The Internet as a Platform for Civic Engagement in Singapore

By

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<u>Declaration</u>

'This thesis represents my own work and I have duly acknowledged in the endnotes and bibliography the sources of information which I have consulted for the purpose of this study. The total word count for this thesis is 28,172 words.'

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Nandini Prashad

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Abstract

Singapore's focus on developing itself as a knowledge-hub spearheaded by internet technology has brought to the fore many issues of contention between active citizenry and technology adoption within the nation-state. This thesis, attempts to locate the evolution of the internet as a platform for civil society *within* the overall evolution of the Singapore state mechanism. Surveys conducted among Singaporeans found issues like online security and anonymity as core concerns among respondents. Adult internet users also expressed skepticism in the viability of the internet providing an alternate civil society sphere in Singapore. Yet an examination of the Government's approach to media control in general, and to the internet in specific, reveals an expansion of the acceptable limits of self expression over the years.

This apparent dichotomy of perspectives vis-à-vis the state and the 'people' is at one level stark and laced with a sense of inevitability given the socio-political climate that has long been the only acceptable norm in Singapore. At a deeper level though, there appears a substantial degree of homogeneity in core ideals of the state and a majority of the adult internet users in Singapore that demonstrates a shared sense of 'nation building', in turn indicative of a *co-evolution* (rather than contention) of the medium conducive to civil society and the state.

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Chapter 1. Introduction:

1.1 Community Engagement, Political Expression and Internet in Singapore:

The Singapore governments' focus on developing the island nation as a knowledge hub spearheaded by internet technology has brought to the fore the many issues of contentions and arrangements between active citizenry and technology adoption here. Studies in the past have often addressed these issues as a power struggle between the state and its various control mechanisms on one hand and the people's tendency to seek out 'gaps' in the system that allow them more freedom of expression and space in cyberspace on the other. These studies tend to view these 'struggles' between the two groups as oppositional and contentious, hereby assuming a certain degree of exclusive heterogeneity of the opposing factions[1].

The correlation between internet technology and political pluralism is a view taken as obvious by many commentators on the subject. The 'nonhierarchical, interactive and global' nature of the medium is credited for providing unprecedented access to information sources as well as affording individuals an increased scope for expression hitherto inaccessible in the mainstream media avenues[2]. This has been especially heralded as a welcome change in totalitarian or illiberal political environments[3] (Rodan, 1996: 1). Proponents of the medium at a Free Expression Asian Cyberspace conference held in Manila, Philippines in April 2006 pointed out that the Internet media offer Asians the means to get around press restrictions under

authoritarian governments. Yet they also advocated a voice of caution in over emphasizing the impact of the internet in such societies, citing the case of China that demonstrated how new technologies could also be used to stifle dissent[4]. Beijing has blocked access to the *Google.com* search engine in most parts of China in a move to further restrict the public's access to information. Internet users in many major cities in China are unable to connect to the uncensored international version of Google while the censored Chinese-language version, *Google.cn* is still accessible. This version was launched in January 2006 amid accusations of what was seen by the cyber community as Google's large 'sell out to the wishes of China's propaganda chiefs'[5]. The second most popular search engine Altavista was also blocked by the Chinese government[6] in a situation when the country's 45 million internet users (the second highest numbers in the world after the United States) can access the internet only through the state run ISPs ensuring easy surveillance and control of accessed information sources (Knight, 2006).

In this ongoing debate over the relationship between the state and the internet, the two are most often pitched *against* each other in a battle for control. This contention is especially marked in Singapore that has on one hand, a paternalistic government that is reluctant to forgo its tight control on media operating within the national boundaries while on the other hand actively catering to a changing socio-cultural environment that is seeking to 'trade in ideas rather than commodities.'

Operating in this context, this thesis will attempt to locate the evolution of the internet *within* the overall evolution of the state in Singapore. In doing so it shall demonstrate the key, albeit limited, homogeneity in the demographics that make up the states and the 'people' perspective. It shall focus on a pertinent aspect of the internet for democratization thesis – The creation of a viable public sphere[7] online among Singaporeans. It is the aim of this study to critically examine the ways in which the internet can enhance citizen participation in Singapore from the point of view of the average adult Singaporean's experience (and thus) , its impacts on their daily lives and in their social decision making processes.

1.2 The Internet and Democratization

Liberal democrats in the western political systems have long recognized that access to information along with multiplicity of deliberation and representations is a fundamental prerequisite for the effective execution of a democratic polity and for a full implementation of citizenship rights (Murdock 1990). Insuch, they include the communication system – whether in the private or public sector alike, as a core public institution with the civic duty to ensure the necessary resources for effective citizenship.

Murdock and Golding (1989) take this further and classify the relation between communications and citizenship into three forms. The first premises that people

must have access to information, advice and analyses that allows them to know what their rights are in other spheres and at the same time, allow them pursue them efficiently. Second they must have access to the broadest collection of information, construal and discussions on areas that entail political choice. Accordingly they must have the means to use communication facilities to register criticism, organize opposition and recommend alternate courses of action. And third, they must be able to identify themselves and their ambitions in the array of representations available within the central communication sectors and be able to partake in developing those representations (ibid: 183). These rights in turn suggest two fundamental features of any such information communication systems. On one hand it must provide maximum possible range of provision while offering appropriate mechanisms for user feedback and participation. Correspondingly, on the other hand, it should also guarantee universal access to the technology that would ensure the right to citizenry regardless of location, income or capacity (ibid: 184).

More on the relation between new media technology and the democratic process of active citizenry has been addressed in a more thorough literature review compiled in a later chapter of this thesis. For now, if one were to use the afore mentioned classification and qualification for examining New Media Technologies (NMTs), the internet in particular scores highly with inbuilt features and capabilities that would, at least theoretically, be able to give the guarantees Murdock and Golding seek. Internet technology by virtue of its amorphous virtual environment is perhaps the most universally inclusive communication channel in modern

telecommunication networks. Its networks that provide a plethora of modes and means of information have made temporal- spatial limitations redundant and simultaneous offer effective avenues to countervail restriction placed on accessing information (and even restrictions placed on individual or group liberties) by the authorities in real time. Increasingly sexual minorities, alternative lifestyle practitioners, socially oppressed and marginalized communities have found platforms on the internet to assert themselves. Gay and rights' activists, victims of gender discrimination, AIDS patients, substance abusers- communities that had long battled social stigma in the main stream society have turned to the internet to mark out spaces where they feel freed of prejudice in seeking out support, advice or even companionship[8]. This holds especial significance for social, economic and political marginalizations that tend to get underplayed, if acknowledged at all, by the main stream media catering to what it perceives as the acceptable norms and dictates of the ruling bodies that may or may not be tolerant of alternate or dissenting voices.

1.3 Significance of Locating the Study in Singapore:

While the significance of locating this particular study in Singapore is addressed in a more detailed manner in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the technological advancements and adoptions in the daily lives of residents are fascinating in themselves. In spite of being the 17th smallest nation in the world with a physical area of 647.5 sq. kms, it

is also the 22nd richest nation today with an estimated annual GDP of S$ 51,231. 7 - making it the second richest Asian nation after Japan[9]. Such a highly developed economy is a marked achievement for a young nation that gained its independence only in 1965 and has in the past been vulnerable to both global economic fluctuations as well as regional epidemics (like SARS) that had a dire impact on the indigenous economy[10].

The island state enjoys a low unemployment rate of 2.7% of the estimated labor force. It also has demonstrated a negative population growth rate between the years 2000 and 2005 with the latter figures standing at 2.6% of the total population. One of the biggest advantages the nation enjoys is its high literacy rate of 95.0% (among residents aged 15 years and above). This is especially significant when one considers that 61.6% of the resident non-students aged 15 years and above have secondary or higher schooling qualification[11]. The levels of education enjoyed by the average population is, by most standards, accepted as a mark of socio-political development for any economy seeking to redefine itself as a leading global player in cultural and technical progress. Singapore has developed one of the world's most comprehensive IT (development) strategies that is largely fuelled and supported by large state-led infrastructure investments. The island economy has declared its intention of transforming itself into an information hub with the currency of value being ideas rather than commodities. Traditionally, such a move would imply the creation of a more inclusive citizenry with the widening of permissible creativity and freedoms, yet in the unique case of Singapore the authorities appear wary about

relinquishing too much political control. Undoubtedly, they are aware of the tensions arising out of the apparent contradictory economic and political agendas; however over the last few decades they have displayed an efficient capacity to amalgamate the two. In most western societies over the centuries, the more educated its citizens were, the more they laid the foundations for creative industries and innovations that extended beyond the arts to initiate moves towards pluralistic democracies. This has not been the case in Singapore so far with the media and the average citizen sharing the state's ideology of 'nation building' as an integral patriotic duty that sees overt criticism of the state and its various mechanisms as acts amounting to crimes of destabilization subject to criminal proceedings being levied against the critiques. More on this will be discussed in a later chapter analyzing the findings of the survey conducted for this thesis.

Foreign publications carrying articles the government viewed as libelous have been sued by the state for defamation and have had their circulations restricted within Singapore. Publications such as The Economist and The Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER) have been successfully 'gazetted' by the government under similar defamation suits and as of August 2006, foreign publications such as Newsweek, Time, The Financial Times, FEER and the International Herald Tribune; are required by law to appoint a local representative for their publishers' who must pay a security deposit of S$ 200, 000 and would in turn be liable to be sued in the name of the publication in the case of any dispute. The move comes after FEER carried an interview with opposition leader Chee Soon Juan and was subsequently charged

for violating the stipulations of the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (Subrahmaniyan, 2006). When it comes to being stringently regulated, the local press is no exceptions either. Controlling all, save one, of the domestic dailies, Singapore Press Holdings' (SPH) management shareholders are appointed by the government in keeping with the Act. Their presence, while not implying direct government control, promotes a climate of self-censorship among journalists- negating the need for open contestations between the press and the state.[12] The sole daily not printed under the SPH flagship, MediaCorp's free daily Today, suspended its popular columnist and blogger Mr. Brown for a satirical commentary on the material incentives given to Singaporeans by the state[13].

The internet as a domain for sourcing information has been afforded a lighter touch when it comes to the actual implementation of the law. As such the Media Development Authority (MDA) provides a 'code of conduct' for internet service providers as well as end users and the medium generically also comes under the purview of the same laws that govern traditional main stream media the governments rhetoric on regulating online content has been far more lenient that would be expected with other media. The main thrust of the state's attention appears to be focused on containing material deemed to a threat to public security, national defence, racial and religious harmony and public morality[14]. The MDA is the regulatory body for online content and it provides the police with broad powers in intercepting messages online and confiscating personal computers without warrant. Online content is also been overseen by groups such as the Teachers Union

in Singapore that offers legal assistance to teachers who want to take legal action against students who defame them in their blogs. This comes in the wake of a case involving Junior College students who were suspended for alleged 'flaming'[15] (Davie and Liaw, 2005).

In such a climate of proscribed individual expression and media freedom, it is interesting to note how the citizens use New Media technologies. What political sense can be derived from their technology adoption patterns and especially from their usage of the internet? As an early and aggressive adopter of the technology, Singapore offers a prime site for studying the impact of the internet outside the advanced-industrial, liberal democratic west. The chosen political model here is also unique- lying in between the extreme poles of liberal democracies and the closed authoritarian regimes. Under Singaporean law, 'constructive dissent' is accepted in the political arena subject to licensing laws etc. This is, on one hand, unlike the case in the Peoples Republic of China where political dissent or dissenting journalism is not accepted while on the other hand, also unlike the USA where the constitution protects the individual against political censorship or politically motivated reprisals. Singapore is open enough for the internet to be used publicly as a medium for dissenting communication although not so open that citizens can take their freedoms for granted (George, 2006:3). Although Singapore has a visible track record when it comes to coercion, they have demonstrated that the use (and/or threat) of force cannot be the primary basis for maintaining social order. Instead the state appears to be backed by a certain degree of consent on part

of the ruled[16] (George, 2006). That the state has demonstrated its support for heading towards greater political openness via 'incremental and carefully managed' reform, is perhaps influenced by the fact that the state machinery as it is today is a product of its historical evolution from its days as a British colony and continued through its merger with Malaysia in 1963. Its bitter exit in 1965 and its long fought 'emergency' against communism from 1941-60 have created a legacy of caution as the state mantra. And the media- both traditional and online- is an offshoot of the dynamics of the state ideology and its subsequent evolution (Ibid: 39-43). When it comes to online content, the regulatory approach has long been self-defined as 'light-touch' which only changed in the aftermath of the dot-com crash of 2000 and the September 11th terrorists attacks on the World Trade Center in the United States. Where earlier the state had deliberately exercised a self-restraining mode based on the logic that any authoritarian action would damage their international reputation especially at a time when market space was being aggressively courted, as the international environment became increasingly volatile the authorities sought to respond to its changed circumstances with a more focused and visible crackdown on online dissent and morality[17] (Ibid: 74). But as has been demonstrated in studies comparing online activism in Singapore and Malaysia, superior internet penetration and access does not necessarily imply more or effective political engagement. This has more to do with the online community actors engaging in technology dialogue and the manner in which they adapt to and in turn adopt the new means for posing confrontations to existing norms. Such a vibrant and challenging environment as

that in Singapore makes for an interesting scenario to locate a study on community-technology engagements.

1.3.1 Developing the Internet in Singapore:

The strategic centrality of importance afforded to developing New Media Technology in Singapore arises from the state's desire to market itself as a leading information hub. Its ambitions stem from a deep rooted sense of competitiveness- a legacy perhaps of the bitter days leading to its ouster from Malaysia and its troubled early independence periods that saw its fragile economy vulnerable to various destabilizing forces ranging from the perceived communists threats to the 'Asian Tigers' economic crash[18] (Rodan, 1996: 6).

In 1981, the National Computer Board Act was passed by the parliament to pave the way for setting up the National Computer Board (NCB). At the same time, the Civil Service Computerization Programme (CSCP) was introduced with a three pronged agenda of computerizing the civil service ministries and departments, train computer software professionals to meet the needs of the nation, and to develop a computer software and service industry[19]. In the wake of this move, the National IT Plan (NITP) was launched islandwide to promote widespread IT applications. The NITP further established various nationwide electronic services that facilitated inter agency collaboration and equally importantly, it aimed to target the 'softer' aspects

of developing a substantial IT manpower base. This involved establishing a popular culture that was receptive to incorporating Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) in everyday life while encouraging creativity and enterprise. The endeavor was extended to the government sector in 1989 when a central computer network linking 23 major government computer centers was inaugurated, marking the first major step towards providing 'one-stop, non-stop services'. In keeping with the direction IT promotion was taking in Singapore, the National IT Committee (NITC) was first set up in 1992 as an advisory body to monitor and guide the adoption of IT platforms in the various sectors of the local economy. By 1997, the need to step up the shift cross-agency coordination regarding the use of IT services in the Government resulted in the NITC being given a high-level multi-agency policy-making and executive mandate.

The development of a national IT agenda came to head with the merger of the NCB and TAS in 1999 to form the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) under the aegis of the then Ministry of Communications and IT (MCIT). The IDA was responsible for the regulation and promotion of the Singapore ICT industry while the Singapore Broadcast Authority (SBA) remained in charge of regulating broadcasting and internet content. By 2001 though, the IDA was moved under the charge of the expanded Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MITA) bringing it under a single supervising ministry with SBA. This move allowed for an integrated approach (finally leading to convergence of the concerned sectors) to resolving both ICT and broadcasting issues under the guidance of a

single ministry. In all the creation of the IDA was significant from a policy making point of view as well. It brought together the regulatory and promotional functions of these sectors under one roof with the intention of assigning a single ministry to find the 'appropriate point of balance' in the governing policies (Goh, 2002: 3).

1.4 Significance of Study

This project is especially timely with the new wave of a state-led focus on developing the IT industry in Singapore. The ubiquity of the internet in the city-state, with one of the highest penetration rates in the world coupled with the current trend of relaxation of political and social controls, has led to a flurry of speculation whether this will translate into greater democratization through enhanced access to previously censored information (Banerjee, 2004). The maturing of the nation since its independence has seen the cautious emergence of citizen participation with rational debate on common concerns in what Habermas has called 'the public sphere'.

Previous controls on the traditional media had fostered an environment wherein people were hesitant to partake in mass deliberations for fear of overstepping the ambiguous limits set by the 'out of bound markers'[20] (OBMs). This situation was further perpetuated by the apparent government impatience with dissent[21]. The existing mainstream media channels also actively promoted the perception of

critical opinions or dissent being unwelcome in the course of nation building. There appears to be in place a substantial degree of self-censorship among the traditional media of and in Singapore and these are often accused by detractors of being little more than mere mouthpieces of the state mechanism[22].

This landscape has changed with the enthusiastic adoption and penetration of new media technologies that, at least in intent, promised consumers spaces free from governmental scrutiny. Inherent in the technology is the scope for anonymity and this allows for voices normally not permitted in the main stream media to have their say. Also the myriad search engines operating online ensure easy access to information- mainstream and alternative. This empowers the consumers to reject the imposition of widely held opinions and norms, propagated by the state or any other dominant group, and arrive at their own perspectives based on information they seek out for themselves. In a society like Singapore where access to views and perspectives, especially concerning wider global affairs or on divergent issues, has long been limited to the state approved lines; this can have far reaching implications in terms of control and opinion making processes among the citizens. With people increasingly turning to the internet to seek out any information they desire as well to perform routine acts of daily life- be they shopping for groceries or 'talking' to family and friends located overseas- the impact of the internet has been manifold. Not least of these has been its impact on the way in which people view communications and the opportunity to express previously forbidden views in a relatively non-threatening environment while locating like minded users not just

from the immediate local community but also from a global network of ideologies. Such 'unfettered' exchange of ideas would seem to pose a threat to any agency that seeks to control the information flows and their resultant perception building effects.

Faced with such a dynamic and thriving cyberworld, the government of Singapore has been forced into recognizing the vitality of keeping abreast with the scenario while maintaining a proactive response to the demand for technological convenience in tandem with information networks. The government is ensuring measures to allow internet users in Singapore more leeway in expressing their thought and opinions on previously restricted issues. Yet to expect the authorities to completely adopt a hands-free approach to the controlling certain aspects of the medium would be unreasonable and impractical. In such a state of contentions and negotiations, a platform for meaningful engagement is often viewed more optimistically than practical implementation warrants. Herein lies the significance of this particular thesis that attempts to study the negotiations conducted in cyberspace for an alternative public sphere in Singapore.

1.5 Objective of Study: Research Questions

This project will attempt to address the following research questions.

- How effective has the internet been among adult Singaporeans in providing them a platform for critical and/or alternate discussions on topics normally not voiced in the offline public domain? How do Singaporeans view the credibility of information available from independent online sources and to what extent do they rely on such information in forming their personal opinions?

- Is the internet being used for critical debate and the creation of an uninhibited civil society sphere? What are the most popular tools accessed by resident users and why?

- With the specific context of Singapore has the Internet's potential political significance been over-estimated? To what extent has the plurality of individual political and social views on the Internet been successful in translate into organized political and social action?

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[1] Details of this have been addressed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, under the section of existing literature review.

[2] According to Rodan (1996:1) "(*This communication medium is) nonhierarchical, interactive and global. Its usage is also growing exponentially. The internet affords unprecedented access to information and new avenues for individual political expression…*"

[3] See Rodan's (1998: 1) quotations of media proprietor Rupert Murdoch's proclamation that "Advances in the technology of telecommunications have proved an unambiguous threat to totalitarian regimes everywhere."

[4] See Associated Free Press , *'Internet freeing Asians but…,'* Today, April 20 2006 edition

[5] See Associated Free Press, *'Google hit the Great Wall'*, AFP, Today, June 8 2006 edition

[6] See Stephanie Olsen in CNET News.com, September 9, 2002 edition, *China blocks search engine Altavista.* The article accuses the Chinese government of blocking access to search engines in an apparent campaign to prevent access to material it deems 'unsuitable and threatening' to the ruling Communist Party. The author goes on to state that the sweep down on internet content is not restricted to search engines like Altavista and Google but also to any website that might be perceived as seditious to Chinese politics. Among other sites access is blocked to USCourts.gov- the home page of the federal judiciary in the USA, CNN, BBC's Voice of America and MIT.edu.

[8] Among other 'alternative lifestyle' websites, the Singapore based Fridae.com and People Like Us (PLU) enjoy higher degrees of social acceptance than would be normally expected from a society that views homosexuality as illegal. The PLU portal was registered officially in February 2004 after a previous failed attempt. This followed then Prime Minster Goh Chock Tong's statements in an interview with Time (Asia) magazine in July 2003 where he spoke in favor of greater acceptance of homosexuals in mainstream society, including 'sensitive positions' in the civil service. The article was welcomed by the gay community in Singapore and resulted in a record number of revelers at the annual gay pride festival 'Nation.03' organized by Fridae.com. The three day extravaganza also marked a milestone in being the first time in Singapore TV history that a local gay event was reported in a positive light. The event was heralded by mainstream media houses like Channel NewsAsia and MediaCorp TV Channel 5 as 'a gauge of Singapore's tolerance'. The same event, now grown in corporate sponsorship and prominence, was refused a license in 2005 on the grounds that it was 'contrary to public interest'.

[9] For further details and other rankings refer the Worldwide Statistics in the CIA Fact Book 2006

[10] For a general overview of Singapore's imports and exports figures, refer to the Dept. of Statistics, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Republic of Singapore.

[11] At mid year 2005 estimates, statistics released by the Dept of Statistics, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Republic of Singapore.

[12] When it comes to freedom of the press, Reporters without Borders (Reporters sans frontiers) has ranked Singapore at the 146th position out of a total of 167 countries surveyed in its Annual Report 2006. In response to the rankings in the 2005 World Press freedom Index 2005 (that ranked Singapore at 140), Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong dismissed it as "a subjective measure computed through the prism of western liberals". In defense of the Singapore model, the minister contented that a press that "was too free" was "not necessarily good for the entire country". The 2006 report accused that whereas in the case of regional or international news the domestic press were 'relatively independent', the same press was 'in the grip of rigorous self-censorship' when it came to reportage on domestic politics. For details of the report see Reporters sans Frontieres: Singapore Annual Report 2006.

[13] On June 30 2006 blogger and popular Today columnist Mr. Brown wrote an article "Singaporeans are fed, up with progress" in his weekly opinion column in the newspaper offering a satirical commentary on the rising costs of living in Singapore. Three days later, on July 3 2006 the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts published its response to the said article in the same newspaper calling Mr. Brown a "partisan player" who was "distorting the truth". Following MICA's response Today suspended Mr. Brown's column leading to fellow blogger and columnist Mr. Miyagi resigning his column from Today in protest. The proceedings

got further murky with the resignation of Today's Chief Executive and Editor-in-Chief Mano Sabnani in November of the same year.

[14] In September 2005 three Singaporean bloggers were arrested and charged under the Sedition Act for posting racist comments on their private blogs. For details see the United States Department of State report of Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2005.

[15] In September 2005, five students of the Saint Andrews Junior College in Singapore were suspended from school for three days for allegedly "flaming" two teachers and a vice- principle on their blogs. 'Flaming' is the act of making seditious statements with inference to a person's personal life or character beyond their public roles.

[16] George Cherian, in his book *'Contentious Journalism and the Internet: Towards Democratic Discourse in Malaysia and Singapore'* attributes this to what he calls 'instrumental acquiescence, based on their not unfounded faith in the government's will to continue to deliver rising standards of living…Promise of financial reward has also been an important means for securing the loyalty of the mainstream news media industry. In addition there has been evidence of a normative consensus at work, maintained through the states ideological domination.' (2006: 37)

[17] See Cherian (2006: 76) *"Traditionally the 2 regimes (of Singapore and Malaysia) have maintained control partly through coercion but mainly through hegemonic consensus…Their preferred mode is not routine repression of dissent opinion, but an ideological domination that makes consent with the regime seem like common sense. Restricting the range of opinions publicly uttered- by prior restraint of media outlets through licensing – is a key part of this strategy. The governments' failure to apply this mode of control to the internet and their resulting need to reach for more coercive methods, should be seen as representing strains on their hegemony."*

[18] The sentiment is found in the assortment by George Yeo, Minister for Information and the Arts: *"Geography will matter less in the future. We must therefore think of new ways to retain our position as a hub. Over the next 20 to 30 years, we must make sure that we have the new infrastructure to remain a junction for goods, services, people, information and ideas. If we succeed, we will be one of a number of great cities in the Pacific Century. If we fail, other hubs will displace us and we will be relegated to a Backwater"* (Rodan, 1996: 6).

[19] From Annex A of the IDA Fact-sheet on Infocomm Milestones.

[20] See Endnotes 12, 15

[21] See Endnote 15

[22] See Endnote 14

Chapter 2. Singapore in Context:

In the ongoing debate over the possibility of effectively censoring the internet the prevailing view seems to accept that control-minded agencies have met their match in this medium that, by its inherent nature, accommodates diverse and innumerable options for obtaining and disseminating information. No matter how or what restrictions the authorities impose on access to the medium, the more determined and technologically literate individuals can find sufficient loopholes in the system to stay one step ahead of the control regimes. This was amply demonstrated in the case of cyberusers in China who attempted to circumvent the state ban of the popular search engine Google.com by adapting the technology to produce a 'mirror site' – elgooG- that, while a spoof of the original English Google site, still allows for users to access otherwise barred sites[1] (Knight, 2006).

Such and other examples from various other locations have leant credence to the perspective that the internet was a formidable foe to any form of illiberal government that sought to curtail people's access to information. While such experiences were witnessed in many new economies especially, it was not evident in the case of Singapore.

With an estimated population of 3,601, 745 in 2006 and a Gross National Income of US$ 28,228[2], the number of Internet users in Singapore has been estimated at 2,421,000, implying an internet penetration of 67.2% in the population. This figure

is also an almost 101.8% growth from 1,200, 000 in the year 2000. As of August 2006, the total dial-up internet subscription had reached an all time high of 1, 549.400 of which total residential internet dial-up subscriptions were 1, 499,800. This meant an internet (dial-up) penetration rate of 35.6%. This figure is yet higher when it comes to total internet broadband subscriptions that stand at 712,800. Of these, 646,300 are attributed to residential broadband internet subscriptions. These figures when combined imply a total household broadband subscription penetration of 58.2%[3]. In such a potent environment access to the Internet is getting increasingly entwined in most commercial and social interactions. Internet awareness is highly prevalent especially among the 'Post-65' generations[4] and it is among this community that acceptance of social and political mores appear, on the surface, to range from apathy to censure. In other new democracies it is often among this class of citizens where the seeds of social, political and economic change are sown but this is not readily observable in Singapore. In spite of enjoying high internet penetration rates Singapore has not witnessed any major moves towards online contentious journalism (George, 2006). For example, Malaysia is five times more populous than Singapore (based on 2002 figures) but has only three times the number of internet users- a more 4 million as against an estimated 1.3 million across the Straits. On the other hand Singaporeans have five times higher incomes than their Malaysian counterparts and its technological superiority over Malaysia is obvious. Yet paradoxically, Malaysia hosts a more developed contentious online journalism[5] (Ibid: 177). A possible reason- or at least an effective influence on this- could lie in the history of Internet Technology growth in

Singapore that has been sponsored and guided by the state. It is not surprising then that government control on online content and channels are apparently higher in Singapore than in most other societies. Perhaps the yardstick for interpretation of political opposition and alternative views has been such that extreme criticism of the policies and practices of the government may get termed as anti-national politics. Perhaps cause lies in the strong identification of the mainstream media with the state and the process of 'nation- building' that allows for people to turn to NMTs to seek out spaces for civic and political engagement alike. The idea of nation building as a "role of the media" comes from a shared sense of collective action needed to fight off a common threat – whether real or perceived- and work towards commonly viewed goals. Especially in a multi-ethnic society like Singapore, the threat of social discord is a looming fear. By linking growth to nationalism, the process of nation-building takes on normative social significance with its aim of achieving rapid socio-economic development (George, 2006: 39).This appears especially distinct from countries (especially) in the West like the United States- where studies show that the existence of plethora of mainstream media avenues actually limits the appeal of alternate media- new media technologies run the unique advantage of having a specific niche appeal that fuels its growth in Singapore This can be attributed to the stringent licensing laws for the traditional print and broadcasting media that act as difficult entry barriers to new participants. Therefore, the possibility of the mainstream media collaborating with alternate online citizen journalists can result in amalgamated platform to showcase fuller diversity of views of Singaporeans[6] (Soon, 2006).

The oft held view that Singaporeans tend to be more apolitical than their peers in other countries appears refuted by a report published by Nexlabs, an information management company that scanned election related postings on the internet (Lin, 2006). According to this report there were approximately 1,200 reports on the General Elections of 2006 published in the months running up to the actual elections. The most widely discussed election theme in the tracked blogs was that of an open society making up for nearly 18% of all articles and postings on the (then) forthcoming elections. This was different from issues highlighted in news websites that ranged from defamation suits and the National Kidney Foundation scandal that rocked the nation just prior to the elections. These findings, highlighting the relevance of the internet especially in the opinion making processes of young Singaporeans, were furthered in a research report published by the Global banking and Investment giant Goldman Sachs in early 2006. The report estimated that Broadband penetration in Singapore was likely to reach 80% in 2007 due to the strong patronage it enjoys from the state. This figure had already risen from 13% in 2001 to 51% by 2005 and was perhaps encouraged by the increasing dependence of young consumers on free e-newspapers and news-portals available on the internet (Law, 2006). With the medium aligning itself as the new bastion for opinion-making and information access, the state cannot afford to underplay the impact of the internet- a fact that is manifest in the changing policy approaches to the internet. For instance the Parliamentary Election Act was amended in 2001 to allow political parties to advertise on the internet. This was done to ensure responsible use of the

internet during campaigning as the free-for-all environment of the Internet is often vulnerable to abuse[7].

The government, ever sensitive to global changes and their effects on local populations has had to adapt accordingly to New Media Technologies as well. The authorities have advocated a 'soft-touch' approach to regulating content available on the internet. To what extent do the amorphous nature of the medium and the inability of most surveillance regimes to completely control it influence the apparent lack of ardor on part of the state to censor the internet as compared to its approach to the traditional media? Even so, the state's admission of its incapacity to censor cyber space avenues accessible by its citizens has not prevented it from stopping the prohibitions altogether[8] (Soon, 2006). The move by the state to 'engage' rather than control of the internet is viewed by some as unsurprising and in keeping with the old state approach to control of old media organizations in Singapore. Parallel is often drawn on the case of admitting and regulating the foreign press in Singapore and the issue of political engagement in cyberspace[9]. The authorities seem particularly austere in allowing what it deems to be 'political engagement' by unlicensed non-political actors[10]. This was offered as an underlying reasoning for prosecuting foreign media houses that in the past have, by featuring articles indicating towards dissenting views in local politics, run afoul with the law in Singapore[11]. Such reaction is perhaps also indicative of a more complex ideological approach of the state when dealing with its citizens. The Government has often been accused to attempting to 'micro-manage' the lives of Singaporeans, a

claim arising out of the incumbent Peoples Action Party (PAP) position that the average Singaporean is unable to see the larger context when exposed to alternate information or opinion[12].

This agenda has aroused strong feeling among many civil society organizations who remain unconvinced of the need for stringent social controls that have far reaching effects on the individual's life. While certain types of controls on online information such as those concerning online pornography and child abuse are accepted as warranted, controls on political speech and individual dissent are not as easily accepted. When such 'draconian' laws are flouted the onus lies with the government to acknowledge the critical difference between responsible information and infotainment; and more importantly, to acknowledge the ability of its citizens to react to online data with due caution[13] (Siew, 2006).

Ang Peng and Nadrajan (1995, in Rodan 1996) offer that broad censorship of the Internet in Singapore is not new with access to newsgroups through local ISPs being subject to the manner in which the state monopoly telecommunications provider- Singapore Telecom – operates its lines. According to this research such engagement with critical voices over the internet is '*consistent; with the approach taken with the international press where authorities devote considerable energy to correcting published views and information"* (ibid: 12). Yet according to these authors, while it has been easier for the PAP to 'intimidate' the traditional media, the internet seems to be harder to bring under its control but even in the face of the

perceived impossibility of censorship in cyberspace the PAP government seems reluctant to concede any more media control than is deemed absolutely necessary. In evoking a sense of 'nation-building' to fight off common threats- the main of which is that of social discord in a multi-ethnic society like Singapore- and achieve common ambitions of rapid socio-economic growth, the state has deftly linked growth to nationalism and thus its control mechanisms appear to take on normative social significance in doing so (George, 2006: 39). This also allows the state to maintain its rhetoric that exposure to divergent views would have a detrimental social and political impact on its citizens and that by restricting access to what it perceives to be unsuitable or destabilizing material is effectively undertaking its moral duty to its electorate[14] (Rodan, 1998: 11). In times when advancements in communication technology allow the individual to become increasingly included as an integral member of a larger global community it would appear that the state is particularly worried about the lack of accountability afforded by the anonymity of the internet[15]. The potential of the internet to instigate deep emotional responses by end users reacting to information they access online has made the government even more committed to keeping abreast of technological changes and responses of other nations to challenges posed by unfettered media access[16] (Chia, 2006). Even while adopting a proactive approach to countering any such the destabilizing forces latent in material available online, the government is also clear in its unambiguous demarcation between genuine political contestation and what it dismisses as 'political commentary by non- political players' indulging in infotainment[17]. The official stance of the government has been consistent in the freedom accorded to

'serious' political commentary subject to the laws of defamation and sedition. This stance also places any comment on the state's policies or practices firmly in the domain of 'serious' politics – an arena into which only those who choose to legally register as individuals or agencies (or web portals) specifically incorporated for political engagement can enter[18].

In a social climate where individual rights are, as a national agenda, often positioned as secondary to the collective will that prefers stability over any individual freedoms[19] - dissidents are often hard pressed to establish a public sphere that allows them to voice their opinions and in such climates, it is the internet that provides such scope. This is sufficient cause for concern for the authorities who, while making provisions to incorporate the very technology to their administration and citizen obligations, are at pains to extend their Big Brother image among any possible disruptions triggered via the medium (Loh, 2006). Hence to 'bring some order to (a) chaotic environment'[20], the state has made it mandatory for political parties and individuals who use the internet to propagate or promote political issues to register with the MDA. The move is propagated as an endeavor to instill a sense of accountability for comments made online. The virtual nature of the internet and its global nature make effective regulation difficult to implement but rules, any how, do have an effect in setting the standards of permissible engagement and dialogue through the appropriate channels. And the government appears to be committed to evolving its laws and policies to stay abreast with the changing technologies and opportunities afforded by new media platforms by constantly

reviewing the rules and updating their position as the socio-political environment changes.

Yet this position belies the dynamic nature of the policy making mechanism in Singapore. The Government is aware of the constantly changing environment and acknowledges the need to wean its indigenous politics away from its 'paternalistic' tradition. As the economy, and with it the electorate matures, the government is increasingly aware of the pitfalls of people's overdependence on their leaders. This is viewed as a possible hurdle to the nation achieving its ambitions of becoming completely self- sufficient. In accepting this, the shifting stance of the state is further indicative of an honest acceptance of the pervasive presence of the Government in its average citizen's life. This has far reaching and positive implications on the creation of an active public sphere led by active citizenry rather than state commands[21] (Loh, 2006).

The government is definitely aware of the need for it to ensure its relevance in today's world especially among the youth- a fact that in turn can get manifested in affording the lighter touch in political and social discourse. Perhaps in recognizing the vast potential of the internet to engage an apathetic and increasingly apolitical future electorate, the state's rhetoric on allowing increased freedom in expressions online underpins its concrete efforts to understand the medium and the many ways in which it can be harnessed with positive results[22]. It also indicates a move towards inviting dialogue in a mutually symbiotic climate afforded by the NMTs (Loh,

2006). Such endeavors would be welcomed by both sides keen to reduce the ambiguity in the enforcement of current rules governing individual speech and expression, especially those politically motivated speech in Singapore. A 'light touch' approach in regulating this along with a more compromisory note in responding to the demand for the creation of a 'real' civil society in Singapore would go far in maintaining the people's 'good faith' and prevent the stifling of genuine expressions of non-contentious creativity[23] (Lee, 2006).

In October 2006 the new feedback channels introduced by the government to facilitate dialogue on a relatively more equal footing rather than what was often seen as a top-down monologue provided facilities by which citizens could use mobile text messages (SMS) and emails to voice their opinions on key community issues. Perhaps such moves are directed towards not only harnessing the emerging technologies but more to manage its public image among the online (and hence global) community[24]. The latter has been increasingly copious among internet users who claim to use the medium because, among other reasons, the traditional media remains largely unconcerned about alternative views and in doing so often present a position excessively unsympathetic and critical of the state mechanisms and what it sees as the demise of individual freedoms (Paulo, 2006).

With the Government beginning to take notice of the online community and the potential of the medium for a more inclusive engagement, public response to such moves remains mixed (Chia, 2006). Some appeared skeptical of the state's

'evolving' approach to enforcing cyber controls and cited the state's past history with censorship of dissent as evidence of a continuing stalemate between personal expression in the media and official control provisions[25]. Others were more optimistic in welcoming the relaxation of control regimes. Evidence to such effect is apparent in the extension of permissible levels and issues open for debate today[26].

While allowing the state a degree of leeway in presenting the size of destabilizing forces incorporated in unregulated 'free-for-all' politics as advocated by proponents of the liberal capitalist- democratic model of governance, it is often noted that not all internet users in Singapore are actively engaged in political participation with the intention of criticizing the state machinery with many citizens being too preoccupied with the contestations directly influencing their daily lives to indulge in party politics (Lee, 2006). Among others these include Animal Rights Activists and Women's Rights Groups who are engaging in critical community concerns with the aim of their 'activism' being to create a more viable civil society in Singapore rather than oppose the government in political contestation[27].

With a clear call for increased public participation in socio-political progress of the country-- albeit in a 'registered and formal manner'—there is much scope for the internet to provide a public sphere for inclusive state- citizen engagement. The potential of the medium is especially interesting to study when juxtaposed on the evolution of the State of Singapore with regards to their Information and Communication Policies. This is a key reason as to locating this study in this

specific and unique context. There is nary a situation as complex and unpredicted as here with old school technology and democracy assertions failing to be proved as they have in most other modern day democracies across the globe. The self positioning of the nation at the apex of the 'Infocomm Age' reveals the many contentions and evolutions that mark the mass acceptance as well as the state endorsement of the medium. It is in such a dynamic scenario that the context of this specific thesis holds its ground.

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[1] In a NewScientist.com news service feature, author Will Knight discusses how the 'mirror site' elgooG is in reality a parody of the English language version of Google which had been banned in China. The 'other' site essentially incorporates a method of reversing all the text on an original web page including the text terms used for searches at the end users side as well. Information on the page can be viewed by using a mirror. Such methods allow search results to return the same hits as the English language Google allowing users to breach the 'Great Firewall'.

[2] See 'Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics"

[3] Telecommunication figures and internet penetration figures and e-gov customer perception survey conducted in 2006 (for the year 2005). Accessed from IDA Singapore website.

[4] Commonly used to refer to people born after Singapore's independence in 1965. This generation is often treated by the PAP old guard as individuals who did not have to experience first hand the struggles of gaining independence and fighting off the communist threat of the times. Hence, it is often opinioned that people belonging to this 'post-65 generation' tend to be less reverential of the state's perspectives of nation-building and paternalistic mode of governmental rule in Singapore.

[5] According to George Cherian in his comparative work on Malaysian and Singaporean contentious online journalism, "It is Malaysia not Singapore that is home to the more developed contentious online journalism. Malaysia's main alternative websites reach more than 100,000 people while (those) in Singapore measures their visitors in the 1000's or 100's. Malaysia has at least three alternative sites employing fulltime staff, Singapore has none. Malaysia's leading sites produce daily news updates; in Singapore a website can consider itself on the roll if it adds a new article a week." (2006: 177) He based his observations on a comparative study of two leading 'political' websites in Malaysian-- Malaysiakini and Harakah-- and two similarly engaged sites in Singapore—Sintercom and ThinkCenter.

[7] See Channel NewsAsia, *'No Podcasting during the elections',* Today, April 4 2006 edition.

[8] Minister George Yeo emphasized, "*Censorship can no longer be 100 percent effective, but even if it is only 20 percent effective, we should not stop censoring*."

[9] See section 1.2 of Chapter 1 of the thesis for relevant laws and rules governing both the traditional media (including foreign press operating in Singapore) and the internet (including private citizen blogs).

[10] The position in question is summed up in Minister Mentor Lee's words: *"There is a big difference between reporting on local affairs and interfering in them. We do not permit foreign news organizations operating in Singapore to participate or interfere in domestic politics. Singapore politics is for Singaporeans only. Should we find that a foreign newspaper or broadcaster has been inaccurate in its reporting or presented unfounded reports, we expect to be accorded the right of reply. I think this is a fair and reasonable thing to ask for. We are simply asking for journalistic integrity... (We) welcome the foreign media to Singapore. I hope they understand our position on this matter and we can continue our amicable and mutually beneficial relationship."*

[11] The Far East Economic Review in 2006 had its license revoked in Singapore after it featured an interview with the Opposition leader Chee Soon Juan. The agency was successfully sued for defamation and violation of the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act. The Economist has also had it circulations 'gazetted' for featuring what the state viewed as libelous articles.

[12] The Prime Minister has often declared his (and the PAPs) position on the issue asserting that: *"We are knowledgeable about things happening in our country. But when it comes to understanding the big picture, many Singaporeans cannot grasp how global trends will influence our nation's future."*

[13] Political Commentator and Journalist Siew Kum Hong gives voice to some of these concerns: *'The Government appears to be unsure of the Singaporean's ability to distinguish between fact and fiction to sift the wheat of information from the chaff of infotainment. Symbolic, unenforceable laws are warranted when they reflect social norms such as the controls on online pornography and the planned criminalization of overseas child sex. But many disagree with the controls on political speech. And when people openly flout a symbolic law at will they make a mockery of it. What then is the signal being sent?"*

[14] Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew contends that *"...The top 3 to 5 percent of a society can handle this free-for-all, this clash of ideas.*" For the bulk of the population, however, exposure to this is likely to have destabilizing social and political effects according to the senior minister.

[15] Dr Balaji Sadasivan, the Senior Minister of State for Information, Communications and the Arts in his statement that *"people should not take refuge behind the anonymity of the internet to manipulate public opinion."*

[16] Minister for Information, Communications and The Arts Lee Boon Yang says that it is the lack of accountability and the irrational emotions they can whip on the internet yet insists that this will not deter the government from keeping up with technological changes and learn from the experiences of other countries.

[17] In an interview featured in the Straits Times, Minister Lee Boon Yang spoke on the difference between information and infotainment and stressed on the need to keep politics in the formers

domain. Answering queries on the apparent ban on political commentary by non-political players, he countered that there was full freedom to publish anything a person chooses or to voice their opinion at election rallies, subject to defamation and sedition laws prevalent in the Singapore. The issues arise, according to Dr Lee, when political campaigning turns into 'infotainment' that blurs the lines between fact and fiction.

[18] Prime Minister Lee also stressed on the need to treat politics as a serious issue.
> *"If you turn (politics) into a joke or poke fun at politicians like some television programs in Taiwan do, I don't think it's a good thing…With regards to politics whether you agree or disagree, be it subversive views or otherwise, they will all be accepted. But politics needs to be treated seriously."*

[19] See works on 'Asian Values' e.g. Jayasuria, K (1998).

[20] .Minister Lee Boon Yang in a Straits Times interview in 2006 was of the opinion that, *"The internet is ubiquitous, fast and anonymous... Despite its usefulness, the internet is chaotic and disorganized, with many half-truths and untruths masquerading as facts".*

[21] In a televised interview aired on MediaCorp's Channel 5 Prime Minster Lee Hsien Loong insisted that *"Whether it's in the area of arts or political discourse, we have loosened up considerably. But certain topics like race and religion remain sensitive not because the government has an opinion on them but because they can create misunderstandings and social strife that would result in very serious problems."* He conceded that the people's overdependence on the Government was a problem and that *"when things happen, everyone's first reaction is: 'what is the Government doing about it'?"* He accepted that the state had become too pervasive in Singaporean's lives and it is looking to minimize its influence to allow citizens to play a more active role.

[22] Says Tanjong Pagar GRC MP Indranee Rajah: *"I think that if we as a party are confident of ourselves, we can probably afford that lighter tough…the PAP must also make a greater effort to understand the cyberspace community…if you want to get messages out there, you need to know how to engage them and you must hear the messages of the people in cyberspace."*

[23] The subject of regulating online content, especially content critical of the state, was raised by Mr. Charles Chong, a member of the Government Parliamentary Committee (GPC) for Information, Communications and the Arts. While admitting to the ambiguous nature of OB markers that regulate politically motivated speech in Singapore, Mr. Chong advocated a 'light touch' approach by authorities in trying to regulate speech as well in handling the public demand for more freedoms in the creation of a 'real' civil society in Singapore. He added that, in the 'heat of the elections', the authorities should be wary of interpreting censorship laws to such an extent that 'people, inadvertently and in good faith, find themselves unable to air their views or even display their artistic talents on political posters.

[24] At a GE 2006 post mortem discussion forum organized at the National University of Singapore, PAP representative Denise Phua recognized the need to engage the youth in cyberspace while voicing her concern over 'the overwhelmingly slanted postings against the ruling party'. She went on to state that *"…This is something that the PAP would do well to take into account…and to manage this channel of communication."*

[25] Mr. Alex Au of YawningBread.com appeared skeptical while pronouncing that such as overtly cautious approach on part of the state to control and censor dialogue in cyberspace would prove to be 'detrimental to the political growth and maturity of (Singaporean) society.'

[26] Me Lee Kin Mun - the author of the popular blog Mr. Brown - accepted this cautious approach while pointing out that, when it came to control regimes and levels of permissible issues, things have already changed for the better : "*It was only five years ago that online political campaigning was allowed. Five years down the road there might be more easing of rules as society understands the internet better/*"

[27] According to political commentator Howard Lee, *" In our lives, the real battles are this that we fight with a passion for what we believe in, not necessarily thesis that are defined as acceptable points of contest, be it out-of-bound markers or electoral boundaries, by the government."*

Chapter 3. Literature Review:

This research explores the dialogue between New Media Adoption and State Response under the broad themes of Civil Society evolutions and the following is a review of literature on studies that have addressed the issues of the role of the public sphere, its elements, agents and imperatives and their relation to democracy.

3.1 The Public Sphere as a site for socio-political activism:

Dahlberg (2001), in his extension of Habermas' public sphere to online deliberative forums, offers that there are essentially three main 'camps' in the notion of internet democracy. The first takes a communitarian view that professes the community spirit and value enhancing role of the internet. The second is the Liberal Individualistic perspective of the internet as an expression of individual expression. In both these perspectives, a pre-discursive political subject is assumed in that democracy is either a 'strategic competition' between established interests or immersed in an 'ethically integrated community'. In contrast, the third perspective- a Deliberative model, studies the internet as an expansion of Habermas' public sphere of the rational-critical citizen discourse. According to Habermas this discourse-- autonomous from the state as well as from the corporate interests-- may form public opinion that can seek the accountability of officials and decision makers.

'dialogue and difference are central to the deliberate model…differences always exist between subjects which necessitates a process of rational-critical discourse in order for privately-oriented individuals to become publicly-oriented citizens and for public opinion that can rationally guide democratic decision-making' (Ibid: 616).

According to Dahlberg it is this practice of deliberation, as evidenced from the history of the public sphere evolution, that transforms cultural norms and social structures By superimposing the concept of the public sphere on discursive spaces on the internet, he asserts that even with the horizontal lines of communication, virtual spaces offer an inadequately weak form of democratic participation owing to the exclusive nature of the medium. Members of virtual communities are not responsible for confronting the entire array of public concerns that effect everyday life. Yet, at the same time there are discursive spaces on the internet that can and do extend the range of the public sphere. In his analysis of these spaces, the author identifies six key requirements that assist in this extension. One of the foremost requirements is seen as the ability to exchange and critique the normative claims that are propagated on reason rather than merely asserted. The second is the degree of reflexivity that allows people to critically understand and locate their values, interests and assumptions within a larger social context. This appears to be limited in the case of cyber-deliberations given the often anonymous nature of the medium that makes it harder for users to identify the real authors or imperatives behind specific perspectives. This creates an environment of skepticism and mistrust of information and data sources, making it harder for consumers to identify with the

various perspectives presented online. Following this is the ability for ideal role taking that urges citizens to commit to an ongoing dialogue with each other in an attempt to see another's perspective. The transient nature of cyberspace makes such a commitment often conspicuous in its absence. In the case of internet aided communications, where 'sincerity' is viewed as the desire to truthfully and comprehensively provide all information relevant to the discussion at hand, the perceived lack of the same makes it difficult to verify identity claims and presented information in cyberspace . According to Dahlberg, another important requirement for the extension of the concept of public sphere to cyberspace is the discursive inclusion and equality for participants in online forums etc. While this claim takes into account the parity in entitlement to raise and question any assertion that affects the individual; it also concedes that certain factors such as unequal access along with inequalities inherent to the discourse can limit inclusion. In practical online debate certain individuals and groups tend to dominate the space both qualitatively and quantitatively with social inequality being a leading cause of extensive exclusion from online forums. The final requirement (for the extension of the public sphere) calls for discourse that is driven by public individuals and is autonomous from administrative or business influence. This too is negated by the increasing assertion of economic interests on the internet that is replacing rational deliberation with instrumental rationality in many online forums.

Accepting this scenario, online deliberations may be assumed to be largely following Habermas' idea of the bourgeois public sphere. At the same time, the

effect of surrounding socio-cultural conditions on the above mentioned factors cannot be undermined and nor can the role of actors in this discourse. Overcoming the limitations inherent to this debate as seen in the preceding sections, the practice of deliberation leads the transformation of cultural norms and social structures which in turn enable an expansion of the public sphere. Such an expansion though cannot occur in a void. It requires consistent intervention, protection and patronage from the state and public interests alike. Mere application of new technology alone cannot ensure this and people must be encouraged to participate in rational-critical discourse in order to successfully employ new technology.

In keeping with Dahlberg's contestation, Philip Agre (2002) also provides a compelling argument for the role of institutions in studying the internet as a site for political processes to occur. The author defines civil association as 'a system of interlocking institutions and not a shapeless meeting of unformed minds' (Ibid: 323). He asserts that while social institutions do evolve with new opportunities created by new technologies, it is in the working of the institution itself where the dynamics of the evolution lie. Technology in itself is vital insofar as the use of it within and between members of social institutions. Once again, it is the 'actors' of social processes and interactions that give credence to the technology. Agre uses what he terms as the Amplification Model to explain the interplay between technology and the institution. According to this model the 'main impact of the internet will be to allow us to do more of the things we are *already* organized and oriented to do (Ibid: 315).

The study of new technologies as platforms for social activism as presented by Agre is also related to Carroll and Hackett's (2006) application of various sociological theories of social movements through Democratic Media Activism (DMA) in Anglo-American liberal democracies. Their thesis begins with the premise that media reform can either take on politically conservative forms or be of a reactionary nature reinforcing patterns of hierarchy and exclusion. Here too the role of 'actors' is central to the process of media activism. They go on to differentiate three layers of activity placing those with nothing more than an incidental interest in the social processes at the very outer layer. The second-- and comparatively deeper-- layer comprises of diffused units of actors who are not in themselves directly connected with issues of communication policy etc yet seek to enjoy indirect benefits from it. At the very heart of these differentiated layers are the direct media industry members and other affiliated social groups involved in social representation. With such concentric classifications, the authors reveal that a progressive and democratic activism in civil society is the key driving force of *media democratization.* Such activities include efforts to alter media messages and workings, institutions and contexts such as the state communication policies, in a more subjective and democratic direction as well as provide a platform for equal participation in public discourse and societal decision-making (Ibid: 84). The authors also present media activism through two approaches that differ in their direction of approach to activism. These are the Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) -- mainly US based in application and ideology--and the New Social Movements (NSM) approach that is euro centric in its experience.

The RMT approach studies how movements form and engage in collective action. This takes in to account the shared interests and forms of social organization that underlie the process. At this point, a series of key differences appear between what the authors refer to as 'conventional' and media activism. The former makes strategic use of the media as a means towards a political end whereas the latter views the media as an end in itself. This analytical difference aside, the demarcation between the two is indistinguishable due to the fact that building an alternative media is similar to conventional processes that address the problem of dependency. Increasingly, the ease of access and the availability of cheaper, user friendly technology - particularly the internet – have further blurred this distinction. It bears to keep in mind that, for media activism the alternative media are not merely potential political instruments rather they are a collective good in themselves. This is owing to the fact that they have the power to negate corporate control of public communication and thus, can foster democratic debate. On the other hand, NSM scrutinize movements as new forms of collective identity engaged in discursive struggles that not only transform people's understandings but also contest the legitimacy of received cultural codes and perspectives.

From a combined analysis of the afore mentioned approaches, it would appear that the public sphere operates between the two dualities of 'defensive' process—revolutionary action directed inwards to civil society—and 'offensive' action that incorporates state and economic institutional initiatives. Negotiations between these

two flows for a public sphere are not entirely contentious in nature with both modes often being interdependent.

> *'The renovation of civil society entails the creation of counter-publics in dialogue with each other, promoting a democratic political culture... At the same time 'agitational activities directed towards wider publics' also address 'offensive' issues of public policy and state power'* (Ibid: 99).

Splichal (2002) goes further in the debate on the role of the public sphere by positing that democratic organization of the public can only occur with the provision of conditions for public education; freedom to conduct social enquiry and distribution of its outcomes to public scrutiny; and the assurance of complete publicity of all matters related to public interests. To allow informed decisions on public issues, a democratic system should be in place where citizens can express their nature while protecting them from arbitrary coercion from either the state or any other authoritative body. It should also provide a space for involving them in determining the nature and extents of their associations as well as promote economic expansion. This can, according to Splichal, only take place in the presence of an open information and communication system that is a product of 'responsible' regulating (Ibid:20). The public sphere needs to be regulated in a manner that is conducive to stimulation of not only the individual but also allow for groups to organize and express their opinion in public debate. The success of any new regulatory measures is not limited to or dependant on new technology

opportunities or change, i.e. increases, in communicative power. Rather it is a function of power relations between key actors participating in social negotiations that determine any perceived successes or failures as the case may be. Control of the media should lie with society as a whole and not with any specific group or groups. The power of commercial interests and political agents must be limited to protect and increase the autonomy of the media and prevent coalitions between the state or capital and the media that are to the detriment of the public. Thus according to the researcher, the 'generic human right to communicate, division of labor and the spirit of cooperation' are the only legitimate basis of a successful public sphere rather than the principals of 'economic and political competition, separation of powers and freedom of the press' (Ibid:23).

3.2 Approaches to civil society:

Selian (2004) presents an insight to the dynamics of civil society organizations (CSOs) globally in the promotion of a global information society. In her study, Selian uses the UN definition of the civil society as '*a transnational domain in which people form relationships and develop elements of identity outside their role as a citizen of a particular state…it thus represents a sphere that transcends the self regarding the character of the state system and can work in the service of the genuinely transnational public interests*' (ibid: 206). The creation of a global civil society depends on a normative commitment towards more humane governance.

Associational life, while lying below the state yet not limited by state boundaries, develops its own sense of allegiances and norms that have a visible influence over the way in which public concerns are addressed. Hence civil society comprises largely of private actors not entirely different from private sector workers or bodies such as scientific, professional or trade associations.

In recent years shifting alliances between CSOs and other major stakeholders in the masses-state engagement processes such as private corporate institutions etc have led to a sense of discontent against 'third sector' activism as the type performed by NGOs who increasingly view global public policy networks as contestants for political, and therefore public, power. According to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) a widespread perception of state failure is usually seen as the main impetus for the birth of CSOs. Yet on a whole such units are not looked upon as credible alternatives to the state. The main reason for this has been the question of their accountability and it is only in recent years that the demand for transparency in the dealings of these organizations has gained ground. It is undoubtedly a challenging task to manage the centralization of representation ensuring legitimization of civil society stakeholders.

Friedland (1996) asserted that, in the creation of civil society, new technologies play a central role in the increasingly complex social networks operating in human existence. He defends that a study of any mediation of social exchanges by electronic communication systems requires a deep and clear understanding of the

social networks structures it works within. The role of knowledge workers once again takes a dominant position in the discourse and there is a preemptive need for distinguishing the functions of collection and dissemination of information on one hand and provision of a space for public debate on the other (Ibid: 189). According to the author, technology acts as platform for people to share common experiences and does little by way of *creating* grounds for revolutionary experiences. The new social capital relationships that emerge from public debate networks locate deliberations in the concrete practices of its citizens as a site for 'richer relations than could ever be developed through polling or the mass media alone' (Ibid: 207). As access to network tools widens the scope of public spaces that allow increasingly robust relationship building and information circulation which in turn enhances democratic citizen groups at the grassroots level.

3.3 Civil Society and Social Unrest:

The Neo-Tocquevillian school of thought, as professed by Fukuyama, Putnam, and Hirst among other prominent scholars, locates civil society as necessarily conducive to democracy. Putnam took the stand that a vigorous civil society is the key to strong democratic governments and associational life created civic norms that can and do easily extend beyond their boundaries creating grounds for democracy at a larger polity level. The negation of these very assumptions forms the basis of

Kwon's (2004) critique of the automatically positive relation between civil society and democracy.

The author does this by analyzing the effects of associational life on democracy in early modern Italy. He traces the roots of anti-democratic movements like Fascism and Nazism to the failure of liberal regimes to integrate the spirit of associations in the common citizens within the larger national democratic institutions. The Liberal regime in Italy relied on its twin arms of restricted franchise and a system of clientele-patronage networks. Associations in such conditions were founded not on faith in democratic rule but more on frustrations with the state for failing address the political and ideological vacuum existing in public life. The 'civic norms' of trust and cooperation that ought to be nurtured by associational life may fail to work in a wider community as their process depend on the associations interactions with the larger political and ideological contexts. Kwon asserts that a clear understanding of the effects of associations on democracy is impossible without an understanding of the identities of the members.

The argument that citizens need widespread admittance to information about policy projects and government activities takes on further urgency at a time when the balance between the state and citizen is shifting to the disadvantage of the latter. According to many observers the growth of state power is an inevitable outcome of the development of capitalist democracies over the past few decades. As the role of the state in steering economic and social agenda grows, so do the problems it faces

in maintaining both the revenues and the legitimacy to execute the role (Murdock and Golding, 1989: 108).

3.4 Civil society and economic imperatives:

Simpson (2004) argued that there is evidence that individuals and groups whose values and agendas are not inline with the commercial ethos and activities of digital capitalism are attempting to occupy and develop their positions on and through the internet. His neo-Gramscian take on Habermas' passive revolution lies on the observation that as capitalist production moves outside national boundaries, the state will try to expand its jurisdiction to facilitate this, thereby becoming internationalized in the form of new international organizations and laws. The internet is thus viewed as a possible site for counter-hegemonic tendencies and there must be deliberative efforts in securing such a consensus within civil society.

3.5 Role of 'Actors' and New Solidarities provided by New Media Technologies:

Frost (2005) locates the role of social actors in the emergence of 'new solidarities' in online community life and in doing so uses Habermas' argument for the same occurring in the print media. Cyberspace as a site for sincere exchange is limited

owing to its very inherent nature of anonymity, ease of exit, disposability and therefore low commitment. The absence of existing and enforceable boundaries and other conditions necessary for fostering social exchanges based on mutual trust is further hampered by the internet's apparent agnosticism in the face of human fatalities. All this negates the importance and role of 'shared meaning' that is vital for the creation of a civil society in cyberspace. It is perhaps this very experience of isolation and exclusion that creates a new source of social solidarity. As the author observes, 'it may be the internets capacity (to) promote awareness of a population's marginal and disenfranchised status that represents its greatest potential for change' (Ibid: 49).

Thus, as a mode of political engagement, the internet works more to free the individual from the restrictions of ascribed identity and communal attachments and replace these with voluntary associations. Simultaneously, Frost posits that, especially in the case of democracies, it is not the volume of participation but quality that represents *meaningful* social discourse. So it would not be an unjustified reading to present the role of actors – meaningful communication—that is validates the use of new technologies in creating political solidarity. In themselves, online social relations play a limited role in giving rise to a political solidarity sufficient to support a democratic post national project.

The issue of alienation as a solidarity factor in new media networks is also raised by Sachs (1995) who identified the feeling of disregard experienced by consumers in

their interactions with traditional news media. Such individuals who feel left out from mainstream politics and journalism, the opinion of others with similar interests and experiences may alleviate feelings of isolations. The internet and its deliberative forums provide content related to major social, political and economic events and issues. These while also covered by the press and other mainstream traditional media, take on a unique communication form in cyberspace with a more cooperative and interactive knowledge exchange. This coupled with the asynchronous nature of computer mediated conversations allow for reflections and analysis by users normally disallowed doing so by traditional media. Thus, previously 'ignored' users can witness and participate in the larger process of formation of public opinion.

3.6 Feedback and citizen participation in decision making process:

Keeping with the thesis of the role of citizens in civil society, I now turn to Hacker (1996) analysis of what he calls the 'crisis of democracy'. Citizens want to be more involved in the process of state and it is essential for leaders to accommodate these desires .In Hacker's opinion there has always been a definite co-relation between communication and power in human history and here lies the starting point for political interactivity among citizens and power holders and brokers alike. Increasing the levels of political information accessible to citizens expands the range of social networks between classes, data sources and political agents. This

would play out then in the form of allowing citizens to have active input in the decision making process especially in matters of public concern as well as providing interactivity among all levels of the socio-political structure. Hacker's study observed that on an average citizen's desire more active and genuine role in the political process rather than to be merely better informed spectators. The call for *activism* is viewed as more desirable in the long term than merely *intellectual expertise.* The opening up of channels of communication for those who would normally have been in the margins any public discourse helps the actors believe that can affect or at the very least provide input into debates that address the quality of their lives. This belief in their perceived ability to affect change and in their potential for acting in their own interests also creates an increased sense of community solidarity.

To successfully achieve this, it is necessary to differentiate between 'consumers' and 'citizens' with new participation systems being grounded in the principle of openness and feedback. Linear lines of communication have tended to support traditional power structures resting on active leaders and dormant publics. On the other hand, interactive communications create symmetric channels of feedback between leaders and the citizen. Such open systems threaten elitist administrations as they allow for a more balanced shift in power equations between the state and the public (Ibid: 224).

Extending Hackers assertion of open communication and electronic democratization, Tumber and Bromley (1998) studied the implications of the Electronic Service Delivery (ESD) to the public. As a channel for direct communication with the public, the use of the internet has become an important avenue in the governments' information armory. While the main impetus for ESD projects has been improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of public services in keeping with the state's obligations to its citizens, a more vital move has been to expand electronic democracy opportunities to enhance the quality of citizenship. Where once citizens felt alienated and disconnected from the political process with traditional media failing to fill the void due to its limited interactivity, toady increasingly, the widespread use of new media technologies provide ample avenues for interactivity and feedback. And governments have been quick to realize the potential of the internet in talking to their citizens and this is changing the very environment of application. The root of this lies in the fact that new media proliferation and constantly evolving levels of interaction are amalgamating to circumvent traditional control apparatus'. The ensuring birth of new, more accommodative laws has, on one hand led to an acknowledgment of greater flexibility and mobility in creating fairly generic guidelines, it has also opened the communication lines to deliberate propaganda (Ibid:163).

Hence the relations and negotiations between the government and citizens on the internet is a key indicator to the success of any attempts to create a Habermasian 'public sphere'.

3.7 Review of Literature focusing on Singapore civil society and Technology engagements:

James Gomez (2005a), writer and Workers Party candidate for GE 2006, addresses the issue of what he sees as a 'civil society gap in Singapore' by providing a contemporary analysis of the role of external advocacy groups in explaining their relationship to the Singapore civil society. The article looks at the manner in which human rights and media advocacy groups create public awareness of the 'transgressions' against individual and media freedom of expression in Singapore via new media platforms. *"Overall the internet ha made it easier for advocates to reach a wide, global audience…with sectors within the international and regional civil society landscape taking an active interest in freedom issues in Singapore and the internet generates easier access to these"* (Ibid:15). The author proposes that with the speed and reach of information exchange afforded by the internet, there now is an increased awareness of various 'freedom' related issues made possible by the growth of Singapore focused websites and online discussion groups that derive their content from the multitude of external reports published on the subject of freedom issues in Singapore (Ibid: 3). Gomez studies the government's response to the increased activism in the media and, while stopping just short of developing the political evolution of the domestic media's defence of their state of freedoms, posits that it is the very fact that the PAP appear to react 'negatively' to online political advocacy signals the success of the endeavors (Ibid: 14).

In another article also published on the website ThinkCenter.org, Gomez (2005b) tackles the implications of various governmental licensing and regulatory rules like the Public Entertainments and Meetings Act (PEMA) on free speech in Singapore. He contends that, historically, the PEMA has been used deliberately target the opposition parties and political dissidents in spite of 'progressive' amendments to the Act (Ibid: 4). The article looks at the power of the media as an opinion inducing channel that is vital for the formation and sustenance of a civil society. In doing so, the author provides a number of case studies to demonstrate the use of the various 'arms' of the state-- ranging from defamation laws to bankruptcy proceedings -- to appear to successfully deter most advocates, thereby creating a sense of 'fear that contributes to self censorship of speech' especially among the local media. This failure on part of the opposition parties to articulate their agenda through some form of the mass media, according to Gomez, remains one of their gravest communication setbacks (Ibid: 3). The article goes on to observe that the multi-layered regulatory mechanisms that govern public speech in Singapore often results in 'interesting' ways in which freedom of speech is perceived, even among many opposition activists. Amidst the accusations of curtailed speech and cumbersome procedural loopholes that make obtaining relevant licenses to exercise public speech a strenuous task, there appear to be a number of members of the different opposition parties who insist that free speech in Singapore is indeed present as long as the speakers chooses to exercise their activities within the framework of current rules. While in 2004 laws on indoor speech were relaxed[1], there appears to be a general consensus among opposition party members that outdoor speeches continue

to be not free. The use of defamation laws has had a strong impact on free speech that creates a forced climate of fear among activists and dissidents. The author concludes by arguing that even if the opposition parties are allowed to engage in free speech, the limited coverage of these activities by the mainstream media negate any positive change in free speech laws (Ibid: 14).

Cherian George (2005a) offers an analysis of the reasons for the endurance of authoritarian rule in Singapore by citing the significant degree of consent on part of the citizens with the government's ideology of nation-building. Such 'instrumental acquiescence' and 'normative consensus' arises from the state's need to legitimize power that is often lost when coercive violence is misapplied in many government-public interactions. This, according to the author, has been efficiently avoided in the case of Singapore where the state appears to have adopted a more light-touch approach changing the manner in which coercive tools are used into economic sanctions (Ibid: 11). This is vastly different from the means installed by other 'violent regimes' and polemical comparisons between the press in Singapore and those located abroad are misleading. George offers the current forms of internet censorship that are successfully technologically integrated within the medium as evidence of the effectiveness of less visible, though more efficient, control regimes. '*Calibrated coercion provides journalists with periodic reminders of just who is boss, but also enough leeway to persuade enough of them that here is still a place in Singapore for the professional practice of journalism, and that the space is expanding*' (Ibid: 15). Thus, the perceived benefits of calibrated coercions have

resulted in many various kinds of negotiations between the public and the authorities.

In another article, Cherian (2005b) compares the political impacts of internet penetration and participation in Singapore and Malaysia. He asserts that politically contentious journalism is a vital form of online activity and draws comparisons of the existence of such phenomena in the two neighboring countries from a socio-political perspective taking into account their 'coercive history based on an Asian Values discourse'. Singapore enjoys a much higher degree of internet penetration among its population than Malaysia, yet the author finds the degree of cyber activism and participation to be a marked level higher in the latter than the former. He goes on to explain this difference by non-technological factors such as the technological promiscuity of users and the fact that, even with limited access to the internet the technology can have significant impacts- both good and bad- depending on the user. While the relationship between NMTs and political actors is always too dynamic and interdependent to be reduced to a simple causal statement, the internet as a medium of engagement is not an independent variable and continues to be molded by the economic and political forces it operates within. Thus, after a certain point of technology adoption, human ingenuity and mobilization emerge to direct radical applications of the technology that draws inside it, soon enough, social networks of organizations as well as in individuals. The ways in which these 'agents of change' exploit and apply certain aspects of the technology within a

broader offline context is the key to understanding the potentials of the internet itself.

The influence of actors, rather than the technology itself, on bringing social change is can also be found in the works of Bokhorst-Heng (2002). The author offers her perspective on the various types of controls placed on the press in Singapore and provides an analysis on the ways in which government intervention is conditioned by the socio- political and ideological climate of the nation. According to this study, Singapore's national viability has been defined largely by economic growth that in turn requires consistent social and political stability. In such a situation, the press is given the mandate to function as a 'tutor' and advocate of the government policy in the daily 'mass ceremony of imagining the nation'- a routine where the government has the dominant voice. Hence, according to the author, the newspapers in Singapore partake, from a central position to the national agenda, in instilling a sense of 'nation building' among the masses. This phenomenon results in a more or less cohesive voice in not only news reportage but also in social and cultural daily commentary as done by the local main stream media, making it impossible for individual dissent to be heard effectively. In an interesting take, the article goes on to contend that it is precisely because of the call for democracy that the press cannot be the fourth estate in an ethnically diffused multi religious society like that of Singapore. Thus, given that the Singapore press is expected to operate within a particular framework of 'imagining the nation' it is no different from any other, developed or not, nation.

3.7 Framework of this thesis:

While all the above reviewed studies locate the civil society and its actors in a contentious position with respect to the state, I propose that they need not be contesting in nature after all. The derivate works on the role of the media and issues of censorship have traditionally been viewed in a confrontational mode with larger state relations in most literature accessed on the subject. My thesis will attempt to locate the media *within,* rather than *against* the purview of the state and its political and ideological processes. In doing so, I will use a contextual and evolutionary theoretical framework to understand and locate the role of the media in general, and cyber space in particular, in Singapore. This in turn implies locating press (and media) freedoms as part of the political evolution in Singapore as the island state seeks to evolve from an information society to a knowledge economy. As the media and state, even society, co-evolve there is strong evidence of understanding the media as a dual process of internal bargaining for extending its freedom on one hand and simultaneously externally negotiating its location and execution within existing state frameworks on the other.

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[1] Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced, during the National Day Rally in 2004, in move deemed to be a partial relaxation of rules of public speech and expression, that Singapore citizens no longer needed to seek police approval to speak at indoor gatherings if the said meetings were held in enclosed spaces away from the hearing or view of people not directly participating in the gathering. Previously, anyone seeking to make a public speech be at a indoor or outdoor location was required to get a permit from the police to do so. The amendment did not, though, extend to foreigners invited as speakers who would have to continue to seek prior approval and all speakers should avoid all matters that relate to issues of religion or race.

Chapter 4. Methodology Applied in Data Collection: Surveys

4.1 Rationale for applying quantitative methods of data collection:

In doing Social science research the choice between using quantitative and qualitative methods for data generation depends on a number of factors such as the circumstances of the research project, its objectives and a certain precedence set by previous research done on similar topics or subjects (Baines and Chansarkar, 2002a). This research attempts to plot and understand people's perceptions towards the internet as a platform for political engagement in Singapore. It also attempts to look at the state response to the proliferation of the internet especially in a high-use 'knowledge hub' like Singapore. Due to the sociological orientation of this thesis, it relies on quantitative research tools to substantiate the various hypothesis of this study. The use of quantitative methods is also crucial given the personal and subjective nature of the research questions being addressed. In order to ascertain the views of actual internet users in Singapore, with respect to their perception of online anonymity, freedom of speech, credibility of online information, the decision to conduct a survey among the electorate was taken. Details of the parameters-Universe and Sample – specific to this study are provided at a later section of this chapter. What follows now is a detailed presentation on the technique and justification of conducting surveys as the primary method of data collection.

4.2 Conducting Surveys:

Surveys are useful instruments for collecting large and detailed amounts of data. There are essentially three common methods of conducting a survey: personal, telephone and mail. The administration and formatting of the appropriate questionnaire in each case would differ and depends on the purpose and impact of the exercise (Baines and Chansarkar, 2002b). Since this study sought to get direct responses from Singaporeans on their internet usage and perception patterns, the personal or ethnographic interviews method was most appropriate. Also the choice to interact with the respondents in their home setting rather than at a public place or in a work environment was deliberate and hence necessitated personal surveys being administered. Though this technique tends to be time consuming and expensive, it is useful when the questions being asked are complex and require clarifications. With a high response rate this method also allows for a detailed probing into responses on the interviewers discretion in a realistic setting. In this particular study, conducting the survey personally in the respondents' home environment put the respondents at ease and encouraged them to answer questions that might have made them wary when administered in their work place or at a public place. For the same reason, it was also possible to administer a larger number of questions with the presence of the interviewer often making people more receptive to disclosing their details to a 'stranger' rather than over the more 'anonymous' techniques of telephone or mail interviews.

Another advantage of data collection method is the relatively low cost involved when compared to the amount of information gathered. A large amount of data can be collected from a large number of people with little extra cost, while letting the researcher examine many additional variable- demographics, lifestyle preferences, attitudes, motives and intentions for using the internet tools etc.

However, survey research comes with its inherent limitations as well. The main disadvantage is that independent variables cannot be manipulated in ways that might be possible in laboratory experiments. This makes it an uncertain exercise for the researcher who cannot know if the variables do in actuality have causal relationships among themselves in a way as to prove the initial hypothesis of the study. That is, at the hypothesis setting stage the study was able to establish a relation between the issue of online security and anonymity but was unable to predict a causal relation between the two. Causality is difficult to establish especially when given the various intervening and extraneous factors involved.

Special care had to be taken to word the questionnaire in a 'sensitive' manner that would put them at ease while providing personal details. Similar attention was paid to avoid any inappropriate wording of the questions so as to not imply bias and affect the results. As was found in the course of conducting this particular research, getting willing volunteers to participate in the survey proved to be a formidable task. Even the prospect of receiving a token gift did not encourage more people to

participate. This and other limitations faced during the course of the field work will be discussed in a separate section later on this chapter.

4.3 Constructing the Questionnaire:

Many researchers have suggested that the process of constructing a questionnaire is sequential in that that stages follow on from one-another. While there might some truth to this, the process proved to be mostly iterative with constant movement between the different stages of the designing.

Proctor (1997, in Baines and Chansarkar, 2002b) provides eight different stages as a check list to conducting a survey research and these were in turn incorporated in the actual field work conducted for this study. The first stage calls for the identification and specification of the research problem/research objectives, which, for the purpose of this thesis was identified as studying how Singaporeans use the internet for political engagement as the central focus of the thesis. For this the survey needed to inquire about not only the usage patterns of the respondents but also their individual perspectives on key issues related to the theme. As the study is not intended to be judgmental of any such activity in its performance special care was taken to ensure that the questionnaire was sensitively worded to avoid implying prejudice or create misunderstanding of intentions.

The second stage involved the deliberate selection of the population to be studied. Singapore citizens above the legal age of voting were identified as the population of the survey. Further, the population was divided along the municipal lines of Town Council areas. Of the all the Town Councils in Singapore- three were identified on the basis of resident behavior in the Singapore General Elections 2006: Potong Pasir, Sembawang and Hougang[1]. More details of this sample selection and its specific demographics are provided in the next section.

The third stage addressed the choice of data collection tool. The selection of the specific interviewing method that will be most effective in getting the desired response within the practical constraints of the field is always a vital one. For the specific purpose and goals of this study, door-to-door ethnographic interviews using a preset survey questionnaire was used. The merits of this method have already been addressed in an earlier section of this chapter while the practical limitations faced during the field research are included at the end of the chapter.

The next stage as proposed by Procter advocated the laddering of topics to be addressed. This meant that the questionnaire should be structured in a logical progression, moving from general information (demographics, introductory questions) to specifics (directly addressing the main research questions). Care was taken to incorporate in the structuring of the final questionnaire that was used in the field[2].

Next came establishing the cross tabulation that would be required in the study. This was particularly vital to the study at hand given the fact that the survey attempted to illustrate correlations between two or more variables making it is essential to verify whether cross tabulation was possible between asked questions and given answers. Since different types of cross-tabulations are possible, it is vital to correctly identify what type of data should be collected. This stage also saw the designing the questionnaire according to which data analysis techniques are going to be used requires answers to be in a specific format. This study used a basic format of multiple choice questions that included obtaining the respondents views by a rating scale arranged in a convenient vertical manner. While accepting that such questions provide limited sensitivity to alternate degrees of convictions, they are accepted as the easiest to tabulate of all question forms while capturing most of the range of opinions expressed by people. On the basis of such data collected, the comprehensive SPSS software was used to run Parson's Correlations between the desired variables[3].

Following the establishment of cross tabulation the next stage addressed the structuring and coding of the survey questions. This meant evaluating and choosing between the uses of open ended or closed questions, dichotomous, multiple-response, rating and ranking scale questions. I selected a combination of multichotomous and closed multiple fixed-response questions in the progression of the survey. The inclusion of an 'others' category in the latter type of questions was necessary to allow individual respondents to provide particularly salient factors

from their unique experiences. The questionnaire also included multiple-choice questions with ranking options with clearly pre-defined parameters of the scale in use.

Once the coding was decided on, attention was turned to the questionnaire layout and designing the support material. According to Proctor (ibid) the questions should be presented in as simplified a manner as possible so as to prevent all potential ambiguities on part of the respondents. Other material may be used to prompt responses e.g. photographs or advertisement stills etc. While this survey questionnaire did not require the use of any additional material, certain specific questions were earmarked for further questioning should the respondents select these options. For this a set of basic questions were prepared that sought open ended oral answers to be recoded by the researcher on site. The format and direction of these additional questions were deliberately left flexible to allow any unforeseen responses to be included in the research.

Proctors final stage called for pretesting of the questionnaire on a small section of the survey population before being brought into actual use in the field. The pre-test group used in my own research had 25 randomly selected adult citizens to whom the survey was administered to in the privacy of their own homes. This helped in identifying early problems and misunderstandings. It also proved to be indicative of the logical success of the questions in eliciting the desired responses that could help prove the hypothesis under scrutiny. The initial pretesting of the questionnaire

revealed certain unintended ambiguities and prejudices that resulted in certain questions being amended or even omitted.

Proctor's description of the questionnaire design progression implied a level of minimalism in sequencing that is not usually apparent in actual practice. In reality, each of the stages is inherently interconnected and sustain constant back-and-forth between the various stages. Facets of the individual stages can and do greatly influence other stages. The phase of cross tabulation also encompasses the essential step of data analysis since the use of a particular statistical methodology will have an impact on upon the rest of the design process. Linkages between the different stages of the process are also evident in the pretesting stage wherein changes made will also have significant impacts on the other stages. Similarly, all the processes are two-way in that while data analysis affects question structuring and working, question structuring and wording affect data analysis. Data analysis also has an effect on the selection of the sample and the selection of the interviewing method. Even with carefully planning and designing of the questionnaire, the actual field study faced certain obstacles in its execution. A brief summary of this follows in the next section.

4.4 Actualities and Parameters of the Study:

4.4.1 Universe:

Since the research aimed at studying the various ways in which Singaporeans use the internet to express their political convictions , cultural imaginations and other ideas, I restricted my universe to adults who are eligible to vote in the national general elections i.e. above the age of 21 years. This was crucial since the study would also probe their level of interaction and involvement in the electoral process. As the year 2006 had been an election year, the decision to lay this thesis against the backdrop of actual socio- political engagement found rationale in closely observing and analyzing the implications of their enriched online experiences in terms of actual civic participation. Other factors, such as age, gender, education or income level were disregarded in favor of citizenship and at least a minimum degree of familiarity with the internet- defined as occasionally accessing the internet either for private or official work related purposes. People possessing any other residency status other than full citizenship were also excused from this exercise.

Three locations were selected in Singapore and the survey was conducted restricted to these areas. The three sites were identified on the basis on their political impacts in the GE 2006. At first, each electoral zone in Singapore was listed for any significant patterns or political characteristics. From among the 14 Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs) and 9 Single Member Constituencies (SMCs), three were identified on the basis of their poll performance at the GE 2006. Sembawang was selected as the location hosting the largest sweep of the incumbent Peoples Action Party (PAP)- 76.70% as compared to 23.30% of votes polled in favor of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP). Potong Pasir proved victorious for the Singapore Democratic Alliance (SDA) (55.84% of votes against 44.16% in favor of PAP) and Hougang for the Workers Party (WP) (62.74% as compared to the PAPs results at 37.26%)[4] (Asia One, 2006). These three constituencies were selected to highlight regions where all three of the major political winners of the GE 2006 were successful in their campaigns. Within each of these three localities, one HDB Block was randomly selected ensuring that the grade of each was consistent with the other selections across locality lines. Since the HBD blocks in Potong Pasir had not experienced estate upgrading work in many years care was taken to maintain this sample uniformity by deliberate not selecting any upgraded HDB blocks in either Sembawang or Hougang either.

By a method of stratified random sampling, every third unit in each of these HBD blocks was selected. In the event that the selected unit was unoccupied or the residents were unable to participate in the survey, the immediate next unit was selected and so forth. In each unit, the head of the household was asked to participate in the survey. This though was usually the main income earner of the family. In a few cases when the head of the house hold was not present at the time of conducting the survey, the next adult available was asked to fill in the questionnaire as the acting "head of the house-hold". Similarly, in a few cases when the 'head' of the house hold was unwilling to participate in the survey, usually found among the elderly, they nominated another adult family member to take the survey in their place. Since the purpose of this study was not to observe people's online engagement patterns on the basis of status within the family, this factor was deemed to be insignificant and therefore acceptable under the tasks of the survey at hand. The sample included almost equal numbers of men and women as respondents and by restricting the age group to above 21 years (the official voting age in Singapore), the age of the total respondent group spanned from early 20s to late 50s. In all, after contacting 150 households, a total of 85 responses were elicited for the survey.

In order to get permission to interview the residents of the housing estates inside their houses, the researcher had sought previous permission from the town councils under whose jurisdiction the estates fell. For this I was required to present, in advance, an exact sample of the survey form to be utilized in the field. While all the

town councils approached were most cooperative in giving me the required permissions to conduct the surveys, one town council responded by returning the questionnaire completed by people 'nominated' by the chairman of the town councils. In spite of requesting to meet with these respondents in person to get a more un-prejudiced response set, I was unable to do so. For this reason, of the 15 responses sent to me this way, I was forced to retain only 5 of the filled in questionnaires. In the desired cases, conducting the ethnographic interviews also allowed for a spontaneous detailed probing of certain responses from the sample. This revealed further clarifications to responses and insights to related issues mentioned in the questionnaire but in practicality, beyond the scope of a multiple choice format that had been selected.

4.5 Practical Limitations Faced in the Field Survey:

The main problem faced by this researcher in the field was getting willing respondents to participate in the survey. While the town councils --approached for initial permission to conduct surveys in the selected residential estates -- were most cooperative in providing the required permits, albeit after the submission of a sample of the questionnaire and official university endorsement of the study as is the normally accepted practice; the residents of the HDBs needed to be persuaded to take the survey. In many cases, the offer of a token gift on completion of the questionnaire failed to have the desired positive results. As is a common problem

faced by most survey methods, the request to participate in the exercise was viewed upon with impatience and dismissal. In such cases, the next apartment was approached. As the study required the responses from the 'head of the household', it was decided to conduct the survey over the weekend. This too proved to have its limitations with many families being away from home at the time of the survey. Attempts to overcome this problem by approaching the apartments during the evenings also failed for the same reason and the survey team was forced to revert back to conducting the exercise during the day. Because of the above mentioned delays, the administration of the survey took longer than expected and in some cases, required the researcher to return to the same location more than once to get enough responses to meet the targets set for an acceptable sample size.

Also since the questionnaire asked for respondents to provide their personal opinions on a number of sensitive issues, the survey ran the risk of affecting the respondents desire to give 'politically correct' answers, effectively bringing into play an indirect form of peer pressure although the pressure may be self-directed and imagined. In the case of this specific thesis, a group of respondents were 'nominated' by a town council manager to participate in the survey. Even on the insistence of face-to-face meeting with the respondents, the researcher was supplied with a number of questionnaires already filled out by the 'nominees' who , on a closer analysis , were revealed to employees and officials at that particular town council. This obvious bias in their responses was further evident in the almost uniformly 'politically correct' answers the group provided. For the sake of

accuracy, all such responses were not included and only a sample from within these was used.

Later certain problems were revealed at the stage of data analysis where certain issues were found to inadequately covered in the questionnaire. Since it was impossible to return to the field and contact the very same respondents as the first exercise, the thesis had to work within these limitations and construct its analysis of the argument at hand using the data available in the most cohesive manner possible.

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[1] Refer to Annex B for voter preferences in GE 2006

[2] Refer to the survey questionnaire provided in Annex A

[3] Survey Results tabulations provided in chapters 5 and 6

[4] Further details on the seats polled and election results to be attached as Appendix B.

Chapter 5. Internet Usage and Technology Adoption Patterns among Singaporean Users:

This chapter presents the findings of a survey carried out among a randomly selected group of Singaporeans to gauge their internet usage patterns and their perceptions regarding the various aspects of the medium. In order to get an idea of their individual perceptions, and thereby attempt to draw inferences on their reactions as a community as a-whole, in-depth interviews were also carried out among the same survey sample. The following sections present an analysis of the data collected over the course of the survey with the first section identifying the degree of participation of the respondents in the Singapore General Elections of 2006 in an endeavor to understand the existing levels of political activism and engagement among them. The section ends by categorizing the location from where the respondents access the internet and the time they spend online. Following this, section 5.2 looks at the various ways in which the respondents use the internet by identifying the myriad online applications and search topics they frequent. The section also discusses their extent of their participation in online forums and discussion groups while analyzing the various types of sites where they choose to participate in online public opinion polls. The next section then discusses the manner in which those surveyed engage with State bodies and representatives while studying their perspectives regarding the use of the internet for the same. After this, the chapter turns to identifying and discussing key concerns expressed by the respondents regarding their participation on the internet. It concludes by providing

an analytical take on the above mentioned survey findings and the possible inferences we can draw from this.

5.1 Degree of Political Activism among Survey Respondents:

Since the survey was conducted soon after the commencement of the Singapore General Elections of 2006, the behavior of the respondents with respect to political involvement had been close. This offered a platform for discussing their perceptions and resultant behavior concerning their political engagement in the processes of state in an attempt to understand how politically active Singaporeans actually are. While this was not the focus of the study, it allowed a discussion on their perspectives regarding the potential of the internet for serious political and civic engagement. This also allowed for a study of their actual participation in mainstream politics and the tools of their decision making process in order to get a sense of their needs that can be furnished by these New Media Technologies. In a system where franchise is universal and compulsory, all the respondents surveyed were residents of locations that witnessed elections and hence, save 5 respondents, the remaining 80 surveyed did, at the very least, vote in their constituencies[1]. Political activism of participants, in terms of their involvement in election rallies and campaigns, had a higher incidence in Potong Pasir and Hougang -- constituencies that voted in favor of the Opposition parties-- as compared to that in Sembawang (See table 5.1). It may be possible that this was an outcome of

increased activities and campaigning on part of both the ruling PAP as well as the opposition parties in these closely contested seats, whereby the opposition attempted to maintain the status quo here with the PAP endeavoring to win the seats back into their fold. It would thus perhaps appear that with expectations of the contest being close and outcomes undecided, these constituencies would witness a heightened pitch in campaigning and voter mobilization, which in turn would culminate in a higher degree of activism among the specific electorates[2].

Table 5.1: Participation of respondents in pre election political rallies:

Location	Total Number of Respondents	Participated in Public Rallies	Percentage of Total Number of Respondents
Potong Pasir	27	9	33.34 %
Hougang	26	7	26.92 %
Sembawang	32	2	6.25 %
Total	85	18	21.18%

There was also a high correlation between the number of people who campaigned for parties or candidates, those who attended party rallies and those who attended public forums organized at the local community level (table 5.2). Similarly there was a high correlation between respondents who followed the election coverage in the news and those who actually attended party rallies. From this it can be posited that in spite of the seemingly single party mode of ruling, there is an absence of apathy among the electorate that could be expected in such a situation. Rather, there is a considerably high level of interest in the processes of the state, especially in the run up to the elections, with most Singaporeans accessing information from various sources to keenly follow political affairs. While most might be unwilling to do more than arm themselves with information, given the governments focus on "serious

politics", the respondents were none the less convinced of the need to encourage increased public-state engagement and said that they would welcome more avenues for this[3].

Table 5.2: Degree of Participation of Respondents in GE 2006 (Correlations)

Activity Participated in		Campaigned For party/ Candidate	Attended Party rallies	Attended Public forums/ Debates	Followed News Coverage	Voted	No Participation
Campaigned for party/ Candidate	Pearson Correlation	1	.277*	.283**	.178	.153	.a
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.010	.009	.103	.162	.000
	N	85	85	85	85	85	12
Attended party rallies	Pearson Correlation	.277*	1	.277*	.423**	.236*	.a
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010		.010	.000	.030	.000
	N	85	85	85	85	85	12
Attended public forums/ Debates	Pearson Correlation	.283**	.277*	1	.178	.045	.a
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.010		.103	.685	.000
	N	85	85	85	85	85	12
Followed election Coverage in media	Pearson Correlation	.178	.423**	.178	1	.251*	-.674*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.103	.000	.103		.021	.016
	N	85	85	85	85	85	12
Voted	Pearson Correlation	.153	.236*	.045	.251*	1	-.674*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.162	.030	.685	.021		.016
	N	85	85	85	85	85	12
No participation	Pearson Correlation	.a	.a	.a	-.674*	-.674*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.016	.016	
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

a. Cannot be computed because at least one of the variables is constant.

5.1.1 Media Influence:

In the decision making process of electing a political representative, how much did the media influence the peoples perceptions of election issues? To study this question for statistical convenience the commonly accepted method of Parson Correlations was used on the data obtained from the complete sample (N= total number of responses computed 85) in table 5.2 given above. Almost 70% of all the

respondents 'actively followed the news coverage' of key election issues in the media. While a majority of those surveyed (60%) said they relied solely on the televised news and/or mainstream newspapers in arriving at their political decisions, the remaining 40% of the respondents voiced a certain degree of skepticism in the neutrality of the mainstream news in reporting political issues. In some of the ethnographic interviews, when asked on the influence of the media, in some quarters there appeared a perception that the coverage afforded to the opposition was comparatively lesser than that provided to the PAP. When probed for their reasons for feeling so, a number of respondents offered the 'negative tone' of articles on 'opposition issues' and cited this as evidence of the 'obvious bias' in the mainstream newspapers in favor of the ruling party[4]. Such perceptions also found mention in the mainstream media, reporting the views expressed by prominent political commentators, that while there was a definite increase in the space provided for 'maneuverings' today than over the last few decade, the mainstream media 'failed' to do so[5] (Han, 2006). In view of this skepticism, it was not surprising then that the ethnographic interviews revealed that a third of all respondents and nearly 80% of those under the age of 30 turned to the internet to seek out information and opinions related to the Singapore Elections.

"How can we be sure even what we see in 'official media' is 100% true?
We try to judge for ourselves and see the source of the information and
the logic, facts etc. so even alternate news sources can be reliable – it all
depends on the source of the data. But isn't that the same with all media?
To let any media news change your opinions and behavior would depend

on the individual but I think for me personally I would not 'blindly' follow what news or media – traditional or not- says. I use my own common sense to judge an issue. I don't need the gov to tell me which is 'reliable' and which is not. They have their own reasons for doing that. So I use the internet to give me information that I can't get otherwise. Some are true and others obviously rubbish. I can see that for myself and won't get influenced but at least I can see things from my own point of view. My friends also do the same" Male Respondent, age 30

The younger respondents here were obviously more familiar with the various internet sites and tools for accessing information and were in turn more active in online forums and discussions than the older respondents.

5.2 Internet Access Patterns among Respondents:

Almost a half of those surveyed access the internet from both their homes and offices, implying a fairly high degree of internet penetration in their daily lives (Table 5.3). 41.2% said they accessed the internet from home only but it is telling that this sub group was made up mostly by housewives or peoples employed in occupations that do not afford them opportunity to have internet access at the work place like those in the construction (e.g. on-site labor) or retail industry (e.g. counter salespeople).

Table 5.3: Location from where Respondents Access the Internet

Location	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Home only	35	41.2%
Office only	3	3.5 %
Both Home and Office	42	49.4 %
Public Internet Café	4	4.7 %
Office and Public Internet Cafe	1	1.2 %
Total	85	100.0 %

Only five of the respondent households did not access the internet at home[6]. Respondents in three of these households said that their children were too young to have a need of the computer as yet and since both or one parent had internet access at their work place, they would wait for a few more years to install it at home as well. All these families accepted that the internet was a vital education tool and encouraged its supervised use among young children. Of the remaining two households, one household constituted an elderly couple who did not perceive any real need for the internet. Here the respondent was also of the opinion that his advanced age would prevent him from learning the relevant computer skills and saw this as an added factor against having a computer at home. The last household cited the "excessively" high cost for broadband access as the main reason for not installing the internet at home and in turn accesses its at the neighborhood public café when seeking urgent information. This respondent along with three others were the only people surveyed who frequented pubic internet cafés as their only point of internet access and only one respondent accessed the internet at both office and the internet cafes. He cited unlimited access to the internet at office as a reason for not needing the internet at home. His reason for visiting the internet café was mainly for accessing online games rather than surfing the internet[7].

Table 5.4: Time Spent Browsing the Internet by Respondents

Time Spent Online	Number of Respondents	Percentage
More than 4 hours a day	10	11.8 %
2- 4 hours a day	15	17.6 %
1-2 hours a day	27	31.8 %
30 minutes- 1 hour a day	23	27.1 %
Less than 30 minutes a day	10	11.8 %
Total	85	100.0 %

Also, only a little less than 39% of the respondents access the internet for an hour or less everyday for non-work related purposes. Alternately nearly 12% of those surveyed claimed to be online for personal purposes for more than 4 hours a day. The next section 5.3 offers a discussion of the most frequently accessed online applications among the survey respondents.

5.3 Popular Uses of the Internet by Singaporeans Surveyed:

5.3.1 Preference for Online Tools and Applications as Ranked by Respondents:

In the survey questionnaire, respondents were asked to rank the tools and applications they used most often while online on a scale of 1- 8 points with 1 being the highest (i.e. most frequently used application) score. 84 respondents (of a total number of 85 surveyed) ranked emails as the most commonly and frequently accessed internet feature. The importance that people assign to inter-personal communication is perhaps re-enforced by the ease of communication tools available

online today. Computer mediated communications (CMC) are increasingly the preferred mode of communication with its instant nature coupled with the low costs involved which is a key feature in long distance communication. The ability to send vast amounts of data across distances without any cost at all is especially significant in making emails and instant messaging (chat) as the two most popular use of the internet among those surveyed, in many cases being accessed more frequently than traditional modes such as telephones or even face to face interactions. This is also witnessed in a later section as being the preferred mode for Singaporeans to contact their political representatives or in communicating with any government agency. This implies that more people are turning to the cyberspace to hold meaningful 'conversations', recognizing the potential of the medium in redefining the manner in which conventional interaction, especially power relations, are addressed in a technology led knowledge economy. The argument can perhaps be extended to the preference for seeking information through generic data search engines and online e-newspapers and other e-news portals being the next most popular online applications respectively. But while the rank standard deviation of emails remains clustered implying the uniformity of respondents this was not the case with the rank standard deviation for the second most popular application- chat. Here the standard deviation shows the highest degree of diffusion among all the ranked applications implying that while more people ranked the option, the specific rankings assigned to it expressed a wide range of scores indicative of the difference in importance given to the same by the respondents. The respondents also ranked the 'entertainment' factor - music videos and games the lowest mean rank with a

relatively low rank standard deviation implying uniformity in the opinions as expressed by individual ranks assigned to this option. The perception of the internet as a 'serious' source of information lends the medium a sense of legitimacy in people's decision making and implementing processes and this was evident across the range of people surveyed in the course of this study.

Table 5.5: Most Commonly Accessed Internet Tools as Ranked by Respondents

Online Applications	No. of Respondents	Highest Rank given to Application	Lowest Rank given to Application	Mean Rank	Standard Deviation
Emails	84	1	3	1.11	0.381
Chat/ Instant Messaging	59	1	7	3.08	1.715
E- newspapers/ news portals	53	2	7	3.60	1.405
Games	38	2	7	4.89	1.573
Music/ Videos/ Movies	46	2	6	4.30	1.133
Discussion Forums	45	2	8	4.93	1.421
Search Engines	78	1	7	3.10	1.410

The use of emails as an important inter-personal communication tool was also evident in the high number of respondents who said that they were members of mailing lists (table 5.6). While the majority at 56 (out of a total of 85) are subscribers to lists circulated among family and friends, this was just marginally higher than the number of respondents who said they received and sent out emails as part of an office mailing list. The high incidence of subscription to or membership to various forms of mailing lists shows a high reliance on emails as a central tool for communications regarding both personal and official matters.

Table 5.6- Number of respondents who are members of mailing lists:

Participation in mailing lists	Number of Respondents	Percentage
From family and friends	56	65.9 %
From office co-workers and employees	55	64.7 %
From other groups of known people	36	42.4 %

5.3.2 Search Strings and Subjects:

Table 5.7- Most Frequently searched topics as ranked by respondents:

Search Topics	Number of Respondents	Highest Rank Given	Lowest Rank Given	Mean Rank	Rank Standard Deviation
Politics/ Current Affairs	70	1	10	2.71	2.247
Commerce and Trade	56	1	9	3.39	2.129
Entertainment	58	1	10	3.52	2.037
Hobby Related	68	1	11	4.01	2.353
Sports	52	1	12	4.48	2.783
Health/fitness	66	1	11	4.58	2.170
Travel	74	1	9	3.68	1.987
Human Rights	29	1	10	7.31	2.740
Homosexual Rights	22	5	11	10.14	1.807
Environment	28	1	10	6.82	2.667
Consumer Awareness	32	0	11	6.16	2.908

Respondents were asked to rank in order of preference the topics or subjects they
most often search for using online resources, with the rank of 1 being given to the

topic or issue they would search for most often (table 5.7). On analysis, politics and current affairs appeared as the most commonly searched topic with 70 respondents assigning a high rank to them. While the rank average indicated this option to be the most popularly searched topic, the rank standard deviation displayed a moderately diffused cluster implying a lack of uniformity in the importance given to it by respondents ranking this. This was unlike the case of 'travel related information' which, while being assigned an average rank of 3.68, showed a low rank standard deviation significant of a relative degree of homogeneity in rankings. While just searching for information on politics does not imply a sense of actual activism, neither does can it be dismissed as completely inconclusive. What is important here is to observe that, within the context of a controlled political environment that is prevalent in Singapore; this phenomenon can perhaps imply a muted but definite form of affirmative action on part of the citizens who might not be as willing to automatically imbibe mass ideology in today's networked society as their predecessors were. Entertainment related searches featured marginally above travel related strings demonstrating the popular shift away from a traditional ways in which people plan their travels. In today's increasingly interconnected world, international travel is commonplace and time-strapped consumers are increasingly using the internet that allows them a high degree of flexibility in catering travel to explicitly suit individual needs. The corporate travel industry seems to understand this shift and offers attractive deals exclusively for their online consumers in a move towards 'paperless' offices and e-ticketing that can help all parties reduce time, financial resources and the usual stress involved in travel planning. Other

topics like Sports, Health and Fitness and Consumer Awareness proved to be more subjective with respondents searching for topics specific to their instantaneous needs e.g. at the time of an illness in the family. It is noteworthy also that Human Rights figured at the bottom of the list just ahead of the bottom ranker- Homosexual Rights[8]. Are Singaporeans more unconcerned than most when it comes to individual liberty contestations, even in environments far removed from their own (e.g. in Europe or other parts of Asia)? When directly questioned on the matter, the answers provided were sufficient to indicate towards fear of being 'caught' at the 'wrong website' rather than a genuine apathy towards liberty issues[9]. The same was reticence was evident when asked about Homosexual Rights with only 29 respondents choosing to give it any rank at all in their list[10]. This option had the single lowest rank deviation and was also the lowest ranked. How much of this was effected by the interviewer's presence is a question that finds inclusion in the limitations of the survey conducted. Perhaps had the survey been conducted through an anonymous postal method, respondents would have divulged different results but since it was conducted in a direct face-to-face manner, all the responses provided have been included after attempts to probe the actual perceptions behind the ranking appeared to indicate that the topic was extremely taboo and embarrassing for the respondents.

5.3.3 Participation in Online Forums and Public Opinion Polls:

Are Singaporean internet users participating in discussions online? Answering this question could perhaps direct us towards getting an idea of the degree of cyber-activism among the users as well as indicate of the success of the internet in providing a viable alternate public sphere.

Table 5.8- Frequency of Participation in Online Forums and Discussion Groups:

Frequency of participation	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Total Respondents
Once a week or less	18	21.2 %
Twice a week	11	12.9 %
More than twice a week	5	5.9 %
Never	51	60.0 %

Table 5.9- Age-wise break up of participation in online forums:

Age (years)	Total Number of Respondents	Participation in Online Forums twice or more times a week	Participation in Online Forums once a week or less	Total Number of Respondents Participating in Forums
21-30	32	16	8	24
31-40	27	0	6	6
41-50	18	0	4	4
50+	8	0	0	0
Total	85	16	18	34

60% of those surveyed said that they had never participated in online forums or other online discussion groups, and 21.2 % said they were infrequent visitors- participating once a week or less- at such site. In fact, it was among the under 30

age group that respondents claimed to access the forums twice or more times a week (table 5.9). Could this be attributed to the comparative familiarity with the tools of the medium among the younger generations vis-à-vis the middle aged respondents? Familiarity affords a sense of comfort in 'talking among strangers' that allows users to frequent such sites to access and exchange personal opinions and information. Another possible explanation for this could be that the younger generations are less hesitant in having their voices 'heard'- even if through the anonymous internet channels[11]. The degrees of participation in online forum groups could also imply the level of trust consumers instill in the medium, to indulge in critical and often contentious debates.

Table 5.10- Level of Participation of Respondents in Online forums:

Degree of Participation	Number of Respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Initiate topics as a member	12	34.3 %	34.3 %
Member but only respond to existing discussion topics/threads	9	25.7 %	60.0 %
Passive member-only read postings made by others	4	11.4 %	71.4 %
Read/participate in public access forums without being a member	10	28.6 %	100.0 %
Total	35	100.00 %	

The degree to which visitors- both as participants as well as passive observers- engage in online discussions is perhaps more telling of the degree of activism online. Of the 35 survey respondents who were frequent visitors at online forums (table 5.10), a majority with 71.4 % were members of the sites they frequented, implying a relatively 'known' environment where they post their comments where they may know fellow commentators, even if only through their chosen

pseudonyms. It is also possible that it is this sense of 'security' among the participants that allows them to hold discussions relatively uninhibitedly, a concern especially when discussion topics that may be deemed as sensitive or controversial in offline contexts.

Similarly, with regard to providing honest opinion when online, the choice of sites wherein the respondents participate in online opinion polls is also indicative of their need for 'secure' spaces where their given opinions cannot be misused. Respondents were asked to rank in order of preference the type of sites where they are most comfortable participating in opinion polls. Polls, both with anonymous and registered participation, were included in the question field and treated as equal for the purpose of this survey. On analyses (table 5.11) most people claimed to feel most comfortable giving their opinion in polls conducted by credited online newspapers and e-zines. With an assigned average rank of 1.95, the low rank deviation indicated the high degree of uniformity in the responses that ranked this option as the most preferred one on the list. Most of such sites require the respondents to register before participating but when the e-newspaper or e-zine is a credible source, especially when it has a regular offline presence as well, the loss of anonymity is taken as a counter measure to ensure the protection of personal data and the prevention of misuse. The same was the case with other general news sites that had legitimized offline presence as well (e.g. polls conducted by channelnewsasia.com or straitstimes.com). These were followed by private blogs or forums that were usually accessed by people known to the site owners. Again, it

was the feeling of familiarity and security that prompted respondents to provide opinions at these sites. It was surprising to note that government websites featured almost at the bottom of the rankings but with a relatively high degree of standard deviation demonstrating the difference in respondents' attitudes to this. While some respondents gave such sites high ranks in appreciation of what they perceive to be an genuine effort on part of the state to engage with the public others felt their personal opinions and data used for registering for the poll would be 'safe' from misuse here[12]. Some respondents asked to explain this offered that there might be a feeling of futility among participants at such sites who feel 'threatened' or 'obligated' into providing 'correct' answers[13]. Under the option of 'others' respondents who chose this all cited a preference for participating in work-related polls conducted through their internal office email servers.

Table 5.11- Sites where respondents prefer to participate in opinion polls and surveys:

Site of Participation	No. of Respondents	Highest Rank Given	Lowest Rank Given	Mean Rank	Rank Standard Deviation
Online Newspapers/ Magazines	22	1	4	1.95	0.999
General News sites/ portals	32	1	5	2.03	1.031
Government Sites	28	1	5	2.68	1.611
Private blogs/ forums	31	1	5	2.32	1.301
Public Chatrooms	19	1	5	2.53	1.349
Other sites	3	6	6	6.00	0.000

5.3.4 Engagement with State Bodies and Representative:

When asked if they had ever attempted to contact a government agency or a representative via the government portals, a majority of 58 respondents claimed to the contrary with only 28 saying they had attempted to do so. Of this latter group, internet tools appeared to be the preferred mode of communication over traditional channels like postal letters or telephones. 46.4% said they had sent an email to the officer concerned with an equal number of 21.4% each preferring to either post their comment or query in forums provided in the site or filling in online feedback forms also incorporated in the same site. Once again, this is fairly telling of the manner in which internet technology is changing the manner in which people carry out inter personal communications while at the same time offering scope for redefining power structures with emails and forum postings instilling a degree of informality to otherwise rigid dealings with state representatives.

Of the 58 people who chose to not provide any feedback at the government site, a majority of those surveyed accessed these sites mainly to get information regarding routine thins like taxes or administrative advice that was clearly provided in the sites. Hence, 65.5% of these people claimed they had no problems to report having got their required information from the main websites. Similarly, 10.3% also said they found no need to provide any comment as the site was clear about the

information they sought. Only a 5.2% of respondents felt the lack of space or options to voice genuine concerns at such mainly informative sites prevented them from offering any feedback to these sites.

These observations were interesting to note insofar as they differed from the manner in which people tended to use the internet for non-governmental purposes. Where as the various communication tools made available by the internet were the most popular applications, the governments presence online was viewed for its informative value rather than actual engagement endeavors.

Table 5.12- Media for providing feedback to government websites:

Medium	Number of Respondents	Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Email sent to officer concerned	13	46.4 %	46.4 %
Comment posted in forum on same site	6	21.4 %	67.9%
Telephoned at contact address provided in the site	2	7.1 %	75.0 %
Letter sent at contact address provided at site	1	3.6 %	78.6%
Online form	6	21.4 %	100.0 %
Total	28	100.0 5	

Table 5.13- Reasons for abstaining from providing feedback to government sites:

Reason	Number of Respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
No space/option for providing feedback online	3	5.2 %	5.2 %
Feedback asked for was mainly related to design/appearance of site not content	5	8.6 %	13.8 %
No perceived need as site constantly updated	6	10.3 %	24.1 %
No problems/concerns to report	38	65.5 %	89.7 %
Others	6	10.3 %	100.0 %
Total	58	100.0 %	

5.4 Concerns among Internet Users:

What makes internet users choose to visit a particular site over another? With NMTs becoming increasingly entrenched in the manner in which people conduct their personal and public communications, the adoption of such technology is fast affecting our very lifestyles in the way we redefine traditional work and play roles. With so much importance given to NMT, and especially to the internet, focus is now shifting to making the medium more 'user-friendly' to provide safer environments for consumers to go about their chosen online activities. The development of sophisticated internet technology has not been without the simultaneous development of data manipulation tools easily accessible to anyone with a little bit of technical knowledge. Cyber-crimes are no longer the exclusive domain of the powerful and very technologically savvy, rather are now, in varying degrees fairly commonplace among users from as varied backgrounds as high school students, housewives and corporate entities. In such an ambiguous situation, what are the key concerns of Singaporeans while accessing online tools or sites? To ascertain this, survey respondents were asked to assign scores on a range of 1- 5 with 1 indicating being highly concerned and 5 being unconcerned on the importance they placed on concerns ranging from data and site security and credibility of online sources to the purpose for which their data is collected online.

5.4.1 Security Concerns:

Table 5.14- Fear of Data Misuse:

Score Assigned	Number of Respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1	49	94.2 %	94.2 %
2	2	3.8 %	98.1 %
4	1	1.9 %	100.0 %
Total	52	100.0 %	

Table 5.15- Security of website:

Score Assigned	Number of Respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1	39	75.0 %	75.0 %
2	9	17.3 %	92.3 %
3	2	3.8 %	96.2 %
4	2	3.8 %	100.0 %
Total	52	100.0 %	

When asked their prime concern when navigating the internet, 94.2% of the respondents said the fear of their personal data being misused was of most concern to them. This concern also prevented them from disclosing any personal details online and doing so only at select secure sites that incorporated high and trusted security and data protection mechanisms. While the main concern was to protect financial and personal details from potential cyber identity theft and financial fraud, the respondents also cited concern about comments made online being taken out of context and misrepresented. With high penalties being given for acts of defamation

and sedition in Singapore, it was of little surprise that the respondents were wary of being taken advantage of in unsecured sites. This was also the single main reason cited by people who said they did not participate in online forums or blogs. It is also worth noting that a majority of the respondents were aware of and appreciative of the governments measure to counter identity theft online preferring to frequent sites displaying the 'TrustSg' seal[14]. The overall security measures provided by the site were also cited as a source of high concern by 75% of the respondents, especially in the event of conducting online financial transactions. Those that regularly made purchases online also accepted that responsibility for protecting oneself ultimately lay with the users themselves who should research the vendors offering the online goods and not disclosing their financial details unless confident of the genuineness of the transaction.

5.4.2 Concerns about Credibility of Online Information:

Table 5.16- Credibility and Identity of Online Information:

Score Assigned	Number of Respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1	14	26.9 %	26. 9 %
2	8	`5.4 %	42.3 %
3	10	19.2 %	61.5 %
4	14	26.9 %	88.5 %
5	6	11.5 %	100.0 %
Total	52	100. 0 %	

When it came to the issue of the credibility of the information available on a site or the identity of online commentators, most people were divided between being

highly concerned and being fairly unconcerned- each scoring an average of 26.9% respectively. The respondents offered that it was up to the users to check the credibility of the information and not believe whatever they found online to be true. They accepted that the freedom offered by the anonymous nature of the internet allowed for irresponsible information being made available online but at the same time they said that most internet users knew by now that in order to take action on the basis on any such information, one needed to cross check the information. The vast number of data sources was viewed as an advantage in cross checking online information and this corresponded with the high rank given by users to the search engines as one of the most popular applications of the internet.

5.4.3 Concerns Regarding Declared Use of Information at Site:

Table 5.17- Declared Purpose of Site

Score Assigned	Number of Respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1	14	26.9 %	26.9 %
2	9	17.3 %	44.2 %
3	16	30.8 %	75.0 %
4	11	21.2 %	96.2 %
5	2	3.8 %	100.0 %
Total	52	100.0 %	

The declared purpose of the site i.e. the main purpose cited by a site in seeking or providing information was of moderate concern among the respondents who appeared to be equally divided over the degree of concern afforded to this attribute. A little fewer than 31% said they were moderately concerned about this given their

'natural' reticence to say anything controversial online, whether at a secure site or otherwise. To this group the reason why a site collected information was not a key concern where as for 44.2% this was an important concern, relating to their fear of their data being misused without their knowledge.

5.5 Inferences:

From all the findings analyzed above it is clear that the potential of using the internet to engage citizens was a feature recognized by most people who used this medium to seek out information not otherwise available in the mainstream media. Where a degree of skepticism remained in the validity and credibility of information accessible online, this was no more than the skepticism they treat information provided by the mainstream media as well. The scope of engagement was especially high among the younger respondents who, given their superior familiarity with the medium and its various tools, are more forthcoming in voicing their views in online mediums. While the ease and economy of communication over the internet remain the leading reason behind people using the medium, its potential as a viable source of information is also recognized by a majority of the respondents. The tremendous scope of the internet to overcome traditional barriers of space and time has made the medium a popular choice among consumers desiring instant access to vital information. At the same time, the convenience

afforded by the medium makes it particularly attractive for consumers to use it to access and contact government related information. This is particularly important for a climate like than in Singapore where the state has been proactive in harnessing the technology to install a more transparent and citizen friendly mode of e-governance. While most respondents surveyed accessing these sites more for getting specific information rather than using it to actively engage with the state, this is particularly vital for a society like that in Singapore where the long held view has been of one of a politically apathetic citizenry. The latest general election held in Singapore witnessed a relatively high degree of online activity as demonstrated by the survey respondents. In keeping with the constraints on 'political commentary', online activity by many respondents was effective in assisting them in their decision making process. The perceived 'bias' in the traditional media against presenting alternate perspectives among some respondents was also key in making the internet an attractive source of information for them. With a robust and discerning online community, the internet's potential for creating spaces for serious discourse and information and communication exchanges is vast. In keeping with this theme, the next chapter addressed the general perceptions about the internet as a medium of exchanging reliable information as expressed by the survey respondents.

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[1] Of the five respondents who said they did not vote in the General elections held in their constituency, three said that at the time of election they were away on work related over seas travel. The remaining two said they were both incapacitated due to illness and hence unable to exercise their vote as well.

[2] Female respondent, age 31, resident of Potong Pasir: "*My friends and I made it a point to attend the rally so that we could hear the party agenda for ourselves. You don't get to hear much*

coverage of either the Workers Party or the SDA on the TV…can only hear PM and PAP portfolio there, .so how to make up mind? Last time I voted for someone else but this time I listened to the opposition speeches and thought they were genuine in their desire to make real changes here. If can't get a balanced view from TV or papers then have to go to rally to hear for myself and make up my mind la"

[3] Female respondent, age 47, resident of Sembawang: "*Right now if I say anything in public it can be taken in the wrong way…people might think I am speaking 'politically' even if that is not the case. So I think the government must do more to let the people voice things in a constructive way. If after that someone says something harmful or wrong then take action but to prevent people from talking in the first place for fear that they may say something wrong is not the way to go and the government knows this. Things have changed a lot. Last time we were not allowed to ask questions or say we did not like anything- now the feedback channels ask us for our opinion- will it change? Maybe not today but in the future with the younger MPs maybe. Till then we need to at least know what is going on…so I follow the coverage in the TV. Sometimes we discuss it among friends informally but even then, if in public, we don't want to say too much…don't know who is listening.*"

[4] Most respondents who shared this view were between the ages of 20 and 40 years. Some of the salient comments on the subject were:
 "*The newspapers are obviously biased against the Workers Party and SDA- or anyone who is not PAP. I don't know how much of this is deliberately done by the government but I doubt it. Probably it's the own views of the papers and the writers there*"
"*Just look at the number of articles in the last month that say good things about the opposition- how many? Or even just present the opposition issues? Very few. Compare this to the number of articles showing the oppositions mistakes or negative things… how to trust the newspaper then? Singaporeans can judge for themselves. Give us the facts and let us make up our minds ourselves.*"

[5] The way in which the mainstream media covered local politics, especially the opposition, was an issue discussed at a forum on politics at the National University of Singapore in February 2006. Panelists such as Mr. Viswa Sadasivan, chairman of a TV production house and ex-SBC producer, was of the opinion that local journalism suffered from what he felt to be an unwarranted degree of timidity in reporting critical issues. He also accused the media of not giving the opposition fair coverage by focusing only on aspects of their manifestos that the government had declared to be 'time bombs'. Acting Director of the Institute of Political Studies Mr Arun Mahizanan attributed this to the constraints in the broadcast medium and perhaps the programming philosophy of the broadcast medium.

[6] The reasons provided by the households currently without internet access at home in this survey were also in keeping with the results published in a report on the Annual Survey on Infocomm Usage by Households and Individuals, 2005, by the Infocomm Development Authority (IDA). Below is a representation of the salient findings of the report. The complete report can be accessed from the IDA website.

Reason for not having Access to a Computer at Home	2004	2005
Lack of Skills	42 %	35 %
Age is a Barrier	9 %	12 %
Children too young	3 %	6 %

Have Access elsewhere	9 %	0 %

[7] Male, age 24, employed as an account executive with a freight and forwarding company: "*I don't need internet at home because I use it all day at office I live with my mother who doesn't know how to use the compute and asks me to find out whatever she needs from the 'net. I do that at office. The only time I go to the café is on holidays to play internet games…I have been playing since I was a teenager so nothing has changed!* "

[8] Homosexual Rights were deliberately differentiated from Human Rights in order to get a possible impression of the different contestations being fought for in the cyberworld and the average engagement of the survey respondents to these complexities.

[9] Male, 23: "*What if the authorities record my IP address at some site banned in Singapore? They might not consider that I am searching for data there for, say, a research project for uni… They might start 'watching' my online activities and maybe I'll get into trouble. Or worse, I'm thought to be supporting some kind of separatists' movement or something…?*"
Male, 27: "*Anyway I can get that kind of news when it is reported as a news feature it e.g. when there is a protest against the military rule somewhere I can safely read about the causes being fought for without having to search for something like 'democratic rights' and get into trouble maybe*" (laughs)

[10] Female, 22:" *You know I went with some friends, just for fun, to attend the gay party at Sentosa- Indignation, in 2004. None of us are gay but we thought it was uncommon event for Singapore and we just wanted to have harmless fun but someone saw a picture taken of us there by a newspaper and next thing, people asking my mother if I was also gay! Now I know not to get caught at the wrong place!. My classmate did a Google search recently about the laws regarding homosexuality and now her inbox is constantly getting spammed with gay porn. IP addresses get recorded on the server and it will be easy for someone to trace your visit. Its bad even to be suspected of being gay in Singapore…*"

[11] Female, 24: "*I often frequent forums on fashion tips or sometimes forums that have links from entertainment sites I go to for movie reviews etc. I use these forums to get information that affects my purchasing decision like should I buy the new Nokia hand phone or not…or if a particular movie is worth watching. Sometimes my friends send me links to forums on current affairs topics- like the time the girls had printed T-shirts of the white elephants and everyone was talking about it. I had no problem exchanging my views with the people in the forum on the topic. Yes, I always use a pseudonym in forums but in the ones I frequent other users know me by that nickname and we have become online friends. But my parents don't like it when I take advice from such sites…especially keep telling me not to be so bold, frank there that you don't know who is the other part...especially when they find me chatting about current issues. I know that they often share my views but they would never go online to say it! I have no such problems but I am careful about the way I talk there…I always leave the forum when it seems to be getting to heated up over controversial issues*"

[12] Female, 42: "*I only participate in surveys in government sites because people are always complaining that they don't listen to what the people want but this is a chance to show your opinion on certain matters that might affect you. I don't think there is any point in polling something in any other site- what actual result with come out from those polls taken? Its only for 'see'. With a public poll the government at least takes action on what the people want.*"

Male 36, "*I don't mind registering with my IC and name in the government site. I know my data is safe there. No one is going to hack in there or steal my personal details. Not so safe in other sites. Also somewhere I say something that can be taken out of context and then creates controversy. Here no one is going to play around with my words.*"

[13] Male, 35:"*I don't think it will do any good for me to go to a government site and then say I don't agree with some proposal there. I don't think they really want to know what the people think- like if it's important enough they will just go ahead and do what they want anyway. People feel obligated to give PC (politically correct) answers at such polls. No one wants to stick their neck out.*"

[14] 'TrustSg' is a nation-wide trust mark initiative by the National Trust Council to encourage the e-commerce environment in Singapore. It helps build the levels of confidence consumers' display while conducting commercial transactions online with a special focus on security of data and privacy of e-transactions.

Chapter 6. Popular Perceptions of Online Information and Data Sources:

In the previous chapter, the manner in which the survey respondents use the internet to engage in social, political and commercial dialogue was discussed. From the results, it was revealed that inter-personal communication applications offered online (emails, chats) were the most popular tools on the internet and appeared to be the preferred mode for respondents to meet their personal as well as official communication needs. Apart from this, search engines were also revealed to be increasingly popular among respondents seeking news and information on topics not normally covered by the traditional media. In some quarters, this source of 'alternate' information was found to be particularly useful during the 2006 General Elections held in Singapore with respondents turning to the internet to get outlooks that they unable to attain from the mainstream media at the time. With the ability of the medium to overcome the hurdle of selective access faced by traditional mediums, it becomes important to also study the actual perspectives users have of the information available on this channel. This chapter shall attempt to do so by addressing the key issues of credibility and anonymity as raised by consumers. As we saw in the previous chapter most respondents said they preferred to remain anonymous when online. Yet at the same time, ironically, they appear to view the trait of anonymity in other sources with suspicion and a marked degree of criticism. This relation between authenticity and pedigree appears at the heart of the question regarding credibility of the medium vis-à-vis the traditional, mainstream media. Hence, anonymity and credibility when taken together at the individuals' level

reveals a complex situation that has been addressed in the sections that follow. First, the chapter looks at the question of anonymity by analyzing the respondents' preferences with respect to their motivations for revealing or concealing their identities when online. Following this, the analysis moves on to the general perceptions regarding the credibility of the various information sources available over the internet, and therefore, the perceived credibility of the internet itself. Having addressed these key issues, the next section attempts to apply these concerns by discussing the actual incidence of Cyberactivism in Singapore as displayed by selected websites that routinely focus on socio-political debate online. What would emerge from such discussion would be indicative of the actual use of the medium in promoting critical social and political engagement among consumers who perhaps have limited access to the same in the mainstream media. In all, the chapter rounds up the discussions with a presentation of the various impacts and influences the internet has on respondents' actual thought and action processes. In doing so, we can attempt to answer the central question of this thesis- Can and does the internet in Singapore offer an avenue for the sustenance of a viable public sphere?

6.1 The Question of Anonymity among Internet Users:

When asked to indicate their desired levels of anonymity while online, 94% of the respondents expressed their preference in favor of some degree of anonymity (table 6.1). Of this a majority of nearly 62% indicated that would prefer to 'always be

anonymous' with 32% citing a preference to 'sometimes be anonymous'. When probed as the an explanation respondents who selected the latter option appeared to prefer being anonymous where ever possible, choosing the reveal their actual identities only on sites and regarding issues they felt to be 'safe' and 'non-controversial'. Most of these respondents also appeared willing to disclose their identities when visiting government websites offering that when asked for personal opinion at these sites they would adhere to a 'common practice' of providing opinions that were not overtly critical of any state endeavor[1]. Another equally significant motivation for this was the generally accepted perception of the security of such sites from data misuse and theft. This was corroborated by the fact that while some government websites require users to sign in with their actual identities, most of those surveyed said that they would be willing to reveal their names at such sites even when not compelled to do so. This desire for maintaining a certain degree of online anonymity stems not so much from the apprehension of 'Big Brother' as from fears of becoming a victim of any cyber crime like data theft, impersonation, fraud or even cyber stalking[2]. With sophisticated surveillance and tracking technology no longer the domain of the state, the increase in the incidences of cyber crimes has led to a heightened sense of caution among internet users. This is ironic given the intense adoption of the medium as the preferred communication tool yet is revealing, again, of the manner in which these interactions are carried out. Traditionally accepted norms of communication are being adapted to the new technology that negates the erstwhile barriers of time and space making even possible, even routine, intercontinental 'conversations' with superior voice clarity,

video imaging and secure data transportation all accessed from the convenience of a personal computer. Concealed identities are no longer a hindrance to establishing meaningful interpersonal relations online and it is perhaps this sense of anonymity that in fact fosters an environment where people feel free to express themselves more honestly than they would in an offline context where the norms of socially acceptable behavior might disallow such honesty[3]. Critics of the medium point to the perception of unaccountability that often accompanies anonymity in cyberspace as the main instigator of false information that might have dire consequences in an increasingly volatile 'real' world[4]. Hence, while it is anonymity that affords internet users the perceived security of uninhibited speech online, it is the very same ability that casts suspicion on the credibility of the data. Such a complex duality is especially pertinent for a society like Singapore where more people appear to be comfortable tacking socio-political issues in an anonymous online environment than they appear in mainstream society.

Table 6.1- Anonymity Preference among Respondents:

Preference	Number of Respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Always anonymous	53	61.9 %	61.9 %
Sometimes anonymous	27	32.1 %	94.0 %
Always reveal identity	5	6.0 %	100.0 %
Total	84	100.0 %	

The survey also revealed a direct and significant relation between participation in online forums and the preference for anonymity among those surveyed. The more

actively respondents tended to participate in online discussions the more they appear to desire anonymity. The same unidirectional relation also held true when drawing correlations between the frequency of participation in such groups and anonymity. This implies that the more frequently users participate in or access online discussion groups the more they show a preference for remaining anonymous in their discussions. So, the chances of active frequent members of forums preferring to remain anonymous would be higher than those of a passive occasional visitor to the site. Among those respondents who frequented forums at least twice a week (taken to also indicate a high and sustained amount of time spent on the internet) all stated their preference for remaining anonymous during the discussions. Of the 12 respondents who participated in forums as active members – either by initiating new threads of discussions or responding to existing ones- 58.3% chose to always remain anonymous in their discussions and 33.3.% opted to 'sometimes' be anonymous. With a high of 91.7% in favor of anonymity, this added further credence to the hypothesis on the direct relation between online frequency and anonymity.

94% of the respondents who preferred to always be anonymous while participating in online forums also cited the issue of data misuse as their main worry (table 6.2) with 92% expressing their concern regarding the adequacy of security measures provided by the various websites (table 6.3)

Table 6.2- Fear of data misuse among respondents who prefer to always be anonymous online:

Scores Given	Number of Respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1	49	94.2 %	94.2%
2	2	3.8 %	98.1%
4	1	1.9%	100.0%
Total	52	100.0 %	

Table 6.3- Concerns on security measures provided by websites among respondents who prefer to always be anonymous online:

Scores Given	Number of Respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1	39	75.0 %	75.0 %
2	9	17.3 %	92.3%
3	2	3.8 %	96.2 %
4	2	3.8 %	100.0 %
Total	52	100.0 %	

6.1.1 Cases of the outliers who choose to 'always reveal identity online':

The 5 respondents who cited a preference for always revealing their identity were all employed with the Government and working in the town council offices of their respective local constituencies. Their preference to avoid anonymity when online appeared underlined by their perception that if one had nothing to hide then there should be no problem with disclosing their personal identity[5]. It is also noteworthy to add here that these outliers also revealed that they never visit online forums or any discussion groups either and mainly accessed the internet to exchange emails

with people known to them. For them, the fear of data being misused by other 'unscrupulous' internet users was the prime cause for concern and 4 of them gave this as the main reason preventing them from participating in online discussions and forums. In comparison, they appeared mostly unconcerned on the question of credibility of online commentators and the declared purpose of the website with low ranks assigned by a majority of the cases (table 6.4).

"*I am not afraid of the government watching me because I know I don't overstep any OB markers even online. I am careful and the government doesn't worry me. But same is not true for online users who think they can say what they want and hide in cyberspace. Now even young kids have fancy gadgets and technology that lets them manipulate things online- so if someone takes comments I may have made at a gardening website and puts in some totally different place like in a forum discussing religion, I will get into trouble. While I know I can prove my innocence perhaps by then maybe the damage to my reputation is already done. Then how? So better not to take part in any useless discussions on the internet at all…*"
Female, 55.

Table 6.4- Concerns among respondents who preferred to always reveal their identity online:

Score Given	Fear of data misuse		Security of website		Credibility of online information		Declared purpose of site	
	No. of Respondents	%	No. of Respondents	%	No. of Respondents	%	No. of Respondents	%

1	5	100 %	4	80%	2	40%	1	20 %
2	0	0 %	1	20%	0	0%	1	20 %
3	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0 %
4	0	0 %	0	0%	1	20%	1	20 %
5	0	0%	0	0%	2	40%	2	40 %

NB: scores were assigned on a scale of 5 with 1 implying 'extremely concerned' and 5 implying 'unconcerned'

6.2 The Question of Credibility of the Internet:

Internet users the world over have demonstrated an extreme dependence on internet sources for accessing information but at the same time, the medium also carries the perception of low credibility regarding the pedigree of vast amount of data it hosts due to the fact that the inclusive nature of the medium allows for any end user to also simultaneously become a producer of information without any mandate for accountability or authenticity. Yet the perceived benefits of the medium via-a-via traditional modes of information and communication appear to have outweighed this lack of authenticity which has not prevented people from incorporating the medium into their daily-lives. Increasingly the media is playing an expanding role in influencing personal decisions and the new media technologies perhaps more so today than ever before. While traditional information platforms are governed by clear laws to ensure the verity of its content, in most part, internet laws are yet in their formative years and policymakers are attempting measures to ensure the continued adoption of the medium amongst the masses while providing boundaries to enhance the credibility of the medium. Among what has been coined the 'Google Generation'[6] information is the new currency of independent thinkers world over

and with such a vast source of instant knowledge, the internet plays a central role in influencing peoples perspectives, attitudes , positions and even their actions. This has been the same in the case of Singapore as well as was revealed by the survey respondents who discussed the issue of online data credibility and thus, reliability.

Survey respondents were asked their reaction to the hypothesis that 'online information was less reliable than information on traditional media sources' (table 6.5). Asked to indicate their opinions on a preference scale, 43.6% disagreed, saying they relied 'equally' or 'more' on the internet than they did on mainstream media sources. According to some respondents the internet provided a more varied scope for accessing information, especially on world affairs, as compared to traditional media platforms that they felt would be more attuned to domestic policy and ideology.

> "*See all news is biased anyway- the TV, the radio and the papers- so why pick on the internet only. In fact the internet at least gives me information of events that are happening in the rest of the world. I don't have cable TV at home so the only TV news I get tends to be mostly restricted to local or at best regional news. Its not that we are an insular society who only care about things that will effect us- but its hard to get that news for most of us- so the internet gives us that option. Of cause a lot of the information on the internet is also very biased and obviously is only reflecting one persons ideology but isn't that the same as the TV*

news that reflects one national ideology as well? So why is one better

than the other- both are same for me…just that the internet is cheaper,

faster and more fun!" Male, 38.

Such perspectives, along with the increased reliance on the internet to get 'first hand' information is also being recognized by the mainstream media who are incorporating various interactive features that allow laypeople, rather than employed journalists, to provide personal inputs on news worthy events thereby offering 'eye witness accounts' rather than detached reporting[7]. In such a situation, the onus lies with the readers in verifying and accepting the provided information for themselves- a fact accepted by all the respondents surveyed irrespective of their position regarding the afore mentioned hypothesis[8].

Table 6.5- 'Online information is less reliable than information found in the traditional media', as expressed by all survey respondents:

Position	Number of Respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly agree	1	1.2 %	1.2 %
Agree	17	20.0 %	21.2 %
Neutral	30	35.3 %	56.5 %
Disagree	31	36.5 %	92.9 %
Strongly disagree	6	7.1 %	100.0 %
Total	85	100 %	

Of the respondents who visited or participated in online forums more than twice a week (N= 11) 54.5% disagreed with the notion that the internet was more unreliable than the traditional media with 9.1% strongly disagreeing. With only 18.2% of the

respondents agreeing that the information accessed from the internet was unreliable compared to traditional mediums, this appeared in stark contrast with the 5 respondents who had cited their preference to always reveal their identities online, most of whom were in agreement that online information was in fact more biased and therefore less credible than that found on other mediums[9].

6.3 The Case for Cyberactivism by Organized Websites:

The researcher, through a rule-of-thumb, visited certain websites hosted in Singapore that claimed to routinely engage in social and political activism online. From this, six sites were short listed to be included in the survey on the basis of their popularity among Singaporean internet browsers. The websites included talkingcock.com, thinkcenter.org, yawningbread.org, newsintercom.org, singapore-window.org and fateha.com. All these websites feature some kind of socio-political commentary albeit in their own unique manners. While thinkcenter.org, newsintercom.org and Singapore-window.org tend to focus more on their demands of increased 'civil liberties' and pose directly contentious editorials on their regular web pages, yawningbread.org appears to take a more moderate approach featuring articles in a light-hearted manner. Talkingcock.com is a satirical insider's perspective of Singaporean society and features little, if at all, in terms of contentious writing. Fateha.org is a website that seeks to promote welfare and social issues among Singapore's diffused Malay communities.

Survey respondents were given this list and asked to indicate their level of familiarity with each of the sites. A detailed break-up of the portals is indicated in the tables given below, but it is interesting to note that while respondents claimed to have only heard of all other sites in the list, 71.4% said they had also visited the popular site talkingcock.com at least once. The main reason cited by most respondents for this was its 'witty' and 'funny' nature that addressed 'serious issues by in a non-threatening and self-dissipatory manner[10]. Talkingcock.com offers what is seen as a quintessentially Singaporean outlook and this prompted most respondents to frequent the site[11]. There also appeared an underlying sense of 'safety' in admitting to frequent a non-contentious site that has long been (at least unofficially) 'accepted' by the government[12]. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of awareness of each of these sites and the results revealed that with 70 respondents owning to have at least heard of talkingcock.com it was the popular website of the list given to the respondents. Respondents also said that while they might have been aware of the ThinkCenter website, it was only with the onset of the pre-general elections case involving Workers Party Candidate and ThinkCenter co-founder James Gomez that they visited the website yet they citied curiosity to find out more about the person than a subscription to the websites ideology[13].

Table 6.6-Awareness of websites among Respondents:

Site	Number of Respondents: Heard Of	Number of Respondents: Visited	Total
Talkingcock.com	20 (28.6%)	50 (71.4%)	70 (100%)
Thinkcenter.org	29 (65.9%)	15 (34.1%)	44 (100%)
Yawningbread.org	17 (73.9%)	6 (26.1%)	23

			(100%)
Newsintercom.org	17 (56.7%)	13 (43.3%)	30 (100%)
Singapore-window.org	19 (73.1%)	7 (26.9%)	26 (100%)
Fateha.org	19 (86.4%)	3 (13.6%)	22 (100%)

When asked to indicate the source from which they originally heard of these or similarly engaged websites[14], the most common seemed to be through community networks and word-of-mouth with 71 respondents selecting for this option. The importance of traditional communication networks in society are interlinked with the adoption of new media technologies as well. At several points people rely on these community networks to get information of new media networks and this symbiosis was evident in the responses people gave in the survey with 69 respondents claiming to also usually hear of these sites through emailed links sent from people known to them.

Table 6.7- The most common ways in which respondents normally first become aware of contentious sites:

Source	Number of Respondents	Lowest Rank Given	Highest Rank Given	Average Rank	Rank Standard Deviation
Emails from friends	69	0	1	0.57	0.499
Through anonymous links	68	0	1	0.03	0.170
Through self conducted online search	68	0	1	0.25	0.436
Through word-of-mouth	71	0	1	0. 75	0.438
Through the traditional media	70	0	1	0. 46	0.502

NB: 0 used as the lowest rank given indicates the option being left unranked by the respondents.

Respondents were also asked to rank the reasons as to why they frequented these (or such) websites (table 6.8) and once again, when it came to the case of talkingcock.com all the respondents chose the option of 'other', citing the 'witty' nature of the site as the key inducement to their frequenting the site. The perception that such sites could provide information not normally available in the mainstream traditional media was also viewed as a reason for repeat visits to these sites. This can also lend credence to the issue of credibility of online information discussed earlier in the chapter. The controversial nature of either, the site in itself or any of the authors featured in it, were also selected as attractions to a particular site by respondents. Almost all the respondents who ranked this reason as among their top three clarified that this might have been especially relevant in the case of ThinkCenter.org. Familiarity with other works by the authors was not a contributing factor in attracting visitors to the site nor was the recommendation from people known to those surveyed. Whereas word-of-mouth and community networks might

have been the manner in which most respondents first heard of a site, its popularity among peers apparently was not reason enough to sustain their interest in the site. In keeping with the observed wariness among respondents in admitting to visiting any contentious sites (except for talkingcock.com where they were eager to discuss the site), interest arising out of sharing similar interests or views with the site's content was ranked at the bottom by the respondents. In all the data, the high to moderate rank standard deviations indicated the absence of unanimity regarding the importance given to these criteria. Hence while 'others' had the highest rank- with a unanimous reference to the 'funny' nature of talkingcock.com- it also had a relatively high standard deviation implying the variation in people's responses.

Table 6.8- Reasons for Frequenting Sites deemed to be 'contentious':

Reason	Number of Respondents	Highest Rank Given	Lowest Rank Given	Average Rank	Rank Standard Deviation
Well-known author	20	0	6	2.70	2.003
Trust worthy site	30	0	7	2.83	1.577
Information not available in the traditional media	51	0	5	2.22	1.064
Content is similar to personal views	44	0	6	3.02	1.389
Controversial site/ author	33	0	6	2.67	1.652
Popular among	44	1	6	2.89	1.728

family and friends					
Others	28	1	9	2.00	1.981

NB: 0 as the highest rank given indicates the option left unranked by respondents.

From the above observations, it can be inferred that in spite of the respondent's apprehensions in admitting to frequent contentious websites, most respondents had some awareness as well as a reasonable degree of familiarity of these and similarly engaged contentious sites. The main justification for surveying the respondents responses to these sites, each of which in some way represent certain ideologies that might be considered unconventional- at times confrontational to popular norms-was in an interest to analyze the actual success of such existing socio-political engagement online among the population. In turn, these findings were included in an attempt to analyze the level of actual engagement between internet users (citizens) and the state, albeit indirectly. The results of this study are encouraging for the prospect of utilizing the internet to provide an alternate and viable public sphere where citizens can voice their opinions and engage with the authorities of matters of common interest to them.

6.4 Actual Impacts and Influences of Information Found Online on Respondents:

Does the apparent trust afforded to the internet by the survey respondents get translated into concrete influences on their personal opinions and actions? When

asked the extent to which information found online can effect or influence their personal opinions and perspectives, respondents who disagreed with the notion that online information was any less reliable than the information available in the traditional media in Singapore (N= 31), approximately 84% said that they often carry on discussions on online issues with their offline community networks using traditional means of communication like face-to-face (table 6.9) yet an overwhelming 90.3% also said they would not participate in any formal channels of debate based on knowledge they glean from online sources indicating perhaps a high sense of mistrust in the credibility of the data. This appeared in contradiction to previous results that seemed to imply a fairly high sense of trust in online information sources. The respondents also seemed unwilling to invest their personal resources- time, money or effort- on issues heard of online with most people sympathizing more with issues that demonstrated a legitimate offline presence towards which they could direct patronage. The same condition was also repeated by 12% of the respondents who said they might be willing to draw others into campaigns they hear of online but only after thoroughly scrutinizing the issue for themselves. On the other hand, nearly 67% claimed to be unaffected by information found online that required any form of offline action. But in this also, the lack of impact was restricted mainly to political information, where as 78% of the same group also divulging that they would definitely take action based on information found online when it came to critical issues like medical advice or household tips etc.

Table 6.9- Impacts and Influences of Online Information on Respondents who feel the information to be as reliable as that available in the traditional media:

Impact	Number of Respondents (%) Yes	Number of Respondents (%) No	Total
Discuss online issues with members of offline communities	26 (83.9%)	5 (16.1%)	31
Use online information to participate in offline debates	3 (9.7%)	28 (90.3%)	31
Contribute personal resources to online causes	5 (16.1%)	26 (83.9%)	31
Attempt to involve others	4 (12.9%)	27 (87.1%)	31

Among respondents who visit or participate in online discussions regularly (more than twice a week, N= 11), a 100% indicated that they might sometimes be persuaded to change their personal opinions and perspectives on finding such information online This group also felt that interactive websites were platforms for uninhibited discussions (table 6.10) yet were equally divided on the issue of the mediums reliability when compared to traditional media (table 6.11), felt that in order to let any information effect their judgment, they would carry out their enquiries into the validity of the claims before accepting their influence.

Table 6.10- 'Interactive websites as platforms for uninhibited discussions':

Position	Number of Respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly agree	5	45.5 %	45.5 %
Agree	5	45.5 %	90.9 %
Disagree	1	9.1 %	100.0 %
Total	11	100%	

Table 6.11- 'Online Information is less reliable than traditional media sources':

Position	Number of respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly agree	1	9.1 %	9.1 5
Agree	1	9.1 %	18.2 %
Neutral	2	18.2 %	36.4 %
Disagree	6	54.5 %	90.9 %
Strongly disagree	1	9.1 %	100.0 %
Total	11	100. 0%	

Once again, in the case of the 5 outliers who said they would prefer to always reveal their identities when online, most said that information found online would rarely affect their personal opinions (table 6.12). The case of single outlier who admitted that information would often effect his perception of issues also qualified his position by stating that he would normally only access the internet for critical information from 'reliable sites' like those run by the government and would therefore be open to having his views affected by information he found there.

Table 6.12- 'Online information can affect personal perspectives', as surveyed among outliers:

Position	Number of respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Often	1	20.0 %	20 %
Sometimes	1	20.0 %	40 %
Rarely	3	60.0 %	100.0 %
Total	5	100.0 %	

40% of these respondents also were of the opinion that interactive websites provided platforms for uninhibited discussions (table 6.13). The remaining took a neutral stance on the matter with 60% believing that online information is more unreliable than information found on traditional media sources.

Table 6.13- Perceptions among outliers:

Hypothesis	Number of Respondents				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
'Interactive websites can provide platforms for uninhibited discussions'	1	1	3	0	0
'Online Information is less reliable than traditional media'	1	0	1	1	0

6.5 Inferences and Conclusion:

As has been discussed in this chapter, most respondents were of the view that the internet medium can provide as reliable information as can be expected from traditional sources as well. The preference for remaining anonymous online arises as much from the desire to protect one's privacy in an environment where personal information can be intercepted and misused with apparent ease, as it does from the perception that the cloak of anonymity allows for a more uninhibited sphere where information and opinions can be shared without much fear of repercussions. The use of the internet among respondents is marked by complexities and ironies, especially when studying the issues of anonymity and credibility of data available on the medium. What emerge are some glaring ambivalences for a medium that has been embraced not without qualifications and constraints. The study reveals the respondents' vibrant and active online presence, which can be perhaps taken as indicative of the larger universe for the study- Singapore. The potential of the

internet to provide a viable platform for public discourse and socio-political engagement is unmistakable. The various constraints of the medium and those placed by the governing bodies have not prevented users from adopting the technology whole-heartedly and this is turn is manifest in the manner in which the selected sample group participate in cyber activism.

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[1] Male, 49: *"No matter how much they (the government) assures us that 'normal' people are not targeted for surveillance I don't know what I say , when, will bring me to their attention. So anyways I use the government websites only for things like filing my tax returns, getting PF information etc- only get information. Otherwise I don't take part in those polls and surveys and all .Most times I don't care too much about the issues they ask about. If it is important, anyways I won't say what I might really be thinking. So I'd play it safe. No point in me hiding my name there- they'll anyway know"*

Male, 46: *"I don't mind revealing my identity on the government site. I know it's the safest site online- no one can steal my details from there and no one is going to 'misuse' my data. So I feel safe in always giving my real name contact etc but only in these government sites...otherwise online I don't use my identity anywhere"*

[2] Female, 28: *"I am always anonymous when online- or create different pseudonyms for various sites. I know that in Singapore there is a general perception that no matter what you do, Big Brother can always find you but I think for most of us that is not so much the concern as is getting picked on by someone else out to harm you online. If you're not breaking the law then you have nothing to fear so I don't think the authorities really 'watch' the average user but other people might be watching...something really bad like a stalker or someone who wants your credit card details...with so much technology it is easy for anyone who intends you harm to be able to get to you so all you can do is be careful and try to protect yourself by not revealing your identity. Sometimes I go to, you know, chat sites to make new friends etc- I always use a nic name and neither can you tell from my email address who I really am...I just don't want to be harassed by some creep online you know. So yeah, it's safer to give your identity to the government than to random strangers- people you have never met- online."*

[3] Female, 24: *"No one uses their real identities online...even if I see a name like Joe on the forum page, I know there are more chances of it being a nick name than it actually being someone named Joe. It's the done thing- and its good because I don't have to worry about people who know me judging me for my opinions. I can say what I want freely...maybe the Joe I'm talking to is actually my friend 'Jack' but we don't know that so we can then have a more honest conversation than we would probably ever have in real life. Some things you just cannot reveal face to face. Being anonymous helps you open up but you also have to know, to sense, if the person is being honest or just saying rubbish- like making it all up. That can get tricky but after a while you can start to tell and get out or block him."*

[4] A report published by internet security firm ArmorGroup offered evidence that fraud was 'thriving' on the internet and attributed the potential for anonymity as a leading cause for this. *"With its ease of access, massive audience and potential for anonymity, the Internet provides an ideal platform not just for counterfeiters of luxury goods but for unscrupulous businesses or individuals to masquerade as reputable companies,"* concludes Howard Cottrell, executive director of IP .
In January 2006, a law was passed in the United States that rendered online anonymous flaming as a crime in a move to better enforce the existing Violence against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act. The act of anonymous flaming now carries penalties including fines and prison sentencing up to two years.

[5] Female, 53: *"You only hide when you are doing something wrong. I don't think I have anything to fear from being misquoted or misrepresented because I don't indulge in things that don't concern me- online or offline. So how can I get into trouble? If someone try also I can take recourse with the government because I know I've done nothing wrong and so I will be the victim. The government policies are reasonable and they don't just chase anyone and everyone- only those who got things to hide. I don't so I can safely use my real name whenever I want online because I know at least the government is reasonable and won't unnecessarily harass me."*

[6] The phrase is used to refer to a generation whose first port of call for knowledge is the internet with the search engine Google being the most popular source. Such heavy dependency users are differentiated from the generations growing up and educated before the widespread availability of the internet especially characterized by the fact that books and conventional libraries were the prime source of information at the time. The distinct characteristics, in terms of habits and expectations, of such people are exerting a strong effect on the fields of academia, commerce, entertainment and libraries and what began as a phase coined for informal usage has now been accepted as a mainstream phenomenon, finding mention in sites of the British Library in London (Annual Reports and Accounts 2004/2005) and many academic sites. See http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue46/carr/ etc.

[7] Online versions of leading mainstream news agencies have begum incorporating specific section in their online editions that encourage subscribers to take on the role of embedded journalists and provide their first hand reporting on events that they might have been witness to. The BBC website (bbc.co.uk) features a specific section that encourages readers to 'have their say' and 'help the BBC make the news'. It also provides a regular feature 'Your Perspective' that displays readers' reportages on events with little or no accompanying editorial.

[8] Male, 34: *"Sometimes my first source of hearing something is from maybe the paper or the news on TV but if it is regarding something that interests me or effects me then I immediately go and look it up on the internet. That way I get many different points of view of the issue and maybe a clearer picture than I would get from just the paper or the evening news."*
Male, 55: *"My son and I share many common interests and we often discuss the news. I see him make many comments that are unknown to me and when I ask him how he knows this he shows me different websites. So I'm very impressed. When he does this he also goes into the links that give him a full background of all the issues relevant to that particular news item and it makes him able to better understand why some things are happening- you know like a historical context. We recently were discussing the Middle East crisis and he asked me questions I could not remember the answers to- he immediately searched it on the internet and was able to question me with much more information that made me rethink my own position!"*

Female, 48: "*I like reading about book reviews or movie reviews before I make the effort to actually buy them. And the websites give me many honest opinions- why would anyone lie there? If a majority of the people on the website say some movie is rubbish then I believe them and tell my friends not to go- sometimes the review printed in the newspaper does not give you this aspect because its just one persons opinion- he could think differently from me but online I get many more opinions and can judge from the majority. Of coz I trust the information I find online*"

[9] Male, 42: "*I don't observe any bias on the TV or in the newspapers? Bias for what? They only report things as they happen so if they report something a certain way they know that most Singaporeans will also be thinking in the same way. Online you can get away with saying anything and that does more harm than good. Online media is biased- with biases coming in from all quarters and you can't even check who is this who is saying something, what is his agenda in saying that? The internet is highly unreliable then- if you are speaking the truth then why hide? Why not reveal your name? So much information is on the internet and much of its posted anonymously or under fake names…how can you trust this when the authors themselves don't have the courage to stand by what they say?*"

[10] Female, 46: "*I like talkingcock because it's very Singaporean. It is not like the other sites that criticize and are constantly in the news for the wrong reasons. Its all just fun and the authorities know that. Everyone has a good laugh over it*"
Male, 31*: "its very witty- says what needs to be said without insulting anyone."*
Male 25: "*you can't get into trouble at that site...its not fighting any political agenda. I think somewhere even the prime minister said that he read it. So its okay for us also/*"

[11] Female, 28: *"I love talkingcock…it's so funny and since it's about Singaporean lives, written by locals also, it's so easy to relate to and laugh with!"*
Male, 31: *"Talkingcock has articles and issues put in a very witty manner. It says so much that is important but by making us laugh about it as well. So no one takes offence you just read something and feel sheepish that you also think like that but on reading, it seems silly…so you can laugh it off"*

[12] The website talkingcock.com found mention, perhaps for the first time, in the Prime Ministers National Day Rally Speech in August 2006. In a referring to the site's content ("*Talkingcock.com. If you want humour, you go there. Some of the jokes are not bad. Not all of them*") PM Lee appeared to voice a sanction of sorts to the owners of the website albeit with an underlying note of caution. The site also found a second mention in the speech when raised in context of the need for the media to evolve to maintain changing consumer interests while keeping to the high standards expected of a responsible media. The Prime Minister called on Singaporeans to use their discretion in judging information for themselves and maintaining the lines between 'serious' (The Straits Times and CNA) and 'fun' (talkingcock)

[13] Male, 26: "*I had vaguely heard about ThinkCenter before but never really paid attention to it. Only when the news on TV and the newspapers started talking about James Gomez that I found out that he often wrote essays at the website. I went to the website to actually find out more about the man since I thought maybe his political sympathies might be the reason why such a non-issue was created into such a big deal. Other than that, I don't think I would ever have reached that site on my own.*"

[14] When asked to indicate the most common ways in which the respondents would normally first hear of such websites, some respondents selected multiple options owing to the fact that they

might have heard of different sites from different sources. Hence a degree of statistical overlap was experienced in the computation of the data. But this does not in any way negate the validity of the responses since to overcome ambiguity respondents were asked to rank their sources.

Chapter 7. Conclusion:

The issue of civic engagement in the internet is an interesting area that has attracted a fair amount of attention over the last decade. Its democratic potential for citizen-state negotiations has been particularly relevant for new emerging economies like Singapore that are often perceived to be, from the outside at least, 'regimented democracies'. With the anonymous nature of its global information and communication networks, the medium has come to imply a new and viable platform for civil society engagements normally not permissible in the main stream and traditional media. The intensified engagement of the government in Civil Society spaces online has facilitated and increased public participation in its processes, and this in turn has done much to rebuild the image of the State as being keenly interested in creating open citizen dialogues and participation. With this in mind, the thesis sought to understand how the public in turn view the viability of the internet in engaging the authorities. Given the internet's immense ability to influence and forge mass opinions on matters critical to public-government interactions, this thesis aims to understand the patterns and ways in which public perceptions are molded in today's information age.

Over the course of this thesis the manner in which Singaporeans utilize the internet has been studied along the context of their commonly held perceptions regarding the medium. From the analysis of the survey findings, it was revealed that the most common use of the technology was to meet the communication needs of the

consumers with the sophistication and economy of access making it the preferred mode in an increasing number of social, cultural and political contexts. With the realization that the government needs to increase its operational transparency while allowing citizens convenient means of providing feedback to the state, the internet has become an effective platform for state-citizen dialogue. Not only are people turning to the internet to acquire vital information, they are also using the medium to communicate with the authorities through online feedback forms, forums or emails. And this is not restricted to official communiqués with various state bodies; internet users are increasingly adopting new media technologies to conduct their routine inter personal communications as well. In Singapore also similar trends emerge the survey data revealing emails and instant messaging applications to be the most popular online tools among a majority of the respondents. Those surveyed also indicated a high preference for using the many search engines available online to access information that would normally be unavailable to them in the mainstream media. This proved to have special significance in the Singapore general elections conducted in mid 2006. Heightened campaigning in the closely contested constituencies of Potong Pasir and Hougang, saw many survey respondents residing in these areas, use the internet to seek information on and critically discuss key election issues. With some of those surveyed viewing the limited coverage given to the opposition parties as an inevitable inadequacy of the traditional media, the internet provided a space for lively and constructive discourse. The influence of information accessed from cyber communities appeared to be as significant to the mass deliberation process as traditional mediums indicating a fairly high degree of

credibility afforded to new media sources. With the power to influence popular opinions, the immense potential of the medium lies in the creation of spaces that allow rational deliberations and encourage the exchange of critical information in a timely manner.

In Singapore, the development of internet technology has been led by the state with policy makers recognizing the futility, and undesirability, of completely controlling the ways in which its citizens navigate cyberspace. This does not imply, either, that the state has adopted a hands-free approach but rather, it has laid down basic guidelines that seek to censor access to websites it deems to be unsuitable (e.g. Pornography, Xenophobia, Religious intolerance etc) or a threat to national security. In enforcing the law on cyber activity, the Singapore government has maintained its commitment to wielding a 'light-touch' approach that, unlike rules for traditional main stream media channels, allow an increased scope for maneuvering with a view to develop local creative talent specializing in New Media Technologies. This gradual 'opening' up of the internet arena has further bolstered the creation of a viable 'public sphere' among Singaporean consumers. Thus, in keeping with the dynamic environment, we can now turn to the research question stated in chapter 1 of this thesis to demonstrate the use of the internet as a platform for civic engagement in Singapore.

7.1 Research Questions Re-Visited:

In this thesis, I have attempted to seek out the possibilities of the internet emerging as an avenue for democratization and the creation of a platform for civic engagement. With all the available data procured from the surveys and in-depth interviews conducted, a deeper understanding of the complexities of the system within which the questions are located emerges. In studying both the actual usage patterns of online tools as well as the general perceptions regarding the information and influences of the medium, the research provides an insight into the internet and civil society discourse.

Addressing the first research question on the credibility of online information, the survey revealed a certain degree of ambivalence among the respondents caught between the desires to be anonymous themselves and a wariness of accepting information from anonymous sources. The fear of overstepping the boundaries set down by the State was seen as the main imperative for the former along with the increased risk of cyber crimes. Yet this did not detract them away from the perception held by the majority that cyber sources of information were, at the very least, as credible as mainstream traditional sources like the television or print media. Online search engines offer a plethora of information but users cited the need to conduct their own verifications of the sources before accepting the data. This, they felt was no more than the way in which they would normally accept or disregard information got from traditional mediums as well. An awareness of the

limitations and critical manner in which the consumers engage the medium is indicative of their maturity in patterns of usage of the technology. This in turn shows their evolution to high levels of maturity as e-citizens, which is an extremely desirable trait in any progressive economy and especially in Singapore.

A legitimate offline presence of online organizations proved to be essential to many respondents in choosing to patronize issues propagated by internet sources by offering a certain degree of credibility to an amorphous medium which relies on the rules of mass inclusiveness to create the information available on it. The 'virtual' and the 'real' are thus taken as mutually complimentary where the virtual, rather than eliminating the real, re-enforces it (Wittel, Lury and Lash, 2002).

The last round of general elections witnessed an increase in the number of people discussing issues pertinent to it online. Those surveyed also expressed an almost unanimous belief that the internet, especially when compared to other media, does allow a marked degree of uninhibited debate yet the recent crackdown by the state, on what it called inflammatory and seditious postings, has also instilled in users a sense of caution that, while not yet translating into the levels of self-censorship often practiced by the mainstream media, forces them to be well aware of the repercussions for 'irresponsible' online activity[1]. At the same time, neither has this curtailed the manner in which 'civil society' evolves in cyberspace. In order to understand this, we must separate it from the western-liberal approaches taken by most critics and look at it from the specific context of Singapore- its evolution as a

state and as a society. To address the issue of the internet's political significance in Singapore, the study attempted to gauge the respondents' levels of political engagement on the internet. In doing so, it found that there appears to be a heightened degree of self expression in play here. To a large extent this can be attributed to the progressive attitude of the state with regards to censorship and control of the internet. What would not have been deemed permissible in the early days of nationhood is now being fairly openly presented in the avenues of cyberspace be it gay rights (e.g. Fridae.com); societal satire (e.g. Talkingcock.com), contentious journalism (e.g. Thinkcenter.org) or plain oppositional manifestoes (e.g. Wp.org.sg). Pointing to the theme of co-evolution central to this thesis, it is evident then, that as the state evolves, so does the media that operates within the changing scenarios. The effects of this co-evolution on the main-steam media have not been the focus for this particular thesis but that there is a positive impact is clearly visible. The internet, as the central focus of this research, has demonstrated its power to influence key decisions in people's lives and even in the manner in which they access and use vital information. Even though many respondents claimed to be less than active participants in online discussion forums, choosing to use the internet mainly as a gateway to information and communication, there is enough evidence to show that, in time, these capabilities will amalgamate to result in the creation of a more actively engaged citizen presence in cyberspace. Singapore already enjoys one of the highest internet penetration levels in the world and as the younger generations increasingly adopt it into aspects of their daily lives, the ways in which social and political activism occurs online will also be more copious.

It is not just the state that appears to be changing to keep abreast with the socio-political and cultural potential of the internet to realize its national goal of becoming a knowledge hub, 'trading in ideas rather than goods' to boost its standing among nations of the developed world. Singapore has developed itself into a highly educated and economically competitive nation that seeks to be at the helm of creative innovation and applications. That it has succeeded to a large extent in asserting its superiority in the field of new age technology is rendered more impressive with the absorption of this at the individual level. The use of new media technologies with their highly interactive interfaces are a part of the Singaporean lifestyle and the continued demand for improvement lies at the core of this drive. The high levels of education and welfare standards enjoyed by a majority of the population provide a vibrant field for developing indigenous creative and technical talent aside, a fact often promoted by the government as well. In such a stimulating environment, it would go against the interests of the state to install stringent curbs on the manner in which Singaporeans tap into the vast potential of the internet. The medium has tremendous potential and when people attempt to realize this potential, it would suit the state to apply less stringent rules for controlling these endeavors. With the possibility to enhance the citizenry, the internet offers consumers the freedom to engage in new domains and in recognizing this; the state too has relaxed the various restrictions applicable to the cyber activities of its people. For the creation of the viable civil society thus, it is not merely enough for the technology to provide the channel but more for the people themselves to attain a level of maturity that emboldens them to critically and constructively participate in the

processes of state. As the responses elicited from the population sampled in the survey indicated, there is tremendous potential for harnessing the internet as a platform for civic engagement in Singapore. The democratic and inclusive potential of internet will perhaps be realized in the future with all signs already indicating policy and usage shifts in its engagements. The plurality of views available on the internet has made the users more aware of their socio-political surroundings and this in turn has been manifested in the increased importance given to the medium, especially by the 'post-65' generation. An increase in critical dialogue online has been able to transform itself into the demand for a more inclusive polity and its resulting active organization. The many ways in which Singaporeans are making their spaces on the internet allows for more mass-oriented representations that the citizenry can identify with online. Once again, we revisit the citizenship and communication interdependencies as proposed by Murdock and Golding (1989) and find them proved in the many avenues for feedback and civic participation that are now offered to Singaporean internet users. Hence, this thesis supports the optimism ventured in the discourse on civic engagement on the internet in the case of Singapore while stressing the importance of locating it within the specific context of the evolution of the Singapore state mechanisms that in turn affects the manner in which the local society develops.

7.2 Directions for Further Studies:

This thesis attempted to focus exclusively on the manner in which Singaporeans use the internet and their perceptions behind the various sources that would imply its success as a viable alternate public sphere. The research was not primarily to find the impact of strong legal structures and non-lenient law enforcement on the perceived fear of state induced surveillance but it could not avoid touching on this. In spite of not being asked specifically in the questionnaire, many respondents expressed their apprehensions on the subject as an important influence on the manner in which they engage in critical discourse online. The large numbers of respondents who volunteered their opinions on this matter can imply scope for further research dedicated to these lines. Likewise, a strong enforcement of cyber laws and media regulations in Singapore is something not explicitly addressed in this thesis either. This could be a potential area for research that would be able to contribute further insights into the internet adoption and usage patterns among the citizenry. This is an area that has not been explored in depth in this study due to practical considerations and remains a limitation of the scope of application of this endeavor. The limitations of this study can provide the basis for the outlines of future directions of research.

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[1] Male, 42: *"Even the internet is not free from restrictions really. If I indulge in irresponsible activities online, say things which are wrong or hurt community's feelings then I know that I will be caught. Young people used to think that they can say whatever they want on the internet, what they could not say maybe in real life situations, but now they know that while there is no law as such preventing you from voicing your opinions you must make sure you can produce ample evidence to support it. And why not? Just because it is all too big, shouldn't mean that anyone can give any false information online…who knows who reads it and believes it… then what?"*

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Appendix A:

Sample of Survey Questionnaire used:

The following questionnaire will be used strictly for academic purposes, for a study on 'Technology for Community Building' which includes a study of the internet usage and perception patterns in Singapore, as part of the requirement for a Masters Thesis at the National University of Singapore. Certain personal details of the respondents are required to build a demographic reflection of the sample group. Anonymity of the respondent is assured. Under no circumstances will the information collected here be distributed or disclosed for any purpose other than the above stated objective. Thank you for your assistance.

_____

1) Name (Optional):

2) Age: 27

3) Gender: Male_____   Female_____

4) Area of residence: River Valley

5) Last educational qualification obtained (Please select one option):
   (a)High School diploma
   (b)Undergraduate diploma (polytechnic)
   (c)Undergraduate diploma (university)
   (d)Honors degree/ diploma
   (e)Graduate Degree/Diploma
   (f)Post Graduate degree/diploma

5) Industry: (Please put an X in the appropriate column)

(a) Advertising/ Marketing/ PR		(b)Housewife		(c)Finance/Insurance/Real Estate	
(d) Construction		(e) Law		(f) NGO/ Social Work	
(g) Education (including students)		(h) Computers/ Electronic		(i) Government/Military/ Public service	
(j) Medical/Health services/ Pharmaceuticals		(k) Consumer goods		(l) Media/Communications/ Entertainment/ Publishing	
(m) Retail/Services		(n) Travel/ Transportation		(o) Unemployed	

(p) Others (please specify) _____

6) What was your degree of participation in the Singapore General Elections 2006? (Please select all applicable options)

    (a) Campaigned for party/candidate
    (b) Attended party rallies/ meetings
    (c) Attended/ participated in public forums/debates on election related issues
    (d) Keenly followed news coverage of campaigns/election related issues
    (e) Voted in General Elections
    (f) No participation

7 i) Do you access/ browse the internet?
    (a) No
    (b) Yes

 ii) If yes, then where do you access the internet?
    (a) Home only
    (b) Office only
    (c) Both home and office
    (d) Public internet café
    (e) Office and Internet cafe
    (f) Other (Please specify) _____

8) How much time do you spend on browsing the internet for personal purposes (e.g.: attending to personal mail, chatting, accessing other web resources etc)?
    (a) More than 4 hours a day
    (b) 2-4 hours a day
    (c) 1- 2 hours a day
    (d) 30 mins to 1 hour a day
    (e) Less than 30 mins a day

9 i) Do you have your own blog/ website?
    (a) Yes
    (b) No

10) Which web resources do you access usually? (Please rank the following in order of decreasing frequency: 1 being most frequent/commonly accessed)

Resource	Rank
(a) Emails	
(b) Chat	
(c) Online newspapers/ magazines	
(d) Games	
(e) Music/ video	
(f) Forums	
(g) General Search	

(h) Others (please specify)	

11) How often do you search/read about the following on the internet? (Please rank in order of decreasing frequency)

Topic	Rank
(a) Articles on politics and current issues	
(b) Commerce/trade/economy related articles	
(c) Entertainment related articles	
(d) Hobby related articles	
(e) Sports issues/coverage	
(f) Health and fitness related articles/sites	
(g) Travel related resources	
(h) Human rights related articles	
(i) Gay and Lesbian rights/issues	
(j) Environmental issues	
(k) Consumer awareness issues	
(l) Others (please specify)	

12i) Are you a member of any online community? (Please select all relevant options)

(a) Yahoogroups		(b) msn groups		(c) aol my groups	
(d) Friendster		(e) Online support groups		(f) DGroups	
(g) Orkut		(h) Not a member		(i) Others (please specify)	

ii) Are you a member of any of the following types of mailing lists? (Please select all relevant options)

(a) Mailing lists among family and/or friends	
(b) Mailing lists among office/work colleagues	
(c) Mailing lists from others known to you	

13) How often do you check/participate in online discussions (forums/ panels/message boards/etc)?
   (a) Once a week
   (b) Twice a week
   (c) More than twice a week
   (d) Never (if you have selected this option please proceed to Q15)

14) What is your degree of involvement in online discussion groups?
   (a) I initiate topics as a member
   (b) I am a member but only respond to topics/threads
   (c) I am a passive member i.e. only read postings made by others
   (d) I read and/or participate in public forums without being a member
   (e) No participation

15 i) If you were to ever participate in online groups/forums would you prefer to be anonymous?
    (a) I would prefer to be always anonymous
    (b) I would prefer to sometimes be anonymous
    (c) I would prefer to always reveal my identity

ii) What would be your concern while participating in an online debate/discussion? (Please rate each of the following issues on a scale of 5 with 1 being 'most concerned' and 5 being 'not concerned')

(a) Fear of personal data being misused/ misrepresented	1	2	3	4	5
(b) Security/ trust worthiness of the website	1	**2**	3	4	5
(c) Credibility/identity of other commentators on same site/forum	1	2	3	4	5
(d) Declared purpose of the information gathered in the discussion	1	2	3	4	5
(e) Others (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5

16) Usually, where do you first hear about government community programs or campaigns? (Please rank your answers in order of <u>decreasing</u> frequency)

(a) Newspaper	
(b) TV/ Radio	
(c) Government or state agency websites	
(d) Emails from government websites	
(e) Other online sources (e.g.: blogs, newsrooms, forums etc)	
(f) Pamphlets and/or printed newsletters	
(g) Community group / party meetings	
(h) Others (please specify)	

17 i) Do you participate in online public opinion surveys/votes/polls etc?
    (a) Regularly
    (b) Often
    (c) Sometimes
    (d) Rarely
    (e) Never

ii) If yes, where do you usually participate? (Please rank the following options in order of <u>decreasing</u> frequency)

(a) Online newspapers/ magazines	
(b) General news websites/portals	
(c) Government/ state websites and forums	
(d) Private Blogs/ forums/ discussion groups	
(e) Public chat rooms/ discussion groups/ forums	
(f) Others (Please Specify)	

18 i) Have you visited the following Government websites within the past one year? (Please select all relevant options)
     (a) www.ecitizen.gov.sg
     (b) www.gov.sg
     (c) www.flu.gov.sg
     (d) www.gebiz.gov.sg
     (e) www.sars.gov.sg
     (f) www.esurvey.gov.sg
     (g) Any other government portal/ website
     (h) Not visited any government website ever

    ii) How often do you visit these government websites?
     (a) Very often
     (b) Often
     (c) Sometimes
     (d) Rarely
     (e) Never

19 i) Have you ever provided any feed back to these government websites?
     (a) Yes
     (b) No

    ii) If yes, then in what way did you contribute your feedback? (Please select all relevant options)
     (a) Sent email to officer concerned
     (b) Posted comment on the available forum in the website
     (c) Telephoned the contact number provided in the website
     (d) Sent letter at contact address provided in the website
     (e) Filled in online feedback form provided in the website.
     (f) Others (please specify) _____

    iii) If no, then what prevented you from providing feedback to the government website? (Please select all relevant options)
     (a) There was no space/ option provided for feedback online
     (b) Feedback asked for in the website was mainly related to design/appearance of   the website rather than content.
     (c) The site is updated constantly and hence, there is no need for feedback
     (d) I had no problems/ concerns to report
     (e) Others (please specify)_____

20 i) In the past one year how have you attempted to communicate with your local MP?

Manner	No. of times
(a) Raise concerns at meetings	
(b) Write letter directly to party/ MP	
(c) Write email directly to party/ MP	
(d) Raise concerns in newspapers/newsletters	
(e) Telephone public community help lines	
(f) Telephone public community help lines	
(g) Others (please specify)	
(h) Did not attempted to contact MP	

ii) Have you ever sent a complaint/ concern/ request to the government website/portal?
     (a) Yes
     (b) No

21) Which of the following websites have you heard of/visited? (Please select all   answers relevant)

Site	Heard of	Visited	Site	Heard of	Visited
(a)Talkingcock.com			(b)ThinkCenter.org		
(c)Yawningbread.org			(d)newsintercom.org		
(e)Singapore-window.org			(f)Fateha.com		

22 i) How did you first come to know about these (and such) websites? (Please select all relevant options below)
     (a) Through links sent to me by a friend via email
     (b) Though links sent to me from an unknown source
     (c) Through an online search
     (d) By word of mouth
     (e) Heard about it first in the traditional media
     (f) Others (please specify)_____

ii) If you occasionally/regularly visit these websites, what has sustained your interest in them? (Please rank the following options in order of decreasing frequency)

Attribute	Rank
(a) The author is a well known/trust worthy personality	
(b) The website is trustworthy from my experience	
(c) The website gives me information that is not available in the traditional media (TV, Newspapers, radio)	
(d) The website point of view seems to be similar to my own	
(e) The website and/or the author is controversial.	

| (f) This website is popular among my friends and relatives | |
| (g) Others (please specify) | |

23) Please read the following statements and select that option that best reflects your position:

i) 'Interactive websites in Singapore are more likely to provide a platform for uninhibited discussions, than the traditional media (e.g. Newspapers, TV, and radio) '.
   (a) Strongly agree
   (b) Agree
   (c) Neutral
   (d) Disagree
   (e) Strongly disagree

ii) 'Information available online is less reliable than that available in the traditional media in Singapore (TV, Newspapers, Radio etc)'.
   (a) Strongly agree
   (b) Agree
   (c) Neutral
   (d) Disagree
   (e) Strongly disagree

iii) 'Information got from online debates or forums can effect/change my perception of an offline (real life) issue'.
   (a) Very often
   (b) Often
   (c) Sometimes
   (d) Rarely
   (e) Never

24) What has been the impact of online debates/discussions on your offline (real life) activities (please select all relevant options)
   (a) Discuss, with your offline friends, the issues learnt from online debates
   (b) Participated in offline debates/rallies/meetings motivated by information learnt online
   (c) Contribute money/time/labor to organizations/causes read about online
   (d) Attempted to get others involved in organizations/causes learnt about online
   (e) No impact or change in my offline behavior or perceptions.

Optional question:
25) Family Income bracket (Please select one option)

(a) More than 100,000 SD (per annum)	
(b) 50,000 SD – 100,000 SD (per annum)	
(c) Less than 50,000 SD (per annum)	

_____
Thank You for your participation!

<u>Appendix B</u>

Singapore General Elections 2006: Results at a Glance
Source: ChannelNewsAsia, Singapore Votes 2006

Singapore's ruling People's Action Party (PAP) claimed a decisive victory in the 2006 General Election, winning 82 of the 84 seats. The PAP took 45 of the 47 seats contested on Polling Day, in addition to the 37, made up of seven Group Representation Constituencies, it secured on Nomination Day after they were unopposed. It took all the seven contested GRCs and seven of the nine single seats. SDA's Chiam See Tong retained the Potong Pasir single seat while the Workers' Party's Low Thia Khiang kept his seat in Hougang.

<u>Share of Valid Votes</u>:

Party		Share
PAP		66.6%
WP		16.34%
SDA		12.97%
SDP		4.09%

<u>Election Results in Sites of Survey:</u>
Sembawang:
PAP- 76.7 %
SDP- 23.3 %

Hougang:
PAP- 37.26 %
WP- 62.74%

Potong Pasir

PAP- 44.16 %

SDA- 55.84 %