

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BLOGS AND
NEWSPAPERS IN SINGAPORE:
AN INTERMEDIA AGENDA-SETTING STUDY**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS**

**COMMUNICATIONS AND NEW MEDIA
PROGRAMME**
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE
2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could not have been completed without the help and guidance of many people, and I would like to express my gratitude to them.

First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Linda M. Perry, for agreeing to be my supervisor and cracking the whip when necessary. Her wisdom and guidance throughout the years are so invaluable, and I am eternally thankful to have such a wonderful mentor to help shape my thoughts and worldview.

Next, I would like to thank my programme head, Dr Milagros Rivera, for her unwavering support during my candidature. Juggling work and studies is not easy, but she always made sure that I was able to handle both effectively, and I too am eternally grateful to have such a wonderful head. If I can have my way, she'll be my boss forever.

Other than my supervisor and my programme head, my beloved wife, the soon-to-be Dr Ho Peiying, is the third person I am eternally grateful to. She's a lovely wife, a good listener and an extremely capable and intelligent woman. She is always there when I need a helping hand or a listening ear. Thank you so much, my honey, and I love you.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the wonderful people in the CNM family. The graduate students are such a fun bunch for intellectual banter, and the professors are always approachable and willing to listen and dispense advice when I seek their assistance. The administrative staff, especially Retna, always makes sure that the graduate students are in the loop of things. I cannot imagine a better place to have done my degree, and it is indeed my great fortune to be in such a great place.

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ABSTRACT

Blogs have significantly lowered the cost of the publication of information for anyone with access to the Internet, and they now compete with the traditional mass media for readers. This thesis explores the relationship between blogs, a relatively new form of media, and the traditional news media, specifically newspapers, employing content analysis of public affairs-oriented Singaporean blogs and the two main newspapers in Singapore, a country with a long legal history of strong press and free speech regulation, using the intermedia agenda-setting framework. Results show few similarities between the content covered by blogs and newspapers, and blogs are usually dependent on newspapers for information, with the exception of internet-related issues. This suggests that the traditional news media are still dominant in determining the public agenda, and blogs mainly offer additional commentary and opinions to supplement issues raised by the mass media, which may be the result of the legal environment which the Singapore press operates in.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Blogs, an abbreviation for the term web logs, can be described as journals published on the World Wide Web, usually with entries in reverse chronological order, where the latest entry is presented first. There are many different kinds of blogs; for example, personal blogs, which are akin to a personal online diary; corporate blogs, which are used for public relations purposes; and blogs dealing with specialized topics such as food, politics, fashion or technology. Anyone with access to an internet connection can easily set up a blog and start publishing content online for public consumption at little cost, and the result is an explosion in the number of people who are publishing their own content online. It is almost impossible to know the total number of blogs on the Web, as there is no centralized directory for blogs and the number is continually changing. However, a quick search using the Google search engine in the week of June 21-27, 2010, returned a total of almost 1.5 billion different sub-domains under blogspot.com and wordpress.com, two of the most popular free blogging platforms. Since every individual blog on these two blogging platforms is given a unique sub-domain, the sheer size of the search results returned by Google on just these two platforms indicates the popularity of blogs, as well as the potential impact blogs can have in shaping public opinion.

According to a Pew Internet and American Life Project national telephone survey conducted between July 2005 and April 2006, 8% of internet users 18 and older in the United States reported keeping blogs, while 39% of the same group said they read blogs (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Another Pew

Internet research report (Lenhart & Madden, 2005) indicated that 19% of teenage internet users in the United States, ages 12-17, in 2005 reported keeping blogs, while 38% of online teens said they read blogs. In a more recent Pew Internet and American Life Project survey conducted between June and September 2009, 15% of adult internet users in the United States ages 18-29 reported keeping blogs and 24% said they commented on blogs, while 11% of adult internet users above the age of 30 reported keeping blogs and 26% said they commented on blogs (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). In the same report, the percentage of teenage internet users, ages 12-17, who reported keeping blogs had dropped to 14% compared with 2005's 19%, and 52% of this group said they commented on blogs (Lenhart, et al., 2010). In general, it appears that maintaining, reading and commenting on blogs appear to be significant parts of many people's internet activities, despite the rising popularity of social media such as Facebook¹ and Twitter².

The ease with which a blog can be set up to provide information for public consumption, together with the significant proportion of individuals' internet activity spent on blog-related activities, means that blogs have the potential to significantly affect public opinion. The government in Singapore has signaled its concern about the potential of blogs to influence public opinion. For example, three bloggers in Singapore were arrested and convicted of sedition in 2005 for making racist remarks on their blogs (Chong, 2005).

¹ Facebook is a web service that allows users to create their own profile pages and add other users as friends. Users can also send messages, upload pictures and links, notify friends about profile updates and join various Facebook networks.

² Twitter is a web service that allows users to send and read short messages of up to 140 characters called tweets, which appear on the users' Twitter profile page.

Blogs' potential to influence public opinion makes them rivals to the traditional news media³, which prior to the internet, were the main source of news and information for the public, playing a key role in shaping public opinion (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Competition among mass media outlets in terms of news coverage has been the norm, and as part of that competition for readers, listeners and viewers, journalists routinely monitor their competitors' news coverage (Lanosga, 2008). With blogs now competing with the mass media for readership, several questions emerge: Do blogs have a role in providing information of public concern traditionally delivered by the mass media, and if so, what is that role? Do blogs actively compete with traditional news media in terms of the speed in which news is reported, or do blogs complement the mass media, providing commentary on news already published by traditional providers? This thesis attempts to answer these questions through a comparative analysis of blogs and newspapers in Singapore, a country with strong media laws, using the agenda-setting theory, specifically intermedia agenda-setting.

³ Media types that existed before the internet, such as print newspapers, radio and television.

Chapter 2: The Media and Internet in Singapore

Singapore is a tiny island state with a population of 5.08 million (Singstat, 2010). Located at the southern tip of the Malaysia peninsula, Singapore is a former British colony that became a sovereign nation in August 1965 after exiting the Malaysian federation, which it joined upon gaining independence in 1959 from the United Kingdom. Singapore experienced rapid economic growth and increasingly higher standards of living in the decades that followed under the rule of the People's Action Party (PAP), which has consistently been elected to power since Singapore gained self-governance from Britain before eventually becoming a sovereign nation. Singapore enjoys First World living standards today, an anomaly in the geographical region in which it is situated, where many neighboring countries are considered Third World in terms of economic development. Singapore is also an anomaly in modern history because its economic success did not come hand in hand with a liberal, democratic system of governance.

There is little agreement among scholars about the exact nature of Singapore's system of governance. Labels include an 'authoritarian' state (Rodan, 1993), an 'illiberal democracy' (Mutalib, 2000) and an electoral autocracy (Diamond, 2002). What scholars do generally agree on, however, is that Singapore exhibits many characteristics of a modern democracy, such as allowing multiple political parties and having elections every few years, but paradoxically, the state has, in the words of Trocki (2006), "virtual

control over the economy and society” (p.186). Souchow Yao (2007) aptly notes that

Singapore is a place of many paradoxes: a society of First World living standards, yet it is ruled by harsh state measures and pragmatic policies reminding one of the practices of a Third World nation; a society with an advanced economy, yet its liberal-democratic standards fall short of similar ‘development’. (p.xii)

The Singapore government’s strong penchant for control means the media in Singapore are no exception to the rule. The Singapore government does not allow the media in Singapore to be independent or to play the role of the “Fourth Estate”. In his speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1988, Lee Kuan Yew, then prime minister of Singapore, explicitly rejected the notion of the Singapore press as an independent watchdog on the Singapore government:

One value which does not fit Singapore is the theory of the press as the fourth estate. From British times, the Singapore press was never the fourth estate.⁴ And in Singapore’s experience, because of our volatile racial and religious mix, the American concept of the “marketplace of ideas”⁵, instead of producing harmonious enlightenment, has time and again led to riots and bloodshed. (Lee, 1988, p.7)

⁴ Lee’s assertion that the Singapore press was never the fourth estate during the time when Singapore was a British colony contradicts the first editorial of the Straits Times published 15 July 1845, which explicitly stated that the role of the press is that of the fourth estate.

⁵ The concept of the “marketplace of ideas” was posited in the 19th century by British philosopher John Stewart Mill in his work *On Liberty*, which was based on the 17th century

Lee was clearly heavily influenced by the racial riots in Singapore's history that occurred in 1950 and in 1964. The racial riot in 1950 was over the custody of a Dutch girl who lost contact with her natural parents during the Japanese occupation of Singapore. The girl had been brought up as a Muslim by her caretaker, and when the girl's natural parents found her whereabouts, a custody battle ensued. The media covered the emotionally charged case extensively, and riots broke out later between Muslims and Europeans. In 1964, a riot broke out in July on the eve of the celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birthday and a second riot broke out in September after a Malay trishaw rider was found stabbed to death. Both riots pitted the Malay ethnic community against the Chinese ethnic community, and the press had extensive coverage of the riots.

The Singapore government clearly views the press as a potential threat to a peaceful and stable society, and therefore, as something that needs to be tightly controlled. However, the Singapore government does not view the press as a dangerous animal that needs to be destroyed, but rather that the press, when properly managed, can be a useful tool for the government, a view that Lee would espouse in his memoir twelve years later:

Freedom of the press, freedom of the news media, must be subordinated to the overriding needs of Singapore, and to the primacy of purpose of an elected government (Lee, 2000, p.218).

writings of John Milton. The concept was more fully developed as a philosophy of governance in American jurisprudence.

Thus, the Singapore government has, since the early days of Singapore's independence, imposed on the media the role of nation-building. In 1971, six years after Singapore became an independent country, Lee explained the role of the media in Singapore in an address to the International Press Institute in Helsinki:

The mass media can help to present Singapore's problems simply and clearly and then explain how, if they support certain programmes and policies, these problems can be solved. (Lee, 1976, p.173)

The roles of the media in nation-building were reiterated again in 1999 by the second prime minister of Singapore, Goh Chok Tong:

One, of course, is to inform. That is the primary purpose of the media. You inform objectively. Better still if the media can also help to educate the people. Meaning if there is a message from the government, the media understands that the message is for the good of the country, not for a particular political party, but for the good of the country. Then, they should help get the message across to educate the people, to bring the people along with the government to achieve a result that is good for the country. I would see those as the two primary roles of the media. (Media 'should not set national agenda,' 1999, p.4)

The media in Singapore, assigned with the role of nation-building, is thus managed with a carrot-and-stick approach, using both financial rewards and coercive laws to make the media completely subservient to the Singapore government. The biggest stick that regulates the mass media is undoubtedly the Internal Security Act (ISA), which allows the Singapore government to

arbitrarily arrest dissidents without warrant and detain them without trial indefinitely. The ISA was invoked against the press in 1971 when four senior executives – the general manager, the editor-in-chief, a senior editorial writer and a public relations officer – of the now defunct *Nanyang Siang Pau* were detained and accused of playing up communist ideology and engaging in Chinese chauvinism, accusations which were flatly denied by the paper (Seow, 1998). The four executives were eventually released after confessing to the charges laid against them. Later on, the chairman of the newspaper was also arrested and detained under the ISA for five years.

Political opposition has also been dealt with under the ISA. A former member of Singapore's Parliament, Chia Thye Poh, who was a member of the Barisan Socialis, a political party rivaling the PAP in the 1960s, was arrested under the ISA and detained for over twenty years after he was alleged to be a communist by the Singapore government. Many other members of the Barisan Socialis were also arrested under the ISA during that period of time.

However, the draconian use of the ISA by the PAP to deal with political opposition and journalists is now relatively rare. The ISA is now mostly reserved for combating terrorism, and the current preferred mode of dealing with political opposition is through the use of defamation or libel lawsuits⁶. For example, the leader of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), Chee Soon Juan, was sued by the leaders of the PAP in 2001 for allegedly making defamatory remarks during an election rally, and Chee was sued again,

⁶ Political dissent has sometimes also been dealt with using other laws. For instance, in 2008, a former opposition party member was charged under the Penal Code for insulting a public servant during judiciary proceedings for remarking that a Singaporean judge "prostituted" herself.

along with SDP, in 2006 for an allegedly libelous article in his party's newspaper. Eventually, the PAP leaders won the lawsuits. According to a report released by the International Bar Association Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), "[n]o PAP leader has ever lost a defamation suit against an opposition figure in court" (IBAHRI, 2008, p.7). Even though the ISA is no longer used to stifle political dissent nor to shut down the press, its existence, coupled with how the Singapore government "has not expressed second thoughts — let alone remorse — over the way it used the ISA in the past", is a haunting reminder of the power the Singapore government retains over political expression (George, 2006, p.44).

Other relatively less fearsome and draconian laws to which the Singapore media are subjected include the Sedition Act⁷, which makes illegal any act to create disaffection towards the government or any 'tendency' to bring the government into hatred or contempt, and the Official Secrets Act, which prohibits the unauthorized release of any government information. The Sedition Act has not been used against the traditional Singaporean news media, but it was invoked in 2005 against Singaporean bloggers who posted racist remarks on their blogs. The Official Secrets Act was invoked once, in 1994, against the *Business Times*, a newspaper owned by Singapore Press Holdings, over an innocuous economic growth figure, but has not been invoked against the media since then.

⁷ The Sedition Act is less draconian because unlike the ISA, jail is capped at three years for the first offence and five years for subsequent offences, and a warrant of arrest is necessary to detain someone under the Act and the accused has to face trial.

The Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPPA) is another important piece of legislation to which the Singapore media are subjected. The NPPA makes the possession of a valid permit compulsory for any newspaper that is published in Singapore. The permit is usually granted on a yearly basis, and the permit may be revoked at any time at the discretion of the government. The NPPA is typically construed as a form of prior restraint and another stick to coerce the media into submission, but George (2006) points out that the permit is also a huge financial carrot. This is because competitors who refuse to comply with the wishes of the Singapore government can be shut out easily, so it is in the financial self-interest of the media to accede to the government in order to gain a monopolistic hold on the market.

In addition to requiring newspapers to have a valid permit, the NPPA also authorizes the Singapore government to control the management of any newspaper company. This was accomplished in 1974 through the mandated institution of special management shares that have 200 times the voting power of ordinary shares, and the holders of the management shares must be approved by the government.⁸ By judiciously controlling the holders of management shares, the government thus controls the boards of directors of newspaper companies, which translates into hiring-control of editorial positions. Through this arrangement, the Singapore government is freed from having to micromanage newspaper production on a daily basis, since the editorial board is likely to be government-friendly.

⁸ In 1981, the Singapore government appointed S.R. Nathan, a former director of the Security and Intelligence Division, to become the executive chairman of the Straits Times. Nathan was later elected as president of Singapore in 1999.

The government increased its control of the news media in 1984 by forcing the merger of several newspaper companies. The merger created Singapore Press Holdings, the largest press company in Singapore, and a near-monopoly of news outlets.

The broadcast press in Singapore, MediaCorp Press, is not subjected to the same kind of boardroom manipulation, but its parent company, MediaCorp, which owns 80% of broadcast outlets (Mediacorp, 2004), is wholly owned by Temasek Holdings, an investment company owned by the Singapore government. Thus, the Singapore government still retains some form of control over the broadcast press in Singapore, albeit in a different form. The government also exerts strong control over broadcasting in Singapore through the Broadcasting Act, which requires broadcasters to have a valid permit before being allowed to operate in Singapore. Broadcasters are also required by law to comply with a code of practice that prescribes the kinds of programmes that are permitted for airing.

Since the early days of Singapore's independence, the Singapore government has, according to researcher Terence Lee, "exacted or seized control of the media channels and outlets in most forms and guises from early on, thereby ensuring that it remains the prime social, cultural, political and economic agenda-setter" (Lee, 2010, p.15). However, the government's tight control of the media began loosening when the Singapore government decided, for the sake of economic growth, to provide public access to the Internet in the mid-1990s, creating a milestone in Singapore's history of regulating the media, because for the first time, citizens no longer need to secure a government license before engaging in mass communication (George, 2006).

One of the main reasons that the Singapore government declined to apply one of its key planks of media regulation to the Internet, the issuance of licenses prior to commencement of information dissemination, is that the Internet can be used for many different forms of communication (George, 2006). The Internet can be used as a personal, one-to-one form of communication similar to making a phone call or writing a personal letter, or a one-to-many form of communication similar to broadcast or newspapers, and regulating the Internet the way mass media have been regulated using licenses is highly impractical.

Another important reason for the lighter touch is that the Internet is a two-way medium. A consumer can easily become an information producer (George, 2006). Previously, the owners of broadcast stations or printing presses were the producers of information in the mass media, and it was easier for the government to regulate the information producers. But the Internet has severely blurred the distinction between consumers and producers, and the number of information producers has increased exponentially. The Singapore government could have chosen to deny Singaporeans from having Internet access to avoid the thorny problems of regulating the Internet, but it chose not to do so. George posits that this is so because the Internet is part of an information technology master plan within “a national strategy for survival in global economic competition” (George, 2006, p.67). The economic potential of the Internet resulted in a regulatory approach that is less heavy-handed than the approach used to regulate the traditional media (Rodan, 2000).

The main piece of legislation for regulating the Internet is the ‘Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification’, which covers both Internet access

providers and content providers. Recognizing what it calls the “limit to what domestic legislation can achieve in the face of a global and borderless medium like the Internet” (MDA, 2010a), the Media Development Authority of Singapore (MDA), the government body responsible for regulating Internet content, has explained on its website that the ‘Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification’, commonly known as the Class Licence scheme, automatically licenses all Internet access and content providers in Singapore:

Under the Class Licence Scheme, Internet Content Providers and Internet Service Providers are deemed automatically licensed and have to observe and comply with the Class Licence Conditions and the Internet Code of Practice, which outlines what the community regards as offensive or harmful to Singapore's racial and religious harmony (MDA, 2010a).

The Class Licence scheme automatically assumes that anyone using the Internet in Singapore is regulated and required to observe the laws of the land. Although the legislation covers only Internet service providers and content providers, the providers are responsible for content generated by their users as spelt out in the Internet Code of Practice, the accompanying document that provides general guidelines on prohibited content. Providers are required to monitor the behavior of their users. In this way, Internet users in Singapore are regulated indirectly by making Internet service and content providers responsible for policing their users.

The Class Licence scheme, however, does not require all Internet service and content providers to register with the government. Only certain

groups, such as political parties or groups engaging in political or religious discussion, are required to register with the MDA. Under the Internet Code of Practice, Internet service providers and content providers are required to deny access to a list of prohibited materials, which are generally materials related to pornography and extreme violence, as well as materials promoting religious or racial hatred. The provisions of the Class Licence scheme and the Internet Code of Practice suggest that the Singapore government does not engage in active monitoring of Internet content, since only a small, select group of Internet users are required to register with the government. The way the Singapore government has chosen to regulate the Internet appears to be much more liberal than the way it regulates traditional print and broadcast media. .

However, the devil is in the detail. The Internet Code of Practice has a provision which allows the MDA to direct the denial of other content it deems should be prohibited. Similarly, the Class Licence scheme provides the MDA with the power to compel any Internet service or content provider operating an online newspaper, defined as “any publication containing (a) news; (b) intelligence; (c) reports of occurrences; (d) remarks; (e) observations; or (f) comments” (MDA, 2010b), to register with the government within 14 days of receiving a written notification from the MDA. The fact that the MDA is empowered to decide what constitutes prohibited content and to compel any Internet service or content provider to register with the government suggests that the Singapore government has no intention of completely giving up control over Internet regulation.

The form employed by the Singapore government to regulate the Internet is what Lee (2010) calls ‘auto-regulation’, which is the self-regulation

of behavior by individuals, even compliance with unclear government policy and laws. In addition, there are topics the Singapore government terms out-of-bounds (OB) for public discourse, which are commonly referred to as “OB markers”. The boundaries of these OB markers are unclear, as the government does not clearly define what constitutes acceptable discourse. Since the Singapore government has allowed itself extremely wide latitude in deciding who needs to register and what content is prohibited, the government can shift the onerous Internet policing burden to Internet users who, due to the lack of clarity of the government’s guidelines, have to be more careful as a result, creating a chilling effect on free speech.

Interestingly, instead of being cowed, many Singaporeans have embraced content creation on the Internet. Blogs, in particular, started flourishing during Singapore’s general elections in 2006, despite even stricter restrictions imposed during election periods. The Singapore government declared a ban on online electioneering in 2006, but many bloggers continued blogging about elections anyway. Eventually, the ban was not strictly enforced (Lee & Kan, 2009). Blogs continued to flourish after the elections, gaining “legitimacy and currency in discussions and debates within popular, state and academic circles as a possible, alternative site for public participation and information” (Lee & Kan, 2009, p.875-76).

Understanding the ways the traditional mass media and Internet are regulated in Singapore is important, as the agenda-setting theory was developed in the United States, where free speech and press are protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution. There is no constitutional protection for the press in the Singapore Constitution, and free speech protections are

expressly limited. Moreover, much of the research on agenda-setting has been done in the United States, where the regulation of media and speech stands in stark contrast to Singapore's approach, as evident from press freedom rankings by Reporters without Borders in 2010 where the United States was ranked 20th while Singapore was ranked 137th in the world. Hence, this thesis will contribute to the literature on agenda-setting through the application of the theory to a context where the media are heavily regulated by a government that wields strong control over all aspects of expression.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Agenda-setting: history and overview

The agenda-setting theory was developed from a comparison of news coverage and issues of concern to undecided voters in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, during the 1968 United States presidential campaign (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In that study, McCombs and Shaw found an extremely strong relationship between issues emphasized by the news media and the relative importance given to those issues by undecided voters. McCombs and Shaw posited that news media have the ability to influence which issues are deemed important by the general public. The news media's emphasis over time on relatively few issues leads to salience for those issues, such that the public perceives those issues as more important than other issues. In other words, the greater the coverage of an issue by news media, the more likely the general public will think that the issue is important. This ability of the news media to set the agenda for the public's attention to issues is referred to as the basic agenda-setting effect.

The basic agenda-setting effect involves the transfer of salience from the news media to the public (McCombs, 2005). The original Chapel Hill study showed that the news media influence the kinds of issues media consumers think about by the prominence given to reports and the amount of coverage given to issues. However, beyond the news media's ability to influence their readers' attention to issues, the agenda-setting effect does not predict the kind of influence the media have on people's opinions. The agenda-setting effect "is not a return to a bullet theory or hypodermic theory

of all-powerful media effects” (McCombs, 2004), but rather, it assigns a central role to the news media in initiating the topics for discussion by the public. Bernard Cohen aptly summarized the effect: “[The media] may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.” (Cohen, 1963, p.13)

Subsequent research on agenda-setting broadened the scope of inquiry to include aspects or attributes of public issues. This is known as second-level agenda-setting or attribute agenda-setting. Attribute agenda-setting research goes one step further than basic agenda-setting research by analyzing how the media’s focus on particular aspects or attributes of a public issue affect the transfer of salience. The work of Ghanem (1996) on crime coverage and public concern about crime, as cited in McCombs (2005), found the salience of crime, in particular, was related to the frequency of news stories about crimes by which the average person felt personally threatened. McCombs found that the news coverage of this kind of crime, or issue relevance, explained the salience much better than the amount of general coverage of crime during the same period, suggesting prominence and amount of coverage are not the only predictors of the ability of the news media to set the public agenda.

The target of analysis of both basic agenda-setting and attribute agenda-setting research is the public issue under examination. Many studies on agenda-setting following the seminal Chapel Hill study have focused on the relationship between the emphasis placed on issues by the news media, both in terms of quantity and prominence of coverage, and the priority given those same issues by the public. These studies, although with mixed results,

generally find a positive correlation between the issues emphasized by the news media and the issues on the public's agenda at the aggregate level (D. Weaver, McCombs, & Shaw, 2004). Wanta (1997) goes a step further to suggest that agenda-setting is a form of social learning in which individuals constantly and actively participate, learning which news are more important through repeated coverage in the media. Wanta also suggests that issue salience is not an incidental process and that the effect of agenda-setting on an individual is determined by factors such as demographic background, attitude towards the media and reliance on the media.

Hence, individual responses to the media agenda are varied, and this affects the ability of the media to set the public agenda. Individuals' need for orientation provides a psychological explanation for the variations in individual responses to a public issue (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). The notion of need for orientation is derived from cognitive utilitarian theories of motivation, which assume individuals to be problem-solvers who seek information necessary to solve problems (D. H. Weaver, 1980). In the context of agenda-setting, need for orientation can be defined using the concepts of relevance and uncertainty, and high levels of relevance and uncertainty generally result in a high need for orientation (McCombs, 2005). This need for orientation also provides an explanation as to why some issues are more intrusive for some individuals than for others. Public issues can be distributed along an obtrusiveness continuum, with some issues intruding into our lives more than others depending on their relevance.

A third concept of need for orientation -- effort required to attend to the news message -- was introduced by G. Lee (2005), who argues that scholars'

earlier assumption of the universal availability of the news agenda may not be applicable in today's media environment. The rise of increasing channels of information via new media⁹, coupled with a decline in attention to network television news, raises questions as to whether issue relevance and uncertainty are sufficient explanations in an increasingly complex media environment (G. Lee, 2005). Also, the assumption of the universal availability of the news agenda is problematic in developing or underdeveloped countries, so consideration of the effort required to attend to the news message is a necessary component of need for orientation (G. Lee, 2005).

In addition to studying individual variations of responses toward mass media, agenda-setting scholars have also expanded the scope of inquiry to the consequences of agenda-setting, which is concerned with the effects of salience transfer on people's attitudes, opinions and observable behavior (McCombs, 2005). Scholars have identified three distinct consequences of agenda-setting: forming opinions, priming opinions about public figures through emphasis on particular issues, and influencing opinions through emphasis on particular attributes (McCombs, 2005).

Scholars also have questioned the implicit assumption driving agenda-setting research, which is that the news media are the main source of the public's agenda (McCombs, 2004). Research on what influences the agenda of the media found mutual influence by news organizations on each other's agenda, the occurrence of which has been termed intermedia agenda-setting.

⁹ New types of media brought about by developments in communication technology, especially the internet. Some examples include instant messaging, blogging and social networking.

Journalists often compare their coverage of events and issues with that of elite news outlets such as the New York Times, the Washington Post and national television networks. According to McCombs (2005), this results in a highly homogenous media agenda, one of the factors leading to salience. For example, Trumbo (1995) found in an analysis of news coverage from 1985 to 1992 of the issue of global warming that elite newspapers such as the New York Times, Washington Post and Wall Street Journal influenced the agenda of the national television networks in the United States. Intermedia agenda-setting influence was also found in another study on the coverage of the issue of cocaine between 1985 and 1986, with the New York Times taking the lead in setting the agenda for other newspapers and television networks (Reese & Danielian, 1991).

3.2 Critical issues about agenda-setting

While research on agenda-setting has developed steadily over the past few decades, three critical issues regarding agenda-setting research have emerged (Takeshita, 2006). According to Takeshita (2006), these three issues are (1) the agenda-setting process, (2) the conceptualization of attribute agenda-setting, and (3) the increasingly complicated media environment brought about by developments in communication technology. These are critical issues, because each has implications that could undermine the value of the agenda-setting theory, resulting in stagnation or the decline of the agenda-setting research tradition (Takeshita, 2006).

The first critical problem facing agenda-setting research is the agenda-setting process itself. Takeshita (2006) notes that scholars disagree on whether

the agenda-setting process is a superficial and automatic impromptu response by individuals, or a deliberate and thoughtful process. According to Takeshita (2006), early studies on agenda-setting by communication scholars trained in cognitive psychology, such as Iyengar (1990), found that the individual tends to rely on information that is most easily accessible in the individual's mind when making a judgment, and information that is most easily accessible is usually about topics or issues which have been dominant in the news. Iyengar (1990) termed this observation as the accessibility-bias model, although some researchers later referred to the same observation as the accessibility-based model (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002). The implication of the accessibility-bias, or accessibility-based, model is that agenda-setting is "an almost mindless, mechanical response based on rote learning from the media" (Takeshita, 2006, p.276.)

However, a handful of other studies, such as those by Geer (1991), Schuman, Ludwig, & Krosnick (1986) and Miller & Krosnick (2000), have questioned the validity of the accessibility-bias model and its view of agenda-setting as an automatic and mindless process (Takeshita, 2006). In particular, Miller & Krosnick (2000) concluded that agenda-setting effects were most pronounced among people with high levels of knowledge and media trust, and that the agenda-setting effects were not as pronounced among other groups. Takeshita (2006) suggests the concepts of "genuine" agenda-setting and pseudo agenda-setting to explain the differences in the strength of the agenda-setting effects on different groups of people. Genuine agenda-setting involves active processing of information gained from the news media, while pseudo agenda-setting is explained by the accessibility-bias model (Takeshita, 2006).

Another critical problem identified by Takeshita (2006) is that of identity. Research on agenda-setting has resulted in the development of concepts under the agenda-setting umbrella that are similar to other concepts and perspectives. For example, the concept of attribute agenda-setting, developed in the 1990s, is similar to the framing effects perspective, developed in mass communication research in the 1980s. Both perspectives seek to explore the same problem of how the mass media define an individual issue for the public. Scholars from the framing-effects perspective have argued that agenda-setting researchers are “unduly expanding the realm of agenda-setting and colonizing other theories” (Takeshita, 2006). Attribute agenda-setting research explores how emphasis on certain attributes of an issue and the lack of emphasis on other attributes influence the individual’s perception of the issue. This is almost the same problem framing scholars are exploring, which is how the news media define an individual issue for us (Takeshita, 2006). According to Takeshita (2006), future research on agenda-setting, in particular research on attribute agenda-setting, needs to significantly differentiate agenda-setting from other theoretical perspectives on how news media can affect an individual’s perception of a public issue.

The third critical problem pointed out by Takeshita (2006), which is related to an issue this thesis attempts to address, is that agenda-setting research is facing an increasingly complex media environment brought about by new communication technologies. Traditionally, mass media “provided a central space and helped set a common public agenda (Takeshita, 2006, p. 286). Mass media were able to set a common public agenda because of “similar patterns of homogeneity among news media” (McCombs, 2005,

p.544). However, digital communication technologies, such as cable, satellites and the internet, have exponentially multiplied the channels of news and information. This has significant implications on agenda-setting theory, because the increasing number of information channels both fragments the public agenda by increasing the heterogeneity of the media agenda and causes a decline in the use of mass media. Shaw & Hamm (1997) explain:

[T]he traditional mass media are in decline as audiences shift to more individualized media, and, partially as a result, the ability of leaders to hold large social systems together is also in decline because citizens are as likely to seek out messages from other individuals or groups who think like themselves as they are to remain committed to messages that represent the entire group. Further, this loss of community accelerates the decline of mass media, because people no longer have as strong a need for mass ties. As a result, national agendas are in danger of fragmenting. Thus, a downward spiral occurs in the use of mass media. (p.210)

McCombs (2005) contests this suggested decline in the relevance of agenda-setting in contemporary society. Firstly, McCombs (2005) noted that a majority of the internet audience are better educated and affluent young adults. This implies, as Miller & Krosnick (2000) argue, that many people are still dependent on mass media for information. Coleman & McCombs (2007) found a strong relationship between issues deemed important by the mass media and by young adults, and between issues deemed important by the mass media and by older consumers. The authors suggested that the increasingly

complex media environment did not appear to have had any effect on the agenda-setting influence of the mass media.

McCombs (2005) also questions the prediction of fragmentation of the audience agenda. Quoting the work of Hamilton (2004), McCombs (2005) noted that the top five American newspaper websites “account for 41.4 percent of the total links found on the Internet to the top 100 newspapers” (p.545). In contrast, the five largest American newspapers account for only 21.5% of the total print circulation among the top 100 daily newspapers (McCombs, 2005). In addition, McCombs noted that many popular news websites are “the online versions of newspapers, magazines, television networks and cable TV news channels” (p.545). This observation, coupled with the findings of Hamilton (2004), led McCombs (2005) to conclude that

just as the Chapel Hill study found a high degree of redundancy across the traditional news organizations using different media of communication, the Internet—at least the most popular sites on the Internet—may simply add another set of cells to that matrix of high correlations. (p.545)

While McCombs (2005) appears to be fairly optimistic in his assessment of the relevance of agenda-setting in contemporary society, Takeshita (2006) is more cautious, concluding that evidence to date is mixed. A review of current studies on agenda-setting and new media in the following section shows somewhat mixed results in the applicability of agenda-setting to new media.

3.3 Agenda setting and new media

Existing studies on agenda-setting and new media have applied the agenda-setting theory in a number of ways. Li (2003) studied differences in the perceived importance of issues between audiences reading the print versions and audiences reading the online versions of three newspapers. A significant correlation was found between issues perceived as important by readers of the print versions and issues deemed to be a high priority by the newspapers' editors. In contrast, there was no significant correlation when comparing issues deemed important by readers of the internet versions and issues deemed to be a high priority by the newspapers' editors. According to Li (2003), the difference could be attributed to variations in the delivery of news and access patterns of users.

Aikat & Yu (2005) examined intermedia agenda-setting among print newspapers, television and online news media, using content analysis. The online versions of the New York Times and the Washington Post were chosen as representatives of print media, MSNBC and CNN online were chosen as representatives of television, and Google News and Yahoo News were chosen as online news media. The study found that the news agenda of all three types of news media correlate significantly, suggesting there is some intermedia agenda-setting between traditional and online news media.

Ku, Kaid, & Pfau (2003) compared online and offline media by studying the impact of the election campaign websites of the Democratic and Republican candidates in the 2000 presidential campaign in the United States. The scholars found that the campaign agenda of candidate websites

subsequently became the news agenda of the traditional news media. A path analysis also revealed that the candidates' websites directly set the public's agenda. Ku, et al. (2003) noted that while the exact functional relationships between the candidates' websites and the public's agenda have yet to be specified, they found strong evidence of the convergence of the campaign websites' agenda and the public's agenda.

Agenda-setting between online discussions and traditional news media was examined by B. Lee, Lancendorfer, & Lee (2005) in a study of the influence of internet bulletin boards on newspaper coverage of the 2000 general elections in South Korea. Employing a cross-lagged analysis, the authors found that newspapers provided topics for bulletin board discussions about the elections, while internet bulletin board discussions about the qualifications of election candidates influenced the depiction of candidates in newspapers. However, a study by J. H. Lee, Choi, & Lee (2003) on World Cup news coverage and online discussions showed that while newspapers had an agenda-setting influence on online discussions, online discussions did not have an agenda-setting influence on newspapers for that topic.

There have also been studies done on agenda-setting and new media that do not involve print media. Roberts, Wanta, & Dwz0 (2002) studied the online versions of New York Times, Associated Press, Reuters and Time magazine, comparing the content of these online news media with electronic bulletin board discussions at AOL¹⁰. Four issues — immigration, healthcare, taxes and abortion — were chosen for coding and analysis. Significant

¹⁰ AOL stands for America Online, an early internet access provider and web platform in the United States.

correlation was found for all issues but abortion, and the authors suggest the lack of correlation might be due to the controversial nature of the issue, resulting in the issue's being discussed on a regular basis regardless of media coverage. According to the authors, these findings suggest that online news media may set the agenda for online readers, as mass media have traditionally set the public agenda. Also, intermedia agenda-setting occurs among online news sources, just as intermedia agenda-setting occurs between newspapers and television. Lim (2006) examined the issue agendas of two online newspapers and two online wire services in South Korea and found that the online news wire services were influenced by the online newspapers, in contrast to previous studies which found strong influence by wire services on newspapers.

Tremayne & Schmitz Weiss (2005) conducted an agenda-setting experiment to determine whether the presentation style of a news website can affect the transfer of salience to readers. The study found no difference in the magnitude of the agenda-setting ability between a news website with headlines only and the same website design but with headlines and a blurb. The same study also found contradictory evidence for the influence of topic on transfer of issue salience. One of the two most prominent stories in the mock news website used in the experiment — war in Iraq — demonstrated greater issue salience in the headline-only condition, while the other prominent story, gay marriage, demonstrated a stronger issue salience in the headline-and-blurb condition.

3.4 Agenda-setting and blogs

Many of the studies on agenda-setting and new media have generally operationalized new media as websites or, in some instances, bulletin boards or online discussion groups. However, new media encompass a much wider scope than websites, bulletin boards or online discussion groups. Publishing content on the internet has been simplified, and individuals can easily put information online. Blogs as a publishing platform, in particular, have grown tremendously in popularity. Technorati, a blog tracking service, currently tracks about 133 million blogs (Technorati, 2009), and there likely are many more blogs that Technorati does not track. Given the prominence of blogs, scholars have started researching the agenda-setting relationships of blogs.

Schiffer (2006) studied the relationship of news coverage of the Downing Street memo controversy and the blogswarm — that is, frenzied and sustained coverage by blogs — generated by the issue over a period of two months. The controversy stemmed from the leak of secret memos in 2005 regarding the United Kingdom's participation at that time in the Iraq war. Some passages in the memos showed that the Bush administration did not have a strong case for the United States to invade Iraq and had manipulated facts to justify the invasion (Schiffer, 2006). Ten leading blogs, the Kos Diaries, which is a liberal group blog, five television channels and twenty-eight American newspapers were examined for coverage of the controversy. Schiffer found that news pages of large newspapers and television news were generally more influenced by official sources, with stories appearing when there were statements by government officials on the issue. Op-ed pages of newspapers were more consistent in their coverage of the controversy, and

Schiffer suggests that the sustained coverage of the issue by the blogswarm could have influenced coverage on the op-ed pages of newspapers more than statements from the government officials did.

Reynolds (2005) compared the differences in the agenda-setting ability of newspapers and political news blogs in the 2004 U.S. presidential elections. The study found positive correlations between a presidential candidate's popularity and the news coverage of both newspapers and blogs, and blogs correlated with candidate popularity more strongly than newspapers. The study also found an interesting inverse relationship between a candidate's popularity and levels of positive coverage about the candidate in both media.

Sweetser, Golan, & Wanta (2008) investigated intermedia agenda-setting between the campaign blogs of the Democratic and Republican 2004 presidential candidates and the news media, finding a correlation between the agendas of the campaign blogs and the news media. A cross-lagged analysis revealed that it was the news media's agenda which affected the campaign blogs' agenda, and the time taken for transfer of salience from the news media's agenda to the campaign blogs' agenda was very short, with campaign blogs reacting almost instantaneously to media coverage.

Lanosga (2008) compared the agendas of blogs and traditional news media regarding legislative topics over a two-week period in the middle of Indiana's legislative session and found that traditional news media set the agenda for political blogs, but the reverse was not found. Blogs appeared to follow the agenda of the traditional news media, adding commentary to the issues that were already covered by traditional media. However, Lanosga

(2008) cautions that the intermedia agenda-setting effect of blogs on traditional news media might not be so apparent because reporters routinely confirm the facts in stories they learn about from other media and then run the stories without crediting the competition.

In another study, a prominent political blog, Instapundit, and a prominent newspaper, The New York Times, were analyzed by Dunn, McCollough, & Martin (2007). They found no significant intermedia agenda-setting between the two in terms of the issues covered by both during the 2006 U.S. Senate race.

3.5 Blogs in Singapore: A research agenda

Much of the earlier research on agenda-setting and new media focused on websites, but this appears to be changing, with more research being done in recent years on user-generated content, such as blogs. While blogs have gained popularity, the agenda-setting ability of blogs has yet to be fully understood, especially outside the United States. Existing research, predominantly conducted in the U.S. context, provides no conclusive evidence supporting intermedia agenda-setting between blogs and traditional mass media. Outside the United States, the literature on the relationship between the mass media and blogs appears to be non-existent. Therefore, this thesis aims to investigate the relationship between blogs and the mass media in an Asian context, specifically Singapore, using the framework of intermedia agenda-setting.

Chapter 4: Research Questions and Hypotheses

Much of the literature on intermedia agenda-setting between blogs and traditional news media shows that scholars have focused on a specific topic or issue on the public's agenda. Such an approach may overlook any regular intermedia agenda-setting, because the focus of inquiry is on a specific issue and not all the news stories and blog entries published over a given period. It is possible that intermedia agenda-setting varies from public issue to public issue. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of intermedia agenda-setting, it is important to investigate whether issues routinely covered by blogs and the mass media coincide over a period of time. This study investigates whether blogs, specifically politically or current affairs-oriented blogs, and traditional news media, specifically newspapers, cover the same issues of public concern in Singapore.

Previous research in the United States (Reese & Danielian, 1991; Trumbo, 1995) has demonstrated that newspapers tend to set the agenda for other forms of mass media. The findings of research conducted in the United States may not be completely applicable to Singapore, but these findings do suggest that newspapers are likely to cover the major issues of public concern. However, there is no literature affirming the homogeneity of the agendas of the mass media in Singapore. Therefore, it is necessary to determine if the agendas of Singaporean newspapers are similar before a comparison of the agendas of Singaporean blogs and newspapers can be made. The top two English-language newspapers in Singapore, *The Straits Times* and *Today*,

together accounting for more than 50% of newspaper readership in the country, were selected. This thesis proposes the following research question:

RQ1. Do the top two newspapers in Singapore cover the same issues of public concern?

The following hypothesis is proposed to answer the first research question:

H1. News coverage of public issues by the top two newspapers in Singapore will correlate closely.

Politically oriented or current affairs-oriented blogs are chosen for comparison with newspapers because they are more likely to cover the same kinds of issues as newspapers. These bloggers are likely to be interested in the content of traditional news media, as are these blogs likely to arouse the interest of traditional news organizations over blogs that function as personal diaries or blogs that are highly specialized.

Since information-gathering is an integral part of journalism, information published on blogs can naturally become part of journalists' information sources. Bloggers, like journalists, also require information to blog, and the mass media are very likely to be part of the bloggers' information sources. Therefore, one of the key research questions for this thesis is:

RQ2: Are the same issues of public concern covered by politically or current affairs-oriented blogs and by the top two newspapers in Singapore?

The following hypothesis is proposed in answer to research question 2.:

H2: Blog coverage of public issues will correlate closely with the newspapers' agenda.

Other than establishing whether there is a strong correlation between the blogs' agendas and the newspapers' agendas, it is important to find the direction of influence. The literature shows mixed results in the ability of blogs to influence the agenda of the mass media and vice-versa, at least in the United States. Research on blogs and the mass media in the United States suggests that blogs are influenced more by newspapers than the other way round. A report by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism found that blogs shared the top stories of newspapers for only 13 of the 49 weeks studied ("New Media, Old Media," 2010). Lanosga (2008) found that the traditional news media set the agenda of blogs in the United States. It is unclear whether blogs in Singapore will follow the same trend as in the United States, but this study seeks to determine whether blogs influence the newspapers' agendas, or whether the newspapers influence the blogs' agenda in Singapore. Therefore, the third key research question for this thesis is:

RQ3: What is the direction of agenda influence, if any, between blogs and newspapers in Singapore?

Considering the literature on blogs and the mass media (Reynolds, 2005; Schiffer, 2006; McCollough, & Martin, 2007; Lanosga, 2008; Sweetser, Golan, & Wanta, 2008), the following hypothesis is proposed in answer to the third research question:

H3: Newspapers significantly influence the agendas of blogs in Singapore that are politically or current affairs-oriented.

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Sample selection

For this thesis, the newspapers selected for analysis are the two main daily English-language newspapers in Singapore, *The Straits Times* and *Today*, with *The Straits Times* having a 38 percent readership share and *Today* having an 18 percent readership share (Nielsen, 2009). It was difficult to find a comprehensive list of politically or current affairs-oriented blogs in Singapore, and there appears to be no relevant listing or directory available. However, there is a website named *Singapore Daily* (<http://singaporedaily.net>) which publishes links on a daily basis, excluding weekends, to blog entries posted on blogs under its watch. According to *Singapore Daily's* website, it “collates and aggregates your thoughts, articles and discussions on Singapore issues and current affairs that are important to you” (“About The Singapore Daily,” 2010). The links published on *Singapore Daily* are to predominantly politically or current affairs oriented blogs. Hence the blogs selected for analysis are those with links on *Singapore Daily*.

Since the intent of this thesis is to identify any regular intermedia agenda-setting effects between blogs and newspapers, it is necessary to analyze news stories and blog entries over a sufficient period of time in order for any observable relationship to emerge. One or two weeks might be insufficient. Therefore, the period of analysis of the newspapers and blogs was set at one month, and the month of January 2009 was selected for analysis, as a convenience sample.

Based on blog entries published on *Singapore Daily* during the month of January 2009, the resulting sample size of politically or current affairs-oriented blogs is 121 blogs. The complete list of blogs collated from entries published on *Singapore Daily* during the month of January 2009 can be found in Appendix A. The newspaper articles were analyzed using microfilm archives of the print-version newspapers. The articles selected for analysis are Singapore-related stories published on the front page of the newspapers and in the local news sections. Stories published in the other sections are excluded from the study, as this thesis focuses on issues of relevance to the Singapore public.

5.2 Coding methods

The articles were categorized by subject in order to establish a rank order of the topics that are covered by both newspapers and blogs. The subject categories were determined from a combination of categories used in past research and an examination of both the headlines of news stories and titles of blog entries. As past research on agenda-setting and blogs was not conducted in Singapore, using subject categories based on existing literature may result in the omission of some categories that are important in the Singaporean context; hence, it was necessary to examine the headlines of news stories and titles of blog entries to ensure that subject categories that are unique to Singapore were not inadvertently left out.

The resulting list of 27 subject categories are Law and Crime, Education, Public Housing, Budget and Taxes, Healthcare and Medicine, Transportation, Science and Technology, Free Speech and Human Rights,

Economy, Social Welfare, Politics, Immigration, Public Figures, Sports, Arts and Culture, Nature and Wildlife, Consumer, Employment, Public Servant Salaries, National Service, Terrorism, Environment, Fire Safety, Ageing and Elderly, Accidents, Foreign Affairs and Diplomacy, Race and Religion, and Others. After the news stories and blog entries were categorized, the articles in each category were then examined to identify the top issues dominating the category to determine if there is any similarity in the top issues covered by both newspapers and blogs.

In order to determine the direction of influence between newspapers and blogs, two approaches were employed. Firstly, issues that were covered in both blogs and newspapers were identified and the dates of publication were compared to determine which medium published about the issue first. However, relying solely on date of publication proved impractical, because blog entries can be published far more readily than newspapers, which are usually published once a day. Therefore, blogs can publish the same story on the very same day but after the newspapers publish the story, making date of publication an inaccurate measure of who published first.

In addition, the *Straits Times* has the practice of publishing news stories on its website the night before they appear in its print version, resulting in some blogs picking up the stories from the newspaper and publishing them before the public availability of the print version. Therefore, in order to determine which medium published first, the dates that *The Straits Times* published online versions of its stories on its website were noted. The online version of each story posted on the website of *The Straits Times* is virtually the same as the print version, except that the online version contains only the first

few paragraphs of the story and not the full story. Therefore, the online version of *The Straits Times* is considered to be traditional news media.

The second approach used to investigate the direction of influence was to ascertain the level of dependency on each other as information sources. Blogs entries that mentioned the terms “*The Straits Times*” or “*Today*” or that hyperlinked to news stories on the websites of either newspaper and news stories in *The Straits Times* or *Today* that mentioned the terms “blog” or “bloggers” were counted and compared to determine if there was any clear dependency of one medium on the other during the period of analysis.

All coding for the thesis was done by the author, and therefore, measures of intercoder reliability such as Scott’s *pi*, Cohen’s *kappa* or Krippendorff’s *alpha* could not be computed, since the computation of intercoder reliability requires two or more coders. The possibility of coding a small portion of the analyzed news stories and blog entries a second time to ensure reliability and consistency in coding was considered, but the idea was dropped due to the high likelihood that recoding is likely to be biased since the author has already coded the sample once. The possibility of testing for consistency by a single coder through recoding has also been deemed inappropriate by content analysis researchers (Krippendorff, 1980; Tinsley & Weiss, 1975).

Chapter 6: Results

A total of 1,419 blog entries and news stories were analyzed for the study, of which 1,020 were published in newspapers and 399 were blog entries. For the month of January 2009, there were 482 links to blog entries posted on Singapore Daily, but when the blogs were analyzed in the first quarter of 2010, more than 17% - or 83 of the 482 posted links - were not accessible. The reasons for the inaccessibility of the 83 links were either because entire blogs had been taken down or the blog entries were password-protected.

The detailed breakdown of the frequency of stories appearing in each subject category for each medium is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Story frequency by category

Subject Category	Straits Times	Today News	Newspapers Combined	Blogs
Law/Crime	131	47	176	13
Education	36	18	54	11
Public Housing	13	2	15	3
Budget/Taxes	19	22	41	32
Healthcare/Medicine	48	12	60	7
Transportation	35	18	53	8
Technology	21	7	28	6
Free speech / Human Rights	11	7	18	81
Economy	78	45	123	23
Social Welfare	31	10	41	9
Politics	15	11	26	31
Immigration/Foreigners	5	2	7	5
Public figures	26	19	45	55
Sports	6	2	8	2
Arts and Culture	9	4	13	20
Nature and Wildlife	2	2	4	2
Consumer	13	9	22	11
Employment	56	28	84	19
Public Servant Salaries	1	1	2	3
National Service	6	4	12	10
Terrorism	3	2	5	0
Environment	3	1	4	0
Fire safety	28	13	41	1
Ageing and elderly	10	7	17	0
Accidents	13	2	15	0
Foreign affairs / Diplomacy	6	3	9	1
Race and religion	8	1	9	0
Others	59	29	88	46
Total	692	328	1,020	399

For each medium, each subject category was subsequently assigned a rank according to the number of stories in the category. The Others category was dropped, as there are too many different kinds of stories in the category for any meaningful analysis, resulting in a total of 1,285 news stories and blog entries in 27 different categories used for analysis. Table 2 shows the ranking of the different subject categories for each medium.

Table 2: Rank order by subject category

Subject Category	Straits Times Rank	Today Rank	Newspapers Combined Rank	Blog Rank
Law/Crime	1	1	1	8
Economy	2	2	2	5
Employment	3	3	3	7
Healthcare/Medicine	4	9	4	14
Education	5	6	5	9
Transportation	6	7	6	13
Public figures	9	5	7	2
Budget/Taxes	11	4	8	3
Fire safety	8	8	8	21
Social Welfare	7	11	8	12
Technology	10	13	11	15
Politics	12	10	12	4
Consumer	13	12	13	9
Free speech / Human Rights	16	13	14	1
Ageing and elderly	17	13	15	22
Public Housing	13	19	16	17
Accidents	13	19	16	22
Arts and Culture	18	16	18	6
National Service	20	16	19	11
Foreign affairs / Diplomacy	20	18	20	21
Race and religion	19	25	20	22
Sports	20	19	22	19
Immigration/Foreigners	23	19	23	16
Terrorism	24	19	24	22
Nature and Wildlife	26	19	25	19
Environment	24	25	25	22
Public Servant Salaries	27	25	26	17

In order to determine the overall strength of correlation between the newspapers and blogs in terms of topics covered, the Spearman rank coefficient or Spearman's rho was computed across the various media, and the results are provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Rank correlation of subject categories between media

Media	Straits Times	Today	Newspapers Combined	Blogs
Straits Times	1	0.885**	0.986**	0.522**
Today		1	0.939**	0.697**
Newspapers Combined			1	0.596**
Blogs				1

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01

The rank correlations show that both newspapers are strongly correlated (0.885) in terms of topics covered, indicating that their content and agendas are broadly similar. Therefore H1's prediction that the agendas of Singaporean newspapers will correlate is strongly supported in terms of topics covered.

The correlation between blogs and *The Straits Times* (0.522) is weaker than the correlation between blogs and *Today* (0.697), but overall, the correlation between Singaporean blogs and Singaporean newspapers is moderate (0.596) in terms of topics covered. Since the correlation is moderate, H2's prediction that the agenda of blogs will correlate closely with the agenda of newspapers is somewhat supported in terms of topics covered.

Spearman's rho indicates that, in general, there is some relationship between the topics covered by Singaporeans blogs and the topics covered by Singaporean newspapers. However, an examination of the ranks of the top three topics covered by both media indicates a clear divergence in what is considered most important by both media. Both newspapers agree that Law/Crime, Economy and Employment are the most important topics to cover, but blogs deem Free Speech/Human Rights, Public Figures and Budget/Taxes

as the most important topics. The top issues in each of the top three categories are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4: Top issues in top three blog categories

Top Blog Categories	Top issues
1. Free Speech/Human Rights	Association of Bloggers Singapore
	AIMS recommendations
2. Public Figures	MP Seng Han Thong set on fire
	MP Charles Chong's "lesser mortal" remark
3. Budget/Taxes	Measures to cope with economic recession

Table 5: Top issues in top three newspaper categories

Top Newspaper Categories	Top Newspaper Issues
1. Law/Crime	N/A (stories are too disparate)
2. Economy/Business	Weak economic growth in Singapore
	Operating cash flow problems for businesses
	Slump in property sector
3. Employment	Retrenchment of workers
	Job creation and availability of jobs

For the top newspaper category, Law/Crime, most of the stories are direct reporting of a wide range of courtroom cases involving, for example, corruption, tax evasion, robbery, murder, defamation, cheating, vandalism, rape and public indecency. Due to the disparate nature of the stories, there was no commonality in terms of emerging issues among the stories in the Law/Crime category. This observation could be explained by the fact that most newspapers in Singapore practice beat reporting, where reporters are assigned to cover a specific topic, and reporters assigned to the courtroom beat routinely report on the cases as they are being heard. No issue arose from this beat during the time period studied for this thesis. The top issues in the other two categories are related: All of them are about economic recession in

Singapore as a result of the global economic crisis that started in the United States in late 2008.

For the top blog categories, the top issues are clearly unrelated to the issues covered in the top newspaper categories, with the exception of the measures undertaken by the Singapore government in to respond to the economic recession in Singapore. This suggests that the issues that blogs and newspapers deem important may be generally different.

There were a total of 37 issues that were mentioned by both blogs and newspapers. A list of the issues and the number of times each medium reported an issue first is given in Table 6.

Table 6: Frequency of first mentions of issues (continued on next page)

Story	First mention (Blogs)	First mention (Newspapers)
1. Maggots in CNY Oranges	Y	
2. How Singapore will fare in 2009		Y
3. Means testing in public hospitals		Y
4. Questioning the integrity of the judiciary		Y
5. New U.S. Visa requirements		Y
6. Army recruit beaten up in camp		Y
7. Trial of ex Ren Ci hospital CEO, Ming Yi		Y
8. Labour movement's top three priorities in 2009		Y
9. Cigarette filter found in herb package		Y
10. First rise of petrol prices in six months		Y
11. Outcry at Tan Yong Soon's expensive holiday	Y	
12. Revamp of national library borrowing privileges	Y	
13. EZ-Link replacement card exercise		Y
14. AIMS Committee report		Y
15. Keeping seniors at work		Y
16. Flyer CEO resigns		Y
17. Tang Wee Sung's kidney donation		Y
18. MP Seng Han Thong set on fire		Y
19. Activists arrested for protesting outside MOM	Y	
20. PM Lee on community bonding during economic crisis		Y
21. Compensation for injured national servicemen		Y

22. Changes to Medical Registration Act		Y
23. Lehman Brothers structured notes refund		Y
24. Helping foreign workers		Y
25. Update on escape of alleged terrorist Mas Selamat		Y
26. Review of public order laws by Ministry of Home Affairs		Y
27. Top 'O' level student leaving Singapore		Y
28. Bloggers' Association of Singapore	Y	
29. Law Society's criticism of penal system		Y
30. Lowering of legal age to enter business contracts		Y
31. Cut in ministerial salaries		Y
32. New Moon abalone broth recall		Y
33. Forecasted loss of 300,000 jobs in Singapore		Y
34. Tapping of reserves for Budget 2009		Y
35. Amendments to Films Act		Y
36. A*Star search for top scientists and engineers	Y	
37. Distribution of offensive religious publications		Y
Total	6	31

The data show that for the 37 stories mentioned by both blogs and newspapers in the time period studied, 31 (83.79%) of the issues were covered by newspapers first. At least one issue covered during the time period studied actually began beforehand. Story 4, a story about the remarks from Singapore's chief justice over the integrity of the Singapore judicial system included references to a blogger who was prosecuted during the previous year for suggesting that a female Singaporean judge had "prostituted herself" and was not impartial. That blogger's entry preceded this story but is out of the time frame studied in this thesis, so the newspapers were judged as being first to mention the issue of judicial integrity in Singapore. However, the results are not significantly affected even if this issue is dropped for consideration. Newspapers overwhelmingly beat blogs in terms of being first to publish a story or raise an issue during the time period studied, suggesting that newspapers appear to most often set the agenda for blogs. Blogs entries also

mentioned newspapers much more frequently than newspapers mentioned blogs, as seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Frequency of mutual mentions

	Mention of the Other	No Mention of the Other	Total
Blogs	87	312	399
Newspapers	10	1,010	1,020
Total	97	1,322	1,419

df=1, X^2 (chi-square) = 195.29, $p < 0.01$

As shown in Table 5, the percentage of blog entries mentioning newspapers is 21.8%, while only 0.99% of newspaper stories mentioned blogs or bloggers during the time period studied. Taken together, the data from tables 4 and 5 indicate that H3, which posits that newspapers significantly influence the agenda of blogs in Singapore, is supported.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 The relationship between blog and newspaper agendas

Spearman's rho indicates that coverage between *The Straits Times* and *Today* are strongly correlated positively, affirming findings of past research (Reese & Danielian, 1991; Trumbo, 1995) that the agenda of the mass media is highly homogenous. The same eight topics ranked among the top ten for both newspapers, and both newspapers ranked Law/Crime, Economy, and Employment first, second and third, respectively. This clearly suggests that the phenomenon of homogeneity of the mass media is not just restricted to the United States. It appears to be equally applicable in Singapore. Coverage of issues by Singaporean newspapers clearly correlated closely. However, there are some small, noticeable differences in the ranks of some topics. For example, healthcare and medicine was ranked fourth on the agenda of *The Straits Times* but ninth on *Today*, at least in the time period studied. The topic of budget and taxes was ranked fourth on the agenda of *Today* but eleventh on the agenda of *The Straits Times*. The homogeneity of the top three subjects and slight variations in the ranks of the other subject categories may be due to a deliberate attempt by both newspapers to differentiate themselves from each other without compromising coverage on issues that both newspapers deem as being the most important to Singaporeans.¹¹

The strong regulatory context of the two newspapers studied has likely affected their agendas. As explained in chapter two, the Singapore government

¹¹ *The Straits Times* is owned by Singapore Press Holdings while *Today* is owned by MediaCorp.

has a long history of regulating the Singaporean press, and this can potentially affect the agenda of the two newspapers in the study. Interestingly, the topic of politics was ranked number 12 for the *Straits Times*, number ten for *Today* and number four for blogs. Politics is a topic that affects many different segments of society, and it is puzzling why Singaporean newspapers appear less interested in covering politics than topics such as technology and fire safety. It is possible that the stronger regulatory environment that the press is subjected to has resulted in self-censorship, considering that blogs, on the other hand, ranked politics fourth, and blogs are subjected to regulation that so far has not been as strict as that of the traditional media.

Interestingly, when the agendas for blogs were correlated with *The Straits Times* and *Today* individually, Spearman's rho indicated a slightly stronger correlation between blogs and *Today* than between blogs and *The Straits Times*. Given that the two newspapers are strongly correlated in their agendas, the stronger correlation between blogs and *Today*, compared to blogs and *The Straits Times*, suggests that blogs tend to favor *Today* over *The Straits Times* as a story source, although the reason is unclear. One possible explanation is that *Today* is a free paper, while *The Straits Times* is subscription-based. Although *The Straits Times* does publish its news stories on its website for free, only part of the story is published and readers are asked to refer to the full edition to get the entire story, meaning that the reader would have to pay for a copy of the paper or subscribe to the online edition to get the full news story. In contrast, all the news stories published on *Today* are available in full for free on both print and web versions. Since the agendas of both newspapers correlate strongly, in terms of reporting the most important

news of the day, a reader who chooses to read the free *Today* paper is not likely to miss out on any substantial news coverage, compared to the reader who chooses to buy *The Straits Times* to read. Hence, blogs could possibly favor *Today* over *The Straits Times* because of cost.

However, in general, Spearman's rho indicated that the correlation between the topics covered by the two Singaporean newspapers, taken together, and by the blogs was not as strong. Therefore, in order to understand the differences in the agendas of blogs and newspapers, the top issues of the top subject categories in each medium were analyzed.

The top issue for blogs during the month of analysis was the formation by ten bloggers of the Association of Bloggers Singapore. This issue was followed, in terms of number of articles posted, by the response of the Singapore government to the recommendations of the Advisory Council on the Impact of New Media on Society (AIMS) on how to manage and regulate Singapore's fast-growing interactive and digital media sector. Two issues involving prominent political figures followed, with one being the deliberate torching of a member of Parliament by a disgruntled constituent, and the second being the remarks about ordinary Singaporeans made by another member of Parliament. The issue of the Singapore government's budgetary measures to deal with Singapore's weak economy was the fifth top issue covered by blogs, and this was the only issue that was related to the top issues covered by newspapers, which were overwhelmingly focused on the economic recession in Singapore.

It is an interesting finding that the top issues of blogs markedly differed from the top issues of newspapers, because in January 2009, the global economy was still deeply mired in an economic crisis that many have labeled as the worst since the Great Depression. Yet Singaporean blogs were not as concerned about issues related to the economy as were the newspapers. Rather, Singaporean blogs were much more concerned about issues of free speech and censorship. The top issue, the formation of the Association of Bloggers Singapore, started when the association's founder announced the inception of the organization, using an entry on her blog, *Eastcoastlife*. According to that blog entry, one of the main motivations for the association was to unite and support Singaporean bloggers, who have been blogging independently.

Singaporean bloggers were like loose sand, they were not united [sic]. ... Small bloggers are just too isolated to be able to fight for their rights. (<http://eastcoastlife.blogspot.com/2009/01/association-of-bloggers-singapore.html>)

Criticisms over how the new organization might affect the freedom of bloggers were fast and furious over the next few days.

[W]hat is the purpose of having an association overseeing and providing guidelines for bloggers? This is tantamount to stifling creativity and the whole idea of the Internet being the media of choice for freedom of expression. (*the lush garden within* , <http://www.mrbiao.com/blog/association-of-bloggers-are-you-kidding-me.html>)

Some blogs took issue with how the new organization may become an exclusive club, resulting in nonparticipating bloggers' being marginalised.

The very grand-sounding "Association of Bloggers (Singapore)", which I'd first heard of today, sounded bizarre enough already in their "exclusive interview with Today", with talks to get (presumably exclusive) coverage of various events sounding suspiciously like an attempt to form a cartel to corner the market. (*Balderdash*, <http://gssq.blogspot.com/2009/01/beware-of-young-doctor-and-old-barber.html>, parentheses in original)

One not so fine day, a gang of kids come, and declare that the playground is now under them. ... They will educate all the kids how to behave in the playground, and they will "recommend" the good kids to ice-cream men. Whoever not with them? Probably no more free ice-cream for you, or not as often. (*Jialat Dot Com*, <http://www.jialat.com/2009/01/21/sorry-association-of-what/>)

The second top issue for blogs was the response by the Singapore government to recommendations made by AIMS. Bloggers heavily criticized the government's response because some recommendations were rejected by the Singapore government. The blog entries generally indicate the bloggers' frustration with the legal restrictions on free speech, another indication of how important the issue of free speech is for Singaporean blogs. For example, the blog *Groundnotes* lamented the rejections as a symptom of the Singapore government's chronic mistrust of its citizens:

At the heart of the matter lies the one principle that the government abides by, whether consciously or not: Citizens are dangerous and ignorant until proven otherwise. This is why MICA rejected the following two recommendations:

1. remove registration need for individuals, groups and political parties that provide online political content;
2. decriminalize the making of party political films;

[\(http://groundnotes.wordpress.com/2009/01/12/the-aims-report-fire-fighting-the-mica-way/\)](http://groundnotes.wordpress.com/2009/01/12/the-aims-report-fire-fighting-the-mica-way/)

On another blog, *Everyday's Life in a Snapshot- for lesser mortals only*, similar sentiments were echoed:

I still believe that the government can do more than these suggestions and meaningfully opening [sic] up the new media to engage citizenry. However, they have to get over their fear of active citizenry and see the new media, not as a tool to manage and control, but as a tool to use to interact with the people they are supposed to serve.

[\(http://singaporecitizen.wordpress.com/2009/01/09/one-step-forward-another-step-back/\)](http://singaporecitizen.wordpress.com/2009/01/09/one-step-forward-another-step-back/)

Despite the economic malaise plaguing the world's economy during the period of analysis, issues of free speech were at the top of the blogs' agenda, rather than the economy. The bloggers' reactions to the issue of the bloggers' association and the government's rejection of some of the AIMS recommendations were strongly worded and passionate, suggesting that the

topic of free speech is highly regarded by Singaporean bloggers and is resilient to competition from other topics, even one as significant as the global economic crisis. Such resilience could possibly have roots in the arrests and convictions under Singapore's Sedition Act of three bloggers in 2005 for posting racist remarks (Chong, 2005). The arrests could have made Singaporean bloggers much more sensitive about any real or perceived interference with their blogging activities, hence the strong responses to infringements of free speech online.

The strong regulation of the press in Singapore by the government could also be a factor in the resilience of blogs towards the topic of free speech. The Singapore government, as shown in chapter two, has shown much greater restraint in Internet regulation relative to the press, and thus bloggers are using the Internet to engage in what George (2006) calls contentious journalism, which is the "reporting and commenting on current events with at least some intention of serving a public purpose ... with the explicit objective of challenging the authority of elites in setting the agenda and forging a national consensus" (p.78). Blogs can be an alternative space of public discourse to the Singaporean press, which has been effectively caged by the Singapore government. Hence, Singaporean bloggers could possibly be deliberately focusing on issues of free speech and human rights to provide an alternative agenda to the national press, which is most likely to be government friendly.

In addition, as the excerpts from the various blogs illustrate, blogs in Singapore in general are not reporting news. They appear to be commenting or editorializing. Blog entries about the other top issues on the blogs' agenda

during the timeframe studied - namely the issues of an MP's being set on fire by a disgruntled constituent, an MP who in Parliament made some remarks that were perceived as insensitive, and the measures announced in the Singapore government's 2009 budget to deal with the economic crisis - also provide strong evidence that more often than not, blogs are commenting on issues rather than reporting news.

I condemn that attack on MP Seng Han Thong. My heartfelt sympathy to him and his loved ones.

No one needs to live in fear for serving the country. Using this dastardly attack is not the way to handle issues, personal or not.

(*Kaffein-nated*, <http://kaffein-nated.blogspot.com/2009/01/no-joke-id-rather-have-shoe-or-two.html>)

I do not wish to be offensive, but I see the symbolic implications of the incident. Bureaucracy was getting its scorching feedback. (*Sam's*

Thoughts,

<http://thinkingbetterthinkingmeta.blogspot.com/2009/01/burned-by-system.html>)

The two entries above show blogs to be expressing personal opinions and commentary, and this pattern continues in blog entries on the other two top issues that blogs were concerned about. On the blog "Everyday's life in a snapshot," the blog posted an extremely critical personal opinion about the insensitive "lesser mortal" remark made by MP Charles Chong:

Let's do this together, lesser mortals. Everyone who reads this shall inform another person that a PAP MP known as Charles Chong has called you a lesser mortal, and spread the word back and forth.

It just happens that the lesser mortals has [sic] put these PAP MPs into Parliament. I think they have forgotten who installed them there. Let's remind them again, by voting CHARLES CHONG OUT.

(<http://singaporecitizen.wordpress.com/2009/01/20/lesser-mortals-unite-and-remove-the-greater-mortal/>, emphasis in original)

Similarly, blog entries about the budget unveiled by the Singapore government in 2009 mainly discussed the merits of the measures taken by the Singapore government to deal with the economic crisis. The nature of Singaporean blogs clearly appears to be that of commentary or the giving of personal opinions, and this raises questions about the role of blogs as a medium. If the role of the traditional news media is to provide news and commentary in the public interest, then what is the role of blogs? The analysis of blogs' content indicates that blogs play a role similar to op-eds¹² in newspapers. The op-ed page in newspapers is the section of the newspaper where writers unaffiliated with the newspaper's editorial board give their personal opinions or commentaries about issues, although they sometimes report previously unreported facts and information. Since each blog is independently owned and blogs are generally commenting on existing issues, the role of blogs is very close to that of an op-ed rather than providing news.

¹² The Webster dictionary defines the op-ed page as a page of special feature stories that appear opposite the editorial page in a newspaper (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/op-ed>).

In a study in the United States by Lanosga (2008), American bloggers also generally provide commentary about published news rather than engage in news reporting. The similarity of the role of blogs in two very different countries suggests that bloggers do not seem to want to engage in news reporting. One main reason for this could be that news reporting is extremely time consuming and journalists are paid to do this job, while most bloggers generally operate a blog at their own expense, which is not a sustainable newsgathering model unless bloggers can find a reliable source of income.

7.2 The direction of influence between blog and newspaper agendas

Blogs appear to be following newspapers in terms of writing on the issues of the day. When both media cover the same issue, newspapers usually publish a story about the issue ahead of blogs, suggesting that blogs consider what is on the traditional news media's agenda when determining their own agenda. There are exceptions, and the exceptions are worth noting. Two of the six issues raised by blogs before newspapers were the outcry over a civil servant's expensive holiday taken during an economic crisis and the formation of Association of Bloggers Singapore. The civil servant embroiled in the issue had chronicled his expensive holiday in detail in a guest column in *The Straits Times*, which resulted in an outcry by bloggers, and then newspapers reported on the outcry in blogs. Similarly, the formation of the Association of Bloggers Singapore was covered by newspapers only after gaining considerable traction on blogs. For the issues of A*Star's search for top local scientists and the Singapore's National Library's revamp of borrowing privileges, the blogs that published these stories first cited press releases on the websites of the respective organizations. This is an interesting finding because it shows that

both bloggers and journalists in Singapore do depend on press releases as information sources, and bloggers may actually influence the agenda of newspapers if they publish stories based on press releases first.

The last two issues published by blogs before newspapers were about tiny maggots said to be found in mandarin oranges sold for Chinese New Year and the arrests of two activists for protesting at the Ministry of Manpower building. Newspapers generally did not lag behind blogs by much for these six issues that blogs reported first. For four of the issues, the time lag was one day, while the time lag of the story of maggots in Chinese New Year mandarin oranges was five days while the time lag of the story of the expensive holiday taken by a civil servant was twelve days.

The blog entry about the maggots was attributed to a chain email, and the newspaper story that followed also cited the chain email. For the article on the arrests of the activists, the blogger attributed an acquaintance, but the subsequent newspaper reports did not cite the blog that first published the story. For the other four issues in which blogs published ahead of newspapers, only the story about the Association of Bloggers Singapore was attributed by the newspapers to blogs or bloggers. On the other hand, for stories that were published by newspapers ahead of blogs, the blog entries all cited newspapers as their sources. Why the newspapers cited blogs only once in the time period studied is unclear, but there may be some reluctance on the part of journalists to cite blogs as a source, lending support to Lanosga's (2008) contention that journalists actively avoid crediting competitors, in this case blogs.

This is also a possible explanation as to why less than 1% of newspaper stories mentioned blogs as compared to more than 20% of blog entries mentioning newspapers during the period of study.

Another possible explanation for newspapers' not citing blogs could be that blogs generally focus on providing opinions and commentary rather than providing news and information, as explained in the previous section. This would mean that blogs are likely to rely on other forms of media for information and current topics to comment on, while newspapers are likely more reliant on official sources to provide news stories to the general public.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and directions for future research

Weblogs, or blogs, allow anyone with an internet connection to publish content easily. The cost of setting up a blog is a tiny fraction of the cost of owning and operating a printing press or a broadcast news studio, and the potential of blogs as sources of information that can influence the general public and the traditional mass media is immense.

However, the results of this thesis, which examined the relationship between blogs and newspapers in Singapore, indicate that for now, despite the ease with which blogs publish, blogs do not appear to significantly influence the agenda of newspapers in Singapore. When newspapers and blogs publish the same story, most of the time, newspapers publish the story ahead of blogs, suggesting that when the content of both media are similar, newspapers set the agenda for blogs. In addition, blogs mention and cite newspapers much more often than newspapers mention and cite blogs, suggesting that blogs are more dependent on newspapers as sources of information. Overall, these findings suggest that newspapers are influencing and setting the agenda of blogs in Singapore.

A qualitative analysis of the content suggests that blogs, in general, are more focused on providing opinions and commentary rather than providing news. Hence, blogs are more likely to depend on other types of media for information and topics on which to comment. The role of blogs in Singapore appears to complement that of newspapers, which generally focus on providing news. While many newspapers do provide commentary and opinion

columns, newspapers are limited by print space and publishing cost constraints, which is not an issue for blogs. However, with newspapers increasing their online presence, the days of blogs as a complement to newspapers could be numbered, because newspapers could easily set up their own blogs to make up for the constraints of printing on newsprint.

This thesis has demonstrated that, in the Singaporean context at least, newspapers, and probably the mass media in general, are still critical in providing news to the general public. This has practical implications, especially for public relations practitioners. Given the fact that blogs generally rely on the mass media and not vice-versa, public relations practitioners should continue to focus most of their attention on the traditional mass media for media channels to reach priority publics. For journalists, the practical implication of the findings of this thesis is simply that bloggers are unlikely to supplant their traditional role in a democracy as suppliers of information of public concern, at least not in the near future.

By analyzing published news stories and blog entries, this thesis has found that the overall correlation between the content on blogs and newspapers is not strong, and a deeper analysis of specific top issues shows that Singaporean blogs and newspapers are concerned about different issues. In particular, the apparent disregard of Singaporean blogs to an issue as significant as a global economic crisis and its impact on Singapore suggests a bias in terms of choosing topics or issues that are likely to gain traction among the bloggers and their readers. The Singaporean blogging community could possibly have certain pet topics or issues that are resilient to competition from other important topics or issues of the day. Bloggers may also be writing about

topics that they believe are being ignored by traditional news media in Singapore. In order to determine if the Singaporean blogging community is predisposed toward certain topics or issues, future research should consider the use of surveys or interviews with bloggers at regular time intervals, asking them what they think are the most important issues of the day and why, over a period of a year or more to discover if there are any topics or issues that consistently rate as being important.

Scholars could also consider interviewing or surveying journalists to determine if journalists do actively monitor content published by blogs and use blogs as a source of information. The research method employed in this thesis can only show blogs' or newspapers' mentions of their sources of information. This study's finding that blogs mentioned newspapers as a source much more than newspapers mentioned blogs as a source does not necessarily mean that bloggers are more dependent on newspapers, or that journalists are less dependent on blogs. It could well be that journalists are monitoring blogs for story ideas but not citing blogs because the journalists are independently verifying facts and directly interviewing and quoting sources that were first mentioned in blog entries. Therefore, in order to determine if journalists are not citing blogs as information sources because they verified the stories directly, surveys or interviews are more suitable methods of investigation.

It is also worth noting that as this study focused on intermedia agenda setting between blogs and newspapers, blogs' mentions of other traditional news media outlets, such as the website of TV news station Channel NewsAsia, were excluded. If the mentions of other mass media outlets on blogs were considered, the percentage of blog entries that refer to traditional

news media outlets as sources of information would have been higher. Future research could expand the scope of investigation of traditional news media beyond newspapers to include news websites, television news and radio news.

To further verify the findings of this study, a longer period of study with multiple coders can be employed. With an extended timeframe, it is possible that different patterns of correlation may emerge as important issues of the day change. During the timeframe in which this study was conducted, two events, the recommendations of the AIMS committee and the case of the Association of Singapore Bloggers, occurred. Since bloggers have a vested interest in these two events, as they could affect their blogging activities, the topic of free speech and human rights were at the top of the bloggers' agenda for that time period. Other topics may dominate in an extended timeframe. Multiple coders would make studying an extended timeframe easier and increase the reliability of the findings of this study, which could have been limited by the fact that there was only a single coder and according to Neuendorf (2002), there exist no satisfactory method of determining reliability in the case of a single coder.

Also, the agendas of emerging forms of social media should also be considered for comparison with the traditional news media. Twitter and Facebook are currently extremely popular forms of social media, and they are, like blogs, media that make publishing content online very easy. Facebook claims to have had 500 million active users on its website during the month of August 2010¹³, and research company RJMetrics put the number of Twitter

¹³ More statistics about Facebook are available at <http://www.facebook.com#!/press/info.php?statistics>

users at 75 million at the end of 2009¹⁴. The number of people who use Twitter and Facebook worldwide are quite substantial, and it would be interesting to explore the differences and similarities between the agendas of these emerging media and the mass media.

¹⁴ Twitter does not publish figures of its number of users, but it is technologically possible to estimate the numbers, and the explanation for how RJMetrics came up with the number is available at <http://themetricssystem.rjmetrics.com/2010/01/26/new-data-on-twitters-users-and-engagement/>

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Appendix A

Moving Higher In Souped-up Heuristically Agon Moment (<http://mhisham.org>)
The Fire in my Life (<http://fireopal82.blogspot.com>)
Singapore Fountain Pen (<http://singaporefountainpen.blogspot.com>)
Dee Kay Dot As Gee (<http://blog.dk.sg>)
Aussie Pete (<http://aussiepete.com>)
Dotseng (<http://dotseng.wordpress.com>)
The Lycan Times (<http://nowhere.per.sg>)
Ravi Philemon (<http://raviphilemon.net>)
Sgpolitics.net (<http://sgpolitics.net>)
The Temasek Review (<http://temasekreview.com>)
Groundnotes (<http://groundnotes.wordpress.com>)
The Edge Singapore (<http://theedgesingapore.com>)
Feed me to the Fish (<http://feedmetothefish.blogspot.com>)
Anonymous_X (<http://anonymousxwrites.blogspot.com>)
Everyday's Life in a Snapshot- for lesser mortals only
(<http://singaporecitizen.wordpress.com>)
Diary of A Singaporean Mind (<http://singaporemind.blogspot.com>)
Eaststop (<http://eaststop.blogspot.com>)
The Online Citizen (<http://theonlinecitizen.com>)
News Release by UncleYap (<http://uncleyap-news.blogspot.com>)
Tan Kin Lian's Blog (<http://tankinlian.blogspot.com>)
A L V I N O L O G Y (<http://alvinology.wordpress.com>)
Simple is the Reason of my Heart (<http://bleongcw.typepad.com>)
My sketchbook (<http://seijieiga.blogspot.com>)
Bernard Aw (<http://bernardaw.wordpress.com>)
The Void Deck (<http://thevoiddeck.org>)
Singapore Life and Times (<http://singaporelifetimes.blogspot.com>)
Midnight Monkey Monitor (<http://leafmonkey.blogspot.com>)
Jacob's weblog (<http://jg69.blogspot.com>)
Cavaliero (<http://cavaliero.blogspot.com>)
Readings From A Political Duo-ble (<http://aussgworldpolitics.wordpress.com>)
Mathia Lee ~ Plans and Preoccupations (<http://mathialee.wordpress.com>)
Jaslyn Go's blog (<http://jaslyngo.sgpolitics.net>)
To fix a Mocking Peasant (<http://mollymeek.livejournal.com>)
Balderdash(<http://gssq.blogspot.com>)
Princess from the Planet of Venupitarius (<http://rachelabsinthe.multiply.com>)
Agents are go!! (<http://agentsarego.blogspot.com>)
野人俱乐部 (<http://blinkymummy.blogspot.com>)
A long and arduous road of an entrepreneur (<http://cobaltpaladin.blogspot.com>)
The Great Sze (<http://thegreatsze.blogspot.com>)
Chemical Generation Singapore (<http://chemgen.wordpress.com>)
Military Life: Memoirs of a Conscript in the Lion City (<http://military-life.blogspot.com>)
The Secret Political Blog (<http://asiancorrespondent.com/secret-blog>)
Groundnotes (<http://groundnotes.wordpress.com>)
The One Dimensional Island (<http://onedimensionalman.wordpress.com>)
Empty Vessel (<http://iantan.org>)

Yesterday....Today....Tomorrow (<http://blogofsorts.wordpress.com>)
Angry Angmo (<http://www.angryangmo.com>)
Rambling Librarian (<http://ramblinglibrarian.blogspot.com>)
Eastcoastlife (<http://eastcoastlife.blogspot.com>)
Tattooed Banker (<http://tattooedbanker.wordpress.com>)
Blowin' in the wind (<http://pressrun.net>)
Simply Jean (<http://blog.simplyjean.com>)
Musings From the Lion City (<http://hardhitting-nobs.blogspot.com>)
Nomadism (<http://fuzzielemon.blogspot.com>)
Singapore Dino (<http://singaporedino.blogspot.com>)
Bohemia Bunny (<http://lynn.entori.net>)
Otterman speaks (<http://otterman.wordpress.com>)
Random Thoughts Of A Free Thinker (<http://searchingforenlightenment.blogspot.com>)
A Singaporean (<http://perrytong.blogspot.com>)
Only "objective" and "factual" political films please, we're Singaporeans
(<http://singaporerebel.blogspot.com>)
Yawning Bread (<http://yawningbread.org>)
Kaffein-nated (<http://kaffein-nated.blogspot.com>)
i have succumbed to peer pressure. (<http://udders.blogspot.com>)
Chee Wai's random musing (<http://houganger.blogspot.com>)
Sam's Thoughts (<http://thinkingbetterthinkingmeta.blogspot.com>)
mrbrown: L'infantile terrible of Singapore (<http://mrbrown.com>)
Mr Wang Says So (<http://mrwangsaysso.blogspot.com>)
NoFearSingapore (<http://nofearsingapore.blogspot.com>)
Chia Ti Lik's Blog (<http://chiatilik.wordpress.com>)
Unbranded Bread n Butter (<http://unbrandedbreadnbutter.wordpress.com>)
Verbal Me (<http://verbalme.wordpress.com>)
Singabloodypore (<http://singabloodypore.rsfblog.org>)
Ganga Sudhan (<http://gangasudhan.com>)
This lush garden within (<http://mrbiao.com>)
Insane Polygons (<http://insanepoly.com>)
Angry Doctor (<http://angrydr.blogspot.com>)
The boy who knew too much (<http://scientific-child-prodigy.blogspot.com>)
Seelan Palay's blog (<http://seelanpalay.blogspot.com>)
Desperatebeep (<http://desperatebeep.blogspot.com>)
Illusio (<http://akikonomu.blogspot.com>)
signorekai on earth (<http://signorekai.blogspot.com>)
Ian On The Red Dot (<http://ian.onthereddot.com>)
My Little Corner (<http://chantc.blogspot.com>)
SilentAssassin's Archive (<http://silentassassinarchive.wordpress.com>)
My Singapore News (<http://mysingaporenews.blogspot.com>)
Tribolum.com (<http://tribolum.com>)
Boleh! Boleh! (<http://sgboleh.blogspot.com>)
The Enquirer (<http://enquirer.sg>)
SG Entrepreneurs (<http://sgentrepreneurs.com>)
Hear Ye! Hear Ye! (<http://aaron-ng.info/blog>)
Vinyarb (<http://vinyarb.com>)
Yummy BBQ Chicken Wings (<http://bbqchickenwings.blogspot.com>)
Empty_Vessels (<http://empty-vessels.blogspot.com>)
Almost infamous (<http://almostinfamous.blogspot.com>)

Singapore Alternatives (<http://singaporealternatives.blogspot.com>)
Jialat Dot Com (<http://jialat.com>)
A Thing (or Two) About Holly Jean (<http://holly--jean.blogspot.com>)
a blog day's work (<http://tankianhwee.wordpress.com>)
Talk Rock (<http://rockson.blogspot.com>)
Singularity Industries (<http://singularityindustries.wordpress.com>)
"Fence in" (<http://boresightlock.wordpress.com>)
Misanthropic And Loving It! (<http://fr0z.blogspot.com>)
Still. Me (<http://da-phish.blogspot.com>)
Voices.sg (<http://voices.sg>)
Alamak (<http://alamak.tumblr.com>)
~eternalhap~ (<http://eternal-hap.blogspot.com>)
Support site for the unemployed (<http://transitioning.org>)
Everyday blog (<http://zarathoustra.org>)
Stomp Out STOMP! (<http://stompoutstomp.blogspot.com>)
Littlespeck.com (<http://littlespeck.com>)
The musings and pictures of a melancholic Singaporean (<http://delvinlee.wordpress.com>)
Social Media and Digital Marketing in Singapore (<http://uniquefrequency.com>)
Deadpris (<http://deadpris.com>)
The Ignorant Soup (<http://ignorantsoup.com>)
The Gal- Nicole (<http://nicole.sg>)
New Sintercom (<http://newsintercom.org>)
Song of a Reformed Headhunter (<http://jeeleong.blogspot.com>)
Liberative – Where ideas explode! (<http://liberative.wordpress.com>)
Singapore Peak Oil (<http://sgentropy.blogspot.com>)
Choonyong.com (<http://choonyong.com>)
Big Talk Singapore (<http://bigtalksingapore.wordpress.com>)