

From gene pool to meme pool

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Although the new and improved user-driven internet known as Web 2.0 has been with us for a while now, South Africans have been a little slow on the uptake.

Participation in this virtual revolution, which has advertisers worldwide scrambling for online real estate is often hard to gauge. A web tool called a blog aggregator drives traffic to blogs by providing links to these and also shows which ones are most popular.

On amatomu (amatomu.com), a brand new South African blog aggregator, you can view statistics on who's blogging who, what and why. An interesting three-dimensional pie chart in the Trends section shows that South Africans blog most about life, technology and media and marketing. However, when it comes to page impressions, requests for specific subjects, life takes second place to sport.

Amatomu, which means 'reins' in isiZulu lists keo.co.za as South Africa's most-read blog. Since its name provides no clue to its content, I had a look, expecting to find a community of propellor heads extolling the virtues of citizen journalism. Instead I found a website with a banner featuring a manic-looking white male in dire need of an eyebrow wax. Keo.co.za is, according to aforesaid caveman's speech bubble (who is, in fact, controversial rugby writer, Mark Keohane, hence the "keo"): "The home of South African Rugby fans". It is populated by creatures like grootblousmile, Loosehead and Doosdiefdrieduisend. They post comments like: "Wikus is nie bang nie want hy dra blou" and "the BULLS will CRUSH the ‘SADERS like a late harvest Gewürztraminer...". Riveting stuff.

As a member of a family that favours Simon Cowell over Fourie du Preez it is easy for me to forget that rugby is endemic to the DNA of the average white South African male. The terms openside flank, turnover ball and scrummage seldom feature at our dinner table.

On Friday night at the local pub, I was reminded of how fervent the passion is for the game for men with odd-shaped balls. Even the most unassuming patrons had their opinion about who would win which game and which players would eventually be chosen for the South African squad. In public places, the species can be heard bragging about the colour of their blood...blue or green or the ever-popular black and white.

When they venture into hyperspace, the archive of their verbal matings and sparrings with fellow fans provides a fascinating digital ethnography.

Here, Knersboy advises Boerboel on where he might catch the match in the Netherlands. Knersboy provides Boerboel with two venues: an Irish pub which "sometimes had too many stiff old ballies" and an Australian one in den Haag called "kangaroos too".

The degree of intimacy in the exchanges sometimes verges on excruciating. "Grootblousmile" lives in Boksburg. I know this because "Hef", who lives in London, and will be watching the rugby at the Zulus bar (he calls it Vegkop), delights at grootblousmile's misfortune at having had an early morning blackout on Friday morning. He knew about it because he read it on 24.com. Grootblousmile replies that he was not affected because "toe lê ek nog en poep ruik".

To make Hef jealous, Grootblousmile explains how he and his mates do the "Roftus" ritual. First, they pitch their gazebos and unpack the mandatory "braaiers" and cooler boxes. He and his pals even have a "Mobile Satelietskottel", DSTV decoder and TV as well as a generator that they "gaat opslaan om die Tjarks game te kyk wyl ons braai en ‘n knertsie gooi".

So the rigger blogmen display and transmit their memes, bits of cultural information passed on like genes to like-minded individuals across oceans and generations, ensuring their survival through hundreds of playoffs to come.