NOT APATHETIC JUST BEING APPROPRIATE: SINGAPORE'S POLITICAL COMMUNICATION UNDER THE SCRUTINY OF SOCIAL MEDIA

by

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Abstract

Many have proclaimed that social media has changed Singapore's political arena by empowering a range of new voices in the assumed apathetic nation. This thesis addresses two correlated questions: Are Singaporeans apathetic to "politics" in Singapore? How effective is the Singapore government's social media strategies towards engaging with the citizens in the aftermath of the 2011 Singapore General Election?

This thesis examines a few cases where Singaporeans contributed to a wide range of political expressions such as activism work and alternative news sites through social media which changed the power structure that Singapore has. Additionally, the Singapore government's social media strategies to promote policy and party's image has shown certain effectiveness in gaining traction. This thesis also observes the Singapore government's attempt to increase their social media presence and engagement to reach out to its people even in the midst of curbing expression and extending their patriarchal control.

Conclusively, this thesis analyses the Facebook interactions amongst the political candidates in the 2015 Singapore General Election to establish the connection that social media interaction between the candidates and the citizens is imperative and in due course affects the vote count and the traction they get with the citizens.

Preface

This thesis is an original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Clarrie Si Qian.

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Dedication

"In a mad world, only the mad are sane." To my little champion – forever and always

Chapter 1: Introduction

'All I aim to do is to persuade you that the Singapore's government's position is not irrational – that we seek no quarrel with the foreign press when we require them to remember they are observers, not participants, in Singapore's politics.' – Excerpt of an address by Prime Minister Mr. Lee Kuan Yew to the American Society of Newspaper Editors on Thursday, 14 April 1988, in Washington D.C

Observers, not participants, in Singapore's politics – The foreign press are not the only one that are observers. Singaporeans who do not have an official role in politics are often observers much like the foreign press. Without having any direct impact on the policies made in Singapore, its people are often told that their apathy is apparent as Singapore is seen as an illiberal democracy[1]. Singapore has been globally ranked the easiest place to do business for consecutive ten years[2]. Over the past decade, Singapore is the only Asian country with the top AAA sovereign rating from all major credit rating agencies, including S&P, Moody's and Fitch[3]. Singapore ranks high on its national social policies, leading Asia and 11th globally, on the Human Development Index (UN), notably on key measures of education, healthcare, life expectancy, quality of life, personal safety, and housing. How come we do not see an outrage or louder protests coming from its people given the lack of civic engagement and civil liberties? Some have mentioned that the focus on economic prosperity overrides the need for any civil liberty.

I argue that beneath the perceived apathy, Singaporeans are active and interested in politics but mostly expressed in a fashion that is not similar to the West with loud noise riots and protest as they have to navigate around the existing rules and regulations that are set in place to subtly curb alternative opinions.

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[1] Illiberal democracy is a governing system in which, although elections take place, citizens are cut off from knowledge about the activities of those who exercise real power because of the lack of civil liberties.
[2] http://www.todayonline.com/business/singapore-still-easiest-city-do-business-world-bank
[3] http://www.tradingeconomics.com/singapore/rating

Globally, there has been a shift from traditional media to new media over the past two decades. The introduction of new media, such as social media, therefore, reduces the amount of time individuals would spend on existing traditional media. Being a country that is ruled under an alleged soft authoritative system, Singapore's traditional media has often been criticised as the government's loudhailer. How effective is the Singapore government's social media strategies towards engaging with the citizens who have been under traditional media control for the past five decades?

I argue that the Singapore government utilizes social media to their advantage and though with an initial flat-out rejection[4] on viewing media as the fourth estate[5], they had to inevitably embrace social media as the emerging fifth estate[6].

To begin understanding the two correlated questions of this thesis, one needs to comprehend how Singapore's political history has shaped its mediascape[7] or how Singapore's mediascape shaped the political backdrop — a brief history of these two entities and how they entwine to form Singapore's unique political communication process between its leaders and its people. The timeline starting from 1965 maps the key dates for the past 50 years of independence (refer to Appendix A) which allow us to glance into critical dates over the years that have shaped Singaporean's way of voicing out politically.

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[4] In a 1971 speech at the International Press Institute General Assembly in Finland, Singapore's first prime minister said "Freedom of the press, freedom of the news media must be subordinated to the overriding needs of the integrity of Singapore and to the primary purpose of an elected government." http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/lky19710609a.pdf (National Archives of Singapore)

[5] Fourth Estate refers to the news media, especially print journalism or "the press" that watches the first three estate and hold their accountable to the public. (Schultz 1998)

[6] Fifth Estate or Fifth Power represents a new sort of social mass medium which cannot be included within the one-way scope of the media of the fourth power. Fifth Estate constitutes plentiful of 'networked individuals' enabled by the Internet that can hold the other estates accountable. (Dutton 2009)

[7] Mediascape is a term coined by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai as one of the five dimensional 'scapes' projected to explain the differences and disjuncture in the global cultural economy. Singapore's mediascape has a strong and unique governmentality where media users are expected to govern themselves in a balanced manner that is constant with the government's discourses. (Lee 2014)

1.1 Singapore's Political History

Singapore has had the same ruling party for the past 50 years. On 9 August 1965, Singapore separated from Malaysia to become an independent Republic and the Legislative Assembly was renamed Parliament. The People's Actions Party (PAP) has dominated Singapore's politics by clinching power in every general election and performs what scholars have argued as paternalistic politics. (Ho 2000, 437) In 1969, race riots were happening all over Singapore and strong sentiments of discord were growing. A collective effort to mend sentiments of discord and bring racial harmony to the nation was encouraged and preferred. The ruling party has since used the nation's interest to justify the rejection of alternative voices and the extension of paternalistic authority. National interests override individual and personal interests, which set Singapore's culture in place[8].

In 1981, the Worker's Party (WP) broke the 16-year monopoly by gaining its first seat in parliament through a by-election. In 1984, PAP introduced the Non-Constituency Member of Parliament (NCMP) scheme to allow the best loser amongst the opposition to enter the parliament to allow for alternative voices to be heard in parliament but these NCMPs were not allowed to vote for certain bills[9]. Many have said that this scheme was to allow the PAP to retain their power by allowing the public to not vote for the opposition parties and still have them in the parliament albeit without voting power. In

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[8] "an adversarial watch dog of government, goes against our goal of consensus politics, of getting Singaporeans to row as a team." Commented by Goh Chok Tong, Second Prime Minister of Singapore

[9] An opposition candidate (having obtained not less than 15% of the total number of votes in his constituency) polling the highest percentage of votes among losers at the general election and who is declared elected as an NCMP. The NCMP scheme ensures that there will always be a minimum number of opposition Members in Parliament. An NCMP holds his seat for the term of the Parliament. As the name suggests, an NCMP does not represent any constituency. He/she is entitled to vote on all matters, except Supply Bills, Money Bills, and Constitutional amendments, motions of no confidence in the Government and motions on the removal of the President from office. https://www.parliament.gov.sg/publications/n

1988, Group Representation Constituency (GRC)[10] was formed and in 1989, the Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP) [11] was implemented. Much of the plan revolved around converging a national identity and building social cohesion – which justifies the basis of having a monopoly so that policies can be carried out to remedy any problem that arises. With this understanding, the government often voice that the nation's interest comes first and foremost and anyone that has the intention to divide national interests will face persecution.

30 years after the monopoly broke, the Worker's Party secured their first GRC in 2011. If given the above explanation and the clean government that Singapore takes pride in, it does seem logical that it took such a long time for the opposition party to take on a whole GRC with five elected Members of Parliament. Nonetheless, it shows that people do want to see a change with the slow rise of the opposition parties. Singapore's political history and arena have shaped the people's mindset to believe that they cannot affect change and if anyone has a different opinion from the government, they are viewed as illogical and desiring to destroy the nation's harmony.

1.2 Singapore's Changing Mediascape

Singapore's print media in the 1970s and 1980s were thriving with many different alternative venues for readers. However, a pattern of mergers and the closures of various newspaper companies, which were allegedly politically motivated, later formed the

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[10] The GRC system was established in 1988 to ensure that the minority racial communities in Singapore will always be represented in Parliament. To ensure this, the Parliamentary Elections Act requires that at least one-quarter of the total number of MPs must be representatives of GRCs.

[11] The EIP is in place to preserve Singapore's multi-cultural identity and promote racial integration and harmony. It ensures that there is a balanced mix of the various ethnic communities in HDB towns. The EIP proportion set for a block/ neighbourhood is based on the ethnic make-up of Singapore.
http://www.hdb.gov.sg/cs/infoweb/residential/buying-a-flat/resale/ethnic-integration-policy-and-spr-quota

Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) – a government-linked print media monopoly. The merger was successful but it led to lesser alternative voices and venues. Local political news were mainly centralised and mainstreamed across all the papers under SPH.

Before 1980s, the government controlled and maintained all television and radio stations through the official Radio and Television Singapore (RTS) department. The government intent was to privatise television and radio broadcasting because of the lack of commercial potential and the unlikelihood of self-financing. This department has evolved into the numerous bodies and eventually was privatised and owned by the government through its state-owned Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF). It was renamed the Media Corporation of Singapore (MediaCorp). (Lee et. al 2014, 28)

In 2004, MediaCorp and Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) agreed to merge their free-to-air television and free newspaper operations forming MediaCorp Television Broadcasting. If one looks into Singapore's mediascapes, we can spot the large government-backed corporations such as MediaCorp and SPH holdings.

When we observe the Internet, there are a handful of unofficial news agencies that were created by the people for alternative discourses such as The Online Citizen (TOC) and Mothership.sg. These alternative news websites often take into account news that the mainstream media such as MediaCorp and SPH do not cover. Citizens can also write in to share their ideas and thoughts of current affairs in Singapore. Even within citizen journalism, there is an air of self-censorship within what people say — this is the 'chilling effect' from numerous defamation suits raised by the government in the past with print and broadcast media.

With the arrival of social media – an entity that is beyond control unlike traditional media, the government began to realise that they have no control over this new form of media. Social media diverges views and thoughts instead of converging them, which is something the government advocates for. This new entity posed a dilemma for a government that controls the traditional media in the country and wants to tap on new media for gains.

1.3 Thesis Overview: Why is it Important?

Social media has characteristics that function differently from traditional media. It is often troubling to those who wish to exercise extended control over the mass media such as the Singapore's government. Social media evens the level playing field for opposition parties who do not have adequate resources to reach out to the public through mainstream media. This, however, also allows the government to tap on new media - the government engages and encourages people to make full use of new media which was not the case for traditional media where citizen were more media consumers than producers. The government realises the political, economic and social costs and benefits of new media and decided to tap on it. However, the opposition parties are not at the forefront of the new media game to be able to contest the ruling party, the People's Action Party (PAP).

I argue that the Singapore's government was able to continue its reign in an Internet era because of the weak understanding of social media usage from its opposition that has resulted in its failure to bring in more votes or convincing the people. To support this, I examine data from the 2015 Singapore General Election that shows that the ruling

party, PAP has a more well-rounded social media presence with constant interactions with the citizens on Facebook – allowing them to gain traction as compared to their opposing counterparts, the Worker's Party (WP) that had weaker social media presence and interactions with the citizen.

Many scholars have touched upon various aspects of social media, politics and the works of society in Singapore through a specific angle. This thesis broadens the factors of measuring apathy by looking at various aspects of 'political issue' in Singapore which its citizens engage with via social media.

There are two main fields of focus when scholars discuss Singapore's media and politics. Firstly, there is an array of articles and research done on journalism and governmentality[12] in Singapore. Most of them bring up OB markers[13] and self-censorship within traditional media where the government does a one-way communication through mediums such as the newspapers, TV shows and radio channels as a way to disseminate information and shape policies, thoughts, and identities.

Secondly, there is emerging research conducted on new media and how it affect and shape politics in Singapore. Most of the research focus on the 2006 and 2011 Singapore Elections scrutinising the transition of traditional media to new media. In 2016, a book titled "Battle of the Heart & Mind" was published and had a very succinct approach to social media usage in the context of the 2011 Singapore Election on the Internet, Twitter and Facebook and they concluded that new media interaction should not

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[12] Governmentality is a term coined by philosopher Michel Foucault, and refers to the way in which the state exercises control over, or governs, the body of its populace.
[13] OB Markers: 'Out of Bounds markers' is a term coined by the PAP based on golfing parlance to identify subjects that are 'off- limits. Issues that are too sensitive to be discussed in public for fear of destabilising or jeopardizing public peace and order (Ho 2000, 440)

be swept under the carpet as there are critical insights to gain from these online interactions between the government and its people.

According to Marko Skoric et al's "Bowling Online, Not Alone: Online Social Capital and Political Participation in Singapore", the studies found political participation in Singapore to be low, indicating that Singaporeans are indifferent about politics. A majority of Singaporeans who disagreed with the government policies preferred to remain silent than to speak up in public. (Skoric 2009, 419)

This thesis examines the various aspect of political communication (other than voting and elections) to demonstrate that Singaporeans are not apathetic. In addition, the interplay of the Singapore government's usage of social media to engage and contest against their opponents through content analysis, inferences, observations and Facebook data to sieve through the "perceived silence" implies that Singaporeans are interested and do play a role in deciding who runs their country.

Chapter 2: Singaporeans' Voices on Social Media

'Remember your place in society before you engage in political debate… Debate cannot generate into a free-for-all where no distinction is made between the senior and junior party… You must make distinctions – What is high, what is low, what is above, what is below, and then within this, we can have a debate, we can have a discussion… people should not take on those in authority as 'equals'' – Former Foreign Minister George Yeo

How does it feel to be living in an oppressive nation where you do not have freedom of speech? I was often asked that question while I was studying in the United States. I was always surprised by the question because I have never felt like I was unable to voice my opinions nor have I ever felt oppressed. I could say what I wanted to say but I had to comment 'responsibly'. There was a distinct difference when it came to the term 'Freedom of Speech' in Singapore compared to other countries.

As stated by the former Foreign Minister of Singapore, George Yeo in 1994 interview, 'You must make distinctions' – in the past, the distinction was made by the aspiration of a person. One can only join and contribute to the discourse in the political arena if one is willing to join a political party. Traditional media was easier to control because the distinction was made. However, with the advent of new media, the distinction was not clear anymore as any common person has access to the realm of the Internet where rules and regulations are more ambivalent.

Beyond just elections and votes, Singaporeans make use of social media to engage with politics to extend their voices to be heard. This chapter explores Singaporeans' voices on social media looking into activism and alternative politics and how these avenues translate the voices of Singaporeans.

2.1 Activism and Social issues

Agenda setting has often been discussed in the context of policy-making and media — social issue enters the public sphere and becomes a political issue. This transition is often directed as the media's agenda to push it into public sphere making it a political issue. (McCombs 2014) However, media being the agenda-setter is not always a direct case for Singapore as the media agenda in Singapore is government-driven. (Tan et.al 2015)

Activism work in Singapore is only encouraged if it does not contradict with the government's beliefs or cause any 'division amongst its people'. The Singapore government stands by its approach of tolerance and harmony. Hence, Singapore's traditional media is not an ideal avenue to push forth an agenda that does not align itself with what the government has in plan. The goal of activism work of any kind is to let people be aware and act on the cause. With traditional media in the way of some activism work, many would have to source out alternative media platforms to voice out their cause.

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community in Singapore have kept to themselves the past decades largely due to the restrictions and the lack of avenues to express themselves. Alex Au, the blogger of a decently popular blog called 'Yawning Bread', started the first blog on gay activism in Singapore in 1996. This blog covers homosexual and political issues in Singapore. This example of activism is used to explain Singaporean's 'lack of apathy' because most of the activism work in Singapore are largely mainstream and approved by the government. The LGBT activism work is not approved by the government and therefore, they do not get mainstream coverage.

The LGBT community in Singapore gained more traction publicly after the proliferation of social media and participatory media. Even with blogging as a new digital avenue for Singaporeans to voice out their political opinions, traditional and mainstream media still dictate what Singaporeans watch and consume. The increasing popularity of social media as a newer medium over the past five years broadened the spectrum of LGBT issues raised in Singapore. This provided people with more information about the LGBT community and much of these alternatives also spill over to mainstream news.

Mainstream news in Singapore only features LGBT news if it involves negative portrayals, such as HIV infections, cases of mental issues and suicide. This often shapes the perceptions of the LGBT community to the majority. Social media allowed activism issues to be raised without the stigmatisation. The annual Pink Dot event is a clear example of how new media has become a vehicle to promote awareness of such social issues.

Figure 1 Screenshots of 4 videos created for the Pink Dot SG event from 2011- 2014

In the western part of the world, participatory culture[14] saw a revival with the proliferated use of the Internet. (Jenkins 2009) Social media has often been criticised as a hype that does not have a direct impact on actual activism work. (Lasar 2009) The low barriers to civic engagement with the pressing of buttons online have led to the term 'Slacktivism[15]' - emphasising that changing a Facebook profile picture is just an effortless way of proving that one did something which has no direct impact to the cause. However, participatory culture on social media has a viral effect that traditional activism do not. It is precisely the awareness of a cause needing attention that makes slacktivism work in Singapore's context much like the Arab Spring that gave the Arab youths a platform to voice out. Social media has been able to give the minority a voice in an overbearing society that claims, 'majority wins'.

Social media usage in Singapore has to be analysed beyond interactions during the election period to allow us to understand how Singaporeans use this platform to express themselves. Singaporeans are concerned about civil liberties and they make public and social issues part of their problem but not necessarily expressing themselves through riots or loud noise protest. In Singapore, it is illegal to assemble in public without a permit and the only place that allows for any assembly to be made is at the Speaker's Corner. Even then, a license is needed from the authorities to hold a speaking function. Yet, this does not deter Singaporeans from making use of the space given to voice out their opinions.

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[14] Participatory culture is a culture in which private persons (the public) do not act as consumers only, but also as contributors or producers.
[15] Slacktivism is a portmanteau of the words 'slacker' and 'activism' where actions performed via the Internet in support of a political or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement, e.g. signing an online petition or joining a campaign group on a social media website.

One example demonstrates a clear spillover effect of new media mobilisation to traditional politics. In 2007, a group of Singapore activists organised an online petition in an attempt to repeal the gay sex ban, statute 377a, that was undergoing a review in the Penal Code Amendment. The organisers used the Internet to gather support from the public, with a vodcast featuring local celebrities, a petition site, and blogs to get the word out to others. A few thousand who have pledged their support had their names and signatures carried in an open letter to the Prime Minister of Singapore. This shows a direct link between online and traditional participation. (Skoric et. al 2009, 419)

According to Harris & Harrigan, 'that in contrast to the declining political participation among youth in many liberal democracies, Singaporean young activists are not less actively engaged in activism than the older generations. Rather, they seem to be active in both the old (e.g., community volunteering) and the new (e.g., issue-based activism) arenas of activist work. However, the accepted definition of activism, or the popular type of activist work, does show a generational shift. They are instead attracted to a variety of social issues that do not directly challenge the ruling power, but, nevertheless, require work to raise awareness and obtain support from the general public.' (Harris & Harrigan, 2015)

In 2014, the National Library Board of Singapore (NLB) received complaints about a book that was against family values. "And Tango Makes Three" is children's book that tells a true story of a pair of male penguins that raised a baby penguin together. NLB handled the complaints and decided after a review to pulp the penguin book and two other books as NLB alleged that it was not suitable for children. The uproar on social

media made this public issue a political issue. People were sharing and commenting online about the decision to pulp the three books.

The most significant event that happened was a sit-in protest outside the main library where families gathered and conducted a read-in outside the library called "Let's Read Together". Two mothers organised the event to highlight the issue of censorship and greater access to books in Singapore. 400 people attended the event and it appeared on alternative and mainstream news sites. The Minister of Information was called upon to comment and a viral photo of

This photo post by Jaxe Pan, a mother (as shown in Figure 2) was circulating on Facebook. The Facebook post was addressed to the Minister of Information on the removal of the 3 books. The photo went viral, garnered 1775 likes and 7817 shares overnight which was incredible and a viral feat considering that Pan was not a celebrity but a regular Internet user that wanted to have her say – something that would not have any coverage if she wrote to the mainstream media.

Figure 2 A picture posted by Jaxe Pan that went viral on Facebook

Social media and alternative new sites made the post viral as traditional media was much slower with the coverage. The social media effects did not retain the books in the children's section but the decision to not have the books be pulped[16] was seen as a response to the public's outcry to an issue that had created a robust discourse on how a society defines family.

2.2 Political Expression: Blogging and Alternative News

Political expressions in Singapore are never directly expressed. There is often a veil of satire, sarcasm, and humour to address the issues. In Singapore, if one is serious

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[16]News of the removal last week drew sharp criticism from some quarters; upset that a public institution devoted to promoting learning and knowledge would censor and pulp books in such a seemingly arbitrary fashion. It led to two petitions calling for National Library Board (NLB) to reinstate the books, and a reading event where the banned books were shared among parents and their children.' http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/nlb-saga-two-removed-childrens-books-will-go-into-adult-section-at-library

about a political issue that points at policies or the inefficiency of the government, you get pinned down as an extremist or an irrational pro-opposition which often do not receive much traction with the people except if they have been in the field long enough. How does social media play a role in political expression? Social media provides Singaporeans with a platform to express and interact with like-minded people.

Several studies and reports have indicated high levels of political apathy amongst Singaporeans. Election turnout rates and results do not necessarily equate to apathy or the lack thereof towards politics. Since Singapore has universal suffrage and all citizens over 21 years old are required to vote by law, this apathy has not been reflected in the election turnout rates. (Skoric et al. 2009, 414) The Younger generation has a different way of expressing their political views on issues other than attending rallies, which are mostly done through social media.

According to Ho Khai Leong, the real issue is whether the ordinary citizen believes that he or she can affect change in policy outcomes. Singaporeans generally believe that their power to initiate or prevent certain policies on the national agenda is minimal, as they have few opportunities, which they can gain access to setting the agenda. Hence, the image of the Singaporean has been an apathetic bystander, a helpless spectator, an uninterested, sceptical individual, and a perpetual grumbler. (Ho 2000, 452) This belief changes the approach of how Singaporeans express their opinions – they acknowledge that they cannot make a change but want to be heard.

There are several ways to insinuate and create satires that criticise the government without getting charged with a lawsuit. One key example is famous Singapore blogger – Lee Kin Mun – also known as mrbrown. mrbrown is well-known as the blogfather of

Singapore and is one of most influential bloggers in Singapore. He has kept up with new media fairly quickly and was on all the major media platforms since 2006.

On 30 June 2006, mrbrown wrote a controversial article, titled 'S'poreans are fed, up with progress!' for his weekly op-ed column in the newspaper TODAY, about the rising costs of living in Singapore. An official from the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA) published a reply in the same newspaper calling him a "partisan player" whose views "distort the truth". The newspaper suspended his column and he subsequently resigned from his own column.

This saga did not stop him from expressing his thoughts and ideas about Singapore. With reference to Figure 3, he went on to create song parodies and skits about the current affairs in Singapore on YouTube that reached out to many Singaporeans. He reaches out to his audience mainly through Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Figure 3 Screenshots of two comedic characters played by mrbrown on Youtube

As of 2016, he has 41,357 likes on his Facebook page – surpassing some ministers and political figures in Singapore. mrbrown would joke about socio-political issues from everyday lives. He set trends through hashtags on Twitter such as #underhappy[17] and #SMRTmovies[18] – a tongue-in-cheek play on socio-political issues in Singapore through social media with reference to Figure 4. The hashtags started trending in Singapore's Twittersphere and people started making puns and jokes on Singapore's socio-political matters as well. This allowed Singaporeans to express matters of concern in a light-hearted manner. Even the mainstream newspaper reported on this online trend which shows that Singaporeans do express their interests on political issue albeit in a mild fashion.[19]

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[17] The phrase "Under Happy" was used to describe workplace happiness survey findings. It was coined to describe happiness levels of Singapore workers in a survey conducted by the Singapore Human Resource Institute and consulting firm Align Group. According to the findings, based on answers from more than 5,000 people, Singapore workers are "Under Happy", a term that depicts the level of happiness between happy and unhappy.

[18] Singapore's public train system had a few breakdowns in 2014 and it sparked an outrage amongst Singaporeans as they saw the breakdowns as an inefficiency on the part of SMRT (Singapore's Public Transport Operator). Mr. Brown took on #SMRTmovies to inject humor over the furor by creating movie title puns such as "The Fault in Our Tracks" from the original movie "The Fault in Our Stars" which became a trend on Singapore's Twittersphere.

[19] http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/are-you-underhappy-today-hashtag-trending-after-term-was-used-in-survey

Figure 4 Screenshot taken from mrBrown's blog post[20] on #underhappy

I read in the news that in a National Workplace Happiness Survey, Singapore's overall workplace happiness index is 59, which falls into the band "Under Happy", between "Unhappy" & "Happy".

This made me Over Sad, so I went on Twitter to start the #UnderHappy hashtag.

1. @mrbrown: Bak Chor Mee came with one less meatball. #UnderHappy

2. @kuekj: Bak Chor Mee, no ter kwa! #UnderHappy

3. @mrbrown: Boss just bought a Lamborghini after announcing this year no bonus. #UnderHappy

4. @mrbrown: "Realistic and correct salaries" for "morally upright" ministers. #UnderHappy

5. @frhn: Managed to board SMRT. Personal space violated and guy beside me has bad breath. #UnderHappy

6. @polarpaws_: Finding the last clean and dry pair of underwear when out on field camp. #UnderHappy #UnderWearHappy

7. @vinyarb: Thirsty, but Dao Huey Zui too hot. #UnderHappy

8. @mrbrown: On the ball during BMT to go to OCS, kena SAFINCOS. (Ok, it's called SISPEC now. I am old. Update: I am told it is now SCS.) #UnderHappy

In 2014, a local blogger was charged with defamation for a blog post that placed the current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in a bad light. Roy Ngerng, a former health care programme coordinator at the Tan Tock Seng Hospital, had written a blog post in May 2014 allegedly comparing the Government's usage of the Central Provident Fund (CPF) monies to a local pastor's alleged misuse of church funds[21]. The Supreme Court ordered Ngerng to pay S$150,000 in damages to Prime Minister Lee for defamation. This comprises S$100,000 in general damages and S$50,000 in aggravated damages. This was the first defamation case raised by the government on a single individual's blog content. There were a few cases of defamation before regarding blog post accusation but none of them got charged which led many to believe that the government is not able to control

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[20] http://www.mrbrown.com/blog/2014/11/under-happy-is-the-new-sian-half.html

[21] The original blogpost was taken down due to court order. In the blogpost, a flowchart of the church organisation that misappropriate the church funds were place side by side with the faces replaced by the current Prime Minister and his wife, alleged that the government is doing the same with Singaporean's monies. http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/pm-lees-lawyers-seek-very-high-damages-defamation-case-against-roy-ngerng

new media as they would with traditional media but this incident proved otherwise. This serves as a warning to any bloggers who do not express their opinions appropriately and responsibly.

Through broadcast media and print media, there are directors and editors to self-censor content before broadcasting it across the country but with the Internet and social media on the rise, information are often not as easy to censor. If one would like a different opinion other than the newspapers provided by SPH, one could head to the bookstore or newsstand to buy New York Times or the Economist for an alternative news source (not all newspapers are available for sale). These information travels at a slower speed.

With the Internet and social media, a click onto The Online Citizen (TOC) would take you to columns and columns of Op-ed within seconds, and the next click would have a news share to the 500 other friends you have on Facebook to read about what you are interested in. Singaporeans are nowhere close to being apathetic about their politics if we look into their social media usage to share alternative news.

2.3 Translation of Effects: Not Apathetic Just Being Appropriate

Many researchers have explored social media largely in the context of election campaigns or protests and not many people look into the daily usage of social media and the other conversations that are often indirectly related to their voices. Although Asian countries have witnessed unparalleled growth in social media use, including activities related to political communication and mobilisation, researchers have explored social media mainly in the context of either election campaigns or protests, ignoring their use during 'normal times' (Lee et al 2014)

If we look into the activism work and the increasing alternative news sites, we can clearly see that apathy is not lacking amongst Singaporean. It is navigating around the existing system subtly that works for Singaporeans which in the case of many can be seen as being apathetic.

"Contrary to folklore, the newsroom [in Singapore] does not receive daily instructions about what to publish, and sensitive articles are not submitted to government officials for vetting…as members of the establishment, newspaper editors are expected to have an instinctive grasp of Singapore's national interests and how to protect them." (George 2000, 177-178)

This instinctive grasp mentioned by Cherian George is the basis of how Singaporeans use media in the past and presently. There is a clear interest in various matters but given Singapore's unique environment – many of such activism work and passion is swept under the rug by mainstream media and often there is no lack of apathy when we enter the digital media realm in Singapore.

Social media as a platform is changing the way of appropriate expression via online media and challenging the "OB markers". With that said, the "OB markers" never had a clear definition to them. In most occasion, one would only know they have crossed the line when a libel charge is placed on them. With social media reaching out to many people, the possibility of charging everyone for 'senseless' comment would be difficult – not that it has not happened before[22] but to extend control over social media would be stepping oneself in the toe.

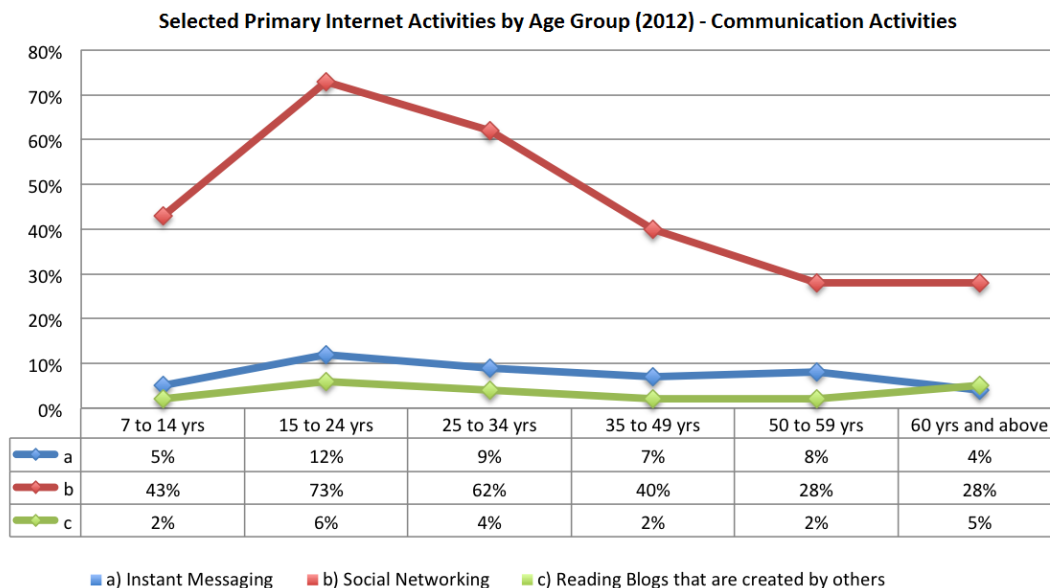[22] A former nurse who was charged under the Sedition Act for making offensive comments online about Singaporeans and religion .http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/filipino-who-made-offensive-comments-about-sporeans-and-religion-charged-under-sedition

Chapter 3: Singapore Government's Social Media Strategies

"Having faith in the media as Fourth Estate also allows the media to become a powerful political actor, despite being unelected. It can and often does make or break governments. It can and often does decide which party wins elections. It can and often does make politicians of all stripes fawn on media barons. We see this in many other countries, and this is not healthy for democracy." Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Law, K. Shanmugam (2016)

Singapore is a tech savvy country. The Internet – the newest form of media in the last decade has offered avenues for people to express their opinions. In 2013, 87% of the household have access to The Internet. The government has a very strong presence online especially with the introduction of the e-government portal where citizens are allowed to have transactions and pay their bills electronically. This has made many citizens very tech savvy with regards to using the Internet for administrative convenience.

Figure 5 Internet Activities by Age Group

Selected Primary Internet Activities by Age Group (2012) - Communication Activities

	7 to 14 yrs	15 to 24 yrs	25 to 34 yrs	35 to 49 yrs	50 to 59 yrs	60 yrs and above
a	5%	12%	9%	7%	8%	4%
b	43%	73%	62%	40%	28%	28%
c	2%	6%	4%	2%	2%	5%

■ a) Instant Messaging   ■ b) Social Networking   ■ c) Reading Blogs that are created by others

Base: Internet users in each age group.
Source: IDA's Annual Survey of Infocomm Usage in Households and by Individuals.

With the rise of social media, many young people 'actively' involve themselves with what they see on the Internet. With reference to the statistics in Figure 5, 73% of people aged between 15-24 years old use the Internet for social networking. Social networking has evolved from just a networking platform to one that people uses to receive information at a high speed. Since the 1960s, the government has abided by what the first Prime Minister (PM) Lee Kuan Yew laid down as the vital basis of the role of the media. He declared that "freedom of the press . . . must be subordinated to the overriding needs of the integrity of Singapore, and to the primacy of purpose of an elected government." The second Prime Minister of Singapore also rejected the concept of the media as the Fourth Estate in Singapore, because "an adversarial watchdog of government, goes against our goal of consensus politics, of getting Singaporeans to row as a team."[23]

Over the past 50 years, the government has introduced many laws and regulations to keep the traditional mass media within the boundaries that are defined officially and unofficially by the government. One of the unofficial boundaries is known as the "OB markers"[24]. If the media is not recognized as the Fourth Estate to hold the government accountable, it poses a challenge for the government to inevitably embrace social media as a Fifth Estate. Fifth Estate explains our collective ability to share information, to create communities, and to organize social movements through online networks. The term originated in an attempt to distinguish the actions and interests of networked societies from those of the mass media, known as the Fourth Estate. The Fifth Estate

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[23] *The Straits Times,* 16 July 1995
[24] OB Marker is short for "Out of Bounds" marker – it is Singapore political term used to signify what issues were too sensitive to be discussed or permitted to be talked about. The term is adopted from golf, where an out of bounds marker denotes the area beyond which playing is not allowed.

constitutes plentiful of 'networked individuals' enabled by the Internet that can hold the other estates accountable. (Dutton 2009)

The government rejected the media as the Fourth Estate to check on the government. However, the fifth estate is commonly controlled by the society where the state cannot be involved. In Singapore's case, the government has set rules and regulations for the Internet and attempt to extend their control through licenses[25].

The Fifth estate constitutes a variety of media platforms for expression other than alternative news sites and blogging. Therefore, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter became a hit as control is less extended on these platforms. The Singapore government appeared to have understood that and adopted a friendly approach towards social media.

3.1 Engaging with the public: Online Profiles

After 2008, there was a surge of online presence by political actors. Many have researched on Obama's use of Facebook during his campaign for the U.S Election. Except a handful of opposition candidates, Singapore's ruling party, the PAP did not catch on with Facebook as a campaign strategy although it was an extremely effective strategy in raising profile awareness. The ruling party was not on the bandwagon yet apart from a few candidates who were actively blogging around the 2011 General Election. After the 2011 General Election, there was a surge in the creation of Facebook profiles. Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, who leads the ruling party, PAP,
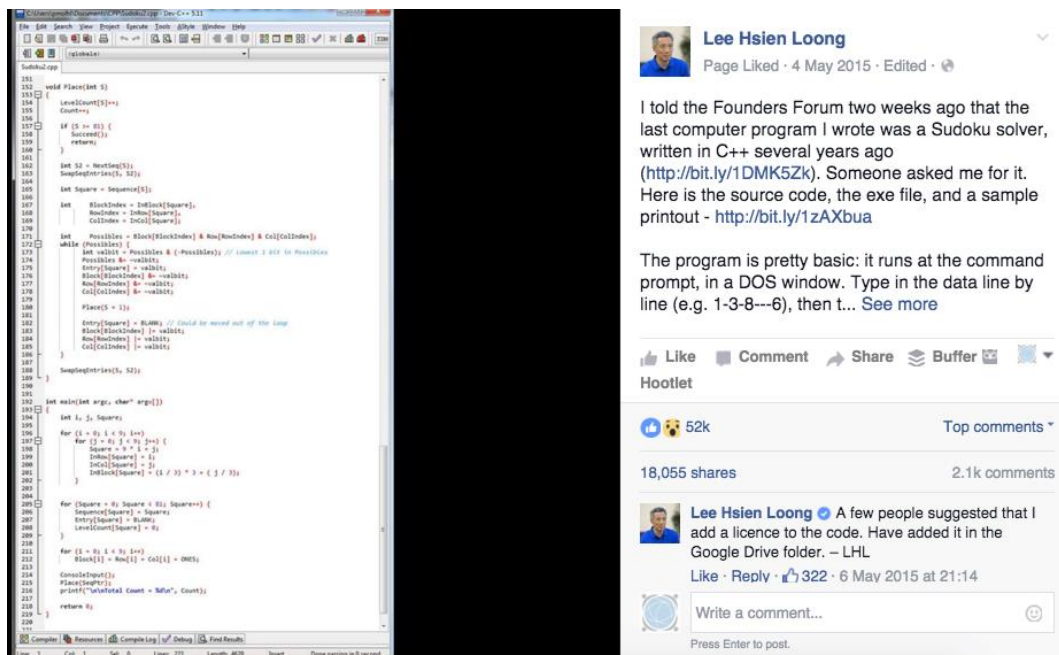
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[25] The new regulations demand that all websites concerned with the news be licensed, and also that each puts down a "performance-bond" of 50,000 Singapore dollars ($39,550). Any content deemed to be in breach of standards would have to be removed within 24 hours of being notified. http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2013/06/regulating-singapores-internet

created his Facebook profile in 2012 to communicate with the younger audience. Within a span of three years between the creation of his Facebook and the 2015 General election, there were numerous occasions where he uses social media to gain traction with the people and have proven to benefit his image.

3.1.2 Sudoku C++ Programming Facebook post

On May 4th, 2015, Singapore's Prime Minster, Lee Hsien Loong posted a Facebook post attaching a screenshot of a Sudoku Solver program.

Figure 6 Lee Hsien Loong's Sudoku Solver Facebook post

This post gained a lot of traction and attention for the minister because not many people were aware of his background in Mathematics. This particular incident shed a positive light on his image. He used social media as a platform to share his talent and was

able to impress the citizens via the new media platform. This episode was revisited when

PM Lee took a trip to visit the Facebook Headquarters in 2016 and was awarded a gift by

Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook of a wooden box engraved with the exact

code written by Mr. Lee.

Figure 7 Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook Post on Lee Hsien Loong's arrival

Mark Zuckerberg posted the picture on his Facebook page and tagged PM Lee in

the above screenshot. This post brought PM Lee to global fame as a world leader who

can code. The general reaction to the post was positive. The risk of sharing on Facebook

is challenging but using it strategically and effectively can propel a person's popularity.

3.1.1 Facebook Q&A Live Session

Another example of making efficient use of Facebook by the government is the

Prime Minister's launch of a Live Facebook Q&A session with the public.

Figure 8 Facebook Q&A Live post by Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong

On January 24th, 2015, PM Lee launched a Live Q&A session to engage and discuss political issues with the people. This session should not be mistaken for the live function which Facebook introduced later in the same year where users can broadcast themselves live through their mobile devices. This Q&A session consists of citizens commenting on the picture posted above (refer to Figure 8) while he answers as many questions as he can within a stipulated time.

The content of the session consist of a call for suggestions and feedback and ended with a link that required netizens to observe the house rules as seen in Figure 9 below.

Figure 9 Lee Hsien Loong's Facebook House Rules

There was a total of 2334 comments. Lee was seen answering a lot of the questions that were posted. However, it also appears that many of the comments that he chose to reply were questions that were mild and most of the answers he provided were standardized and mostly done in a politically correct manner. This interaction, however, showed that Mr. Lee was keen in engaging with the public via social media to reach out to the younger crowd.

3.2 Promoting New Policies with YouTube

Singapore's government has also stepped into the social media arena and tapping on new media as a platform to promote policies. The government has always engaged with the public through a one-way communication approach. Looking through the social media profiles of each government ministries, there are hardly any interactions beyond a

greeting or a board for announcements. This is the same case for their usage of YouTube as a form of visual communication – an attempt to step beyond traditional media outlets.

As shown in Figure 10, 11 and 12, the pictures are screenshots of a series of YouTube videos uploaded under the account 'govsingapore' to promote the Pioneer Generation (PG) Package for pioneers in Singapore for affordable ageing healthcare.

Figure 10 PG package promotion video in Cantonese, Teochew and Hokkien

Pioneer Generation Package – Pioneer Showti 两PG 版 (Cantonese with Chinese subtitles)

Pioneer Generation Package – Pioneer Cheer 咱是自己 (Teochew with Chinese subtitles)

urney 嘻游记 (Hokkien with Chinese subtitles)

Figure 11 PG package promotion video in Malay & Tamil

Pioneer Generation Package - Izinkanku by Taufik Batisah (English subtitles)

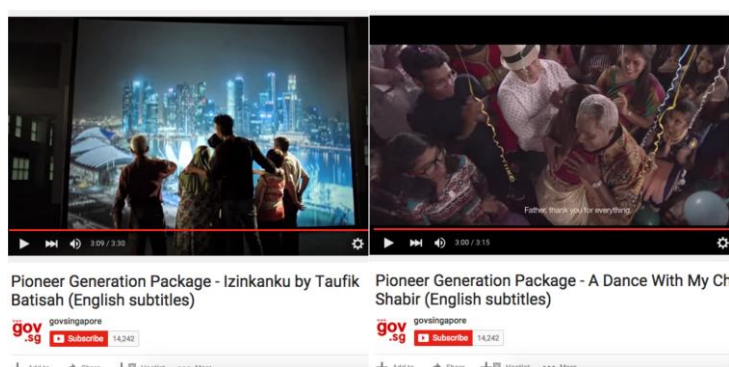Pioneer Generation Package - A Dance With My Ch Shabir (English subtitles)

Figure 12 A sample shot of the PG package benefits stated in all the music videos

The videos were strategically done in Malay, Tamil, Mandarin and three Chinese dialects for the older population. A very prominent observation is that all the videos

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under 'govsingapore' were disabled for comments. The number of likes and dislikes were also hidden. Land Transport Authorities of Singapore (LTA) has a YouTube page but they do not disable their comments section. This clearly shows that the social media strategies are not done in a similar fashion amongst the statutory boards and the various ministries.

In this day and age, the Singapore government still runs social media the way they would in the past where information are only to be broadcasted and not much interaction is expected from the public. When the comments section gets blocked, it blocks out discourses that could be held within the comments section which could act as a feedback platform. The lack of conversation under the videos uploaded by the government leaves an awkward gap in the interactions between the government and the people.

Therefore, the communication between the government and the public is still one way since the comments are all disabled. The government is using social media as they would have with traditional media albeit the push for interactions utilizing new media – there is no consistency where it comes to the usage of social media.

Nevertheless, the government attempted a new social media strategy by hiring famous local YouTube celebrities to promote new policies and plans. In the past, the promotion of policy was mostly done through pamphlets and mainstream media so the use of external social media celebrities widens the government's approach towards accepting media in unconventional forms.

3.3 Translation of Effects: Navigating the 5th Estate

It is important to note that the government has since changed its approach towards media and in particular – social media. While they might be able to effectively contain traditional and mainstream media, social media is an avenue which allows the government to reach out to the masses.

The new strategies mentioned above highlight the fact social media is not just a site for socialising. It has become a multi-faceted platform that can be used to one's advantage if planned strategically.

The surge in online profiles and the increasing online presence have given the Prime Minister a good image, which was otherwise, tainted during the 2011 Election and after the release of the controversial white paper. Yet, it is clearly evident that the government have since improved their social media strategies significantly to gain traction after the 2011 Election.

Chapter 4: Social Media Effects on 2015 General Election

'Our ministers have to get better at this and you know many ministers are blogging now, interacting on Facebook etc. They have to communicate in a different medium and convey nuance, policy, intentions and explanations in a more personal way by engaging people. But it is not just the ministers doing this, the government as a whole has to be more active and adept in engaging Singaporeans online.' – An excerpt from the 2011 National Day Rally Speech by Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong

Social media played a very significant role in the 2011 Singapore General Election. The coverage of the elections in the past before was under the control and limitations of print and broadcast media via newspapers and television. Social media made its first appearance in politics in 2008 when the Obama administration relied on it for a major part of its success.

The PAP has always controlled traditional media in Singapore. New media and social media have offered a platform for an even-level playing field for the opposition parties. An overall look at political social media profiles shows that PAP has a strong social media presence for most of their candidates. However, having a presence online does not amount to the level of engagement, which the candidates have with its people. This analysis is done by collecting Facebook data on the level of engagement between candidates and the people to see if candidate engagement had an effect on the majority of votes.

4.1 The 2011 Social Media Election: A Sharp Turning Point

The 2006 Singapore General Election was termed the 'Internet Election'. The use of the Internet to discuss and collect thoughts were quite evident (Gomez 2006). During the 2011 General Election, many new social media platforms has established a whooping number of users. YouTube started gaining popularity right after the 2006 election in

Singapore, with Facebook and Twitter gaining prominence in 2008 and 2010 respectively. Within the span of five years, these social media platforms came into place and Singaporeans made a lot of 'noise' during the 2011 General Election. There were two very significant outcomes for the first social media election in Singapore.

4.1.1 The 'Nicole Seah' effect

As one of the youngest and more outspoken candidate in the 2011 General Election, Nicole Seah, who was under the National Solidarity Party (NSP) contesting in Marine Parade GRC became famous online and offline. Seah's popularity was manifested on the number of likes she got on her Facebook page. George Yeo from the PAP, the only minister prominent on social media then who had a Facebook page, had only 20,000 likes over the span of three years. Seah had a total of 67,000 likes within the first 7 days of the campaign in 2011. It was highly noted that she was the second most popular politician in Singapore on Facebook with the most popular being the first Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, who did not manage his own page.

A large number of likes does not necessarily translate to more votes. This was evident when NSP, represented by Seah and four other candidates lost to the PAP in Marine Parade GRC even as the online popularity polls favoured Seah over Tin Pei Ling. Tin, a young candidate from the PAP contesting for the Marine Parade GRC as well, was not as well-liked and had a few controversy[26] [27] under her belt during the election. While

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[26] Kate Spade saga: allegations that she was fielded because of her husband's position as principal private secretary to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.
http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20110331-271039.html
[27] Facebook comment on cooling off day: A complaint was lodged against her by Seah of the NSP. Under the Parliamentary Elections Act, no election advertising is allowed on Cooling-Off Day.
http://news.asiaone.com/News/Elections/Story/A1Story20110810-293816.html

Seah had 98,493 likes on Facebook then and with Tin having only 7,396 likes, the results of the election still favoured Tin and her team.

However, it is noteworthy that NSP garnered 43.36% of the votes even when Tin's team consisted of former Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong. One could conclude that social media did not do much but it was a wake-up call for the ruling party.

4.1.2 The loss of Aljunied – 'You have 5 years to live and repent'

The loss of Aljunied GRC was very significant and memorable in Singapore's political history. For the first time, five candidates from the WP were elected into the parliament. This loss also saw the departure of a prominent minister of the cabinet, George Yeo. The result not only took many by surprise, it also sent a strong message to the ruling party that they should not be complacent about the power given to them by the people. Yeo had the most presence online than any other minister but still faced defeat. It also did not help the situation when Singapore's first prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew mentioned that the people living within the Aljunied GRC have 'five years to live and repent' if they chose the opposition party[28]. Facing a younger crowd, such a tactic that was effective in the past did not seem to work anymore. With a combination of new media and the frustrations of the people, the PAP lost their first GRC to the WP.

The 2011 General Election sent very strong messages to both the ruling party and the opposition parties. There was no social media strategy that was used effectively in 2011. Everyone was new to the social media platforms that many occurrences were

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[28] https://sg.news.yahoo.com/aljunied-voters-will-regret-choosing-wp--mm-lee.html

unprecedented and haphazard. However, the only constant theme was that Singaporeans were voicing out and their voices were getting louder online.

4.2 Hypothesis, Method, and Results

Given the uproar of the 2011 General Election, the PAP learned its lesson and decided to jump on the social media wagon. Many ministers started their Facebook pages in an attempt to engage with the citizens. Since the use of social media benefitted the opposition party in 2011, many political parties thought that the 2015 election would see a stronger fight. However, from a brief glance, it does not seem the case as the opposition parties did not seem to harness any social media strategies after the 2011 election. In my hypothesis, I point out that if the strongest opposition party (WP) in Singapore were to increase their public engagement more via social media, the marginal difference for the area's majority vote would be larger. I argue that the strongest opposition party in Singapore, WP is not using social media to its full potential to gain traction with its people.

4.2.1 Method

The Facebook pages of 12 candidates were selected: six candidates from the PAP and six candidates from the WP. The candidates were chosen from the top three most competitive areas with the smallest marginal difference in total vote majority and the bottom three areas with the largest marginal difference in total vote majority. I have also chosen to only look at only one opposition party because the WP was the only party that took the most seats from PAP during the last election that is believed to be the first

"Internet" election that tapped on social media for the first time. Due to the differing sizes of the GRC, only the candidate with the most number of Facebook likes on their pages was chosen from the team.

Table 1 Top three areas with smallest marginal difference in total vote majority

Aljunied GRC (Winner's Majority: 2%)	
Lye Thiam Fatt PAP: 67,424 (49)%	**Chen Show Mao WP: 70,050 (51%)**
Punggol East SMC (Winner's Majority: 3.6%)	
Charles Chong PAP: 16,977 (51.8%)	Lee Li-Lian WP: 15,818 (48.2%)
Hougang SMC (Winner's Majority: 15.4%)	
Lee Hong Chuang PAP: 9,565 (42.3%)	**Png Eng Huat WP: 13,027 (57.7%)**

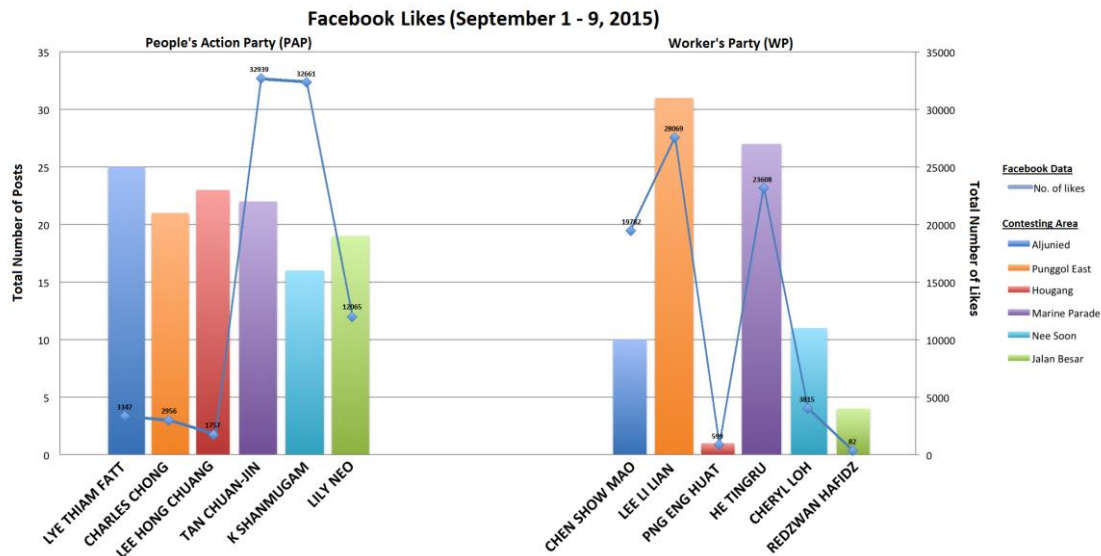**Table 2 Top three areas with the largest marginal difference in total vote majority**

Marine Parade GRC (Winner's Majority: 28.2%)	
Tan Chuan-jin PAP: 85, 138 (64.1%)	He Ting-Ru WP: 47,753 (35.9%)
Nee Soon GRC (Winner's Majority: 33.6%)	
K Shanmugam PAP: 82,287 (66.8%)	Cheryl Loh WP: 40,841 (33.2%)
Jalan Besar GRC (Winner's Majority: 35.4%)	
Lily Neo PAP: 63,644 (67.7%)	Redzwan Hafidz WP: 30,302 (32.3%)

4.2.2 Results

From the results collected, I came up with three graphs separately. The graphs show the number of posts of each candidate that contested for the six chosen areas over

the 2015 campaign period in comparison to the number of likes, shares, and comments respectively. It appears that with more engagement on social media (such as comments and shares), the likelihood of getting more votes is higher.

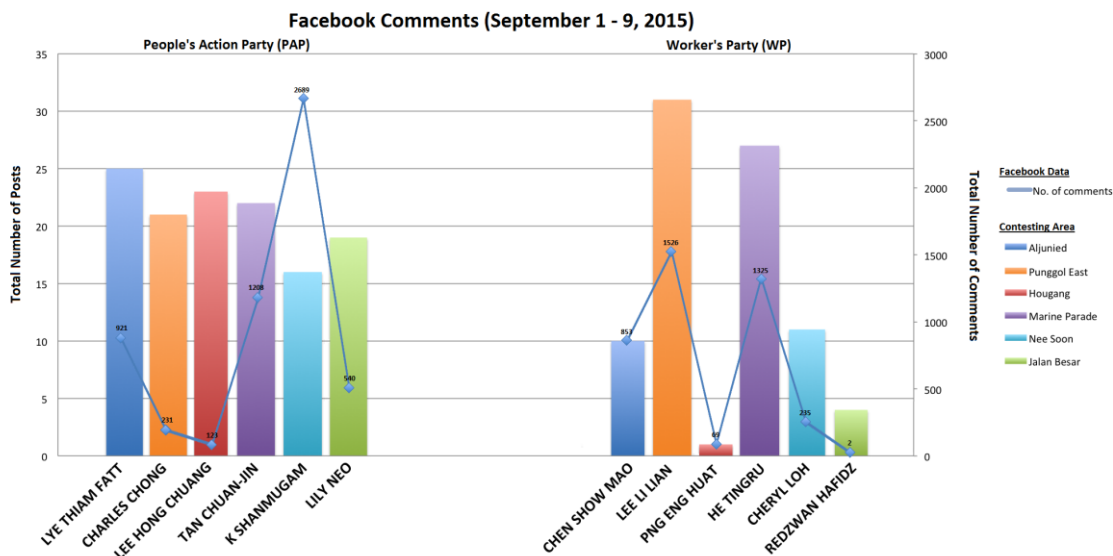**Figure 13 Selected Candidates' Total Posts & Total Likes (Campaign Period)**

According to the graph shown in Figure 13, the PAP candidates have more consistent number of posts as compared to the WP, which evidently has an inconsistent frequency of posts. This shows that the PAP have consistently utilised social media to make their presence known. Despite having 10 times more likes than her opponent, Lee Li Lian of the WP lost to Charles Chong of the PAP. She lost by 0.2% - which was a very close margin. This observation tells us that popularity on social media does not equate to actual votes that he or she might garner. There are also a few underlying

reasons that are plausible such as the AHPTEC controversy[29] that happened just before the election which might have affected the vote count.

Looking at the PAP portion of the graph, there is a significantly higher likes for candidates whose areas have a larger marginal differences in total majority vote. It is also noteworthy that there is any incredible amount of likes on their posts that do not equate to interactions comparing Figure 14 and 15, where the comments and shares are significantly lesser.

Figure 14 Selected Candidates' Total Posts & Total Comments (Campaign Period)

In Figure 14, He Ting Ru from the WP had more comments than her opponent Tan Chuan Jin who is one of the prolific cabinet ministers in Singapore. Even though Tan won, the number of people heading to the page to comment about issues was higher for He. It might be noteworthy to mention that she was a new candidate that was labelled as the "New Nicole Seah" and that may have resulted in her to have an increased

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[29]The AHPTEC controversy: the PAP attacked the WP for lapses at its town council, saying it exposed a deeper integrity problem at the party. http://www.straitstimes.com/politics/8-reasons-for-surge-of-support

coverage and attention much like Seah did in 2011. Therefore, the high volume of comments on her posts did not mean favouring a vote for her.

Lye Thiam Fatt from the PAP had a spike in the number of comments even though there was very little likes throughout this posts. This was due to one controversial post that he posted — a photo of his party logo being thrown into a burner in the neighbourhood. This post when viral online with citizens from all over the country coming in to comment and share the post. This incident amounted to a spike on the graph.

Figure 15 Selected Candidates' Total Posts & Total Shares (Campaign Period)

In Figure 15, the analysis is more critical due to the nature of sharing on Facebook. The sharing function often requires additional effort and endorsement compared to clicking a like button. In the PAP portion of all three graphs, the amount of likes, shares, and comments for two prominent ministers, Tan Chuan-Jin and K

Shanmugam are seen to have skyrocketed, which could be attributed to their ministerial duties which allow them to be better known to the people.

The number of shares is critical because sharing a post often means an endorsement of some kind for the political figures. We noticed that one of WP's candidates, Png Eng Huat of the Hougang SMC who had little social media interaction compared to his PAP counterpart, Lee Hong Chuang, seems to be an outlier as his social media presence did not equate to the votes — he posted one Facebook post during the nine-day campaign period. It is critical to note that Hougang is an area that has a handful of elderly folks that do not use social media as actively as youths. Also, Hougang was the first SMC that the WP won in 1991 via an election so the people living there are very loyal to the opposition party[30]. This could be one of the reasons why social media is not necessary for some areas of Singapore and that it will not release any potential effects as it did for other areas in the country.

4.3 Translation of Effects: The Hare Did Not take a Nap

Many candidates have a personal Facebook page for the contesting areas and some candidates are popular and more recognisable as compared to the rest. There are also Facebook pages that represent all the candidates of the elected team that represent the GRC. From the 2011 election, it appears that PAP has learnt its lesson to socialise more via the Internet and walk the ground with the public. The PAP has since implemented structures to improve the interactions between the offline and online

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[30] 'The results showed that the voters were, in the end, prepared to go with the WP's track record in Hougang over the last 20 years, and to keep faith." Asst Prof Eugene KB Tan on the 2011 election http://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2013/06/TD_The-Low-Thia-Khiang-Effect_270512.pdf

community. They were able to effectively attract younger audiences through YouTube and engaging with younger citizens through Facebook. The PAP might have taken a nap in 2011 when they did not have a social media strategy which cost them five members of parliament. But they came back strong for the 2015 general election with a steady presence online that could be the reason for their victory.

On the other hand, the WP did not make full use of social media and possibly due to the lack resources and manpower, social media was not a priority. The lacklustre attempts by a few candidates of the opposition party did not engage with the online community, unlike those of the ruling party, where they had most of their candidates on Facebook. This allowed more people to be exposed to potential team members. The WP lost a golden opportunity to formulate a social media strategy to attract some of the votes to cross the required margin within the last five years. One of the prominent members of the opposition party, Sylvia Lim seemed to realise the importance of social media just before the campaign periods. In 2011, she attempted to blog but did not follow up on Facebook and blogging. Again, in 2015, she attempted at using Instagram but she did not build a stronger rapport ahead of time to be able to draw any significant support compared to the Prime Minister who diligently used social media the past four years and have since gained positive traction from the people.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Much like the inferred Rashomon effect[31] introduced in Tan, et al.'s book Battle of the Hearts and Minds, there are multiple talking points in the 2011 & 2015 Singapore General Election. (Tan, et al. 2016) Everyone has a different take on whether Singaporeans are apathetic or not, depending on what realities they are exposed to. In other words, how they consume media who likely dictate how they produce media and express their opinions.

This thesis has covered Singaporeans use of social media through various extensions. The use of social media is inevitable with the world becoming an interconnected village. If we were to compare Singapore with other countries who have made use of social media to raise political issues or cases of sovereignty, it would be a little tricky because of its context and unique history. The use of social media to advocate for local activism work shows that Singaporeans are not as apathetic as one would think. Singapore's activism efforts have to be viewed through growing acceptance and not an immediate call for action. It is often seen as a success if a certain law is passed or overturn for activists in the western world but in the case of Singapore – there are a lot of underlying successes that might be overlooked due to many existing rules that are still in place. Social media does allow a space for debate to occur. However, for a country that has shut its people out of discourse in the past, it will be difficult to embrace rich and robust discussions as it would take time for such environment to be cultivated.

The lack of loud noise protest would be clear apathy for some but I would fight for an exclusive case that Singaporeans have situational apathy towards politics. It is a

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[31] The Rashomon effect is how the same events can be viewed in completely different ways by different people with different backgrounds, expectations, and experiences.

culture cultivated in Singapore to communicate responsibly – whose definition does this responsibility lies on? The elections are not the only political event that can showcase Singaporeans lack of apathy.

The death of the First Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, in 2015 has been argued as an event that showcased that Singaporeans are not apathetic as the country got together to grief over the passing of one of its founding fathers. Yet, it is also the same reason that affected the analysis of how effective social media has been as a comparison to 2011 election. The grief and nostalgia spilled over to the 2015 General Election. It serves well to note that the celebration of Jubilee 50 and the death of Singapore's founding father remained in the minds of the people and might have largely influenced their vote.

To conclude, I would suggest the opposition parties work on their social media strategies as the subsequent elections will reach out to the generation that has started reading news on the Internet instead of the newspapers. The ruling party, PAP was caught off guard in 2011 but they caught up with the social media trail. It would most certainly benefit both the ruling party and the opposition parties to invest in their social media presence and engagement with a society of people who are tech-savvy not apathetic.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Singapore's Political & Communication History (1965 to 2015)

Year	Events	
	Political	**Communication**
1965	Singapore gained independence	Radio and television operations were joined together as Radio and Television of Singapore (RTS)
1968	PAP won all seats in 1968 General Elections	
1969	Race riots between ethnic Malays and Chinese broke out	
1972	PAP won all seats in 1972 General Elections	
1976	PAP won all seats in 1976 General Elections	
1980	PAP won all seats in 1980 General Elections	RTS ceased transmission. The Broadcasting Division of the Ministry of Culture became a statutory board, the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC)
1981	WP's Joshua Benjamin Jeyaretnam elected into Parliament, breaking a 16 years PAP monopoly through a by-election	
1984	PAP won 77 out 79 seats; two members of the opposition parties are elected as members of parliament. *Non-Constituency Member of Parliament* was introduced	
1985		Dissolution of Ministry of Culture. Information Division came under the new Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) and arts promotion component was assimilated into the Ministry of Community Development (MCD) as the Cultural Affairs Division

1987	22 people were arrested during *Operation Spectrum* and detained under the *Internal Security Act*	
1988	PAP won 80 out 81 seats in 1988 General Election. Formation of GRC	
1989	Ethnic Integration Policy is implemented under Housing Development Board (HDB)	The launch of Singapore's first 24-hour radio station, Perfect 10, now known as 987FM
1990	Goh Chok Tong became 2nd Prime Minister of Singapore preceded by Lee Kuan Yew, 1st Prime Minister of Singapore	The Information Division of the MCI and the Cultural Affairs Division of MCD and other statutory boards reunited to form the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA)
1991	PAP won 77 out 81 seats in 1991 General Election	
1993	Ong Teng Cheong becomes first directly elected President. (Singapore's 5th President)	
1994		The Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) was formed as a statutory board under MITA to oversee and promote the broadcasting industry in Singapore.

SBC was privatised into a new holding company, Singapore International Media (SIM).

First English-language newspaper in Asia to launch an online news service (Business Times) |
1996		SBA regulated Internet content
1997	PAP won 81 out 83 seats in 1997 General Election	
1998		SIM ceased transmission.
1999	Asian Financial Crisis	SIM becomes Media Corporation of Singapore (MediaCorp Singapore)

2000	Speaker's Corner launched at Hong Lim Park	
2001	PAP won 82 out of 84 seats in 2001 General Election	The ICT functions under the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology came under MITA and was renamed the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, but retained the acronym MITA
2003	SARS outbreak	SBA, Singapore Films Commission and Films and Publications Department merged to form the Media Development Authority (MDA)
2004	Lee Hsien Loong becomes 3rd Prime Minister of Singapore	MediaCorp and Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) agreed to merge their free-to-air television and free newspaper operations forming MediaCorp Television Broadcasting Facebook was launched
2005		A blogger, Chen Jiahao, a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, was made to apologise and shut down his blog containing criticisms on government agency A*STAR, after its chairman threatened to sue him for defamation Three people were arrested and charged under the Sedition Act for posting racist comments on the Internet. Two were sentenced to imprisonment YouTube was created
2006	PAP won 82 out of 84 seats in 2006 General Election	Famous local blogger, mrbrown wrote an article for his weekly opinion column concerning the rising income gap and costs of living in Singapore. An official from the MICA published a response calling him a "partisan player" whose views "distort the truth". The newspaper suspended his column

2008		Sharp increase in Facebook users worldwide. (The U.S Election – Obama's use of social media)
2010		PAP & Opposition Party created Facebook
2011	PAP won 81 out of 87 seats in 2011 General Election. This is the first time an opposition party (WP) has captured a GRC since the inception of this scheme in 1988	
2012		PM Lee Hsien Loong created Facebook to interact with citizens
2013	More than 3 000 Singaporeans gathered at the Speakers' Corner for a protest against the government's Population White Paper, which projected a possible 6.9 million people in Singapore by 2030	MDA requires sites that regularly report issues relating to Singapore and have significant reach among website visitors in Singapore to apply for individual licenses. The license is subjected to annual renewal
2014	PM Lee filed a defamation lawsuit against Roy Ngerng, a socio-political blogger	
2015	Lee Kuan Yew's death Celebration of Singapore's 50th #SG50 PAP won 83 out of 89 seats in 2015 General Election. PAP unable to win back Aljunied. The first election since Singapore's independence, which saw all seats, contested	