Singapore's Policy Advancement Paradox:
Online Political Participation under Authoritarianism

By

Logan Pratico

Senior Honors Thesis

Global Studies Department

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

April 2020

Approved by

____

Dr. Graeme Robertson, Thesis Adviser

____

Dr. Jonathan Weiler, Reader

Table of Contents

Dedication ………………………………………………………………………………. 3

Acknowledgements ……………………………………………………………………... 4

Abbreviations ……………………………………………………………………….... 5

Chapter I: Introduction ………………………………………………………………….. 6

Chapter II: Literature Review ……………………………………………………….. 14

Chapter III: Artificially Creating User Engagement on STOMP …………………….... 27

Chapter IV: Capitalizing on Pre-existing User Engagement …………………………... 47

Chapter V: Creating and Capitalizing on User Participation …………………………... 67

Chapter VI: Conclusion ……………………………………………………………... 88

References …………………………………………………………………………… 91

Dedication

For the grassroots organizers working to make all voices heard, the Wikipedia writers that create entries simply to make knowledge more accessible, the software engineers that contribute to open source projects, and anyone else that brings out the beauty of the hyper-connected world.

Acknowledgements

Thank you Dr. Robertson for your mentorship with this thesis. I will look back on our meetings discussing my research fondly. Each time I entered your office confused and overwhelmed, and left feeling inspired and motivated. Your incredible depth of knowledge, your ability to piece together information to create effective research, and your strong mentorship are all qualities I hope to embody one day.

Thank you Dr. Weiler for your mentorship over the past four years. Your insight, guidance and support since I first enrolled at UNC have shaped my college experience. Throughout the past four years, you have acted as a professor, an advisor, a thesis reader and a mentor. My appreciation for your guidance in each of these areas cannot be overstated. You have inspired a passion for both global politics and academia in me; for this I am incredibly grateful.

Thank you Dr. Johnson for pushing me to continuously reach for a higher bar while writing this thesis. Your guidance over the past year has improved my analytical, writing and research skills in immeasurable ways.

Thank you to my peers in GLBL 691—I truly enjoyed working with you all this past year.

Thank you to my friends who supported me and provided me feedback throughout this process, and who listened as I talked their ear off over a new breakthrough I made in my research.

Thank you to my family who never stopped supporting me, through this and any other endeavor I have taken on.

Lastly, thank you to Open Eye Café and Weaver Street Market for keeping me well caffeinated through it all.

Abbreviations

PAP – People’s Action Party

PMD – Personal Mobility Device

SGEM – Speak Good English Movement

STOMP – Straits Times Online Mobile Print

Chapter I- Introduction

In a 2011 interview with Forbes magazine, the founder of the Internet, Vint Cerf, was asked if his creation had fulfilled his expectations. Choosing to discuss the power of the Internet, Cerf responded: "Information flow is what the Internet is about. Information sharing is power. If you don't share your ideas, smart people can't do anything about them, and you'll remain anonymous and powerless" (Karlgaard 2011). Within Cerf's words is the underlying connection between the sharing of information and power. The hyper-connectedness of modern society has redefined the nature of information sharing. In this new world, ideas can flourish with incredible speed. Individuals hold the power to mobilize and advocate for change on an unprecedented scale, presenting a new challenge to centralized power (Heimans & Timms 2017). However, the fallacy in this line of thinking is the assumption that this connection is inherently beneficial for the individual. Instead, the reality is that sites facilitating a connection between Internet users can actually be used to reinforce centralized power structures. Despite evidence from other countries that online democratic tools, and the Internet more generally, have forced regimes to decrease their control over the public, the strength and ability of Singapore's People's Action Party (PAP) to exert authoritarian public policy remains strong (Howard & Hussain 2013; Oliver & Ostwald 2018). Thus, my research will seek to answer the question: Why is the Singaporean government able to continue to implement authoritarian public policy despite the emergence of Internet technologies allowing for increased online participation and political engagement?

I. Argument

My research suggests that through the strategic use of online practices typically associated with democracy, such as increased participation and political engagement, the PAP is able to reinforce its own authoritarian powers. This is done by providing a channel for Internet

users (hereafter referred to as netizens) to engage with Singaporean public policy in new ways that capitalize on individuals' increasing desire to participate online (Heimans & Timms 2018). These new opportunities for engagement have restructured the nature of participation to incorporate a larger base of Singaporean citizens. However, despite these new modes of participation, the PAP can still put forth a singular political narrative centered on advancing the party's policy initiatives.

In doing so, the party works to reinforce a centralized political narrative through decentralized channels of communication. This political narrative centers on the idea that, while Singapore has experienced tremendous economic and societal success in the last 50 years, many Singaporeans view these successes as constantly at risk of falling apart (Mutalib 2000; Wong & Huang 2010). Furthermore, Singaporean citizens have come to adopt an opinion that paints the People's Action Party as the inherent cause of the nation's success (Tan 2014). The PAP has been able to take advantage of this viewpoint and in turn paint themselves as the hero, any opposition as the villain, and the Singaporean citizen as the immature victim, ever vulnerable to outside influence (Mutalib 2000). While the Internet has provided an avenue to contradict the Singaporean political narrative, the PAP has carefully channeled the power of increased engagement in the online public sphere to continue to engage in authoritarian policy initiatives.

In this thesis, I explore three sites— STOMP, *The Straits Times* and *Change.org*—and the ways in which they are utilized by the regime to advance public policy. STOMP and *Change.org* are both sites that embody the participatory nature of the Internet by facilitating user engagement and allowing for peer-to-peer information sharing. *The Straits Times* is a media outlet that takes a top-down approach to sharing information wherein journalists curate news stories that are then posted online to the website. As I explore, each of these sites plays a crucial

role in advancing the regime's public policy given the new hyper-connectedness of Internet users.

Using 21st century technologies, the PAP is able to shape public policy in two ways. First, through the creation of websites centered on user participation and engagement, the PAP allows netizens to engage with public policy in artificial, but powerful ways. That is to say, the PAP has created sites that allow for netizens to show support for the regime without allowing for any dissent. Sites such as the Straits Times Online Mobile Print (STOMP) have provided Singaporeans with an avenue to engage with the PAP's political agenda that, in turn, reinforces its traditional power structures. Second, *The Straits Times* and *Change.org* allow the PAP to highlight instances of online support for the regime that exist, while ignoring dissent. The use of *Change.org* petitions, in collaboration with the pro-PAP media outlet *The Straits Times,* creates a tool for illustrating popular support for public policy when it best serves the regime ("Global Intelligence Files" 2010). I explore these dynamics in Chapters III and IV. In Chapter V, I explore a singular case to demonstrate how the regime both artificially creates public support and capitalizes on pre-existing examples of it to advance public policy. Each of these points will be explored in greater detail using a methodology discussed below.

II. Context

There are many bodies of research surrounding authoritarian control in the political sphere in the 20th century (Peleg 1994; Husák 2018), and the 21st century (King et al. 2013; Gehlbach 2011). As Peleg argues, power centers on the ability to prevent the flow of information (1994). In the past, Singapore has been able to do this by regulating the publications of books, movies and other forms of media (Tan 2018). However, in the 21st century, new modes of information sharing have emerged wherein individuals hold the power to share information on a

peer-to-peer basis (Heimans & Timms 2018; Roberts 2018). This has allowed for political participation through information sharing on a global scale (Heimans & Timms 2018; Ferdinand 2000). Research surrounding this idea suggests that authoritarian forms of government will be overpowered by the increasingly robust platform for free speech that is the Internet (Howard & Muzammil 2013). This idea is supported by the fall of many powerful individuals from Harvey Weinstein with the #MeToo movement (Heimans & Timms 2018), to President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt during the Arab Spring (Clarke 2019). However, despite these expectations, the PAP's authoritarian policy agenda has been able to withstand the democratic tools made possible by the Internet. In fact, as I explore throughout this thesis, Singaporean citizens will go as far as to use these technologies to reinforce the government's autocratic power.

Thus, this thesis centers on the PAP's ability to advance policy initiatives that reinforce authoritarian power in the 21st century. Peters (2003) defines public policy as the activity that governments engage in for the purpose of changing their economy or society. For the purpose of my research, I use this definition when referring to public policy decisions taken by the PAP. Beyond this, when referring to public policy advancement, I expand on Lascoumes and Le Gales (2007) definition of public policy *instrumentation*. That is, the devices utilized with the generic purpose of carrying a concrete political or social concept into implementation (Lascoumes & Le Gales 2007). This research builds off of this definition to define public policy *advancement* as the efforts taken by governments to implement public policy. Public policy advancement by the PAP aims to avoid resistance from Singaporean citizens while still entrenching authoritarian power. Thus, the PAP must simultaneously incorporate popular support, and use such support to centralize its power.

For this research, it is important to understand how public policy advancement entrenches authoritarian power in Singapore. As scholars (Wong & Huang 2010) argue, the Singaporean regime has a surprisingly shallow depth of legitimacy in the city-state. While the regime has maintained a long degree of support (Tan 2014), its ability to maintain legitimacy rests on an exchange relation between Singaporean citizens and the party (Wong & Huang 2010). However, this relation emphasizes that the regime will provide security and prosperity for its citizens in exchange for political legitimacy (Wong & Huang 2010). This relationship must be constantly maintained in Singapore to ensure that the regime is able to maintain authoritarian power in the face of an increasingly mobilized base of citizens (Tan 2014). As I explore, much of the regime's public policy works to ensure feelings of both security and prosperity in Singapore. However, when the PAP enacts new public policy, it simultaneously mends the exchange relation it maintains with its citizens and reinforces its authoritarian power.

III. Methodology

The methodology for my thesis involves the collection of qualitative data from each of the three aspects of my argument outlined above. I collected and analyzed news articles from STOMP and *The Straits Times* and online petitions from *Change.org* relating to PAP public policy. This analysis draws conclusions about the ability for the PAP to continue to enforce an authoritarian policy agenda as practices characteristic of democracy emerge online.

First, I begin my qualitative analysis by exploring the Straits Times Online Mobile Print (STOMP). STOMP is an organization that allows citizens to create Singaporean news stories and share them with the nation. In conducting research on STOMP, I examine the *English as it is Broken* column, an extension of the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) that sought to encourage Singaporeans to adopt Standard English over Singaporean English (or Singlish). As

will be explored, this column encouraged individuals to actively participate in a political agenda put forth by the PAP. In analyzing *English as it is Broken,* I pull a series of questions and answers taken from the column to describe the ways in which the PAP reshaped the nature of participation surrounding SGEM. While the column was discontinued in the late 2000s, two best-selling books have been published under the same name. Both of these books, filled entirely with questions and answers taken directly from the column, will provide the foundation for the data in this section. What I find is that the party works to both increase and reshape participation on *English as it is Broken* by providing a channel for netizens to take the movement in its own direction.

Second, I explore the platform *Change.org* and the way that it is used to illustrate popular support for regime policy on *The Straits Times*. *Change.org*, widely used in Singapore, is perhaps the most direct example of democratic organizing on the Internet. The site allows individuals to create and sign petitions in a quick and easy fashion ("Change.org" 2020). In analyzing *Change.org* petitions, I search for those that address the government directly in both support and opposition of the regime surrounding the banning of the Swedish heavy metal band Watain. The revoking of Watain's performance license was highly publicized as some argued it set back free speech in the nation while others stated the band's lyrics were harmful to the Christian faith and, as such, should be censored (Chan 2019). As I explore, not all of the *Change.org* petitions are in support of the government's decision to prohibit the band from performing, however the PAP is able to utilize *The Straits Times* to highlight support for certain petitions, allowing others to live in the margins of the Internet. This case study is combined with data collected using *The Google Custom Search REST API*—a program that can be used to scan the web for news articles programmatically—to demonstrate how the PAP utilizes *The Straits*

Times to selectively draw attention to certain petitions and ignore others. When comparing the *Change.org* petitions with previous research surrounding public policy in Singapore, I will provide analysis as to how Singaporeans have come to view and engage with the PAP's political agenda in the digital era. What I find is that the party highlights specific *Change.org* petitions on *The Straits Times* that exemplify popular support while ignoring petitions that exemplify opposition towards government policy.

Finally, I explore the interconnected nature of STOMP, *The Straits Times,* and *Change.org* in advancing public policy. Here, my methodology is similar to the previous data chapters. I explore the use of each site in advancing public policy surrounding the banning of personal mobility devices (e-Scooters, e-Bikes, etc.) from footpaths throughout the city-state. Each site plays a definitive role in working to ensure that the ban of personal mobility devices from footpaths gains popular support. In order to explore this concept further, I use *The Google Custom Search REST API* to scan both STOMP and *The Straits Times* for mention of personal mobility devices in the year 2019, when the discussion to ban the devices was at its height. From there, I analyze several of the articles to demonstrate how STOMP generates popular support for regime public policy, while *The Straits Times* uses pre-existing instances of popular support on *Change.org* to further the party's policy initiatives. Through this, I find that the regime simultaneously works to generate popular support, and also works to capitalize on pre-existing examples of it, to advance public policy initiatives.

IV. Outline

Throughout this thesis, I work to show why the PAP is able to continue to implement authoritarian public policy despite increased engagement and democratic participation facilitated through the Internet. First, I provide a starting point for this thesis by addressing previous

research in this field. The previous studies I pull from can be broadly defined in three main categories: (1) authoritarian regimes in the 21st century, (2) the shift in information flow in the 21st century, and (3) public policy advancement in Singapore in the 21st century. In the third chapter, I analyze STOMP to show the power of social news sites in influencing public policy. The following chapter explores *Change.org* and *The Straits Times* as platforms for highlighting popular support for the banning of Watain. In the fifth chapter, I analyze how STOMP, *The Straits Times* and *Change.org* are used in lockstep to advance an authoritarian policy agenda. Finally, in chapter six I conclude by discussing the implications of my findings.

Chapter II- Literature Review

I. Introduction

In order to understand why the People's Action Party (PAP) is able to continue to advance any authoritarian policy agenda despite the growing presence of Internet tools that facilitate democratic participation, it is first necessary to understand the context in which authoritarianism, information sharing and Singaporean policy making exists in the 21st century. The end of the Cold War brought a paradigm shift in authoritarianism. Likewise, the digital age ushered in new technologies that led to a shift in information flow. Both of these changes have dramatically altered Singapore's approach to policy making in the 21st century. Thus, the foundation for my research connects with the following categories of political science literature: (1) authoritarian governance in the Post-Cold War era, (2) the hyper-connection of individuals in the digital age, and (3) authoritarian policy advancement (as defined in Chapter I) in Singapore. The first two categories address the political and technological systems and their changes in the late 20th and 21st century, whereas the final category of literature can be viewed as the resulting system for advancing policy in Singapore that emerged out of the first two transformations.

II. New Forms of Authoritarian Regimes

In the 21st century there are essentially two schools of thought concerning authoritarianism. The first argues that regimes exclude practices typical of democratic institutions—such as separation of powers, citizen participation and majority rule—in favor of implementing overtly authoritarian policies (Doubek 2018; Ambrosio 2018; Kneuer & Demmelhuber 2016). The second argues that autocratic regimes use pseudo-democratic institutions that appear to advance democracy, to reinforce autocratic control (Ezrow 2018;

Gagné 2015). Singapore seems to fit well in this latter description. However, as examples of both regime types exist, this section of my literature review will address the current research in both areas of authoritarian study.

Removing the Mask of Democracy

In the past decade, the form of authoritarian governance that existed throughout the Cold War has experienced a fierce resurgence (Ambrosio 2018). Nations have become more overtly authoritarian in the past decade ("Freedom House" 2010; "Freedom House 2019). Turkey, for example, experienced a fierce decline in both political freedom and civil liberties between 2010 and 2019, sliding from a characterization of "Partly Free" to "Not Free" in 2018 ("Freedom House" 2010; "Freedom House" 2019). In a similar sense, Thailand has also become significantly less free, experiencing a downward trend in democratic freedom resulting in a re-characterization from "Partly Free" to "Not Free" in 2015 ("Freedom House" 2019; "Freedom House" 2019). Nations such as India, Hungary and Egypt have all followed similar trends. However, these trends do not exist in isolation for a select number of countries. Rather, when examined in aggregate, all nations over the past decade have become increasingly more authoritarian. In 2019, for example, 64 nations were measured to have experienced democratic decline, with only 37 experiencing democratic gains ("Freedom House" 2020). *Figure 2.1* illustrates the global deterioration of democracy over the past fourteen years. In this context, it becomes clear that, over the past decade, authoritarianism has experienced a strong revival.

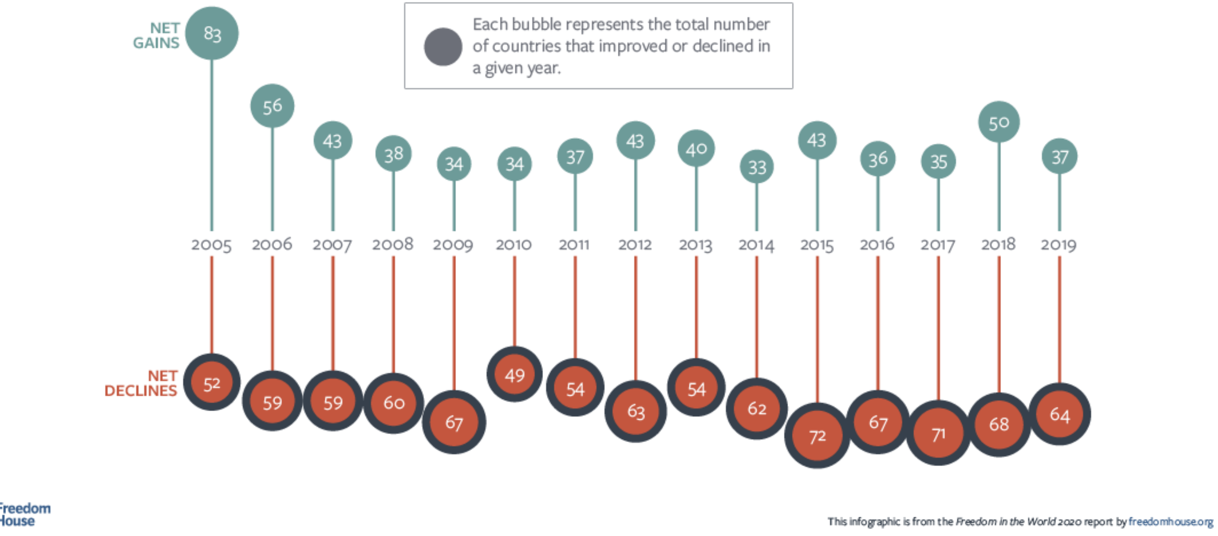


Figure 2.1: Number of Countries with Democratic Advancements and Declines since 2005 ("Freedom House" 2020)

As Ambrosio (2018) argues, whether it is through abolishing term limits, violently cracking down on peaceful protests, or creating a dynasty by grooming one's children to govern, "the mask has clearly slipped and autocrats are now far less concerned about keeping up the pretenses of democracy" (122). Ambrosio further illustrates his argument by referencing Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary, who in 2014, criticized the foundation of liberal democracy by openly declaring that he supports building an illiberal state such as those that exist in China, Russia and Turkey. Such rhetoric is indicative of a shifting tide in world politics that welcomes autocratic rule. Still, while Singapore may be a recognizably authoritarian government from the outside, within the city-state, the PAP takes care to create a political sphere that encourages democratic participation in the political process. Both online and offline, Singaporeans have a greater ability to vote, speak or otherwise engage in politics than in more overtly authoritarian regimes around the world. As a result, the PAP takes a different approach to

policy making than other authoritarian regimes with little regard for democratic institutions. The party must make decisions with more concern for citizen reception as the voter base is slightly more mobilized (Tan 2014).

Furthermore, as Kneuer and Demmelhuber (2016) argue, the political context that allows Orbán to openly support authoritarianism is permitted through Authoritarian Gravity Centers (ACGs) that can be attributed with the growing prominence of authoritarian systems in the modern age. As the authors explore, regimes actively export autocratic principles on a regional level. These principles can then be used as a conceptual playbook for other governments to follow (Kneuer & Demmelhuber 2016). That is to say, as more states follow the overtly authoritarian path, the regimes will create an established reference group that permits authoritarianism in the modern era (Ambrosio 2018). As the authors argue, with the emergence of more overtly authoritarian action in recent years under governments in Russia, Iran or Venezuela, neighboring nations are given ideas and resources to further their already non-democratic governments into authoritarianism (Kneuer & Demmelhuber 2016). This concept, known as the demonstration effect, explains how authoritarian developments in one place will often act as a catalyst to those in another (Ahmed 2017). However, as the rest of the world has shifted further towards authoritarianism over the past decade, Singapore has maintained nearly the exact same degree of freedom in the political sphere (“Freedom House” 2010; “Freedom House” 2019). Such a reality suggests that Singapore has no intention of either relinquishing or tightening its control over its citizens. Instead, the People’s Action Party attempts to retain its control through a political context that is both democratic and autocratic in nature.

Authoritarianism with a Hint of Democracy

Hybrid regimes—or those that combine democratic and autocratic principles—have become more common in the post-Cold War era. However, Singapore stands unique among others in that the nation was established as a pseudo-democratic state in the 1960s, and has continued the same degree of control throughout the PAP's reign ("Freedom House" 2019; Tan 2016). As Gagné (2015) argues, hybrid regimes combine democratic and autocratic traits to maintain a system of strict control while at the same time presenting a democratic façade to the world. In this sense, hybrid regimes present a certain degree of legitimacy to citizens (and, perhaps, the international community) while allowing autocratic rulers to maintain dominance. Hybrid Regimes have existed since the 1950s, but they have grown in incredible number in recent years (Gagné 2015). However, hybrid regimes are still somewhat more beholden to their citizen base than other authoritarian regimes. The lack of staunch repression, and the lessened restriction of dissenting voices pose new challenges to a hybrid regime's ability to advance public policy.

As Ezrow (2018) argues, this shift towards hybridization is marked with the near extinction of a specific aspect of authoritarianism: totalitarianism. At the turn of the century, this form of absolute governance began to fade until only North Korea remained (Ezrow 2018). Instead, new forms of control have emerged allowing for the perception of democracy under authoritarianism. While democratic institutions such as voting, freedom of speech, or governmental checks and balances appear to be in place, they are often illegitimate. In Russia, for example, elections take place, however they are often considered unfree and unfair (Dewan 2018). These modern autocratic governments, characterized as hybrid regimes, have become more experienced in using media, electoral processes, and the economic sphere creatively to

their advantage. Rather than exercising complete control over the economy, for example, hybrid regimes may encourage neoliberal practices while still enforcing staunch regulation when necessary to maintain power (Ezrow 2018). This form of governance is indicative of Singapore's political past and present. The regime's closed political access, coupled with an open economic sphere is a marker of its position in the 21st century as a hybrid regime (Ademmer, Langbein & Börzel 2019).

It is important to recognize, however, that Singapore stands unique among other hybrid regimes in the 21st century. While other regimes have gradually transformed their political institutions (Ambrosio 2018; Ezrow 2018) in a marked shift towards populist authoritarianism (Muddle & Kaltwasser 2017), Singapore has instead maintained many of its political institutions. This can be seen as a staunch contrast with other regimes that attempt to delegitimize judicial and legislative areas of government in order to centralize power ("Ecuador Bucks the Authoritarian Trend" 2018). Instead, Singapore has upheld the legitimacy of these institutions. In this way, the nation has not gotten definitively more authoritarian or democratic ("Freedom House 2019). Instead, the regime has firmly maintained its position as a hybrid regime throughout its reign.

To elaborate, as Moriesen (2014) explores, Singapore can be viewed through a variety of different lenses in terms of its political structure. However, the characterization that Moriesen uses, and the one that this paper will utilize, is that Singapore is a *politically* illiberal and *economically* liberal system (Moriesen 2014). On the basis that the PAP does not have any substantial opposition, does not allow for free press, marginalizes any existing opposition, and holds little tolerance for opposing views, this thesis will refer to Singapore as an authoritarian or autocratic state (Moriesen 2014). It is important to remember, however, that Singapore does have

a neoliberal economic sphere. This economic disposition has created new complexities for the PAP in the global sphere. As the nation continues to grow in global markets, the PAP is simultaneously working to maintain its authoritarian power (Moriesen 2014). In doing so, it has been forced to provide some concessions to Singaporean citizens. Censorship over the Internet, for example, is far looser than in other authoritarian regimes ("Freedom House" 2019). Citizens hold the ability to participate in large numbers online in such a way that allows for both popular support and dissent against the regime to emerge. However, for the reasons stated above, Singapore can still be labeled as an authoritarian power. My research shows, the PAP has begun to take a new approach to advancing its own public policy that capitalizes on the new political dynamic emerging in the globalized world. That is, the PAP has begun to capitalize on new avenues of popular engagement online to ensure that popular support for regime policy emerges. This in turn allows the regime to utilize tools that facilitate democracy to paradoxically reinforce autocratic powers.

III. Information and Connection in the 21st Century

As digital technology has continued to progress, so too have the modes for spreading and sharing of information. Throughout the 20th century, information moved in a top-down fashion from state-owned or private news groups (TV, newspaper and radio) to individual consumers. This system had few peer-based communication methods for individuals (Roberts 2018). Thus, in order to disseminate information en masse, large scale media outlets were required. In authoritarian regimes, this allowed for a singular political narrative to be put forth by simply controlling the media. However, with the birth of the Internet in the late 20th and early 21st century, new methods of sharing information have allowed this traditional flow of news from media agencies to consumers to be subverted (Roberts 2018). Originally, new technology led

scholars to believe that the Internet would spark a new wave of democracy where the liberalization of information sharing would lead to a liberalization of politics (Diamond & Plattner 2012; Howard & Hussein 2013). However, as the 21st century has continued and a resurgence of authoritarian forms of governance has emerged, many have come to realize that the Internet can be just as much a catalyst for autocracy as democracy (Heimans & Timms 2017; "Freedom House" 2019). As I explore throughout this thesis, the PAP is able to use increased online participation in a seemingly paradoxical way to advance authoritarian public policy.

As Howard and Hussein (2013) argue, the Internet was an influential source in connecting individuals through Tunisia and Egypt during the 2011 Arab Spring. As unrest in both nations began to grow, collective action through Facebook ignited a significant portion of the population, rallying them around a collective issue that could then be translated to the streets. In Egypt, the death of Khaled Said sparked online protests and the creation of the Facebook group "We are all Khaled Said" (Howard & Hussein 2013). It was on this Facebook group that the initial call for protests in Cairo's Tahir Square was made (Ghonim 2015). This suggests that the Internet holds the power to engage citizens in political movements that are capable of challenging centralized powers. However, when such power is challenged, autocratic governments do not simply yield the ground.

In Tunisia and Egypt, as the protests continued to grow, both countries eventually took down the Internet in an effort to suppress dissent (Howard & Hussein 2013). Then, in perhaps the most devastating example of the Streisand Effect[1] in modern governance, the act of cutting the Internet caused more people to take to the streets to attempt to get more information. This

[1] The Streisand Effect refers to a phenomenon whereby an attempt to censor has the unintended consequence of publicizing the information more widely. Originally named after Barbra Streisand, who, while trying to suppress photos of her residence in Malibu, California, inadvertently drew more attention to them.

caused the protests to then grow in considerable size as those who were indifferent about the issue were forced into the streets to simply find information (Howard & Hussein 2013). In this case, Internet tools facilitating political engagement overpowered centralized power structures and brought the ability of authoritarian governments to maintain power in the digital age into question.

The events during the Arab Spring suggest that the power of autocratic governments weakens as a result of the Internet (Howard & Hussein 2013). In particular, the revolutions that took place in Tunisia and Egypt appear to demonstrate the idea that the Internet's hyper-connected nature will become an unstoppable liberalizing force, capable of toppling entrenched dictatorships around the world. However, the rise of authoritarian regimes in the past decade has demonstrated that this is a fallacy ("Freedom House" 2019). In Singapore, the PAP has firmly remained in power despite many rapid advancements in the tech industry (Ortmann 2018). This fact suggests that the Internet is not the harbinger to democracy that some had hoped. Instead, as I show, it is a tool for facilitating increased participation in the political sphere that can give power to democratic or autocratic forms of governance.

Through this discussion, it becomes clear that the shift in information flow as a result of the Internet is not inherently liberating. While some scholars such as Larry Diamond (2010) have used the term *liberation technology* to describe the Internet, the idea of the platform as a harbinger of democracy is coming into contest. Perhaps, as Diamond presents in a later work with Marc Plattner (2012), a better term is *accountability technology.* That is to say, technology that provides a tool for checking and monitoring others within the political sphere (Diamond & Plattner 2012). The emergence of cell phone cameras and YouTube, for example, allowed for a grainy video of a Tunisian street vendor's sacrificial protest to spark political revolutions

throughout the region (Diamond & Plattner 2012). However, at the same time, similar technologies give power to current regimes such as China's Communist Party. The use of facial recognition technologies, for example, have allowed the Chinese government to facilitate surveillance on its own people in an unprecedented way (Bai 2019). As I explore, in Singapore, many Internet platforms embody the essential difference between *accountability* and *liberation technology.* Sites like STOMP, *The Straits Times* and *Change.org* are founded on the principle of participation associated with democracy. However, their outcomes are often less than democratic. Instead, they allow the PAP to use netizen engagement to advance authoritarian public policy and subsequently reinforce centralized power.

Scholars have often given focus to the role of technology to facilitate democratic action (Heimans & Timms 2017; Howard & Hussein 2013). Yet the methodology, and by whom the technology is being used, determines whether said technology acts as a tool for democratic change, or a handmaiden for authoritarianism (Ghonim 2015; Cadwalladr 2019; Heimans & Timms 2017). As Heimans and Timms (2018) argue in *New Power*, participation and connection facilitated through the Internet is not inherently intertwined with outcomes favorable to democracy. Rather, technology simply allows for hyper-connectivity. The result of such connection is left up to those that are in a position to harness its power. In this sense, platforms encouraging democratic practices such as Facebook, Twitter, and those I examine in this thesis hold the potential to reinforce autocratic power. Sites such as STOMP and *Change.org* embody the participatory nature that has characterized the Internet in the digital age. While both sites are notably democratic in allowing all Singaporeans to share information, they frequently encourage authoritarian principles in a way that appears to be founded on popular support. This thesis will

explore how these online sites facilitating citizen participation can be used to advance authoritarian public policy.

IV. Policy Advancement in Singapore in the 21st Century

The strategies that the PAP uses to implement authoritarian public policy is the focus of this section. As Wong and Huang (2010) have noted, Singapore's liberal economic sphere, coupled with its illiberal political sphere has caused many to question how the regime is able to maintain power. The authors argue that while the regime enjoys a large degree of support in the nation, the depth of its legitimacy is shallow (Wong & Huang 2010). The fact that the PAP has maintained political legitimacy despite economic liberalization and globalization is due to a relationship between citizens and the regime wherein the latter provides security and prosperity for Singaporean citizens in return for receiving political legitimacy (Wong & Huang 2010). Even when the relationship is stable, it requires attention to ensure that the legitimacy of the regime is maintained (Wong & Huang 2010). As I explore throughout this thesis, much of the PAP's attempts to advance public policy are founded on ensuring that the exchange relation between citizens and the regime remains strong.

As scholars have noted (Tan 2014; Ong & Tim 2014), since the 2011 elections, the PAP has taken a different approach to engaging in new policy decisions. In 2011, the PAP gained the smallest percentage of votes since the general elections of 1968. The regime only garnered 60.14% of the popular vote (Ong & Tim 2014). As a result, the oppositional Worker's Party garnered 8 of the 101 seats in the Singaporean parliament, the largest for any oppositional party in Singapore since the 1968 election (Ong & Tim 2014). While the party still held a firm majority in government, the 2011 electoral results led to a new political climate that many have come to refer to as "the new normal" (Ong & Tim 2014; Tan 2014; Wee 2015). The phrase

reflects a heightened sense of vulnerability felt by the PAP in the face of a newly mobilized and politically active electorate (Ong & Tim 2014; Wee 2015). The "new normal" has, in turn, lead to a dramatically different stance taken by the PAP on policy decisions in the 2010s. In many cases, the PAP has engaged in more cautious policy decisions with an emphasis on garnering public support rather than going against the Singaporean public and engaging in an overhaul of current policy.

As Tan (2014) notes, performance is a key aspect of the PAP's longstanding authoritarian rule. The economic and social success of Singapore, characterized by high growth rates and the formation of a middle-class, linked the regime with Singapore's success story (Tan 2014). This in turn provided a degree of credibility for the regime's policy decisions. However, this success has also subsequently driven public expectations of the government to incredibly high levels (Tan 2014). This fact, coupled with the increased mobilization of the electorate has brought the regime's political power into contest (Tan 2014). However, the PAP did not simply yield the ground. Instead, the party began to attempt to find credible solutions to policy problems that allowed it to regain its political hegemony (Tan 2014). In this thesis, I show how the party works to encourage and reshape the nature of political participation in order to channel the power of online democratic action to enact new policy.

The above research suggests that the PAP's power has come into contest in recent years and this challenge has caused the regime to engage in new methods for enacting public policy. While some (Wong & Huang 2010) have argued that the depth of the regime's legitimacy was shallow before the 2011 elections, there is no doubt that the regime faced a serious threat to power at the start of the 2010s (Tan 2014). This forced the regime to develop new methods for policy advancement that accounted for an increasingly mobilized voter base. As I explore in the

subsequent chapters of this thesis, the emergence of online tools facilitating netizen participation holds the potential to greatly threaten the regime's power. However, the PAP is still able to reinforce its centralized power by engaging in policy advancement that capitalizes on, and even works to facilitate, such mobilization.

V. Concluding Notes

The above literature seeks to create a foundation for exploring policy making in Singapore in the 21st century. The shift in information flow, as well as the changing tides of authoritarianism have had dramatic effects on the PAP's ability to advance public policy in the 21st century. More generally, the political and technological transitions that have emerged in the modern era have given way to a new dynamic between authoritarian regimes and their citizens. As is apparent with the Arab Spring, this new dynamic may cause friction between traditional autocratic power structures and the newly connected citizen base. However, it will not inherently lead to democracy. Instead, governments have begun to change their tactics for exerting control. Rather than govern with a heavy hand, regimes such as the PAP have opted to capitalize on the increased connection of individuals to encourage their own agendas. As I argue in the remaining chapters, this allows the regime to create a new system for encouraging and implementing authoritarian public policy in such a way that operates on the same peer-to-peer basis as the information flow discussed above.

Chapter III- Artificially Creating User Engagement

I. Introduction

In working to understand the PAP utilizes sites that appear to facilitate democracy to advance authoritarian public policy, this chapter explores how the PAP engages with the Straits Times Online Mobile Print (STOMP). Specifically, this chapter explores the utilization of STOMP in garnering support for the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) as an example of the Singaporean regime's attempts to make use of the Internet to advance its own public policy. Throughout this chapter, I argue that the authoritarian People's Action Party (PAP) utilizes STOMP to facilitate mass participation and engagement surrounding its public policy. This has the effect of creating a system in which increased participation from netizens is used to advance autocratic power.

To demonstrate my argument, this chapter analyzes the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM), a government public policy initiative launched in 2000. Through this initiative, the PAP intended to encourage the population to adopt westernized "Standard English" and reject the Singaporean dialect of English, colloquially known as "Singlish" (Bruthiaux 2010). Specifically, I analyze the beginning of the movement and its centralized approach to encouraging Singaporeans to "speak good English" wherein participation was limited to the leaders of the movement. I then contrast this approach with the regime's later attempts to decentralize power and encourage participation from a wider base of Singaporeans. These attempts to decentralize power within the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) will be the focus of this chapter. Most importantly for this project, this section analyzes the online forum known as *English as it is Broken.* The column, created in conjunction with the People's Action Party (PAP) and the Ministry of Education, was a definitive attempt to encourage increased

participation in authoritarian public policy. Initially started as a weekly print column in the *Straits Times,* the *English as it is Broken* forum launched in 2008 as a regular feature on STOMP (Tai Ann & Soh 2010). STOMP's *English as it is Broken* forum allowed individual citizens to share and create stories by taking photos or sending written information to STOMP via WhatsApp, SMS or through the site (Tai Ann & Soh 2010). In analyzing the forum, this chapter shows how the PAP is able to continue to enact authoritarian public policy as tools allowing for democratic participation begin to emerge on the Internet. In essence, the PAP uses a site associated with democratic practices to advance an authoritarian ideology centered on controlling culture, and more specifically language, in Singapore.

Within the context of Singapore, the ability to advance public policy online is apparent with the Straits Times Online Mobile Print (STOMP). The site is a subsidiary of the Singaporean media conglomerate Singapore Press Holdings. STOMP encourages the sharing of information between individuals in a fashion indicative of the peer-to-peer nature of sharing information discussed in Chapter II. Whereas, traditional media sources facilitate information sharing in a top-down fashion – that is, from a news conglomerate to individuals— STOMP encourages information sharing on a horizontal basis. Citizens hold the power to share and create stories by taking photos or sending written information to STOMP. This information is then posted to the site after being reviewed and edited by STOMP writers. In this sense, the site embodies a form of information sharing that exists between individuals, rather than between a singular news agency and the masses.

However, STOMP's parent company, Singapore Press Holdings, has known ties to the PAP in which the editorial board of each of its subsidiaries tailors content to favor the regime ("Global Intelligence Files" 2010). With STOMP, this strategy centers on the use of moderators

to review and edit stories submitted by users. Thus, while the information is generated by Singaporean citizens, the ability to control and regulate information is still in the hands of actors favorable to the regime. Still, the *idea* that citizens control the information flow creates a new dynamic for media consumption that is impossible with the top-down information hierarchy (Timms & Heimans 2018). When information is perceived to be coming from everyday people, it is far more relatable, it feels as though it is coming from one's peers and thus accurately reflects the interest of the masses rather than an elite minority (Gross 2019). However, with STOMP the use of moderators to regulate news stories creates a filter that allows Singapore Press Holdings to continue to control the flow of information as they do with more conventional media sources. At the same time, this creates the perception of unregulated information sharing. As I explore in this chapter, this allows the regime to artificially create instances of popular engagement online that work to advance regime policies.

In order to understand the PAP's ability to advance public policy in this way, however, it is necessary to define *artificial* in terms of popular engagement. As I explore below, netizen participation on STOMP is still voluntary and, in my research, does not appear to follow any direct government coercion. That is to say, netizens participate on their own accord. However, the atmosphere in which netizens are encouraged to participate exists in a context where dissent is omitted. In controlling the flow of information online, the PAP is able to create a platform that appears to hold a multiplicity of ideas, when in reality it only allows for popular support. In this sense, the instances of popular engagement online are defined as artificial in that they do not emerge naturally from a free range of ideas. Throughout this chapter, I explore the PAP's artificial creation of popular engagement online and the resulting effect on advancing regime public policy.

The following section of this chapter aims to contextualize the Speak Good English Movement, and STOMP within the Singaporean political sphere. Section III then builds off of this context to illustrate the ways in which the PAP utilizes STOMP through *English as it is Broken* to garner support for the Speak Good English Movement. In exploring this further, I select two posts out of hundreds analyzed to illustrate the way that the PAP restructures SGEM around participation through *English as it is Broken.* These posts, explored in Section III aim to provide brief contextualization of the ways in which netizen's participate in *English as it is Broken.* Finally, I close this chapter by summarizing my findings and outlining the basis for subsequent chapters.

II. Context

In coming to understand the PAP's use of the Internet to advance its own authoritarian public policy, it is first necessary to understand two interconnected forces working together to give strength to the Singaporean regime. In this section, I connect the authoritarian People's Action Party (PAP) to STOMP and the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM). Following this, I demonstrate how both of these components come together to allow the PAP to use the Internet to advance its own authoritarian public policy.

The Straits Times Online Mobile Print (STOMP)

The Straits Times Online Mobile Print (STOMP) was founded in June of 2006 (Tai Ann & Soh 2010; "Media Releases" 2007). STOMP embodies the peer-to-peer nature of information sharing by allowing netizens to post articles to the site. In collectively sharing news on the site, Singaporeans are given the opportunity to be active members of their society by engaging with,

and sharing news they themselves deem to be important. In this way, STOMP stands out from traditional news media because of its use of individual voices to generate news. Indeed, the site's tagline reads "Activating Singapore's most awesome *citizen* journalists [emphasis added]" ("Straits Times Online Mobile Print" 2020). The ability for Singaporeans to share information between each other on STOMP would seem to embody the participatory nature of the Internet that has made it so powerful in the 21st century (Heimans & Timms 2018). However, this information is reviewed and moderated by authors employed by STOMP's parent company, Singapore Press Holdings (Tai Ann & Soh 2010; "Straits Times Online Mobile Print" 2020). As previously discussed, the media conglomerate often puts forth information favorable to the government throughout its many news sources, suggesting that STOMP may not be as democratic as it first appears ("Global Intelligence Files" 2010).

The pro-government editorial policy of Singapore Press Holdings brings into question whether STOMP truly reflects the ideology of Singaporeans, or the People's Action Party. While the site encourages citizens to submit content quickly and easily from their phones, the information is curated by STOMP editors (Dearman & Greenfield 2014). These individuals decide what is posted, when it is posted, and what information is included within the article. Thus, while on the surface level the site may appear to facilitate user generated stories, the information presented is first filtered by those loyal to the People's Action Party. In this way, information sharing appears to have shifted from a centralized base towards Singaporean citizens. However, as is explored in the next section, even with this decentralization of information sharing, the Singaporean regime is still able to use the site as a tool for advancing a singlular narrative and subsequently advance public policy initiatives. The key difference however, is that the end policy seems to have been reached democratically. In effect, this creates

a system wherein public policy appears to reflect the will of Singaporeans. The reality, however, is just the opposite.

One reason that STOMP is so useful to the PAP in advancing authoritarian policy through democratic practices is due to its simplicity. STOMP's ease of use leads to a relatively low amount of effort required to engage with the site. In 2007, after existing for just one year, STOMP had over 70 million page views and was listed as Singapore's number one social networking site ("Media Releases" 2007). Furthermore, Singapore Press Holdings praised the site for its ability to enact change through citizen journalism ("Media Releases" 2007). Since its creation, STOMP has been incredibly successful at both encouraging netizen participation, as well as facilitating an atmosphere that feels as though one's involvement is enacting change. The ability to cultivate this participation holds incredible power in the hyper-connected world (Heimans & Timms 2018). As this chapter will explore, when utilized by the authoritarian PAP, the democratic nature of STOMP can be used to reinforce authoritarian power.

When viewed in this context, the power of STOMP as a tool for the People's Action Party to influence public policy becomes clear. The ability to channel collective action provides the government with an effective way to spread information that is consistent with the shifting modes of communication in the 21st century. This in turn allows the government to encourage its own agenda and use STOMP as a tool for garnering support surrounding new policy.

The Speak Good English Movement (SGEM)

In April of 2000, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong launched a government program to encourage Singaporeans to speak a more ubiquitous dialect of English known as Standard

English. The public policy program, known as the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM), has utilized different methods from organizing seminars, to giving speaking awards, to engaging in partnerships with other organizations, in an effort to encourage Singaporeans to adopt Standard English ("Speak Good English" 2004). These attempts to promote a uniform version of English are indicative of the multicultural policy programs that the PAP has put in place throughout its reign. The program was created in response to Tong's belief that Singlish was "English corrupted by Singaporeans" (Tan 2016). The government believed that in order to fully assimilate with western, developed nations, a mastery of Standard English was necessary (Lim et al. 2010). In this way, the speaking of good English was linked to the future prosperity of the nation. As such, the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) was created to encourage grammar structure and vocabulary more consistent with Standard English than Singaporean English (Wee 2014).

However, it is important to recognize that SGEM is explicitly a policy program that advances the authoritarian nature of the regime. As a starting point, the program was created by an authoritarian government, on this basis alone it can be viewed as an example of a policy program put forth by centralized power structures. However, on a much deeper level, SGEM embodies the PAP's attempts to control the cultural sphere throughout Singapore. Since the independence of Singapore in 1965, the government has taken a stance of forced multiculturalism in an attempt to ensure that the incredibly diverse ethnic groups in Singapore are capable of living harmoniously. As Huat argues, the speaking of English is used as a tool by the PAP to distance itself from any racial group as a result of it not being tied to any ethnic constituency (2003). In this sense, English is seen as a key marker of promoting harmony throughout the country (Huat 2003). However, the reality is that this harmony is often superficial

and instead is used as justification for unilateral policy decisions made by the government (Huat 2003). In this sense, SGEM can be seen as an example of authoritarian public policy by the PAP as it both emerges from unilateral decision making, as well as contributes to a system that allows for increased control by the PAP.

Furthermore, it is important to note that SGEM differs from other literacy and language campaigns in that it not only advocates for speaking Standard English, but also, from its inception, encouraged the renunciation of Singlish (Bruthiaux 2010; "Speak Good Singlish" 2009). In this regard, SGEM is indicative of the PAP's attempts to enforce a hegemonic culture through public policy. SGEM attempted to alter the cultural framework of Singaporean society by removing an aspect of Singaporean culture that made it unique (Bruthiaux 2010; Wee 2009). When viewed through this lens, the Speak Good English Movement reflects the authoritarian nature of the PAP's attempts to control the cultural sphere of Singaporean society.

When the Speak Good English Movement was first launched in the year 2000, its approach to engaging the public fully embodied a top-down approach to disseminating information and policy advancement. The movement was led by a committee of individuals, interested in reducing the use of Singlish among Singaporeans under 40 (Nirmala 2000a). In its first year, the movement utilized the power of the Singapore Teachers' Union to create a seminar at the Shangri-La Hotel. This seminar, attended by roughly 500 people, most of them teachers, worked to emphasize the teaching of Standard English in Singaporean schools (Nirmala 2000b). The idea was that teachers would begin to implement what they learned at the conference to students throughout the city-state. At this time, the movement embodied the nature of traditional power structures before the technological revolution (Heimans & Timms 2018). The government first worked to encourage the speaking of good English among a select group of individuals.

Those individuals would then spread this information to the larger mass of Singaporeans. The trickle down nature of reworking the English language in Singapore made the hierarchy of power abundantly clear. In the first year, the People's Action Party put forth an ideology that was then distributed to the masses in a top-down fashion. When viewed through this lens, it becomes clear why the movement was often criticized as an overreach of the PAP's power (Bruthiaux 2010). Using these methods, the PAP's advancement of public policy appears forceful. While the teachers attended the conference willingly, the concepts that they learned were implemented in their own curriculums, creating an education system that excluded Singlish. However, as I explore, the PAP dramatically altered the approach to encouraging Singaporeans to speak good English by accounting for more peer-to-peer methods for sharing information.

Since its inception, SGEM has drawn mixed responses from the Singaporean public. Many argue that SGEM aims to improve the image of Singaporeans in the western world rather than to actually learn the proper speaking of English; that the movement failed to account for the actual spoken practice of English, particularly in multilingual societies; and that the project was indicative of governmental overreach that has so often characterized the PAP (Bruthiaux 2010). Furthermore, Singaporean English is viewed as a marker of Singaporean identity. From this, responses to the movement such as the Save Our Singlish Campaign and the Speak Good Singlish Movement have arisen, arguing that Singlish is a uniting factor that both connects the multicultural nation and makes it unique (Wee 2014). However, others supported the SGEM, arguing that the speaking of proper English was crucial to ensuring Singapore's position as a developed nation in the global sphere (Lim et al. 2010). The conflicting ideologies surrounding SGEM during this time period illustrate a friction between governments and citizens in which opposition movements spearheaded by individuals were put in direct contrast with the

authoritarian PAP. As is explored in the next section, the PAP was able to alter this dynamic through the creation of an online forum on STOMP. In doing so, increased participation in SGEM emerged, making popular support for the policy more clear. In this way, the authoritarian government used a supposedly democratic tool to advance its public policy.

III. Influencing Public Policy: *English as it is Broken*

This section explores the PAP's use of STOMP as a tool to implement authoritarian public policy, namely SGEM, through the *English as it is Broken* column. The *English as it is Broken* column was introduced in print in 2006 as part of the Speak Good English Movement. Two years later it was launched as a regular feature on STOMP. The column allowed Singaporeans to engage with the movement by submitting questions concerning proper English to STOMP, and then having their questions posted online with responses (Pakiam 2008 Tai Ann & Soh 2010). The online version of *English as it is Broken* became an instant success. The column used the participatory nature of the Internet to facilitate engagement for traditional power structures within an authoritarian regime. That is to say, the PAP used tactics typically associated with democracy, namely increased participation, to advance values put forth by the autocratic power. As discussed above, the Speak Good English Movement reflects the PAP's aim to exert control over the cultural sphere. The Singaporean government used STOMP's *English as it is Broken* column to advance this policy in two ways: (1) by using the column to restructure the movement to better engage Singaporean citizens, and (2) by shaping the nature of how individuals participate. I discuss each of these two points below.

Participatory Power to Advance the PAP

As previously stated, the power of *English as it is Broken* rested in its ability to encourage participation surrounding the Speak Good English Movement. Thus, in a seemingly contradictory way, the PAP was able to utilize practices associated with democracy to reinforce autocratic public policy. The PAP understands that today's leaders, even under authoritarian regimes, must succeed in a world with both institutional and collective power (Heimans & Timms 2018). That is to say, the hyper-connected nature of the Internet holds the potential to challenge dominant and hegemonic power structures. In order to account for this changing power dynamic, the People's Action Party has worked to increase participation surrounding authoritarian policy.

In accordance with this line of thinking, the PAP transformed SGEM from a movement defined by traditional power structures and distributed to Singaporeans, to one that actively encouraged participation from all through *English as it is Broken*. In doing so, the PAP worked to push power away from itself and toward Singaporean citizens. *English as it is Broken* allowed netizens to write to English speaking experts with any questions related to proper English that would then be shared on the column with responses from a team of experts, three times a week (Pakiam 2008). Concerning the public's engagement with the government program, the Deputy Editor for the Straits Times, Felix Soh wrote:

> "… members of the public generate all the English language posers [sic]. Daily, we receive query after query on English language usage since we introduced the feature in July 2006. We could not shut off the tap, even if we had contemplated doing so. The queries just kept flowing in non-stop." (Tai Ann & Soh 2010 pg. 1).

As Soh illustrates, Singaporeans felt an incredibly strong desire to participate in the movement. As the column transferred to STOMP, the amount of effort required to participate dropped even further as those interested in accessing the column could do so online, and those interested in submitting entries could do so via the site, SMS, and WhatsApp ("Straits Times Online Mobile Print" 2020). As an increasing number of Singaporeans could participate in the movement, and as action became less centralized and more collective, the power hierarchy apparent within the PAP's public policy program became less obvious.

However, the fact that the forum (and STOMP more generally) was regulated by moderators favoring the PAP, suggests that the site did not truly embody the open nature of information sharing that it appeared to. Rather, only posts that supported the speaking of Standard English over Singlish, and thus advanced SGEM, were accepted. In all posts analyzed for this site, none of them appear to be critical of SGEM. However, as is reflected in the Speak Good *Singlish* Movement and the Save our Singlish Campaign, opposition to the movement did exist. This suggests that the PAP aimed to increase participation with SGEM solely with respect to those who supported the movement. Rather than create a forum that encouraged a variety of opinions, the PAP aimed to increase participation from only one side.

The netizen engagement in *English as it is Broken* is somewhat surprising considering the frequent criticism SGEM drew with respect to its attempts to erase Singlish in favor of Standard English (Bruthiaux 2010; Rose & Galloway 2017). However, *English as it is Broken* allowed netizens to participate in new and exciting ways. This had the effect of drawing out a larger number of users seemingly in support of the movement. With the introduction of the online forum, the friction surrounding SGEM was no longer between citizens and government, but between the citizens themselves. The result was a system wherein those both in support and

dissent of SGEM engaged in democratic practices. However, one side was created by an authoritarian power, controlled by an authoritarian power through moderators, and worked to reinforce authoritarian public policy.

A central goal of the PAP when attempting to enact authoritarian policy such as SGEM is to engage as many individuals with the movement as possible. As exemplified by Soh's quote above, the ability to increase participation and engagement is directly associated with support for the movement. However, increasing the number of individuals participating was not the only action the PAP took to advance its public policy with respect to SGEM. In addition, the regime also worked to remold the ways in which Singaporeans participated.

Reshaping Participation

In addition to increasing the number of individuals participating in the Speak Good English Movement, the creation of *English as it is Broken* allowed the People's Action Party to fundamentally change the ways in which Singaporeans were able to participate. At its inception, the movement was only open to those with a deep commitment to the English language. To return to one of the first events held by the Singapore Teachers' Union, the 500 participants were almost entirely academics with a deep interest in speaking and understanding the language (Nirmala 2000b). However, *English as it is Broken* was created with the specific purpose of not only increasing participation, but also providing "a non-academic way for [Singaporeans] to learn how to use and speak English correctly" (Tai Ann & Soh 2010 pg. 1). This method for encouraging engagement was based on the idea that certain institutions – be they political,

academic or otherwise – are inherently inaccessible to certain individuals due to financial, time or familial obligations.

With this shift from academic participation towards a more effortless and engaging platform to learn English, the Speak Good English Movement was open to a far wider support base. Individuals did not need a PhD in the subject to have a voice in SGEM. Instead, with the advent of the STOMP forum, all that was required was a phone or computer and a desire to engage. In this sense, *English as it is Broken* allowed individuals to participate in their own way. In working to reshape the ways in which individuals could participate in SGEM, the PAP allowed netizens to define the movement for themselves. Those without an academic background could engage in fun and lighthearted ways, whereas those interested in exploring English from an intellectual perspective could engage in more inquisitive ways. However, while netizens could choose the ways in which they participate, those that did participate were still being educated in modes of acceptable language use (Dearman & Greenfield 2014). The result was a system that capitalized on netizen participation to reinforce authoritarian public policy initiatives.

To elaborate, one reason for the column's triumph was attributed to its convenient, engaging and interactive nature with a humorous twist (Pakiam 2008). As exemplified in *Figure 3.1* this jovial approach gave the column a feel that appeared less like the product of a government program and more like a Facebook news feed – that is, it held just the right balance of actual information and lighthearted fun (Pakiam 2008; Tai Ann & Soh 2010). *Figure 3.1* displays an image taken in a shop reading "Buy One Free One" to illustrate a buy one get one free deal. The satirical title "Buy this milk and set it free!" reflects a rhetoric that attempts to poke fun at the improper use of English in public. As such, it can easily be dismissed as unimportant and insignificant. However, at the same time it establishes a framework for

governing the modes of acceptable language use in Singapore. The forum allowed for citizens to participate in non-academic and lighthearted ways. Yet the modes of participation still worked to enforce a hegemonic way of speaking English. As such, few would assert that this post illustrates the PAP's influence in altering the use of language in Singapore. Rather, the site defers the regulation of the English language to netizens, allowing individuals to hold each other accountable through non-threatening posts on *English as it is Broken.* Thus, the forum's ability to govern language use had the effect of advancing SGEM in a peer-to-peer fashion. Calls to "speak good English" no longer came from the regime, but rather from Singaporean netizens, eager to participate in the movement.

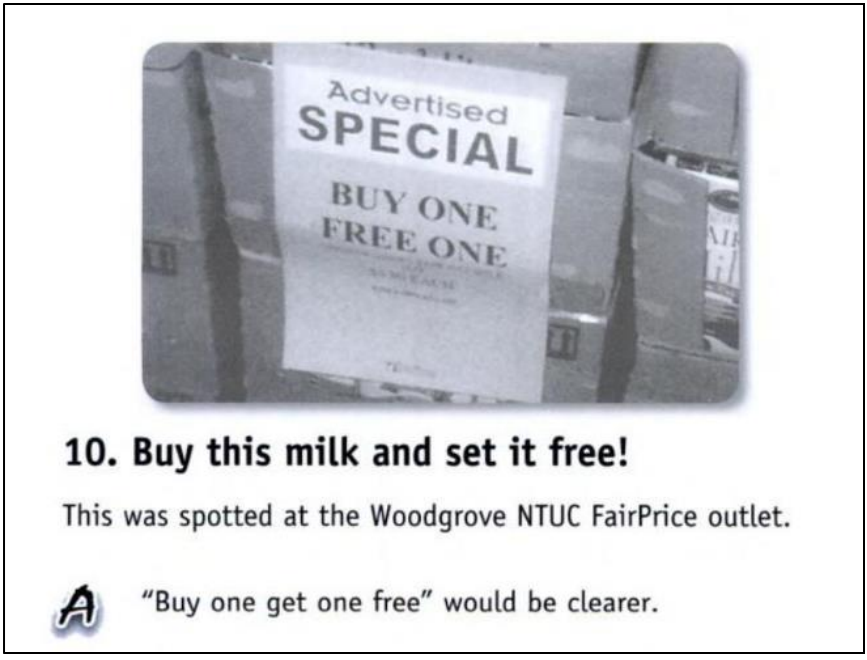
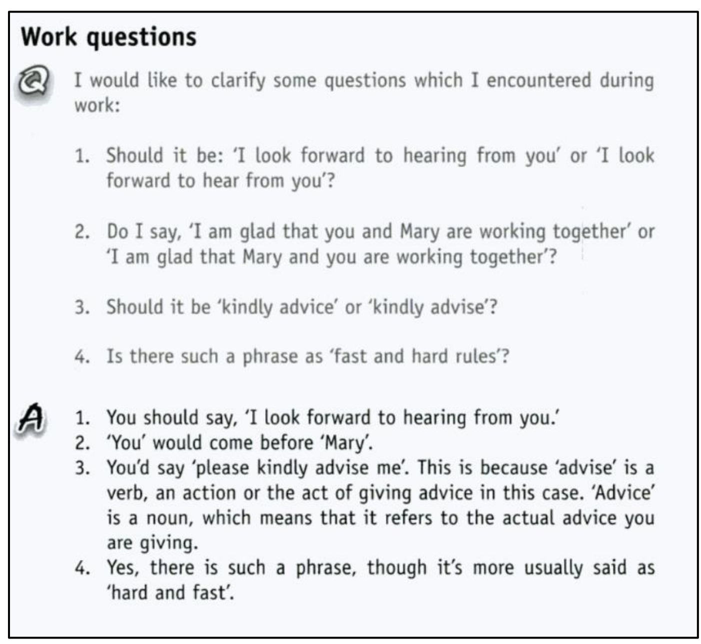


Figure 3.1: A comical post from the *English as it is Broken* Column (Tai Ann & Soh 2010)

As explored above, the creation of the online column allowed users to create and engage with an authoritarian policy program in ways that felt non-academic and lighthearted (Pakiam 2008; Tai Ann & Soh 2010). In addition, Singaporeans also had the opportunity to participate in

more serious ways. As *Figure 3.2* shows, for example, some posts appear to have a more formal tone. Unlike *Figure 3.1, Figure 3.2* contains no jokes, it is clearly divided into four sections, each with explicit questions that stem from the use of English in the work place. In this post, it appears more as though netizens are being coached on how to speak within the work place. This alternative mode of participation in *English as it is Broken* uses the site to engage in more serious inquiries. This post follows an instructional tone, intended to inform the viewer. With this, the reader is presented with the opportunity to improve the way that they speak at work. With respect to this specific post, the underlying assumption is that there is, in fact, a correct way to speak at work. As such, by posting these questions, the PAP's attempts to encourage Standard English in public (including work environments) is reinforced.



Work questions

Q: I would like to clarify some questions which I encountered during work:

1. Should it be: 'I look forward to hearing from you' or 'I look forward to hear from you'?
2. Do I say, 'I am glad that you and Mary are working together' or 'I am glad that Mary and you are working together'?
3. Should it be 'kindly advice' or 'kindly advise'?
4. Is there such a phrase as 'fast and hard rules'?

A:

1. You should say, 'I look forward to hearing from you.'
2. 'You' would come before 'Mary'.
3. You'd say 'please kindly advise me'. This is because 'advise' is a verb, an action or the act of giving advice in this case. 'Advice' is a noun, which means that it refers to the actual advice you are giving.
4. Yes, there is such a phrase, though it's more usually said as 'hard and fast'.

Figure 3.2: An example of one of the more serious column queries

In either instance, however, netizens were able to decide how to participate on their own terms. *English as it is Broken* could simultaneously embody the spirit of social media and other meme sites as well as more informative sites for serious queries. The multifaceted nature of

English as it is Broken was facilitated through the ability to participate openly and on one's own terms. Furthermore, while the information was moderated by the STOMP team, *English as it is Broken* appeared to create a site where individuals could share information with each other, the information was taught to them by everyday citizens rather than by authority figures. This had the effect of feeling less forced and more personal (Heimans & Timms 2018). Additionally, the collection of individuals working together to advance SGEM in their own ways created a system that appeared to embody democratic practices. However the implications of this engagement had the alternative effect of reinforcing authoritarian public policy. Thus, through *English as it is Broken,* Singaporeans could participate in advancing authoritarian public policy on their own accord. As a result of the forum, there was no longer a need to encourage a singular way of learning Standard English. Instead, Singaporeans could learn the language on their own terms, allowing them to feel the same in that they were a part of a community, but different in that each poster was provided with a new degree of agency (Heimans & Timms 2018). Thus, a new dynamic between citizens and government was created that provided incredible support to centralized powers (Lecheler et al. 2010). In this sense, increased participation did not necessarily give way to more democracy. Public engagement in *English as it is Broken* definitively reinforced the authoritarian government's public policy.

Beyond this, in advancing SGEM, the regime is able to reinforce its legitimacy as a political power capable of ensuring the nation's prosperity (Bruthiaux 2010; Tan 2014). As previously stated, SGEM's stated purpose was to assimilate Singapore with western, developed nations, by adopting Standard English (Lim et al. 2010). In this way, the policy program can be seen as a way of working to ensure the success of Singapore as a developed nation. Furthermore, as Tan (2014) argues, the PAP's legitimacy rests on the belief that the regime will provide

prosperity for its citizens. Thus, in advancing the Speak Good English Movement, the PAP works to reinforce its authoritarian power. However, because the attempt to encourage a hegemonic version of English was met with criticism in Singapore, the regime developed new methods for soliciting participation online in order to illustrate popular support for the movement. This had the effect of engaging netizens in the movement in new ways that did not feel forced, yet still advanced the regime's policy initiative.

In order to fully understand how the above methods for increasing and reshaping participation can work in the governments favor, it is also necessary to understand the conditions that were necessary for *English as it is Broken* to reinforce authoritarian public policy. While the forum takes a decentralized approach to sharing information, the posts are monitored by a team of editors who ensure the information put forth is in support of the regime. Thus, no anti-PAP rhetoric will ever be seen on *English as it is Broken.* This allows the PAP to channel the participatory power of netizens to engage with public policy in a way that is specific to pro-regime support. Thus, the site appears to be a free market of ideas, when in reality it only puts forth information favorable to the regime. This distinction between STOMP and other, less regulated, information sharing sites is incredibly important for the PAP in attempting to reinforce its public policy. The Internet is simply a tool that can lead to outcomes favorable to democracy or autocracy. As such, under certain conditions, in this case the use of moderators, the PAP is able to effectively utilize the Internet to advance an authoritarian policy agenda.

Thus, through both increasing and reshaping participation with SGEM through *English as it is Broken,* the PAP was able to channel the power of collective participation online to reinforce its policy agenda. When taken at face value, the ability of sites that encourage collective engagements to reinforce authoritarian power appears paradoxical. However, the case study of

English as it is Broken exemplifies that centralized powers hold the ability to channel netizen engagement to reinforce authoritarian public policy.

IV. Conclusion

The above methods employed by the PAP to advance the Speak Good English Movement shed light on the government's use of collective action to advance public policy. In the 21st century, with both collective and institutional power holding strong sway in modern governance, it is crucial that autocratic powers like the PAP utilize new methods to influence public policy. With the hyper-connected and participatory nature of the Internet, sites like STOMP have become an avenue to achieve this. By creating a platform for a wide number of individuals to actively engage with a government program, the PAP saw a massive increase in its support base for SGEM. This support base was so great that at its height, *English as it is Broken* produced two bestselling books (Tai Ann & Soh 2010).

Furthermore, The Speak Good English Movement is reflective of the PAP's authoritarian reach into the cultural sphere (Bruthiaux 2010). As dissent began to grow, a dangerous power dynamic emerged between the regime and Singaporean citizens that placed the masses in direct opposition to the government. However, columns such as *English as it is Broken* hold the ability to engage supporters of the regime's program in easy and accessible ways. This allows the PAP to appear to defer the power of the movement towards netizens, shifting the focus away from the centralized authoritarian regime and more in the direction of the people. However, it is important to recognize that this support base was artificially created. That is, support existed in isolation of alternative opinions. The use of moderators to regulate information on STOMP creates a system in which netizen engagement is only supported when it exists in favor of the regime.

Here, the power of artificially creating instances of public support cannot be understated. With *English as it is Broken*, netizens had a say in SGEM, they could determine the direction for themselves. Rather than being told exactly what the policy initiative was by a higher authority, they were able to choose its direction by engaging with it in their own way. At the same time, however, the PAP was able to ensure the content produced was favorable to the regime through the use of moderators. In this way, the government is able to simultaneously encourage public support and discourage dissent; all without directly influencing or coercing its citizens.

This ability to increase participation in an authoritarian program reflects the aim of many regimes to mobilize the masses. While many argue that authoritarianism works to silence collective voices, the hyper-connectivity of the Internet suggests that in the globalized world, immobilization is increasingly difficult to achieve (Colton & Hale 2009). This reality is particularly true for regimes such as Singapore's. As discussed in Chapter II, regimes that hide behind a façade of democracy are presented with the opportunity to either engage the masses or to drop the mask and fully embrace their authoritarian systems. As Singapore has chosen the former, the ability to maintain power becomes increasingly difficult and uncharted. However, by encouraging public participation on the Internet in strategic ways, the PAP has continuously increased the number of individuals that engage with autocratic public policy. As is explored in the following chapters, STOMP is not the only avenue that the PAP uses to advance its policy agenda. The following chapter explores the use of the sites *The Straits Times* and *Change.org* to advance the regime's public policy.

Chapter IV- Capitalizing on Pre-existing User Engagement

I. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored the relationship between STOMP (Straits Times Online Mobile Print) and the People's Action Party (PAP) to show how STOMP was used as a tool for the PAP to advance its public policy agenda by artificially creating avenues to express popular support. In this chapter, I shift my focus towards the way the regime accounts for increased participation on sites over which it does not have control. In this sense, I seek to answer my thesis question of why the PAP is able to continue to implement authoritarian public policy despite Internet technologies allowing for democratic practices by addressing the growing degree of online activity outside of the regime's control. In this chapter, I argue that the PAP is able to do this by utilizing two Internet tools. The first, known as *Change.org,* is founded on netizen (or Internet user) participation and cannot be regulated by the regime. The second, known as *The Straits Times,* is a conventional media source that has long been considered a mouth piece for the PAP ("Global Intelligence Files" 2010). As I demonstrate, both of these tools work in lockstep to advance regime public policy wherein *Change.org* generates public engagement with the regimes policy agenda, and *The Straits Times* ensures that only support can be viewed by the broader public.

I explore how an online petition, created and supported by Singaporeans, provided the regime with a mechanism to illustrate popular support and subsequently advance its public policy agenda. This petition, created on *Change.org*, called for the Swedish heavy metal band, Watain, to be banned from Singapore. The PAP eventually did ban Watain, causing many other petitions to emerge criticizing the decision. Singapore's relatively free Internet allows for a

multiplicity of ideas to be put forth online ("Freedom of the Net" 2019), making the emergence of dissenting petitions an inevitability. Because the government of Singapore cannot prevent dissenting opinions from growing on *Change.org*, it must adopt new methods for ensuring that the strongest voices are those that favor the government. Thus, in this chapter I explore the PAP's attempts to create an image surrounding its policy decisions that only highlights support, and ignores criticism. As is explored through the Watain case study, the ability for the regime to do this is strengthened through online tools.

As I demonstrate, the PAP uses *The Straits Times,* the pro-government and most popular media outlet ("Global Intelligence Files" 2010; Kaur et. al 2016), to selectively highlight *Change.org* petitions that demonstrate support for the regime's public policy, and at the same time ignore those that express dissent. In selectively choosing which petitions to cover, the PAP is able to use *Change.org,* a tool that appears to be founded on democratic principles, to advance an authoritarian ideology. To understand this further, I use text scanning tools, specifically, the *Google Custom Search REST API*, to gather *Straits Times'* articles that discuss *Change.org* petitions. The findings, discussed in Section III of this chapter, work to illustrate how the PAP uses both traditional media outlets like *The Straits Times* and sites that facilitate netizen engagement like *Change.org* to advance its policy agenda.

In the following section, I discuss the traditional news source *The Straits Times* and its close relationship with the PAP. Additionally, I introduce and contextualize the online petition site *Change.org* within Singapore. In Section III, I analyze how both of these sites were utilized to advance the PAP's public policy through the banning of the Swedish heavy metal band, Watain, in March of 2019. Finally, in Section IV, I summarize my findings and discuss the implications of the PAP's use of *Change.org* to advance its own public policy.

II. Context

In this section, I provide background and contextualization for the ways the PAP is able to advance its public policy using both traditional and non-traditional information sharing sites. The first site, *The Straits Times,* is the dominant Singaporean news source in the country. In my research, the site works to draw attention to *Change.org* petitions that show support for the PAP's public policy, while ignoring those that do not. The second site, *Change.org* is an online petition tool where netizens are encouraged to add their names to a list of signatures surrounding causes they support. I find that *Change.org* allows netizens to show support and dissent for authoritarian public policy. In exploring both sites, I illustrate how the PAP utilizes netizen participation on *Change.org* through online petitions to demonstrate support for its policy programs on *The Straits Times*. In essence, the PAP points to favorable petitions on *Change.org* in *The Straits Times* to indicate public support, while at the same time ignoring unfavorable petitions.

The Straits Times

The Singaporean media company known as *The Straits Times* was founded in 1845 when Singapore was under British rule. The media company is a subsidiary of Singapore Press Holdings, which also owns STOMP—the site discussed in Chapter III ("The Straits Times" 2010). The company can best be understood as a news agency in the most traditional sense. *The Straits Times* utilizes professional journalists, editors and publishers to create its content (Dearman & Greenfield 2014; "The Straits Times" 2010). In this sense, the news agency takes a top-down approach to disseminating information to the population through both print and online

media. *The Straits Times'* is also perceived to be a fairly credible source of media in the country (Jiuan 2002). Thus, those looking for more serious news would be drawn to *The Straits Times* for its consistent coverage of current events in the economic, political and cultural world. This credibility allows *The Straits Times* to publish news that carries a heavier weight than other information sharing sources such as Facebook and Twitter, which have become breeding grounds for misinformation (Gertz 2019).

The Straits Times is also the most popular news source in Singapore (Kaur et. al 2016). While other news sites such as *Channel News Asia*, and *Asia One* are popular in Singapore, they are not specific to the nation, nor do they garner the same degree of popularity as *The Straits Times* (Kaur et. al 2016). That is not to say, however, that the attention *The Straits Times* draws is necessarily deserved ("Global Intelligence Files" 2010; Kaur et. al 2016; Mydans 2011). The site has known ties to the PAP dating back to before the nation gained independence ("Global Intelligence Files" 2010; Mydans 2011). The media company has also largely been criticized for being a mouthpiece of the PAP ("Associated Press" 2017). While *The Straits Times* is privatized and thus not under the direct control of the government, the PAP has employed a series of legal controls that can be utilized to ensure journalists and editors put forth content favorable to the regime (Lee 2010). A prominent example of this, The Societies Act of 1967, states that an organization of more than 10 people must be registered (Lee 2010). This Act forces *The Straits Times* to self-regulate for fear of having its corporate license revoked by the government. This is just one instance of a series of regulations the PAP implements to control media content (Lee 2010). The result is a media atmosphere in which editors effectively tailor content to support the regime. As I explore below, the bias apparent in *The Straits Times* leads to system wherein

collective support for the regime is highlighted, and dissent is omitted. This allows the PAP to advance its own public policy by continuing to control the traditional media.

Media control in Singapore has largely shifted in the late 20th and early 21st century. In the 1980s, the government began merging and closing various newspaper companies, to create fewer mainstream print media sources (Lee 2010). The government also created Singapore Press Holdings, which monopolized print media in the nation (Lee 2010). This led to the reduction of alternative voices in domestic news on Singapore that only continued as the print companies transitioned into the digital sphere (Lee 2010; "Living History" 2015). This has caused scholars (George 2002 pg. 175) to describe the Singaporean media atmosphere as centered on "the government's freedom from the press" over the press's freedom from the government (Lee 2010). Thus, in the case of *The Straits Times,* the site is perceived to be voice for the PAP (Mydans 2011), wherein the company is expected to put forth a narrative consistent with the party (Lee 2010). Thus, for the purpose of this research, I consider *The Straits Times* to be an extension of the PAP that the party has used to advance its policy agenda for decades. What I explore using the case study below, is how a site such as *Change.org* can be utilized in conjunction with *The Straits Times* to develop a new method for policy advancement founded on collective support.

As I explore in this chapter, the government has shifted its approach with *The Straits Times* to selectively incorporate sources and debates generated in other spheres of the Internet. In the past, pro-government media often ignored popular opinion in favor of presenting a narrative favorable to the PAP (Lee 2010). Now, the PAP turns to sites that facilitate increased connection among netizens to show popular support for its public policy. *Change.org* is one site that allows

the PAP to definitively point to popular support for public policy, I discuss these dynamics below.

Change.org

Change.org is a for-profit, global petition website based in Silicon Valley with over 200 million users (“NonProfit Times” 2017). While the site praises itself for being a champion of democratic practices online, the truth behind this claim is not so absolute. While the site does lead to increased civic engagement, many have criticized it as a tool that does little to enact tangible policy change. The ability to translate the civic engagement seen on *Change.org* to the analog world, wherein it can influence all levels of government, is weak (Mele 2016). The site’s emphasis that anyone can create a petition capitalizes on the belief that in the hyper-connected world, anyone can be a change maker (Heimans & Timms 2018). *Change.org* argues that the connections it facilitates extend across nations and cultures. In so doing, it claims to unite the world around important causes (“Change.org” 2020). This rhetoric, taken from the *Change.org* website, implies that the increased connection of individuals, facilitated through the site necessarily leads to outcomes favorable to democracy. However, this chapter demonstrates that the PAP is able to use *Change.org* to advance its authoritarian policy goals. This outcome is paradoxical to the expectations of scholars (Minocher 2019) and *Change.org*’s own vision.

To elaborate, *Change.org*— based in San Francisco, California—is largely outside of the direct sphere of the PAP’s influence. *Change.org* does not have ties to the regime. Furthermore, the nature of the site does not allow its content to be naturally tailored to benefit any singular entity. The site is not a news platform like *The Straits Times,* nor is it a social media site like

Facebook or Twitter. Rather, *Change.org* simply allows netizens to quickly and easily create petitions on topics important to them, free of charge. Individuals can then show their support for the petitions by adding their names. As a petition gains more signatures, a counter tracks the number of signees, showing an increase in collective support for the petition's topic ("Change.org" 2020). In the Singaporean political sphere, this reality means that petitions can often arise both in support of and opposition to the regime's public policy.

Thus, conceptually, *Change.org* can be viewed as an Internet tool working to promote democratic practices. In February of 2020, for example, a petition calling for a question on child poverty in the U.S. Democratic Presidential debate gained nearly 80,000 signatures. Due to the significant traction the petition gained, candidates could be seen discussing child poverty on the debate stage for the first time in 20 years (Glenn 2019). These instances exemplifies the power of netizen participation in leading to tangible political change. However, as I explore below, the power of *Change.org* in creating democratic outcomes is not so absolute.

Despite the site's democratic potential, *Change.org* has drawn criticism for its inability to prevent electronic "bots"— or fake users generated by computers — from creating accounts and signing petitions in order to show support for causes (Wray 2018). This suggests that anyone interested in drawing attention to an issue can manipulate the site to advance an agenda in a seemly democratic way, without popular support. While there are reports of this occurring in Singapore, the claims are difficult to prove and *Change.org* argues that their site protects against this, making fake signatures an impossibility (Eddino 2019). At the same time, privacy concerns should also be noted. The creator of a petition can see the signors' names, but names cannot be viewed publicly unless the creator of a petition discloses them ("Change.org" 2020). This situation has potentially harmful implications when petitions are generated in opposition to

repressive government systems. However, there is no reported instance of the PAP engaging in retribution against those who have signed. Based on this information, I consider that all petitions generated on *Change.org* are legitimate, that they are signed by actual individuals interested in supporting the cause, and that these individuals do not fear government persecution for signing a petition. From here, I explore the ways in which the PAP uses legitimate examples of netizen engagement online to advance its policy goals.

As I explore later, the PAP does not need to bolster support through the use of bots for online petitions in favor of its policies. Nor does it need to overtly censor petitions that oppose the party. Instead, the regime allows both sides to be debated openly by not interfering with *Change.org* itself. Because *Change.org* is not a popular site for sharing information in Singapore (or any country), these debates exist in the margins of the Internet. Thus, the PAP is able to draw attention to petitions that support its policy decisions and can easily ignore petitions that criticize or oppose its positions. It is important to note that the PAP is not required to acknowledge any of the petitions in any way. To understand exactly how the PAP is able to draw attention to a specific type of *Change.org* petition, I explore in detail the petitions that emerged around the banning of the Swedish heavy metal band, Watain, below.

III. Highlighting Support for Public Policy Decisions: A Case Study on Watain

In this section, I illustrate the way the PAP selectively uses *Change.org* petitions to support its policy decisions on *The Straits Times.* Specifically, I analyze the PAP's banning of the Swedish heavy metal band, Watain, after a *Change.org* petition emerged calling for their performance license to be revoked. Through this example, I show how the PAP highlights netizen participation on *Change.org* to show support for its policy decisions while ignoring

critical or oppositional positions. In this way, the authoritarian government capitalizes on an Internet tool typically associated with democracy (*Change.org*) to advance an authoritarian policy agenda.

On March 7, 2019, the Swedish heavy metal band, Watain, was scheduled to appear at the small venue EBX Live Space on Pereira road in Singapore (Lim 2019). After receiving all necessary permits and permissions to perform, just hours before the concert, the Media Development Authority (MDA)—the PAP's main censorship body— revoked the band's performance license (Lim 2019). This was not the first time that a band had been prevented from performing in Singapore. A number of bands including Led Zeppelin have been prohibited by the PAP from playing. Rather, what makes the banning of Watain unique is that the call for removal did not come from the government, but from a Christian group in Singapore who argued that the band's lyrics were deeply offensive and denigrating to the Christian faith (Lim 2019). The MDA's decision to revoke Watain's performance license was promoted by a *Change.org* petition, started by a Singaporean named Rachel Chan, that advocated for the banning. The decision to ban Watain's performance and its reasoning were covered widely on *The Straits Times.*

Although the government portrayed the ban as a popular policy, the decision was criticized by many Singaporeans as an affront on free speech in the nation (Lim 2019). Immediately, four dissenting petitions emerged online calling for the band's license to be reinstated. The fact that the banning was called for by netizens was a central aspect of *The Straits Times'* coverage on the topic as it demonstrated popular support for the Watain cancellation. However, *The Straits Times* chose to ignore the dissenting opinions put forth by the public and only highlighted support for the banning. In this case, the PAP was able to create an image

surrounding its policy decisions that appeared to be founded on collective support, but in reality only presented one side of the issue.

In this sense, the banning of Watain is an example of authoritarian public policy in that it exemplifies the PAP's attempts to regulate culture deemed harmful to the social harmony of Singaporean society (Huat 2003). As discussed in Chapter III, the PAP has often drawn criticism for its authoritarian overreach into the cultural sphere (Bruthiaux 2010). This control is often justified on the basis that in order to live in a multi-ethnic society, some regulation of speech and ideology that could be harmful to other races, religions, and cultures is necessary (Huat 2003). This cultural regulation works to govern the behaviors and mindsets of Singaporean's (Lee 2010), and subsequently establishes the PAP as the powerful protector ensuring the continued prosperity of the city-state (Huat 2003). Thus, in engaging in the regulation of culture, the PAP works to further cement its political power within the city-state.

The PAP's overreach of power into the cultural sphere is embodied in the banning of Watain. In a statement concerning the banning, the Minister for Home Affairs, Law K. Shanmugam, justified the censorship on the basis that the band promotes religious hate speech that contradicts Singaporean values (Hadi 2019a). Citing the support of the Christian community, Shanmugam argued that the band's lyrics were offensive to Christians. In this way, the banning of Watain was founded on the idea that Singapore must work to maintain harmony among cultures in order to ensure a prosperous society (Hadi 2019a; Huat 2003). Thus, the decision to ban Watain reinforced the PAP's political legitimacy by arguing it preserved the prosperity of the nation (Wong & Huang 2010). As explored in previous chapters, the exchange relation between the PAP and Singaporean citizens rests on the idea that the party provides prosperity, and in return, receives legitimacy (Wong & Huang 2010). In this way, the decision to ban

Watain can be viewed as a public policy initiative that works reinforce the PAP's political power.

However, critics argue that the effect of the banning on Singapore's free speech rules is far more harmful than the damage of letting the band perform (Lim 2019; Tan 2019). To elaborate, some netizens believed that the banning of Watain damaged the fundamental right for people to express themselves even if that expression was not universally well received (Lim 2019). As I explore below, criticism of the banning did exist online. Yet by selectively highlighting support and ignoring dissent—specifically on *Change.org*—the government was able to effectively enforce its public policy. In order to better understand this concept, I outline the dissenting petitions that emerged on *Change.org* below.

Counter Movements on Change.org

As previously stated, significant protests to the banning of Watain did exist online. Here, I analyze four such petitions and their contents to illustrate the arguments behind opposition to the banning. The four petitions I analyze gained the most traction in terms of number of signatures. While the dissenting petition with the most signatures (just under 6,000), is still well under the original petition in support of the banning (which gained over 15,000), the number of signees is not insignificant (Chan 2019; Lim 2019). Moreover, a total of 12,000 signatures were garnered across the four dissenting petitions. After analyzing these petitions, I illustrate how the PAP was able to effectively ignore them, while simultaneously highlighting the original petition that called for the banning.

On *Change.org,* the petition that called for the banning was quickly followed by four additional petitions that criticized the decision. The first two petitions were direct in their criticism of the government. They argued that the banning of Watain was a huge setback to free speech and democracy in Singapore. The first, titled "Get Rachel Chan deported from Singapore", took aim at the woman who started the petition. This petition gained 2,300 signatures and argued that Chan had spread fake news and misinformation (Tan 2019). In so doing, she had effectively discriminated against a group of people interested in the band's music. The second petition, titled "Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs to reinstate and reschedule Watain show," gained nearly 6,000 signatures and argued that the banning was a huge setback to free speech in Singapore. This petition, much more political in nature, directly criticized the government for prioritizing certain cultures and regulating speech in an authoritarian manner (Lim 2019; Tan 2019). Both of these petitions gained thousands of signatures in support. Yet neither of them drew significant attention on *The Straits Times*.

The third petition, satirical in nature, was started by a Singaporean citizen who argued that Maroon 5 should also be banned for its harmful lyrics, such as "sugar, yes please", that encourage young Singaporeans to consume more sugar in their diet—going against the government's attempts to fight diabetes in Singapore (Lay 2019). This petition gained roughly 2,000 signatures. The final petition called for the banning of the English soccer team Manchester United on the basis that it has a red devil as its official logo—a feature that could also be viewed as harmful to the Christian faith. This petition gained roughly 1,300 signatures. Both of these petitions attempted to make fun of the policy decision enacted by the regime. In so doing, they attempted to expose the hypocrisy of the government's ban. The low number of signatures for each of these petitions relative to the number received for the petition that called for the banning,

could be used to justify exclusion from *The Straits Times* articles. However, the first two petitions did gain more traction. Furthermore, the criticisms of the banning, illustrated in these petitions, were also excluded from *The Straits Times*. In this way, the PAP controlled the narrative presented on *The Straits Times* and only allowed discussion of citizen support for the ban to appear. The fact that *The Straits Times* is the most popular news source in Singapore (Kaur et. al 2016) meant that the dominant narrative surrounding the ban failed to include popular dissent.

As explored further below, the dissenting petitions were largely left out of popular discourse. This silence might be one possible reason for the difference in the number of signatures. Because the dissenting petitions did not receive as much attention from popular media, many netizens may not have been aware of their existence and thus unable to sign them. This idea is supported by the fact that number of signatures in support of the banning continued to grow as more *Straits Times* articles were published. Even still, the criticisms present in the *Change.org* petitions are valid and demonstratively important to Singaporeans. Thus their exclusion highlights the PAP's attempts to ignore popular dissent for the regime's public policy.

Representation of Change.org Petitions on The Straits Times

As previously stated, *The Straits Times* exemplifies traditional media sources wherein news is disseminated from a team of professional journalists, editors and publishers to the population. In this sense, it is not considered an open and public space wherein all voices can be recognized. *Change.org,* on the other hand, is largely viewed as a tool to facilitate democratic engagement on the Internet by engaging netizens in causes important to them ("Change.org"

2020). The PAP is able to use *The Straits Times*—the most popular news source in Singapore (Kaur et. al 2016)—to acknowledge *Change.org* petitions that support the regime's public policy and ignore those that criticize the PAP's decisions.

To illustrate this point, I analyzed articles from *The Straits Times* written in the two weeks after the March 7th banning. During this time period, the banning of Watain dominated *The Straits Times'* headlines. Using the *The Google Custom Search REST API,* a program designed to scan online articles for key words and return results during a specific time period, I searched for any articles on *The Straits Times* containing the word "Watain." Because the band was at the center of press coverage, this was the only keyword used. This search returned fifteen articles over the two week period. In *Figure 4.1,* I organize these articles into four distinct categories: (1) those that solely mention the *Change.org* petition in support of the banning (8 articles), (2) those that solely mention the *Change.org* petitions against the banning (0 articles), (3) those that mention both the *Change.org* petitions in support of the banning and those that are opposed (1 article), and (4) those that do not mention the *Change.org* petitions at all (6 articles). All articles found are included in the table and fit into exactly one category.

	Mention petition in support of banning	Mention petitions against banning	Mention petitions on both sides	No mention of petitions	Total
Number of Articles:	8	0	1	6	15

Figure 4.1: Articles Concerning Watain Banning on *The Straits Times*

The results illustrate the degree to which collective support in favor of the regime is prioritized in *The Straits Times*. From the articles returned by the search, the majority mentioned the support for banning Watain on *Change.org*, while only one article reports on any significant opposition to the banning. However, as previously stated, significant opposition did exist. Dissenting petitions had emerged and gained significant traction calling for the band's performance license to be reinstated. All four of these dissenting petitions gained thousands of signatures just hours after they were posted. However, they were rarely mentioned in *The Straits Times'* official coverage of the banning. The findings illustrate how the PAP works to use the Internet to highlight support for public policy while ignoring dissent. The PAP's grasp on *The Straits Times* in the past has allowed the regime to create a favorable political narrative ("Global Intelligence Files" 2010; Mydans 2011). However, with the onset of increased political participation online, specifically through *Change.org,* the PAP can now point to instances of netizen support. In doing so, the government creates an image surrounding its policy decisions that appears to be founded on collective support, but in reality only presents the government's side of the issue.

One article in *The Straits Times*, for example, titled "IMDA pulls plug on gig hours before Swedish band's show: Home Affairs Ministry raises concerns over Watain show that had been given R18 rating," cites the *Change.org* petition. The article states:

> An online petition on Change.org, which has garnered 15,000 signatures, had called for a ban on concerts by Watain and Soilwork, another Swedish metal band. It said the bands "do not represent the culture which we want in our youth." Soilwork is slated to play at EBX Live Space on Oct 29 (Hadi 2019b).

In this case, the petition serves the definitive purpose of quantifying the degree of support for authoritarian public policy. In doing so, the government works to demonstrate that its policy decisions—in this case the censorship of music—are supported by Singaporean citizens. In all of the articles that mention the petition to ban the concert, the number of signatures in support is cited. Furthermore, in two of the nine articles in favor of the ban, the above quote is repeated nearly word for word (Hadi 2019b; Ting 2019). The inclusion of *Change.org* petitions in this way demonstrates the goal of the PAP in controlling the narrative behind the banning. The regime aims to draw attention to the public support of the petition to illustrate that its policy has the support of Singaporeans. However, these articles fail to accurately depict the issue. Instead of drawing attention to the debate that took place on *Change.org*, the opposition that emerged was ignored and coverage of it was excluded from *The Straits Times*.

Furthermore, in all of the articles in *The Straits Times*, there is no mention of the core argument against the banning put forth in the petitions. The dissenting petition that gained the most traction, titled "Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs to reinstate and reschedule Watain show," argued that the cancelling of the show was a "huge setback to Singapore's democracy [and] free speech…" (Lim 2019). However, in none of the articles is there any mention of the fact that the PAP's policy decision is hampering the free flow of ideas or free speech. In the one article that does mention the dissenting petitions, the author states that the petitions simply argued that Watain's license should be reinstated. Not that the petitions argued that the banning was indicative of a larger political issue. Thus, in selectively omitting certain petitions and the issues that they address, the PAP is able to effectively demonstrate public support for its policy without drawing attention to the larger concerns addressed by many Singaporeans. The implications of using *Change.org* petitions in this way is discussed below.

Implications

In this section, I explore the implications of the selective inclusion of *Change.org* petitions in *The Straits Times.* By highlighting supporting petitions and ignoring dissent, the PAP is able to implement authoritarian public policy despite Internet technologies allowing for democratic practices becoming more apparent. While the band's license was quickly revoked, the regime still needed to justify the banning to the Singaporean public. Through *Change.org* petitions, the PAP was able to create a narrative on *The Straits Times* that outlined a significant support base for the banning. While it may be true that a significant number of Singaporeans called for the banning, the coverage on *The Straits Times* fails to account for any opposition.

Thus, while *Change.org* lies outside of the government's direct control, the regime is still able to use the site to advance its authoritarian public policy. The PAP works to bring citizen voices in support of the regime to the center of the conversation in *The Straits Times*, while ensuring that those in opposition remain on the side lines. Thus, while *Change.org* may appear to be a tool to uphold democratic values, it can actually be used to enforce centralized power structures.

In revoking Watain's license, the PAP was able to further regulate the cultural sphere of Singapore (Bruthiaux 2010). In this case, the banning of Watain works to govern conduct and practice in such a way that enforces a dominant cultural and political ideology (Lee 2010). In stepping in to censor content that is deemed to be harmful to the Christian faith, the PAP asserted itself as a protector of social and cultural harmony in Singapore (Huat 2003). Thus, by regulating the cultural sphere, the government was able to present itself as a necessary force to ensure the longevity of Singapore as a nation (Huat 2003; Lee 2010). However, this action was met with resistance and criticism. When this criticism emerged on *Change.org* the government is

left with relatively little option to regulate or censor its content. Thus, it utilizes *The Straits Times,* a site over which it has no control, to ensure that Singaporean's are unaware of dissenting petitions and fully aware of supporting petitions. This allows the PAP to advance a policy agenda that reinforces its authoritarian power.

It is also important to remember that *The Straits Times* has long been known to tailor content to support the PAP ("Global Intelligence Files" 2010; Mydans 2011; "Associated Press" 2017). The difference here is that the regime is able to use potentially democratic tools in strategic ways to highlight support and stifle dissent. In capitalizing on the hyper-connected, and seemingly democratic nature of tools such as *Change.org*, the PAP is able to create an image surrounding its public policy that appears as though it is founded on public support. The reality, however, is that far more debate exists. Still, this debate is often pushed to the margins, outside of popular media. When mention of the petition emerges on *The Straits Times*, dissenting voices are left out of the conversation. While *Change.org* remains open and accessible to any Singaporean Internet user, its reach is far weaker than the top headline on *The Straits Times'* website. Thus, what emerges is a system in which the PAP does not need to regulate the increasingly public sphere outside of its political reach. Rather, it can allow for both support and dissent to grow outside of the spotlight, while only bringing the former into public view.

Whereas previously, bias in media generally centered on extreme statements that appealed to emotion more than reason (Kaisler & O'Connor 2019)**,** the pro-PAP rhetoric in *The Straits Times* is now able to cite a specific number of supporters that agree with a given policy decision. In doing so, the PAP is able to effectively argue that the banning was, in fact, a *reasonable* decision as it came from the will of the people. However, in exploring the banning on a deeper level, it becomes clear that significant voices did oppose the decision. In choosing to

omit these voices from the popular narrative put forth on *The Straits Times,* the PAP marginalized dissent and asserted its authority to control the public debate.

Furthermore, the bottom-up approach to creating petitions on *Change.org,* wherein issues of import are decided by netizens, can be viewed as an ideal scenario for the regime. That is, if the regime were to regulate *Change.org* it would be limited to the creativity of government employees when determining policy direction. Instead, the regime can utilize the power of netizen engagement to find new ways to enforce authoritarian public policy. As is further explored in Chapter V, by giving Singaporeans individual agency to engage with public policy in an open space, the PAP can defer the act of policy advancement to netizens. In this sense, the PAP understands that the aim is not necessarily to control netizen engagement in the 21st century, but rather to channel its power in ways that are favorable to the regime.

The result of only highlighting support for authoritarian public policy is that government action does not appear to be in conflict with the will of Singaporean citizens, but rather in support. Both *The Straits Times* and *Change.org* play crucial roles in advancing the regime's policy agendas. There is no overt censorship of *Change.org* by the PAP, nor are there any reports that the Singaporean government artificially creates petitions to manufacture popular support. Rather, the PAP can utilize *The Straits Times* to selectively highlight petitions that already exist. Thus, the PAP can channel netizen engagement to produce outcomes favorable to the regime. The power of *Change.org's* unregulated and decentralized nature is thus conditional on the use of *The Straits Times.* As discussed throughout this thesis, connected netizens now hold a new power to challenge institutional and centralized power through the Internet. Thus, in order to maintain power, authoritarian governments must channel a decentralized base of citizens to

maintain power. One avenue through which the Singaporean government does this is by bringing attention to examples of popular support for authoritarian public policy while excluding dissent.

IV. Conclusion

The relationship between the PAP, *The Straits Times* and *Change.org*, illustrates the ways in which an authoritarian government can capitalize on connective Internet tools to advance public policy. In a seemingly contradictory way, a tool that aims to give everyone a voice only empowers those in favor of government policy. Thus, dissenting voices continue to be marginalized. By capitalizing on its control of *The Straits Times,* the People's Action Party is able to use the hyper-connectivity of the Internet to strengthen its authoritarian policies. In doing so, the PAP can point to definitive support for its public policy decisions. However, these policy decisions are still met with significant dissent. Yet those expressing their dissent are left out of the mainstream narrative the government attempts to put forth. The result is a system in which the PAP can use *Change.org* to advance its own authoritarian policy. In the following chapter, I continue my analysis of *Change.org* and *The Straits Times* and incorporate the Internet tool STOMP (discussed in Chapter III) to show that these tools do not operate separately from each other. Rather, they all work in lockstep to advance the authoritarian regimes public policy through seemingly democratic tools.

Chapter V- Creating and Capitalizing on User Participation

I. Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I explored STOMP, *Change.org,* and *The Straits Times* in order to understand their use as tools for policy advancement in different contexts. In Chapter III, I analyzed the ways that the PAP can artificially create instances of popular engagement online through *English as it is Broken,* in order to advance the Speak Good English Movement. In Chapter IV, I analyzed the ways that the PAP was able to channel the power of netizen engagement outside of its direct control through *The Straits Times* and *Change.org* with the banning of Watain.

In this chapter, I trace the PAP's utilization of *STOMP, Change.org* and *The Straits Times* to control the political narrative surrounding the decision to ban personal mobility devices (PMDs)— or e-Scooters, e-Unicycles, and e-Skateboards— from footpaths in Singapore. I combine the concepts developed in the two previous chapters to demonstrate that these tactics for advancing authoritarian public policy do not exist in isolation. Instead, each site plays a distinct role, working in lockstep with others to advance the PAP's authoritarian policy agenda. With this analysis, I seek to answer the question of why the PAP is able to continue to advance an authoritarian policy agenda despite emerging Internet technologies allowing for increased netizen participation. I argue that the PAP uses all three sites together to create an effective tool for online policy advancement. As I explore, each site serves its own purpose for policy advancement; *The Straits Times* and *Change.org* are used to tailor pre-existing popular support to fit the regime, and STOMP is used to generate support. Furthermore, when the PAP chooses to engage in policy action, each site suddenly becomes a tool for policy advancement at the same time. In looking at a specific moment when the PAP chooses to enact new policy—in this case

the banning of PMDs—I aim to show the interconnected nature of the sites as tools for PAP policy advancement.

On November 5, 2019, the PAP implemented a new law on the use of personal mobility devices in Singapore. Whereas previously, PMDs were allowed on both biking paths and footpaths, in November the PAP decided to ban PMDs from footpaths, allowing them to only be used in bike lanes (Wei 2019a). This policy decision emerged after a woman named Ong Bee Eng was killed when an e-scooter collided with her on a biking path (Yong 2019). While Ong's death signifies the initial discussion to ban PMDs in popular media in Singapore, as I explore, a call to regulate the use of PMDs existed on *Change.org* well before the PAP decided to engage in new policy initiatives. However, this call largely existed in the periphery of the Internet, outside of popular view. It was not until after the government decided to ban PMDs that popular support was highlighted online through *The Straits Times*. In a similar sense, articles can be found on STOMP that reinforce the PAP's stance of PMD regulation before Ong's death. The articles work to reinforce PAP policy by contrasting dangerous PMD driving (often the subject of STOMP articles) with the government's policy stance. This comparison places the regime as the protector of safety in Singapore, and those who break the rules as dangerous to the safety of others. After Ong's death, articles on STOMP reinforcing PAP policy saw a significant spike in number. Thus, the online discussion surrounding the regulation of PMDs on each site before and after Ong's death is the focus of this chapter. I aim to show that the PAP uses each site in specific ways and at specific moments to advance PAP policy.

The decision to ban PMDs is the focus of this chapter as it exemplifies the regime's attempts to maintain authoritarian power in the age of increased interconnectedness and globalization. As scholars (Wong & Huang 2010) argue, the PAP has maintained political

legitimacy despite economic liberalization and globalization in part due to a relationship between citizens and the regime wherein the latter provides safety and security in return for receiving political legitimacy. This exchange relation, which I refer to as the security-legitimacy relationship, is the basis for the PAP's ability to maintain authoritarian power (Wong & Huang 2010). In the case of banning PMDs, Ong's death raised questions concerning the safety of PMDs (Yong 2019). On this basis, the security legitimacy relationship began to weaken. In order to remain in power, the PAP began to reassure citizens' safety concerns. While on the surface, this may appear to be an example of citizen action overpowering authoritarian governance, as I explore below, the regime did not give into popular support, nor did it enact policy that would prevent deaths like Ong's from occurring in the future. This suggests that the PAP's main priority was reassuring pedestrian safety in Singapore and mending the security-legitimacy relationship in order to maintain power.

Furthermore, the decision to ban PMDs is an example of authoritarian policy as it reflects a new approach to enacting policy that the PAP has taken in the 21st century. To elaborate, the 2011 elections in Singapore posed serious threat to the regime's political power (Ong & Tim 2011; Tan 2014). For the first time since the PAP took power, it appeared as though the nation was shifting towards liberal democracy (Ong & Tim 2011). However, the PAP did not simply yield its ground to democratic transitions (Tan 2014). Instead, the regime adopted new methods for finding solutions to policy problems to account for a newly mobilized electorate (Ong & Tim 2011; Tan 2014). Indeed, many of the previously successful tools for policy advancement became detrimental under current circumstances (Tan 2014). For example, previously the PAP would engage in policy overhauls wherein dramatic changes to public policy would be made. This strategy has been viewed as too blunt in the face of a new, more mobilized mass of

Singaporeans (Tan 2014). One way that the government has attempted to alter its engagement with public policy is to take a risk averse, more cautious tweaking of existing policy (Tan 2014). The approach to policy advancement that the PAP has taken is reflected in the government's approach to banning PMDs. Rather than give into the initial calls to ban PMDs in their entirety, the government took less harsh approaches in order to attempt to strengthen the security-legitimacy relationship in a risk averse fashion that allowed it to maintain centralized power.

In this sense, at first glance that PAP's decision to ban PMDs may appear as though it is indicative of a larger trend of popular support overpowering authoritarian governance in Singapore. However, the government's policy approach dos not reflect popular support, nor does it effectively address the issue of citizen safety from PMDs. The ban from footpaths did nothing to prevent Ong's death from occurring in the future as her death occurred on a bicycle path (Yong 2019). This fact, when coupled with data on accident reports in Singapore showing that PMD accidents make up roughly 2% of land vehicle collisions in 2018 (PMDs, bicycles, motorcycles, and cars), suggests that the Singaporean government aimed to reassure the safety of Singaporean citizens following Ong's death rather than engage in policy decisions that prevented future accidents (Wei 2019d). Additionally, of the 299 PMD accidents that occurred in 2018, only 8 of those reporting injuries were pedestrians (Wei 2019d). Based off of this data, the decision to ban PMDs appears more so as a policy decision to mend the security-legitimacy relationship rather than to definitively protect Singaporean citizens. On this basis, it can be viewed as an example of authoritarian policy advancement.

Upon establishing the banning of PMDs as an example of authoritarian policy, I now illustrate how I will explore the regime's attempts to utilize sites that appear to be founded on netizen engagement to advance such policy. In order to explore how the PAP is able to advance

its policy concerning PMDs online, I used advanced internet searches to target articles on banning PMDs through *The Straits Times.* The methodology of this search is discussed below.

A *Change.org* petition, started by a Singaporean named Zachary Tan in April of 2019, called for the banning of PMDs throughout the city-state (Tan 2019). Initially, the petition gained 9,000 signatures in the first five months. However, as I explore using the *Google Custom Search REST API*—a program that allows one to search for news articles from specific sites programmatically—the petition's representation on *The Straits Times* was largely distorted. Moving beyond this, I trace a series of STOMP articles that illustrate the current regulation of PMDs in Singapore. In researching the presentation of PMDs on STOMP, I analyze a series of 18 articles that demonstratively reinforce the PAP's regulation of PMDs before and after the decision to ban them from footpaths. The connection between each of these articles is mention of the Active Mobility Act, a law regulating land vehicle usage in Singapore implemented in 2018 ("Active Mobility Act" 2019). I thus trace the use of these articles as tools to remind netizens of the regulation on PMDs in the city-state. The results of my findings for this chapter are twofold: (1) each site serves a specific purpose for authoritarian policy advancement and (2) the sites are not consistent PAP policy advancement tools—instead they are utilized at moments when they best serve the regime.

In the following section I trace the use of *Change.org, The Straits Times* and STOMP in advancing the policy surrounding PMDs put forth by the PAP. I have discussed each of these sites in detail in previous chapters. As such, I briefly restate their purpose in advancing policy here. *Change.org* is a site that allows netizens to create and sign petitions important to them; it operates outside of the direct control of the PAP, and as such contains information in support and dissent of the government. *The Straits Times* is a conventional media outlet in Singapore that

puts forth information favorable to the regime (Mydans 2011); the site takes a top-down approach to disseminating information wherein stories are created by a team of professional journalists, editors and publishers and the information is distributed to Singaporean citizens. STOMP operates similarly to *The Straits Times* in that information is edited to support the regime. The difference is that STOMP appears to be founded on a peer-to-peer information sharing network. In this way, STOMP acts as a tool for artificially generating popular support for the regime in Singapore (Dearman & Greenfield 2014). As discussed below, each site plays a crucial role in advancing PAP public policy.

II. A Case Study on Personal Mobility Devices

In this section, I analyze the interconnected nature of STOMP, *Change.org* and *The Straits Times* in advancing PAP public policy. Each site plays a distinct role in catalyzing popular support for the regime. Furthermore, the movements in which they are used demonstrates the interconnected nature of each site in advancing authoritarian public policy. Here, I focus on a specific example of PAP public policy wherein the regime banned the use of personal mobility devices (PMDs) on walking paths throughout the city-state. As previously stated, the decision to ban PMDs emerged after the death of a Singaporean woman named Ong Bee Eng on September 25, 2019 (Han & Wei 2019). Ong died of injuries after she collided with an e-scooter while riding her bicycle (Yong 2019). The decision to ban electric vehicles from footpaths came as a result of increased fear for the safety of pedestrians after Ong's death (Wei 2019a). In this sense, the decision can be viewed as an example of authoritarian public policy as it reflects the PAP's attempts to strengthen the security-legitimacy relationship in moments when the relation is most vulnerable (Wong & Huang 2010). Throughout this section, I explore the use of STOMP, *The Straits Times,* and *Change.org* in drawing public support for the regime's

decision to ban PMDs. As I show, before Ong's death, the sites were not used to highlight popular support for the banning of PMDs, despite the presence of strong online discussion surrounding their regulation (Tan 2019). However, after Ong's death, each site suddenly became a tool for advancing authoritarian public policy nearly instantaneously. The ways in which the PAP utilized online tools facilitating netizen engagement to garner support for this policy decision is the basis for this section.

In the case of banning PMDs in Singapore, the death of Ong catalyzed a fear about security among citizens. On this basis, the PAP acted in order to ensure that the relationship between the regime and its citizens remained stable. The PAP quickly put forth a series of regulations on the use of PMDs in Singapore that eventually culminated in the banning of the devices from footpaths throughout the nation. However, the decision to ban PMDs from footpaths did little to prevent instances like Ong's death from occurring in the future as the accident occurred on a biking path—an area where PMDs were still allowed (Yong 2019). Thus, it follows that the decision to ban PMDs from footpaths emerged to reassure the safety of Singaporean citizens, rather than to legitimately prevent the conditions that lead to Ong's death from occurring in the future. The decision also reflects the risk averse approach to policy advancement taken by the PAP since the 2011 elections (Tan 2014). However, in order to ensure that the narrative surrounding the PAP's policy decisions remained in its favor, the regime utilized *The Straits Times*, *Change.org*, and STOMP to illustrate and create instances of popular support. In exploring the sites in this way, I aim to understand how the PAP is able to control the direction of popular support online when it is most necessary.

The Straits Times and Change.org

This section follows a Change.org petition that calls for the banning of PMDs and its coverage on *The Straits Times.* The petition was created in April of 2019, 5 months before Ong's death (Wei 2019c) and called for the banning of PMDs throughout all of Singapore (Tan 2019). In working to understand the ways in which the PAP uses netizen engagement to advance its public policy agenda, I first trace the portrayal of the petition before and after the death of Ong Bee Eng. In doing so, I trace the use of the petition as a tool to illustrate popular support for the regime's policy decisions, despite the petition calling for action that the government refused to take— that is, the banning of PMDs in their entirety from Singapore (Wei & Teh 2019). What I find is that the regime uses the petition to draw attention to public support for the regime's policy on *The Straits Times,* without directly enacting the policy that the petition calls for.

I used the *Google Custom Search API* to scan the Internet for *Straits Times* articles discussing the petition online. The search is generated using a cURL[2] command containing three parameters: (1) a custom generated site key, restricting all responses returned to *The Straits Times* website (www.straitstimes.com), (2) the keywords used to conduct the search, and (3) a date restriction limiting all responses to the year 2019— when the discussion of banning PMDs was most politically salient. In conducting this research, I generated two separate cURL searches, each with separate keywords. The first search was generated using the keywords "PMD" and "Change.org;" the second search used the keywords "PMD" and "Petition." Thus, the searches returned two separate responses, each with articles from *The Stratis Times* in 2019 containing the keywords "PMD" and "Change.org" or "PMD" and "Petition". Because *The*

[2] cURL is a software project run from the command-line that allows users to send and receive data using various network protocols. In essence, the program allows users to generate a call and receive a response using URL syntax, but from the command-line (Stenberg).

Straits Times always abbreviates the term "Personal Mobility Device" to "PMD" there was no need to include the extended phrase in these queries. The search returned a total of eight articles that are discussed in detail below.

In April of 2019, a Singaporean Zachary Tan created a *Change.org* petition titled "Banning of PMD / e-bike in Singapore" (Tan 2019). The online petition called for the complete banning of e-scooters, e-bikes and other personal mobility devices from being used anywhere in Singapore. Stating the risks of using PMDs, Tan argued that the devices were capable of moving too fast and were too hard to hear when approaching, making them a danger to Singaporean citizens. The 1,200 word petition argued that PMDs presented a strong risk to pedestrian safety in Singapore and as such should be banned in their entirety (Tan 2019). Despite gaining over 9,000 signatures in the first five months—an similar amount to that obtained by Watain—the petition was not acknowledged on *The Straits Times* before Ong's death at all. This is likely due to the fact that there had not been a specific event that brought the issue of PMD safety into the public eye. In essence, the PAP felt no strong need to acknowledge the petition as the current use of PMDs didn't threaten security and thus presented no threat to the regimes authoritarian power. Thus, despite holding significant support for the banning of PMDs, the PAP allowed the petition to live in the margins of the Internet, outside of popular view. Such an ability to ignore petitions in this way suggests that the PAP is able to utilize tools that facilitate democracy at selective moments when drawing support for autocratic public policy becomes necessary.

However, after Ong's death, the *Change.org* petition—now five months old— saw a significant spike in the number of signatures, growing to over 30,000 by the end of September of 2019 (Wei 2019c). This spike indicates a heightened sense of fear for the safety of Singaporeans and shows that the security-legitimacy relationship was under stress (Wong & Huang 2010).

Thus, the PAP was required to act in order to maintain power. In this way, the petition acted as an indicator of the steps that the regime needed to take in order to maintain authoritarian power in Singapore. Because people called for increased security, the regime was no longer required to determine the course of action it needed to take in order to maintain power. Instead, it could rely on citizen participation to feed the regime with new information that could then be utilized to advance its authoritarian power.

However, the PAP explicitly stated that it had no intention of fully banning the use of PMDs throughout the city-state (Wei & Teh 2019). Instead the regime attempted to engage in other, less strict policy initiatives to strengthen the security-legitimacy relationship between citizens and government. These regulations included a minimum age to purchase a PMD, and the implementation of a PMD drivers test (Yong 2019). The reason that the PAP did not want to completely ban PMDs could be due to the fact that they had already become too prominent in Singapore, or that certain occupations (like delivery drivers) had become dependent on them for their livelihood (Wei 2019c). Regardless of the reason, the PAP explicitly stated that it would not implement a full ban of PMDs as the petition called for (Wei & Teh 2019). As I explore below, the fact that the PAP had no intention of fully banning PMDs did not stop them from using the petition as an example of popular support for regime policy. Instead, the PAP highlighted the petition on *The Straits Times* in order to advance other forms of public policy.

As previously stated, the PAP used the *Change.org* petition to illustrate popular support for the regime's public policy through *The Straits Times.* In the two months following Ong's death, when the discussion to ban PMDs was at its height, the petition was mentioned in eight articles on *The Straits Times.* Each article mentions the petition and the number of signatures that it gained. Additionally, many of the articles also include a policy decision taken by the PAP to

ensure the safety of Singaporean citizens. That is to say, the decision to ban PMDs from footpaths was not the first policy initiative that the government enacted to ensure the security of Singaporeans. One article titled "Man dies after falling off e-scooter in Tanah Merah Coast Road" discusses Ong's death and its instigation of a larger call for government regulation (Yong 2019). The article states the following:

> On Tuesday morning, the online petition had about 9,000 signatures, but the number grew to more than 50,000 by 5pm on Friday. On Friday, the Active Mobility Advisory Panel issued a set of recommendations to the Government to better regulate the riding of PMDs. These measures include a minimum age of 16 for PMD riders and a theory test that riders have to pass before they are allowed on public paths. Senior Minister of State for Transport Lam Pin Min, in a Facebook post, said the Ministry of Transport will study these recommendations and provide its response in due course. (Yong 2019)

In this case, the petition is used for the specific purpose of demonstrating public support for increased regulation of PMDs. The decision to regulate PMD use to riders 16 and up, and the inclusion of testing to ensure that riders use PMDs safely, signal attempts by the government to better regulate PMD use. Both of these policy decisions demonstrate an attempt to legitimize the PAP's power as a safeguard for the security of Singaporean citizens. Furthermore, they reflect the PAP's recent attempts to engage in policy tweaking rather than an overhaul of current initiatives (Tan 2014). However, by referencing the online petition, which does not call for either of these initiatives but rather the full ban of PMDs, the government strategically uses popular support for policy decisions different from that which the regime takes to reinforce its authoritarian power.

This was not the end of the PAP's policy engagement with PMDs, however. On November 5th, the government decided to ban the use of PMDs from footpaths in Singapore. The decision was presented as being the result of Ong's death (Wei 2019a). However, the accident occurred on a bicycle path rather than a footpath (Yong 2019). In this sense, the banning of PMDs from footpaths appears to be an attempt to reassure the safety of Singaporean citizens, rather than a preventative measure to curb instances similar to Ong's death from occurring in the future. Thus, in this way, the regulation subverted the calls to fully ban the use of PMDs, while still attempting to reassure Singaporean's who felt threatened by the devices. However, the PAP still used the petition to advance its policy initiative, despite the signatures calling for different action than what the PAP chose to enforce. In this way, *Change.org* becomes a tool for quantifying public support in such a way that goes against the petitioners' goals. From this, the PAP is then able to use the site to advance a policy agenda separate from the will of Singaporean citizens while still capitalizing on popular support.

The ability of the regime to use a *Change.org* petition to advance a policy agenda different from what the supporters called for is further reflected in *The Straits Times* article titled "E-scooter rider charged over Bedok accident that killed cyclist" wherein the petition and Ong's death are both used as justification for the banning (Alkhatib 2019). The article states:

> After [Ong's death], a petition on change.org calling for the ban of PMDs and e-bikes gained traction. As of noon on Monday, it had more than 75,000 signatures... Since Nov 5, e-scooters have been banned from footpaths (Alkhatib 2019).

The above quote demonstrates the connection between Ong's death, the *Change.org* petition, and the decision to ban PMDs from footpaths. However, the petition explicitly calls for the removal of all PMDs from Singapore (Tan 2019), not just from footpaths. This difference between the

petition and the PAP's policy agenda is not included in *The Straits Times* article. Yet still, the PAP continues to use the *Change.org* petition as justification for banning the PMDs from footpaths. This suggests that the PAP is working to mend the security-legitimacy relationship rather than take action to definitively protect the safety of Singaporeans. With this, it becomes clear that *The Straits Times* not only uses *Change.org* to selectively highlight instances of popular support, but also uses such support to tailor the narrative surrounding public policy to fit the regime—even if such support does not reflect the policy taken by the PAP.

The above use of a *Change.org* petition that calls for policy action that the PAP is unwilling to take, indicates the regime's attempts to utilize popular support to put forth an authoritarian message. Whereas previously, the PAP would engage in classical authoritarian tactics, such as censorship and propaganda, to create a dominant narrative that silenced political advocacy that went against the regime's goals (Tan 2016), in the 21st century the regime can rely on citizen support to advance an authoritarian policy agenda. In doing so, the PAP no longer needs to work to create a singular truth that reinforces its power (Heimans & Timms 2018). Rather it can allow for many ideas to be put forth and strategically tailor them to suit the regime. In this sense, the PAP co-opts digital supporters and highlights popular support in order to advance authoritarian public policy (Heimans & Timms 2018).

As the above example indicates, what emerges from the free flow of information sharing on *Change.org* are petitions that actively work to reinforce the PAP's power. This in turn provides the regime with a new body of netizens, capable of feeding the regime with new ways of advancing its public policy. Whereas previously, the PAP was limited to its own government officials when determining the direction of its public policy, now it can defer action to netizens who take party rhetoric and turn it into tools that can actively be utilized to reinforce centralized

power. In the case of PMD regulation, the PAP had no use for such a petition as a tool for highlighting popular support. However, after Ong's death, when the question of banning PMDs became a matter of public security, the PAP was required to enact policy that re-legitimized its ability to ensure the safety of its citizens. In order to ensure that the political narrative surrounding this policy decision remained in favor of the PAP, the *Change.org* petition was utilized to illustrate popular support.

Here, I have analyzed the ways the PAP is able to utilize netizen engagement on sites outside of its control to advance authoritarian public policy. Below, I return to STOMP to explore the ways in which the site is able to insert political rhetoric into a site that appears to be founded on netizen participation. In looking at *Change.org, The Straits Times* and STOMP as tools for influencing the political narrative surrounding the regulation of PMDs in Singapore, I aim to illustrate how each of these sites serve a distinct purpose in advancing authoritarian public policy online.

STOMP

Here, I explore the PAP's ability to advance public policy using a peer-to-peer information sharing site within its control. As previously stated, STOMP is a site that allows netizens to create their own Singaporean news stories. The appearance of STOMP as a site that facilitates user participation allows for the perception of peer-to-peer information sharing. However, the use of STOMP editors makes the site less of a free market of ideas than it may at first appear (Dearman & Greenfield 2014). As previously stated, STOMP's use of editors creates a system wherein user generated stories are tailored to support the regime (Dearman &

Greenfield 2014). As I explore, STOMP played a key role in advancing the public policy decision to ban PMDs from footpaths. The artificially created, peer-to-peer STOMP information network provides the PAP with a seemingly democratic tool that can be used to advance authoritarian public policy. As I explore below, the regime capitalizes on STOMP at crucial points when controlling the narrative surrounding PAP public policy is most important. This tactic is similar to ways that the PAP utilizes *The Straits Times* and *Change.org* as discussed above. In illustrating the similar tactics that the PAP uses on STOMP, I aim to illustrate how all of these sites form an effective tool for PAP policy advancement.

Below, I trace a series of STOMP articles that discuss the use of PMDs. Each article concerns the improper use of PMDs in Singapore both before and after the decision to ban them from footpaths. Specifically, each article references the Active Mobility Act (AMA), a Singaporean law that provides information as to which vehicles can be used on what paths in the city-state ("Active Mobility Act" 2019). The law was created in 2018 by the Land Transport Authority, a government department regulating land vehicle usage in Singapore ("Active Mobility Act" 2019). I include these articles specifically because they accurately represent the relationship between the PAP and STOMP in which the site is used as a tool to highlight regime policy. As discussed below, the way that STOMP highlights the Active Mobility Act works to strengthen the security-legitimacy relationship in Singapore and thus makes it a powerful tool for advancing authoritarian public policy.

In order to find all articles in 2019 that mentioned the Active Mobility Act, I created a custom Google Search engine that only returns articles from the STOMP website. I then used this search engine to programmatically search the STOMP site with the keywords "PMD" and "Active Mobility Act" using the *Google Custom Search API.* The search returned 18 articles

from January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019, the year that the decision to ban PMDs was most prominent. Despite the fact that many articles are published across 2019, the language included in each is remarkably similar. Each article follows a similar framework wherein a story is posted of a PMD rider driving dangerously or otherwise breaking the current law set by the PAP. The articles then state "Under the Active Mobility Act (AMA)…" and proceed to indicate the law surrounding PMDs that is relevant for the specific article. The formulaic nature of referencing the Active Mobility Act suggests that the language is not inserted by netizens who generate STOMP articles, but rather by the team of editors working for the company and are closely tied to the regime. In this way, the regime is able to use a site that appears to be founded on netizen engagement, to advance an authoritarian policy initiative.

One article, published after the ban of PMDs from footpaths took effect, titled "PMD users riding on footpath at Chin Swee Road shows some are still not respecting law" illustrates the way the Active Mobility Act is used on STOMP articles (Daley 2019). The article states that many PMD users are ignoring the ban on footpaths in Singapore. In the article, the netizen who posted the story says "Seeing these people's indifference to the law is really scary" (Daley 2019). This quote is immediately followed with a sentence reinforcing the current regulation of PMDs in Singapore: "Under the Active Mobility Act, PMDs are only allowed on cycling and shared paths" (Daley 2019). Additionally, the image shown in *Figure 5.2* is also included to visually demonstrate where PMDs are allowed in Singapore. The image, taken directly from the Land Transport Authority's website, reflects the PAP's current regulation surrounding PMD usage. This image consistently changes to reflect the current stance of the PAP surrounding PMD regulation. *Figure 5.1* shows the image before the decision to ban PMDs from footpaths; *Figure 5.2* shows the image after the decision. The inclusion of this graphic in STOMP articles both

before and after the ban from footpaths indicates the regime's attempt to reinforce its current public policy surrounding PMD usage online.

Figure 5.1

PAP policy surrounding PMD usage before Nov. 5 ban.

Figure 5.2

PAP policy surrounding PMD usage after Nov. 5 ban.

The reference to the Active Mobility Act, and the inclusion of the image, suggests that the articles are used to reinforce existing regime policy. However, the formulaic language used and the inclusion of the image from the Land Transport Authority's website suggests that this information is not coming from netizens, but rather from STOMP's editorial board. The result is a system wherein information appears to come from a decentralized base of netizens, but in reality puts forth information from a centralized, authoritarian power structure. Moreover, the dates that the articles were published indicate the regime's attempts to enforce authoritarian public policy at moments when its legitimacy is brought into question. As discussed above, the PAP only needed to engage in authoritarian public policy after Ong's death on September 25,

2019. As I explore below, this was precisely the time when the PAP chose to include its political messaging on STOMP.

Furthermore, while the Active Mobility Act is directly referenced 18 times on STOMP in 2019, it only appeared in four articles in the nine months before Ong's death. The remainder of the articles were published following her death with the vast majority of posts emerging in October and November when the decision to ban PMD use on footpaths was at its height. *Figure 5.3* illustrates the distribution of STOMP articles mentioning the Active Mobility Act from the first instance on March 20, 2019 until the end of 2019. Each article also includes a variation of the images presented in *Figure 5.1* and *Figure 5.2*. *Figure 5.3* shows a definitive spike in articles that mention the Active Mobility Act following Ong's death on September 25, 2019. In the two weeks following, the Active Mobility Act is mentioned four times in separate STOMP articles. The trend continues as the discussion to regulate PMDs dominates Singapore's political sphere.

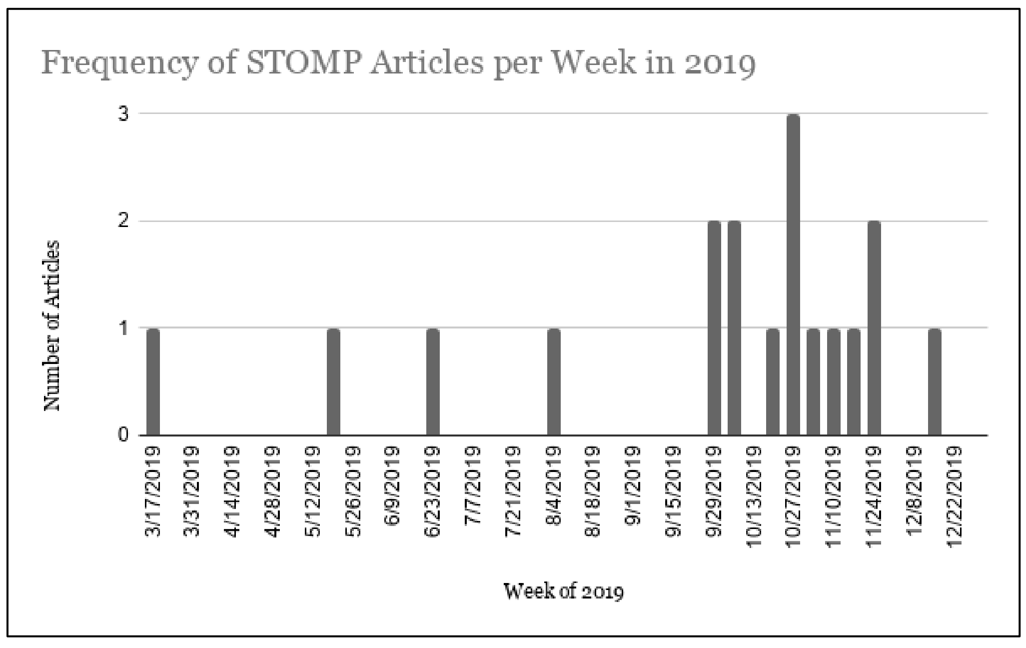


Figure 5.3: Distribution of STOMP Articles in 2019 Mentioning the Active Mobility Act

The spike in STOMP articles mentioning the Active Mobility Act illustrates STOMP's use as a tool for reminding Singaporeans of the current regulation of PMDs at a time when the discussion is political salient. As stated above, the inclusion of the Active Mobility Act serves the purpose of reinforcing an authoritarian policy initiative in the minds of Singaporean netizens. The Active Mobility Act was created in 2018 and existed long before Ong's death. Yet it was not regularly included in STOMP articles until after her death. This is likely due to the fact that the discussion of regulating PMDs as a matter of public safety was not yet a politically salient issue. However, in September of 2019, it became necessary for STOMP to reinforce the current regulation of PMDs to strengthen the security-legitimacy relationship. In this way, the PAP was able to artificially manufacture popular support for the regime when it was most necessary. By referencing the Active Mobility Act and including the images in *Figure 5.1* and *Figure 5.2,* the articles affirm the policy decisions of the PAP in a way that appears to be coming from netizens. Moreover, this affirmation occurs at specific moments when advancing authoritarian policy is most necessary. In manufacturing this support in such a way to appear as though it comes from Singaporean netizens, the PAP is able to utilize a site that appears to advance democratic values, while reinforcing autocratic public policy.

Furthermore, the data above indicates that the PAP's use of STOMP is not a constant machine used to reinforce authoritarian public policy. Rather, it can be turned off and on, depending on when it serves a political purpose. This sporadic reinforcement of PAP public policy reflects the dynamic nature of STOMP as a political tool. The PAP can use STOMP to reinforce whatever government policy is most salient at the time. In doing so, the party is able to capitalize on the diversity of information posted to STOMP to find articles that advance the

specific policy agenda the regime wishes to put forth. The result is a site that feeds the regime with a new source of information, provided by netizens, which the PAP can then utilize to advance its policy agenda.

The use of STOMP as a tool for advancing the PAP's policy decisions surrounding PMD regulation reflects an atmosphere wherein a centralized power relies on decentralized tools of netizen engagement to advance authoritarian public policy. The use of STOMP articles containing mention of the Active Mobility Act highlights the party's attempts to channel the power of netizen engagement to reflect popular support for the party. Furthermore, the inclusion of these articles, specifically when the discussion of PMD usage was most salient, reflects the PAP's attempts to tailor popular discussion of regime policy. The regime only attempts to control such discussion when the issues are most prominent in the Singaporean political sphere. Thus, while the Active Mobility Act existed well before Ong's death, it served no purpose for the regime to draw attention to it. It was not until the question of security emerged surrounding PMD use that including this policy initiative on a site enabling netizen engagement was necessary.

III. Conclusion

The use of *The Straits Times, Change.org,* and STOMP to advance the PAP's policy agenda surrounding PMD usage illustrates the interconnected nature of the sites in advancing public policy. When viewed in isolation, each site appears to reinforce authoritarian public policy in a similar manner to that explored in Chapters III and IV. However, when viewed together, the sudden focus on the *Change.org* petition through *The Straits Times*, and the STOMP articles after Ong's death indicates that the regime utilizes all three sites to advance authoritarian public policy in moments of political importance.

Thus, while each site exists separately from the other, the PAP strategically uses all three at the same time, when enforcing public policy is most necessary. As demonstrated with the use of the *Change.org* petition on *The Straits Times* as well as STOMP's engagement with public policy through the Active Mobility Act, the PAP utilizes sites that appear to facilitate democratic participation to advance authoritarian public policy at selective moments. In this sense, the PAP's system for advancing public policy online is highly coordinated, with each site playing a specific role in illustrating popular support for the regime. This chapter demonstrates that the PAP actively engages *Change.org*, *The Straits Times*, and STOMP to reinforce authoritarian public policy through netizen engagement.

Chapter VI- Concluding Notes

The research put forth in the preceding chapters works to provide a framework for understanding the ways in which tools that appear to facilitate democratic practices can be used to further autocratic power. In working to answer my thesis question of why the PAP is able to continue to advance autocratic public policy despite the emergence of new technologies facilitating increased political participation online, I have found that the regime is able to create and capitalize on instances of popular support that give strength to the party. In a seemingly paradoxical way, the PAP is able to capitalize on a decentralized flow of information, facilitated through peer-to-peer communication methods, to entrench centralized power. In this way, the PAP can build support for new public policy that appears to shift the nature of policy making from a vertical, top-down system, to one that operates on a decentralized on horizontal basis.

The idea that decentralized communication methods advance centralized power is contrary to what scholars (Howard & Muzzamil 2013; Diamond & Plattner 2012) argued at the start of the 2010s. After the Arab Spring, many believed that the Internet would facilitate new methods of democratic participation that would eventually lead to the downfall of centralized power structures (Diamond & Plattner 2012). However, the rise in authoritarian power that emerged in the years following the Arab Spring has demonstrated that this is simply not true ("Freedom in the World" 2019). Instead, we have come to learn that the Internet is simply a tool, which when utilized in a certain way, can lead to democracy or autocracy. In the case of Singapore, the regime has been able to capitalize on precisely the same aspects of the Internet that scholars (Howard & Muzzamil 2013; Diamond & Plattner 2012) believed would lead to democracy—that is, increased political participation and user engagement—to enact authoritarian public policy and subsequently legitimize the PAP's power.

Throughout this thesis, I outline two methods through which the PAP is able to use such political participation to advance autocratic power. The first, demonstrated through STOMP, works to artificially create instances of popular support. In this way, the regime works to provide netizens with an avenue to participate in regime policy. While these avenues may appear trivial, they none the less have the effect of furthering authoritarian public policy in meaningful ways. The second, demonstrated through *Change.org* and *The Straits Times,* works to capitalize on examples of pre-existing support for PAP policy outside of popular view. In doing so, the regime takes advantage of the multiplicity of ideas that emerge on the Internet and only highlights those that demonstrate support for the regime. In coming to understand these two methods for advancing public policy in Singapore, I argue that the regime has found a new methodology for maintaining authoritarian control that accounts for new Internet technologies.

In exploring the PAP's attempts to advance The Speak Good English Movement through *English as it is Broken*, I discussed the nature of artificially generated political participation. That is, the ability of the PAP to create platforms that appear to allow for multiple views to be expressed, but instead only show regime support. While addressing the PAP's banning of Watain, I explored how two sites—one that embodies the peer-to-peer nature of sharing information (*Change.org*) and one that takes a top-down approach (*The Straits Times*)—are utilized to selectively illustrate examples of pre-existing popular support for regime public policy. Finally, in exploring the PAP's decision to ban personal mobility devices from footpaths in the city-state, I illustrated how both of these methods for policy advancement do not exist in isolation, but rather work in lockstep to advance PAP public policy at specific moments. Each case employs online tools to advance public policy offline, utilizing 21st century methods to maintain centralized power.

In this way, it becomes clear that the PAP is able to maintain power precisely because the regime has been able to account for 21st century technologies. In the case of the Arab Spring, many authoritarian regimes in the Middle East neglected to account for increased communication outside of their direct control (Howard & Muzzamil 2013). This, in turn, allowed decentralized communication methods to challenge centralized power structures. However, when regimes are able to channel the power of netizen engagement and subsequently use it to their advantage, the results can give incredible strength to centralized power.

This is not to say, however, that the methods that Singapore employs are translatable to other authoritarian regimes. Singapore's history as a hybrid regime, its position as a technologically advanced nation, and its relative size all allow for the ability to utilize online democratic tools to advance autocratic powers. The success of such a system in China or Russia, for example, where the regimes take different approaches to advancing public policy, remains unclear. Thus, in order to understand the power of the Internet in enacting public policy in regimes outside of Singapore, further research is required.

One thing, however, remains clear: in the digital age, information sharing is key to political power. Whether such power lies in the hands of citizens, eager to use it in ways that advance democracy, or in the hands of governments and other powerful actors working to use it to reinforce their own political objectives, remains unclear. Information sharing is at the center of the Internet and the constantly shifting dynamics that govern it have fueled this thesis. The Internet is filled with paradoxes. But understanding that it is simply a tool, which can be used to facilitate democracy or autocracy, is the key to understanding technological and political systems in the 21st century.

REFERENCES

“Activating Singapore's Most Awesome Citizen Journalists.” *Stomp*, 2019, stomp.straitstimes.com/.

“Active Mobility Act.” *Land Transport Authority*, 2019, www.lta.gov.sg/content/ltagov/en/getting_around/active_mobility/rules_and_public_education/rules_and_code_of_conduct.html.

Ahmed, Helal Uddin. “Impact of Demonstration Effect in Society.” *The Financial Express*, 2017, thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/impact-of-demonstration-effect-in-society-1510155138.

Alkhatib, Shaffiq. “E-Scooter Rider Charged over Bedok Accident That Killed Cyclist.” *The Straits Times*, 11 Nov. 2019, www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/e-scooter-rider-charged-over-bedok-accident-that-killed-cyclist.

Ambrosio, Thomas. “Authoritarian Norms in a Changing International System.” *Politics and Governance*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2018, p. 120., doi:10.17645/pag.v6i2.1474.

Bai, Xiang. Video Analytics. Face and Facial Expression Recognition Third International Workshop, FFER 2018, and Second International Workshop, DLPR 2018, Beijing, China, August 20, 2018, Revised Selected Papers. Springer International Publishing, 01/01/2019,

BBC. “Trump's Military Command for Space Warfare: BBC World Service.” *WNYC*, 2019, www.wnyc.org/story/trumps-military-command-for-space-warfare/.

Bruthiaux, Paul. “The Speak Good English Movement: A Web-User’s Perspective.” *English in Singapore*, 2010, pp. 90–108., doi:10.5790/hongkong/9789888028436.003.0004.

“Change.org.” *Change.org*, 2020, www.change.org/.

Clarke, Killian. “Analysis | Eight Years after Egypt's Revolution, Here's What We've Learned about Social Media and Protest.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 8 Apr. 2019, www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2019/01/25/eight-years-after-egypts-revolution-heres-what-weve-learned-about-social-media-and-protest/.

Dearman, Philip, and Cathy Greenfield. *How We Are Governed: Investigations of Communication, Media and Democracy*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014.

Dewan, Angela. “Monitors Slam Russian Election as 'Overly Controlled'.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 19 Mar. 2018, www.cnn.com/2018/03/19/europe/russia-election-reaction-intl/index.html.

Diamond, Larry Jay., and Marc F. Plattner. *Liberation Technology: Social Media and the Struggle for Democracy*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.

Dirks, Emile, and Sarah Cook. "China's Surveillance State Has Tens of Millions of New Targets." *Foreign Policy*, 21 Oct. 2019, foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/21/china-xinjiang-surveillance-state-police-targets/.

Doubek, James. "China Removes Presidential Term Limits, Enabling Xi Jinping To Rule Indefinitely." *NPR*, NPR, 11 Mar. 2018, www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/03/11/592694991/china-removes-presidential-term-limits-enabling-xi-jinping-to-rule-indefinitely.

"Ecuador Bucks the Authoritarian Trend." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 6 Feb. 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/ecuador-bucks-the-authoritarian-trend/2018/02/05/691a1268-0aa4-11e8-8b0d-891602206fb7_story.html.

Eddino, Abdul H. "Radical Music: Ban on Watain Concert Sparks Debate: Cancellation of Watain show Raises Issue of the Place of Ideologically Problematic Music here." *The Straits Times*, Mar 10, 2019. *ProQuest*, http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/2189275206?accountid=14244.

"*English as it is Broken*." *Wayback Machine*, 2010, web.archive.org/web/20100501001958/english.stomp.com.sg/english/.

Ezrow, Natasha. "Authoritarianism in the 21st Century." *Politics and Governance*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2018, p. 83., doi:10.17645/pag.v6i2.1610.

Ferdinand, Peter. "The Internet, Democracy and Democratization." *Democratization*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2000, pp. 1–17., doi:10.1080/13510340008403642.

"Freedom House." *Freedom House*, 2020, freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2020/leaderless-struggle-democracy.

"Freedom House." *Freedom House*, 2019, freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2020/leaderless-struggle-democracy.

"Freedom House." *Freedom House*, 2015, freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2020/leaderless-struggle-democracy.

"Freedom House." *Freedom House*, 2010, freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2020/leaderless-struggle-democracy.

"Freedom in the World 2019: Democracy in Retreat." *Democracy in Retreat | Freedom House*, 5 Feb. 2019, freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019/democracy-in-retreat.

"Freedom of the Net." *Singapore Country Report*, 11 Feb. 2019, freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2018/singapore.

Gomes, James. *Publish and Perish: the Censorship of Opposition Party Publications in Singapore*. National Solidarity Party, 2001.

Gehlbach, Scott, and Konstantin Sonin. "Government Control of the Media." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2011, doi:10.2139/ssrn.1315882.

George, C. "Singapore: Media at the Mainstream and the Margins." *Media Fortune, Changing Times: ASEAN States in Transition*, Russell H.K. Heng (ed.), 2002. *Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies*.

Gertz, Nolen. "The Four Facebooks: Misinformation, Manipulation, Dependency, Distraction." *New Atlantis (Washington, D.C.)*, no. 58, 05/09/2019, pp. 65-70,

Glenn, Israel. "Poor Children Deserve a Question in the Presidential Debates." *Change.org*, 2019, www.change.org/p/children-need-a-voice-in-this-election-ask-a-debate-question-about-child-poverty.

Gross, Terry. "Cambridge Analytica Whistleblower Christopher Wylie." NPR, NPR, 8 Oct. 2019, www.npr.org/2019/10/08/768287535/cambridge-analytica-whistleblowerchristopher-wylie

Gunther, A. C., and A. P. Hwa. "Public Perceptions Of Television Influence And Opinions About Censorship In Singapore." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1996, pp. 248–265., doi:10.1093/ijpor/8.3.248.

Guriev, Sergei M., and Daniel Treisman. "Informational Autocrats." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2018, doi:10.2139/ssrn.3208523.

Hadi, Eddino Abdul. "Parliament: MPs Back Cancellation of Watain Concert, but Question Last-Minute Reversal." *The Straits Times*, 2 Apr. 2019, www.straitstimes.com/politics/parliament-mps-back-cancellation-of-watain-concert-but-question-last-minute-reversal.

Hadi, Eddino Abdul. "IMDA Pulls Plug on Gig Hours before Swedish Band's Show." *The Straits Times*, 7 Mar. 2019, www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/entertainment/imda-pulls-plug-on-gig-hours-before-swedish-bands-show.

Han, Goh Yan, and Toh Ting Wei. "65-Year-Old Woman Injured in Bedok e-Scooter Accident Dies in Hospital." *The Straits Times*, 25 Sept. 2019,

www.straitstimes.com/singapore/transport/65-year-old-woman-injured-in-bedok-e-scooter-accident-dies-in-hospital.

Heimans, Jeremy, and Henry Timms. New Power: How It's Changing the 21st Century - and Why You Need to Know. Picador, 2018.

Howard, Philip N., and Muzammil M. Hussain. Democracy's Fourth Wave? : Digital Media and the Arab Spring. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Huat, Chua Beng. "Multiculturalism in Singapore: An Instrument of Social Control." *Race & Class*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2003, pp. 58–77., doi:10.1177/0306396803044003025

Huat, Chua Beng. "Multiculturalism in Singapore: An Instrument of Social Control." *Race & Class*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2003, pp. 58–77., doi:10.1177/0306396803044003025.

Huntington, Samuel P. "Democracy's Third Wave." *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1991, pp. 12–34., doi:10.1353/jod.1991.0016.

Husák, Martin. "Rock Music Censorship in Czechoslovakia between 1969 and 1989." *Popular Music and Society*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2017, pp. 310–329., doi:10.1080/03007766.2017.1295503.

Jiuan, Tan S. "Singaporeans' Attitudes Towards Work, Pecuniary Adherence, Materialism, Feminism, Environmental Consciousness, and Media Credibility." *Singapore Management Review*, vol. 23, no. 1, 01/01/2001, pp. 59,

Kaisler, Lara, and Dennis O'Connor. "Research Guides: How to Evaluate Information Sources: Identify Bias." *Identify Bias - How to Evaluate Information Sources - Research Guides at New Jersey Institute of Technology*, 2019, researchguides.njit.edu/evaluate/bias.

Karlgaard, Rich. "Internet Guru: Google Evangelist Vint Cerf." *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 18 May 2011, www.forbes.com/forbes/2011/0606/opinions-rich-karlgaard-innovation-rules-internet-guru.html#78d5e671da2d

Kaur, Satveer, et al. "Media, Migration and Politics: The Coverage of the Little India Riot in The Straits Times in Singapore." *Journal of Creative Communications*, vol. 11, no. 1, Mar. 2016, pp. 27–43, doi:10.1177/0973258616630214.

King, Gary, et al. "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression." *American Political Science Review*, vol. 107, no. 2, 2013, pp. 326–343., doi:10.1017/s0003055413000014.

King, Gary, et al. "Reverse-Engineering Censorship in China: Randomized Experimentation and Participant Observation." *Science*, vol. 345, no. 6199, 2014, pp. 1251722–1251722., doi:10.1126/science.1251722.

Lascoumes, Pierre, and Patrick Le Gales. “Introduction: Understanding Public Policy through Its Instruments?From the Nature of Instruments to the Sociology of Public Policy Instrumentation.” *Governance*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1–21., doi:10.1111/j.1468-0491.2007.00342.x.

Lecheler, Sophie, et al. “Dealing with Feelings: Positive and Negative Discrete Emotions as Mediators of News Framing Effects.” *Communications - The European Journal of Communication Research*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2013, doi:10.1515/commun-2013-0011.

Lee, Terence. *The Media, Cultural Control and Government in Singapore*, Routledge, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/lib/unc/detail.action?docID=530340.

Li, Robin. “Close down STOMP.com.sg.” *Change.org*, 2014, www.change.org/p/sph-stomp-com-sg-close-down-stomp-com-sg.

Liang, Chong Zi. “MDA Lifts Ban on 240 Publications Ranging from Communist Material to Adult Interest Content.” *The Straits Times*, 19 Jan. 2016, www.straitstimes.com/singapore/mda-lifts-ban-on-240-publications-ranging-from-communist-material-to-adult-interest.

Lim, John. “Singapore Bans Heavy Metal Band from Performing Because They Will 'Disrupt Social Harmony'.” *Mashable SEA*, 7 Mar. 2019, sea.mashable.com/culture/2671/singapore-bans-heavy-metal-band-from-performing-because-they-will-disrupt-social-harmony

Lindgren, Simon. “Movement Mobilization in the Age of Hashtag Activism: Examining the Challenge of Noise, Hate, and Disengagement in the #MeToo Campaign.” *Policy & Internet*, 2019, doi:10.1002/poi3.212.

“Living History - 170 Years of the Straits Times.” *Straits Times*, 2015, graphics.straitstimes.com/STI/STIMEDIA/ebooks/Living-History.pdf.

Macaulay, Thomas. “How the Singapore Government Supports the Country's Tech Scene.” *CIO*, CIO, 24 July 2019, www.cio.com/article/3299480/how-the-singapore-government-supports-the-country-s-tech-scene.html.

“Media Releases - Singapore Press Holdings.” *Singapore Press Holdings*, 2007, sph.com.sg/media_releases/436.

Mele, Christopher. “Online Petitions Take Citizen Participation to New Levels. But Do They Work?” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 28 Dec. 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/12/28/us/online-petitions-activism.html.

Minocher, Xerxes. “Online Consumer Activism: Challenging Companies with Change.Org.” *New Media & Society*, vol. 21, no. 3, Mar. 2019, pp. 620–638, doi:10.1177/1461444818803373.

Mydans, Seth. “In Singapore, Political Campaigning Goes Viral.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 5 May 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/05/06/world/asia/06iht-singapore06.html.

Mudde, Cas, and Kaltwasser Cristóbal Rovira. *Populism: a Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

Nirmala, M. "Buck up, poor English reflects badly on us: PM." The Straits Times 30 (2000): 4.

Nirmala, M. “Teach Good English? Seminar Will Give Tips.” *The Straits Times*, 26 May 2000.

Oliver, Steven, and Kai Ostwald. “Explaining Elections In Singapore: Dominant Party Resilience And Valence Politics.” *Journal of East Asian Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2018, pp. 129–156., doi:10.1017/jea.2018.15.

Ong, Elvin, and Mou Hui Tim. “Singapore’s 2011 General Elections and Beyond.” *Asian Survey*, vol. 54, no. 4, 2014, pp. 749–772., doi:10.1525/as.2014.54.4.749.

Ortmann, Stephan, and Mark R. Thompson. "Introduction: The “Singapore Model” and China's Neo-Authoritarian Dream." The China Quarterly, vol. 236, 2018, pp. 930-945. ProQuest, http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/2158471491?accountid=14244, doi:http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/10.1017/S0305741018000474.

Pakiam, Desiree. “Stomp's English Column Continues to Engage.” *Stomp's English Column Continues to Engage*, 2008, www.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20080613-70714.html.

Peters, B.Guy. *Advanced Introduction to Public Policy*. Edward Elgar, 2015.

Presuel, Rodrigo Cetina, and José Manuel Martínez Sierra. “Algorithms and the News: Social Media Platforms as News Publishers and Distributors.” *Revista De Comunicación*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2019, pp. 261–285., doi:10.26441/rc18.2-2019-a13.

Rahimat, Siti Binte. “Petition on Behalf of All PMD Users in Singapore: Allow PMD on Footpaths or Roads.” *Change.org*, 2019, www.change.org/p/petition-on-behalf-of-all-pmd-users-in-singapore-allow-pmd-on-footpaths-or-roads.

Roberts, Margaret E. *Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China's Great Firewall*. Princeton University Press, 2018.

Robinson, Lisa. “Singapore: 'Satanic' Swedish Metal Band's Gig Cancelled 'for Reasons of Public Order'.” *Freemuse*, 15 Mar. 2019, freemuse.org/news/singapore-satanic-swedish-metal-bands-gig-cancelled-for-reasons-of-public-order-freemuse/.

Rodan, Garry. *Singapore Changes Guard: Social, Political and Economic Directions in the 1990s*. Longman Cheshire, 1994.

Rose, Heath, and Nicola Galloway. “Debating Standard Language Ideology in the Classroom: Using the ‘Speak Good English Movement’ to Raise Awareness of Global Englishes.” *RELC Journal*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2017, pp. 294–301., doi:10.1177/0033688216684281.

Sawe, Benjamin Elisha. "Largest Ethnic Groups In Russia." WorldAtlas, Jul. 18, 2019, worldatlas.com/articles/largest-ethnic-groups-in-russia.html.

Schwartz, Jason, et al. “Conservative Outlets Take on Facebook.” *POLITICO*, 29 Mar. 2018, www.politico.com/story/2018/03/29/conservatives-facebook-liberal-bias-490920.

Shearer, Elisa. “Social Media Outpaces Print Newspapers in the U.S. as a News Source.” *Pew Research Center*, 2018, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/10/social-media-outpaces-print-newspapers-in-the-u-s-as-a-news-source/.

“Singapore.” *Freedom House*, 5 Aug. 2013, freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2010/singapore.

“Singapore Bans Chinese-American Scholar as Foreign Agent.” *AP News*, 4 Aug. 2017, https://apnews.com/12ca804cdf1d496c8bdf8928a4a7404a

“Singapore Internet Users.” *Internet Live Stats*, 2016, www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/singapore/.

“Singapore.” *Singapore | Freedom House*, Freedom House, 11 June 2019, freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/singapore.

“Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) 2004 Targets Working Adults in Service Industry .” *WebCite Query Result*, 2004, www.webcitation.org/5u56sao2E?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.goodenglish.org.sg%2F2009%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2009%2F04%2Fabout-years04-pressrelease-20040421.pdf.

“Speak Good Singlish Movement.” *Facebook*, 2009, www.facebook.com/pg/Speak-Good-Singlish-Movement-128281041371/posts/?ref=page_internal.

Stenberg, Daniel. “Curl the Man Page.” *Curl*, curl.haxx.se/docs/manpage.html.

“Straight Times Online Mobile Print.” *Stomp - Activating Singapore's Most Awesome Citizen Journalists*, stomp.straitstimes.com/.

Tai Ann, Koh, and Felix Soh. *English as it is Broken*. EPB Pan Pacific, 2010.

Tan, Kenneth Paul. “Singapore in 2014.” *Asian Survey*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2015, pp. 157–164., doi:10.1525/as.2015.55.1.157.

Tan, Kenneth Paul. “Choosing What to Remember in Neoliberal Singapore: The Singapore Story, State Censorship and State-Sponsored Nostalgia.” Asian Studies Review, vol. 40, no. 2, June 2016, pp. 231–249. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1080/10357823.2016.1158779.

Tan, Zachary. “Banning of PMD / e-Bike in Singapore.” *Change.org*, 2019, www.change.org/p/all-singaporeans-banning-of-pmd-e-bike-in-singapore.

Tan, Sumiko. “GE2015: PAP Vote Share Increases to 69.9%, Party Wins 83 of 89 Seats Including WP-Held Punggol East.” *The Straits Times*, 29 Apr. 2016, www.straitstimes.com/politics/ge2015-pap-vote-share-increases-to-699-party-wins-83-of-89-seats-including-wp-held-punggol.

Tan, Cheryl Lu-Lien. “The Singlish Language Reflects the Power of My People.” *Time*, Time, 9 Aug. 2016, time.com/4441078/singlish-language/.

Tan, Jared. “Sign the Petition.” *Get Rachel Chan Deported from Singapore*, 2019, www.change.org/p/shanmugam-k-sc-get-rachel-chan-deported-from-singapore.

“The Straits Times.” *Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010.

“The Global Intelligence Files: PHL/PHILIPPINES/ASIA PACIFIC.” *WikiLeaks*, 2010, wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/66/664520_phl-philippines-asia-pacific-.html.

Ting, Choo Yun. “Churches' Council Expresses Appreciation over Cancellation of Swedish Metal Band Watain's Concert.” *The Straits Times*, 8 Mar. 2019, www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/churches-council-expresses-appreciation-over-cancellation-of-swedish-metal-band-watains.

“Using Standard English Is The Way To Be Understood, Emphasises Speak Good English Movement 2006 .” *Language Councils*, Speak Good English Movement, 2006, www.languagecouncils.sg/goodenglish/-/media/sgem/document/press-room/2006/press-release-2006.pdf.

Wee, Lionel. “‘Burdens’ and ‘Handicaps’ in Singapore’s Language Policy: on the Limits of Language Management.” *Language Policy*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2009, pp. 97–114., doi:10.1007/s10993-009-9159-2.

Wee, Lionel. “Linguistic Chutzpah and the Speak Good Singlish Movement.” *World Englishes*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2014, pp. 85–99., doi:10.1111/weng.12055.

Wei, Toh Ting. “E-Scooters to Be Banned from Singapore Footpaths from Nov 5.” *The Straits Times*, 10 Nov. 2019, www.straitstimes.com/singapore/transport/parliament-e-scooters-to-be-banned-from-footpaths-from-nov-5.

Wei, Toh Ting. “E-Scooters Banned from Footpaths: Over 100 PMD Riders Get Warnings; Riding on Paths' Grass Patches Can Be an Offence.” *The Straits Times*, 8 Nov. 2019, www.straitstimes.com/singapore/transport/lta-issues-warnings-to-over-100-riders-of-e-scooters-pmds-on-first-day-of.

Wei, Toh Ting. “Fewer Riders of e-Scooters on Footpaths but Some Are Undeterred.” *The Straits Times*, 5 Nov. 2019, www.straitstimes.com/singapore/transport/fewer-riders-of-e-scooters-on-footpaths-but-some-are-undeterred.

Wei, Toh Ting, and Cheryl Teh. “PMD in Fatal Crash Exceeded Weight, Width Limit: LTA.” *The Straits Times*, 26 Sept. 2019, www.straitstimes.com/singapore/transport/pmd-in-fatal-crash-exceeded-weight-width-limit-lta.

Wei, Toh Ting. “Nearly 300 Treated at Hospitals for PMD-Related Accidents Last Year; 1 in 6 Had Severe Injuries.” *The Straits Times*, 5 Nov. 2019, www.straitstimes.com/politics/nearly-300-treated-at-hospitals-for-pmd-related-accidents-last-year-1-in-6-had-severe.

Wiatr, Jerzy J. *New Authoritarianism: Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century*. Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2019.

Wilson, Andrew. *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post -Soviet World*. Yale University Press, 2018.

Wong, Benjamin, and Xunming Huang. “Political Legitimacy in Singapore.” *Politics & Policy*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2010, pp. 523–543., doi:10.1111/j.1747-1346.2010.00247.x.

Wray, Michael. “Massive anti-cycling petition full of false names, claims Bicycle Queensland CEO”. *The Courier-Mail,* 2018, https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/massive-anticycling-petition-full-of-false-names-claims-bicycle-queensland-ceo/news-story/fdf3e0dd06aa3343948dce1020df03b1

Yong, Clement. “Man Dies after Falling off e-Scooter in Tanah Merah Coast Road.” *The Straits Times*, 27 Sept. 2019, www.straitstimes.com/singapore/man-dies-after-falling-off-e-scooter-along-tanah-merah-coast-road.