New Ways to Fight a War in the Information Age
-a study on media tactics and ICTs as a useful tool to spread a message of democracy

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Abstract

The development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has forever changed the way of the world in some important areas. Understanding the ICTs superior traits when it comes to processing, storing, searching, reproducing and transmitting information is of utmost importance. The centrality of information in our society have even resulted in some declaring that we have entered into a new stage in human existence- The Information age.

The ICTs’ inexpensiveness provides new opportunities for resource weak and non-institutionalized organizations to organize, coordinate, network and publish/disseminate their information.

The Burmese democracy movement was early in adopting ICTs and hence presents a fascinating case. This project’s objective was to answer: can the ICTs function as a useful tool in assisting the Burmese democracy movement in raising international awareness and support for their cause - a free and democratic Burma? And what ICT- usage and work methods can be identified as potentially successful when it comes to transmitting the democracy groups’ political message?

Through qualitative interviews done at the Thai-Burma border, the study concluded that ICTs does already play an important role as a tool for communication in the Burmese Democracy movement, but that the ICT-usage could be developed significantly in using ICT as a tool for publicizing information. It was also concluded that the democracy movement could have much to gain in adopting better media skills and a greater understanding of the dynamics of the contemporary media system. The Information age’s altered media sphere entails new opportunities for political groups if they learn to master the media logic. The study also concluded that the democracy movement could gain even more by actively supporting the development of a independent Burmese mass media. Thus providing the movement and Burma with an important addition - a neutral, balanced and credible sender of information and news.

Key words: Information and communication technology (ICT), the Information age, political communication, Burma, independent media, democracy and democratization.
Probable text:

Preface and acknowledgements

Burma, a country far off in south east Asia, covered by Western mass media only sporadically, is by any account a fascinating case. The country’s rich cultural past, its ethnic diversity, the natural resources, the political history of ancient kingdoms, colonialization and independence struggle, dictatorship, civil war, the second struggle for independence, the brave democracy movement both inside the country and in exile, all and each holds enough information and interesting stories, to fill a thousand pages.

Visiting Burma is like visiting another planet. It’s an incredibly beautiful country, but yet, a nation stuck in a time capsule. Societal development have been grossly neglected by the military regime for decades and the mismanagement of country is clearly visible at any trip off the main streets, areas, or cities. Yet, one can not help marvelling at the people and their kindness in greeting a stranger. Despite being taken hostage by a military junta that keeps changing its name in a futile and ridiculous try in irradicating past sins, the people of Burma greets you, not with a accusation for not doing more to help to alleviate their plight, but a greeting in broken English followed by a zillion questions.

Their struggle for freedom, democracy and basic human rights should render concrete support both from neighbouring countries, and the rest of the world. Sadly, the world contains business interests, countries and lethargic majority of uninterested citizens, arrogant and indifferent of the Burmese people’s situation. Thus the status quo.

During my contact with Burma and perhaps foremost the democracy movement in exile, I have learnt about struggle, perseverance, and not giving up. Therefore the thesis’ main focus is about seeking new ways to move the world into action, by using mass media. It might be presumptuous to give advice, but nevertheless, it is my firm belief that understanding the 21st century’s media logic, could be helpful in the struggle to raise awareness about Burma.

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1. Introduction
-The Information age, a world paradigm here to stay

The development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), has forever changed the way of the world in some important areas (Castells Vol.I 2000, Slevin 2000). The birth of ICTs, that is Internet, Intranet, email, chat and various variations of these communication tools, has introduced new faster and less expensive ways to communicate. Without attempting to pass judgment of its relative significance and global importance, it is a matter of fact that the development of ICT has forever changed the way of the world. Understanding the ICTs superior traits when it comes to processing, storing, searching, reproducing and transmitting information, have resulted in some declaring that we have entered into a new stage in human existence-The information age (Castells 2000, Vol. I).

Castells (2000:20 Vol.I), even claims that we have not only entered an informational society, that is, a society where information generation, processing, and transmission has become "the fundamental sources of productivity and power because of new technological conditions emerging in this historical period", but a Network Society. "Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies"(Castells 2000:500 Vol.I). Together with the technical (r)evolution, this social morphology has become global, thus connecting and integrating a wide range of geographically dispersed societal actors. Presence or absence in the often complex and global network will according to Castells (2000, Vol.I ) have far reaching societal effects for a number of areas. Political actors and media are only two sectors of many, which will have to learn how to navigate in this new information thick environment and understand the intricate networks. If the actor, that is, individual, group, organization, region or nation state, is unsuccessful and are left behind in the network society, only exclusion and marginality remains.

Other researchers supports the suggestion that we are moving into a new age (Hauge &Loader 1999, Slevin 2000). Slevin (2000) does however challenge Castells slightly deterministic view of the societal development, and argues for a more positive and proactive approach to the development of ICT. He stresses the ICTs usefulness as a tool for meeting new challenges in late modernity and its potential to assist in coping with the modern experience, rather than focusing on the disorientation and uncertainty the societal development might induce (Slevin 2000).

Whether or not, one finds the different societal labels presented earlier agreeable or not, it is a fact that technical innovations in the field of communication, have created, or at least intensified some societal trends (Castells 1998 Vol. II, 2000 Vol. I, UNESCO 1999), such as: 1) It no longer takes huge amounts of money to spread information to a dispersed and/or large group of people, mass communication and/or the spread of information has thus been liberated from the traditional mass media organizations and governmental authorities. Today, anybody with basic computer knowledge, a computer with the necessary software and a modem, can be a publisher. 2) Geographical considerations are no longer necessary in the same way. The time
factor to disseminate information to large groups is reduced. 3)The ICTs facilitate inter-active services and two-way communication.

1.1 The ICT - a new tool for democracy and democratic forces?
ICTs are the most fundamental tool of an emerging knowledge-based society (Hamelink 1999). The Internet has not only altered production and dissemination modes and individual media usage, but has created accessibility to a global bank of information. The Internet allows more people then ever in history to access, create and transmit information to a global audience (Castells 2000 Vol.I). In short, The Internet and ICT gives the privileged global citizen possibilities to communicate more freely with other world citizens. Earlier problems with time and space have diminished.

In a democracy under development, free information flows and an arena of public debate is not guaranteed and perhaps it is here the ICT can be truly beneficial. Truedson (1999:8) points out "Internet, has in certain ways made it harder to censor the information flows in a country … A publication can easily be published in a country where the statement are allowed". The information can thus be printed or be made public on-line. The web pages can always be accessed behind firewalls through mirroring sites (ibid.?). Due to ICT's pertinence to spread information in a rather uncontrolled manner the ICTs can increase citizens insights into government affairs (Hague & Loader 1999, HRW 1996 vol. 8, Clift 1998), and "radically change the traditional balance of power between government and those who produce information" (Rapporteurs sans Frontiers 2001). In short, the ICT's has the potential not only to diversify the sources that generate information, but widen the scope of the actual information.

Slevin (2000:47) states, "The Internet is radically altering the degree to which individuals and organizations can enter freely into discourses across extended time-space. It opens up new opportunities for dialogue and deliberation, empowers people to make things happen, rather than having things happen to them, and facilitates new forms of solidarity and cooperation". Human Rights Watch, HRW (1996 vol. 8:23) also concludes; the ICTs have a potential "to empower users to become active producers of information rather than passive consumers".

Possessing these inherent traits the ICT has a great democratic potential (UNESCO 1999). The power of allowing information to travel wide and fast at a low cost provides for one of the corner stones in democracy- accessible (correct) information. Hence, individuals living in a democratic society with a general living standard that allows not only the privileged classes to own a computer, access and use the Internet, but also includes the less privileged in the process, the democratic potential is clearly there. Theoretically, the Internet can thus function as a new digital public sphere, which offers citizens an opportunity to communicate freely and as a tool to fulfill their need for independent public discourse (cf. Dahlgren 2001; Jönsson, 1998; Åkerström 1999). "Global communication is about protecting and enlarging freedom of expression for all our citizens and giving individual citizens the power to create the information they need and want from the abundant flow of data they encounter" (HRW 1996 vol. 8:6).
Critics have however argued for a more moderate perspective on the ICT and it’s usefulness in building and strengthening democracy. It has rightly been pointed out that access to ICT and the ability to use the technology does not ensure an increased interest in democracy (London 1994, Truedson 1999). Internet is not the antidote to the dominant power of global mass media, an absolute weapon against state control and censorship, or the ultimate instrument of a new more participatory form of citizenship (Marthoz 1999), but a tool to be put to service by societal agents.

Coordination and mobilization are vital in most political activities and Internet has already proven to be an excellent tool (Hague & Loader 1999, Truedson 1999, Åkerström 1999). Bimber (1998:16) conclude, “lower costs of organizing collective action offered by the Net will be particularly beneficial for one type of groups: those outside the boundaries of traditional private and public institutions, those not rooted in business, professional or occupational memberships or the constituencies of existing government agencies and programs”. Crossman (1995) writes in (Bimber 1998:4) “the big losers in the present -day reshuffling and resurgence of the public influence are the traditional institutions that have served as the main intermediaries between government and its citizens—the political parties, labor unions, civic associations, even the commentators and correspondents in the mainstream press”. Davis (1999) on the other hand point out, that even traditional and resource- rich interests groups can ripe the benefits from the ICTs, if they are willing to adopt the skills needed to take full advantage of the new technology (Davis 1999).

A number of different minorities and independent organizations, such as environmental and human rights organizations, successfully use the Internet to gain more influence and international support (Castells Vol. II 1998, Walch 1999). The use of the net as a subversive tool was pioneered by the Zapatistas army, a guerrilla group based in Chiapas, Mexico. The group started a rebellion, but not alone, but with the whole world watching through the mass media that early had been approached. The Zapatistas had a systematic and well carried out media strategy, entailing the dissemination of communiqués, war reports, press notes to a number of receivers on the net, including activist groups, individual supports and in large news organizations (Castells 1998 Vol. II ).

The Internet has also proven its ability to work for democratic forces in a number of cases. In China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma and elsewhere, opposition groups have chosen the Internet as their tool for communication as the traditional national media, freedom of expression is greatly curtailed (Basuki 1998, Eng 1998, Maung Win 1998, Zedir 2000). Accordingly, the ICTs can work as a global megaphone for voices that otherwise would not have been heard in the public sphere, a sphere nowadays more or less dominated by commercial global mass media network with little interests in marginalized voices (Johannessen & Themnér, 1998). HRW (1996) concludes "it is precisely because the Internet's potential for increasing the political participation of the disfranchised that governments are seeking to control it (HRW 1996 vol. 8:7).

Acknowledging a democratic potential in an existing democratic society capable of providing the necessary infrastructure to all its citizens, undeniably raises the question about the destiny of those less fortunate countries and regions, where there doesn't exist a proactive government and/or a political climate that encourage or allows
everyone’s participation in the public debate and the process of governing. What role can the ICTs play in settings where democratic forces outside the governmental structures have no or very little room to act and have no option but to become an insurgency group to pursue their vision of a more democratic society? Does the ICT provide these groups with new and better opportunities and possibilities to inform, communicate, and co-ordinate their struggle for increased democracy? Can the ICTs function as a useful tool in disseminating their political message? These are some of the questions that the author hopes this project will answer.

In order for political actors to operate optimal in this new information thick environment and fully using the openings, requires not only integrated knowledge and understanding of the new technology’s pros and cons, but the information age’s communication climate for political actors. Accordingly, an understanding of public relations, political marketing, direct lobbying, and international relations and how to use mass media as a tool in reaching segments of targeted publics, is important.

Burma was selected as a case country since the Burmese democratic movement based inside Thailand, contains some very interesting examples of democracy insurgency movements that relies heavily on the Internet and various IT based communication activities in order to influence the international community to act on Burma.

1.2 Purpose and objectives
This research project will focus on ICTs’ usefulness as a tool in supporting democratic forces existing not only outside the governmental structure, but as opposing it. The primary question is: can the ICTs function as a useful tool in assisting the Burmese democracy movement in raising international awareness and support for their cause -a free and democratic Burma? Secondly, what ICT- usage and media tactics can be identified as potentially successful when it comes to transmitting the democracy groups’ political message?

The research project objective is to provide the reader with an ample theoretical and factual background in the fields of; political communication in the information age, mass media in the 21st century, and ICT as a tool for political activities.

1.3 The main demarcations
Despite the fact that ICTs in itself does not promote, evoke or sustain democracy, it has been prescribed almost a holy status in the field of democracy. It has been argued that the technology has some inherent traits making it a perfect tool for strengthening and upholding democratic structures and the very building blocks of democracy: free communication and deliberation, and ICTs potential to facilitate the whole process of democratizing knowledge, that is, making large amounts of information available to all at no or very little cost. The Internet is an outstanding medium for disseminating information and access to information is of vital importance for obtaining and upholding a democratic society (Hauge & Loader 1999, Walch 1999). However, citizens’ interest levels in taking an active part in democracy, information and usage gaps in the population, actual infrastructure deficiencies and other factors, makes the real world benefits if not questionable, but at least less apparent.
Ideally this study had included both the Burmese democracy movement inside Burma, and the movement in exile. It would have been very interesting to conduct a study on the entire Burmese democracy movement, that is, the internal and the exile movement’s different media usage. This is however impossible for two reasons. Firstly, Burma is one of the most isolated and closed countries in the world and it is virtually impossible to conduct research inside Burma not risking your interviewee’s well being. Accordingly, a field study has to focus on actors available outside Burma. Secondly, looking into all media usage in two very different settings would have requested much more time and resources than is available for a master thesis. As ICT are of significant importance to the exile movement, it was selected as a study target.

Also, as ICTs are virtually non-existing inside Burma, any kind of hypothetical discussion of ICT potential as a democratizing influence and agent of transition, would be perceived as utterly ignorant, and is thus refrained from. Also, even if it lies close at hand to take on the whole discussion on the ICTs possible democratic influence on the democracy movement itself, this thesis will not. Hence, the thesis will not discuss whether or not the ICT have democratizing spin-off on the movement and its governance structures and decision making processes.

The Burmese democracy movement is wide and dispersed, not only when it comes to geography, but on ideology. There are a number of different groups that all could be said to belong to the democracy movement. Accordingly, they have different communication needs and preferences, and to study them all would be impossible. Focus was thus placed on organizations that could be said to primarily have political goals. Pure social and cultural organizations was thus not contacted during the field study.

It has also been the authors intention to stay clear of any effect-discussion of the ICT. Even though it had been interesting to try to measure the ICTs effectiveness in obtaining the political groups’ goal of raising awareness about Burma, this study will not. The project merely aims at pointing at a phenomena’s existence and some of its characteristics. The receivers of political messages from the Burmese democracy movement was thus not contacted and included in the study.

Due to time and resource constraints, the project’s theoretical background was slimmed down early to focus on describing and understanding the new technology’s pros and cons, the information age’s communication climate for political actors and the Burmese context. Thus leaving out any extensive descriptions of other fields identified as important, such as, public relations, political marketing, direct lobbying, and international relations. The demarcation criteria was influenced by the fact that only a few of the organizations could be said to have any organized lobbying, PR activities etc.

Further, the thesis will not deal with the technical aspects of the ICTs. The phenomena of ICTs are fairly new as the new technology did not reach larger segments of the population in the wealthy part of the world until the early- mid 90’s. Any description of the rapidly changing technology is very likely doomed to soon become outdated.
1.4 Structure of the thesis
The first chapter of thesis, *Introduction - The information age, a world paradigm here to stay*, aims at providing the reader with a basic understanding of the information-thick environment that any actor is wise to learn to understand. The first chapter also provides the reader with information about the ICTs potential as a useful tool both in a democratic setting, but perhaps more importantly, in settings where democratic forces are struggling to restore democracy.

The second chapter, *The Information Age Environment - Opportunities and Challenges for Political Actors*, will provide the reader with an overview of the Information age’s communication climate for political actors, with special attention given to the mass media’s importance in political communication in the 21st century. The chapter also reviews the situation of the resource weak in a commercialized media setting.

The third chapter, *ICTs potential as a tool in political communication*, addresses how ICT can be of use in trying to reach external receivers and as a tool for internal coordinating of the political activities that need to precede any external communication activity.

The fourth chapter will provide the reader with *an introduction to Burma and the political and social situation inside the country*. Special attention is given to the media and press’ situation. It will also give an overview of the democracy movement’s development inside the country and in exile.

The fifth chapter contains a description of the methods used in the study and methodological considerations. The sixth chapter contains *the Results - a tentative map of the potential of ICT*. The chapter focus on presenting information from the interviews done during the field study in Thailand, December 2001- January 2002. The sixth chapter also presents some tentative comments on the research findings and connecting it to the theoretical background. The seventh chapter, *the Discussion - Liberating new actors*, contains apart from a discussion of the studies results’ wider application, some concluding remarks.

1.5 A note from the Author
As can be observed, the author has chosen to refer to the country officially named, Myanmar, as *Burma* and not Myanmar. In 1989, the military regime changed the name of the country along with a series of cities, towns, regions and ethnic groups (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996). The ethnic minorities and the democratic opposition groups do however not recognize the name change. Hence, in respect for the democratically elected Burmese opposition, the author will use the names in use before the junta’s name change in 1989.
The Information age includes a number of societal components. However, the following chapter is to direct the attention to the Information age’s communication climate for political actors, with special attention given to the mass media’s importance in political communication in the 21st century. Mass media, ever since coming into existence, have held a very central role in political communication, especially when targeting large groups (Hadenius & Weibull 1999 McNair 1999, Strömbäck 2000). Today, mass media is the prime source for political information (McNair 1999). Hence, learning to understand today’s media and by which rules it operates and is run by, is a significant advantage when trying to use it as a communication channel (McNair 1999, Nord 1997). Regardless of the groups’ size and resource situation, targeting international /high- level/ actors, international publics and/or local/regional constituencies in order to create and sustain support for one or several issues, the characteristics of the modern mass media need to be monitored and taken into account.

This chapter will besides reviewing the modern mass media, also look at political communication in commercialized media setting and the communication -situation of resource weak insurgency groups.

2.1 Political communication in the Information age- learning to master media logic!
Political communication have been defined in a number of ways, but central to most definitions is the intent to influence politics (McNair 1999). Brian McNair uses the following all-comprising definition of political communication (McNair 1999:4)
1. all forms of communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objectives;
2. communication addressed to these actors by non-politicians such as voters and newspaper columnists, and
3. communication about these actors and their activities, as contained in news reports, editorials, and other forms of media discussion of politics.

Mass media have, in most societies, a very important function in political communication activities. The media function both as a transmitter of political communication which originates outside the media organization itself, and as a sender of political messages, that is, the message is interpreted and explained by journalists. The role of the media in both respects is crucial (McNair 1999).

Political communication in a democratic society can be viewed as a game, where different actors have different strategies to make the best use of the playing field (Nord 1997). The media has a very central role in the game, not only as a channel for various societal actors, but also as an independent actor (McNair 1999, Nord 1997). The media is active in defining the political reality, that is, “a finished articulation of what really matters in political affairs at any given time (McNair 1999:73). When it
comes to international news and politics, this role is even more apparent, as the audience is left with very few alternative sources.

Evidence provided by media research theories, such as agenda setting theory and cultivation theory, indicates that media has a significant role in the construction of discursive or symbolic clusters that people use to define and understand the world (Lewis 2001), and power over the public agenda in the perspective of identification and acknowledgement of certain issue instead of others (Nord 1997). The media can thus play an important part in setting both the public’s and the political agenda by repeated and intense coverage. McNair (1999) lists the 1984 Ethiopian famine, and the issues of HIV/AIDS as phenomena that the media has put on the societal agenda.

In agenda setting theory the central point is not what views and opinion the individual has per se, but in what areas they have formed opinions. Media’s power over the individual’s political agenda is fairly well established (Nord 1997). In short, controlling media and the information flow, entails partly controlling the public’s agenda in a given society. Communicating successfully in the information age to a large number of people, whether or not it is a political message, demands an understanding of the media’s internal logic and how the media can be made to work in your best interest (McNair 1999).

Politics and communicating politics have like other areas been affected by the structures and processes by the information age (Castells 1998). Castells (1998) even claims that this new format ‘Informational politics’ is entirely dependent on mass media as vehicle and outside the media sphere only political marginality remains for the actor. McNair (1999) seems to agree in that, not understanding the media’s logic and needs will entail difficulties in gaining access for political actors. The technological development of media products and the market’s increased interests and demands on the media organizations have had a definite impact on political actors’ work methods (McNair 1999). Obtaining access to media space is far from easy, and a basic understanding of the media’s work methods, selection criteria and general work situation, is highly advisable.

2.1.1 The information age’s altered media sphere
The expansion of media outlets made possible by cable, satellite and digital technologies, have resulted in an increased competitive pressure on the individual organizations to fill the media product with content (McNair 1999). There is thus an increasing demand for news material, which most political actors are more than happy to help alleviate. Today it has been noted that a “relationship of mutual convenience and interdependence evolve between the politician and the media professional” (McNair 1999:27). The journalist strives to satisfy the public’s hunger for news while the other is trying to maximizing his/her favorable public exposure in the media. So if the later hold important societal information, its a sealed deal

McNair (1999:70) writes “there is much to be gained by learning how the media work- their news values, professional practices and routines- and using this knowledge to present journalists with information in a way, most likely to be accepted and turned into news”. McNair (1999:209) concludes “as political
actors and the media have grown independent on each other, politics has become not only a persuasive but a performance act, in which consideration of style, presentation and marketing are equal to, if not greater importance than, content and substance”.

2.1.2 The information age’s media logic- a commodification of news

Communicating via market oriented mass media in order to render support for one’s political message demands an understanding of the working conditions of mass media in 21st century. One important step entails understanding the media’s economic conditions (McNair 1999, Nord 1997). News organization today have to function on four markets simultaneously, the audience market, the stock market, the advertising market, and the news market (Nord 1997). On the audience market there is a daily competition with other media’s that can be measured by rating surveys and polls. Every media organization is also rated on the stock market, where its stock are valued every day depending on its performances or the market’s expectancies. On top of this, the media organization have to be attractive on the advertisement market, and stay on top on the news market, where information and news is “bought” from central societal actors in the exchange for headlines and media space(Nord 1997).

In general mass media is transforming into a commercially oriented business, where large profit levels are highly valued and the mass media organization is run like any other commercial operation (Newman 1999). Mass media but perhaps primarily television, has in many countries been a stately affair (Hadenius Weibull 1999). Now private alternatives are allowed to enter into almost all media production, with the result of more and more media organizations turning into parts of global media conglomerates. These, media giants often have a portfolio of different media outlets ranging from print press, television, on-line services and etc. Their goal is, nevertheless to make a profit for their share holders around the world. The new economic constraints on media organizations results in somewhat different working environment, such as, the media product needs to be shaped after the market/ the paying public’s demand, financial efficiency at all levels of the organization, and new time constraints, and not to forget, a different journalistic role.

McManus concludes that news evaluation is a complex process and a mix of economic and journalistic considerations, but that economic considerations are determining, hence rendering the economic considerations precedence over the journalistic. “News is not primarily a picture of reality, but is seen as a commodity like any, that is adapted to the market’s demands” (Nord 1997:69). What the market wants and is willing to pay for is the governing factor for the profit oriented media organization. The journalist’s work is partly being reshaped into a producer of sellable goods, that is news articles, television spots and other media products (McNair 1999). The journalist is partly being asked to fill the markets needs, regardless if it is a brainless want/need or not. Also, the increased competition between different media outlets have placed pure economic considerations centrally in the news production process, thus introducing new conditions on the journalists to be efficient and generate a profit (Nord 1997). The number of readers, listeners and viewers decides the
mediums attractiveness and value at that market. The media product has to be produced in the cheapest possible way, without loosing the customer.

Time has always been a factor in at least news oriented media outlets. Today all large media organizations and news agencies are more or less complex multimedia organizations, dependent on the new technology for delivering their product, print, audio and television news and on-line services 24 hours a day (Boyd-Barrett 1998). Being fast and being first is a commercial advantage, and time is thus money. New technology making the 24-hour day possible, introduces new time constraints on the journalist’s work methods. It effectively diminishes the time spent on complex issues, double checking of sources and doing in-depth analysis.

The hunt for financial efficiency at all levels of the organization, puts new constraints on journalist to keep down the costs. As a result, journalists have not only formed official and unofficial alliances to government, business, civil society organizations, interests groups and so on, but grown dependent on the information that these actors are willing to give/feed them (McNair 1999). “With a little cynicism, one could say that there is a hushed-up symbiosis between the journalism industry and public relations. Modern journalism could not survive without the raw material supplied to it, press releases, media events, interviews, background material, etc.- work which Oscar Gandy (1982) aptly calls ‘information subsidies’. PR and other information activities lower the media’s costs in obtaining information, and in return various organizations get their message through in publicity” (Loustarinen 2002:21).

As, big corporate organization is heavily involved in the media industry; a pro-corporate slot is a convenient position for a media organization to adopt (Lewis 2001). Lewis (2001) also argues that media consistently present support for the elite interests and excludes popular opinion when it contradicts the powerful interests, especially when left leaning. In 1988 Chomsky and Heman created a much criticized propaganda model which traced the routes by which money and power are able to filter what information and news to fit the commercialized market. The process often ended up marginalizing dissent but giving space to the government and dominant private interests to spread their message to the public (Loustarinen 2002). In short, what Lazarsfelt & Merton wrote in 1948 is perhaps even more valid; “Big business finances the production and the distribution of mass media. And all intent aside, he who pays the piper generally calls the tune” (Nord 1997:134).

This also results in a different global media setting, as most larger media organizations are located in the Western hemisphere. The altered media sphere, where the larger western news agencies dominates the international news environment and sets the parameters for defining the exceptional and significant all over the world, that is, defines what is news, needs to be recognized (Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen 1998). However, modern western journalism is still diversified and many discourses and interest compete. This means that a well-organized and systematic PR and information agent could obtain “an influential and elevated position as a source, with the ability to frequently, and using its
own concepts, frame interpretations of history, the present situation and future” (Loustarinen 2002:21).

It should however be acknowledged that non-governmental, non-profit media organizations still exist apart from government subsidized public service organizations. A number of alternative non-profit media outlets, such as, daily newspapers, journals, magazines can be located on the Internet. Even if international media scene is dominated by profit hungry media conglomerates (Giffard 1998); there are at least one large non-profit international news agency – the Inter Press Service (IPS). Their business idea is to cover the broader and more complex issues raised in a global setting, giving in-depth background analysis and promote free communication and professional flow of information in the developing countries. IPS tries giving a voice to those who traditionally have been marginalized by main stream media and seldom covered, as the later has increasingly become geared towards entertainment, and crises and scandals-coverage (Giffard 1998).

2.1.3 Working the opinion- the task of manufacturing events and news…and support

The commercial media setting provides the resource rich actors with some excellent opportunities in reaching its audience via the media, as media space can be bought either directly or via manufactured events and promotional activities directed towards journalists (McNair 1999). As media is a prime vehicle for communication to the voter/consumers, a major industry has evolved to assist political actors in getting their message across through the media (Newman 1999). In order to occupy the media, resource rich actors hire media consultants and media professionals, individuals who for a living feed the journalists and media with the buyers’ preferred image of the world. The public relations function has thus become a necessary dimension of the modern political process in the twentieth century (McNair 1999, McNair and Peiczka 1996).

There are new conditions for reaching, creating and constructing opinions in a strictly commercialized media setting and it spells out: marketing/campaigning, feeding journalist and media with the right material and knowing what that is (Newman 1999). There are four major media vehicles for paid advertising and channels to communicate with the receiver segments: Television, radio, newspapers and magazines (Newman 1999). Most people today are so time starved that information must be delivered in short, discrete sound bites if it is to be noticed and processed by the receiver, and television is an expensive but often suitable medium. Each medium does however play a slightly different strategic role in an overall promotional strategy (Newman 1999).

However, the effectiveness of political advertising and political communication coming directly from the political actor will always be limited (McNair 1999). The listener, viewer, reader will easily be able to distance him/herself from the propaganda/ message. Therefore political actors have much to gain by having the media appear as the as the sender. Gaining access to independent media, a more credible sender, is however both time and resource demanding as it
requires a more or less professional apparatus of public relations advisers to be successful (McNair 1999).

The new commercial media environment, does however provide both resource rich and resource weak actors with some excellent opportunity in influencing the media, by taking advantage of the journalists’ trying economic constraints and the media’s need to up-hold an image independence and objectivity. McNair (1999:159) writes “media organizations have their own institutional interests to pursue, which include being seen to be independent and objective and, in most cases, competitive and profitable. These imperatives create opportunities for non-elite groups to gain access to mainstream media”. This situation could be very valuable for political actors with little resources for direct lobbying and expensive political public relations activities, if used wisely. Wise use, entails responding to the media’s organizational and production demands, cultivating contacts and above all establish the group as a source of reliable information. Loustarinen (2002) argues that the main factor for successful information activities or propaganda is to adapt to an open and heterogeneous media system and fully understand the source system of journalism, news criteria and generic conventions. “It is important to attain a position as something readily at hand and available, to become a information source that is trusted and relied upon, to understand the interest and differences of the various media on the basis of their product differentiation, and to understand and make use of journalistic writing styles and work routines so that the message has the right timing and is given an eventful, visual, personalized, concise, slogan-like and drama-filled format. The diversity and immense scale of journalism means only that one’s message must be modified to suit different generic formats and the frequency of its repetition must be high enough. Changes in the reception of mass communication must be grasped fast, preferably in advance” (Loustarinen 2002:21).

In short, “the group or source must cultivate dependence, through generating newsworthiness, which requires an understanding of what constitutes newsvalues” (McNair 1999:160). The level of newsworthiness is partly dependent on the groups policy position and how it deviates from prevailing social norms or the opposition.

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The presented picture of commercial interests, new media logic, time and the pure manufacturing of events in order to gain the media’s attention does give some hints on how to play the media. Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (1998) concludes: the global media industries have been undergoing a process of concentration, deregulation, privatization and commercialization to a wholly unprecedented degree. However for more than 99,99% of the worlds population access to mass audiences is a extremely remote likelihood, “the proclaimed universality of the Internet notwithstanding” (Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen 1998:11). Newman (1999) enthusiastically states: the Internet can function as a direct marketing tool with a two-way flow and ICTs can greatly facilitate the entire process, interaction between campaign organization and
interested groups, such as volunteers and fund-raisers. “the Internet can level the playing field for third party and poorly funded challenges” (Newman 1999:65).

2.2 Insurgency, freedom fighters and cyber warfare
Currently there are a number of groups struggling for democracy, autonomy and/or improved civil and political rights using a variety of different methods. Many groups regard themselves as freedom fighters or revolutionaries acting on behalf of the people. Frequently labeled as “terrorists” by their opponents and sometimes perhaps rightly so, as some groups continue to apply terrorist tactics to deliver a political message, that is, bombing, assassinations, kidnappings, and hostage-taking, actions that in most cases have no or very little military significance (McNair 1999).

Small and resource weak groups that are not allowed space in the ordinary communication channels in a given society, often find themselves in a difficult situation to spread information about their issues of concern (McNair 1999). These groups have one opportunity in creating a crises in society and thus provoking some sort of counter-reaction on their claims. Heradstveit & Bjørgo (1992) calls this tactic to create chaos in the combated society- the crises maximization tactic.

As terrorism very seldom tries to exterminate the enemy literally, terrorism has a role to play as propaganda or rhetoric. An act of terrorism is in a way a communication act (Heradstveit & Bjørgo 1992). Terrorism can therefore also be seen as a media management strategy adopted by groups whose members feel excluded from the political discourse. As Western media all too often grant space for events that are abnormal, unusual, new, disruptive, and violent, this tactic can be quite successful (McNair 1999). Media criteria for news is that the incident has to be surprising, unusual, conflict ridden, dramatic and violent, and preferably connected to a well-know individual or group (Heradstveit & Bjørgo 1992). It’s in the mass media’s nature to cover stories containing one or more of the listed criteria. If an individual/group can create an event that is a combination of these criteria, they can be fairly sure of receiving media’s attention (Heradstveit & Bjørgo 1992, McNair 1999). The terrorist groups often provide the journalist with not only drama, but spectacular visual material- two basics in assessing a story’s news-worthiness. Accordingly, by using force these groups gain access to the main stream media’s news-making process at a very low cost.

However, it should be firmly noted that even though these groups meet the requirements of modern news production, it seldom bestows the groups with legitimacy (Heradstveit & Bjørgo 1992, McNair 1999). They may get media space, but seldom any room to explain their extraordinary actions, thus failing to create a sympathetic viewer, listener, reader to the cause.

Some insurgency groups have since long laid down their weapons, despite having started out as an armed insurgency group. These insurgency groups have continued their struggle using a mixture of non-violent methods. The gun has been exchanged for the pen and/or the keyboard, a modem, a web site, a chat group, an electronic newsletter, international networking and lobbying, mass media strategies, information campaigns, sanctions and international boycotts. These groups, perhaps even more so
than the terrorist groups, are in desperate need of keeping the media’s passing attention to spread their political message to a mass audience- it is their only way to collect the moral rewards for using non-violent methods.

These non-violent insurgency groups and freedom fighters are on the margins of political main stream media and have to compete alongside with more established and resource -strong political actors for space in the public sphere. Most of the times these groups do not have access to the financial resources and thus the components that basically can ensure media-space: media strategists, qualified and creative personnel in advertisement, and public relations (McNair 1999). Nevertheless, these organizations have to learn how to understand and play the 21-century’s mass media game and how to use the media as a channel without paying commercial rates. ICTs can potentially assists these groups in a number of ways.

Regardless of the scientific correctness, a number of groups fighting for democratic change in their countries have made the assessment that an active IT- strategy could work for them. Democratic insurgency groups all over the world have decided to try to make IT work for them in distributing information about their situation. Groups in Chiapas, Mexico, East Timor, Burma and Malaysia, to mention a few, have made the decision to try to make the Internet work for them (Eng 1998, Khin Maung Win 1998, Basuki 1998, Wang Lay Kim 1998).
3. The ICT’s potential as a tool in political communication

The new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) which includes electronic mail, the world wide web, regional/local nets and local inra- nets, share many characteristics. But most importantly they are designed to handle large amounts of information quickly and inexpensively; to facilitate computer- mediated communication and have a potential for global reach- all extremely important for the actors that cannot afford expensive lobby consultants.

This chapter will first give a short and basic introduction to the different ICTs- Information Communication Technologies widely used. The introduction will be followed by a review of the ICT’s traits facilitating a group’s struggle for social change- The ICT potential as a tool for social change . The next section will describe the ICT’s usefulness from a practical point of view and discuss the ICT’s potential as a toolbox in political activities/ communication. The section- The ICT’s and effect- Does it work?, will give some short comments on the ICT potential impact and effects. The chapter will be finished off with a section discussing the ICT’s downsides- The ICTs’ possible drawbacks as a tool in communicating politics.

3.1 Basic Information Communication Technologies

Basic ICTs consist a number of hardware and software components, all necessary to take full advantage of the ICTs potential. This section will however only focus on the software and the activities made possible by the applications.

Every medium is guided by its own internal logic. It’s structure guides and decides the medium’s communication opportunities and its limits (Dahlgren in Åkerström 60-70ff 1999). All communication done via ICTs, also labeled as computer mediated communication (CMC), such as, email, chat/Messenger, discussion groups, and Internet, is defined as applications involving human communication and interaction within an on-line environment. All possessing different traits and hence strengths and weaknesses.

3.1.1 Email and chat/Messenger

The different forms of CMC can be categorized into synchronous or asynchronous (Kollock and Smith 1999). Messenger and chat session is an example of synchronous communication, whereas emails are asynchronous. The synchronous or asynchronous nature of the communication process obviously influences the interaction between the participants. A quite indisputable consequence of synchronous communication is the possibility to engage in a dialogue where the text is a result of the participants taking turns in a conversation-like manner, while asyncronic communication would be the electronic equivalence of writing letter.

Messenger is an application where people can have undisturbed, dialogic conversations with one another, whereas chat sessions are public arenas where people, often anonymous users, join and leave the session constantly. Chat session can support several conversations simultaneously.
In addition there are message-boards and news groups where the message can either appear immediately on the board/list, or take a while if the list is moderated. The development of public discussion groups was made possible by so-called news groups. They are often organized hierarchically into different forums, debating a specific topic (Slevin 2000).

3.1.2 The Internet
The Internet, in non-technical terms, is a network of servers and ultimately individual computers connected through either a modem, through fiber optic cables like ADSL and broadband. The individual access the Internet through connecting to a host computer of an Internet service provider (IPS) where they hold an account. The information displayed on the Net is viewed with the help of a browser, a reader of Internet files helping the user to send electronic email, chat, transmit files and automatically load down helper applications when these are needed. The Net’s make up of hyperlinks allows users to wander from one source to another seamlessly, deciding for themselves which information they wish to have transferred to their browser and which information links they would like to skip (Slevin 2000).

The Internet is a free medium in the sense that anyone with a computer, modem and access to a telephone line is, if not invited to participate, at least not excluded from interaction on the global communication arena. Accordingly, the Internet provides room for a multifaceted group of people. One might even talk about a net population, that is, a global group of various on-line actors (Walch 1999).

The medium is guided like other by its own internal logic (Dahlgren in Åkerström 60-70ff 1999). The Internet has primarily five logical structures: a multimedial dimension that is, it can contain both text, sound, images and sensoric stimuli, a hyper-textual dimension, that is, the reader can choose where and what to read in the text in a non-linear manner, a interactive dimension, that is, two-way communication in sometimes real time, a storage dimension, a metaphorical dimension (Dahlgren in Åkerström 60-70ff 1999). The medium’s internal logic determines its optimal use.

A large audience around the world can access information placed on the Internet. The size of the audience is growing every day. In 1995 their were about 26 million Internet users in the world and today latest estimate show that 200 millions communicate, shop, pay their bills and so on, on the Internet (SVD 10082001). Accordingly, if a message posted on the Internet is meant for individuals based in the more well-off part of the world, the potential audience for the message is almost inconceivable. However, it can be argued that the Internet is not truly a global medium, as it does not nearly cover the entire world. The North dominates the global communication arena.

3.2 The ICT potential (for social change) in a international setting
The ICTs' characteristics, that is, its global span, low costs, speed, lack of censorship, and very liberal publishing "guidelines", gives the medium a potential for creating societal change if driven by organized pro-change actors. "Citizen movements, now global as well as national and local, are key drivers in changing societies. They
constitute an evolving form of democratic governance, sometime rivaling the influences of head of state, generals, scientists inventors and multinational corporate executives" (Walch 1999:3). “In a world in which interaction has become increasingly stretched across time and space, the Internet is acting as a catalyst, releasing a pent-up demand for more reciprocal and sophisticated control over the exchange and use of information” (Slevin 2000:47). Activist, using ICT to coordinate, have been the agents of change in a number of recent well covered international demonstrations. The mass protests against the IMF and World Bank meetings in Seattle 1999 and Prague 2000 are examples of these global networks ability to mobilize individuals for societal change (Järgerhorn 2001). Hamelink in Walch (1999:ix) concludes: the Internet has extraordinary potential for human empowerment. The question is whether progressive citizens can mobilize a global civil movement, and take the lead in actions towards a more humane world. “The greatest obstacle in this process is the lethargic majority of uninterested citizens”.

The medium does not automatically induce social change, but it can through its characteristics and internal logic facilitate the process in a number of ways(Walch 1999):

I. **It increases diversity and reduces dependency on a few sources**, through it's liberal culture, inclusive structure and in-expansiveness (Walch 1999). It is significantly less expensive to publicize information using the Internet, than using other media. Hence, smaller networks and individuals are not constrained by budgetary means and are in a sense liberated. The ICTs also makes enormous amount of information readily available even for groups with tight budgets (Truedson 1999, Walch 1999).

Slevin (2000:74) notes, the Internet “blurs the conventional producer/receiver dichotomy. Information flows two-ways, and the Internet users can equally well be producers of information as receivers of it”. “Prior to the development of the Internet most of us were largely invisible to most other people in the world. Internet users, however, have to adapt their activities to a new kind of publicness” (Slevin 2000:181). The interactive qualities of the Internet also create new possibilities for participatory opinion formation (Slevin 2000).

The many news and information services on the Net provides space for a multitude of voices, but that the communication or dissemination of information is often taking place in secluded thought- ghettos, not reaching or effecting a broader public (Åkerström 1999).

II. **It supports openness and transparency** as it makes the public sphere available for more diverse actors and their demand for correct and timely information. As the Internet have few real economic constraints, resource weak and alternative voices and perspective are provided room in this non-censoric environment. More diverse interests are raised and pursued with the help of the internet. As more actors are allowed to contribute to the world information bank, more checks and balances are introduced into the local, regional and international system.
III. It has a potential to shift the locus of control of information. The new ICT:s has a great potential to shift some of the control of the global information flow, from governments and institutions to individuals and interests groups (Sharpiro 1999). In a number of cases, such as the Clinton- Lewinsky- Drudge report, and British Home Secretary’s entanglement with marijuana, the Internet have proven to be a destabilizing force when it comes to controlling information, thus making it increasingly difficult for elite’s/politicians to stop the spread of information that they would have preferred to remain a secret (McNair 1999). The ICT makes it almost impossible for a politician/ central actor to stop the public’s consumption of information that is released on the Internet.

More groups are given an opportunity to form an agenda autonomy, that is ICT provides the user with the freedom to set their own agenda without being censored by media or other institutional gatekeepers (Walch 1999). The new ICTs hence provides those individuals lucky enough to have access to the ICTs a possibility to challenge those powers who used to single handedly control information. This power shift also entails that on-line individuals can seek alternative sources and versions of the “truth”.

IV. It erases geographical constraints. The computer-mediated communication is not inhibited by geographical boundaries. Information travel wide and far at a very low cost all over the world. This is particularly important for groups whose freedom of speech is severely constrained by regional/national authorities or directly in conflict with strong business interests (Trudesson 1999).

V. It has a potential for de-isolation of various interests and human empowerment. The ICTs increase the single individual's access to information regardless of where he or she is located, and facilitate the process of connecting groups with common interests (Walch 1999). Groups with a common goal can easily coordinate their interests and activities with the help of the ICTs. Hence, progressive citizens can mobilize a global civil movement, and take the lead in actions towards change. The greatest obstacle in this process is however the lethargic majority of uninterested citizens (Trudesson 1999, Walch 1999).

VI. It can induce a feeling of de-medialization, that is, the medium creates and supports a feeling of direct contact and interaction. In this type of communication, information and reality is not filtered. "It becomes de-mediated. I am a participant, not a spectator" (Walch 1999:71). The ICTs can facilitate extensive discussion and provide the political actors an opportunity to present more personal and detailed information that is difficult to convey in other media outlets (Newman 1999).

VII. It can reduce the number of blind spots. ICT can provide space for interests and the parts of the world that is of no interest or perhaps even represent conflicting interests, to the mainstream commercial mass media. ICT can help reduce blind spots, that is, areas on the map where commercial media and state media has no or very little coverage (Walch 1999).
VIII. It can facilitate boundary bashing and the bypassing of hierarchy. The ICTs entails a certain amount of disrespect for boundaries and state decrees. ICT can provide individuals and groups at all levels an opportunity to access a wealth of information, communicate freely around common interests and coordinate actions. Hence, the ICT circumvents commercial and state hierarchies. It also has an impact on the organizational communication, as it easily becomes horizontal and cross-organizational (Walch 1999). Naturally, the spread of ICT does not automatically bring down dictatorships, but it can support individuals and groups working for it (Walch 1999).

IX. ICTs could facilitate the establishment of the south-south link, as the costs is so low. The ICTs could with the right support, included people outside the elite circle in the North and the South, and give them an opportunity to be a part of the global information system (Walch 1999). Currently the North is dominating the global information system and one concern is that the ICT use of the North may be replicating the colonization of the South, only this time a electronic. Some elite’s of the south take part of the interaction, but primarily it is a west/North dominated medium (Walch 1999). Some critics claim; “It is easy to see that the Internet is basically a conversation that the north is having with the itself. The vast majority of users, and virtually all regular users are people living in the north, born in the north but working elsewhere, or those from other countries which were educated in the north” (Nes 1999: 40).

3.3 ICTs at work- a particle toolbox for global political communication
The new ICTs are designed to handle a number of activities important to political communication. Different minorities and organizations, such as environmental and human rights organizations, successfully use the Internet to gain more influence and international support (Castells 1998). The ICTs are utilized by an increasing number of social movements in offering alternative information, not provided by commercialized mainstream mass media (Walch 1999). “Pressure groups and other organizations in civil society are exploring computer facilitated communication as a means not only to reach potential supporters and bypass the traditional media filters, but to network with one another, sharing information and resources” (Bryan, Tsagarousianou and Tambini 1998:2).

Davis (1999:12) does however argue against the image of Internet as a equalizing medium between groups. Despite the relatively low capital cost for communication, the resource gap will remain and “resource -rich groups will enjoy a substantial edge”. The resource rich will continue to be able to buy professional help and hence many times end up with a better end-product. The more well-to-do groups are more likely to have Internet sites that are filled with up-dated content, more attractive layout, more interactive elements, multi- media features and technical innovations. Davis (1999: 13) concludes “Power has not shifted to an amorphous group called “the People”. Resource rich groups, that have learnt to take full advantage of the ICTs will only have the chance to reduce their cost of monitoring relevant fields in politics, disseminating information, recruiting and mobilizing members. Thus leaving them
with more money for lobbying and advertising efforts. Nevertheless, even if ICT can not function as a equalizer between different groups, it can still provide new opportunities for groups that otherwise would be excluded.

Even though the ICTs as a toolbox are under exploration, ICTs are already being used in a variety of ways in political work. Most interest groups pursue a combination of inside and outside strategies in their political work, thus trying to both inform, persuade and mobilize individuals for their cause. Outside strategies, that is, efforts designed to shape the public agenda and mobilize public opinion in support for their causes, are extremely important either as a support activity for the inside strategies, that is, direct lobbying towards policy makers, or as the sole method to pursue a certain agenda. “The news media serve a critical link between the group and the mass public” (Davis 1999:3). Ryan (1996) argues, interests groups “uses media as a vehicle for mobilizing support. Organizers are usually aiming at several audiences simultaneously: they want to consolidate membership and active supporters; to reach a more general public and move it from disinterest to sympathy; to show their strength to the powerful players involved , be the government or corporate officials; and finally, to win over the mass media as an audience in its own right” (Davis 1999:3).

Groups, which have close association with governmental agencies are unlikely to pursue an outside strategy to accomplish a specific policy end since the inside one can be just as effective at less cost” (Davis 1999:2). Most interest groups pursue a combination of inside and outside strategies, thus trying to both inform, persuade and mobilize individuals for their cause.

The ICTs have shown to be very useful in the following activities (Walch 1999): for organizing information resources for internal and external use, for information dissemination/ publishing to individuals/groups; to coordinate activities within the organization and among like-minded organizations; for networking and mobilization; for facilitating internal decision making/ strengthening internal democracy, to interact and communicate individually or within networks via member participants list and chat/ ICQ /conference room. The ICTs can also facilitate lobbying efforts- providing supporters with contact information of the individuals/groups to approach, that is, making it easier for individuals to become an active supporter.

I. Organize information
The ICTs, provides the user with excellent opportunities to organize information. Modern computer equipment is built to handle large amounts of information in systems with different levels of access. Not only does it provide sophisticated archive systems, but search tools for the file and archive system that is stored either on the local computer or at a unit that is possible to access from the outside. Text documents, pictures and sound files can both stored and accessed on demand or sent to a large group of people at a low cost (Krause et al 2002, Truedsson 1999).

II. Global information dissemination and publishing
ICTs provides a cost-effective way to quickly distribute press releases and newsletters, letters to the editor and opinion articles to an audience outside the
organizations, as well to the members (Krause et al 2002, Truedsson 1999). Many organizations have thus developed their own news/information service, covering news in their specific field. A growing number of people, at least in Sweden, do use the web to read news and a increasing number of media outlets, produce daily news specifically for the Internet (Liljeström 2000). With time and increased access Liljeström (2000) argue that news sites could a) function as a “alerter” of news, that is, the individuals learns about a event through the news site, and b) contribute to the individual continued knowledge about a specific news. “The ability of the web to break news faster than traditional media outlets gives it a unique offering that will force the major news networks, newspapers, and magazines to tie their operations more intimately to the Internet (Newman 1999:62). Even though creating and sustaining a news service is time consuming and resource- demanding, it can be an effective way of spreading the organization’s news. Liljeström (2000) does however stress the importance of good website management, because if the reader gets used to slow or non-existing up-dates, the reader will most likely choose an alternative news source in the case of larger news events.

III. Coordination
ICTs makes the coordination of activities between and within organizations easier (Walch 1999). Coordination, and mobilization are vital in most political activities and Internet has already proven to be an excellent tool (Truedson 1999, Åkerström1999). ICTs “is a tool that can be used strategically to enhance grassroots organizing and outreach efforts related to political campaigns and public policy issues. It is most effective as a supplement to -- not a substitute for -- traditional organizing and outreach techniques” (Krause et al 2002).

During the last two years, the world have witnessed a number of successful large scale protest activities, all coordinated largely on the Internet: such as, WTO -Seattle in December 1999 gathering 100 000 individuals, World bank - Washington April 2000 gathering 10 000, World Bank -Prague September 2000 gathering 7000-12 000, and last year EU-Gothenburg and G8-Genua gathering large numbers of demonstrators (Jägerhorn 2001). All events gathered large crowds, publicly voicing their concern with the international organizations inability to deal with some of the more negative side effects of globalization (Jägerhorn 2001).

IV. Networking and mobilization
The ICTs have emerged as an excellent tool in networking and global campaigning as it greatly facilitates coordination and mobilization between geographically dispersed groups (Truedson 1999, Walch 1999).

Electronic networks can be divided into two main types: large global permanent networks and temporary campaign networks (Walch 1999). Large permanent global networks are characterized by addressing several broad issues, such as human rights, sustainable development and so on. There are no fixed specific objectives or set time frame for the work and no clause stating that once
objectives are met the network will dissolve itself. These networks contain a vast bank of information allowing for the users to obtain information timely and effectively. The network also functions as a meeting point for a large body of various groups and individuals.

The Association for Progressive Communication (APC) started in 1990, and is one of the largest and well known networks for humanitarian, human rights, peace and sustainable development issues (Walch 1999). Their main objective is to facilitate social change with the help of the increased use and proliferation of ICTs. Other examples of global permanent networks are www.oneworld.net, www.oxfam.org, www.envirolink.org, and www.forumasia.org.

Temporary campaign networks are often smaller in number and created for a specific single-issue. The goal of the network is to obtain the specific goal of the campaign and hence become abundant. The long term objective for the network is hence to obtain the goal and dissolve. The www.napf.org/abolition2000, www.aif.dk/burmakomiteen/index.html, and www.prepcom.org, are all campaign network focusing on creating change in a “small” defined area.

The Internet’s capacity in coordinating international and national movements became widely recognized when the international campaign against landmines (ICBL), was awarded the Nobel Peace Price in 1997 (Truedson 1999, Walch 1999). The ICBL-network managed to organize some 1000 organizations from all over the world, which added the weight necessary to get 122 states to sign the ban- agreement in December 1997. The e-mail and mailing lists were the most important tool. The Internet site also played an important role in communicating information and gathering support from all over the world. Jody Williams, who personally was awarded half of the Nobel Peace price, have stressed how important the Internet was in the campaign and particularly in engaging individuals in the third world (Truedson 1999). Whiteout the ICT’s it is very unlikely that the campaign against landmines could have gained the momentum needed, to reap such success -making the signing a reality(Truedson 1999).

V. Interact/communicating individually or within networks
Traditional mass media, such as newspapers, magazines, TV and radio are often characterized by a traditional sender-receiver model, where the spread of one-way messages is the mode of communication. ICTs, on the other hand are informationally interactive and/or interpersonally communicative (Rasmussen 1996: 126). The medium can hence enhance interaction and be used for two-way as well as one-way communication.

The ICTs provide single individuals opportunity to find, communicate and form coalitions with another individual as well as to a large group. The same individual can also interact and communicate in real-time through various conferences and web-based chat groups. (Walch 1999). "Human interaction increases which can lead to increased productivity through increased and better use of ideas and documentation". (Walch 1999.71). In facilitating two-way communication, the ICTs can also be used in strengthening the organization’s
internal democracy. Consultation rounds via ICT can greatly diminish the problems connected with trying to gather a group of geographically dispersed people.

VI. Source of information
The new technology makes geographical distance of lesser importance when it comes to access of information. The transmission of information and possibility to access the same information from one side of the world to another, makes the medium ideal to be used as information re-disseminator and source of information (Walch 1999, Truedson 1999).

The ICTs can also be used as a substitution for more traditional media. Accordingly, providing alternative news service instead of commercially self-censured or state censured media. ICTs can help underground press overcome state censorship and/or specific ownership’s interests and market economy demands and still reach a large audience. (Walch 1999).

To Summarize- the ICTs offers actors both among democratic forces in Burma and elsewhere some very valuable tools in communicating their message. Naturally, one should be aware of that even the best ICTs mediated information campaigns does not automatically lead to action and lack of information does not necessarily lead to inaction in the targeted segment (Bimber 1998). One should therefore be cautious of having hopes that ICTs can be used as viable tool for moving the general surfers or the ardent Internet activist for that matter, from an inactive to an active state, actively working for one’s cause.

3.4 Significant drawbacks with ICTs
The new information technology does have drawbacks. Like most human inventions the ICT’s can be used for performing a multitude of social good tasks, and still produce less optimal side effects.

A very real drawback is the medium's ability to quickly provide us with insurmountable amounts of information, and thus speed up information overload and information entropy (Bimber 1998). The individual is left to try to identify and critically assess the original source’s agenda and hence the trustworthiness of the information. If the sender’s identity is openly stated the task is seldom problematic. But if the sender’s identity is hidden or not given, problems may arise in evaluating the correctness and usefulness of the information. Sjösted and Stenström (2002) warns for the possibilities to deceive in the information age and argues that the Internet can provide for a new set of forms and tools for deception. Dealing with the abundance of information and sources by effective screening filters can result in missing out on information from new and unexpected information sources and contacts (Bimber 1998, Walch 1999).

This new "world-order" of abundance of information does not only empower individuals and groups, but adds a new form of obstacles of reaching new audiences. The ICT can be used as a tool for individualizing and tailoring information according
to exiting preferences, hence allowing the individual to avoid contact with organizations, individuals, groups, institutions who provide contradictory and incompatible information. The individual can hence more easily create a controlled information flow, where few if any, pieces of information not coherent with already existing values and belief systems are not allowed through (Sharpiro 1999).

3.4.1 Cyber wars - non-violent, aggressive activities
ICTs can unfortunately also support some really damaging activities. There is a growing awareness in cyberspace that the sphere can be used for what could be called aggressive, non-violent fighting. These activities are potential dangers for the organizations relying heavily on ICT in their work, and protective measures are advisable. Walch (1999) list some methods used by keyboard warriors.

Some organizations try to fight their opponents in cyberspace through *coordinated e-mail campaigns*. Experiences in the US do however indicate that the usage of e-mail as a mean of adding pressure on a target individual or group is not optimal. As sending an e-mail does not entail a great deal of effort on part of the sender, e-mail does not have the same impact as for example a written traditional letter or a phone call (Truedson 1999). The Internet should perhaps instead be used for encouraging engaged participants to write a letter or place a call (Truedson 1999).

The activity of *spamming*, that is, sending an extremely large amount of e-mails to a specific in-box, often resulting in the breakdown of the server, is very effective (if the objective is to disable a certain email address (Walch 1999). Serious spamming can go on for a long time, hence severely impairing the victim's ability to communicate globally via the electronic infrastructure.

*Hacking* into the enemy’s server and/or website is another method that can create some real damage for the victim. The hackers can alter content on the server and/or website, and also change the original users password to their own server/web site, thus making it difficult to quickly restore whatever the hackers altered. A relevant example is the group of activists that in 1999 hacked into the Burmese regime’s website, Myanmar.com and changed the content. They also changed their password, thus making it impossible for the regime to reach their own page for a couple of hours.

A *virus attack* can easily be sent through the email and depending on the virus composition great damage can be afflicted upon the receiver. If sending a vicious virus, not only the intended receiver/enemy can be effected, but other affiliated organizations, hence creating chaos in an entire network.
4. Burma - Introduction to political and social situation

Burma, like any other country has had its fair share of both prosperous moments and times of decline. But looking at Burma today it’s easy to draw erroneous conclusions about the country’s history and incorrectly derive that it’s past solely has been filled with tremendous hardship.

Please consult the Appendix for map on Burma, basic facts about Burma and ethnic minority map.

4.1 Independence 1948 - military coup(s)

In the beginning of this century, Burma was one of the most prosperous countries in the Southeast Asia and famous for its rich natural resources (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996). Burma was also the region’s largest exporter of rice (Sholto 1998).

The struggle for independence was lead by Mr. Aung San, today commonly regarded as the father of modern Burma. He managed to assemble and unify the country and its many ethnic minorities enough to negotiate an independence agreement from Great Britain. Sadly, Aung San was murdered shortly before the independence day. Despite the event preceding the independence in 1948, the country was believed to have a bright future ahead. The country had a newly founded democratic system, a widely spread and well-functioning educational system, egalitarian society, food/rice surplus and peace (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996). Burma also had one of the most free press systems in Asia with more than 30 independent daily newspapers (Allot 1994). In short, at independence Burma had many factors speaking in its favor.

Independent Burma also faced formidable problems. Three months after independence the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) went underground and took up arms against the government; the Karen people rebelled because they felt that their interests were being neglected, and the fleeing Chinese Koumintang set up bases in Northern Burma to fight Mao Zedong. The Burmese government also faced serious internal problems (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996). When only a minority supported the prime minister U Nu, he surrendered power to a general, called Ne Win. As a head of provisional caretaker government, Ne Win set out to re-establish law and order. In 1960 general elections were held and U Nu re-emerged as prime minister (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996). Many problems still remained and a number of ethnic groups were greatly dissatisfied. Accordingly, prime minister U Nu opened negotiations with the ethnic leaders in 1962.

In March 1962 Burma were hit by a great tragedy - a military coup led by the general Ne Win (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996). Few probably then anticipated that the military regime would survive and prove to be an indefinite force in shaping Burma for many decades to come. The coup also ended a 14- years long experiment with parliament democracy (Maung Myint 2001). The military coup was explained by the military coup leaders as a necessary and temporary measure to secure the stability and survival
of the Burmese state. The country had become increasingly unstable and in some parts of the country full civil war had been a fact since independence (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996, Maung Myint 2001). In April 1962 the Revolutionary Council announced its policy statement “The Burmese way to socialism: a bizarre mixture of Marxism, xenophobia, nationalist and megalomania” (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996:58), followed later by the launch of a political party, The Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP). Shortly after the coup, students began demanding the restoration of democracy, but was opened fire on and killed (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996). This student uprising would be the first after independence, and to be followed by many more, all ending in the death of great many young people. The tradition of student movement and politically active students was and is however a part of Burma’s history.

Thant Myint- U (2001: 253-254ff) has however argued against the popular picture listing the merits of the country at independence and that the country inexplicably fell behind it’s neighboring countries. “ I would like to point to two colonial legacies, often ignored… The first is a legacy of institutional weaknesses. Simply put, the late nineteenth century, as we have seen, witnessed the collapse of many important early modern political and social institutions. These were then replaced by colonial institutions, unrooted in local society, which were themselves shattered in the aftermath of the Japanese conquest of 1941-41 … Thus Burma at independence faced a weak institutional legacy, a vacuum, which the new war time army was soon able to fill”.

The military regime succeeded in holding on to power all through the 70’s and 80’s. The result of the military rule became truly evident 1987, when the United Nations “awarded” Burma the Least Developed Country- status (Donkers & Nijhuis1996, Maung Myint 2001). In late 1980’s the people’s dissatisfaction with situation grew in strength and an incident of police brutality became the ignition for the democracy movement’s second struggle for independence.

4.1.1 The Press and media situation in Burma: 1948-1988

During the 1950s, Prime minister U Nu maintained a small department called the Press Review Department and its job was to read through newspapers, magazines, books and periodicals, so that the various governmental departments had a chance to respond quickly to issues on the public agenda (Allott 1994). After the coup in March 1962, the Revolutionary Council allowed the free press to continue its work, without interfering for a short period, but in 1963 a much less tolerant line towards the press was introduced. It was announced that all official governmental information would be included in a new publication- the Working People’s Daily (Lok-tha Pyeit-thu Nei zin) (Allott 1994).

The regime soon presented a new Printers’ and Publishers’ Act, stating that all publishers had to register and submit copies of every published book to the Press Security Board (PSB) (Allott 1994, Donkers & Nijhuis 1996). The PSB was assigned to read all published books, periodical, and magazines, and forbid the distribution of unsuitable publications. The new practice that books have to be submitted to the PSB after they have been printed, but before distribution, created a strong pressure on the author to self-censorship as the costs for the publisher to “correct”, (ripp out or ink
sections deemed unsuitable, were high. All materials containing all sort of serious or socially interesting material were thus avoided. In 1964 the press was hit again, as the Council announced that it would "resolve the problem of the ownership of the country’s main newspapers", by nationalizing them, but still allowing them "full freedom of expression within the accepted limits of the Burmese Way to Socialism" (Allott 1994:6). Allot (1994:6) concludes ”thus ended Burma’s free press, a press which in the parliamentary era of the 1950’s had been one of the most free and lively in Asia, with more than thirty daily papers, including six in Chinese and three in English”.

1974 Constitution reads "Every citizen shall have freedom of speech, expression, and publication to the extent that such freedom is not contrary to the interests of the working people and socialism” (Allot 1994:7). 1975 the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs issued a new set of guidelines for authors and publishers in order to further curtail dissident voices and freedom of expression. The Central Registration Board laid down the following principles to be adhered to in scrutinizing political, economic and religious manuscripts, novels, journals and magazines. All material would be scrutinized to see whether or not they contain:

1. anything detrimental to the Burmese Socialist Program;
2. anything detrimental to the ideology of the state;
3. anything detrimental to the socialist economy;
4. anything which might be harmful to national solidarity and unity;
5. anything which might be harmful to security, the rule of law, peace and public order;
6. any incorrect ideas and opinions which do not accord with the times;
7. any descriptions which, though factually correct, are unsuitable because of the time or the circumstances of their writing;
8. any obscene (pornographic) writing;
9. any writing which would encourage crimes and unnatural cruelty and violence;
10. any criticism of a non constructive type of the work of government departments;
11. any libel or slander of any individual

As the new guidelines basically ensured that every written text could be objected to, under one or several of the headings, freedom of expression was curbed even further (Allot 1994). The vague rules left it entirely open to the individual censor to make an arbitrary judgment.

4.2 The second struggle for independence- the uprising
In August and September 1988, Burmese citizens from all walks of life, went into the streets all over the country to protest in peaceful demonstrations against the military regime (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996, Maung Myint 2001). The 1988 mass demonstrations was the peak of a internal democracy movement, mainly led by university students, that had evolved from pockets of dissent (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996, Maung Myint 2001). The core of the movement were university students belonging to various faculties in mainly the Rangoon area. However, the democracy movement grew rapidly and included all parts of society in August (Maung Myint 2001).
Despite massive support coming from both abroad and the Burmese society in general, the movement was brutally beaten down. The military shot at least 3000 individuals, turning the major cities to a virtual blood bath. Approximately, 5000 were jailed and another 12,000 people were forced to flee and immediately leave the country (Maung Myint 2001).

Despite the brutal crackdown, the democratic struggle did not die out. The call for democracy was repeated and the regime curbed and decided to allow general elections in 1990. The 1990 elections resulted in a landslide victory for the opposition led the National Leauge for Democracy (NLD) headed by Aung Sang Suu Kyi (ASSK), the daughter of Aung San (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996, Maung Myint 2001). She had returned to Burma in 1988, after having spend several years abroad. Unexpectedly ASSK, not having been involved in politics prior to her return to Burma, stepped up and shouldered the role as the leader of the democracy movement (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996).

Despite the opposition's overwhelming victory, the junta refused to relinquish power and let the elected Members of Parliament (MPs) take up office. Instead, they responded to the democracy movement’s rightful claim to the power by stepping up their crack- down on democratic forces in the country (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996, Maung Myint 2000). For the past decade the NLD has consistently sought a dialogue with the junta to solve the issue of transition.

4.2.1 The formation of the armed democracy movement

After the massacres in Burma, many intellectuals and student who had played a central role in the organization of the 1988-movement, feared for repercussions and fled to the Thai-Burma border and to Thailand, but also to other neighboring countries. Many students that had fled to the ethnic controlled border areas, began building a military arm of the movement with the help of the minorities that had given them sanctuary. “The ethnic rebels were not prepared for the arrival of so many Burmans. They themselves were suffering a shortage of weapons and ammunitions ... in addition, there was a certain degree of distrust of the newcomers” (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996:68). But after a few weeks of chaos in November 1988, all the underground student organizations established The All Burma Student’s Democratic Front (ABSDF), in the Karen territory, in order to continue the struggle, only this time using arms. The Karens assisted the students struggle with small arms and military training. Other ethnic minorities receiving students helped in a similar way (Maung Myint 2001).

A number of groups set up an umbrella organization called the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB). Its aim was to try to overthrow the military regime and install a democratic government and a federal state (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996). “It was the first political and military covenant between the ethnic minorities and the Burma opposition since U Nu’s unsuccessful attempt in the seventies (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996:69). (See Appendix for member organizations).

4.2.2 The temporary press-freedom of 1988

In the beginning of 1988 signs indicated that the PSB had become more relaxed and even permitted slightly critical work to be published. In March when the pro-
democracy demonstrations had begun, a new openness could be noticed. During the summer several reports were made public stating that the police forces had been responsible for the loss of civilian lives. In late August 1988 several newspapers and magazines stop temporarily as the staff were busy demonstrating. Even the official newspaper stopped publishing for three days and when it reappeared, it was significantly different - they were reporting what was really going on in the country (Maung Myint 2000).

Simultaneously several unofficial news sheets started to appear, bluntly expressing their opinions on the events, showing graphic photographs. This honeymoon period for the Burmese press was however short lived. On September 18, the army seized power once more, only this time calling itself, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). On September 21 the old –styled newspaper Working People’s Daily reappeared, again carrying no real news. The Working People’s Daily, today called The New Light of Myanmar, still exits today carrying little real news (Maung Myint 2000).

After the brief period of press freedom and subsequent crack down, many journalist and writers choose not to go back to the regular media, but to get involved politically and in the upcoming elections. Several journalists, writers and cartoonists were either jailed or dismissed from their jobs. Others were once more incorporated into the military’s propaganda machine (Maung Myint 2000).

4.3 Burma today
Today’s Burma is counting four decades of totalitarian rule and repression of life in all its various forms and shapes. The result of the military rule is truly precarious and the regime’s conduct has by the UN been described as “at war with its own people”. During the junta’s four decades of ruling, they have succeeded in bringing the country to the verge of social and economic bankruptcy, but even more distressing creating one of the world’s most notorious human rights violations records (Amnesty 1999, 2000, Eriksson 1998, HRW 1998, Mya Muang 1995, Sholto 1998). The Burmese people, that is, all indigenous people and the majority ethnic group the Burmans, equally suffers tremendously under the regime’s totalitarian rule (Amnesty 1999, 2000, Donkers & Nijhuis 1996).

Today, 2002, the Burmese people is still being held captive by a military regime, only this time calling itself, State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Except for the elections held 1990, the regime has since it’s appearance on the political arena, made few if any credible attempts to return powers to civilian rule (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996, Sholto 1998) and it remains utterly arrogant and defiant towards all international, bilateral, regional, inter-governmental criticism and UN resolutions to start negotiating with the opposition (Maung Myint 2001).

As a result, neighboring country and perhaps mostly Thailand has reluctantly continued to receive refugees and immigrant, fleeing from forced labor, forced resettlement, political, social, religious and cultural repression. Thailand have tried several times to “solve the problem”, but as deportation and resettlement of refugees
has resulted in fierce international criticism, large groups of Burmese refugees still remain in Thailand (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996).

The Burma’s most distressing situation has gained significant attention from the international community (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996, Maung Myint 2001). Burma and the Burmese people precarious situation has since 1988 rightly been in focus and targeted by supra structures such as the UN and EU, but also by individual countries and international non governmental organizations, NGOs. The international pressure have been somewhat divided, as important actors like ASEAN and China are reluctant to get involved in internal matters (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996, Maung Myint 2001). Maung Myint (2001:1) explains, “the moral admiration for the democracy fighters has, in practice, to compete with commercial interests that give priority to trade benefits”. It should, however, be noted that some countries in ASEAN have openly disputed this order (Maung Myint 2001).

Unfortunately though, putting the limelight on Burma’s human rights violations has not improved the situation, only in greater detail revealed its horrors. The track record for the international community’s efforts to improve the human rights situation in Burma shows nothing but distressing facts. A great amount of reliable sources shows that the human rights situation in Burma is worse today than ever (Amnesty 1999, 2000, Donkers & Nijhuis 1996, HRW 1998, Maung Myint 2001).

It’s widely recognized both within and outside Burma that the country’s long -running problems cannot and will not be solved unless there is thorough political reforms and a dialogue with the ethnic minorities (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996, Sholto 1998, Smith 1994). This necessary process can not start nor flourish under current conditions. “A sustainable process must be founded on mutual will and is depending on all parties being able to meet and negotiate as equals in a spirit of reconciliation and peace” (Aung San Suu Kyi 1995).

Despite the announcement of secret talks between the opposition and the junta made by the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General, Mr. Razali Ismail, no major concrete changes have been noticed. The talks, have for more than a year, been in “a confident building stage” and very little information of the talks content has been presented to the press (Maung Myint 2001). “The junta has thus far been exploiting the so-called talk. Military leaders have repeatedly told their colleagues and diplomats and donors from other countries, particular Japan, that they have been engaging in a dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi, that is on the verge of an historical breakthrough” (Irrawaddy Oct-November 2001:7). As very little has happened since the talk was announced in late 2000, there is reason to believe that the regime is staging the talks to satisfy the international community, and has no intention of ever start a transition process. “The truth is that despite the so-called talks between Aung San Suu Kyi and the SPDC, the repression and outrages for which the junta has been roundly condemned continue unabated” (Irrawaddy Oct-November 2001:7). ASSK was however released from her last house arrest in June 2002 and allowed to take up her political work. How long she will remain free this time is unsure, and whether this small step will be followed by other steps towards transition.
4.3.1 The media situation after the uprising and today

Except print press, the Burmese regime offers radio and TV, which all are integrated in the it’s propaganda machinery, thus only disseminating strictly pro-government information. After the crack –down, the PSB was strengthened and continued censoring in accordance with its previous guidelines. Recent events also made the PSB more sensitive for hidden political message and a blacklist of writers was established in 1988. The blacklist also contains a list of topics that may not be touched upon in non-governmental writings. Allott (1994: 23) lists the following off-limits topics: democracy, human rights, politics, the events of 1988, senior government officials, the BSPP, the Nobel Peace Prize, anything that might bring ASSK in mind, criticism of SLORC or military personnel, immorality, prostitution and any other subject determined unsuitable by the PSB, which basically could be anything.

International news agencies are allowed to hire government- approved local staff and only irregularly are foreign journalist given visas to visit the country short periods of time (Maung Myint 2001). The regime also repeatededly confiscate film and video tapes of foreign and local journalist in order to prevent any uncontrolled news about the situation in the country to reach the outside world (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996). Even foreign journalist outside the country, can expect to be monitored and if writing critically about the regime, he/she can face problems should they ever want to visit Burma (Aung Zaw 2001a ).

Monthly privately owned magazines are one of the more lively and popular media products, mainly because, the national (news) papers more or less obvious propaganda has turned the people towards the magazines. The genre development has also been boosted by the fact that the scrutiny procedures are different and less discouraging for authors. It is less disheartening and time wasting to have a short story rejected than having a full- length novel rejected by the censors. Authors have also learned to work around censorship. Today "the only way for writer to address one or more of the many taboo subjects is through the construction of metaphors and, in resorting to these, she or he can only hope that the veiled meaning will by discerned by the reader, but not by the censor” (Allot 1994:31).

Besides controlling all publications, radio and news media, the regimes also produce and circulate “tailor made propaganda, such as information booklets and film scripts, written by employees of the department of Psychological Warfare and the Military Intelligence” (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996:113).

The very tight censorship and control over the flow of information inside the country, have resulted in strengthening the radio stations being produced and sent from abroad. There are four radio stations which broadcast in Burmese; the British Broadcasting Company (BBC), the Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Asia (RFA)- all known to disseminate reliable information about Burma and the outside world. The Democratic Voice of Burma DVB, which is run by the opposition and dedicated to be of service to the Democracy Movement, focus on news about Burma. Founded in 1992 by the government in exile, it is slowly assuming a role of a independent news organization. As radio is one of the few independent media outlet providing the listener with real information, it is very popular inside Burma. The junta has therefore
several times tried to jam the transmission. The regime also created a law making it illegal to listen to foreign radio services, an act punishable with jail sentence.

Beside the independent radio, independent news can be found in a number of publications run by exile Burmese. The largest monthly journal in English is the Irrawaddy and is well know and respected for its strive for independence. Other publications is the Dawn Journal, and the New Era Journal (Maung Myint 2000).

4.3.2 Information technology inside Burma
As of September 2001, approximately 4000 carefully screened people in Burma had an e-mail account through the only government-owned e-mail service provider (The Irrawaddy no7 2001). The country's first “cyber café” opened in Rangoon in 1999 but it does not yet offer direct access to the Internet, but only a national Intranet (US State Dep. 2000). The Ministry of Defense operates the country's only known Internet server and has begun to offer Internet and email services selectively to a small number of customers, such as, military generals and their associates, some private companies such as members of Myanmar computer entrepreneurs association, hotels and travel tours. The selected few, can access about 860 carefully screened websites on the world wide web.

Accordingly, an ordinary citizen cannot get an email account inside Burma and Internet usage among the general population is basically none existing (BurmaNet 010405). However, there are four or five shops in Rangoon downtown, particularly on Pansoedan Street in Kyuaktadar Township, which give you email service to send or receive messages for Kyat 300 (US $ 0.6) for one-time use either for sending or receiving. These shops are under strict surveillance by the military intelligence.

Today there a few websites on the Internet that is run by Burmese publishers, making Burmese monthly magazines and weekly journals available to overseas Burmese. The Burmese editors of these on-line publications, can however not visit their own website on the world wide web (Ko Thet 2001). They send their material to Bagan Cyber Tech, a IT company with close ties to the regime, who then scrutinize all material before up-loading it into the Internet (Ko Thet 2001). “(T)he reason why the government allows these websites to exist is that they see them as ‘Window dressing’ and thus as good publicity for them” (Ko Thet 2001:22).

The Burmese military regime is aware that the Internet is used by pro-democracy activists and their solidarity network abroad as a tool for disseminating information and coordinating campaigns. The daily news service, the BurmaNet is distributed all over the world and is an important source of information for the democracy movement. The email list have also been used by different activist groups to coordinate consumer boycotts against companies doing business in Burma. The junta, hence restricts all access to electronic media and in October 1996 as a preventive measure, the regime passed a law, providing jail term of up to 15 years to anyone who imports, uses or possesses a computer modem or fax machine without government permission (Maung Myint 2000, US State Department 2000). In January 2001, the government forbid all online publication related to politics and all that was “directly or indirectly detrimental to the current policies and secret security affairs of the government,” (BurmaNet 01-03-19). The Post and Telecommunications Department
also reserves the right to amend and change regulations on the use of the Internet without prior notice. These measures curtails the opposition’s possibility to use ICT inside the country but hardly the democracy movement in exile, who contrastingly have a relatively high Internet usage.

In order to manage the surveillance of the Net and electronic traffic inside the Burma the military have acquired equipment from Singapore and China to open a information war center to be able to intercept and monitor telephone calls, satellite phones, fax, e-mail, and radio communications (Maung Myint 2000:95). The technology is also being used for protecting the regimes own presence on the Internet. Some of the pro-democracy activists have both the will and the capability to silence the Burmese military propaganda on the Internet, by hacking into the Junta’s official website. The site have been successfully attack on a number of occasions (Maung Myint 2000).

4.4 The democracy movement in Burma and in exile today

The Burmese democracy movement can be divided into two sections: the internal movement led by front figure Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the opposition in exile.

I. Inside Burma: The NLD and the opposition have consistently, since the 1990 election asked the regime to cooperate and commit to a dialogue in order to solve the deadlock. The regime has repeatedly said that any dialogue is dependent on a number of pre-requisites, pre-requisites that keep changing and increasing in numbers (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996). Simultaneously the regime conducts a constant “campaign of harassment and intimidation” in order to wear down the NLD leadership and its support base (Maung Myint 2001:21). ASSK together with the higher NLD leadership have frequently been forced into physical and political isolation through repeated house arrests during the 90’s (Maung Myint 2001). Large number of NLD members and MPs are also being held in police “guest houses”. In 1998, on the regime’s own account, a total number of unwilling guests was 200 NLD MPs and 651 NLD party members.

Through the late 1998 and early 1999, the SPDC organized mass rallies denouncing the NLD and ASSK in each region of the country. The state-controlled media accompanied this strategy with frequently reoccurring reports on NLD supporters who “voluntarily” resigned from the party and virulent personal attacks on ASSK. The junta’s strategy seems to be to terminate the NLD, without formally outlawing it (Maung Myint 2001).

In 1998, the NLD together with a number of opposition parties, set up the Committee Representing the People’s Parliament (CRPP) to represent the people’s parliament until a full session could be assembled. The aim was to fulfill the role of the 1990 elected parliament. The Regime regarded this as an attempt to install a parallel government and consequently launched an intensified suppression campaign against the NLD through the country (Maung Myint 2001).

Maung Myint (2001), writes that unfortunately the regime’s campaigns have had some success. The regime has been very effective in stopping information about the NLDs activities reaching media and other actors outside Burma (Maung Myint 2001:1). Year
2000, the NLD should have celebrated its 12th anniversary, but unfortunately it could not celebrate in “a time when its own survival is in question due to heavy restrictions imposed by the military regime. Indeed, the NLD leadership is struggling hard to keep the decimated party alive” (Maung Myint 2001:27). As the years have passed the NLD party members have been jailed or forced to give up their political activities and the NLD have had to struggled to both keep the internal democracy movement alive and the international community’s interests and attention. Loosing the international actors’ commitment means loosing the party’s political lifeline (Maung Myint 2001).

II. The democracy movement in exile: The fight for democracy inside Burma, is assisted by the democracy movement in exile and with the current situation inside the country, it plays a tremendous important role in keeping the movement vocal and alive.

In 1988 neighboring countries like Thailand and India received a number of fleeing activists (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996). Despite extensive help from the ethnic minority to set up an armed democracy movement in exile, the armed method lost support in mid 90’s as a number of ethnic minorities signed cease-fire agreements with SLORC, thus leaving the remaining fighters under heavier bombardment. Thai authorities hardened attitudes towards the groups’ movements around the border, posed additional difficulties for the ABSDF and other groups (Donkers & Nijhuis 1996, Maung Myint 2001). As a result, it became increasingly difficult to continue an armed struggle and by 1996 the group gradually disintegrated. Many activists did however continue to participate more actively in the non-violent struggle for democracy (Maung Myint 2001).

Today, the democracy movement in exile is found in a number of countries all over the world. Thailand is however, the head quarter for a wide range of dispersed organizations working towards restoring democracy inside Burma. These groups, that could be categorized as political organizations, social and cultural organization, Burmese news organizations/media, together with an international support network, make up “the Movement” or sometimes referred to as “the Revolution”. Today the democracy movement is divided on several issues, and in a multitude of different organizations. But despite their differences on how to organize and work, they do share a common goal- a free democratic Burma.

Despite hardship of exile, the democratic forces have continued to challenge the regime. In 1990, an exile government was established - the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) at the oppositions jungle head quarters at Manerplaw. The NCGUB was immediately recognized by Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB). The establishment of NCGUB was followed by the forming of the National Council of Union of Burma (NCUB), a supreme council for Burma’s democratic forces to work as a interim policy-making body (See Appendix for member organizations). Each year the NCGUB is instrumental in working out strongly-worded resolutions with the help of other UN-missions sympathetic to the Burmese opposition. The NCGUB have an UN service office in New York working at maintaining good contacts with the UN system. The NCGUB plays an important role in keeping the attention focused on Burma (Maung Myint 2001).
More information on the Burmese democracy movement’s various activities and a discussion of the ICT’s potential as an effective working tool in political communication is found in chapter six.

5. Method

The methods for gathering information and analysis used in the study are primarily qualitative, as an understanding of the area of inquiry hardly could be developed through the means of surveys, experiments and other quantitative research methods. The study needed a flexible and explorative research method allowing for a trial and error approach in the field. “Qualitative research is more nonlinear and cyclical. Rather than moving in a straight line, a cyclical research path makes successive passes through steps, sometimes moving backward and sideways before moving on” (Neuman 1991:324).

5.1 Research design

The main objective of the thesis has been to explore; The primary question is: can the ICTs function as a useful tool in assisting the Burmese democracy movement in raising international awareness and support for their cause - a free and democratic Burma? Secondly, what ICT- usage and media tactics can be identified as potentially successful when it comes to transmitting the democracy groups’ political message? The study also aimed at providing the reader with all the necessary background information needed to fully understand, not only the potential of the new ICTs but also the Burmese context in general. To address the issue of providing the reader with ample background information and understanding, extensive literature and Internet studies were conducted in the following fields: the information age’s media logic, political communication, ICT and the situation in Burma and the Burmese democracy movement.

In answering the main objective, a research mix was designed consisting of an on-line survey of the movements Internet- presence, and qualitative in-depth interviews with Burmese advocacy groups based at the Thai- Burma border area targeting international actors. The research design also included a few observation sessions in Thailand.

5.2 Sources of information: on-line survey, interviews and literature studies

The study relies on various primary data, that is, data gather directly and analyzed by the researcher (Neuman 1991), such as: qualitative interviews, an on-line survey on the advocacy groups Internet- presence, and observations conducted in Thailand.

5.2.1 The on-line survey

An on-line survey/review was conducted before the actual field study and had the purpose of equipping the researcher with a general idea of how the Internet was being
used in disseminating information about the situation in Burma and who the senders/advocacy groups were, that is, organizational information. As the field study only would target Thai-based organizations, Thai-based websites were selected for the survey. The review of the Thai-based groups’ net-presence consisted of locating and classifying the sites. The website review was a mini pre study, intended to give the researcher an idea of the general level of technological sophistication.

The Internet was scanned in order to locate Internet sites focusing on Burma and the democracy movement. Search engines and already known Burma sites’ link directory was used as an entry point. The process was finished when no more sites could be found through either channels. Despite that the survey generated a number of well managed and useful websites (informative, updated and easy navigated), kept by organizations mainly in the West, these were not included. Only Internet sites put up by Thai-based organizations were included in the review. As the general level of informational and technical sophistication were low, the sites were only classified as either “active” or “non-active”, that is, had the page been up-dated in the last month or not.

5.2.2 The Interviews

Interviews are well suited for capturing the complexity of a specific phenomena, individuals’ or groups’ perception and understanding of reality (Andersson 1985, Kvale 1997, Trost 1997). Giving the respondents a chance to elaborate openly and unconstrained increases the chances of obtaining a comprehensive picture of the interviewed individual’s understanding of his/her world (Neuman 1991, Weiss 1994). Qualitative interview are useful in: developing detailed descriptions; integrating multiple perspectives; describing processes; giving holistic description, and showing how events are interpreted by participants and on-lookers (Trost 1997, Weiss 1994).

Interviews should not contain questions or deal with areas that the respondent can’t answer or have any information on (Andersson 1985). Therefore, the interviews in the field were qualitative and semi-structured in-depth interviews, in the sense that each interview was preceded by a carefully prepared guide containing a range of topics to be covered and only a few pre-prepared questions (Andersson 1985, Neuman 1991, Trost 1997). The interviews was not standardized, that is, the interviews did only partly contain the same questions and topics, and the questions were often rephrased depending on the interviewee’s level of English. Probes are useful in all interviews, both in building confidence and encouraging the interviewee (Andersson 1985). Probes were diligently used together with a range of various questions following up specific interview statements (Trost 1997). The interviews were however not ethnographic, that is, interviews that are “highly unstructured and done on many separate occasions in long-term fieldwork” (Bernard 1995: 209). Interviews can also vary in the degree of transparency on its true objectives and background (Kvale 1997). Transparency of the study’s true objective and criteria for selection for participation, should always be disclosed if its possible (Andersson 1985). This study was characterized of a complete openness concerning its objectives and all interviewees were told about the studies background and why they had been selected before being interviewed.
The interviewees can be divided into two groups; “expert interviews” whom mostly were individuals with a broad overarching perspective and experience of the democracy movement and understanding of its ICT and media usage; and interviews with organizational representatives of Thai-based groups within the democratic movement. The label, expert, is not be viewed as an expert in a Western sense as a majority lack formal educational background and basically are self taught in the area of expertise. The Interviewees should however be regarded as experts in the exile context, as they do, compared to others in the exile community, possess in-depth knowledge in their respective fields. All together 16 interviews were conducted between early December 2000 and late January 2001. The interviewees targeting political actors, ranged from pure political party members to political organizations pursuing a general political goal of reconciliation, political education and development.

The selection of expert interviewees was based on the notion of maximizing the variation of thoughts and individual knowledge about a certain area of importance to the study. Larsson (2000) labels this selection as a variation- selection. The selection of organizational representatives also included influences of stratified selection, as the author specifically aimed at interviewing representatives from specific groups identified as centrally located in the movement. The author did take measures to ensure what Trost (1997) calls a heterogeneous sample, that is a maximized variation of ideas and perspectives from a of group, in this case the democracy movement and organizations close to it. A number of interviewees were selected mainly by a snowball sample, were new interviewees were recommended by people that had already participated in the study (Neuman 1991).

The selection process was thus influenced by several methods. The various selection processes was however not simultaneously used. Early stages in the field work was influenced by the stratified and variation sample method. But as it grew more difficult to locate individuals readily available in Chiang Mai and Mae Sot a snowball sample was used by necessity.

As doing research in a fairly closed social setting can entail problems in gaining access, many of the early interviewee’s were selected and contacted with the kind help of Peter Halford at Burma Relief Center. The initial contact were taken on email and followed up by a phone call.

Interviewing raises a number of ethical concerns concerning the interviewees’ vulnerability on various levels, but confidentiality should only be offered when the researcher can guarantee it (Andersson 1985, Kvale 1997, Trost 1997). In this study confidentiality was promised to all interviewees as the individuals’ criticisms towards various elements and traditions both within Thailand and within their own movement could cause the individual considerable discomfort.

All together 16 interviews were carried out and all but two interviews were taped and later transcribed by the author. Two interviews were lost on tape due to technical problems. Both interviews were however partly recreated through the interview notes. Being taped can be experienced as uncomfortable (Andersson 1985), and all interviewee’s were asked beforehand, if taping the interview would be all right.
Interviews where the English was of very poor quality were gently edited to preserve its meaning. The editing was done in order to prevent the lost of an entire interview at a later stage when perhaps the memory would not be able to fill in the gaps and make it comprehensible.

Transcribing interviews is an activity far from unproblematic, a fact often forgotten (Kvale 1997, Larsson 200). To make complete justice to the data when transforming the material from one format to another, that is, from voice based data to text based data, includes several obstacles. Kvale concludes (1997:149, author’s translation) “Each transcription from a specific setting to another entails a number of assessments and decisions”. Kvale (1997) argues that one should even address the question of the transcription’s reliability and validity. Kvale (1997) writes that there is no fixed rule for all interviews, but one, to clearly state in the report if the interviews have been edited or not, and in which way.

5.2.3 The observations in Thailand
Rasmussen (1996: 86-87) argues that ethnographic inspired methods are necessary to grasp how technology is being used in their specific contexts. The researcher must “dig deeply into the agents' use of technology either using ethnographic case studies and field visits or social experiments”. A few unstructured observations session were conducted in Thailand at one of the advocacy group’s office. More observation sessions were planed originally, but as languages barrier proved it to be a cumbersome method, the observation sessions were abandoned. The only observation sessions kept for the analysis entailed watching and listening to a group’s reasoning around ICT during a IT training session being held by a IT trainer from England. As the website trainer was English, the session could be followed verbally.

An observer can interact with the observed individual or organization on various levels and choose between a high or low amount of interaction with the situation/individual/group (Neuman 1991). In this particular study the observer role was characterized by a low amount of interaction at the observation session.

5.2.4 The Literature studies
Another important source of information for the project is the data collected in shape of written material from a number of on-line and off-line books, articles, various email news lists, newsletters, and websites.

A number of books covered areas not found in Swedish libraries, accordingly a large number of the material was purchased in Thailand and on-line.

5.3 Data analysis of the material
When analyzing qualitative methods, a theory develops during the data collection process thus making the theory grounded in the data (Neuman 1991). Conceptualization and operationalizing occur at the same time as data collection and preliminary data analysis. Data and theory thus interact throughout the entire process in qualitative data (Neuman 1991). Qualitative data analysis does not only focus on descriptions, but a differentiation and a search for patterns of understanding (Lantz 1993).
The on-line survey, was a mere pre-study aiming at looking at the groups on-line presence and get a general idea of the groups degree of technological sophistication. As only few sites existed, no real analysis was carried out. The sites were only coded as active, that is being in use, or in-active, that is, not in use. To be an active site, the material has to be updated the last month.

When it comes to analyzing qualitative interviews there are a number of ways to proceed but a combination of on-going analysis and “a grand analysis” after having done the last interview can be a suitable method (Trost 1997). Lantz (1993: 74-75) gives the following guidelines for qualitative data analysis:
1. It should endeavor to create a comprehensive and consistent whole.
2. It should strive to continuously create interchanges between the global and the parts or themes of the studied phenomena. The analysis should try to relate to the specific or vague thematic narratives of the interview to the whole.
3. It should search for consistent patterns in the responses in the interview’s different sections. Inconsistencies should be explored as they hint hidden dimensions.
4. It should find and acknowledge the interview’s autonomy, that is, each interview should be understood only on the information available in that interview.
5. Any interpretation of the interview demands that the interviewer has basic knowledge of studied phenomena, thus having reached a basic sensitivity for the studied area.
6. It is not possible to conduct a completely unbiased analysis of an interview.
7. The analysis should through differentiation increase the understanding of the phenomena’s meaning and in a sense be creative. Merely summarizing and presenting the interviews content, does not suffice as an analysis.

Larsson (2000) lists a number of recommendations, such as: sorting the material into groups, themes, categories, sub-groups and so on; noting the size on the group/category; try to locate patterns between the variables in the material; identify plausible conclusions; create metaphors; try to interpret the material with the help of selected theories; and finally create an inner theoretical coherent whole.

Kvale (1997) presents a number of possible concrete procedures for carrying out the analysis by:
1. Concentration of the interview material into a smaller number of central statements
2. Categorization of the interview material into meaningful categories and sub-categories
3. Creating narratives of the interview material
4. Interpreting the interview material with the help of one or many conceptual frames
5. Applying an ad-hoc analysis of the interview material, thus creating and using for the occasion newly invented conceptual frames.

Neuman (1991) divides the process into three phases of working with the material. During the first phase, open coding, the researcher performs an open coding by locating themes and assigns initial codes or labels in a first attempt to condense the mass of information. The researcher identifies and notes critical themes and
statements and highlights important expressions. Open coding entails listing plausible themes and testing them (Neuman 1991). In second phase, the **axial coding**, the researcher tries to make a connection among the themes and elaborates on the concept that the themes represent. The researcher begins to organize the ideas and identifies the axis of key concepts in the analysis (Neuman 1991). In the last phase, **the selective coding**, major themes of the research project are identified. Selective coding involves scanning data and previous codes and looking selectively for cases that illustrate themes and makes comparisons and contrasts after most or all data collection is complete. The researcher begins after having finalized well-developed concepts, to start to organize the overall analysis around several core generalizations or ideas. The researcher reorganizes specific themes identified in earlier coding and elaborates more on major themes (Neuman 1991).

For the study at hand, a combination of on-going analysis and “a grand analysis” after having done the last interview was used. Each interview was transcribed in total immediately after the interview and read through, sometime generating new ideas to coming interviews. If the interview contained particularly interesting information, the section was highlighted and marked on the paper. However, a more thorough and detailed analysis of the interviews was not commenced until well after the field session was completed.

The “grand analysis” was started with reading through all the interviews several times. Interesting sections was marked and given short descriptions in the margin, such as, ICT-history, ICT -usage, mass media usage, media culture and so on. Each interview’s autonomy was also tried to be understood by summarizing each interview in a few main points (5-10), containing both general widely held views and conflicting statements.

The first step, “getting- aquatinted -with- the -material”, was followed by cutting out all the marked sections, assigning them a identification number, and finally grouping them into new theme-groups. Some of the material was left out as it was not enough connected to study’s objective. The remaining material, was placed in theme-groups that was named and renamed several times. Some groups were small and cohesive in the sense there seemed to be a general agreement of the subject’s make up, other groups were more spread out and conflict ridden containing several contradicting statements. Later an A3 was used to show the themes interconnectedness and in some instances linear connection. Later, after having finalized the categories to present the result, full quotes was picked up from the interviews.

### 5.4 Criticism of research design, methodology and sources

In all research, whether you are the reader or the author, a certain skepticism towards the specific methods used is recommended and the study has to critically address the design and methodology's imperfections (Andersson 1985, Neuman 1991). A critical evaluation of the study has to be carried out despite the fact that the researcher can never be viewed as completely objective and neutral in this evaluation. (Wiedersheim-Paul & Eriksson 1990) One has to ask, was the right method chosen considering the study’s objective and practical limitations. Naturally, all methods have its drawbacks,
but combined in a creative research design that uses methods that complement each other, some of these drawbacks can be minimized.

In this study the design used, consisted of a cocktail of qualitative methods: a survey/review, interviews and observations, a fruitful design in the opinion of the author. Relying solely on qualitative methods will always mean opening up to criticism for excluding quantitative methods. However, when critically examining the study at hand, the lack of quantitative data is not the most evident feature, but the difficulties connected to doing research on a isolated country where independent research activities are forbidden and severely punished. Accordingly, regardless of discussing a mixture of methods or a specific method, some very distinct areas of concern can undeniably be identified.

Firstly, there is a problem of gaining access to sources. As Burma is entirely off-limits for independent and critical research (Smith 1995), any research has to be done outside the country with groups/individuals in exile, a destiny not entirely unproblematic. That is, gaining access to groups and individuals in exile living illegally in Thailand entails locating and tracing down fairly mobile individuals.

Secondly, a general scarcity in sources affects the researcher’s ability to assess various primary and secondary sources’ value and credibility in under researched context. Sources often have a motive for presenting the information. Therefore it’s imperative to get access to information about the source’s motives. There are few written independent research articles and books on Burma, both in terms of variety, of the time period covered and origin of the source, available for validating obtained information. Also as the Burmese context is often heavily politicized, trying to determine various sources’ agenda (hidden or not) is imperative, but far from easy. Judging the credibility of statements and facts given to you during interviews, are all but easy, but none the less, absolutely necessary.

Furthermore, a large part of the information available on Burma is often produced by scholars that are non-Burmese, hence probably presenting views influenced by Western culture and value system.

Thirdly, there is undeniably a language and culture barrier in the Burmese context for any researcher from the outside. The interviewer’s gender, body language, gestures, facial expressions, tone are but a few factors that can have and impact on an interview setting (Andersson 1985, Trost 1997) . There are also many different ethnic languages and specific cultural traditions in Burma, making even Burmese people from different ethnic groups noting the differences. As a foreigner, not speaking any of the native languages, and deeply unfamiliar with the cultural codes, large pieces of information is undeniably unavailable. The differences in cultural codes naturally affect the research situation on all levels. Depending on the cultural eyeglasses, the perception of various pieces of information is affected.
5.5 Some critical points concerning specific methods used in the study
The different methods, naturally have both advantages as well as disadvantages. Understanding a method’s drawbacks is best defense for keeping the disadvantages on control. The on-line survey will not be reviewed here as it’s results was omitted from the analysis.

5.5.1 The critical points concerning the interviews
All interviews are affected by various surrounding factors. Andersson (1985) lists four main categories: the interview situation (time, place, other people listening), the interviewer (social characteristics, skills, motivation), the interviewee (social characteristics, ability to answer, willingness to answer, sense of security), and the contents of the interview (degree of difficulty, degree awaken interest, sensitivity).

Kvale (1997:134) lists the following criteria for estimating the quality of an interview:
- The amount of spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant responses presented by the interviewee.
- The shorter questions and the longer answers- the better
- The degree the interviewer makes the interviewee’s responses’ meaning clear during the on-going interview.
- The ideal interview is to a large extent interpreted during the interview and not after.
- The interviewer tries to verify the interpretations of the responses during the on-going interview.
- The interview is standing on it own; communicating on it’s own.

Using the check-list can give an indication of the quality of the interviews and be used as an indicator of how the interview should be valued. Failing to reach the set standards should trigger some assessment of the disadvantages. As for the interviews in the study, the majority were of high quality, using Kvale’s (1997) criteria. Only two could be said to be of poor quality as they contained short and non-detailed answers. Very little information was spontaneously given and it can be suspected that the interviewee did not fully understand all of the questions.

One drawback in using expert interviews is the difficulties in assessing the expert’s expert- background, that is, to fully examine the expert’s education and experience. How did the ‘expert’ receive the information that ultimately constitutes his expert knowledge? In short it can be difficult assessing the expert’s credibility and any hidden agenda. This problem increases when the number of experts in a particular field are limited, and hence to a greater extend is aloud to stand undisputed.

Another important factor in creating a successful interview session is the question of building and sustaining trust and confidence between interviewer and interviewee (Kvale 1997, Lantz, 1993, Larsson 2000). Building trust in the interview situation is intricate, especially in an intercultural setting (Gudykunst & Kim 1996). As only three interviews were conducted with non-Burmese interviewees, it is very likely that a number of intercultural codes, both verbal and non-verbal data, have been lost in the other interviews.
A third prevailing factor in the interviews, is the number of conflicting answers, both in the same session and between various interviews. The existence of contradictory statements that can be found in many interview studies is natural (Kvale 1997, Larsson 2000). “Interview material can be problematic, richly detailed accounts of vividly remembered events are likely to be trustworthy. Nor does apparent inconsistency always demonstrate invalidity. After all people can act in inconsistent ways or maintain inconsistent feelings… Sometimes we can check on the validity of a respondent's account by interviewing other respondents. Occasionally, there are records we can look to for corroboration” (Weiss 1995:150). Larsson argues (2000), as it's not an aim of the qualitative process to eliminate all forms of contradictions, the ambivalence and contradictions often found in qualitative interviews should by no means disturb the research process. The aim should be to describe them instead. A very likely explanation to the many conflicting answers are the many conflicting views and visions for the movement.

5.5.2 Critical points concerning the literature study
The first point the author would like to draw attention to, is concerning literature studies as a method. By using data collected by someone else, one automatically loses control over the research process. One drawback is hence the fact of lost control over the data and its coming into being. When using secondary data in forms of articles, papers on the Internet, the researcher’s possibilities of critically examining the data’s origin is limited. As it stands today, anyone, at any time can publish basically whatever material they want. The lack of supervision and regulatory institutions makes it extremely important to examine the sources and critically review their authenticity and reliability as data. Is the information found on the Internet, that is, the chat groups, e-mail lists independent and trustworthy? And how is that assessed? The individual user has to figure out whose truth is presented and what agenda lies behind the presented information.

One major problem with online documents is their rather unstable character, as they are characterized by being ever changing, sometimes even daily.

5.6 Validity and reliability in qualitative research
The concepts of validity and reliability are originally generated by the more quantitative research traditions. However, the qualitative study’s reliability and validity must be dealt with and should not merely be disregarded as objectives for quantitative data. Validity is often being dealt with by labeling the study as “explorative” thus somehow getting exemption from basic research rules (Lantz 1993). In qualitative research issues of reliability, credibility and relevance are important factors (Trost 1997). Trost (1997) argues that credibility is the largest problem for qualitative studies and it entails that the researcher has to ensure that the data are presented in a transparent way and the analysis are truthful to the study’s basic data. Validity, often explained by the phrase: “are you measuring/studying what you intended?”, should be dealt with continuously throughout the entire research process of qualitative research (Kvale 1997:213).

“The qualitative analysis’s validity is decided by how well the entirety meaning is preserved” (Lantz 1993:72). Lantz (1993:73) argues, “Validity is gained through a
deepened analysis of certain parts of the studied reality and through synthesizing meaningful patterns at a more abstract level. The analysis validity rests on internal subjectivity and theoretical/external validity”. Internal subjectivity is the match between the researcher and the studied individual’s/group’s understanding of a certain phenomena. External/theoretical validity is the connection between the studied phenomena and selected theoretical concepts that are used in the study as analytic tools (Lantz 1993). Kvale (1997) starts out from three classical criteria for truth: correspondence between the research statement and the outside world, coherence and inner logic of the statement, and the pragmatic criteria targeting the statement’s practical consequences.

Discussing the main method used in this particular study and validity, a few points are discussed by Kvale (1997). Validity is based on the correctness of the link between the theoretical starting point and research questions brought forward in the process and the method used in extracting this information. In the interview situation, validity is firmly inter-linked with the interviewees’ degree of truthfulness in their answers and the quality of interviewer’s capabilities as an interviewer. After the interview, the correct and thorough transcription of the interview is important in order to have valid material for the analysis. The analysis’s validity is based not only on the questions being brought forward to the material, but on the consistency of the interpretations and if the inner logic is tenable.

Naturally, the goal has been to have a high degree of validity, reliability and credibility, by ensuring that the data are presented in a transparent way and the analysis is truthful to the collected basic data. The project has accordingly been constantly reviewed and examined both by other Burma scholars, Burmese individuals, and other people experienced in do research in a Burmese context. It should also be noted that the project primarily has been guided and inspired by what Kvale calls pragmatic validity (Kvale 1997:224), that is, the study and it’s results are value by its potential to create and support liberating actions for the people taking part in the study. The study’s value is thus decided by it’s potential to initiate and provoke actions assisting a certain group of societal agents to pursue their fullest potential.
6. Results and analysis  
- a tentative map of the potential of ICT

The project’s objective was to address the question: The primary question is: *can the ICTs function as a useful tool* in assisting the Burmese democracy movement in raising international awareness and support for their cause—a free and democratic Burma? Secondly, what ICT- usage and media tactics can be identified as potentially successful when it comes to transmitting the democracy groups’ political message?

Naturally the question is immensely more complex than what might be given the impression here. First of all, the democracy movement is a large and dispersed set of actors situated both inside Burma and in Thailand, India and several other countries. Consequently, the groups target slightly different audiences and depending on where they operate, they need to use different methods. However, despite the many differences between the organizations making up the movement, they have one objective in common - to raise awareness about the situation in Burma, outside the country itself.

Giving a full and complete account of all these actors’ activities and existing ICTs usage, plus identifying specific potentially successful ICTs usage, is clearly impossible in an MA thesis. Nevertheless, it is the authors firm belief that it is possible to point at a few prominent ways of usage of ICTs and new alternatives to explore, both for the individual organization and the movement in general.

It is clear that ICTs can and already does function as a useful tool in assisting the democracy movement in raising the awareness about the situation in Burma. The interviews were filled with examples of how important ICTs have become since its introduction in the movement in mid 90’s. But perhaps more importantly, the interviews gave some interesting ideas on how to work differently in order to obtain the movement’s joint goal of raising the level of awareness about Burma’s plight.

The following chapter will first focus on describing the ICTs usage development and how ICTs are used today both in internal and external organizational work. The remaining part of the chapter will focus on a potential work area – the independent media - that could be strengthened and given more space to act. A truly independent Burmese media have a potential to reach and develop new channels to an international audience.

It has also been the intention to use as much quotes as possible and let the interviewees’ words and expressions, tell the story.

6.1 The development and introduction of the ICTs in the democracy movement

The democracy movement in exile came into existence through the large-scale exodus after the massacres in 1988. During 1988-89, large numbers of people came to the border areas, but up until 1995 the HQ of the Eastern border was situated inside Burma, at Manerplaw (I.4). In 1995, the movement suffered a huge blow when the
SPDC managed to capture Manerplaw (I.4, 5). Before the fall of Manerplaw, the Burmese democracy movement in exile was predominately a traditional struggle carried out with arms. Communication was focused on troop movements and was carried out with radio equipment and Morse code (I.5).

Loosing Manerplaw, also meant loosing large amount of documents, publications, books, as a lot of the documentation had to be destroyed in order to prevent it from falling into the hands of SPDC (I.4). Only the most important documents were carried over the border and into Thailand. The military defeat at Manerplaw also meant a change of the democracy movement into a more diversified struggle, carrying both non-violent activities as well as a military.

In early-mid 90’s computers and email were introduced to the movement (I. 4,5,7,8).

“ABSDF started using email first. They were the starting point for the movement” (I.4). “Dough Steel the IT-guru introduced the Net to ASDF in 95” (1.8). “Actually I should give credit to Dough Steel. He taught us the computer” (I.7).

Dough Steel, the man who introduced the ICTs to the movement, is mentioned often as both as the initiator of ICT and the founder of the very well known and widely used international web based news service, the BurmaNet.

“Immediately he understand the importance of information technology and the movement. His idea sparked everybody’s interest” (I.7).

Early 90’s Open Society Institute provided the funding and encouraged the use of the then existing DOS-based email.

“OSI has supported us a lot, they give money and support for computers, modems, Internet training, emails” (1.4).

6.2 General ICT usage today

Earlier, ICT’s usefulness in several organizational activities was identified: organizing information, information dissemination and publishing, coordination, network and mobilizing, interacting/communication individually or within networks, and as a tool to search/find web based information sources.

“The NCG and the ABSDF, they might be the first organization that got introduced to computers and email and things like this. But most organizations got introduced at the same time to this new technology. And now all border organizations, all, every organizations now use the Internet to communicate with each other” (I.5).

Today, the ICTs usefulness as an inexpensive tool for communication is undisputed.

“Good command of IT gives the organization advantage and … the organization becomes more communicable … information also can also mean having power for your organization … It has been also important for co-ordination” (I.11).

The ICT are mainly spoken about as a tool for communication, rather than as a tool for distributing and publishing information. The ICT is predominantly appreciated for being inexpensive compared to using the phone, especially when it comes to international phone calls (I. 8, 11, 12, 13, 16). Some organizations have stopped using
the phone, except for local calls, using emails and messenger for all communication outside the city, region, country (I. 12, 13).

The Internet is also a valuable and inexpensive tool for finding information about various issues (I,1 ,5 ,12 ,13 ,14 ).

The ICT is an extremely important tool for exile government, NCGUB. With one minister in Thailand, one minister from India, three living in Washington, one in New York, two advisors living in Canada, one in Vancouver and one in Montreal, the Burmese government is maybe one of the world’s most ICT-dependent. The government, based in NY carries out a number of its duties by using ICT, such as, brainstorming sessions, discussions, consultations, co-ordination and committee work using ICT(1.8).

“Also we have MPs in Thailand, in Bangkok, in Mae Sot. We also have MPs in Australia, in Sydney and we also have an office in Brussels, the EuroBurma office, which is working very closely with us ... we have to link up with all these offices. And the Internet is very useful in terms of consultation and information sharing ...The ICT is used to send out proposition drafts and setting an agenda for a meeting. We first make a draft and then we send out to the participants and then get approval from participants” (I.8).

The NCGUB also gets a lot of email from ordinary Burmese individuals that approach the government on various issues.

Naturally not all groups within the movement use ICT the same way. There seems to be the same differences in usage found in most Western countries, that is, the younger and better educated, are more likely to use the ICT fully.

“Those who are living in the west, or educated in the west they use it a lot, they use the Internet a lot. But those at the border they receive it and they read it but they are more eager to talk on the phone or face to face” (I.8).

Age is a factor, as well as ethnicity. 1.8 talks about ethnic political groups:

“Even though their leader don’t want to touch the computer, they are encouraging the younger generation to learn about it” (I.8).

“Different groups are more or less familiar with computers. Old generation less familiar ... They see an email but don’t think that have to respond right away ...We have to remember the differences and wait. ... and make a follow up phone call. And all important things also send in a fax ”(I.11). I.11 continues “its a generation thing more than a ethnic... Many of the ethnic younger people are very good. But the problem that they are not in the front”.

I.11 explains the reason behind the differences in ICT usage between the Burma groups and the ethnic groups by giving a short summary of the democracy movement’s history. In 1988-89 when the Burmans fled to the border areas, they had no old leaders with them.
“The young ethnic generation they have the same old leadership, which they cannot change ... and some leaders get very threatened by some of the changes” (I.11). “The old ethnic generation have been fighting their whole life and it is very difficult to say to them that they are wrong, for them to understand that this is not going to work ... and that they have to learn new things” (I.11).

Several interviewees also mention that ICT can never replace face-to-face meetings, at least not in an Asian context.

“Face meetings a very very very important especially in the Asian context. According to the Asian political culture you know that the personal friendship and trust is very very important ... Especially with our friends at the border. They are still not completely confident yet with the Internet. Now every leader at the border have a computer, but they are not so keen, you know. They just receive it, you know we share the information with them” (I. 8). I.11, also argues “you still need to meet. An email is not colorful and lively like a person ... in emails it can be difficult to know what to respond to ... so therefore we use colors to mark important questions, that you have to answer. We put it in red, red fonts, so they know (ethnic counterparts) that this important and that they have to respond” (I.11).

The interviews also contain a few visions of how ICT can be used even more, if the financial resources were available and the organization had obtained the necessary skills. I.16 said they, in the future hoped to set up a federal web based newspaper with the help of several other organizations. Another interviewee said that they were hoping to start using the Internet for teleconferencing, thus enabling for geographically dispersed individuals to meet and see each other in real time (I.8).

6.3 Using the ICT as a tool for publishing on-line material -websites etc.

As stated earlier, ICT seems to be viewed primarily as a tool for communication and information searching, rather than as a tool for publishing and disseminating information in a fashionable way, using a website as a channel. Organizational websites are still quite an uncommon phenomena in the Burmese democracy movement. After having taken part of the Irrawaddy’s, a on-line newspaper, statistics on their web-traffic, it seems safe to say that a well run website would not lack an audience.

A couple of organizations are however in the process of establishing a website. Primarily the groups view a website as a tool to communicate to an audience outside the border area.

We want to “use the website to present our own identity and visions so we would like to, how do you say, reach people with our organizational image and political profile. We want to tell people about our ideas and interest. At the same time we want to get their attention and spread our information about our present activities, about how do you say, present opinions and views and political visions for Burma ... to information about what we have done, how we got
involved in Burmese political development over the years, what we have achieved ... At the same, how do you say, we like to launch our own campaign” (I.4). “Website is created for the public relations department. So when we deal with the international community. I mean, the international community should not be confused relating to our movement” (I.5). The organization X is going to get their own website because there are “so many different version about X, which can be confusing for a lot of people ... so many have written about X, but not the X ourselves”(I.12).

Another site, recently established, wants their site to become a reliable source of information for other organizations working in the same field and as a tool for doing campaign work in the future(I.13).

Free Burma Coalition, a US based organization, is mentioned as a model for web-based campaigning and that campaigns should be coordinated with them (I.5). Summing up, a web site is thus seen as a potential platform to present the organization, its political ideas and as a tool for campaigning. The website is also a suitable tool for making information archives available.

Setting up a website is however not only merely a question of getting a URL address and uploading some information, a fact several organizations seems aware of. One group, in the process of setting up their website, stated that the major challenge consisted of:

“find the idea ... How to make attraction to our site for our readers. To make it impressive page for our targeted audience”(I.4). “some people suggested that we can put out one or two pages information and then maybe add later, but we don’t want that. It is bad, because when you look at a web site, any site, and its not good, and there’s nothing helpful and useful or nothing attracting, even if they update it later, they will not come back. So you need to create a good impression fast”(I.4).

The question of keeping the contents constantly up-dated (I.4, 13) and having the resources also to up-date the technical skills for managing the site (I.4, 13), are viewed as problematic.

Another organization in the process of setting up a site, argued that launching websites could result in the opposite of raising awareness of the movements work (I.5).

“If every organization, every small organization set up a web site and when the international community look up on our movement it can create some confusion ... Maybe if every organization have their own website it is good for every organization ... But related to the movement it could be... They should be in line with each other. I mean that every organization’s site’s information should be in line with each other”(I.5).

I.5 also makes a valid point in arguing that the websites should be properly linked to each other.

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Accordingly, the ICT do already play an important role in facilitating the Burmese democracy movement’s work to coordinate, network, communicate individually or within networks, and as a mean to reach on-line sources of information. The current trend, that is, the ICT will play a greater role in producing and publishing information on-line, will provide the political actors with yet another useful tool.

Granted that the movement might not yet use the ICT fully to on-line publishing well researched information in a orderly and fashionable way, and that this avenue might be a very suitable tool for some organizations in raising awareness about Burma. Nevertheless, regardless if the organization establish the most sophisticated organizational website or other on-line publication, it will never render the same credibility as a more neutral sender. Finding and establishing a relationship with an actor, with a solid reputation of being neutral and balanced, is probably an even better option. That is, being a political organization, spreading a political message and speaking in his/her own interests, is always going to be met with some skepticism by most audiences.

Reviewing literature on the subject political communication (see section 2.2), suggests that mainstream media can function as such a sender. Accordingly, independent media could be a very valuable partner in raising international awareness about the situation inside Burma.

Today the mass media is grossly underused as a tool to raise awareness about the situation inside Burma. A Lexus survey done for the year 2000, shows that there were little over 2000 stories on Burma/Myanmar in the US press year 2000. Many of them were duplicates since they originated from the wires. Three topics dominated 2000, the helicopter crash killing several top generals, Luther and Johnny and Gods army, and fighting’s/clashes going on the Burma borders. The NCGUB got had been quoted exactly once, when excepting a award in Canada. ABSDF, also high media profile, two stories out of 2000. One was a significant hit dealing with struggle. The other one, was about a photo exhibit. Shan got 21 stories out of 2000, it was however all about drugs and guns. The Karen got 47 hits, but it was all about Jhonny and Luthor and Gods army. Nothing about the issues that the group fight for. Aung San Suu Kyi, got coverage in 231 out of 2000 stories.

Summing up, working with established media outlets is an under-explored area, which if successfully used, could prove to be a valuable method for the movement. Working towards understanding selected mass media outlets, their needs, work methods, establishing relationships with individual journalists, and establishing an organizational unit ready to cater for the media’s’ needs, can thus be a suitable plan.

Another, and perhaps even more challenging task, is to simultaneously allow and actively support the establishment of an independent Burmese media in exile. It cannot be stressed enough: only if the media is allowed to be truly independent in the word’s most explicit sense, can it function as a credible sender and in the prolongation be of any use to the movement. If the Burmese media organization, in any sense is perceived by the reader/listener/viewer and other local/regional/ international media
outlets as an extended arm or under the direct influence of one or several political interests, its value as a sender is greatly diminished.

This also naturally entails, that Burmese political organizations have approached the Burmese media in the same fashion it would approach the regional or international media.

The following sections will commence with presenting some concrete ideas that arose in some of the interviews on how to improve the political actors’ media performances. More thorough information on how to improve an organization’s media skills can be found in the literature covering the area, and/or through media skills training’s. The remaining part of the chapter will deal with the concept of an independent media in a Burmese context, its history, current status and potential future. The section will summarily deal with some the obstacles that needs to be acknowledged and dealt with when establishing an independent Burmese media.

6.4 Learn to master the international media outlets’ logic
Earlier the information ages’ media logic was shortly presented at length (See section 2.2.2- 2.2.3), but the information can be summarized into: establish yourself as a source, find out what the journalist needs/wants and finally, feed the journalist/media outlet with your tailor made well produced material.

Several interviewees gave ideas on what organizations in the movement should think about when it comes to approaching media:

I. Stop sending out political statements that contains no new information

“meetings, ceremonies, yawn, yawn ... Anniversaries, who cares? I mean that is not going to raise their profile in the international media”. “They don't understand about stories. They are still stuck on this business about statements. But there is nothing to make statements about and nobody cares” (I.15). “What use is a newsletter, which is just a list of statement by this organization. Its just preaching to the converted. Its just beating your own chest or something and show how tough you are to the other opposition organizations” (I.10).

II. Decide on a specific target, such as a newspaper, a journal, a radio station, an organization, etc.

The most often identified target groups is the international community (I. 4, 5, 13). This group is however seldom clearly identified, thus making it difficult to tailor information toward the receiver’s specific needs. The international community basically seems to include everyone outside Thailand /Burma, such as, media, grassroots organizations/activists and Burmese support groups overseas (I. 4, 5).

“Some groups view the Internet kind of magical. And they also assumed that people who were getting it, was also taking it in and using it somehow...they understand how the Internet works and how electronic mail and postings at websites and they understand that. But still, magical or very hopeful. And again, its not just a very clear view of target-action by target-audience, and that is a real problem”.
III. Adopt a pro-active press strategy
Build relationships with strategically important journalists and media outlets. Don’t just wait to be contacted, be the one who initiates the contact (I.15). This also entails monitoring strategically important media, plus analyzing news and trends. It can be valuable “to develop a strategy input to the movement’s leadership”, by monitoring and analyzing the news.

IV. Keep the disseminated information balanced
“You don’t necessarily need to directly criticizes the SPDC in everything you write, when you do news in Burma. You can just give a general description of X and often end up implicitly implying the juntas failure to provide basic services for the people”.

Overuse of strong words and emotive language will make the information be regarded as propaganda and not information, and end up being thrown away.

6.5 The concept of independent Burmese media - The exodus and onwards
Independent media in the Burmese context have had only a couple of short periods where it has been allowed to work in modern time (See section 4.1.1, 4.2.1, 4.3.1). However, the importance of free and independent media was acknowledged during the up-rising. During the demonstrations inside Burma:
“we always listen to the BBC and VOA. Because we would also like to know what happened in other parts of the country. So those news we got from that media only, instead of other communication. So we realized the importance of the media, so as soon as we arrived to the border area, as soon as we could settle in this area, the first office that we established is media and foreign and affairs” (I.11) ... “since that time we need to inform the international community about Burma” (I.11).

Before 1988 there were only news about Burma in the Thai-based papers (I.11). After the exodus a lot of people came out knowing the importance of the media. In 1989 ABSDF started a news service consisting of news about Burma from Thai and Asian newspaper and sent to people around the world (I.8). There was thus a understanding of the need to use media as a tool to spread information about Burma outside the border area. During the mid 90’s the development of Burmese language radio also sparked the interest for independent media. The Burmese language radio started to use stringers from the movement and satellite equipment to report to the radio and in 1995 the opposition movement established the Democratic Voice of Burma. Summing up; the importance of media as an important outlet and tool for spreading information about Burma seems to have been understood ever since the democracy movement came into existence.

Despite media’s acknowledged importance, thought of allowing space for a independent Burmese media has not always been an accepted idea. This is however changing. During the last couple of years interest of establishing a Burmese media has increased, because of several factors;
a) the Burmese political actors were not particularly successful in gaining access to the main stream media scene after the hype of the up-rising faded.

“After 3-4 years (mid- late 90’s) people started to feel that when we make the news, the news-people, they don’t take it... So we started to think about creating our own news agency and develop the news more” (I. 11). “Instead of only having a information committee of the organization people started to work as independent news journalists ... Like Irrawaddy and NDD News agency and the Shan” (I.11). The fact that “a lot of organizations was no longer getting the coverage they wanted”, could perhaps be a factor that a lot of organization is more interested in news today, than a couple of years ago (I.15).

b) the funders were increasingly reluctant to keep putting money into propaganda products.

Around 1999-2000, "I was under the impression anyway that really all the publications, all they were, were propaganda mouthpieces for the groups ... there was kind of a shift, which I think, I can’t say this for sure, but it seems to me that it was funder driven, in a way. Because people started to talk more about that they were reluctant to keep putting their money in the media ... and into propaganda organs” (I, 15).

c) increased motivation for building skills for the future.

“Another thing happened in that two years, well basically just when the talks came about. The emphasis seemed to shift. At the time, it was a real sort of doldrum in the movement. There was a lot of discontent with the old structure. There was a feeling of, -wow, we have been here for a really long time and nothing has happened!, -what is going on? It was sort of grumbling a little bit about leadership and the direction and -we are not getting anywhere and where are we going?... And then came the talks and suddenly there was a new sort of- Wow, it could happen! It was quite surprising actually how quickly that everyone kind of perked up and started to talk about transition. So then of course transition brought a new little bit emphasis on activities that build skills for a future democracy... like a free press .... So that widened that space again a little bit for those ideas to become acceptable, about being an independent journalist” (I.15).

d) it is, thanks to ICT, economically possible to publish and disseminate information.

“It has basically been a new sort of development, which is this thing about news groups and that is basically Internet related development, and that they can put out their news on the email and on a list server... So quite a lot of the ethnic organizations Palung, Lahu and Mon and various others produce a flow of information to come out of the ethnic areas, where otherwise no information was coming from” (I.15). “They are starting to understand that news out of Burma is more valuable than opinions from organizations. And I think that email and the Internet had a lot to do with it and the ease of doing it. You know in the
old days you had to, like if you wanted to run a publication, once it was very difficult to get on the radio, otherwise you had to support the actual infrastructure to have a publication. It was very hard to do that” (I.15).

6.6 Independent media in the Burmese context - opportunities....
Some organization’s seem to understand the opportunities of mass media as a channel, and that a political organization is always perceived as biased and thus less credible(I. 4, 15, 16).

“organization X try to use them to disseminate our information ... It is much better to be used by the media, it is much more credible, more credibility also to have your name in the newspaper. Everyone wants to have their name in the newspaper, gives more credibility. But it is difficult” (I.5).

In short, media is a better and more credible sender, whether you disseminate information to your local constituency or receivers on the other side of the globe.

Supporting independent media could provide isolated groups and areas with a possibility to be heard.

“They can either promote themselves and their organizations and their policies and opinions, which no one is interested in at all, or they can concentrate on bringing out news and information about their area and then make something of it. And if that news is intrinsically newsworthy and well presented it can go somewhere.” (I.15).

In short, the information can go far outside the border area and be picked up by international media outlets (I.10, 15).

Applying a long perspective, there are yet other set of opportunities. Establishing an independent media is also of utmost importance for a future free democratic Burma. The existing media inside Burma have little experience of being free and independent. Transforming the mass media, ready to fulfill its role to critically investigate powerful societal actors, such as elected MPs, authorities and business interests is going to take time. Establishing and getting used to an independent mass media now and not in the middle of transition, can maybe diminish the chaos somewhat.

“you have to understand that the country is going to be lawless to a certain extent in the beginning. First 4-5 years are going to be transition and all that comes with that ... and it is not going to be easy on whoever it is. And there is going to be a lot of interests. You have a choice to either work with them or you work against them and get killed. It is going to be violence and a violent society. And in politics you will have to make deals that you don’t want. Politics is about deals, that is what it’s all about” (I.6).

6.7 ... and obstacles
Trying to create and provide space for independent media in the middle of a struggle for democracy is far from easy, due to many factors. First of all, almost nobody have lived under a democracy with a free press and thus might not understands the press’
important role. The mere fact that the media is on nobodies side, but its reader/listener/viewer can thus be problematic.

“OK, so that is not really their tradition and they not necessarily understand how it works ... What the check and balances are. How it protects the public, protects the individual, protects the government, how it protects the journalist and how it all works and its sort of a balance” (I.15). “These organization (political) doesn’t understand the independent role of the media ... the question is always neutrality, because they(media) are still part of the democratic movement. But a lot is going on whether the journalist should be on the side of the evil arm, or if it should side with democracy... Why should the news not take the organizations statement? We still have to make public about our policies and so, but nobody will take full statement. They will not agree, they will not publish that. So slowly that are also understanding the importance of a free and independent media, and how to make a news release” (I.11). “The debate is more about the neutrality of the independent media. Basically its about whether the media can make a critical report about a movement organization or not - that is the main thing. Some people say - why not? if they do something wrong, why should we not report?. Other organizations, say - that can be true but there is a lot that the SPDC are doing that is doing very bad thing?. So compared to those our mistakes are small. Who’s side are you on?... So that is the debate... the new media can be a sort of check and balance. Because even though the movement is on the side of the people, even though we are doing the good thing. we can do a bad thing. So we should be corrected”. (I.11).

It is also important to “accept that they are in a struggle and that is their motivation” (I.15)... “because they are in a struggle, and this little narrow bubble here on the border, they have their own need for, sort of controlling party lines and what the movement is doing and all of the rest of it. And there should be no threatening voices coming up”. There is a strong political cultural code of “unity for democracy” and that any disagreements should preferable be dealt with after overthrowing the SPDC. “unity is so important ... we must be unified, talk, talk, you know. So, also sacrifice, well we must sacrifice, because it’s the revolution. So it is all revolution. The revolution is the spirit” (I.6).

The political culture or the culture of the revolution will naturally influence an independent media organization’s work.

“they will go so far in being independent, reporting on a wider range of issues, potentially maybe being more critical, but they self censor. Perhaps its probably more about self-censorship than that someone is waiving a big stick over them. Its loyalty to the cause, its loyalty to the groups that they have come out of, its not necessarily that they are going to get wacked by the policy unit or the leadership or whatever” (I.15). Being political active in a organization has literally been the
only way to work for the movement. “You have to have a membership somewhere” (I.15).

The code of loyalty to the movement also entails some pressure to provide space for the political actors messages and media organizations constantly receive information, which they are asked to include in their media product.

“the problem is, its not news. Usually there is no news in the statement.. we get a lot of statements... they don’t understand that its not news” (I.16). I.16 says that there is no direct pressure yet, but they are asked to help to publish the political statements. Others tell the same story.

“They all have the 10th anniversary or 11th anniversary of this or that, and they try us to do a story, but we are interested in a completely different story. We try to do interesting stories and keep our professional standards. We still have to rely on them for information for sure” (I.14). “Everywhere in Thailand and Burma, everyone, all the political groups here are very manipulative ... they all have their own agenda. They all want the government to look really really bad and what they do good, so you have to be very careful and read between the lines what they say to you... you always, always have to think about who is who and what their interests are, what they want, what is their story” (I.14).

Being independent also means being able to critically review the democracy movements actors and their activities. I. 16 says;

“In general I think that there should be some criticism, but its very difficult for us to criticize the movement. Especially the funders working with Burma they are a little bit political and also thing is that we have to rely on the opposition sources. And Burmese opposition is not ready to be criticized. They are not used to it and they are not very open. Its a dilemma to criticize the movement when the SPDC is so much worse. Change will come but slowly. It's the system, the practice, for the especially ethnic resistance, they have conducted an armed struggle for the last 50 years. They also have a very authoritarian structure, rather than a democratic structure. They have some election system, but in the daily management there is really an authoritarian structure. The opposition groups are changing, but the leaders are still in their positions, and they have never been criticized and they never let the people criticize them. So it will be very difficult for the media. Most of the people are also, you know Burma have been under military dictatorship for more than forty years, so many people have no experience in democratic environment and free media”.

Several media personalities witness that there are problems of gaining access to sources at the border, they say: “No” to publishing political non-news statements and/or being too independent or too critical (I.14, 15, 16).
“The problem is that we need to rely on the border sources, so we need to have good relation with all the opposition organizations. Because we don’t have much inside sources” (I.16).

X is afraid to loose the sources if they were too independent and the contacts, that he needed in order to know what was going on (I.16).

However it should be remembered that a political organization’s work methods and ethics is not that different from independent media. One interviewee concludes:

“you are responsible of communicating to you audience to keep them well informed about things that are useful for them and help them make decision about their lives, etc., that is the premises of independent journalism and it is actually still the premises for political activists, that you should speak to your constituency and you have an obligation to be, you know, accurate, give them all the information, and respect their right to make up their own mind” (I.15).

6.8 Existing independent Burmese media outlets

Despite the difficulties there are already a few independent Burmese media outlets. The Irrawaddy, is probably the largest media organization. It started in 1992 and have grown from a small leaflet to a respected independent monthly news-oriented journal, publishing a print edition and a on-line version. Their website also contains archives and other services. (I.4, 14). The web’s preliminary statistics imply that there is a wide audience, interested in reading about Burma. The Irrawaddy goal is to promote democracy and a free press in Burma, and be unaffiliated (I.14).

“It is a good thing that we are not close to any political group. And I think we have and we retain respect. But some of course don’t like what we write, because its too much. Because we are independent, too independent for them”.

The only media who was truly independent is the Irrawaddy. They had done some critical articles about the NCGUB that everybody talked about. But they also had received threats after writing too critically (I.16). “The Irrawaddy, I don’t at all agree with their analysis sometimes, but I totally respect them. They have a agenda, to establish an independent media free from the opposition … the Shan Herald News Agency, who started in 96-97 I think, is trying. And they have started to put out some good material. They are not fully independent, but they are trying… Network for development and democracy’s news group, that are also trying” (1.9).

There is also a growing number of smaller newly established news organizations mushrooming and so- called list servers. List servers are ICT based lists that are open for postings. Several of the news organizations are under development, and some might become fully independent media groups in the future. These organizations are web-based in the sense that they disseminate news and information via email-lists. NDD’s Network media group is also a news organization struggling to become independent despite having started out as a part of a organization with a political agenda (I.15, I.16). According to I.16, Mizzima in India, Shan and Bangladeshi-based Narinjia is good news providers, but they all cover different smaller areas (I.16). Mizzima, an India-based independent news group founded in 1998, is fairly well
established. It provides news and feature services in both English and Burmese via email and fax. It also has a well functioning website which is updated regularly. Mizzima’s aim is to promote awareness on Burma and its current affairs. Its activities are mainly geared towards Indo-Burma issues.

There are also a Shan list server, Shan Herald Agency for News, one Arakan list, one from MLOB (I.2). There is also a Chin information service which is kind of a list server. (See Appendix for map on the ethnic minorities).

The most referred to media channel - the BurmaNet - is however not a Burmese media organization, but a news service, disseminating daily news clippings from the entire world via the email. All 16 interviewees mention the BurmaNet and referred to it as important. BurmaNet is received by a free -of- charge- subscription, but can also be accessed on a website. The BurmaNet consists of people volunteering from different parts of the world in sending in clippings on Burma issues form that country’s newspaper, and press release sent in by various actors inside and outside Burma (I.7). Which information to included into the daily moderated edition, is decided by the editor. The list was established 95-96 and was in the beginning un-moderated, but as the list deteriorated and slowly turned into a platform for personal disputes and slander, the main list became moderated by an editor. The editor have always been a foreigner, which might have helped in establishing its independence from any political or ethnic group. The un-moderated list still exists and is open for anyone to make a posting (I.2, 7).

There are somewhere between 1500-2000 subscribers of the moderated list, all over the world (I.7, 9).

Subscribers consists of a range of “academics politicians, NGO people, Burmese exiles, lots of government people, lots of UN people” (I.9).

Besides being well moderated and generally perceived as a balanced list, the BurmaNet is important for several political groups because of its large and high-level readers. The Burmese groups is increasingly using the BurmaNet as an important tool to get their message across, across the Thai-Burma border and into the big world. Before, the BurmaNet would receive postings from armed opposition groups, that would contain accurate information, but was couched in so much propaganda, it didn’t make it into the moderated version.

“Now, I think that a lot of the groups have become media savvy and you see a lot more postings from Burmese groups” (I.9).“It’s (BurmaNet) a gateway. Because the wire agency they all look at the BurmaNet, the diplomats, all interested people look at BurmaNet. So that is absolutely a gateway. And its true that the information will go further than it used to and they have got a chance”. (I.15) “their message is not going to go everywhere and be picked up everywhere. But I think its safe to say that they do have better chance, with the combination of good training and the electronic media”(I.15). “A lot of media, mainstream media will use BurmaNet ... So if these Burmese news groups can get their news onto the BurmaNet, assuming that they have English capability, then that is also a good start for them to go further... It has to be fairly well written, they are not going to, they
don’t have time to rewrite it and if it's just full of propaganda then they will just cut it out. Obviously the best written stuff will be used the most... let's say the RFA reads BurmaNet and they also like it, then yeah it will go places... It's also interesting that new media helping building old media, the radio” (I.10).

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When answering the question about the ICT’s potential to facilitate the Burmese political organizations work to raise awareness about Burma, some concluding points needs to be made.

First point, ICT can never in itself raise awareness about the distressing situation inside Burma. It can however be a very useful tool to carry out a number of tasks that needs to be done in all political work, such as planing, coordinating, disseminating information material to mass media or other target groups. Planing strategically, prioritizing, producing tailor-made information material, developing or maintaining the skills needed for various activities, implementing and follow up on the activities, is however, always going to be the organization’s responsibility.

Second point, mass media regardless if it is local, regional or international can function as a reluctant, but valuable partner in raising awareness about Burma. The ICTs does not provide any clues or help on how to play the sometimes intricate media game. Nor is the skills needed to play the media game, provided by ICT, but it can facilitate the contact and diminish the cost of staying in touch with strategically important media organizations.

Third point, ICT can function as a valuable tool for new actors to grow and develop. As the costs of producing and publishing information or news on a world wide basis is greatly diminished by the ICTs, such as independent media organizations can enter the scene. ICT makes it possible for resource weak groups, to publish and disseminate media products all over the world. However, these media organizations will need new societal space in order to fulfill its potential as a credible and reliable disseminator of information about Burma. Only, if allowed to become and remain independent form political interests, will the media be truly useful.
7. Discussion - Liberating new actors

Today, there are number of support groups working in various ways to raise awareness about the appalling situation inside Burma. The projects range from traditional fundraising, boycott- campaigns, lobbying towards governments, to mere information campaigns geared towards raising the general awareness about Burma. These groups, together with the Burmese democracy movement inside Burma and in exile, has despite Burma’s inaccessibility managed to awaken empathy in a range of countries. The fact that the movement’s various actors, despite their individual differences, have succeeded in gathering support for a country where practically no aid agencies are working, only a few countries have an embassies, no large media-networks allowed in, and where visiting as a tourist is not encouraged, is truly an achievement.

The achievement becomes even more apparent when the high-level support from governments, regional and international organizations are added to the equation.

In where lies the secret? The use of ICT? Mighty and powerful allies, a strong international network of activists? Or other factors? Naturally there is no singular factor providing a full covering explanation, and surely the truth is a combination of factors and actors, all striving towards the same goal- to protest against the military regime in Burma.

Nevertheless, whatever the details of the large causal chain might be, a few activities are central in all political and informational work. Managing to: organize information, produce, publish and disseminate information, coordinate, network and mobilize, communicate individually or within networks, and finding information, are central actives in spreading a specific message. Regardless of which branch of the movement that is examined, the listed activities are facilitated by the competent use of ICT.

Successful communication is however not only about disseminating information, but sending the right information to the right receiver using the right channel. Communication is also about controlling and protecting the message all the way to the receiver. The part of assuring that the message is not only received properly but also understood and preferably used, gets more difficult as geographical and cultural distances between sender and receiver increases (Gudykunst & Kim 1996). Hence, controlling and assuring a message’s path to successful transmission on a global arena is not always easily and readily done. The work and energy needed to monitor the whole communication chain is to say the least very resource demanding. In short, successful communication is to be seen as a set of directly inter linked parts, where the chain can never be stronger than it’s weakest part.

Clearly, the Burmese democracy movement, both inside and outside Burma have managed to communicate successfully. The situation inside Burma is known and condemned by many all over the world. But many still remain ignorant and the regime is still there. The job is thus not yet finished.
The movement was fairly quick to adopt and use the new information technology (mid 90’s), and many groups have been active users of the ICT for transmitting various messages to an international audience. This is excellent, but more can be done in perfecting the skills in not only making better use of ICT, but using mass media more effectively as re-disseminator better. This entails: a) understanding the mechanism behind gaining access to mass media for non-institutional, non traditional actors. “media organizations have their own institutional interests to pursue, which include being seen to be independent and objective and, in most cases, competitive and profitable. These imperatives create opportunities for non-elite groups to gain access to mainstream media” (McNair 1999:159); b) adopting new media skills; “there is much to be gained by learning how the media work- their news values, professional practices and routines- and using this knowledge to present journalists with information in a way, most likely to be accepted and turned into news” (McNair 1999:70).

Another important factor is to fully understand and realize the difficulties in communicating with larger media organization. But not letting the difficulties stop you. The more actors that perceive a certain channel/receiver as central and important, the more information and communication traffic is directed to it. The difficulties of getting ones information recognized increases the more popular and important the channel/receiver is. For example, sending information to the New York Times, Le Monde, BBC, CNN, VOA and so on, means fierce competition for getting the receiver’s attention. Regional and national media organizations are somewhat easier to access. In short, accessing media in general is very hard, but doable.

Another, more long term project is to actively promote and allow for the development of independent Burmese media outlets. Independent media will introduce a new channel for information about the situation in Burma - a channel that has the potential to be more influential and successful than channels perceived as having a political agenda. The new independent media’s objective will be to provide balanced, neutral and well researched news and information, serving only their journalistic ideals and their readers/listeners/viewers. This might sometimes entail publishing critical information that is viewed as damaging by some individuals/groups, but it can be no other way if the media is going to develop as a real asset. Allowing for a new set of actors to disseminate credible and reliable information is thus not going to be without challenges, but the potential gains most definitely outnumbers any inconveniences on the way.

Supporting the independent media has yet another potential gain in reaching the Burmese people still inside the country. Several interviewees claimed that the foreign Burmese language radio was the preferred medium for people inside Burma when ever they wanted reliable, balanced, neutral news and information about Burma and the outside world. BBC was the most popular, followed by Voice of America, and Radio Free Asia. Democratic Voice of Burma, the opposition’s Oslo- based radio station, was still perceived as a media organization struggling to become independent.

Looking further and into the future of Burma. It is hard to see how Burma, then hopefully a struggling democracy, is going to function properly without independent
media organizations. The mass media and perhaps mainly the radio is going to be an important medium for societal information out in the countryside. Accordingly, Burma is going to need mass media outlets, that people perceive as independent, or else they are just going to continue to listen to foreign radio.

Information and communication technology, can facilitate the work that needs to be done in a number of ways. Today, the ICTs are already being put to use in several areas, helping the democracy movement obtaining its many goals. Whether the usage of ICT are going to be expanded and developed is, like with all technology, going to be up to the individual users.
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### List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSDF</td>
<td>All Burma Students’ Democratic Front</td>
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<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>Association for Progressive Communication</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<td>ASSK</td>
<td>Aung San Suu Kyi</td>
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<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Group</td>
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<td>BRC</td>
<td>Burma Relief Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSPP</td>
<td>Burma Socialist Program Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPB</td>
<td>Communist Party of Burma</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRPP</td>
<td>Committee Representing the People’s Parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAB</td>
<td>Democratic Alliance of Burma</td>
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<td>DVB</td>
<td>Democratic Voice of Burma</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>HRW</td>
<td>Human Rights Watch</td>
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<td>NCGUB</td>
<td>National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma</td>
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<td>NCUB</td>
<td>National Council of the Union of Burma</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non governmental Organization</td>
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<td>NLD</td>
<td>National League for Democracy</td>
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<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Development Aid</td>
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<td>PSB</td>
<td>Press and Security Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>PVO</td>
<td>People’s Volunteer Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLORC</td>
<td>State Peace and order Restoration Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPDC</td>
<td>State Peace and Development Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>VOA</td>
<td>Voice of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World trade organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix

The Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), member organizations
Leaders in brackets

1. The All Burma Muslim Union (ABMU), Tin Maung Thet
2. The All Burma Students’ Democratic Front (ABSDF), Than Khae
3. The All Burma Young Monk’s Union (ABYMU), U Khemmesara
4. The Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), Khine Ray Khine
5. The Chin National Front (CNF), Thomas
6. The Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Burma (CRDB), Tin Maung Win
7. The Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS), Aung Moe Zaw
8. The Karen National Union (KNU), Ba Thin Sein
9. The Lahu National Organization (LNO), Aye Maung
10. The Muslim Liberation Organization (MLO), U Kyaw Hla
11. The National United Front of Arakan/Democratic Party of Arakan (DPA), Aung Sein Tha
12. The Overseas Burma Liberation Front (OBLF), Raymond Thaung
13. The Overseas Karen Organization (OKO), Marshall Haines
14. The Pa-O People’s Liberation Organization (PPLO), Khun Okker
15. The People’s Liberation Front, Aye Saung
16. The People’s Patriotic Party (PPP), Than Zin
17. The Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF), Aung Sa
18. The Shan State Nationalities People’s Liberation Organization (SNPLO), Tar Ka Lae
19. The Wa National Organization (WNO), Maha San

Members of the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB)
1. The Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), established 1988
2. The National Democratic Front (NDF), established 1976
3. The National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), established 1990
4. The National League for Democracy, Liberated Areas (NLD- LA), established 1990?