With the events occurring in the Arab World, the question is being asked about the role of social media in the generation/facilitation of uprisings and revolutions against authoritarian regimes.   Some say that they happened without the aid of the media because the shutting down of Internet communications did not bring the people's resistance to an end.   O thers say the media provided people with a means of communication that made it easy to mobilise action against governments.

In my opinion, the media, like all technological advances that facilitate interaction and communication – from the invention of stone tools and the wheel through to the computer – have a subliminal influence on human behaviour.   And the influence is towards democratic intercourse.   Because technology is shared with all regardless of class, race, religion and all other restricting human institutions, it brings people together.   Take the supermarket for instance: it changed the way people shop.

Instead of waiting for the authority behind a counter to dispense goods, people in a supermarket walk around freely, examine goods and make choices.

It is a freedom we take for granted; we don't recognise it as democracy in practice.

When I went to live in Giyani at the end of 1988, I was among people who had little access to the telephone.   It wasn't thought necessary to provide this rural area with telephone lines and make communication easier for the people.   When the cellphone arrived soon after, the whole situation changed and people now had an individual and freely available means of communication.   They were given independence from government controlled communications. They were given easy access to people in the local area and all over the country.

This is one simple example of the myriad ways in which technology gives rise to people power.

Technology dispenses greater individual freedom and independence. In the more technologically advanced societies, individuals live in an environment that allows for greater self-development.   But some people see individualism as negative.

It is true that everything human has both negative as well as positive aspects.

But to see individualism simply as a matter of selfishness and self-indulgence is to miss its great benefit that outweighs the negative.

It is the acknowledgement of greater and greater individual freedom that keeps the human race advancing towards greater freedom for all.

The individuals who gave us the wheel, the bicycle, the carriage, the car, the aeroplane, the spaceship made it possible for us to travel further and further and the more we travel, the more we learn about our world, our universe and ourselves.

   The recognition in the South African constitution of rights for women, gay people, children, the disabled, people in prisons, is an acknowledgement of the diversity of human individuals.   Pre judice, i.e. discrimination that arises from class, race, religious and other groupings that demand conformity, is banned.

The human being is recognised first
as an individual and second as a member of a group.

The society dispenses justice to the individual, not the Zulu, the Hindu, the rich man.

   And the more technology advances, the more it spreads ideals of democracy: individual endeavour, freedom of choice, freedom of association, freedom of communication , freedom of expression and a spirit of independence.

   Despite the clear demonstration of technology in spreading humanism, people like to cling to the myth that humanism resides in traditional ways and values.   But really, traditions cannot compete with technology.