA2015 and subvert Parliament in the process. These also help with understanding what various institutions, organisations as well as ordinary people said about the issue at the time, and also illuminated reports about the court case in question. In analyzing these statements and articles this paper employed a *Hermeneutic* Approach – an approach originally designed to analyse theological texts, and shares a lot with Weber's concept of *Verstehen*. Verstehen can be understood as an ability to understand social phenomena or a form of operation used to understand and explain human behaviour. This method originates from the field of *hermeneutics*, which was a special approach to understanding and interpreting published writings (Ritzer, 2000: 111). The articles and statements were analysed in terms of three moments; (1) the *social-historical moment*, which entails an examination of the author of the text, what the text is addressing, its intended audience, the context in which it is produced, received and transmitted, (2) the *formal moment*, here a formal analysis of the structural and conventional aspects of the text were analysed using *ethnographic content analysis*, and (3) the *interpretation-reinterpretation* moment, where the results of the first two moments are codified and interpreted (Bryman, 2012: 557 - 561). All the news articles analysed were confined to the media houses under consideration in this study.

The identification of potential respondents happened through reading various media reports about SONA 2015. I sent emails and Facebook messages to respondents informing them about the research and formally requested interviews. In the messages I attached a copy of the *information participation sheet*, *informed consent form, questionnaire*, and a copy of my research proposal. It was difficult securing these interviews because of the elite positions that some of the respondents occupy in society, but also because of their extremely busy schedules. Some respondents like Mapi Mahlungu of eNCA did not respond at all. During the interviews I refrained from taking notes on my observations as I wanted the discussions to be as conversational as possible, and not appear formal and as some type of interrogation. My little experience of conducting research has taught me that just the act of switching on the

recorder on my phone makes respondents a bit tense, even though they have consented to being recorded.

A viable approach in this study was to understand the narratives of the respondents so as to hear them clearly tell their stories. From these stories similarities and differences were identified using a coding frame with identifiable themes. I introduced the coding frame in order to bolster what I found in the narratives of the respondents, by clearly identifying major tropes in a systematic fashion (see appendices). In analyzing the data collected from interviews, this study has employed a combination of two approaches which are *thematic* and *narrative* analysis. Thematic analysis has been chosen so that it can aid with the ordering and synthesizing of data, so as to create an index of central themes emanating from the narratives of all respondents. Using a thematic analysis has allowed for the representation of the narratives in spreadsheet format and cross referencing of the data collected. Thematic analysis has been criticized for not having a distinctly identifiable heritage or outlined as belonging to a distinctive cluster of techniques (Bryman, 2012: 587). This should not put its use in doubt as its flexibility allows for it to be used easily with narrative analysis. The themes in the coding frame were derived from the semi-structured interview questions, by searching for factors like similarities and differences, metaphors and analogies and repetitions. Narrative analysis served this study well in that it provided the ability to analyse data in a way that is sensitive to how people make sense of what happened, and not only what actually happened. This approach takes into account the perspectives of those being studied by recognizing that people perceive their lives in terms of continuity and process. What is important about this approach is that it relates not only to the life span of the issue, but as well as to accounts relating to episodes and the interconnectedness between them (Bryman, 2012: 582).

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

This dissertation is concerned with evaluating whether a digital public sphere exists in the South African mediascape. This discussion will be structured in the following manner; Firstly, findings and discussions will be organised in relation to the questions being asked, and secondly alongside Rauchfleisch and Kovic's hierarchical model of generalized functions of the public sphere. The first question that will be discussed is; how were digital or new media technologies used to cover or report on the SONA 2015? The second question that will be answered is; besides chanting 'bring back the signal', what did members of the media do when they discovered that there was no signal in the National Assembly? The third question that will be discussed is; based on the views expressed in the media by Parliament, various politicians, civil society organisations as well as members of the media, was the internet signal deliberately turned off and how did they feel about the disruptions at SONA 2015? The fourth question that will be tackled is; how did the judiciary deal with the matter and what considerations did they make in relation to new media technologies? The answers to all these questions as well as a synthesis of Rauchfleisch and Kovic's generalised functions will be used to answer the main question of this work; does the South African internet or digital space constitute a digital public sphere?

The use of new media technologies to report SONA 2015

While new media technologies were used to varying degrees, it is evident that all media houses under focus used new media technologies in their coverage of SONA 2015. While the editor of ANN7 Moegsien Williams was not asked a direct question about how his organisation used new media technologies to report on SONA 2015, however he gave answers that indicated that ANN7 did not prioritise the use of the internet. This is arguably evident in the fact that there were no stories found about SONA 2015 on ANN7's website for analysis. When asked if ANN7 broadcast the footage of the EFF being removed and how his organisation obtained the footage because the Parliamentary feed had been censored. He responded by saying the following;

> ...everybody is a citizen journalist so even if the parliamentary rules say that the cameras in parliament will focus on the speaker even when there is chaos on the side, there are people in opposition benches or whatever side that are sitting with cell phones where they can record these things, so it goes back to my point that do not impose censorship because it is not going to work but we would have covered whatever we could get, we are not guided by parliamentary protocols so if there was footage available showing the scuffle and the white shirted guys throwing Malema and EFF out, we would have showed it and if I'm not mistaken we covered the stuff…

Moegsien's response shows that as a broadcaster, ANN7 did not use smartphones to record the footage for itself, and it seems they just concentrated on the feed they received from parliament for TV and did not show the removal live. As much as ANN7 showed the footage, they relied on unnamed members of the public, or citizen journalists who attended SONA 2015 to supply them with footage. This shows that the reporting of the event was not exclusive to media organisations only, but was being reported on by MP's as well as members of the public that were in attendance in Parliament. It is important to note his assertion that everybody is a citizen journalist and that these people are able to capture whatever footage they want regardless of Parliament's rules that prohibit such recordings. Thus, any attempts by parliament to regulate or even censor the recording of proceedings, has arguably become futile. Interestingly he says they are not guided by Parliament's protocols and that he believes that if the footage was available they most probably broadcast it. This talks to one of the challenges that democratic institutions like Parliament face, which has to do with the fact that they can no longer fully control media texts they produce and those produced about them. It seems there is pressure for these institutions to further open themselves up. While ANN7 followed Parliament's protocols and carried the official feed from Parliament without immediately using cell phone footage, Williams still asserts that as an editor he would much rather open up Parliament to such recordings as Parliament does not have the power to control information flows because of the ubiquity of cellphones. He also strongly believes that the recording and distribution of information using cellphones is something that is now part of the future of the South African mediascape. The fact that ANN7 did not archive any stories about SONA 2015, except for only one story that covered the build-up to the event, suggests that for some or other reason ANN7 did not prioritise the internet for the coverage of, or the archiving of stories about SONA 2015.

This assertion is even made valid when one considers the fact that on the websites of SABC, eNCA and EWN one easily found more than twenty articles when searching for 'SONA 2015'. This is especially peculiar if one considers the fact that the owners of ANN7 also own SAHARA Computers and are deeply involved in information technology and thus could easily overcome any technical limitations to the archiving of stories. There are a number of possible reasons why ANN7 did not prioritise the internet and the use of cellphones to cover the event. The most basic and plausible explanation is the fact that ANN7 is aligned and supportive of the ANC and the fact that the President is friends with the Gupta family who own the news organisation and they would necessarily avoid publishing anything that negatively portrays the President and the ANC government. This is evident when Williams says,

> We support the ANC as the ruling party, from where I sit as the editor, if you go to our editorials during the May elections last year; the line if I remember correctly, somebody says the ANC currently has the best policies", and further asserts; "I do agree with the government, the ruling party that there is something wrong in our journalism and it is up to media to begin to fix that

Nevertheless when one considers the editor's answer when he was asked if it was in the public's interest to carry live the footage of the EFF's forceful removal from Parliament, a different explanation is revealed. He answers as follows;

> The public interest is a debatable thing. We must accept that we are a developing country and 50 per cent of our people still in the rural areas, vast numbers of them, their only access is through radio, Ukhozi and other radio stations and they would have received radio reports and the visual stuff, they did not see so which public are we talking about…

From this answer it is clear that the editor strongly believes that the internet is not a true representation of the voices of the South African public, and thus his station concentrated on catering for the public he believes are affected by the digital divide through television and print. What is interesting is that ANN7 is only available on DSTV and based on his argument, it should follow that ANN7 does not cater for the poor masses. William's view of the digital or technological revolution that has gripped South Africa is inconsistent in that on one hand he believes that his organisation (and others) is still practicing old journalism through print and that it is only in the future that we will see the total production and consumption of news

through digital technologies, while on the other hand he talks about a South Africa where even ordinary folk in taxis currently possess cellphones. He says the following;

> but the broader issue around media technology, digital revolution and the fact that what you see in my office right now is what I call chopping down trees and putting ink on it but I should say as an editor in the next 20 years this should not be happening, you will get your journalism and information on your tablet, your cell phone, on your iPad...

In the main, it is evident that ANN7 or TNA Media as a whole is still trying to figure out its role and strategy when it comes to digital technologies. The editor challenges the South African media to articulate a proper vision for the digital future by saying;

> ...so now we are faced with the challenge where for instance if you take the print media, you ask where are we going now, what are we going to do now as we are in the middle of the decade with all the technology challenges we are facing, online, digital media, the need for multimedia, where are we going…that's the essential question that I'm posing in the media.

When looking at SABC News, a total of 26 articles about SONA 2015 was collected, this is evidence of the use the internet to publish and archive stories. These stories do not have any space for comments by readers, meaning that the SABC's platform is not used for engagement but rather the dissemination of information. The SABC also has presence on Twitter and Facebook, and on these pages they declare that that all the news shown on TV can be found on any of their digital platforms, however due to the large volume of posts, posts from February 2015 cannot be accessed. This is evidence of the SABC using social media platforms for not only to disseminate information, but also to allow people to engage and debate topical issues of the day. It also has presence on YouTube where a number of videos related to SONA 2015 have been posted. Some videos were posted on the 12th of February 2015 on the day of the event and some were posted a few days after. For example a 19 second video showing the forceful removal of the EFF was posted on YouTube on the same day that it occurred, and this video garnered a total of 48 427 views. Another example is that of a 1 minute 37 seconds video showing the DA walkout of Parliament, which garnered a total of 20 223 views. This video was published on the day that it happened. This means that news about SONA 2015 that was broadcast on television was to some greater or lesser extent replicated on the broadcaster's online platforms. Just as it was found in the

State of the News room 2014 (Daniels 2014: 44), SABC News journalists tend to use both Twitter and Facebook to publish news. Interestingly these journalists tend to mix personal and professional posts together. This is important because it is an indication that these journalists can express their personal opinions.

While there was no direct question posed to Jimi Matthews about how the SABC used new media technologies to cover SONA 2015, when asked if the broadcaster showed images of the forceful removal of the EFF and other disruptions, he replied and said; "Yes we did and that again is why I'm so flabbergasted by the continuous notion that the SABC censored those images". And when asked to suggest a way for Parliament to deal with the presence of new media technologies in the hands of print media, he responded as follows;

> ...because of technology, mobile cellular technology, there is no print house in the country that do not have the digital websites so print reporters are tweeting, print reporters are blogging and live streaming and posting videos and they are not sitting there with their note pads and pencils and very few of them in fact use the note pad because they using their phones to record as well….if you asking me my view…I think whatever happens in the house must be reflected and if we can broadcast it, we should.

This is an indication that the SABC is aware of, and is using new media technologies as well as online platforms to distribute and archive stories. This also shows that news organisations have totally transformed they way they collect and construct news. This can be seen as a response to changes in the environment they operate in. The fact that reporters are blogging is an indication that they are not just reporting, but are also involved in the debates that take place online. Article 17 of the stories collected from the SABC's website indicates that one of the tactics used to cover SONA was to collect various tweets from different people in the South African public, including that of SABC journalist Vabakshnee Chetty, famous radio personality Gareth Cliff, ANC Parliamentary Chief Whip Jackson Mthembu as well as general members of the public. These different opinions are synthesized on Storify and published. This particular article is solely looking at reactions to SONA 2015 and attracted more than ten thousand views. The use of new media technologies is not just aimed at disseminating information only, but to invite members of the public to contribute to developing discourses and acknowledge their opinions. This is also an indication of the existence of a network of communication that is ubiquitous and not geographically bound.

These opinions and their structure are discussed under the question of what was said by various members of the South African public. Storify is described as a platform or mobile application that is; "Built for the social newsroom, wherever you find it. Allow multiple editors to simultaneously update, review and publish your story from anywhere (storify.com, 2016)". It is evident from these examples that there was extensive use of new media technologies to cover SONA 2015 although there is very little evidence of live tweeting from SABC journalists on the day in question.

Primedia's coverage was totally based on new media technologies in collaboration with its radio broadcast platform. This is evident when one considers article 9 from EWN in which non executive chairman of Primedia Roger Jardine says the following;

> "In 2015, political scrutiny is immediate, and no signal jammer or adjustment of the camera-angle in Parliament will stop the high tide of the information age. Within minutes of the forcible removal of opposition MPs from the chamber, **Eyewitness News** had uploaded the violent images that shocked South Africa and the world. By the weekend, 270 000 downloads had been made from the website. A healthy measure of our democracy is the degree to which citizens can scrutinise their elected officials without fear or interference."

It is clear from the above statement that EWN used new media technologies to cover the event live over the internet. This coverage is immediate and to Jardine represents immediate scrutiny of those who hold public office. It is important to note that for Primedia's non executive chairman the mediascape has fully been transformed into one characterised by the information age. In such a mediascape there are multiple points of entry into an event and censoring tactics lose their power. Again a network of communications that can distribute and share information globally within minutes is evident. This information comes in the form of tweets, Facebook posts, blogs, news articles, pictures and videos, making the South African digital sphere rich with information. The use of new media technologies was not just for news gathering and distribution, but was also for the coordination of actions that assisted with the restoring of the cell phone signal in the National Assembly. These uses are illuminated under the question that addresses the actions of journalists when they discovered that the signal had been disrupted.

eNCA's coverage of SONA also included an online survey which had started a few weeks before the event. In article 21 of the eNCA batch written by Bianca Ackroyd, she writes the following: "The #SONAsurvey ran for a few weeks and asked readers to tweet @eNCAnews which two issues should be the focus for 2015." This survey is the strongest indication that media houses are using social media to gauge and register public opinion. For example in the article Ackroyd reports that; "the top concerns for government to prioritise this year are the state of SA's economy, education and the electricity crisis." This survey again shows that there exists a network of communication in which streams of communication are filtered and synthesized in a manner that generates "bundles of specified public opinion". It is argued that when gathered and synthesized through media outlets, opinions of the public tend to have impact. In the interview with Iman Rappetti who covered the SONA for eNCA on television, asserts that the days of covering such events using traditional media only are over, and that new media technologies were an integral part of their work as journalists. In her own words she asserts the following;

> You literally have to employ every method these days in covering the story so everyone is connected to their social media in some way through devices or tablets or … we are live tweeting inevitably for those people who aren't able to watch the show on television. The great thing about having that video was the perspective of the camera as it was in parliament would not allow us to see we can make seen.

For Rappetti, new media technologies added "a dimension and a complexity to the story". She also gives a sense that there is a network of people on social media who are connected to streams of communication via tablets and mobile phones. This is why news media outlets live tweeted SONA 2015. What can be observed is that the digital mediascape is not dependent on conversations only, but is enriched by videos as well as pictures.

Members of the media take action and chant in protest

The consideration of the actions taken by members of the media is important because it illuminates the roles played by various individuals as well as groups. These roles and actions talk to how members of the media construct and perform their identity online. Of importance is the ability to see how online actions interweave with offline ones. It also sheds light on how new media technologies were used to hold government to account. In terms of what members of the media did when they discovered that there was a signal jammer, the SABC

did not take any action against Parliament even though Jimi Matthews disagreed with the ruling and explanation that the jamming of the signal was a mistake. In his own words he says the following; "I think it was wrong…I do not accept that it was necessary, unless these securities are not telling us that we living in an environment where the president and the members of the parliament are living under severe threat. I think it was unnecessary and fundamentally wrong." It would seem that the SABC was aware and agreed with the rule that demands that the camera focus on the Speaker when there is unparliamentary behaviour in the chamber and that they agree with them. When asked if Parliament was justified in controlling the images recorded in its premises, Jimi Matthews replied as follows; "... the parliamentary rules on broadcasting from the house are clear that if there is a disruption of any sort that the camera will remain on the speaker of the house, what happened on evening is that the parliamentary broadcast team did not follow their own rules so if you look at the initial tapes, the camera moves where there is a disruption and across the chamber. If the director had followed their own rules…"

In explaining his role on the day Jimi Matthews said the following; "I was in a broadcast van, remember at the time I'm…ah I am the group executive for news and current affairs for radio, television and the digital sites so it was critical for me to be in the hub..." Evidence suggests that there was also no instruction to use cell phones to record the forceful removal of the EFF because according to Jimi Matthews he did the following;

> "When the EFF members were pushed out, my instruction was give me a split screen or squeeze back as we call it with disruptive elements but stay on the president because though it might be interesting television to see the scuffling, some might be interested in the president's speech and something as simple as give me a split screen became problematic but I'll get back to why it was problematic. I then told them to keep on recording the scuffles in the chamber; we can play that back later on but stay on the president."

It is however unclear how the SABC staff would have split the screen if they only relied on Parliament's visual feed.

While Moegsien Williams says that jamming the signal was "stupid", it is not surprising that the station did not take any action against Parliament or protest the jamming as they supported the measures implemented by Parliament by saying;

> ...they (the EFF) decided to hell with the rules and protocols of the Parliament and you know as they put it, with colonial rules which we strongly criticised, because Parliament is a very important institution of our democracy so if you say there are no rules…in the absence of the rules then you have chaos and that's what happened in the parliament with the SONA, there was chaos so we supported the measures that have been introduced by the ANC to deal with that chaos...

When asked if ANN7 would join the legal battle against Parliament, the editor replied as follows; "We are trying to stay away from those things, we just going to cover things that we see, I know that some people have tried to launch some kind of legal action and they have lost… nah we are not keen on that and we also do not have the money to contribute."

The actions taken by Primedia in response to the jamming of the signal can be interpreted to be quite strong and are evidenced by the fact that Primedia was the first complainant in the court case against Parliament. And before chanting 'bring back the signal', members of the media that included several Primedia staff, had long discovered that cell phone signals had been disrupted and had tried in vain to get Parliamentary officials to remedy the situation. Roger Jardine of Primedia said the following; "Members of the media in the press gallery tried, in vain, to get the signal turned back on long before President Jacob Zuma entered the National Assembly. After at least two hours of futile lobbying, they started to chant 'bring back the signal'." It is important to note that as a grouping, members of the media have created and solidified their identity as a specific group, which is an indication that identities can form online or be transferred from offline spaces onto online spaces. According to Barry Bateman, a senior reporter at EWN, members of the media discovered the jamming of the signal 2 hours before the President's address and they started sounding the alarm on Twitter informing other journalists and even Parliament. In his own words he says the following; "the discovery of the signal problems was made at about 5:20pm, when *Beeld* news editor Pieter du Toit tweeted that Parliament's technical staff confirmed that there was indeed a jamming device in the House". It is important to note that identity is not just created by individuals or groups, but by institutions as well, hence journalists could identify Parliament online through its Twitter account.

According to Bateman, the editor of Rapport Adriaan Basson informed journalists and others via Twitter that the Spokesperson of Parliament Luzuko Jacobs had been informed and that he was investigating the matter. Based on this evidence, it is clear that the media did not sit back and only chant 'bring back the signal' just before the President could deliver his address. Using Twitter to co-ordinate their actions, journalists lobbied several officials, including the office of the Speaker, to attend to the jamming of the signal. Bateman asserts that; "the only area targeted for cellphone disruption was inside the House..." this means journalists were still able to transmit messages from surrounding areas outside Parliament and in some cases journalists hung outside toilet windows to access the signal and publish online. SANEF immediately tweeted the following statement; "We call on Parliamentary officials and the Presidency to urgently review the decision to cut off cell phone signal in the chamber. #SONA2015— SANEF (@SAEditorsForum) February 12, 2015". Journalists spoke among themselves and directly to Parliamentary officials, politicians as well as civil society members both online and offline about the signal issue, and labored to resolve it.

From the above it can be deduced that on Twitter there are institutions and individuals whose identities are real and can be verified. In this scenario, journalists identified as a group that was affected by a common problem and coordinated its actions to deal with that problem. At the centre of the dispute are policy issues about access to the internet to exercise the freedom of expression as well as the filming and broadcasting of events in Parliament. This is an indication of there being some form of agenda successfully set by journalists. The agenda set by journalists was clearly to get the signal working before the start of the President's speech. Above is evidence that shows that part of that agenda was set online, where journalists first communicated in order to understand their circumstances and sharing information about various actions that they had taken. It is conceded that this agenda setting could not have taken place exclusively online, as journalists sitting in the press gallery were talking to each other. It is argued that online public spheres cannot be conceptualised independently of offline or real life public spheres. In this case online communication managed to disrupt traditional flows of agenda setting, since the first order of business on the day was not the President's speech, but a call by the media for the signal to be restored. This they did through communicating online, chanting 'bring back the signal, and eventually through opposition parties as shown by Bateman's tweet; "DA raises point of order the signal jamming is in violation of the Constitution. Mbete says the secretary will follow up. Not good

enough.— Barry Bateman (@barrybateman) February 12, 2015". Among their strategies, journalists enlisted the power of the internet to connect, organise and force Parliament to be more receptive to their demands.

The tweet by Bateman above is an example of how new media technologies were meant to be used on the day, that is, the immediate and live dissemination of information about the event to the public. This dissemination and sharing of information serves the function of spreading information of topical issues which are partly debated on online platforms. Evidence suggests that members of the media were well aware of potentially there being an instance where Parliament would censor images of grave disorder, as it had happened in a 'question and answer' session before the 2015 SONA. Davis says the following about the matter; "journalists were particularly unhappy about this state of affairs because of the knowledge that if the parliamentary TV feed was cut – as it was in times of chaos last year – the tweets, photos and illicit video footage of the House from journalists would be the only information available to the public." Here there is an implicit suggestion that the general public have access to the internet despite arguments of the digital divide in SA. This, talks to the issue of the availability of the internet to a large enough part of the South African public to facilitate identity building as argued by Rauchfleisch and Kovic (2016: 4). Evidence points to the fact that members of the media had started to take action long before the day of the SONA of 2015. Findings show that SANEF had written to Parliament prior to the SONA requesting that there be guarantees that images of grave disorder will be shown should the EFF fulfil its promise to disrupt the proceedings, however Parliament did not respond in time. Writing to Parliament is an example of an agenda set offline and while related to the agenda of re-establishing the signal in the National Assembly, these are two separate issues. The latter was spontaneous and saw members of the media involved in a network of communication among themselves, and with civil servants in Parliament, politicians, institutions, civil society as well as general members of the public. While it can be safely assumed that members of the media were ready to subvert Parliament using cell phones and the internet, the disruption of the signal was a genuine surprise, hence members of the media took an usual step and abandoned their role as observers and protested, as noted by Davis;

> It should be noted that it is normally unacceptable for journalists in the media bay to draw any attention to themselves during such events, and journalists had previously been subjected to a lengthy speech about the need to maintain decorum in the House, so these actions were highly unusual.

New media technologies were not only used to cover the event in question live, but were also employed to subvert Parliament's broadcast policy. It is argued that the signal incident exacerbated the intention to use new media technologies to record proceedings in Parliament. The altercations between the Speaker and the EFF further readied not only the media, but a number of those attending to use the cell phones and tablets to record what was happening. This is supported by the fact that, immediately when the forceful removal of the EFF began, members of the media began recording and distributing the unpalatable images Parliament so desperately sought to censor. Article 17 of the articles collected from eNCA.com, is accompanied by a still picture of the EFF being removed from the National Assembly, and the caption reads as follows; "eNCA's Paula Chowles was able to record EFF Members of Parliament being physically removed from the National Assembly, by security dressed in white. The Parliamentary TV feed was focused on Speaker Baleka Mbete. Video: eNCA." There was clearly an unprecedented amount of sharing of information between journalists, broadcasters, politicians as well as members of the public. This is confirmed by Iman Rappetti in our interview when she says; "…I remember we started getting reports from our reporter ahead of the start that they couldn't send pictures out because they were live tweeting and they were making recording from the gallery". Article 10 of the batch from eNCA makes a claim that Twitter averaged 30 tweets per second, an indication of the sheer online activity in relation to SONA 2015. What is interesting with this article is that it is accompanied by a video which partly shows the forceful removal of the EFF, and this section of the video is credited to Terri Stander, who is a DA MP. Members of the media knew the images they were recording were illicit but still went ahead with their actions. This is shown in article 10 written by Xolani Koyana; "Only shaky, illegally recorded cell phone footage of the scuffles showed what actually happened", as well as in the statement above by Rebecca Davis.

Following the incident SANEF requested a meeting with the Speaker of Parliament as well as President Zuma about what had transpired. The meeting took place on the 20th of February a few days after the SONA. This is evidenced by a statement released by SANEF which said the following; "President Jacob Zuma today, 20 February 2015, met with the leadership of the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) at Sefako Makgatho Presidential Guesthouse in Pretoria where they discussed matters of common interest" (see statement one

of SANEF statements). In the meeting SANEF laboured to make it clear that members of media had tried to remedy the signal jamming situation long before the start of the event; "The leadership of SANEF further appraised the President of their attempts to engage government and parliamentary leadership and media liaison persons on the jamming of the signal long before the commencement of SONA and the President expressed his regret that solutions could not be found beforehand." It is important to note that part of this occurred online. In the meeting president Zuma condemned both the disruption of the event as well as the jamming of the signal. According to the statement, the President, "further reassured the SANEF leadership of government's commitment to freedom of speech and the media, as well as freedom to disseminate information and impart knowledge to the South African public." The non-profit organization accepted the President's declaration and in their own words said the following; "The SANEF leadership accepted the President's words of reassurance and expressed appreciation of the President's commitment to freedom of speech and the media as well as his willingness to engage with them." This also talks to the question of what various members of the South African public said about the matter.

SANEF did not end its actions by just meeting the President only. Together with Primedia, Right2Know and ODAC they approached the courts seeking several reliefs. In statement 2 of the batch collected from their website, they state the following;

> The South African National Editors Forum together with Primedia Broadcasting, Right2know, Media24 and Open Democracy Advice Centre this morning approached the Cape High Court to seek an order that Parliament undertakes that no jamming of mobile signal shall ever happen. Sanef also sought an order that Parliament should agree to provide wide angle shots of video coverage of proceedings especially when there was disruption in the House. In the next stage of the case, Sanef will seek permission for broadcasters to bring their own equipment and cover the proceedings themselves. An attempt to reach agreement out of court failed and the matter was then heard by Judge Elize Steyn. She recorded Parliament's undertaking that the signal jamming should never have happened and it will ensure that it never happens again. This is a victory on signal jamming.

It is interesting that the media sought to further argue to bring in their own equipment to cover proceedings when they already have those devices in Parliament anyway. This step is indicative of the fact that agendas formulated online cannot be separated from actions taken

in real life, as not of all life's processes can be carried out in the virtual world. Hence it is this paper's position that an online public sphere or public spheres cannot be conceptualised independently of offline public spheres. The discussion above shows that the new media technologies were firstly used to cover SONA 2015 event live and capture it as it happened. Secondly they were used to organise and coordinate the actions of journalists and thus formulate an agenda. Thirdly they were used to open up Parliament to the public by subverting Parliament's decision censor images that it deemed unpalatable. This discussion has also illuminated some of the things that were said by various stakeholders about the issue and lays a proper foundation for a full discussion of the various points of views expressed in the media.

Voices and opinions expressed in the media

It is interesting that virtually all the views analysed from these news articles, there is consensus that that the signal jamming should not have happened and that it will never happen again. One is left to wonder how this consensus was reached, either through persuasion or through the fact that it would have been embarrassing to defend what can be argued to have been indefensible. This discussion first considers the views and opinions expressed by SANEF, then those of Parliament and government officials. Secondly it will focus on the views expressed by the subject media houses as well as those of the general public. When considers statement number 3 from those collected from SANEF's website, one begins to see the anger of the organisation as well as what access to the internet means to this organisation. Immediately after the signal jamming incident, SANFE said the following;

> The South African National Editors' Forum is outraged by the shocking, illegal clampdown on freedom of expression in Parliament during the State of the Nation address on Thursday night. We believe these unconstitutional actions were an attempt by both the legislature and the executive to prevent journalists from telling the nation the full version of Thursday nights' events.
>
> 1) In an unprecedented move, cellphone scrambling devices were installed in Parliament to block any communication from inside Parliament. We have reason to believe that the executive, particularly the security agencies of the country, took the unlawful decisions to block the signal in contravention of the Electronic Communications Act. 2) Parliament refused to show the eviction of members of

> parliament by security officials who were called in by Speaker Baleka Mbete. Sanef previously wrote to the office of the Speaker and met with officials from her office to request that the coverage of proceedings should not be limited to what parliament regards as the "business of parliament", but broadened to show the South African public everything that happens in the house, in accordance with the constitutional principle of openness, transparency, accountability and the right to know. 3) Sanef is further outraged by the intimidation of journalists and attempts by security officials to prevent reporters from conducting interviews with MPs who had just been ejected from Parliament. Journalists were threatened with arrest and withdrawal of their accreditation.

The reader is once again persuaded to consider the claims by SANEF which suggest that switching off the signal is tantamount to preventing the nation from engaging in the freedom of speech. This is done to emphasise the fact that SANEF and those that it represents see the internet and its online platforms as a vehicle through which the entire nation of South Africa is connected and can receive and impart information. Again this talks to identity formation as well as access and openness. It is clear that according to the organisation, the disruption of the signal was deliberate and is seen as an attempt to hinder the freedom of speech. This belief is further solidified by the fact that journalists were threatened and prevented from interviewing MP's that had been thrown out of the National Assembly. SANEF further announces the steps it will take against Parliament's actions. Decisions taken offline in its council meeting, however being announced and spread via online platforms.

Parliament strongly disputed these claims in a statement released on the 17th of February 2015. In the statement the institution strongly asserted its right to protect its reputation and labeled the actions of the EFF and DA as anarchic and an assault on the Constitution. Parliament further said the following;

> "What happened was not an accident. It was a premeditated, coordinated act of inflicting a serious assault on our Constitution – an act directed at our democracy."The statement continues to say; "Obviously, such statements could not be taken lightly. We had to plan and act with all possible scenarios in mind."

It is clear from the above that Parliament's actions were not spontaneous but prepared and coordinated to deal with what they perceived as a threat to stop the SONA. Given the fact that journalists spent two hours prior to the President's speech to get the signal jammer switched off to no avail, one can be forgiven for believing those suggesting that the signal disruption was a deliberate move on the part of government and Parliament. Considering the fact that the signal jamming incident was one of the last items dealt with in the statement and that only a paragraph was allocated for this issue, one cannot be criticised making the assumption that this matter was not important for Parliament, and that the institution did not see it as a serious violation of the Constitution. Here is what the institution said about the issue in the statement;

> "We need to state categorically that Parliament does not own any device that scrambles communication or cellular phone. We have not ordered the use of such devices. Our view as Presiding Officers is that our democracy should not be placed in such a situation where, in Parliament, the use of such devices is even contemplated. We reiterate that the House is for honourable Members. However, security services deploy their assets when they do their work as part of their operations. We are not operational in our relationship with the security services. Once the scrambling of the signal was brought to our attention, we asked the Secretary to attend to it. We will look at tightening and improving our systems in order for us to ensure that this does not become a precedent."

The above statement is one of the strongest indications that the use of the signal jammer was deliberate. It is argued in this paper that the deliberateness of the disruption of the signal can be interpreted as the Government's awareness of the power of the internet and there was a need, according to government, to limit this power. According to Parliament the South African democracy was placed in a situation where it had to contemplate using devices such as signal jammers. This deduction is further reinforced by the fact that Parliament had planned and acted with all possible scenarios in mind. The Speaker says they dealt with the matter as soon as they were notified, however evidence suggests that Parliamentary officials were lobbied both online and offline for some time to no avail. While the EFF was the target of Parliament's counter disruption actions, it should be noted that one of the main concerns of the institution, was its reputation and image in the eyes of the world. The statement addresses this issue first and opens as follows; "We are all disturbed by what transpired at the State of

the Nation Address (SONA) last Thursday because our image as a people was tarnished and our reputation as a country damaged." It is contended that Parliament or possibly the executive arm of government sought to protect its image and reputation by disrupting the internet signal. The executive is included here because the jamming of the signal was not only defended by Parliament, members of the executive held their own press conference to justify the government's actions on the day. While the officials were prepared for any eventuality, they seem not have prepared themselves for a media block, as well as opposition parties that would protest the jamming of the signal, and stop the President from commencing with his speech. This is supported by Judith February's assertions in article 33 of the EWN batch when she says;

> "The DA's Mmusi Maimane and Corne Mulder demanded the signal be unscrambled. And so it was in the end, despite the Speaker wishing to kick the matter into touch and refer it to the Secretary of Parliament. Kudos to the opposition for a principled stance on the matter - a bright point in an otherwise bleak night."

The Speaker tried to have the President commence with his speech without the restoration of the signal, however opposition Parties did not allow this.

To further affirm the assertion that the South African government was heavily invested in protecting its image and reputation, in article 2 of the eNCA batch, Rebecca Davis notes the following;

> Despite the bravado of the ANC caucus – who sang and toyi-toyi'd on Parliament's steps for some time after the close of the event – there was clearly an understanding from the Cabinet that what happened in the National Assembly was, if nothing else, a PR disaster, already being picked up on by international media. In an emergency press conference after Zuma's address, Minister in the Presidency Jeff Radebe admitted that the spectacle of violence was ["embarrassing"]

The minister also said; "Our country is a constitutional democracy and we cannot allow such embarrassing scenes to go unhindered". In article 9 of the SABC batch International Relations and Co-operation Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane is quoted to have said the following about the scrambling of cellphone signals; "I will call it a technical glitch until there is a full investigation called upon by the presidency and Parliament to say we need to all know what happened, and then call it by its rightful name." Telecommunications Minister Siyabonga Cwele said; "Somebody said there was a gadget inside, I don't know if there was a

gadget inside." There seems to have been a consented effort by cabinet ministers to dismiss the incident as a mistake or a technical glitch that was not supposed to have happened.

State Security Minister David Mahlobo released a statement in response to the jamming of the signal and said the following;

> We wish to state that there was no executive or political decision to interfere with the free flow of information and constitutional obligations on transparency and openness during the State of the Address (SONA). The Minister responsible for State Security was also taken aback. This airspace security plan was executed with precision especially when the Deputy President and President were in transit until the time of taking of salute at the doorsteps of the parliament, estimated between 18:35-19:00. However the application of this counter threat measure was prolonged beyond the normal operational requirements. The signal disruption was caused by an operational error by the member on duty. The operator failed to properly terminate the device and this impacted on proper access to some users of mobile phones. A departmental investigation is currently underway with a possibility of disciplinary action for those responsible for this operational failure. The Department of State Security regrets the unintentional disruption of signal in certain parts of the parliamentary chambers.

EWN senior reporter Barry Bateman disputes this in article 12 and says the following; “It’s misleading, because anyone who was there on Thursday will tell you that the signal was disrupted only inside the House, while just a few steps outside, and of course anywhere else in the Parliamentary precinct, the signal was just fine. Disregard this explanation from the minister entirely, because it’s included to kick up dust, to complicate matters and hide the lie. In article 17 Bateman further asserts that; “Radio frequency experts have told **Eyewitness News** a cellphone jamming device is not designed to enforce a no-fly zone, as claimed by the State Security Minister David Mahlobo.” Former intelligence minister Ronnie Kasrils who is a fierce critic of the current government called on officials not to place the blame on a low ranking technician, which is something that many in the media block, civil society and political spheres believe government has been doing to escape other tricky situations like the in the Gupta Gate plane landing saga. The saga had to do with the illegal landing, at Waterkloof Air force base, of a commercial aircraft full of weeding guests, which was chattered by the Gupta family (M&G, 2013).

At this point one starts to see clearly arguments and counter arguments brought forward by different stake holders. In the statements above, Bateman and SANEF can be seen disputing the claims or arguments being offered by various Ministers, particularly the Minister of State Security Mr. David Mahlobo. Here it is argued that Rauchfleisch and Kovic's (2016: 5) third level function of 'control and criticism' can be observed. At this level the political elite remain responsive to stimuli from the public (represented in the main by the media) and the public also reacts to the actions and arguments of the political elite. This gives rise to further stimuli that the elites are again receptive to, meaning a policy cycle commences. It is further argued that citizens which also include journalists explicitly gave the political elites a mandate when they demanded the signal to be restored and thus performed the role of monitoring and correcting, to which the political elite responded by eventually restoring the signal in the National Assembly. It is contended that the institutional configuration allowed for a control and criticism policy cycle, enabling the internet to contribute by making the monitoring and feedback role of the public simpler and more immediate. This in contrast with the move by media houses of writing to Parliament requesting changes, to which Parliament is less responsive.

ANC Secretary General Gwede Mantashe also condemned the jamming of the signal and called for an investigation. However his concluding remarks on the matter suggest that the jamming of the signal was to a large extent an extraordinary step that was necessary or justifiable for Parliament to take; he said the following; "The reality of the matter is when people go out of their way disrupt Parliament then Parliament must go out of its way to defend democracy and the right of the people of South Africa to be given feedback from parliament." This statement is contained in article 15 of the eNCA batch of articles, and it contains other statements from opposition party leaders as well as civil society members. The following is what some of them said about the jamming of the signal. Leader of The Congress of the People Mosiuoa Lekota said; "We are shocked that the ruling party seems to have illegally installed a jamming device in parliament. This is so calamitous to our constitutional democracy that it warrants an investigation to determine the course of action." The Leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party Mangosuthu Buthelezi said; "Are we in the country that this constitution says we are in? That's my quip about it. I think it was absolutely amazing. If it was done by intelligence then God help us." Dr Pieter Mulder of the Freedom

Front Plus asserted the following; "We felt very strongly about interfering with media freedom. We made the point of order and we succeeded because the signal came back."

It is clear from the above that opposition Party members to some degree believe that the jamming of the signal was a deliberate move on the part of Parliament. For these politicians the absence of cellphone signals and by extension the non-functionality of the internet, impacts negatively on the South African Constitution. Thus without the availability the internet South Africa ceases to be the 'ideal' or the world revered Constitutional democracy it is known to be. The internet is thus synonymous with media freedom in the South African mediascape. A free and diverse media is regarded as critical to promoting transparency, accountability as well as the freedom of expression which are in turn vital to a democracy that is responsive to the needs of the people (Right2Know, 2016). It can thus be inferred that the internet facilitates accountability by allowing people to express themselves freely and to engage with their elected officials so that these officials are more responsive to the demands. This again talks to the fulfillment of the function of control and criticism. From an orthodox liberal-democratic view, media freedom is a prerequisite for the truth to emerge through contestation in the marketplace of ideas. Former General Secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions Zwelinzima Vavi said the following about the jamming of the signal; "For someone to decide to jam the signals and stop the media from doing its work and stop all of us to disseminate information as we see fit. Whoever did that was kicking comrades Nelson Mandela, OR Tambo and the millions of people who died for freedom of speech, association and freedom of the media over many years." It is clear from the above that without access to the internet, members of the media cannot do their work, and if traditional media are regarded as a contemporary public sphere, then by extension it can be deduced that the absence of the internet means there is no public sphere. The internet allows for the sharing of information and the publicizing of issues, and according to Vavi it allows for people to connect with each other and identify as individuals or as groups.

Civil society members did not just comment on the matter, they also took action. Right2Know was not only an applicant in the court cases under study, it also led marches, facilitated discussions on the matter and also made a Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) application forcing government's security agencies to reveal the number of spying devices in their possession. Article 1 of those collected from the institution's website details how members of the organization gathered and marched through the streets of Cape Town on

the 19th of February 2015, in response to the events of SONA 2015. In the main the sentiment expressed by the organizations members and supporters is summed up in the words of academic and author Jane Duncan who said the following;

> The State Security Agency has developed warped priorities. What does it do about the assassinations of political activists in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu Natal? Yet, it has time enough to install cell phone jammers in Parliament," In the article it is asserted that the overwhelming theme of the meeting; "…was not the public's failure to hold an elite to account, but the will to "take parliament back" as a space created by the struggle for freedom of ordinary citizens against apartheid — a "people's parliament.

Again there is sentiment that the jamming of the signal was not accidental. It is vital to note that from the above article, there is evidence of the public scrutinizing itself and questioning its ability to hold the political elite accountable. This may suggest that despite there being the internet, the public has to a large extent failed to hold Parliament to account, hence it was emboldened to scramble the cellphone signal. The night of the 12th of February is seen as a night where ordinary members of the public were involved in a battle for the right to participate in a space which is meant for the people. Because these people were fighting for the signal to be restored, it can be inferred that the internet gives ordinary citizens access to Parliament. It must be noted that Parliament itself streamed the SONA of 2015 live on its YouTube channel; this can be read as an acknowledgement on its part that there are members of the public who gain access to its activities via the internet.

As noted earlier, the editor of ANN7 Moegsien Williams argued that the internet did not represent the true public of South Africa. The issue of the digital divide is one which is highly contested in the South African mediascape, however in the main there is agreement that the poor need more access to the internet. It has been argued in this paper that universal access should not be the benchmark for a qualification of a public sphere, however there needs to be an assessment of whether the constituent parts of the South African public are represented in the space. So when one considers the fact that even organizations like 'Abahlali base Mjondolo' who represent squatter camp dwellers have websites and social media accounts, one is inclined to believe that while the South African digital space is still dominated by the elite of society, there is representation of different constituencies in that space.

Ii is also contended that access to the internet needs to be conceptualized differently, and indirect access considered. For example Steven Grootes of EWN in article 27 says the following;

> But it is unarguable that what happened on Thursday is not likely to have won any new votes for the ANC. No one who didn't vote for the ANC last year is now going to vote for them because they used the physical force of the state to throw out the EFF. And while Parliament's TV feed didn't show the actually throwing-out, so many people took videos and pictures that they will circulate endlessly for months, and end up being seen at any taxi-rank near you. When the *Daily Sun* puts Parliament on its billboards, you know that the SABC is not going to be able to control this narrative in quite the way it used to.

While a direct link between the ANC's decline in the 2016 local government elections and online debates, it is interesting that Grootes believes that the images of what transpired that were distributed over the internet would have a negative impact on the ANC's performance in the elections. It can also be deduced that Grootes also believes that the lack of direct access to the internet does not equate to not having access to images and information about SONA 2015. Because of the internet as well as the proliferation of smart-phones, the images will remain in circulation for months, such that even those without premium access to the internet will have the images and information to base their judgments on. Grootes suggests that such circulation challenges the power and reach of the SABC.

It would seem as though new information is accessed at a higher premium and that as time progresses that information declines in value as it is replicated and as that happens it becomes easier to access. In 2014 the All Media Products Survey (AMPS) figures put daily readership figures for *Daily Sun* at 5 351 000 (AMPS2014BA), with a circulation of 274 165 Audited Bureau of Circulation. 11% of the newspaper's readers are in Living Standard Measure (LSM) 2 – 4, 68% are in LSM 5-7 and 20% in LSM 8 – 10. 33% of Daily Sun readers are unemployed (Ads24, 2014). It is also important to note that this newspaper has a Twitter account, Facebook account, YouTube, Instagram as well as an application on Android. This means that those who read the newspaper are redirected and encouraged to access audio-visual content online. This indicates that even the poor have some or other level of access to the internet, and that content that appears online is replicated and amplified on traditional

media and vice-versa. This also confirms that there are virtually multiple points of access to information and Parliament.

Judith February who is a Senior Research Associate at the Institute for Security Studies who makes up part of the civil society voices, said the following in response to Parliaments explanations; "Well, the explanations were all clear as mud. However, what we do know is that Mbete received information on the Wednesday before SONA regarding 'devices' to be used but, unbelievably, seemed not to pay it too much attention given the busyness of the moment. And then as she said, 'what happened, happened." It is clear from this statement that those in the civil society including February did not accept Parliament's explanations and that Parliament deliberately ignored calls to fix the scrambled cellphone signals. In article 18 of those collected from EWN, February further asserts the following;

> No one could have derived any pleasure from the scenes in the National Assembly last Thursday night. No one except President Zuma, it seems. A series of pictures capturing the President laughing heartily as EFF MPs were forcefully dragged out of the House speaks volumes. The laughter and the grins confirm everything we need to know about Jacob Zuma; that he is unfit for office and has scant regard for the Constitution.

This is one of the strongest indications that new media technologies have exposed Parliament to the reality of multiple cameras which it cannot control. This corroborates Rappetti's assertion that these technologies make the unseen seen and that they add a complexity to any narrative. It is highly unlikely that Parliament's cameras would have filmed the President laughing, especially given the rules governing filming and broadcasting in the chamber. All these images that wouldn't have been part of the discourse and debates that ensued mean that the prevailing mass media public sphere is significantly more information rich, such that it has been augmented 'beyond recognition' by new media technologies.

Members of the media concur that the prevailing mediascape cannot be controlled, and that any attempt to censor content will be futile. It has already been shown that both Moegsien Williams and Jimi Matthews believe that the power of the internet and new media technologies have rendered sacred spaces less sacred. This means that spaces that could not be entered or observed before can now be occupied and put under scrutiny. Specialist

researcher at the SABC Ronesh Dhawraj Said the following about the internet in article 2 of those collected from the SABC;

> I still contend no other SONA or political event has received this much attention in a long while. Add to the traditional media mix (radio, television, print) the far-reaching tentacles of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, You Tube and the sheer disseminating might of satellite platforms, only then can one come close to realising just what a public relations catastrophe it was for the African National Congress (ANC)-led administration.

This means that on these platforms the reputation of Parliament or of the government can be placed under scrutiny and judged. Dhawraj confirms this paper's contention that the mix of traditional media and new media technologies results in a significantly augmented mass media public sphere.

Dhawraj highlights an important change in the behavior of the public in the South African mediascape which can be easily overlooked. He says the following;

> What I particularly enjoyed about this event was the heightened interest by South Africa's youth. Remember, this is a connected generation. Even if they were catching the live feed via the many television channels or via the multitude of radio platforms, this is a demographic that uses supplementary avenues such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and You Tube to voice their very strong opinions… This generation is the future of our country.

The fact that the new generation of media consumers in South Africa has different media consumption patterns and behaviours means that the very nature of the country's mass media public sphere is being augmented and it may be at the genesis of morphing into a digital public sphere. What is interesting about the social media space is the fact that there are tools which are able to gauge what people are talking about and how they feel about the topic they are talking about in an instant, this was never the case with mass media technologies.

It is argued that while hard to achieve, instances of rational disputes are observable through the opinion articles of journalists as well as media executives like Jardine. This is in keeping with Rauchfleisch and Kovic's argument that the demanding criteria of rational discourse are likely to be realised by professional communication in the mass media than through ordinary citizen online communication. The above discussion reveals that the media and Parliament do

not trust each other. The SABC and ANN7 believe that traditional private media in South Africa are harsh on and overly critical of government. The media, civil society as well as members of opposition political parties believe that the scrambling of the cellphone signals was deliberate. Interestingly there is consensus that the internet is powerful and that it has changed the South African mediascape. While there is consensus that the jamming of the signal was wrong, there is disagreement on why it happened. Members of the media and civil society wanted the courts to declare the jamming of the signal illegal and secure guarantees that it would not happen again. The media felt that not showing the removal of the EFF amounted to censorship and demanded that the official cameras of Parliament provide wide angle shots of proceedings, specifically during incidents of disruption. The media also demanded that their own cameras be allowed into the National Assembly. These demands were disputed by Parliament, and the following discussion explores the manner in which the courts dealt with the matter.

The Courts and how they dealt with the matter

CASE NO.2749/2015 was presided over by Judges J. Dlodlo, J. Henney and J. Savage. In the judgement that was delivered, Dlodlo and Henney concurred, while Savage dissented. The former two judges ruled against the applicants, and ruled that Parliament's actions not to film and broadcast visuals of "unparliamentary conduct and gross disorder" frame by frame in real time were not unreasonable. The Judges ruled that if Parliament broadcast these visuals it would lead to the generation of audiences for violent content and in turn the reproduction of such conduct, resulting in weak discipline in Parliament as well as jeopardise its functioning. It is crucial to point out that this is a classic case of the *effects theory* and moral panic, where the media, specifically television is blamed for societal ills. This claim is dispelled by the fact that images of unparliamentary conduct were recorded and distributed across the globe in minutes, however the discipline and conduct in Parliament was not weakened and that in its next sittings Parliament functioned surprisingly orderly. This is evidenced by Ranjeni Munusamy's assertions in article 13 of those collected from EWN; "And on the eighth day, we got our happy ending. Well, not really. What we got was a commotion-less sitting of Parliament and a president who extended a much-needed olive branch across the House."

The judge also dismissed the Applicants' request to bring in their own cameras and that they or ICASA be granted the authority to manage broadcast feed. The majority ruling saw this as an attempt by media houses to increase audience ratings and added that these organisations were businesses that were concerned with increasing revenues and not with Parliament's functioning or dignity. Interestingly point '[56]' of the judgement said the following about the prevailing mediascape;

> Undoubtedly televising and broadcasting (and now electronic transmitting) are potent in that they have immediacy, and they reach an audience unparalleled in human history. Indeed projecting graphic images and sound and as they happen into homes, offices and public places is undeniably a phenomenon of the age

This statement is the only place where new media technologies are mentioned, however there is a strong acknowledgement that new media technologies contribute to an information rich public sphere, and allow for more people than any other time in history, to gain immediate access to institutions like Parliament.

However because it was ruled that the applicants had conceded the constitutionality of section 21 of the Powers and Privileges Act which provides that;

> No person may broadcast or televise or otherwise transmit by electronic means the proceedings of Parliament or of a House or Committee, or any part of these proceedings, except by order or under the authority of the Houses or the House concerned, and in accordance with the conditions, if any, determined by the Speaker or Chairperson in terms of the standing rules.

The applicants could not object to the different treatment of electronic media versus print media. Thus the applicants accepted that Parliament had the right to control such media along with the content they produce. The judges relied on Sections 59 and 72 of the Constitution which contain provisions that allow Parliament (when it is reasonable and justifiable to do so) in an open and democratic society, to exclude the public, including the media, to rule that was within Parliament's rights to censor images coming out of its premises. Sections 59(1) and 72(1) of the Constitution provide that the National Assembly and the NCOP must conduct their business in an open manner, and hold their sittings in

Public, but reasonable measures may be taken to regulate public access, including access of the media.

It is clear from the above that even an institution like Parliament which is regarded as a public sphere, is subjected to access restrictions of some form or another. So if an institution like Parliament can be called a public sphere even without universal access, the digital sphere should also be granted this label provided it meets the requirements of the generalised functions of the public sphere. The ruling compared and equated Parliament's demands for restrictions to access as those demanded by the courts in South Africa. It further asserted that if the media accept that "the dignity and functionality of the courts should properly prevail over their insistence on 'showing all', however aberrant or grotesque." they should be prepared to accept Parliament's parallel claim. The ruling also argued that Parliament had the constitutional right to protect its functioning and dignity and that the measures implemented by parliament were reasonable. In closing, the judgement added the following;

> Indeed the unqualified default position sought by the Applicants can only encourage the worst behaviour in Parliament. The policy under attack is itself a reasonable regulatory instrument for ensuring that within its capacity, Parliament provides information to the public about its business that is fair, accurate(and I would add), comprehensive. The Policy does strike a balance between the rights of the public to be informed about Parliament and the duty to maintain the dignity of Parliament and its Houses.

It is argued that the above ruling implicitly implies that new media technologies promote chaos, and would promote the dissemination of unfair and inaccurate information. It is important to note in the main citizens are seen as only receiving information and not engaging or debating it. The court also ruled that it cannot tell Parliament how to regulate filming and broadcast as that would amount to not respecting the separation of powers on its part.

On the contrary Judge Savage ruled that while the separation of powers needed to be respected, she asserted that "...intervention is permissible if it is undertaken to uphold the Constitution because our courts are the ultimate guardians of the Constitution." Savage also

ruled that the measures taken by Parliament were in contradiction of Parliament's constitutional obligation to ensure that its business is conducted in public and in an open manner. The judge argued that an open Parliament allowed for the members of the executive to be held accountable and that not showing the forceful removal of the EFF from Parliament, robbed the public their right to hold their representatives to account. She further argued as follows;

> Openness repels the exercise of secret power and ensures accountability to the people. The measures unreasonably limit public access to a visual broadcast of important events involving elected representatives in a manner which requires such information to be obtained only from the print media, or as increasingly the case, from social media. Given our country's torrid history of censorship and media restriction, the measures are unreasonable in their impact on openness, accountability, free expression and media freedom.

Savages view gives the strongest indication that new media technologies, in particular social media are seen to be accessible to a sizable number of people in society, as more members of the South African public rely on social media for their news. While cell phones were used to illegally record events of SONA 2015, it can be inferred from the above judgement that new media technologies ensured that there was openness, accountability, media freedom as well as the freedom of expression. These are qualities which support this paper's view that a digital public sphere exists, although it is still elite and not universally accessible. It is argued that the manner in which print media is viewed is outdated since print media are no longer confined to paper only; they have websites which publish audio-visual content and they also have social media accounts which compel them not to only write about what they see, but to record and at times engage in debates about it as well. The infrastructure has been built and made available by giant technology companies and people as well as various industries use these technologies, and in turn contribute to new developments. This means that even if new media or the digital sphere does not necessarily support fertile ground for a digital public sphere, participants who believe in the idea of a public sphere will continually develop and use the infrastructure in a manner that strives to achieve it. The presence and use of new media technologies in Parliament allowed people to fully see the behaviour of their representatives and thus fostered openness. These technologies repelled the 'exercise of secret power' and guaranteed accountability to the people. It is also true that people were

able to express themselves freely on the matter, one just has to consider article 18 from eNCA which is titled '*Best-gifs-sona2015'*. In this article one sees that people make fun of serious matters, however, that does not mean that they are not dealing with them seriously. It also indicates that communication in the public sphere does not always take the form of deliberation and well considered arguments. People did not just talk and debate about the matter, they also used animation through the use of Graphic Interchange Format images to express themselves and indicate their point of view. If we take satire to contribute to serious political engagement, it should follow that such content from ordinary members of the public contributes seriously to the public sphere.

Judge Savage ordered that the method used by Parliament (Respondents 1-3) to produce and broadcast the audio and visual feeds for SONA 2015 were unconstitutional and unlawful. This is the strongest indication that a rapidly changing mediascape in an age of information is rendering Parliament's policies obsolete and unlawful. The impact is not only on Parliament, as the very media organisations that use these technologies feel they are themselves lagging behind. Jimi Matthews of the SABC put it as follows;

> if you are in the news room today you would understand that we almost all a few steps behind technology, the technological developments in the last five years has transformed the news room in a way more fundamentally than in the last fifty years. In the last five years, the disruption that technology has created in the news room has been more significant than in the last fifty years so it is understandable that some of the laws and regulations, media law and regulations are no longer applicable to the flexibility of technology.

Savage's ruling reveals that the security services did not obtain the permission and authority of the Speaker or the Chairperson under section 4 of the Powers Act or to use a signal jamming device in Parliament. The Respondents also accepted that the device was not used under the provisions of section 4(2) of the Act which provides for circumstances where there is immediate danger to life and the safety of people and property. Under these provisions the

security services would have been obligated to report their use to Parliament, and this was not the case. Savage found that Minister David Mahlobo and the State Security Agency acted unlawfully, and that their defence that the use of the telecommunications jamming device was a mistake could not stand or change the unlawfulness of their conduct. The Judge added the following about the use of the device; "It restricted telecommunications and curtailed both the constitutional rights of the public and the media." Access to the internet has become a constitutional right of the public, and part of the South African public sphere since it is now a tool that is integral to the practice of journalism. Media organisations and practitioners should start realising that this age requires them to actively interrogate laws that govern their spaces and anticipate changes to the law. This requires them to augment the manner in which they participate in the policy process. Offices like the Media Management Unit of Parliament need to take up this challenge to ensure that institutions like Parliament remain in touch with the future.

The Applicants had requested that the audio and visual feeds not be interrupted until Parliament had developed new policy of filming and broadcasting in the National Assembly. Judge Savage felt that the Applicants were demanding that the court make an order that would direct Parliament on how to position its cameras. The Judge dismissed this request and hinted that it would be violating the separation of powers. In effect the Judge ordered that paragraph 8.3.3.2 (a) of Parliament's Policy on Filming and Broadcasting of Parliament was "unconstitutional, unlawful and invalid". The paragraph reads as follows;

> Disorder on the floor of the House:
>
> a) Televising may continue during continued incidents of grave disorder or unparliamentary behaviour for as long as the sitting continues, but only subject to the following guidelines:
>
> i. On occasions of grave disorder, the director must focus on the occupant of the Chair for as long as proceedings continue, or until order has been restored; and
>
> ii. In cases of unparliamentary behaviour, the director must focus on the occupant of the Chair. Occasional wide- angle shots of the chamber are acceptable.

Paragraph 2 which deals with the 'Treatment of Disorder' under Parliament's Television Broadcasting Rules of Coverage and is similar to paragraph 8.3.3.2 2 (a) of Parliament's Policy on Filming and Broadcasting of Parliament, was also declared unconstitutional.

It is on the basis of this ruling that the Applicants lodged an appeal which was registered as Case No. 784/2015. The Western Cape High Court set aside the majority ruling of Judges Dlodlo and Henney and upheld the dissenting ruling of Judge Savage. Savages ruling is crucial in the context of an African continent where legitimate constructive criticism has often been equated to disrespecting the political elite. The dissenting Judge pointed out that there was a misinterpretation of what is meant by dignity, and argued that the dignity afforded to Parliament cannot be equated to dignity given to individuals in Section 1(a) or Section 10 of the South African Constitution. This means Parliament holds no constitutional entitlement to have its dignity preserved. The Judge argued that the authority that Parliament already enjoyed as a constitutionally mandated spahere of government cannot be enhanced by measures which limit openness and public access. Savage further argued that even if scenes of disorder and unparliamentary behaviour may impact negatively the public's view of Parliament and its members, it remains the elected forum of the people.

A digital public sphere in South Africa

Up to this point this paper has discussed four questions which have contributed to the consideration of the question of whether the South African internet or digital space constitutes a digital public sphere and its impact on Parliament, mainly by commenting on how the South African digital space meets the requirements of identity building, agenda setting as well as control and criticism. In the main, evidence suggests that the South African digital space in the manner that it functions, it satisfies these three generalised functions of the public sphere. Evidence suggests that the nature of discourse happening on social media and on the comments sections of the media houses understudy is not the type of deliberation envisioned by deliberative democrats is nonexistent . For instance The SABC does not offer any spaces for user comments and engagement on its articles, except for a box for general feedback comments on their home page. The SABC collects social media posts, edits them and publishes them on Storify.com. While there is no deliberation happening on the SABC's website, evidence suggests that the SABC uses and views social media websites as spaces where people can express themselves and comment on their stories. On the other hand eNCA.com claims to have an audience of 1.7 million followers and of the 31 articles collected from its website there were no comments made by members of this public on the

spaces provided, which indicates a total lack of engagement or attempt to deliberate. This also indicates that the number claimed by the broadcaster may be overstated since this number is just a unique identifier of a computer and not a person. Nevertheless there is no deliberation happening on this space. It is interesting that the members of the South African public that the broadcaster services are described as 'desirable audiences for advertisers', as opposed to citizens. This description suggests that in the main these audiences are attracted to the website solely for the purpose of being sold to advertisers and not to have them critically engage with social issues. Thus the broadcaster invests more resources on prime its audiences for advertisers, than engendering a space for deliberation.

eNCA's discussion policy on the contrary asserts the following;

> eNCA.com's discussions and comments have been created to allow you to engage with other users on the issues facing South Africa and the world. If you're familiar with eNCA, you will know that we don't back down from rigorous, intelligent debate. What we don't tolerate, however, content that is malicious, bigoted, defamatory, or simply irrelevant to the topic under discussion. We also don't allow people to use these forums to advertise their products or services.

It is clear from the above that the broadcaster sees itself as actively engendering and maintaining a digital public sphere, where members of the South African public can deliberate on all sorts of local and global issues. The broadcasters also see themselves as part of the debates and not just facilitators. In keeping with Habermas' public sphere, violent language is prohibited and is regulated at two levels; first members of the public are left to police each other's comments, and when a comment has been reported three times by three different people, the broadcaster steps in and either edits, deletes or reinstates the comment. Once a user's comments have been edited or deleted three times, their account is suspended. EWN largely operates in the same manner, except for the fact that it is actively vetting comments and encourages its members to also play the policing role.

Vitriolic language in some instances has had such a negative impact that any efforts of engendering and maintaining a digital public sphere have been abandoned by some broadcasters. For example, article 2 from eNCA.com first appeared on the *Daily Maverick*, which is a popular South African website which delivers news, analysis, and opinion. On its discussion policy the website gives the following reasons for suspending all comments on its website;

> Back when the Daily Maverick was a sketch on the back of a cocktail napkin, we hoped to build an e-polis of ideas. We wanted to create a website where a bunch of talented journalists, high-profile columnists and regular folk thwacked around the issues of the day. We hoped that our comments section would play a central role in fostering healthy, robust, sharp-edged debate—a town hall in which all were welcome, regardless of the usual caveats. We felt that South Africa could be a lodestar for this sort of thing: our differences would melt away in the fire of intellectual engagement, and we'd forge a new, coherent identity because we were all so damned smart. It hasn't quite turned out that way. Like most news and opinion websites the world over, we've had to contend with the fact that a small but significant percentage of our commentators troll our site in order to fling filth at our writers, our opinionistas, and at other contributors and commentators who happen to disagree with their finely tuned Weltschmertz. We've been slow to act because we truly believed that we'd arrive at a solution that would somehow cut down on or eliminate entirely the flood of hateful words that had become a mainstay on a venue that hundreds of thousands of readers rely on for their daily information.

The above evidence supports my contention that as much as the internet and its technologies may be prone to the interference of the proverbial 'big brother', people who believe in the idea of a public sphere will always strive to use and forge these technologies to mirror their desires of a public sphere. It is clear from the above that the creators of the Daily Maverick were hoping to establish a town hall within the South African digital space however they failed due to what they deem is a 'small percentage' of malicious members of the public, and thus they failed to establish a digital public sphere. Interestingly the publisher says that at some point a solution had been found, meaning that it managed for some time to achieve a digital public sphere. If most of the opinion and news websites across the world are plagued by malicious publics, then it should follow that all public spheres will be subjected to violent speech, and what becomes key is how it is regulated and how the various participants respond so that the desired public sphere prevails. In my opinion eNCA's solution is far better than the one taken by the Daily Maverick especially when those who perpetuate violent language are a small percentage. The reasons for suspending comments are not just isolated to hateful and malicious speech, they are also commercial and this supports my contention that financial interests trump the interest of engendering and maintaining a digital public sphere and this sees more resources invested or concentrated on the former. It is also true that without the

revenue from advertising many of these spaces would collapse. The Daily Maverick says the following;

> Over the past six years, we have worked painstakingly hard to build a legacy brand of which we could be proud. Unfortunately, our comments section is tarnishing that brand. As of today, we are suspending our comment section until such time as we can either moderate away those who feel entitled to spew hate speech on our property, or come up with some other solution that fosters genuine engagement rather than reductive trolling.

While people may strive to augment the internet and its technologies to achieve a digital public sphere, evidence also suggests that these websites are not just open and free to the public, they are owned by private businesses who to a larger extent dictate what goes on their platforms. I would imagine that this would have been the case with the coffee houses which were in private hands in the 17th and 18th centuries. From this, one may be inclined to conclude that a digital public sphere does not exist in South Africa, especially when subscribing to normative demands of a public sphere. The following is stated on the Daily Maverick's website;

> Some of our readers will be confused into thinking that this serves as a curtailment of their right to free speech. But there is nothing in the unwritten, unsigned contract between a website and its readership that remotely implies a "right" to comment.

This evidence suggests that access to the digital public sphere as run by private media, and technology companies, is not a right but a privilege, and thus not a real public sphere. The publisher remedies the impact of the suspension by referring the public to social media platforms as follows;

> One of the joys of the internet is that it provides near endless venues for the posting of marginalized opinions, and we urge those who feel slighted by our new policy to investigate options such as Twitter, Facebook, 4Chan and other sites which have so successfully offered voices to the voiceless.

One is inclined argue that the South African digital public space functions not as an unregulated space, or a space with universal access, but as a collection of multiple private platforms, which fulfil the generalised functions of the public sphere to varying degrees. The owners of the Daily Maverick clearly believe that social media websites like Twitter and

Facebook have been able to establish digital public spheres and that there are multiple points of access to these spaces. However evidence suggests that social media platforms are far from being spaces where deliberation as envisioned by deliberative democrats takes place. For example Twitter uses what it calls 'conversation ranking' to control conversations. This strategy involves grouping replies by sub-conversations in order to show the best content first. This means tweets do not appear in chronological order and are presented based on what the administrators of Twitter think the user is most interested in.

The news platforms in the main require people to register in order to join their conversations using a valid email address or social media account. Social media accounts require a valid email address. Registering with one's social media account is encouraged on eNCA since it allows one to publish one's comment on eNCA.com as well as one's social media account at the same time. So like the Daily Maverick, eNCA sees social media platforms as platforms which operate as public spheres, or at least spaces which allow people to freely express themselves. The function of identity building is also again boosted by these registration demands. The impact of social media platforms being conceptualised as a valid spaces for vibrant debate and self expression by various stakeholders can be seen in the fact that most main stream media houses report on what is being said on these platforms. This means that despite there being no deliberation taking place on the platforms in question, the conversations taking place on there are of significance. For example, from the articles collected on EWN.co.za four articles report on activity and comments on social media (specifically Twitter), fourteen from eNCA.com and seven from the SABC do the same. The mere fact that these broadcasters report on activities and comments on social media websites means what is said on these platforms matters a lot and commands some social significance, despite there being normative deliberation.

The significance of what is being said on these platforms is not only confined to the content of the comments, but by who expresses that comment or opinion. The tweets that are reported on are also from ordinary people however it is significant that the tweets of opinion leaders, celebrities, institutions as well as journalists are often quoted, and the evidence suggests that when these individuals tweet, their tweets gain the most retweets and comments. For example article 30 from eNCA reports on several tweets including that of their own journalist Paula Chowles reporting that journalists are protesting for the signal and added a link to a video she recorded and posted on YouTube. Her post received 3737 retweets, 1111 likes as well as 2122 views on YouTube. Times Live tweeted the same news

as Chowles and it was retweeted 4040 times with 99 likes. Katy Katopodis' tweet about the same news was retweeted 120120 times, and liked 3131 times. Of significance is that former American Ambassador to South Africa, Patrick Gaspard's tweet about the issues was retweeted 101101 times and liked 2828 times. The compound increase in the number of people seeing and talking about events at SONA 2015 cannot be dismissed. International audiences as well as opinion leaders were also part of the conversations and debates that ensued.

For example article 12 from eNCA.com reports on a tweet by Washington correspondent of *The Guardian*, David Smith who was defending his reports about what President Thabo Mbeki said about the SONA 2015 at a question and answer session a few days after the event. Mbeki's office released a statement accusing the journalist of distorting the words of the former President, saying the journalist's claims that Mbeki had negatively criticized President Zuma were false. In his defence Smith tweeted the following; "I asked Mbeki if Zuma should have answered. He replied: "I think so. Don't quote me but that was the easiest way to have dealt with it." This comment was retweeted 350350 times and liked 102102 times. The fact that the journalist saw it fit to respond to Mbeki's office via Twitter, and defend his integrity in front of 109 000 followers, suggests that the platform has significant impact on public opinion and can facilitate debates about validity claims. It is also clear from the above that such debates or exchanges do not start and finish on one platform. For instance Mbeki's office released a statement which was published on its website, Facebook and distributed via online news wires to various media houses, who in turn wrote articles which were distributed via print, television as well as radio, with the response coming from Twitter, and other platforms Smith has access to. Evidence from my interview with Moegsien Williams of ANN7 supports this affirmation and that there is discourse which resembles or 'mimics' deliberation. This discourse is professionally contained in media articles as well as television reports and is continued (informally, semi-formally as well as formally) on social media posts, as well as offline via many conversations including the very interview I had with Williams. I contend that this is how debates or discourses that resemble deliberation happen at a societal level in contemporary South Africa. This makes it difficult to trace because it is ubiquitous. The editor of TNA Media says the following; "If you go Anton Harber, he wrote a column in response to my piece and he was irritated by what I have written but I also got the feeling that at the end of the day he agrees with me that there needs to be a change, you can go to the paper to see his response"

The discourses or conversations that happen in the digital sphere may not constitute deliberation in a normative sense, however these conversations do denote a democratic exchange of ideas and opinions. As mentioned earlier, Papacharissi argues that as a public space, the internet provides another forum for political deliberation, while as a public sphere the internet may possibly facilitate discussion that encourages a democratic exchange of ideas and opinions. Based on this assertion, it should follow that the South African digital space is indeed a digital public sphere. If one considers Savages judgement and that of the Western Cape High Court on appeal, one is more inclined to infer that the internet contributes to discussions that encourage a democratic exchange of ideas and opinions which thrive on openness, accountability, free expression as well as media freedom. The use of secret power was curtailed by the use of the internet in conjunction with other new media technologies, an act which not only enhances discussion but democracy as well.

According to the courts, the absence of the telecommunications signal (and thus the internet) as well as censoring the removal of the EFF, hindered the ability of citizens to consider the actions of their representatives as well as the prevailing political problem at the time. The use of cellphones and the internet made the images of the forceful removal of the EFF from Parliament available and allowed citizens to judge their representatives and the situation as they saw fit. One can argue that the digital sphere improves citizens intellectually by heightening their ability to consider policy, especially through the provision of rich, multi-perspective information which would otherwise not be available to them. The digital space also allows for people to learn about the political concerns of others and thus facilitates an open exchange of opinions as well as ideas that have tangible impact on everyday life.

As shown earlier, both Moegsien Williams and Jimi Matthews do not see the internet as a true representative of South African public opinion as the space is controlled and dominated by the wealthy in society. So they disagree that the South African digital space constitutes a public sphere. This again raises the question of the digital divide which has not been eradicated in the country. However I have argued that instead of universal access, we need to at least determine whether groups from all social classes are represented in the digital space. Steven Groote's assertions about images circulating for months up until they are found at every taxi-rank, disputes the views of both Williams and Matthews, and suggests that even ordinary folk have access to debates that occur on digital spaces, albeit after months. It is a

pity that such access cannot be easily quantified, and thus we cannot objectively quantify how many people are engaged in these democratic exchanges.

To a large extent the Twitter exchange between Minister Dlamini and Yusuf Abramjee of EWN is an example of how status and power are diluted in social media platforms. Social media platforms engender a space where individuals can speak directly to institutions and those who lead them. The conversations between elites are also open to public view and immediate scrutiny. This exchange also shows that mutual respect is a product of not necessarily a product of deliberation, but one's actions in one's personal and professional capacities in everyday life. For example Minister Dlamini tells Abramjee that she used to hold him in high regard, but she had lost all that because he had protested and led journalists in chanting for the signal. In his article, head of Primedia Roger Jardine continues the debate and responds to Minister Dlamini, concluding that she was threatening journalists, with jail or some unnamed harsh action. Jardine's article again supports the assertion that these conversations of democratic exchange are ubiquitous, and they take place on different platforms. In this article Jardine also rebukes the ANC and questions their commitment to media freedom and democracy. For Jardine come out and pen an article shows the deep impact that using a signal jammer had in the South African society, and the fact that he believes penning such an article is part of holding the ANC to account. While Jardine is an advocate of democracy, he is also speaking out on behalf of a company whose very livelihood depends on the internet. This also suggests that commercial activities cannot be separated from the public sphere.

Jardine asserts the following;

> Is the minister threatening to jail journalists? Whatever was meant by the threat, as the head of Primedia, I unreservedly condemn attacks of this nature on any member of our team. Indeed, I would condemn it if it happened to journalists from other media houses. Open communication and freedom of expression are not party political matters, they are the cornerstone of a free society. While we are understandably focused on the political implications of jamming the signal, we should not lose sight of the profound economic repercussions. South Africa relies strongly on foreign investment and, in particular, portfolio flows that help us finance our current account.

From this it can be seen that Parliament's actions have an impact on the economy and the economy too, has an impact on Parliament. This deduction, links back to the fact that,

broadcasters are in the business of selling audiences to advertisers. Interestingly their discussion policies prohibit users from engaging in their own commercial activities.

This debate is again touched on in article 25 of those taken from EWN, as well as in article 28, where it is mentioned that Minister Dlamini denies that her tweets to Abramjee amount to threats. It is highly likely that this issue was ventilated in the meeting between The President of South Africa, the Speaker and SANEF. For example members of SANEF spoke to the President about the fact that they had tried to alert various officials in Parliament about the signal two hours before his speech; a point advanced by Jardine in his article. It is here that we see events and conversations happening online finding their way into formal discussions, sanctioned by the government. In response the President issued a statement on the Presidencies website reassuring the public and the media that his government was committed to the media, their freedom of speech, as well as their right to disseminate information and impart knowledge to the South African public. In his exchange with the Minister, Abramjee not only responds to Dlamini, but also tags SANEF, as well as the Presidency and brings them into the conversation. This reveals the networked nature of such conversations and the fact that they cannot be easily separated from offline debates. It is clear that social media contributes to deliberation albeit differently. While tweets are short and informal considerations, it is true that they can be thoughtful and careful. These may be informal, but they are a precursor to formal discussions and have a bearing on democracy.

It is contended that these conversations on social media can be formalised by institutions like Parliament, however this is no easy task and requires dedicated workers. For example in 2014 Parliament's communication team launched a SONA selfie campaign, encouraging those attending the SONA to take selfies on the red carpet. Parliament's spokesperson Luzuko Jacobs said the campaign had been initiated on the morning of the SONA of 2014 as a light take on the occasion in order to lighten the mood, and that it was not meant to be serious. Parliament did not even follow up on what was posted or the results. In as much as this may not have been a serious campaign, it indicates Parliaments awareness of the fact that it can solicit opinions and views from the public. These images, views and opinions solicited by Parliament are nevertheless useless if the institution does not track and analyse the results, as revealed by Jacobs. Interestingly his reasons for abandoning the campaign for SONA 2015 are related to the Media Management Unit's workload. In article 1 of those collected from

eNCA, Jacobs says the following in response to why Parliament did not follow up on the results; "There is far too much committee work to do,". This answer reveals the fact that being on social media, and engaging the public on these platforms requires work and is not necessarily easy, especially for organisations. Until Parliament hires dedicated social media managers who do not have to do committee work in place of managing social media, the impact of social media on policy decisions in Parliament will be minimal. When thinking about formalising social media conversation, one is inclined to consider efforts like those of the eNCA survey discussed earlier as instances of communication that Parliament can directly use or tap into determine the public's opinion.

Evidence suggests that Parliament is still experimenting and finding itself on social media and on the digital sphere in general. Jacobs indicates that Parliament will continue trying out such initiatives in the future and is open to ideas. This supports my contention that the South African digital public sphere is still in its formative stages, and will necessarily not conform to the prescripts of normative public sphere theory. What is interesting about Parliament's campaign is that eNCA did its own research and found that peoples' responses were not necessarily what Parliament had asked for. Various members of the public, even those who were not attending, usurped the opportunity to voice their opinions about jobs, the economy and various other issues affecting them. They did this creatively using memes and witty comment. This indicates that people have the ability to impose their own agenda on Parliament through these platforms, and that they will not be dictated to.

Following the selfie campaign in 2014, Parliament embarked on a campaign to solicit suggestions for President Zuma's speech for SONA 2015. In a statement shown in article 31 of eNCA, the Presidency said the following; "The president invites inputs and suggestions through social media on issues people consider important for their well-being and those of their communities that should be included in the speech," This is a step up and more serious than the selfie campaign of the previous year. Evidence suggests that the Presidency tracked and analysed the public's comments and suggestions, and it gave status updates of the messages received. For example in a statement released on the 5th of February 2015, the Presidency says the following;

> The Presidency continues to receive a stream of constructive suggestions on what issues President Jacob Zuma should tackle in his State of the Nation Address on Thursday, 12 February 2015.A diversity of inputs, issues and comments have so far

> been received through Facebook and Twitter. Some of the dominant issues are: Small Medium and Micro Enterprises development, education (the quality of basic education and increasing of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme budget), social development (revising social grants), crime and drugs … As of this morning, 5 February 2015, the invitation @PresidencyZa on Twitter had been seen by 27,871 people and received more than 2 000 comments. The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa Facebook page had reached 106,400 people, eliciting 1 504 comments and suggestions. The Presidency appreciates the participation of the public in the preparations for the State of the Nation Address. All inputs are valuable and are being taken into account in the President's address to the nation.

As can be seen from the above, comments solicited on social media by the South African government were formalized, analysed and synthesized into categories of serious issues. It is also clear from the above that the Presidency received the most interaction from Twitter where over two thousand people commented from almost twenty eight thousand people who saw the government's invitation, as opposed to a mere one thousand five hundred and four comments from over a hundred thousand people who saw the invitation on Facebook. These numbers show that even if universal access was achieved, not all people will engage in debate or contribute to the process of deliberation, especially if their points or views have already been expressed by other participants. This initiative is innovative when one considers the fact that for the Parliament of South Africa, public participation is mainly constituted of observing debates and not commenting, or submitting via the internet. On its website, Parliament indicates that the public can participate through forums, meetings, Parliamentary Democracy Offices(PDO's), submissions, petitions or by contacting their representative and through media. Forums, meetings as well as PDO's require attendance and do not have a virtual attendance system in place. Submissions can either be done orally or in writing, however it is not clear if written submissions can be submitted online, as no email address or instruction is given. There are email addresses of all members of MP's on Parliaments website, meaning that members of the public can send lengthier arguments and points of views. Thus deliberation of sorts can happen through emails, however there is no clear instruction or promotion of engaging online. This is the same with petitions which require an MP to formally present them in Parliament. The media tab on Parliament's website which explains participation through the media shows that the institution has not formalized and does not encourage the use of new media technologies. Under this tab the public are encouraged to

read newspapers, listen to radio, watch television or talk to each other only. The institution does not even promote its social media accounts and YouTube channel, which further confirms that Parliament is not using digital infrastructure to actively support and engender deliberation. For example comments are disabled for all its videos on YouTube and only has 15 178 subscribers.

Of all the media houses, EWN has the most comments on its articles from users, and these provide the best example of instances of deliberation. Article 21 is an opinion piece by freelance journalist Mandy Wiener, in which she engages and criticises her Facebook 'friends' about their negative views and comments about South Africa. The article is titled, Mandy-Wiener-Facing-up-to-SAs-Facebook-critics, and represents strong evidence of my contention that there is some form of deliberation that takes place over time and on various platforms, both online and offline, and the two cannot be separated. Wiener's article is a response and continuation of online conversations that took place on Facebook and are continuing on a mainstream media platform. She says the following;

> While it is not a particularly accurate litmus test and not exactly a scientifically accurate gauge of public opinion, my Facebook timeline does tell a story. Over the past few weeks it has been filled with vitriolic outrage about 'this country' and how rubbish the government is. 'Friends' are liberally sharing any piece of propaganda, true or not, that paints the country in a poor light. They rage about load shedding in 'darkest Africa', the embarrassing behaviour of parliamentarians, the brutal wave of crime, the idiocy of politicians, the cancer of corruption and the general incompetence and uselessness of any kind of uniformed official. They throw around phrases like 'police state' and 'slippery slope'.

As can be seen, evidence suggests that opinions on social media timelines can be analysed and synthesised into a single body of collective opinions, representing a particular viewpoint. It would seem that those participating in the digital sphere can present their validity claims backed by extra information sourced from other platforms. Evidence also suggests that vitriolic language is an ever present threat that plagues any public sphere. This is evidenced by the many rules and regulations that Parliament has had to adopt and reduce the public's participation to virtually mere observation of their 'representatives'. It is also evidenced by the discussion policies found on the websites of broadcasters which strongly condemn the use

of such language. Participants in the public sphere can choose a variety of actions when they encounter vitriolic language. Some like the Daily Maverick fold and choose to shut themselves off, some like the eNCA and EWN choose to make it a collective responsibility of monitoring and flagging such language, and some, like Wiener choose to take it head on and call it out in reasoned debates, even at the risk of seemingly 'wrestling with a pig'. Wiener *says;*

> I am also going to call out my 'friends' on Facebook when they choose to share and post illegitimate criticism and nonsense from non-credible news sources just so they can rack up the likes and stir up anti-South African sentiment. They also need to know that they are being racist, even when they assure us 'You know, I'm not racist but…

This shows that mutual respect is not a necessary prerequisite for deliberation to happen, however it is a desired ingredient that should be demanded and fought for.

Wiener continues in her article and says; "Here's an email I recently received from a friend who has emigrated: There are many issues that seem to be getting worse. Instead of progressing, it seems that there is a regression - what I once believed would be the shining African hope." This is evidence of the multi platforms on which debates happen. If deliberation demands for people to careful and thoughtful, then they should be allowed sufficient time to retreat and reformulate their arguments, and present them through mediums and techniques that allow them to be as thoughtful as possible. In this case Wiener's friend chose email. These interactions which I contend are deliberations on digital spaces at a societal level also continue offline, Wiener says the following;

> It's not just on social media that this is seeping through. I spent three hours at a Home Affairs office last week waiting to collect a passport. A whiney young woman in the queue made it her mission to let everyone around her know how useless the administration was. She stamped her well-heeled foot and declared that she couldn't wait to go back overseas where she has been living. Almost in unison, half the room turned around and told her to bloody well leave if she didn't like it here.

Wiener's article generated a total of 46 comments whose contents denote thoughtful and lengthy considerations by individuals. These comments are from individuals and not civil society groups and are not formal, in the sense that they are not sanctioned by any government authority that will bind people to some agreed superior or most rational mandate.

The lack of such formality should not necessarily mean these discussions do not lead people to discuss issues that inform their actions, or that these do not have impact on government actions or policy. This is because the role of the media in this country is formalized by the Constitution and endorsed by government. The residual opinion gathered from such discussions feeds into spaces of formal discussion as shown in the meeting between the President and SANEF. In her article Wiener directs her rebuke towards white members of the South African public, who in turn respond to her and each other about the status of the country and a variety of other issues. Some of the users defend their negative views of the current government and justify their reasons for emigrating, while others disagree and defend their reasons to stay in South Africa and fight for a better country. Others even go to the extent of proposing action that can remedy the situation, with others agreeing to such initiatives.

It is such online conversations and engagements that encourage one to view the South African digital space as a public sphere; however my contention is that this public sphere is still in its formative years, and thus it is still difficult to label it as such. Iman Rappetti's interview reveals quite a lot about the power of the digital space, and at the same time its requirement that those participating in it, fight for their right to partake. She describes the internet as the South African society's "information oxygen" as it gives people access to more information and choice. Rappetti goes as far as declaring that these constitute a basic human right. She believes the internet is not just an echo chamber, but a space where people can genuinely form an opinion in an effort to impact policy. The seasoned journalist says the following; "There is room for people to have a discussion. There is room for people to think, why is the status quo as it is?" As much as she believed that the opinion formulated by people had some impact on government policy decisions, she declared that she only had anecdotal evidence to support her beliefs, and pointed to examples like the #FeesMustFall campaign Gabonese elections which got the world talking. Rappetti contends that without the internet there wouldn't have been an immediate dissemination of news and there wouldn't have been an immediate collection of people in various embassies around the world protesting an election result and condemning the violence happening in that country.

According to Rappetti, with the internet, even the smallest and poorest countries now have a voice in the global village and that this technology provides a platform where global citizens

can stand in solidarity against any injustices. She describes the public sphere simply as, "a place where people are." To her mainstream media is the public sphere since it has a history of being amongst the people since the earliest of days. This supports my argument that if Habermas has accepted that modern media are the new public sphere, and if modern media see and use the internet as a necessary tool in their trade, it should follow that the digital space constitutes a public sphere. However, Rappetti also cautions against the haste of labeling things when asked if she thought the internet was a public sphere. She says;

> Again, in pursuit of labels, I would say it might suit us to say, but if I think about it more critically, it isn't, because we also know that we have to be vigilant, because there is disinformation in that sphere.

The vigilance Rappetti speaks about is not only confined to disinformation, it also talks to being vigilant against vitriolic language as well. This supports my contention that participants in the public sphere have to constantly fight for their right to participate. The seasoned journalist also points to the presence and interference of 'big brother' as well as malicious hackers.

Rappetti regards the South African Parliament as well as the South African courts as public spheres, and believes that access regulation in these spaces is necessary so as to maintain order and ensure that concrete results are achieved. This supports my argument that access in the public sphere has always had some or other access barriers. Universal access is desirable, however it is an ideal and not a realistic goal that can be achieved, even if all South Africans were given gadgets and airtime, there would still be issues of education, class and social background which limit access. Rappetti also believes that the introduction of the internet and smartphones into the South African mediascape has had an everlasting impact on Parliament. In her own words, she describes the impact as follows;

> Because we don't only have one dimensional view. We have a multidimensional view. And a multidimensional view that is immediate. Because I can live tweet it now. I don't have to wait for someone else to tell me. I can tell you now… I can show you pictures. I can take videos, my God, I can be that other camera in front of us…

Like Rappetti, I believe that Parliament has been unable to respond to the reality of a new South African mediascape characterised by the information age. Parliament failed to use Twitter or Facebook to respond to the concerns of journalists, civil society and people in

general. The institution was also unable to control the independent taking of pictures and videos by journalists, MP's as well as members of the public in attendance, meaning it failed to control the narrative of SONA 2015. Rappetti believes the institution's resistance to change is historical;

> They're an institution that is in some ways mothballed by convention, a convention of our past. That is as far as I know. Besides from the addition of the national council of provinces which takes parliament to the people, which is different from what we had during apartheid, and if I'm wrong correct me on that one, that's my understanding. Maybe they could move with the times, they could embrace the times. And it's interesting for me why they choosing not to do that. It feels like they have things to protect, a space to protect… from whom and for what?

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In its quest to evaluate the existence of a digital public sphere in the South African mediascape, this work has found that indeed, there exists what can be termed a digital public sphere, albeit, not one that resembles Habermas' 17th and 18th century public sphere, but one that is in keeping with the 21st century and all its trends. It is argued that this digital public sphere becomes visible when one considers online news platforms, social media platforms, as well as websites of civil society organisations, including government ones. These it is argued form a network of communications platforms which allow for individuals as well as institutions to form identities, organise and set agendas so as to engage in the control and criticism of policies. It is further asserted that there is indeed a level of deliberation that occurs, evidenced by the extracts of social media communications reported on by the media, the various statements issued by civil society organisations, and most importantly the opinion pieces penned by media executives as well as journalists. Using Rauchfleisch and Kovic's generalised functions of the public sphere, shows that the South African digital space meets the criteria required for these functions to be met. This gives people the ability to stand in solidarity and act against some injustices or pursue various causes. These individuals and institutions are spread across the globe, and are concretised by real offline relationships, which are then illuminated and multiplied in the digital space. It is strongly argued that online and offline spaces cannot be separated as they have a 'symbiotic' relationship, and constantly influence each other. Precisely because people's identities and cultures change over time, the public sphere's character and operation will thus constantly be in a state of flux. This means that the rate of change of the character and operation of the public sphere is equal to the rate of change of the identities and cultures of the people, hence the space in question will not resemble Habermas' public sphere.

Scholars cannot study the modern public sphere and expect to find the same things that Habermas conceptualised from the 18th century, because the public sphere is a living

organism. It is argued that institutions, in this case news organisations are instrumental in the process of constructing identities online especially at a macro level where their audiences are conceptualised as South Africans. Individual users, who comment on the websites and social media platforms of news organisations, identify as South African or as legitimate people with an interest in what is happening in South Africa. Institutions like Parliament extend their concrete identities by occupying space on several platforms online. Political officials like Ministers, civil servants as well as civil society organisations do the same, thus giving the South African digital space its realness or authenticity. It is clear that there are benefits to users for using and declaring their real identities. With these identities in place, stakeholders in the South African digital space are able to generate view points and establish specific agendas and pursue them. It is thus argued that although largely limited to the elite, it is argued that the South African digital space achieves the basic function of the public sphere which is to create a sense of collective identity among a group of people and institutions. News media organisations and Journalists identify as a bloc that forms a type of body politic, which purports to represent the general will of the people. The platforms offered by news media organisations and through the social media they participate in, individuals are primed as South African and are invited to engage with not only the content that these organisations disseminate, but the individual views of its journalists as well. As organisations that are heavily invested in communications, it should follow that news media organisations facilitate a large part of the digital public sphere by concretising the identities of its audiences both for political and commercial reasons. The former talks to claims that the media represent the general will and views of the people.

When put into operation, the setting of the agenda takes a number of forms. For starters, there is a process of sharing general information about an issue, and there after there will be a taking up of positions and view points, which give birth to different agendas. It cannot be expected that only one agenda will result as we live in societies where the common goods demanded by the people are enormous and more diversified than in older societies. Again, overtime these same the common goods demanded by society change as their identities and culture change. With regards to SONA 2015, journalists used the social media to share and corroborate their information about the jamming of the signal with each other and members of the public. They used social media to register their concerns with the relevant authorities. This is a rare instance where online tools are used for the immediate function of control and criticism. Beyond that, journalists used digital platforms not only disseminate news, but to

also voice their opinion and argue their standpoints in various debates. Of significance are the voices of media executives like Jardine which are directed at politicians.

This shows that the digital space satisfies the function of agenda setting, and this is not isolated to the events of the day in question, but is visible in debates that go back and forth between various individuals, where in this case, talk to issues of the freedom of speech and the use of new media technologies in Parliament. This has also been seen in movements like #FeesMustFall and #DataMustFall. These online activities are connected to, and are continued offline, in spaces like Parliament or the Presidential guest house where SANEF met with the President and other Ministers. Thus the process of control and criticism is initiated and carried out online, and eventually links policy considerations in Parliament and other public spaces. This is happening because of the solid identities that have formed online which compel political elites to be receptive to the demands of the public, which in the main are sound the through the media. In contrast to Yu Shan Wu's (2013: 77) observations, the South African social media scene has grown to have political potential and seems to at least influence policy decisions. In her work, Wu argued that the reasons online spaces were not influencing policymaking in South Africa were that social media was new and take up was still in its infancy, secondly she noted the lack of recognition from the government and the political leadership, as well as a larger context which affected the public's recognition. While there has been a rapid growth in the number of South Africans taking up social media and the use of other online platforms, the space remains elitist. Despite this reality, it has not stopped government form recognising the digital and social media spaces as platforms on which to engage the public. However this recognition is somewhat limited in the sense that the social media engagement that Parliament and the Presidency have embarked on has largely been social and experimental, and in the main, communication has been one directional. There is however evidence of the Presidency engaging people and requesting contributions that will inform policy, which shows some deeper level of recognition in terms of policy considerations. The biggest recognition of the digital sphere has largely come from individual ministers and politicians of the ANC like Bathabile Dlamini, however, opposition parties like the DA and the EFF seem to have embraced the digital sphere more than the leadership of the ANC. Perhaps recognition is not only evidenced by how these parties and individuals use social media and other the digital platforms, but by the negative actions of disrupting the signal as well. Evidence strongly suggests that the move on the part of government officials was deliberate, and comments by the Speaker and a number of her colleagues shows

Parliament was worried of the negative image that might result because of the power of new media technologies. It is argued that this recognition of the digital sphere as a threat serves as evidence of responses to stimuli coming partly from the digital sphere, although in a negative manner. The ruling by the courts affirmed the South African judiciary's recognition of the internet and its associated communication technologies as a vital part of the public sphere, and a tool that can be used to enhance democracy.

It is clear that as government embraces or formally recognises social media and other communication platforms, it will have to employ dedicated staff that will look after its accounts and communication strategies online. One of the chief reasons why Parliament is not responding and engaging actively on social media networks is due to the fact that its Media Management Unit does not have adequate staff to deal with the added workload of actively engaging the public on the internet. These are some of the practical limits affecting any public sphere. In terms of the larger context which affects the public's recognition, Yu Shan Wu (2013: 79) argues that even if legislators and ordinary members of the public became more engaged online there is no evidence that suggests whether action will be taken offline or vice-versa. Evidence indicates that social media helped journalists and civil society organisations to break Parliament's veil of silence with regard to the signal jammer as well as show the behaviour of MP's that parliament intended to censor. The people used social media to corroborate information about the jammed signal, and the fact that Parliament's officials had been informed and were ignoring the alerts and complaints. This led to the unprecedented chanting of 'bring back the signal', which halted the President's speech. Parliament's policies were not just influenced but were challenged on the day, both online and offline. I consider the actions of SANEF of meeting with government officials as well as going to the courts as part of these offline actions, informed by what transpired online.

The actions by SANEF and other journalists show that the media are not neutral observers and reporters of reality, they are involved in constructing that reality. It is argued that while not abundant there are instance of rational disputes over validity claims especially when one looks at the opinion articles written by various media practitioners. It is argued that it is this combination of professional and personal communication from journalists which in the main meets the demanding criteria of rational discourseMembers of the media are critical role players when it comes to the use and construction of various online communication platforms including social media which are constantly primed as as a public sphere.

By making the internet an intrinsic tool of their trade, journalists and media houses have managed to make the digital sphere part of the mass media public sphere. Members of the media also used social media to directly engage with MP's and make their demands, and lobby them to join their cause. The very act of flooding the digital sphere with information has a bearing on policy decisions since the availability of such information generates debate and can sway public opinion, and jolt government officials into positive or negative action. Following the EFF's online countdown clock Parliament admitted to preparing for any possible scenario, meaning actions online impact on the actions and decisions of government officials. The letter penned by head of Primedia Roger Jardine and published online is an example of the press' lobbying and attempts to constantly influence public opinion. It also indicates that the public sphere can never be free of commercial relations and activities.

Indeed the advent and subsequent proliferation of smartphones in the South African mediascape, coupled with the growth and use of social media platforms and online news media platforms as well as other communications tools on the internet in general. Indeed there emergence of new media technologies have had a disruptive impact on institutions of democracy like Parliament. Going into the future Parliament, which is regarded as a dominant public sphere, will have declining control of the images and narrative that come out of its precinct, unless it hires dedicated staff that will be authorised to engage on social media networks. What cannot be disputed is the fact that new media technologies forced the review and curtailment of outdated media policies in Parliament. It also helped with exposing censored images of the behaviours of MP's, especially in the context of extreme disagreement. These technologies helped expose the language of violence that the ANC government had resorted to in Parliament, and they also help set a precedent that will guarantee the exposure of such language in the future. Of course this did not happen without the minds and fingers of those behind the machines. These individuals have to constantly learn new ways of communicating online, and keep up with rapidly changing trends. This requires work and time, especially when one wants to be a proficient user and communicator on various online communication platforms. It is clear that both citizens, as well as institutions of South Africa will have to adapt, or be sidelined by a platform that has entrenched itself in South African news rooms and media spaces in general. The digital sphere is in a state of development and morphs into different states from time to time, with varying impact and consequences.

While it is known that in places like Ethiopia (Human Rights Watch, 2014) the internet is used to monitor people and clamp down on dissenting voices, in South Africa it was used to push back against threats to media freedom emanating from the actions of government. It should however be pointed out that the might of new media technologies is contingent, given the fact that at a mere switch of a button on a jamming devices, all that power disappears. The power of new media technologies in South Africa is derived from various sections of the Constitution; however Section 16 is at the core of this power. It is the provisions on media freedom in this section that gave journalists the power and courage to halt the President's speech, and demand that the signal be switched back on. This power also derives from the fact more and more South Africans use the internet to derive and share information about what is happening in their political surroundings and debate it. Online communication platforms, especially social media networks have become sources of the latest news, not only because journalists and their institutions inhibit them, but because the news makers themselves participate on these platforms. The internet is not just an alternative to television or radio; it replicates them and makes them accessible even in remote places across the globe, with the added advantage of interactivity, openness as well as the potential for equality. Although with some qualifications, it is in this way that this paper argues for the existence of a digital public sphere in the South African mediascape.

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