

**BLOGGING AS COLLECTIVE ACTION: THE ROLE OF  
COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND SOCIAL NETWORKS  
IN ENGENDERING CHANGE**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b> .....	i
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	vi
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	ix
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	x
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
Background.....	1
Research Objectives.....	5
Theoretical Framework.....	7
Rationale and Significance .....	12
Structure of Thesis .....	15
<b>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	17
Social Movements from Resource Mobilization Perspectives .....	17
A Social Network Approach.....	22
Formal Social Networks .....	23
Informal Social Networks.....	25
Multiplex Ties and Strong Ties.....	27
Online Social Networks .....	29
New Social Movements and Collective Identity .....	34
Four Dimensions of Collective Identity.....	36
Online Collective Identities .....	40
Technology and Online Activism .....	44
Disseminating Information and Organizing Action.....	45
Building Networks and Communities.....	48
Blogging.....	50
Media Regulation in Singapore .....	54
Socio-Historical Context and Regulatory Framework.....	55
Technology and Democratization .....	56
New Media and Cyber Discourse .....	58
Changing Political Opportunities and Civic Engagement .....	60
Research Questions.....	62
Research Question 1 .....	62
Research Question 2 .....	64
Research Question 3 .....	66

<b>CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY</b> .....	68
Sample and Data Collection.....	68
Using Commercial Search Engines .....	68
Using Blog Aggregators .....	71
Snowballing Seed Sites.....	72
Survey .....	73
Procedure .....	74
Sample.....	76
Measurement.....	79
Motivations for Blogging.....	80
Activism Involvement.....	80
Membership in Non-Governmental and Civil Society Organizations .....	80
Participation in Activism .....	80
Types of Activism Involvement.....	81
Reasons for Non-Participation.....	82
Use of Internet Technologies for Activism.....	82
Social Networks and Relational Characteristics .....	83
Number of Social Contacts .....	83
Tie Strength.....	84
Perceived Social Influence.....	85
Trust, Information-Seeking and Social Selective Incentives .....	85
Interviews.....	86
Procedure .....	87
Sample.....	88
Transcription and Analysis .....	89
 <b>CHAPTER 4 POLITICAL BLOGGERS &amp; ACTIVISM</b> .....	 94
<b>PARTICIPATION</b>	
Blog Content of Political Blogs .....	94
Political Bloggers’ Activism Participation .....	98
 <b>CHAPTER 5 ACTIVIST BLOGGERS &amp; COLLECTIVE IDENTITY</b> ..	 107
Shared Consciousness among Activist Bloggers.....	107
Identity Signifiers and Perception of “The Others” .....	116
Articulation of a Common Adversary.....	121
Dichotomy between Community and Individualism .....	127
 <b>CHAPTER 6 SOCIAL NETWORKS &amp; ACTIVISM PARTICIPATION</b> .	 136
Structural Proximity and Activism Participation.....	137
Relational Characteristics in Activist Bloggers’ and	

Non-Activist Bloggers' Social Networks .....	144
Strength of Ties .....	145
Perceived Social Influence .....	148
Trust .....	150
Information-Seeking .....	152
Social Selective Incentives .....	155
Relational Characteristics among Activist Bloggers' Informal, Formal and Online Networks .....	159
Strength of Ties and Trust .....	159
Information-Seeking .....	164
Perceived Social Influence and Social Selective Incentives .....	166
<b>CHAPTER 7 INTERNET TECHNOLOGIES &amp; ACTIVISM.....</b>	<b>175</b>
Disseminating Information and Organizing Activities .....	175
Fostering Connections and Building Networks .....	184
Social Media and Viral Activism .....	192
<b>CHAPTER 8 DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>202</b>
Collective Individualism as a Galvanizing Force .....	202
Organization Affiliation and Collective Identity .....	207
Different Networks and Different Roles .....	208
Organization Type and Network Effects .....	214
Internet Technologies as Instruments of Change .....	215
Organization Affiliation and Technology Deployment .....	219
Theoretical and Methodological Implications .....	220
Implications for Theory .....	220
Implications for Research .....	222
Implications for Method .....	226
<b>CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>228</b>
Blogging as the New "The Personal is Political"? .....	229
Limitations of the Study .....	236
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>240</b>
<b>APPENDIX A .....</b>	<b>258</b>
<b>APPENDIX B .....</b>	<b>267</b>
<b>APPENDIX C .....</b>	<b>275</b>

<b>APPENDIX D</b> .....	277
<b>APPENDIX E</b> .....	280
<b>APPENDIX F</b> .....	281

## SUMMARY

Political developments that took place in recent years suggest that blogging has embarked on a different trajectory, from a personal and therapeutic medium to one which transforms both the nature and mode of civic participation. Observations of how bloggers are emerging as political players are not limited to Western countries but extend also to Asian countries such as Korea, Myanmar and Malaysia. This study is set in Singapore, where the government has adopted an authoritative and patriarchal approach in regulating media and speech since the country's independence in 1965. Although media scholars extol blogging as a medium that empowers ordinary citizens to influence the political landscape, existing work on blogging tends to focus on bloggers' motivations, their hyperlink networks and, at best, have drawn correlations between blog use and political participation.

Theoretically grounded in resource mobilization theories and new social movement theories, this study ascertains the role of informal, formal and online social networks as well as the process of collective identity building among political bloggers in influencing their crossover from online to offline participation in collective action. Taking into account the role of human agency in activism, this study also examines the types of activism in which political bloggers are involved and how they have used Internet technologies to meet their goals and objectives. Cognizant of the proliferation of web 2.0 technologies, this study explores whether, and how, activist bloggers use technologies such as Facebook and Twitter. The three research questions are: (1) Does a collective identity exist among activist bloggers and if so, what is the nature of the collective identity shared among them? (2) What roles do social networks play in engendering political bloggers' participation in activism? (3) What roles do Internet technologies play in activism?

A mixed methodology of qualitative and quantitative techniques was used to address the three research questions. Comprising political bloggers in Singapore, the sample was collected through an exhaustive web crawl. In-depth interviews were conducted with 41 bloggers, including prominent activists as well as bloggers who did not participate in activism at all. I gathered data on political bloggers' perception of others and the nature of the collective identity shared with other political bloggers in Singapore; the nature of their participation in activism; their relationships (or lack thereof) with other political bloggers and activists; as well as their use of Internet technologies for activism purposes. In addition, the survey also determined the demographic details of political bloggers as well as background information on their blog use. Other than measuring the number of people political bloggers knew in their informal, formal and online social networks who took part in activism, the survey also collected data on relational variables such as strength of ties, trust, social influence, information-seeking and selective incentives in each network for both activist bloggers and non-activist bloggers.

Both qualitative and quantitative data show that political bloggers in Singapore are a heterogeneous group and participate in a wide range of what Locher (2002) defined as alternative and reformative movements. Pertaining to collective identity and blogging, this study establishes firstly, that activist bloggers experienced a strong sense of collective identity, manifested through a shared consciousness, clear identity signifiers, and an articulation of an adversary compared to non-activist bloggers. Secondly, the findings validate existing social network theories by showing that there is a strong correlation between political bloggers' social networks and their participation in collective action. Social networks played different roles: informal networks were critical in building trust and strong ties, while formal networks



fulfilled information-seeking needs, exerted social influence and social selective incentives effects on veteran activists and enhanced solidarity among members. However, qualitative data showed that over time, formal organizations cultivate friendships, build solidarity and strengthen solidarity among members. Thirdly, the findings shed light on how Internet technologies and social media are used by political bloggers to realize their activist agenda. Over and above answering the research questions, three groups of political bloggers emerged from the findings – offline-based activists, online-based activists and non-activists. The different roles played by formal, institutionalized organizations and ad hoc online participatory groups are also discussed in this study. By developing a conceptual framework that marries collective identity, social networks and human agency, this study paves the way for the development of a theoretically coherent approach in examining new media and collective action.

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:	Types of Activist Activities Engaged in by Activist Bloggers ...	100
Table 2:	Correlation Coefficients between Personal Motivations, Political Motivations and Activism Participation .....	115
Table 3:	Statistics for Social Network Contacts for Activist Bloggers and Non-Activist Bloggers.....	143
Table 4:	ANOVA of Network Variables by Activism Participation.....	146
Table 5:	Summary of Social Network Variables for Activist Bloggers and Non-Activist Bloggers .....	158
Table 6:	ANOVA of Network Variables by Networks for Activist Bloggers.....	160
Table 7:	Statistics for Internet Use by Activist Bloggers and Non-Activist Bloggers.....	182

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Age Groups of Socio-Political Bloggers .....	77
Figure 2: Education Levels of Bloggers .....	78
Figure 3: Income Levels of Bloggers.....	79

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

The term “blog” is short for Weblog, a new form of personal and subcultural grassroots expression involving summarizing and linking to other sites. In effect, blogging is a form of grassroots convergence. (Jenkins, 2006a, p215.)

With the ubiquitous adoption of information communication technologies and the embracement of broadband technology, phenomena such as blogging and information sharing on Wikipedia demonstrate the dynamics of collaboration and collective intelligence engendered by new media and new media literacy skills. Jenkins (2006a) advocated that the principles of access, participation, reciprocity and peer-to-peer communication create a participatory culture where individuals from different walks of life are able to converge online, pool their resources together and engage in collective consumption and production of media content. Scholarly interest in how individuals harness technological features and technological convergence to achieve their objectives, whether personal, social or political, is taking on different trajectories. The genesis of blogging lies primarily in personal gratification as individuals engage blogs as a medium for self-expression and to satisfy a narcissistic desire to be seen and heard, resulting in the popularity of the medium as a new form of personal journal (Blood, 2002; Trammell, 2005). Another key factor that accounts for the popularity of blogs among users as well as their unforeseen impact on real

world politics is their interactivity. Interactivity refers to one's ability, in the context of blogging, to leverage technology in communicating bi-directionally with readers, made possible by common tools such as hyperlinks to other bloggers and blog content, as well as the comment feature (Blood, 2002; Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robinson & Weigel, 2006; Kim, 2007). The accessibility and ease of use afforded by blogging software reduce barriers such as cost and technical disability, and contribute to the phenomenal growth of blogging.

However, within a relatively short span of time, it was soon apparent that blogging embarked on a new trajectory in terms of purpose and nature: that of disseminating information and facilitating exchanges of opinion, leading to unanticipated impact on real life politics and civic participation. In the milieu of new media, technological optimists claim that blogs are the next possible force that will unleash a new wave of civic participation among regular citizens. As the literature review in the following chapter will establish, it became evident to both academia and the media industry that blogs have implications that extend beyond the personal and into the political sphere (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Lin, Halavais & Zhang, 2007; Nakajima, Tatemura, Hino, Hara & Tanaka, 2005). In the U.S. context, Jenkins (2006b) describes blogs as a form of egalitarian grassroots movement that "spoils the American government" and contributes to a new form of media system as bloggers share and scrutinize available information, and challenge one another's assumptions. For instance, American bloggers proved to be a new force to contend with during the Memogate controversy and the Howard Dean campaign in 2004 (Tremayne, 2007, p.xiv). The effects of blogs are not confined to the West. In Malaysia, the blogosphere has been rife with political discussions and outright criticisms about the government and its alleged (mis)management of the country's economy; this supposedly

culminated in the unprecedented gain of seats by opposition parties in the 222-member Parliament during the general elections in 2008, thereby undermining the ruling party's grasp on national politics. During the aftermath of the elections, the Malaysian Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi, admitted that the government's failure to tap into the blogosphere and pay heed to the citizenry's views and opinions contributed to the election outcome. A prominent blogger, Raja Petra, was arrested under the Internet Security Act in September 2008 for his blog articles on the basis that they could cause public disorder, perhaps a tacit acknowledgement of the potential power of online discourse (Hong, 2008).

In Singapore, the ruling party, People's Action Party, has, in recent years turned its eyes to the rise of blogging and its implications on both politics and the civic society. In order to keep in touch with a public that is becoming increasingly new media literate, the government started to engage with the citizenry via new forms of media such as blogs. Some government officials such as the Post-65 Ministers of Parliament, as well as those from opposition parties, have set up their own blogs in an attempt to reach out to an increasingly media-savvy electorate. In March 2007, the government commissioned an independent advisory committee, the Advisory Council on the Impact of New Media on Society (AIMS) to propose new rules of engagement with citizens, cognizant of the rising and changing usage of media and technologies (Lim, 2008). Representing online citizens, a group of bloggers who called themselves Bloggers 13 released their version of the proposal to the public and the media at a press conference, taking their online participation to the offline context. In their report, which was released even before AIMS' report, the bloggers called for deregulation and greater Internet freedom. The Online Citizen (TOC), a group blog founded on the principles of citizen journalism, with bloggers contributing to the

website on a voluntary and regular basis, also garnered public attention for its offline activities. Taking engagement to another level, TOC conducts street polls, holds talks and protests at the Speakers' Corner, in an effort to reach out to the masses and gain a clearer understanding of the nation's pulse (Hussain, 2008). TOC's readership and its growing visibility in the offline realm garnered a full page article by journalist Au Yong (2008) in *The Straits Times*, a Singapore newspaper daily with the highest readership of 1.43 million readers, reaching an estimated 38% of the population in 2009 (Singapore Press Holdings, *The Straits Times* Media Kit, 2010). Thus, blogs are gaining greater recognition, not just as an alternative medium for the expression of opinions personal to bloggers themselves, but also as grassroots vehicles that challenge the status quo of established institutions and governments in the real world. This is because blogs are a cost-effective, relatively easy to use, and efficient platform through which ordinary citizens are able to bypass established and traditional authorities in the exchange of opinion and information (Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b). Although a number of scholars have indeed focused attention on the spontaneous formation of collective action through social media, such as Rheingold's (2003) concept of "smart mobs", there remains little research that examines the liminal region between the individual, collectiveness and action. In addition, the existing body of scholarly work tends to approach bloggers as a homogenous group. Scholars have yet to explain why some bloggers take part in activism while others do not, and which factors account for blogging to translate into other forms of activism beyond posting online. This study addresses the question of whether, and how, bloggers engage in collective action, and within the population of bloggers, whether there are different categories of bloggers differentiated by their levels of involvement in activism. Beyond that, through using social movement theories as the guiding

framework in its investigation of the phenomenon of blogging and collective action, this study investigates the relationship between key enabling factors established by social movement theorists and blogging. By examining the applicability and the relevance of theoretical concepts rooted in the field of social movements, specifically collective identity and pre-existing social structures, this study develops a comprehensive framework and explains the factors that bridge blogging and civic participation.

### **Research Objectives**

McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly's (2001) definition of contentious politics sets the premise for the analysis of collective action in this study. They posit that contentious politics comprise "*episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants*" (p. 5). In Singapore, both offline and online media have been subjected to a complex set of regulations set by the government. However, as discussed earlier, the World Wide Web has created an alternative space for concerned individuals to converge online and discuss political, economic and social issues in Singapore (Ho, Baber & Khondker, 2002; George, 2003, 2006; Kluver, 2007; Skoric & Ng, 2009). The use of blogs has also been on the rise, as seen in traditional news media reports on Singapore blogs and the government's interest in engaging bloggers through different means. By using social movement and new social movement theories as the theoretical framework to guide the analysis of political blogging, this study has four objectives. Firstly, by applying theoretical concepts of collective identity, a concept that is integral to new social movements, this study explores the



nature of collective identity among political bloggers. Bloggers as a collective challenges the conventional notion of blogging as a personal and narcissistic activity. Yet, as social movement theories and extant literature has established, a collective identity experienced by a movement's participants is integral to engendering collective action and social change. Hence, this study establishes the relationship between political blogging and collective identity by exploring the nature of collective identity and its various dimensions such as shared consciousness, identity and boundary markers, identification of the adversary and identity multiplexity (see for example, Buechler, 1993; Castells, 1997; Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Malesevic & Haugaard, 2002) among bloggers regarded as individualistic and egocentric.

Secondly, this study examines the role of social networks and network variables in accounting for one's participation in collective action. An established tradition in the field of social movement studies is the application of social network concepts and theories to shed light on the processes of movement recruitment and mobilization. In the offline context, social movement scholars found that social networks are a key factor in explaining a movement's success in recruiting and mobilizing participants. Through social network analysis, scholars have isolated some of the key variables responsible for collective action and these include structural proximity to social ties, pre-existing networks, and structural factors such as network positions. Existing studies that examine social networks of bloggers and organizations in the online context typically employed hyperlink analysis as the main method of study, and the conclusions that are made about online social networks are usually underpinned by assumptions of intentionality on the part of website owners and bloggers (for example, Adamic & Glance, 2005; Biddix & Park, 2008; Park & Kluver, 2007). Offline networks were often omitted from these studies. As such, current

scholarly endeavours have so far failed to explain the factors which account for their networking patterns. Thus, by using interviews and surveys to understand the reasons for forging online relationships, this study proposes an alternative methodology to examine the roles and implications of both online and offline networks from autochthonous accounts.

Thirdly, new media technologies are emerging as a new social movement repertoire with its increasing usage by political parties and non-governmental organizations as an effective and cost-efficient tool to propagate their cause, reach out to target constituencies, mobilize online action and organize offline activities (see for example, Bosch, 2010; Langlois, Elmer, McKelvey & Devereaux, 2009; Stein, 2007). However, the studies in the following chapter will illustrate that the majority of the research on cyber-activism centers on political parties and organizations. There is a dearth of scholarly work on how political bloggers use the Internet to pursue their agenda. By including macro-level (collective identity) and meso-level (structural) factors in explaining human agency in collective action, this study connects blogging as a personal medium with social movement repertoires. Finally, through empirical analyses of collective identity and social networks among bloggers and how they use Internet and new media technologies for their activism work, this study develops a model which explicates the relationships among these dynamics for different groups of bloggers.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This section discusses social movement theories, specifically resource mobilization and new social movement perspectives, their underlying assumptions and key variables involved in both schools of thought. Since the emergence of the

earliest social movements in the 1950s, social movements have undergone three waves of transformation. This is not to suggest that each of the three categories of social movements was completely independent of one another in terms of forms and actions, but that in spite of certain overlaps, distinct differences were observed among them. The earliest perspective of social movements was the traditional collective behaviour perspective developed in the 1950s in which “movements were treated as anomalies, symptoms of a system malfunction and strain” (Hannigan, 1985, p.437). Spontaneity and the lack of structure typified such a form of social movement. Moreover, social movement was treated as “a closed system, stressing the role of movement leadership, commitment and control” (p.443). In addition to the lack of organization or structure and the prevalence of an almost “mob behavior” born out of common grievances, another key attribute of traditional social movements is the lack of emphasis on movement outcome.

However, the coarse assumptions of collective actions as founded on people’s irrationality and the lack of organization were challenged as scholars became more aware of the power concentrations that shape movements and their effects (e.g., labour movements). The critique of the traditional collective behaviour perspective spawned the development of the resource mobilization (RM) theory in the 1960s and early 1970s, which addressed power dynamics that were neglected in the old school of thought. The increasingly coordinated ways in which collective action took shape led to scholars’ recognition of a more organized, structured and patterned form of contentious politics. The late 1960s witnessed the rise of movements in different parts of the world—the civil rights and antiwar movements in the U.S., student protests in Germany, Britain and Mexico, and pro-democracy mobilization in Prague—bringing to light what appeared to be planned and deliberate movements (Della Porta & Diani,

2006). Rationality was manifested through a decision-making process where the decision to participate or not to participate was based on calculations and the weighing of costs and benefits. The organization and institutionalization of collective action are key in the RM perspectives which “considered the existence of adversities a constant given; where ‘social movement entrepreneurs’ called attention to problems to recruit and mobilize followers and create or enlarge social movement organizations” (Langman, 2005, p.47). In the RM tradition, social networks, incentives and rationality underscore the success of movements, with movements exhibiting organizational dynamics similar to that of other types of institutionalized action (Buechler, 1993). Social networks, particularly those with formal organizations, were viewed to exert social pressure and influence on movement actors to take part in a movement even in times of doubt about the movement’s success. In sum, Buechler posited that “RM theory views social movements as normal, rational, institutionally rooted, political challenges by aggrieved groups” (p.218).

In spite of the elucidating perspectives provided by RM theories, it was soon apparent that there were gaps in such an approach. One of the main critiques is the neglect of the plurality of concerns and conflicts within movements (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). The social transformations that became more visible after the Second World War created new arenas for conflicts; and actors in social movements were no longer confined to the industrial class but also included women, students and professional groups. Buechler (1995) made the same observation when he critiqued that “Marxism’s economic reductionism presumed that all politically significant social action will derive from the fundamental economic logic of capitalist production and that all the other social logics are secondary at best in shaping such an action” (pp.441-442). Opposing the class-based assumptions of the Marxist tradition, new

social movement (NSM) theorists such as Castells (1997) and Melucci (1996) addressed other bases for collective action, such as those steeped in politics, ideology and culture, as opposed to class relationships defined by the process of production. What is central to this new approach is the “construction and legitimizations of collective identities for coherence and to articulate resistance” (Langman, 2005, p.48). In addition, opposing the structured and institutionalized organization of collective action, new social movements were now characterized by decentralization and diversity.

Where RM theory stresses resources and organization and downplays the role of culture and identity, the French School views the “formulation of grievances and the articulation of ideology as inseparable from cultural processes of framing, meaning and signification which are prior to any utilitarian calculation of costs and benefits” (Buechler, 1993, p.230). But, as movements encompassed diverse and heterogeneous individuals, new social movements in turn faced challenges such as factionalism (e.g., within the feminist movement). Critics such as Tarrow (1994), Poletta and Jasper (2001) argued that NSM theories tend to over-emphasize the genesis of, and the factors that lead to, the birth of social movements and, consequently, neglects the dynamics of movement processes such as the role of changing political opportunity structure and social networks. Poletta and Jasper (2001) argued that there is a tendency to polarize collective identity and structural resource mobilization perspectives, at the same time failing to recognize how identity can actually play an instrumental role in mobilizing movement participants. Poletta and Jasper posited that oftentimes, identity is falsely assumed to be the opposite of interest, incentives, strategy and politics because identity can be used as a form of strategy to elicit sympathy and support among constituencies. The over-emphasis on individual

beliefs and how it merges with a collective agenda and ideology neglects structural attributes and over-simplifies the role of identity.

It is thus evident from key literature as well as the critique of each theoretical approach that gaps exist within each, and a more holistic framework for analysis is needed to deepen our understanding of social movements. Furthermore, the ubiquity of using information communication technologies to forge alliances and relationships raises the question as to how dynamics of collective action may differ in the context of new media. Langman (2005) made an incisive observation when she pointed out that “one problem with most social movement theories has been exclusive concern with either structural or individual factors”; she highlighted the need to address both individual and structural factors, as well as “the mediating process between them, of which the most important were identification and structuring of the superego, and the role of media in fostering emotions and action” (p.49). Based on key variables adopted from social movement theories, a set of criteria is developed for the examination of the social network formed by political bloggers in Singapore. Both perspectives focus on distinctly varying aspects of social movements, with RM theories advocating the importance of changing political opportunity structures and pre-existing social networks; and NSM theories advocating that collective actions are made possible through the sharing of a common issue and a shared identity based on similarities in ideology among participants. Merit should be accorded to both perspectives which have yielded insights into key variables that make collective action possible and deepened our understanding of the evolution of social movements.

Cognizant of the key theories reviewed above, the existing theoretical gaps and the increased prevalence of new media usage for collective action, this study views a social movement as a social process in which both collective identity and

micro-structural factors play an enabling role in making it possible for rational individuals to converge and exploit existing possibilities in an evolving political opportunity structure. As the use of new media becomes more ubiquitous in a real-world environment where regulations concerning political participation and discourse abound, politically-engaged individuals are able to utilize new media technologies to overcome real world constraints, converge in the cyberspace, promote alternative ideologies and engage in collective action to achieve common goals. In line with the arguments put forth by scholars who investigate the instrumental role of the Internet in social movement studies, this study hypothesizes that through the sharing of similar ideologies in terms of political beliefs and a common vision on the governing of the Singapore society, a collective identity is forged, and individuals (bloggers) see themselves as part of a collective spurred by moral incentives. That said, this thesis further posits that social networks play an integral role in eliciting participation among politically-conscious individuals, and that overlaps between online and offline social networks must exist in order for online connections to translate into some form of collective action offline. By incorporating these key elements and variables in the study of political blogging in Singapore, this study will merge two critical fields in social sciences (social movements and new media usage) and generate a greater understanding of the role of new media in facilitating collective action.

### **Rationale and Significance**

The proposed line of inquiry will have a three-fold contribution. Firstly, the study will enrich existing scholarship in activism and new media by investigating the relationship between blogging and activism, whether, and how, bloggers engage in political participation. Copious literature on cyber-activism exists, but the dominant

focus of these studies rests on how technologies are deployed by real world organizations (such as non-governmental or civic rights organizations) and marginalized political groups to achieve their objectives. As the literature review in Chapter 2 will uncover, there is a general consensus among scholars in this field on how technology and media are used to promote awareness, disseminate information, recruit supports, organize activities and raise funds (Elin, 2003; Kreimer, 2001; O'Donnell, 2007; Stein, 2007). Such a line of investigation to date has largely excluded blogs. With the exception of a small number of studies that examine political bloggers, current literature on blogging has so far established the personal utilities of blogs and online networking dynamics of blogs, drawing inferences on the relationship between blogging and civic engagement. Given the power of information publishing and dissemination accorded to ordinary citizens, this study thus generates empirically tested findings on the relationship between blogging and collective action, whether blogs truly have a transformative power, as proponents of blogging have argued, or whether they are mere gratuitous media for one to express discontent and grouses.

Secondly, this study contributes to existing theories on collective action by extending the subject of study into the realm of new media. Social movement theories have been part of an entrenched tradition of studying collective action and have illuminated the various dynamics which explicate how, and why, collection action arises. As will be established in the literature review, a common approach used to examine the role of technology in social movements is to look at the presence and nature of collective identity in the context of new media. Cultural studies and media scholars have found that classic components of collective identity (shared consciousness, identity signifiers and boundary markers, articulation of the adversary



and identity multiplexity) which exist in real world movements tend to apply to the online context as well (Ayers, 2003, Custard, 2007; Hollenback & Zinkhan, 2006). However, in most of these studies, the subjects or sites of analysis are organization websites, email lists and discussion forums, which are clearly demarcated spaces within cyberspace that have been created for the congregation of similar-minded individuals. This study thus extends this line of investigation to blogging; by testing the established concepts in collective identity among bloggers, this study reconciles blogging as a personal and narcissistic activity and a collective one.

In addition, although social network concepts and analysis have been deployed to examine the dynamics of social movements, the literature review will establish that the majority of existing studies were conducted in offline contexts. Some of the more pertinent social network concepts and variables that have been used to elucidate social movement recruitment and mobilizing processes are pre-existing social networks and structural proximity (i.e., the number of ties) to other movement actors (Gould, 1991, 1993; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Pfaff, 1996; Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000; Zhao, 1998). These studies have also established that different networks play different roles. By applying these variables in examining the structural factors behind bloggers' participation in activism, this study extends social network theories to users of new media technology and examines the role and significance of each network type. More importantly, this study develops greater theoretical coherence by combining informal, formal and online social networks in the analysis.

Thirdly, by adopting both macro and micro approaches in examining activism among bloggers, this study builds on existing collective action theories, developing a conceptual framework which elucidates on blogging and civic engagement. RM theories and the social network perspective have explicated the micro-structural

factors that result in a movement's success or failure (e.g., pre-existing ties with existing movement participants). On the other hand, NSM theories yield macro-level analyses that focus on the origins and identity of movements (e.g., the role of identity in fostering a sense of collectiveness and solidarity). In so doing, this study addresses not just the "why" and "what" of political blogging as a form of collective action but also the "how", hence generating a more comprehensive framework for future analyses of new media and collective action, particularly in the areas of collective identity and social networking among bloggers.

Finally, in using both qualitative and quantitative methods, this study provides a methodologically coherent approach to answering questions and limitations raised by existing studies. Although providing illuminating findings on collective identity, methods currently used such as content analysis, discourse analysis and hyperlink analysis fail to explain personal motivations and beliefs that contribute to the formation of collective identity, forging of social network ties and the ways in which online participation translates into offline engagement. Thus, this study fills a methodological gap and contributes to existing scholarly work by applying techniques such as interviews and surveys to elicit autochthonous or first-hand account from bloggers.

### **Structure of Thesis**

This chapter provided the background which sets the context for the study. The research objectives and rationale presented frame the study and highlight its significance at a time when new media is being deployed for innovative usage in the area of civic participation, and the ensuing discussion of the theoretical perspectives identifies key areas for investigation. **Chapter 2** provides a review of the literature

relevant to this study. Cognizant of the research aims, the literature review will discuss pertinent fields in social movements and collective action—collective identity, social networks, cyber-activism and blogging. A section is also devoted to reviewing the historical and political forces that have shaped the media scene and regulatory structure in Singapore. This is followed by tracing developments in the government’s regulatory approaches and changes in the media scene, both of which are integral in illuminating the changing political opportunity structure available to Singapore political bloggers. Chapter 2 ends with a presentation of the three questions and a discussion on the scope of each. **Chapter 3** presents the research methodology as well as the operationalization of key variables. **Chapter 4** provides an overall snapshot of political bloggers in Singapore, their affiliations to organizations involved in the work of bringing about political and social change, and types of activism participation. **Chapters 5, 6 and 7** detail the findings for each of the three research questions. **Chapter 8** discusses the findings and **Chapter 9** presents the conclusions for the study, discusses its limitations and proposes recommendations for future work.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

If you want to achieve the kind of change we claim we want on our blog, we have to get our hands dirty and get on the ground, rather than preach to the converted... We have to step out of our little sandbox if we really want to make some change. (Gerald Giam, quoted in Au Yong, 2008)

There are two objectives for this chapter. Firstly, it identifies major and relevant scholarship on social movements, and the roles social networks and collective identity play in a movement's recruitment and mobilization processes, cyber-activism and blogging. In so doing, the review will highlight existing research gaps concerning Internet technologies and social movements. Secondly, it provides an overview of Singapore's media landscape to illustrate the shifting socio-political dynamics that impact the use of media and technology, so as to build a case for the study of political blogging in Singapore. This chapter concludes with three research questions that guide this study.

#### **Social Movements from Resource Mobilization Perspectives**

Locher (2002) proposed four types of social movements to aid analyses on the motivations and dynamics of collective action. Alternative social movements aim to create change in opinions and behavior pertaining to a specific issue among a target group; redemptive social movements seek to engender "a more dramatic change, but only in some individuals' lives" (p.235) and strive to persuade people to become part

of specific groups. The Drug Abuse Resistance Education which focus on keeping American youths from getting involved with the use of drugs and Jehovah Witnesses that actively seeks converts are examples of alternative and redemptive movements. According to Loch, the third type of social movements, reformative social movements “want to change an entire community or society, but in a limited way” (p.236). These movements usually entail lobbying for the government to change in specific domains, such as implementing policies that bring about changes at the societal level, such as the feminist movement and civil rights movement. Finally, revolutionary social movements seek to completely eradicate an old social order and supplant it with a new one, as in the case of movements by militia groups. Regardless of the motive, what typifies social movements is the involvement of groups of people organized to bring about or resist some kind of social change.

Changing opportunities of resources and emphasis on organizations for collective action mark a departure from the traditional collective behavior school of thought (Tilly, 2004). New opportunities of resources are attributed to what Tarrow (1998) termed as changing political opportunity structures that encompass increased access, shifting alignments, divided elites, influential allies, repression and facilitation. Tarrow’s proposition is best illustrated by the overthrow of Philippine President Estrada in 2001 when the success of movement participants was boosted by an undercurrent of political instability. Other than the innovative use of technology to organize and coordinate movement activities, Tilly (2004) argued that the influence of organizations and political figures opposed to Estrada was another key factor that contributed to the success of the political coup.

Furthermore, contrary to traditional collective perspectives, RM theory views “social movements as extensions of institutionalized actions and to focus on a

movement's attempts to reform the predominant social structure and/or gain entry to the polity" (Buechler, 1995, p.438). A strong slant towards organizations and their roles in social movements is observed in RM perspectives where movements are viewed as structured and patterned. Buechler (1995) explained that RM perspectives are based on the "characteristic premises of rational actors engaged in instrumental action through formal organization to secure resources and foster mobilization" (p.441). Resources, in the realm of RM theories, typically refer to institutional resources such as cadres, funding and organizing facilities that are critical to an organization's success in recruiting and mobilizing sympathizers (Jenkins, 1983). Social movement scholars have broadly grouped movement organizations under two categories - professional movement organizations and participatory movement organizations (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). In professional social movement organizations, leaders devote their time fully to the movement and the organizations derive a large proportion of their resources from external sources. Membership or paper memberships are small and sometimes non-existent. Although their well-structured nature facilitates mobilization of their conscience constituencies, professional movement organizations are at times bound by the wishes of their benefactors. On the other hand, participatory movement organizations are grassroots organizations whose existence depends mainly on members' willingness to participate in activities. Buechler (1993) proposed a similar classification of movement organizations which have "formal, bureaucratic, centralized structures" or exist as informal organizations.

Irrespective of the organization type, social movement organizations serve as important sources of identity for a movement's members and ensure continuity in and action (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Earlier perspectives according to RM theories

suggest that a movement organization's centralized and formally structured organization creates greater efficiency in mobilizing and coordinating resources (Jenkins, 1983). In The Netherlands peace movement, movement groups played a key role as they garnered an unprecedented level of support by facilitating petitions, organizing demonstrations and weekly activities. In one instance, one of the peace movements obtained 3.75 million signatures against the deployment of cruise missiles in 1985 (Klandersman & Oegema, 1987).

Such mobilization efforts are largely dependent on communication between leaders and members, among members as well as among different movement organizations. Klandersman (1993) highlighted different forms of communication between an organization's leader and members. For example, in "centralized federal movement structures" (Klandersman, 1993, p.387), local units are bound together by a strictly hierarchical overarching structure, and trained cadres, acting on behalf of the central leadership, reduce the distance between the local and national levels.

Supporting this claim, Barkan, Cohn and Whitaker (1995) advocated that movement organizations' ability to organize both "internal participation" (defined as activities that help an organization to maintain itself and involve interaction among members, such as recruiting new members and providing transportation to members) and "external participation" (activities that involve representing the organization's views to the government and wider public) was crucial to garnering support for its cause and hence achieving movement objectives (p.116).

Besides mobilizing members to act through the dissemination of information, movement organizations also provide selective and collective incentives, thereby encouraging participants to take part in the movement, without which they may be inhibited by free-riders. The role of incentives, selective and collective, received

much scholarly scrutiny from RM scholars who view movement actors as rational individuals. Scholars such as Klandermans and Oegema (1987) iterated that an individual's motivation to participate is a function of his or her perceived costs and benefits. This understanding stemmed from Olson's theory of collective action, rooted in rationality, in which one's actions are primarily driven by self-interest (1965, 1968). Klandermans (1984, 1993) defined collective incentives as the value of goals as well as one's expectation of the movement's success. He further broke the theoretical construct down into three components: one's expectations about the number of participants, one's expectations about his or her own contribution to the probability of success, and one's expectations about the probability of success if many people participate (Klandermans, 1984).

Other than collective incentives, selective incentives (which are costs and benefits) are the other component which affects one's motivation to participate (Klandersman, 1984). Klandermans and Oegema (1987) argued that the shape and form taken by selective incentives is dependent on the movement's nature, and can be either soft/social (non-material) or hard/non-social (material). Their observations of the 1984 peace demonstration in The Netherlands uncovered the critical role which selective incentives played in motivating people to participate in the peace movement, and that social incentives (number of friends and acquaintances who are expected to attend the demonstration) had greater weight than non-social incentives (e.g., sacrificing free time and fear of disturbances). This was likely due to the fear of censure and stigmatization individuals may receive from their peers should they not participate in the demonstration. The influence of social selective incentives as established by movement scholars point to the role one's social networks play in affecting his or her decision to join a movement. The following section reviews



studies which examine the significance of social networks in individuals' decision-making process concerning participation in collective action.

### **A Social Network Approach**

Cognizant of the efficacy of social networks in recruiting and mobilizing actors, social network theories became a popular and useful approach used by scholars to understand the processes which affect individuals' decision to participate in collective action. Social network perspectives helped explain individuals' involvement in collective action, especially in situations when there was an apparent lack of tangible incentives and benefits (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987). Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson (1980) proposed that individuals' social networks act as conduits for the spread of social movements. Social networks are formed among individuals who are connected through formal or informal ties with others who live in the same locality, among those from the same societal class or an organization, or among those who share similar interests and concerns. The main tenet of social network perspectives resides in how relationships formed among social entities (i.e., individuals and organizations) pose as channels for the transfer of material and non-material resources (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

In the context of collective action studies, formal and informal ties in social networks serve as conduits for the spread of social movements (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Snow, Zurcher & Ekland-Olson, 1980; Zhao, 1998). One's structural proximity to movement members were said to enhance the mobilizing potential of a group due to prior solidarities and moral commitment (Jenkins, 1983). In current literature, social network concepts that are used to explain collective action include: network positions of movement participants and the ensuing differences in the roles they play

in a movement; the role of social ties (informal and formal) and multiplex ties in the recruitment and mobilization of movements, and the strength of ties (Gould, 1991, 1993; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Pfaff, 1996; Snow, Zurcher & Eklund-Olson, 1980; Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000; Zhao, 1998). An overarching argument advocated by these scholars is that structural proximity to movement actors through informal and formal ties affects and sustains participation in collective action as social network ties foster trust, solidarity and facilitate information-exchange. To quote Kim and Bearman (1997), interpersonal ties are “the conduit not simply for information exchange or organization, but for interpersonal influence, which operates on interests as actors seek balance across their relations with others” (p.90).

With RM theory focusing on the role of social movement organizations in organizing and mobilizing membership (Della Porta & Diani, 2006), formal networks emerged as one of the earliest subjects of analyses in social movement studies.

**Formal social networks.** As discussed in the preceding section, RM theories investigate collective action phenomena through the focal lens of movement organizations. This is because embedded in a social movement organization is an environment that cultivates formal ties necessary for the mobilization and sustenance of activism engagement. Defined as ties to other members or volunteers in the same movement organization, formal ties were found to be important sources of information for movement participants and social influences (Gould, 1991; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993). This is because in an organizational setting, interaction opportunities increased communication and the sharing of grievances (Dixon & Roscigno, 2003; Gould, 1991; Zhao, 1998).

A key finding from social network studies pertaining to social movements is that having social ties with individuals belonging to the same organization is a predictor of activism participation. Sharing organizational memberships with individuals who were more prominent or occupied more central positions in social movement organizations were found to be a predictor of recruitment into the Mississippi Freedom Summer project at the University of Wisconsin in 1964 (Fernandez & McAdam, 1998). Their findings supported an earlier study by McAdam (1986) which compared organizational ties between participants, non-participants and withdrawals. Through the analysis of application forms for the same Freedom Summer project, McAdam found that there were no differences in terms of ideological beliefs between participants and non-participants as both camps were committed supporters of the freedom campaign. However, the data showed that, compared to non-participants and withdrawals, participants had a greater number of organizational affiliations and more extensive ties to other participants.

Scholars also advocated that formal ties instilled loyalty among members, thereby affecting individuals' receptiveness to be recruited, motivated and participation in movements (McAdam, 1986; Passy & Giugni, 2000). For instance, formal ties with unions fostered a sense of loyalty which positively affected workers' participation at the Ohio State University in 2000 (Dixon & Roscigno, 2003). Union identity, which was measured by card-carrying status, positively affected workers' likelihood of striking. Formal ties were also found to exert social influence and pressure on individuals' participation in collective action. This argument was supported by Klandermans' (1984) study of action mobilization in a Dutch workers' movement. Interviews with movement participants revealed that membership in a strong union increased workers' motivation to join the movement due to the presence

of formal influences among colleagues and increased selective benefits. His findings were supported by Dixon and Roscigno (2003), who found that social ties with fellow members exerted pressure on workers to participate in the strike organized by their co-workers. Passy and Giugni (2000) also established that other than the importance of informal ties with spouses, formal links in voluntary organizations were also critical to sustaining a movement actor's participation. This was especially observed in cases where such ties were integrated into the individual's central life-spheres which they defined as inter-related areas in an individual's life.

**Informal social networks.** Empirical findings established the significance of interpersonal ties in influencing one's recruitment and induction into a movement. Informal ties to individuals who are existing members of a movement have been said to arouse one's motivation to participate. The effectiveness of informal ties was established by studies examining factors which influenced and sustained participation in social movements in both high-risk and low-risk settings. For instance, Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson (1980) found a correlation between one's structural proximity to existing movement actors and one's decision to participate in a movement. Measuring correlations between different types of recruitment methods, Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson (1980) found that pre-existing informal ties were more successful than face-to-face street recruitment efforts in the case of the Nichiren Shoshu movement. Eighty two percent of the members ( $n=345$ ) were recruited through pre-existing, extra-movement and interpersonal ties, as compared to 17% from proselytizing efforts in public places.

Similarly, in their comparison of movement dynamics and participation in different political regimes, Kim and Bearman (1997) observed a positive relationship

between increasing interpersonal interactions and collective action, and concluded that a determinant of the success of collective action in privileged and rebellious regimes resides in the presence of interpersonal ties. Social networks are also essential to establish trust and cohesiveness, especially in tumultuous times. Informal networks increased solidarity among movement participants in the case of French insurgency (Gould, 1991) and in East Germany's revolution in 1989 (Pfaff, 1996). In addition to increasing one's awareness of movement activities, strong ties established within informal networks also played an important role in reducing the sense of risk while increasing self-confidence (Pfaff, 1996).

The third type of effects informal ties had on movement participation is the exertion of selective incentives. Previous studies showed that individuals' informal contacts influenced one's selective social incentives in deciding whether or not to participate in a movement (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987). They observed a positive correlation between one's perception of the expected reactions of others, the expectation of the number of friends who will turn up at the event, and one's participation in a peace demonstration in The Hague. Similarly, Zhao (1998) established that student networks cultivated in dense campus dormitories exerted pressure and even coerced student activists to participate in protests.

Cable, Walsh and Warland (1988) investigated the effects of social psychological and structural variables of four community protest organizations involved in various low-risk collective actions such as public education and fundraising. By analyzing survey data and organizational newsletters, and fieldwork, they ascertained that in small town communities, solidarity in terms of perceived similarity with others in the same community led to greater empathy with the cause and support for the movement organization's activities. The physical proximity

among members of the same small-town community also caused members to be more considerate of local sensitivities and, hence, to become more supportive of local organizations as compared to their more cosmopolitan counterparts. Karki (2006) found similar effects for interpersonal ties in the Nepalese context where there was a proliferation of ethnic organizations and regional movements. Set out to examine how and why individuals became involved or were recruited for activism, Karki conducted surveys and interviews with ethnic groups to determine the social and political processes one underwent in becoming an activist. He found that although both formal and informal organizations directly and indirectly supported activism and mass mobilization, interpersonal contacts in the forms of friends, kin, community and those living in the same geographical region facilitated individual recruitment especially in situations where the formation of organizations was prohibited. In the Swiss context, Passy and Giugni (2000) found that embeddedness in social networks through being married to another activist had a positive influence on an activist's commitment to activism.

**Multiplex ties and strong ties.** In investigating the role of social ties in the recruitment of participants for social movements, scholars have investigated the effects of each type of network—formal and informal—in influencing movement participation. Existing studies suggest that a combination of both types of network ties effect and shape participation in movements. For instance, by analyzing archival and published sources on the Paris Commune insurgency, Gould (1991) found that both formal and informal ties (with organizational and pre-existing informal networks respectively) shaped the mobilization of the insurgents. However, informal ties appeared to assume a more important function as the efficacy of formal ties is

dependent on the presence of the interpersonal ties which are rooted in geographical propinquity within neighbourhoods. Formal networks in the battalions served as conduits for communication and interaction while informal networks enhanced solidarity among participants as the movement unfolded. Similarly, Cable, Walsh and Warland (1988) found that in small town communities, the effects of formal ties were mitigated by informal ties.

However, within the body of scholarship on the roles of formal and informal ties, it is evident there exists a debate pertaining to the strengths and impact of each type of ties, resulting in the evaluation of the roles multiplex ties play. For instance, McAdam and Paulsen (1993) found that neither organizational embeddedness nor strong ties to other volunteers were predictors of activism, but rather, it was “a strong subjective identification with a particular identity, reinforced by organizational or individual ties, that is especially likely to encourage participation” (p.659). Similarly, in the Nepalese context, Karki’s (2006) study established that the effects of social networks on individuals’ decisions whether to participate are often based on the presence/absence and number of ties they have to familial and organizational networks, but did not ascertain which network played a more significant role. What these findings suggest is that although informal networks appear to exert greater effects than formal networks, the two types of network ties possibly play different roles.

These studies affirmed the notion of formal and informal ties functioning as “strong ties” which encourage not only participation, but also commitment, in collective action, so essential to the processes of diffusion, political organization and social cohesion. The overarching theoretical premise is that strong ties are more influential in terms of exerting social pressure and providing social support (Tindall,

2002). Granovetter (1983) posited that strong ties bond people together and are more useful to individuals, especially during times of uncertainty and insecurity. He further argued that it is during difficult times that individuals are more likely to turn to strong ties for protection as well as to reduce their uncertainty. Building on Granovetter's work, Krackhardt (1992) suggested that "strong ties constitute a base of trust that can reduce resistance and provide comfort in the face of uncertainty" (p.218). In his study of an organization that had undergone a union certification campaign, he found that strong ties (friendship ties) were more influential in shaping opinions on the campaign than what he termed "affectless ties."

These studies clearly suggest that other than rational processes that go on at the cognitive level, structural factors such as proximity to informal and formal contacts also exert an undeniable force that impacts a movement's ability to recruit and mobilize. These empirical findings raise a question pertaining to the role of online networks, given the proliferation of technologies. The next section reviews key themes and claims concerning online social networks and collective action.

**Online social networks.** With the increased adoption and use of the Internet to fulfill social needs, social networks are examined in the context of computer-mediated communication (CMC). According to Park (2003), scholars who study CMC networks or networking have tended to emphasize computer systems as channels of information flow. This is because the proliferation of Internet adoption has led to the emergence of communication networks comprising computer systems. As this proliferation increasingly links individuals and organizations on the World Wide Web, social network analysts have turned to aggregations or communities formed in cyberspace to examine the political and cultural implications of these



online networks. On the extension of traditional social network analysis to the World Wide Web, Wellman (1999) concluded that “the essence of social network analysis is its focus on social relations and social structures—wherever they may be located and whoever they may be with” (p. 8). Wellman’s assertion is supported by scholars who approach computer networks as social networks, and apply social network analysis to their analysis of online communication.

It is evident from more recent literature in sociology that social movement scholars support this thesis as well. Diani (2000) argued that CMC plays an instrumental role in collective action as it improves the effectiveness of communication and helps to build a sense of solidarity and collective identity, reiterating arguments made by social movement scholars such as McAdam (1982) and Oppenheimer (1989) who found that weak ties contribute significantly to the spread of movements among diffused networks. This is because “weak ties are more likely to link members of different small groups than are strong ones, which tend to be concentrated within particular groups” (Granovetter, 1973, p.1376). Through weak ties, people have access to novel information about the movement as these ties stretch further in social space (Tindall, 2002). Media scholars such as Haythornthwaite (2002), Wellman and Gulia (1999) argued that online networks help build weak ties which are critical for the diffusion of information, ideas and influences. Although these social ties are considered weak by comparison, nevertheless, online relationships fulfill information-seeking needs, serving as effective channel for forging of alliances based on common interests (Schumate & Lipp, 2007; Stein, 2007). Online networks thus provide gateways to communities and information for Internet users (Bryson, 2004; Hwang, Schmierbach, Paek, Gil de Zuniga, & Shah, 2006).

One common approach of studying online social networks is using hyperlink analysis. This method is based on the premise that hyperlinks, a structural feature of the World Wide Web, serve as the linkage between websites, thereby connecting individuals, companies, organizations and parties. Scholars such as Park (2003) and Washbourne (2001) asserted that hyperlinking allows for networking through horizontal communication. The overarching argument in existing studies is that by facilitating the transmission and sharing of information in the form of documents and pictures, hyperlinks connect individuals and establishments whose websites are linked to one another's (Foot & Schneider, 2002, Garrido & Halavais, 2003; Soon & Kluver, 2007). In recent years, hyperlink analysis has emerged as a leading theoretical and methodological approach to studying online relational networks. This is based on the assumption that the use of hyperlinks is underpinned by intentionality and specific motivations when website authors tie their own efforts to allied ones through hyperlinking websites (Garrido & Halavais, 2003; Rogers & Marres, 2000).

One of the key arguments revolving around online social network studies is that communication networks engendered through hyperlinking structures serve as conduits for the dissemination and propagation of information. In Ceren's (2006) study of the American blogosphere, he posited that "the unique link-based structure of the blogosphere suggests (and enforces) a particular kind of orientation towards more traditional forms of media" (p.6). The link-based structure of the blogosphere enhances bloggers' ease to reference specific articles, disseminate information and comment on the information. In doing so, Ceren argued that bloggers are able to gather information effectively and efficiently for the purpose of analysis and mainstream media debunking. Other than information in the form of content, hyperlinks also enable the identification of potential recruits or sympathizers. In their

study of the hyperlink network of English Speaking Islamic Resistance Organizations (ESIROs), Schumate and Lipp (2007) hypothesized that “hyperlinks provide a powerful way for both members and non-members (e.g., non-governmental organizations engaged in another issue, publics) to locate and make sense of the number of non-governmental organizations working on an issue (and) once an interorganizational hyperlink network is created, both members and non-members interested in an issue can navigate to the other organizational members easily.” (p.7). As such, the hyperlink network acts as a connective good by connecting members and non-members to other members of an non-governmental organization issue network through informal organizing strategies.

Other scholars have also addressed the more symbolic function of online social networks, specifically in the creation of ideological networks or communities. Garrido and Halavais (2003), Rogers and Marres (2000), and Russell (2005) theorized that hyperlinks among organizational websites are representations of symbolic relationships among linked entities. For instance, by tapping into a variety of information communication networks, such as those centered on indigenous rights, women’s rights and environmental justice, the local identity of indigenous peasants was transformed to a more globalized one, thereby securing greater transnational support for the Zapatista movement (Russell, 2005). This was due to the Zapatistas’ deliberate strategy in “adopt[ing] network-style organization and communication techniques, cultivating a network identity organized around global issues rather than traditional identity affiliations such as gender, nationality, and ethnicity” (p.6). By analyzing the communicative practices of the movement, which include interviews with EZLN leadership, communiqués, websites and postings created by Zapatista supporters, Russell concluded that the Zapatista support network and the material

circulated online both contributed to the meaning of the movement and situated it within the context of global politics. These findings are supported by a separate study by Garrido and Halavais (2003). From the analysis of the hyperlink practices of Zapatista-related websites, they mapped out the Zapatista network on the World Wide Web which illustrated some of the ties and strategic alliances built within and around the movement worldwide, demonstrating that global networking via the Internet was critical to the global success of the movement.

In another study, Rogers and Marres (2000) analyzed hyperlinking patterns in mapping the debates on global climate change and found distinctive linking styles among corporations, government bodies and non-government organizations. Their findings suggest that hyperlinking among organizations is a sign of recognition and a way of involving other parties in the cyberspace circle of debate. Their proposition was reiterated by Ceren (2006) in his study on the blogosphere. He argued that homophily within online social networks was also supported as communities of bloggers were characterized by particular ethos expressed through a common language to blog groups that shared similar ideologies. Some common markers of the language include similar content themes, often-used phrases and mutual terms of derisions. In the Asian context, analyses on hyperlinking networks formed by political parties, civil society organizations and politicians suggest mutual recognition of ideological similarity and political affinity among linked entities (Park & Thelwall, 2008; Soon & Kluver, 2007).

What this section of the literature review has established is that social networks are an integral component of collective action as the ties shared by individuals in a network (informal or formal) act as cognitive and affective linkages. As social movement scholars have found in their analyses of collective action

participation, relational dynamics that take place within networks transmit information, foster trust, build solidarity and exert social pressure. The review of online social networks reiterates the importance of online networks in fostering connection and laying the foundation for the building of ties and alliances among like-minded activists. However, being in structural proximity with others may not be sufficient as identification with one another is also a critical component that galvanizes individuals into action. Hence, the next section of the literature review departs from resource mobilization and social network perspectives and addresses key theories and studies pertaining to new social movements and collective identity.

### **New Social Movements and Collective Identity**

Collective identity theories which have been used to explicate the ability of new social movements to mobilize and recruit participants will be discussed in this section, and the review of current studies of new social movements in both offline and online contexts clarify key dimensions of collective identities experienced by movement participants. To reiterate, the theories and research reviewed in the preceding sections reveal that RM perspectives typically focused on the roles of incentives and mobilization of resources through social networks in facilitating collective action. One critique of the RM theory is its organizational bias and over-emphasis on individuals' rationalistic calculations of costs and benefits which have led to the neglect of "other logics of action based in politics, ideology, and culture, as the root of much collective action" (Buechler, 1995, p.442). Challenging the class-based Marxist approach of earlier theories, NSM theories address the roles of ideology and values which produce meanings for movement actors and elicit their participation (Pfaff, 1996). Looking beyond identity defined by production processes,

NSM theorists also “looked to other sources of identity such as ethnicity, gender and sexuality as the definers of collective identity” (Buechler, 1995, p.442). The French School in the late 1960s spawned theorists such as Manuel Castells and Alain Touraine who provided a radically different lens through which collective action is studied. Departing from RM theories, the NSM school of thought “de-emphasizes the importance of social movement organizations and focuses on the movement as a whole” (Hannigan, 1985, p.442). This line of argument has increasing resonance in a globalized world that is linked by information communication technologies and facing growing numbers of diasporas where collective action finds supporters in various parts of the world.

One of the central arguments put forth by NSM scholars is that unlike social movements that are tied to class relations and economic realities (the focus of RM analysis), new social movements are issue-driven and “target the social domain of civil society rather than the economy or state” (Nip, 2004, p.28). Contrasting with the RM perspective which stresses the importance of economic and instrumental incentives, NSM theories place a greater emphasis on the ideological dimension, as observed in movements pertaining to students’ rights, women’s rights, anti-globalization, gay rights, anti-war and environmental issues. Participants and supporters involved in such movements advanced social justice, human rights and equality, and the recognition of marginalized identities. The primary focus of these movements tends to promote autonomy and self-determination with emphasis on post-materialist values as opposed to conflicts over materials resources (Buechler, 1995).

## **Four Dimensions of Collective Identity**

The formation and role of collective identity are defining characteristics of new social movements. Buechler (1993) argued that “for many mobilizations, the most central process is the social construction of a collective identity that is symbolically meaningful to participants and that logically precedes meaningful calculation of the costs and benefits of joining in the collective action” (p.228). According to NSM perspectives, a collective identity is a manifestation of group attributes and member similarities at a social context and plays a role in effecting the success of a movement (Adams & Roscigno, 2005). This is because the ability of a movement to generate shared frames is essential for a movement’s success in recruiting and mobilizing members, and sustaining membership (Adams & Roscigno, 2005; Wall, 2007). Della Porta and Diani (2006) claimed that collective identity is an integral part of social movements because it not only defines the boundaries between actors in a conflict, but also creates networks of trust among movement actors in complex social environments and assigns meanings to experiences of collective action over time and space. Such propositions call for a deeper exploration of the construct of collective identity such as: What is the basis for collective identity? How is collective identity attained within a group or organization of individuals involved in collective action? What are some of the manifestations of collective identity?

One key dimension of collective identity is the presence of a shared consciousness. Commonality is integral to cultivating a shared consciousness and solidarity among members in a group—whether based on similar values, goals, religious or ethnic background and nationality—and fosters a sense of “we.” Nip (2004) defined shared consciousness as “interpretative frameworks that include political consciousness, relational networks and the goals, means, and the

environment of action of the movement” (p.26). A sense of collectiveness is founded on shared orientations, values, attitudes and worldviews (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). For instance, ideology plays a binding role in new social movements as it “performs multiple functions, including transforming vague dissatisfactions into a politicized agenda, providing a sense of collective identity, and defining certain goods as potential movement resources” (Buechler, 1993, p.222). Van Summeren’s (2007) study of the Muslim diaspora in The Netherlands suggests that the strong sense of Muslimhood that binds Muslims trapped in the delicate balancing act of negotiating their religious values with the secular ones in The Netherlands is based on their similar backgrounds and religious beliefs. The shared consciousness of what it means to be a Muslim living in a secular state is based on various religious dimensions that include the wearing of the headscarf (the *hijab*), disapproval of pre-marital sex as well the important role of *imams* (religious teachers in Islam). Malesevic and Haugaard (2002) contend that awareness and practical consciousness “constitute the essence of that membership and the sense of collectivity” (p.3). Members should be aware of what being a member entails, the ways of doing things, and be able to identify themselves and others in terms of “collective affiliations and characteristics” (Jenkins, 2002, p.18). Such knowledge could be political, cultural or social, as in the case of “Danishness,” which encompasses shared knowledge of myths, stories and history.

Secondly, a group’s identity is articulated by what members say about themselves (or what they do not say) and how they relate to others, a process which involves conceptualizing differences that discriminate them from others (Cohen, 2000). In his study on the emergence and transformation of signifying identities, Cohen argued that a group’s self identity is mediated by its perception of the identity of the “other.” Boundary markers demarcate who belongs to a group, and in so doing,



identifies “the others” as in the outsiders of the group (Wall, 2007). Theorists such as Melucci (1989) asserted that as identity formation is a cultural process, language, symbols and unique practices are integral to its definition and articulation. Echoing Melucci, Della Porta and Diani (2006) proposed that identifiers which facilitate the identification of members include characters or personalities who have played a significant role in a movement action or in the development of the movement’s ideology, artifacts and events or places of a symbolic significance. Worldwide observances of and demonstrations held on May 1 and 8 are examples of symbolic events at work. Through taking part in activities held on these two days, participants could identify others who constitute “us” in supporting women’s suffrage or labour rights with ease, and experience solidarity and cohesiveness through engaging in the same rituals. Such events are thus a form of symbolism that assigns meaning to collective action experiences that are dislocated over time and space (Della Porta & Diani, 2006).

A third dimension of the articulation of a group’s identity includes the expression of opposition to a dominant culture or group (Castells, 1997). Although Castells proposed three types of identity based on his analysis of contemporary movements (legitimizing, resistance and project identities), a common element is the construction of a collective group identity pressing for change in relation to the dominant institutions or groups in society. Dong’s (2006) analysis of the anti-Japanese protests suggests that Chinese youths who participated in the 2005 demonstrations were driven by their peer-reinforced perceptions of the Japanese as obnoxious Western-worshippers. Serbs as “the others” which emerged through media content on satellite TV and video (which served as the main means of communication between the diasporic Yugoslavians and their homeland) shaped Croatians’

identification with one another and strengthened their support to resistance movements in the former Yugoslavia (Kaldor-Robinson, 2002).

Although a collective identity seems to be synonymous with consensual and shared consciousness of what the group stands for, it does not, however, suggest homogeneity and constancy. This is because identity formation is a social process which involves constant negotiation and re-negotiation. In fact, Della Porta and Diani (2006) asserted that “in reality, it is rare that a dominant identity is able to integrate all the others. More usually, identities have a polycentric rather than a hierarchical structure” (p.100). The women’s movement is an example of a collective identity that is fluid and multiplex in nature; besides broadly identifying with other women as members, there are also overlapping layers of identification underscored by class, race and education (Buechler, 1993). The collective identity experienced by Chinese youths who participated in anti-Japanese protests in China encompasses both the Chinese national identity and Chinese youth identity (which the youths differentiated from that of the larger Chinese society). Thus, to quote Hall (1996):

Identities are never unified and on, late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. (p.4)

In summary, the outcome of new social movements, contrary to that proposed by RM theory, is more ideologically-based and driven. Such movements engender and maintain a community identity, leading to the attainment of autonomy and political self-management for its participating members (Buechler, 1993; Polletta &

Jasper, 2001). For instance, the women's liberation movement in the U.S. was borne out of a shared knowledge of women's disadvantaged position in society due to a historically and culturally entrenched patriarchal society (Buechler, 1993). In spite of the multiplexity of identity due to women's different racial and economic status, what galvanized participants to attain political suffrage (i.e., women's right to vote) was the recognition of gender power imbalances and awareness of women's disadvantaged position in the social and political realms. What has been discussed so far clearly points to the critical role collective identity plays in enhancing a movement's success. The theories and studies reviewed in this section also pointed out key pillars in collective identity theories, which are, to reiterate: a shared consciousness, identification of "us", articulation of the adversary, as well as the multiplexity of collective identity. The next section reviews research on collective identity in the online communication and action, specifically the role of technology in facilitating the creation of a movement's identity.

### **Online Collective Identities**

The proliferation of communication media in an increasingly connected world has resulted in communication technologies playing an important role in shaping (or reshaping) a common identity. In the current age where new media users are both producers and consumers of online content, scholars' attention have shifted to how digital networks shape and facilitate activism, and analyzing how various groups use the Internet to engender change at transnational, national and group levels. A dominant theme that emerges from these studies is how digital networks enhance the growth of issue-based movements by allowing people from diverse backgrounds and residing in geographically dispersed locations to converge in cyberspace and cultivate

a shared or collective goal (Ceren, 2006; Custard, 2007; Hollenback & Zinkhan, 2006). Diani (2000) argued that CMC plays a more instrumental than symbolic role in social movement networks as it “may strengthen identities and solidarities among their members by increasing the rate of exchange between geographically very distant activists and organizations, and therefore the density of what is, however, a very peculiar constituency” (p.395). Drawing from her work in media anthropology, Madianou (2005) theorized that technology does not create identity but rather, enables an identity to emerge through the creation of communicative spaces that are both inclusionary and exclusionary.

A shared consciousness, one of the main tenets of collective identity theories, takes the form of common interests and values—whether political, social or economic—which form the basis for the formation of virtual activist groups (Hollenback & Zinkhan, 2006). Through interviews and cyber-ethnography, Ayers (2003) analyzed two feminist groups (one online and one offline) and concluded that there was a stronger sense of collective identity among the online feminist group due to members’ shared definitions of who they are, a high level of consciousness and the establishment of clear identity boundaries. Adams and Roscigno (2005) studied the role of identity in recruiting members by white supremacist organizations (e.g., the Ku Klux Klan and Neo-Nazis groups) through an analysis of websites’ thematic content, thematic structure and associations. The textual analysis revealed that the shared consciousness that pervades organization members is founded on race, as being “Aryan” or “white” is the primary trait that defines “notions of the state, attributes of upright citizens and the nature of the white supremacist movement” (p.765).

As discussed earlier, in-group boundary is determined in relation to the out-group, leading to the creation of social categorizations (such as “us” versus “them”) and one’s social identity as part of a larger collective. A clear identification of “others” helps to foster collectiveness in the online context as well, as illustrated by studies of online venues such as websites and discussion forums. In Nip’s (2004) content analysis and observation of a bulletin board for gay women, the findings suggest that the culture of opposition to heterosexual relationships is pivotal in strengthening the mutual recognition and reinforcement of the queer identity. In some cases, explicit and distinct references are made to out-groups which serve to reinforce and further bind members’ identification with one another. Van Summeren’s analysis of the content that is exchanged in discussion forums uncovered distinct references to “we” (the Muslims) as the in-group as opposed to “non-Muslims” or “you Dutchmen” as the out-groups. Furthermore, identity signifiers such as the observation of religious rituals (e.g., observing the Ramadan and mosque visits), ideological beliefs (adherence to the Islamic religious doctrine), and Islamic mythical beliefs (e.g., healing through praying and the protecting power of the Quran) help to demarcate boundaries and, in the process, strengthen the sense of camaraderie among displaced Muslims. Similarly, in the case of the white supremacist movements, the use of symbols such as the flaming cross and hooded Klansmen on organizational websites enhanced the expression of the white supremacists’ identity (Adams & Roscigno, 2005).

Other than the use of explicit references or visual symbols, discourse patterns and emphasis also reveal key identity markers upheld by a group. The establishment of boundaries in terms of identifying who was part or not part of the movement against World Trade Organization (WTO) was done primarily through discussion and

debate (Wall, 2007). Her content analysis of email lists reflected a continuous identification of membership through perpetual deliberations on whether there was room for participation by oppositional groups (referring to right-wing nationalist groups, and those who were more reformist or radical). Wall concluded that “the discussion of movement positions and values were part of an ongoing process to delineate boundaries” (p.268).

An interesting notion of collective identity formed in cyberspace is its fluidity, echoing the thesis of identity multiplexity advocated by Buechler (1993) and Hall (1996). Russell (2005) posited that the convergence of discourse online via a public space has the potential to shape and mould a movement’s identity. Based on an analysis of the group’s Internet usage and media coverage of the movement, Russell established that in spite of the movement whose original identity was that of a guerilla movement in the Mexican rainforest fighting for land rights of the Chiapas’s indigenous population, the convergence of different information networks through linkages established between the Zapatista site and other international human-rights organizations (e.g., those on indigenous rights, women’s rights and environmental justice) extended the identity of the Zapatista movement as a localized indigenous movement to other broad global causes, contributing to the movement’s success. The identity of the Zapatista movement thus assumed a multiplex nature as it is linked to myriad causes unified under the overarching themes of human rights and anti-capitalism. The fluidity and multi-dimensionality of identity is further illustrated in the Mamadouh’s (2004) study of Indymedia and how the Internet is deployed to engender collective action based on four aspects of collective action: grievances and alternatives; organization; mobilization; and identities. Essentially an international network of websites managed by Independent Media Centres, Indymedia provides a

media platform to empower activists. Based on her analysis of 122 websites through archival research, survey and study of online narratives, Mamadouh found that other than facilitating the mobilization and organization of both local and global centers, the Internet also plays a critical role in framing and reinforcing the multi-scalar (i.e., both local and global) identity of Indymedia. By focusing on both localized and global events and issues strategically, Indymedia fortifies its image as an organization which addresses the grievances of both local and global audiences.

The above studies point to the distinct presence of collective identity formed in cyberspace that spans time and space. In spite of the difference between real and virtual platforms where collective action take place, the literature reviewed thus far suggest that similar dimensions of collective identity are observed in online groups as well. The next section addresses the instrumental role CMC technologies play as part of a social movement repertoire in facilitating collective action, and how established and grassroots organizations harness technology for movement purposes.

### **Technology and Online Activism**

With the growing proliferation of blogs, personal, organization and party websites, scholars have advocated that the World Wide Web potentially provides an alternative and viable space for individuals and marginalized groups to circumvent offline media regulations and engage in discourse with one another. Although cautioning against technological determinism, Diani (2000) and Tilly (2004) also acknowledged that media and technology are becoming a part of the social movement repertoire of contemporary social movements. Typical social movement repertoire encompass different types of protest actions that are performed to achieve movement objectives, such as signing petitions, demonstrations, sit-ins, boycotts and blocking

traffic (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). With the increasing adoption of media and Internet technologies which facilitate information dissemination, protest diffusion and organization are being given an additional boost. The following sections identify key themes pertaining to the harnessing of Internet technologies in helping individuals and organizations reach their movement objectives, specifically in how Internet technologies are used to disseminate information and raise awareness for campaigns, organize and mobilize collective action and establish useful connections with sympathetic constituents. Recent literature on emerging web 2.0 technologies such as blogs is also discussed to explicate the changing modes of collective action.

### **Disseminating Information and Organizing Action**

The earliest foray into the study of political communication and Internet technologies was the analysis of how Internet technologies were used by established political entities such as parties and organizations. A common theme of research pursued in this area dealt with how the Internet enabled political parties to establish connections with the citizenry and different public interest groups, making it possible for marginalized groups to recruit members while challenging existing rules and regulations (e.g., Ho, Baber & Khondker, 2002; Liu, 1999; McCaughey & Ayers, 2003; Shapiro, 1999). Johnson (2003) advocated that the three distinct features of the Internet technology—many-to-many communication, anonymity and reproducibility—facilitate campaigning efforts due to the ease and speed of information dissemination. Social movement theorists such as Diani (2000) and Tilly (2004) advocated that media and Internet technologies wield significant effects in the spreading of information, thereby facilitating the spread of collective action. Andrews and Biggs's (2006) analysis of the 1960 racial-equality sit-ins in the southern parts of



America seemed to support this thesis. They found that news media played an important role in diffusing protest across 334 cities. Looking to Asia, the mobilization of millions of the electorate in street protests in 2001 against President Estrada through the use of text messaging became a watershed event in Philippines politics.

Pertaining to Internet technologies, one of the earlier tools that media scholars examined was email. Originating as a means for exchange among researchers, email soon became a basic tool of communication and organization that was used to send complex messages and materials among individuals. By facilitating ongoing discussions in both civic and political organizations, email helped to strengthen relationships among group members and attachment to the group itself (Schwartz, 1996). Other than dissemination of information and publicizing a cause, existing studies also showed how the Internet's non-hierarchical networked structure facilitates organization and participation on the part of movement supporters and sympathetic constituencies in a campaign. Kreimer's (2001) reference to the Internet as "technologies of protest" best encapsulates the dominant role of new media in mobilizing action among fringe groups or civil society organizations (e.g., neo-Nazism, disability rights, environmentalists and anti-corporate enthusiasts). Through content analyses and case studies, scholars have investigated the specific ways in which social movement organizations and ad hoc issues-advocacy groups utilize Internet technologies for mass mobilization and execution of planned activities. For instance, when the Federal Election Commission (FEC) in the U.S. issued a notice of enquiry into the extent to which election-related activities should be regulated, the information that was made available to the public was both lengthy and written in complex legalese, thus deterring comprehension. What the Center for Democracy and Technology did subsequently was to simplify the information and create standard

web-based forms for members of the public to use and submit their comments to the FEC (Berman & Milligan, 2003).

The other ways in which the Internet facilitates easy and quick participation by movement actors include calling for offline action (e.g., demonstration), executing an offline action which can be performed more effectively online (e.g., call to contact politicians), and facilitating online action that help achieve a movement's aim (e.g., a spamming campaign) (Vegh, 2003). Stein's (2007) analysis of Internet use by six social movement organizations in the U.S. confirmed that the Internet was the main mode for increasing awareness among target constituencies, as well as organizing and encouraging participation among target constituencies. Through their websites, movement organizations also described and provided details on specific campaigns, and explained how to contribute to them. Her analysis further showed that movement organizations leveraged the mobilization capacity of the Internet to distribute urgent action alerts, plan local, national and international actions online, and post event calendars online.

In recent years, the burgeoning popularity of web 2.0 technologies such as Facebook and Twitter have provided additional platforms for marginalized political players to mobilize target constituents. The progression of online technologies from "web 1.0" to "web 2.0" involved the shift from personal websites to blogs and blog site aggregation and from publishing information to participation in information creation (Flew, 2005). In addition, departing from web content creation that was funded by up-front investments, Flew posits that content creation via web 2.0 technologies is an ongoing and interactive process. Such a participatory approach towards both consuming and producing web content paves the way for the emergence of Winner's (2003) "citizen-governors". Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010) identified a

“repertoire” of potential collective actions, distinguished by the role Internet technologies played (Internet-support versus Internet-based) as well as the “threshold” of participation (low versus high involvement), ranging from online petition, virtual sit-in, to hacktivism and creation of protest website and alternative media.

### **Building Networks and Communities**

Another area of research which has received much attention from media scholars pertains to the networking effects of Internet technologies and the establishment of online communities. The instantaneity, reach, and interactivity of CMC made it possible for people who share similar ideology or grievances to converge online with ease and speed, hence leading to quick formation of collectives driven by shared goals (Ayers, 2003; McCaughey & Ayers, 2003; Vegh, 2003). Moreover, links among different protest organizations and the ability to circumvent traditional gate-keeping structures accorded by the Internet made it possible for concerned individuals and groups to unleash a collective and relentless protest (Gurak & Logie, 2003). This was demonstrated in the case of mass online protests against Lotus’s Marketplace product, which led to the withdrawal of the product even before its launch (Gurak & Logie, 2003).

Recent scholarship on contemporary movement organizations indicate that the proliferation of technology adoption is shaping the way in which movement organizations network internally (between leaders and members, and among members) as well as externally (among different movement organizations). Examining a wide spectrum of movement organizations (e.g. WTO protest groups, Christian Coalition, Meet Up, and Amnesty International) along the dimensions of interaction mode

(personal and impersonal) and engagement mode (entrepreneurial and institutional), Flanagan, Stohl and Bimber (2006) found that the “formal, centralized organizations with identified leaders, prescribed roles, and quantifiable resources that are fundamental to collective action theory are no longer the only, nor even the primary, means of contemporary organizing”(p.47). Their claims are supported by a coterie of scholarly work which indicates that the structures of movement groups are becoming increasingly less well-defined and nebulous (Diani, 2000; Langman, 2005). This is because the interactivity afforded by Internet technologies enables visitors to a website or bulletin board to enter easily into dialogue with other members of the movement (Kreimer, 2001). Biddix and Park (2008) found that the creation of a networked community through hyperlinks enabled college students involved in the campus living wage movement in the U.S. to overcome previous movement limitations such as inability to sustain interest through stages of latency and inability to span student generations. By facilitating the sharing of contact lists for easy access and linking up with activists from different university campuses, the Internet provided a means for these students to share information, organize and mobilize fellow activists, thereby sustaining the movement. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter are also providing new venues for like-minded individuals to gather in cyberspace. This explains why Langlois, Elmer, McKelvey and Devereaux (2009) described these new media as “new types of technocultural spaces” (p.429) which provides material, communicational and social means for issue publics to exist.

The above studies demonstrated how technology and new media are fast becoming an indispensable part of the repertoire of contemporary collective action, both localized and transnational. Technological tools that are embedded in Internet technology (emails, discussion forums, hyperlinks, to name a few) make for quick

and almost instantaneous dissemination of information that is critical for a movement's success. Beyond raising awareness, the Internet also facilitates accessible and quick participation among movement supporters and extends a movement's reach beyond geographical boundaries, illustrated by global anti-WTO demonstrations. Web 2.0 technologies such as social networking sites and blogs have been scrutinized for their role in enhancing civic participation. However, as mentioned earlier, existing analyses have largely excluded individuals as scholars focused on technology use among parties and non-governmental organizations. The next section addresses key themes that have emerged from the study of blogging, the subject of this dissertation; more specifically, bloggers' use of the medium.

## **Blogging**

The phenomenon of blogging has garnered much attention since its emergence in the 1990s. Blogs are essentially web pages that are linked to specific pages which are created through the use of simple electronic-publishing tools, and cover a wide variety of topics, ranging from personal journals to interactive forums (Blood, 2002). Research on blogging has come a long way, with the earliest foray residing in analyzing and understanding the uses and motivations behind blogging. However, as soon as it became evident that blogs were exerting some form of political impact through anecdotal observations, the study of blogs soon assumed a political dimension. The literature reviewed in this section suggests that blogging is effecting political participation and bloggers tend to congregate based on the principle of homophily.

Earlier studies showed that blogging is driven by the need for self-expression rather than civic engagement. The growing popularity of blogs was attributed to the

ease of creating an online journal to document one's life and the degree of control bloggers have over the types of interactive features they want to incorporate in their blogs (Kim, 2007). Pioneering efforts in media studies on blogs addressed the uses and gratifications of blogging (Blood, 2002; Herring, Scheidt, Bonus & Wright, 2004; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht & Swartz, 2004; Papacharissi, 2004; Trammell, 2005; Trammell, Williams, Postelnicu & Landreville, 2006). A seminal work was Herring, Scheidt, Bonus and Wright's (2004) genre analysis of 203 randomly-selected weblogs (including personal journals, filter blogs, k-logs and mixed-typed blogs). Their study ascertained that personal-type journal blogs were the most prevalent (70.4%) and are deployed by bloggers to express their subjective perspectives on matters of interest to them. These personal journal typed-blogs were used by blog authors to "report on their lives and share their inner thoughts and feelings" (p.6). Similarly, in Trammell's (2005) content analysis of 358 Polish blogs, she found that self-expression was the main motivation for blogging, followed by: the need for social interaction (59.5%), entertainment (51.7%), passing time (24.3%), information (8.4%), and professional advancement (2.2%). The narcissistic nature of most blogs is also confirmed by Papacharissi (2004) who found that the desire for postings to be read by friends or family is the primary motivator for blogging. In the Iranian context, blogs provided women with opportunities to share their intimate thoughts "in a society where women had no public forum, no opportunity to express themselves" (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008, p.93). Amir-Ebrahimi argued that self-expression through blogs reinforced the identity of the self, thereby engendering a sense of empowerment among Iranian women.

However, as mentioned in the earlier chapter, due to recent developments which point to the influence of blogs on civic participation, research on blogs has

taken on a new trajectory. Technological optimists predict that blogs will unleash a new wave of civic participation among regular citizens. This is because, unlike traditional broadcast and commercial networks that set the agenda and place pre-determined issues on the national agenda, bloggers function as grassroots intermediaries who accord visibility to an issue if they deem the issues relevant to different publics and, in the process, reframe the issues, thereby ensuring that everyone (versus those in control of media) has a chance to be heard (Jenkins, 2006b). For instance, by filtering information, providing short summaries and links to further information on related issues, “topic-oriented” blogs (defined as blogs with the purpose of conveying professional information) act as one-stop information hubs (Bar-Ilan, 2005).

Studies have also shown that political bloggers are motivated by different objectives and goals beyond personal ones. A recent study by Tomaszeski (2006) on political blogs sheds light on the different motivations which set political bloggers apart from personal bloggers. Their motivations include: to share the blogger’s point of view, to participate in an online political debate, to interact with other bloggers, to influence other people, and to oppose the current political debate. Tomaszeski’s findings of political bloggers’ interest in engaging and deliberating with other bloggers seem to support Nakajima, Tatemura, Hino, Hara and Tanaka’s (2005) classification of bloggers into agitators who stimulate discussion, and summarizers who provide summaries of the discussion, based on their study of blog threads among Japanese bloggers. Bosch’s (2010) analysis of South African political blogs and citizen journalism sites found that bloggers placed themselves in authoritative positions in the area of social commentary and actively influenced opinions. Although these studies do not measure blogging and civic participation per se, they clearly

indicated that a different set of bloggers exist, whose focus and motivation for blogging extends beyond the self.

In more recent scholarly endeavors, political communication scientists have also directly addressed the relationship between blog use and political engagement beyond blogging motivations. Russell and Echchaibi's (2009) work on international blogging presents a collection of case-studies of how blogs are used to articulate identity and resist political pressures in European and Asia-Pacific countries. Gil de Zuniga, Puig-I-Abril and Rojas (2009) used secondary data analysis from the Pew Internet & American Life Project to compare the influence of traditional online information sources (e.g., online news sources and government websites) and blogs. What their study established was that blog use enhanced political discussion, online campaigning, and other forms of online political participation (e.g., signing a petition or donating money). However, in a separate study, Gil de Zuniga, Veenstra, Vraga and Shah (2010) established that bloggers' offline political talk was an important determinant of their offline political participation, suggesting that a spillover of discourse from the online to offline context is necessary in evoking engagement.

Other than ascertaining the effects of blogging on civic engagement, scholars have also looked into how blogs lead to the formation of online communities and social network. The overarching finding of these studies is that bloggers connect with others whom they perceive share similar ideologies. A common method used to depict and explicate networking patterns of bloggers is hyperlink analysis. Adamic and Glance (2005) examined the linking patterns and discussion topics of political bloggers in the U.S. and found significantly different blogging behaviour based on political ideology. Conservative blogs linked to one other more frequently and exhibited denser linking patterns compared to their more liberal counterparts.



Conservatives and liberal bloggers were found in distinctly separate communities with few cross-linking, and this division extended to the content exchanged as liberal and conservative bloggers focused on different news, political figures and topics. Similarly, Hargittai, Gallo and Kane (2008) analyzed linking practices among a set of widely read liberal and republican blogs from the U.S. and their findings confirmed that bloggers are more likely to link to those who match their ideological beliefs. In their analysis of the linking practices of South Korean politicians, Park and Kluver (2007) found that politician bloggers hyperlink to demonstrate their party affiliation, gender and regional ties, in ways that are similar to that of their official websites.

What such studies suggest is that the social networks formed among bloggers are based on homophily, similar to traditional social networks in offline contexts. Although offering rich insights into the political potential of blogs, these studies do not address the extension of bloggers' activities into the offline context. The next section provides an overview of the media regulatory landscape in Singapore, and a discussion of how gradual transformations in the political economy surrounding media and technology use provide political opportunities for media users such as bloggers to further their activist goals.

### **Media Regulation in Singapore**

This section provides an overview of the media scene in the city-state. Firstly, it addresses and identifies pertinent political and social dynamics that surround the government's regulation of the local media as it spills over into cyberspace. Secondly, it highlights recent developments in new media usage, which pose a challenge to regulatory controls.

## **Socio-Historical Context and Regulatory Framework**

Stemming from the initial days of post-colonialization, the mass media in Singapore has played a supportive role in nation building. Traditional media such as print and broadcast were deployed for the purposes of producing and promoting the city-state, and the government's control of the media to cultivate and disseminate hegemonic views and values was justified on the grounds of building social cohesion among its citizens from diverse ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds (Banerjee, 2002; Kuo, 1995). A myriad of laws was put in place to govern both print and broadcast media, some examples being the Broadcasting Act, the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act, Undesirable Publications Act and Public Entertainment and Meetings Act. The public service monopoly of broadcasting was intended to protect and promote national culture and identity (Banerjee, 2002). The prohibition of private ownership of the mass media as well as satellite dishes (until the 1990s) have helped the government to maintain both political and social stability, critical factors that are purported to have created Singapore's economic success.

Within a short span of about 40 years since its independence, the growth pace of the small nation-state achieved a phenomenal rate, averaging 8% per annum, an outcome that has been attributed to the government's sound economic planning and focused efforts to attract foreign investments in various industrial sectors (Koh & Poh, 2005). One of the factors that accounts for Singapore's rapid advancement from a Third World to First World status is the leap-frogging of the economy from the manufacturing stage to the innovation-based stage. The 1990s witnessed a shift in the policymakers' priority as they embarked on transforming the island with a population of over four million into an information hub, one that trades in ideas rather than commodities. Visible success for such initiatives such as the Singapore IT2000

Masterplan and Infocomm 21 Strategy was clearly evident from the sharp increase of Internet penetration and broadband among the populace. By 2006, home computer penetration among surveyed households reached 78%, with 38% of the households having access to two or more computers, and 71% of households having Internet access. As of 2009, Internet access and broadband access among households reached 81% and 80% respectively (Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, Annual Survey on Infocomm Usage - Households and by Individuals, 2009). The success of the information technology (IT) programs was a result of the government's efforts to promote IT usage among the workforce and the general public, as well as emphasizing usage in the school curriculum. Today, Singapore is ranked among the top five economies in Asia Pacific on the ICT Development Index (International Telecommunication Union, The World in 2009, ICT Facts and Figures).

### **Technology and Democratization**

Access to technology has been argued by scholars Lenk (1999), Hague and Loader (1999) to be a critical precondition to citizenry participation and democracy. One common assumption is that the presence of the Internet backed by widespread access to both technology and networks would inadvertently lead to the creation of a vibrant civil society and greater political participation. However, in the case of Singapore, the extent to which the Internet has been deployed as a democratizing tool in Singapore is limited, despite the government's successful initiatives in increasing access to information technologies across the population (Rodan, 1998).

The vulnerability of the state, given its geographical location, diverse ethnic and social makeup, is the main reason given by the government to curtail the expression of political opinions on the Internet. According to Lessig (1999), there are

four constraints or regulators that regulate the Internet and limit its democratizing potential: the law, norms (social and/or cultural), market (price) and architecture (the nature or structure of the product). In Singapore's context, the law is by far one of the more effective forms of regulating usage of the Internet as it operates in two ways. Firstly, by stipulating how an individual or an organization should behave and stating the punishment for deviation, the law operates on a direct level. Secondly, the law also operates in an indirect way when it aims to modify one of the other structures of constraints, for instance, norms.

Under the Media Development Authority (MDA), the regulation of the Internet is purported to be essential, not to stop religious and political bodies from setting up websites, but to promote accountability among users by holding content providers for the web content that they put up. A complex set of rules and regulations such as the Internet Code of Practice and the Class License Scheme have been put in place to regulate discourse in cyberspace and to promote the accountability on the part of content providers. The government's control and regulation of the Internet was also evident during election periods. In August 2001, the government passed a bill that amended the Parliamentary Elections Act which stipulated that non-party political websites were not allowed to hyperlink to websites that campaign for any party or candidate during election time. The use of audio files and podcasts by political parties was also banned during the elections in 2006.

Regulation through law inadvertently leads to a second layer of regulation, that of norms in the society as it has impact on Singaporeans' willingness to go online and voice their opinions or views. For instance, reluctance or even fear was clearly manifested during the aftermath of the fateha.com incident. Fateha.com was a website established in the year 2000 to serve as the mouthpiece of the Malay community. The

editor of fateha.com was charged with criminal defamation because of three articles he posted on the website in 2001 which questioned the allegiance of Malay Members of Parliament and their ability to represent the interests of the local Malay community. Following the editor's arrest, the government ordered fateha.com to register as a political website with the MDA under the Internet Class License Scheme. Such reactions from the government drew sharp criticisms from some members of the public who argued that such measures further stifled creativity in online expression and debate, as well as instill fear and anxiety among the online community (Tan, 2002). Other than fateha.com, there have been several other incidents demonstrating the government's policing and control of the Internet which led to the shutting down of certain websites, such as the withdrawal of the online forum, the Speakers' Corner Online, set up by the Think Centre (Gomez, 2002). Singaporeans' direct and indirect dependence on the state for various resources, their vulnerability to surveillance and the possibility of political persecution worked together to undermine the willingness of groups and individuals to combat the government's regulatory measures (Rodan, 2003).

### **New Media and Cyber Discourse**

Despite the existence of regulations impacting the public's willingness to engage in political discourse, recent developments suggest that the Internet does play a significant and important role in Singapore. Ho, Baber and Khondker (2002), who conducted a study on alternative websites in Singapore related to politics, religion and alternative sexuality, found that certain possibilities and spaces which did not exist in days prior to the advent of the Internet have since opened up to fringe groups such as People Like Us (a gay site). These groups are now able to connect with their members,

organize meetings or discussions online, thereby circumventing existing laws which require them to obtain permission for assembly in the real world. In addition, the Internet also provides an additional channel for civil society groups and organizations such as the Think Centre and Singapore Review to promote their views and contest dominant discourse in offline discussions.

George (2003) argued that the inherent characteristics of the Internet and the economic benefits associated with the adoption of the technology makes it difficult for the government to regulate new media in the same way that it did with traditional media such as print and broadcast. George (2003) argued that, unlike print and broadcast media which serve more narrowly-defined functions, in dealing with what he calls the “narrow tailoring dilemma” (p.247), the Singapore and Malaysia governments have had to compromise on the degree of political control wielded over the Internet with its multi-faceted functionality. Thus, the government’s attempt to strike a balance between “illiberal political interventions with market-oriented strategies for economic growth”, coupled with the sheer volume of rapidly-transmissible packet-switched content, have resulted in the creation of loopholes that are exploited by marginalized groups and individuals. In his analysis of Internet use by groups such as the Think Centre and Sintercom in Singapore, George (2006) proposed that the Internet has been viewed as an alternative medium where alternative content that challenges hegemonic perspectives and networking patterns among linked sites constitutes contentious journalism. This form of journalism contests consensus that is shaped and sustained through the mass media by those in power.

## **Changing Political Opportunities and Civic Engagement**

More recently, the growing use of new media for self-expression and the sharing of opinions have spurred the government's recognition of new media's potential to change the political landscape. Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs are gaining popularity, as revealed in a 2008 survey by Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore. Out of a population of 4.5 million people, 11% create their content (e.g., create and maintain their own blogs and broadcast self-produced videos via YouTube and Google Video) and 70% communicate via social networks, blogs, instant messaging, emails and peer-to-peer platforms (Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, Annual Survey on Infocomm Usage - Households and by Individuals, 2009). Kluver (2007) analyzed the political relevance of new media technologies such as blogs, podcasts and instant messaging systems during the 2005 Presidential Election and concluded that the Internet is broadening the scope of civic discussion in Singapore by enabling the public to engage in issues of political and social significance in "non-politicized forums" (p.19). Singaporeans have also begun to leverage leveraging blogs, social networking sites, forums and online videos to raise awareness and garner support for myriad causes (Tan, 2008). Some of these endeavours include the "No to Rape" campaign, which lobbied for the criminalization of marital rape, started by three youths who leveraged new media technologies such as blogs, Facebook and Twitter (Chew, 2009).

On the government's part, as part of its strategy to reach out to a growing population that is becoming more media savvy, members of the ruling party have also launched their own blogs to interact with Internet-savvy citizens (e.g., P65 blogs). In his National Day Rally speech delivered on August 17, 2008, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong highlighted how new media has changed politics in the U.S., China,

South Korea and Malaysia, and alluded to the impending easing of regulations that govern new media use in Singapore. He acknowledged that “it is time to update the rules or risk them being made obsolete by the rapidly changing new media landscape” (Chia, 2008, p.A4). Some of the measures that the government is exploring include permitting Singaporeans to post political videos and campaign material on the Internet by the next General Election in 2011, relooking the existing ban on the dissemination of party political films and that on outdoor demonstrations. Through AIMS established in 2007, the government also solicited feedback and suggestions from professionals, academics as well as bloggers on possible approaches to fine-tune its “light-touch” policies on regulating Internet use.

Indeed, such a more open-minded approach towards new media technologies is a far cry from the government’s earlier hesitant attitude towards the Internet technology. Such changes in the government’s attitudes towards media and technology create new opportunities for dissenting groups. In response to the commissioning of AIMS by the government to develop recommendations for media regulation, The Bloggers 13 – a group of bloggers formed through open invitation online - came up with a proposal written on behalf of the online community calling for greater de-regulation. The proposal called for more drastic changes such as the repeal of the Class License Scheme, and Sections 33 and 35 of the Films Act. Repealing the relevant sections in the Films Act will allow the production, distribution and screening of party political films, as well as deny the government the authority to ban any film deemed contrary to public interest. As mentioned in Chapter 1, TOC, a group blog founded on the principles of citizen journalism, has acquired much visibility not just for the news it develops and puts online, but also the offline



activities it organizes and supports such as demonstrations at the Speakers' Corner and its Singapore Anti-Mandatory Death Penalty campaign.

These latest developments point to changes in political opportunity structures and a growing optimism in possibilities of the Internet in engendering political and social change; specifically, in providing opportunities for deliberative discourse and the lobbying for policy changes. However, existing scholarly endeavors addressing Internet technologies and their democratization effects in Singapore tend to be policy-centric and focused on media regulation and the ensuing effects on online and offline deliberation. There is a lacuna in current literature which adopts a bottom-up approach and examines whether, and how, Internet and new media technologies are empowering ordinary individuals in pressing for political and social change. Hence, in view of the changes and developments taking place in Singapore, this study is both timely and relevant in investigating whether, why, and how political bloggers constitute new types of social movement actors.

### **Research Questions**

To achieve the research objectives stated in Chapter 1, three broad research questions will guide data collection and analysis. These questions are categorized according to the following themes: (1) collective identity among political bloggers; (2) social networking dynamics of political bloggers; and (3) the role of Internet technologies in activism. The operationalization of variables will be elaborated on in Chapter 3.

**Research Question 1: Does a collective identity exist among activist bloggers and if so, what is the nature of the collective identity shared among them?**

Research Question 1 addresses the role and significance of collective identity as a recruiting and mobilizing force that galvanizes disparate individuals into coming together and working on a common cause. This research question investigates the relationship between collective identity and blogging, which is purported to be an individualistic and egocentric activity. Through in-depth interviews, this part of the dissertation will explore the presence and nature of collective identity among political bloggers based on dominant collective identity dynamics established by new social movement theorists and new media scholars.

To recall key themes uncovered in the literature review, the key dimensions of collective identity are: shared consciousness, articulation of identity (through boundary markers and identity signifiers), articulation of the out-group (“the others”) or adversary, and identity multiplexity. The concept of the collective, a construct that involves multi-faceted issues such as who are the bloggers that form a part of this collective, and what are characteristics or traits that mark the boundaries and define such a collective, will emerge from the data. Such a grounded approach is necessary as the concept of collective identity involves conscious meaning production and reproduction on the part of the participants and is dependent on their perception of themselves and others. For instance, what are some of the blogging practices that differentiate them from non-activist bloggers? What are some of the shared knowledge or common practices that distinguish activist bloggers as a group that is different from other bloggers? Who are “the others” or the adversary for these bloggers? Thus, semi-structured interviews with Singapore activist bloggers will uncover, from first-hand accounts, whether a collective identity exists and, if so, what it means for them. However, activist bloggers remain a small minority of political bloggers. Thus, interviews were also conducted with non-activist bloggers to ascertain

their attitudes and perceptions with regard to the presence (or absence) of a collective identity among political bloggers.

The theoretical framework for collective identity will guide the development of the semi-structured interview guide. The questions are organized according to themes and relate to theoretical conceptions concerning identity and collectiveness, and they are:

- (i) Vision and goals for blogging;
- (ii) Perception of similarities with other bloggers;
- (iii) Perception of differences from other bloggers;
- (iv) Perception of self as a bloggers;
- (v) Blogging practices;
- (vi) Perception of solidarity and collectiveness among bloggers; and
- (vii) The use of technological tools to establish a sense of collectiveness.

## **Research Question 2: What roles do social networks play in engendering political bloggers' participation in activism?**

As established in the literature review section, the social network approach has been widely used as a way to explicate a movement's success in recruiting and mobilizing participants in offline settings (Dixon & Roscigno, 2003; Gould, 1991, 1993; Klandersman, 1984; Klandersman & Oegema, 1987; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Pfaff, 1996; Snow, Zurcher & Ekland-Olson, 1980; Zhao, 1998). In the online context, the link-based structure of cyberspace has been argued by scholars to enable one to identify potential recruits or sympathizers (Rogers & Marres, 2000; Schumate & Lipp, 2007). Thus, scholars have predicted that the Internet will play a bonding function in connecting like-minded individuals who may otherwise be separated geographically.

The hyperlinking structure of cyberspace facilitates both the dissemination of information and forging of alliances with other like-minded individuals and organizations (Ceren, 2006; Diani, 2000; Foot & Schneider, 2002, Garrido & Halavais, 2003; Rogers and Marres, 2000; Russell, 2005; Soon & Cho, 2011).

Existing literature on social movements and collective action which take place in the offline context established that structural proximity to other activists influenced activism participation. There is a dearth of empirical study on whether, and how, informal and formal social networks affect participation in collective action among individuals who harness Internet technologies for activism purposes, particularly in the study of political bloggers. Therefore, marrying both offline networks (informal and formal) and online networks, the first sub-question addresses the relationship between political bloggers' structural proximity to other activists in their informal, formal and online networks and their activism participation.

- (i) Do social networks influence political bloggers' participation in activism?

According to extant literature, social networks exert a significant impact on one's participation in collective action by establishing strong ties and trust, exerting social influence and selective incentives, and providing channels for information sharing. Previous studies examined the presence of social network ties, but scant attention has been paid to ascertaining whether relational variables were linked to activism participation/non-participation. This raises the question, aside from structural proximity to other activists, of whether there are differences in relational variables (i.e., tie strength, trust, perceived social influence, information-seeking and social selective incentives), which may account for participation or non-participation in activism. Thus, this study seeks to specify if networks influence participation or non-

participation due to the presence (or lack thereof) of trust, strong ties, information-seeking, social influence and selective incentives. Thus the second sub-question is:

- (ii) Are there differences in relational variables between activist bloggers and non-activist bloggers?

What has also been established in the literature is that, although both formal and informal networks play an influential role in engendering participation, they should not be examined in isolation as various types of networks exert different effects. Marwell, Oliver and Prahla (1988), McAdam and Paulsen (1993), and Shemtov (2003) pointed to a stark research gap in social movement studies: the failure of empirical studies to explicate the precise dimensions and contents of a social tie which affect its ability to influence participants. The third sub-question ascertains whether social networks (informal, formal and online networks) play different roles in building tie strength, establishing trust, facilitating information-seeking, and exerting social influence and selective incentives.

- (iii) Do different social networks play different roles in political bloggers' participation in activism?

### **Research Question 3: What roles do Internet technologies play in activism?**

To recap what was discussed earlier in the literature review, most of the scholarly work on cyber-activism is centered on political parties and special interest groups. Existing studies showed that that Internet technologies are used by organizations and political parties for several purposes: to promote awareness of their cause and to disseminate information (Bryson, 2004; Hwang, Schmierbach, Paek, Gil de Zuniga & Shah, 2006), to recruit members or supporters, facilitate online and offline action (Kreimer, 2001; Vegh, 2003), and hyperlink to facilitate the exchange

of information and to establish associations with like-minded organizations (Nah, Veenstra & Shah, 2006; Stein, 2007). Although extant literature has pointed to the growing trend of civic participation among bloggers, the extent to which these actions are applicable to bloggers remains unknown. Hence, the third part of the study will uncover, from the bloggers' perspectives, how they use technologies to promote their cause and achieve their agenda.

By eliciting their perception on the effectiveness of new media technologies in this aspect, this study also confirms and validates the impact of new media technologies on collective action. Extending studies on the use of Internet and new media by political parties and civil society organizations to users of user-generated technologies, the third part of the study is guided by the following questions:

- i) Do activist bloggers use Internet technologies to promote awareness of their agenda and disseminate information, and if so, how?
- ii) Do activist bloggers use Internet technologies to organize online action and offline action, and if so, how?
- iii) Do activist bloggers use Internet technologies to network and forge connections with others, and if so, how?

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

To answer the three research questions, qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this study. In view of the nascent stage of research on political blogging in Singapore, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods helps to generate insights into complex phenomena such as collective identity, social network dynamics and technology use for activism purposes. This chapter details the procedures involved in crawling the blog population and identifying the study sample, and explicates the instrument design and data collection process. Due to the topic of the study and nature of the sample, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the challenges encountered during data collection for methodological refinement.

#### **Sample and Data Collection**

Since this study addresses political blogs in Singapore, the target population and unit of analysis were bloggers. I identified Singapore political blogs in three ways: keyword searches via commercial search engines, using local blog aggregators such as Singapore Daily and SingaporeSurf, and snowballing the sample from the blogs identified. Sample collection was conducted over a 4-week period, from January 11 to February 8, 2010.

#### **Using Commercial Search Engines**

I used commercial search engines—Google and Yahoo!—to crawl as many political blogs as possible. This technique was proposed by Halavais (2003) as a way to overcome problems in sampling the World Wide Web. In his paper on sampling

and crawling cyberspace, he identified two common problems: the lack of an unambiguous method to accurately gauge the universe of web pages, and how inter-linking of web pages further confounded the sampling process. As such, he suggested that a reasonable solution would be to sample the “public web,” defined as “web pages indexed by major public search engines” (Halavais, 2003, p.1). Based on an earlier study where I used a combination of Google, Yahoo! and Alta-Vista (now defunct), various commercial search engines yielded slightly different results and facilitated achieving sample saturation (Soon & Kluver, 2007). Similarly, in a more recent study, I used Google and Yahoo! to achieve sample saturation for political parties, blogs, discussion forums, news media, non-governmental and civil society organizations in the Singapore context (Soon & Cho, 2011).

For this study, I used Google and Yahoo! to identify seed pages through keywords such as “Singapore blogs,” “Singapore bloggers,” “Singapore political blogs” and “Singapore political bloggers.” The term “political blog” warrants some discussion as to how they differ from regular or non-political blogs. In the U.S. context, Gil de Zuniga, Veenstra, Vraga and Shah (2010) defined political blogs as “those that have mostly political content” (p.40). From a list of 300 most-linked blogs obtained from blogpulse.com (a blog ranking site), they identified and limited their study to 154 political blogs. In this study, to achieve greater clarity and minimize contamination during sample gathering, political blogs were defined as those that discussed issue regarding the Singapore government, the ruling party (People’s Action Party), opposition political parties, governance of Singapore, freedom of speech and anti-censorship, policies and regulation on education, economy, societal issues (e.g., homosexuality, women’s rights, migrant workers’ rights), civil service (e.g., ministerial pay), religious practices, Singapore’s international relations and their



effects on Singaporeans, and Singapore way of life. The following are examples of three blogs in which the authors explicitly stated their intention in blogging about politics in Singapore. In other cases, where the blog description was not available on the home page, I navigated to pages such as “About” or “About the writer.”

From Singapore Alternatives at <http://singaporealternatives.blogspot.com/>

This blog is about the political struggle I am engaging in Singapore. The title ‘Singapore Alternatives’ is chosen because my only political dream is to build a true alternative in Singapore. Alternative to PAP government, of course. As the Alternative, the political party must be able to have the visions and policy insights to lead Singapore. I will write on various policy views and personal beliefs that I think is crucial in building up the Alternative. All constructive comments are welcome.

From Chia Ti Lik’s Blog at <http://chiatilik.wordpress.com/>

Time and truth will tell whether my criticisms alone amount to more barbs and stings to the Ruling party than that offered by our opposition parties. I have in this blog, set up a record of my letters raising issues and potential problems to the mainstream press. Whether or not the press decides to filter this feedback, the record of which will be made for all to view. Available for all who care enough to search and wise enough to see.

From nofearSingapore at <http://nofearsingapore.blogspot.com/>

This is our only home. We want to engage society actively and constructively. Only by asking the right questions can we arrive at the correct answers. There is no need for fear as we are only doing what we must. To be apathetic is to be selfish and derelict in our duty to our children and our children's children.”

From the blogs that emerged using the keyword searches, ineligible units were excluded from the population list. “Ineligible units” are defined by Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer and Tourangeau (2004) as “elements that are not part of the target population” (p.74). In this study, irrelevant blogs comprised personal blogs that are strictly social in nature or function solely as online diaries and were sieved out. Some examples of these blogs include Xia Xue (<http://xixue.blogspot.com/>), The Insights of Crappy Jasmine Gal (<http://sgblogs.com/blog/insights-crappy-jasmine-jaschocolate-blogspot/197>) and A Shopaholic's Diary (<http://sgblogs.com/blog/shopaholic-diary-selsel/987>). The blog content on these blogs were mainly personal and social in nature, and many of them also served as platforms for advertisements of goods and services.

### **Using Blog Aggregators**

The top site which emerged from the keyword search on Google was SgBlogs (<http://sgblogs.com/>) which was a “Singapore blogs aggregator/directory/search engine/portal/rankings site” as described on the “About” page (<http://sgblogs.com/about>). After clicking on “Blogs,” I navigated to deeper web pages which listed Singapore blogs. During data collection, 75 blogs were listed and ranked. However, this collection of blogs included both political blogs and non-

political blogs, such as those mentioned above. I also used two other Singapore blog aggregators to yield a more exhaustive search for blog samples, and they were SingaporeSurf (<http://www.myapplemenu.com/singapore/>) and Singapore Daily (<http://singaporedaily.net/>). Both sites aggregated Singapore blogs on a daily basis, with their archives dating back to January 2008 (SingaporeSurf) and August 2007 (Singapore Daily). SingaporeSurf aggregated blogs which focused on Singapore's political, social and economic issues, and sometimes those of neighbouring countries as well. On Singapore Daily's site, there was a section titled "Daily Sg" which aggregated blog posts and comments on issues of the day. During the four-week sample collection, I visited these two sites on a daily basis to collect blog samples. To ensure a more comprehensive crawl, I also crawled blog posts archived from June 2009 onwards. Once again, personal or social blogs were omitted. Compared to results generated through Google, Yahoo! and SgBlogs, SingaporeSurf and Singapore Daily proved to be a rich source of Singapore socio-political blogs and yielded fewer irrelevant blogs.

### **Snowballing Seed Sites**

The third phase of sample collection included snowballing the population. The seed blogs that were identified through the earlier mentioned steps served as the basis for the gathering of more sites. According to Babbie (2007), the snowball technique is "appropriate when the members of a special population are difficult to locate" (p.184). In this study, snowballing the population involved tracing hyperlinks from the blogroll of each seed site identified in the first stage (i.e., keyword searches via commercial search engines and searches on blog aggregators). My study on the network structure and patterns of the online social network comprising political

bloggers, political parties, non-governmental and civil society organizations and new media groups used a similar method of sampling (Soon & Cho, 2011). Through this process, the final population list comprised 224 political blogs (see Appendix A for the sample list).

### **Survey**

The survey methodology is a common technique used in social movement studies as the questions often perform the critical function of uncovering intricate social dynamics pertaining to movement recruitment and mobilization. For instance, surveys and interviews uncovered the relationships between variables such as participants' perceived costs and benefits of participation in a social movement, expectations of others' behaviour and their willingness to participate (Klandermans, 1984); motivations for involvement, actions taken and network positions of the participants (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000); social ties and activism (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993); campus ecology and the transmission of dissident ideas and information among university students (Zhao, 1998). In addition, the survey method is an ideal tool with which to pose standardized questions, to investigate opinions and attitudes, is more effective for sensitive questions and also allows for more accurate generalization (Nardi, 2006). Besides facilitating the collection of original data in describing a population that is too large or dispersed for direct observation, the survey also serves as a useful and practical mechanism for measuring attitudes, beliefs and orientations among the sample of study (Babbie, 2007). In this study, the survey method was useful in eliciting responses for sensitive questions pertaining to one's civic engagement, strategies adopted and contacts known.

The survey administered to the bloggers captured three important types of information pertaining to Singapore political bloggers. The first category of data pertains to the bloggers and their blog use. These included demographic data, the length of blog use and their motivations for blogging. The second set of data was on political bloggers' involvement in activism—their membership/non-membership in non-governmental and civil society organizations, participation/non-participation in activism, types of activism involvement, reasons for non-participation as well as their usage of Internet technologies for activism and communication purposes. The third set of data collected by the survey was information on bloggers' informal, formal and online social contacts. Other than capturing the number of contacts in bloggers' three social networks, the survey also collected information on relational dimensions in bloggers' social ties with others (i.e., strength of tie, social influence, trust, information-seeking and selective incentives).

### **Procedure**

Due to the sensitivity of the topic given the political and media regulation history in Singapore, I anticipated challenges and difficulties in obtaining consent and participation from new media users. Hence, a participant information sheet detailing the research protocol, approved by the National University of Singapore Institutional Review Board (IRB), was sent to bloggers in the study population. To protect participants from any possible harm which may arise from their participation, I adopted several measures pertaining to data collection and storage approved by the IRB and informed study participants of the measures—I was the only researcher who had access to their identifiable information (e.g. name, blogsite and contact number); their details would not be released to any other person or used in a publication or

presentation; their participation in this research was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reasons. The participants were also informed of the steps I took to in order to safeguard their privacy, e.g. recording their personal details on a separate sheet detached from the data collection form and kept in a separate file.

I used a combination of communication modes to establish contact with the study sample. Bloggers in the population list were contacted via two ways. An email was sent directly to those who included their email contact on their blog. The email explained the nature of the study, its scope and an invitation for bloggers to assist the study through participating in a survey. For bloggers who did not include their contact details online, a similar invitation was posted as a comment on the blogs' comment pages. In place of incentives such as token gifts, bloggers were informed that study findings would be made available to them upon their request. The final sample who took part in the study comprised bloggers who had responded to my email request, as well as those who responded to my comment on their blogs. Both groups of respondents were given a choice of survey mode—email, telephone, or face-to-face.

At this juncture, I will explain the rationale for the procedure described above. Direct email to solicit participation in the survey was chosen over creating an online survey and posting a link to it. This was due to the sensitivity and nature of the topic which could dampen responses. De Leeuw, Hox and Dillman (2008), Nardi (2006), Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer and Tourangeau (2004) have written extensively on the advantages and disadvantages of each survey mode: face-to-face, telephone, mail and Internet. One attraction of Internet surveys lie in their promise and assurance of anonymity, as well as its visual appeal, but, De Leeuw, Hox and Dillman (2008) pointed out its drawbacks, including premature termination. Although

tedious, personal one-on-one solicitation of participation helped to alleviate suspicion and assured potential respondents of my trustworthiness and authenticity of the study. More importantly, follow-up questions could be posed to respondents due to the personal connection established through the exchange of emails. As a result, this technique made it possible to collect data on potentially sensitive topics and questions, enhanced by the assurance established through personal contact between the subject and me.

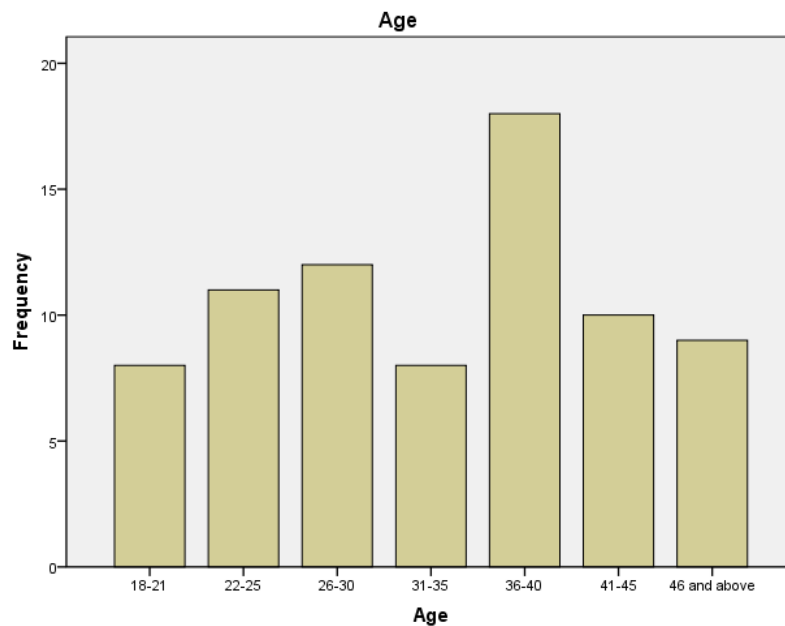
Given the nature of the instrument and sensitivity of the topic, a mixed-mode design using email, telephone and face-to-face surveys was used for this study. Other than being an efficient (in terms of cost and time) mode of data collection, telephone interviews also appealed to respondents who were unwilling to commit too much time to participate in a face-to-face meeting. However, face-to-face interview was given as an option to overcome trust issues on the part of interested but apprehensive respondents. In addition, as some questions may be perceived as sensitive and personal to respondents, the high social presence in face-to-face surveys allowed me to pick up nonverbal cues which indicated reluctance or confusion.

### **Sample**

In the data collection process, 56 questionnaires were completed by the respondents and emailed back to me, while 20 questionnaires were filled by the respondents face-to-face when they met me for the interview session. Only one questionnaire was completed over the telephone as the respondent found that to be most convenient for her. The questionnaire took the respondents an average of 25 minutes to complete. Based on the population of 224 bloggers, the survey yielded a participation rate of 33.9%.

Out of the 76 bloggers who participated in the survey questionnaire, 67 (88.2%) were male and nine (11.8%) were female. Figure 1 presents the breakdown of age groups for political bloggers in Singapore. Based on the chart, 51% of the bloggers were in the 15- to 35-year-old age bracket, defined as “youths” by the Singapore Youth Council (National Youth Council, FAQ, 2010). The next most common age group for bloggers was from the mid- to late-30s (23.7%). The demographic data suggests that Singapore’s political blogging community is dominated by young males.

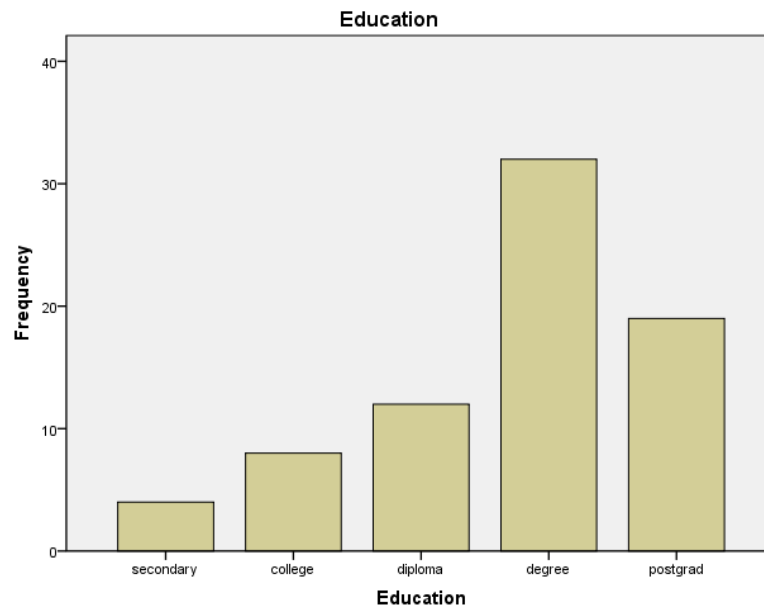
Figure 1. *Age Groups of Socio-Political Bloggers*





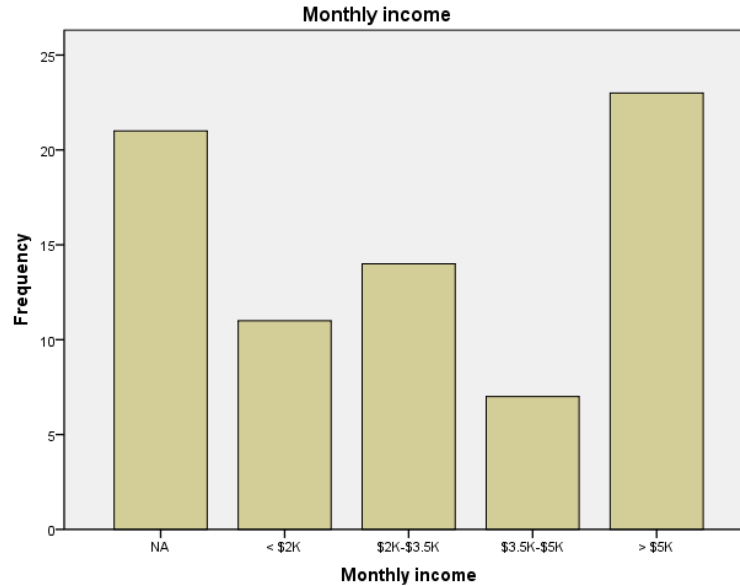
In terms of academic qualifications, Singapore political bloggers were well-educated, with 67.1% (51) holding a degree or post-graduate degree. Only 15.8% did not attain tertiary education. See Figure 2 for a breakdown of education levels among bloggers.

Figure 2. *Education Levels of Bloggers*



Majority of the bloggers (73.7%) were employed while 26.3% were unemployed. Within the unemployed group, many were students who did not earn any income, while a small proportion was self-employed and declined to indicate their income level. The survey also indicates that Singapore political bloggers came from all walks of life, and held a wide range of occupations, ranging from pre-school teacher, artist, healthcare researcher, insurance trainer, lecturer, lawyer, doctor, businessman and engineer. See Figure 3 for a breakdown of income levels.

Figure 3. *Income Levels of Bloggers*



In terms of civil society participation, the survey showed that 31 (40.8%) were volunteers and/or members with non-profit and non-governmental organizations, 45 were not (59.2%); 50 (65.8%) have participated in some form of activism activity and 26 (34.2%) have not. The findings clearly indicate that the population of Singapore political bloggers is a heterogeneous one in terms of demographic profile and activism history.

### **Measurement**

Existing instruments from studies on blogging motivations, collective action, and the use of new media for activism were adapted for this study. The following sections details the operationalization and measurement for the variables identified for the study. See Appendix B for the questionnaire.

**Motivations for blogging.** Existing instruments from studies on blogging were adapted and combined for the purpose of this study. Paparachissi (2004), Trammell, Williams, Postelnicu and Landreville (2006) coded blogs and established the main motivations behind blogging to be entertainment, information, social interaction, self-expression, pass time and professional advancement. Additional items that measured political motivations for blogging were included in the instrument (Tomaszeski, 2006). A five-point Likert scale was developed for each of the 15 items for the question which asked bloggers why they blogged, ranging from personal motivations (e.g., “to document my life” and “as a form of entertainment”) to political ones (e.g., “to participate in an online political debate” and “to influence other people”). Survey participants had to rate their level of agreement for each item, from 1 being “strongly disagree,” to 5 being “strong agree.” These 15 items were grouped into personal motivations and political motivations.

**Activism involvement.**

***Membership in non-governmental and civil society organizations.*** To capture information on whether bloggers belonged to any non-governmental or civil society organizations, the questionnaire included the question: “Are you a volunteer or a member of any party, non-profit group or organizations (such as civil society or non-governmental organization)?” Respondents had to tick either “Yes” or “No.” In cases where there was a positive reply, respondents were requested to list some of the organizations in an open-ended field.

***Participation in activism.*** Similar to the above question on membership with non-governmental and civil-society organizations, a question required respondents to indicate on an ordinal scale (“Yes” or “No”) whether they had participated in any

activism activity in the last three years. Examples given to respondents include the AWARE Extraordinary General Meeting (which was one of the most recent and high profile activities related to the civil society which garnered much press coverage), migrant workers' welfare campaign, Bloggers 13, Repeal of Section of 377A of the Singapore Penal Code. An open-ended field was provided to respondents who selected "Yes" to this question so as to collect information on the activism activities which Singapore political bloggers were involved in.

*Types of activism involvement.* Respondents who indicated that they participated in some form of activism activity were asked to tick as many items that applied to them from a list of 16 activities. These items were adapted from existing sociological studies on social movements. Tindall (2002) developed a comprehensive scale of 14 items in his analysis of choice of activism strategies pertaining to protests on environmental issues. These items covered different levels along the spectrum of activism involvement, such as "donated money to a wilderness preservation or other environmental organization," "write a letter regarding a wilderness presentation or forestry related issue," "sign a petition to preserve a wilderness area," "attend a rally or protest demonstration on the lawns of the legislature to support wilderness preservation," "give a lecture on wilderness preservation and/or logging practices to a school group or voluntary organization." These items were adapted for Singapore's case. In their study on anti-war activism, Nah, Veenstra and Shah (2006) also used similar items to measure different types of strategies adopted by American citizens. An additional item, "displayed a banner or sign on your website or blog" was included in this question. Finally, an open-ended option under "Others" was added so that respondents could list activities that were not included in the list. A frequency

count was conducted to ascertain the most common types of activities political bloggers engaged in.

***Reasons for non-participation.*** A question was included to capture Singapore political bloggers' reasons for not participating in any form of activism. A combination of items from the instruments used by Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson (1980), and Stevenson and Greenberg (2000) were incorporated in the survey instrument. As political bloggers may have more than one reason for non-participation, they were asked to tick as many items which applied to them from these options: "didn't know anyone actively involved," "not enough time," "wasn't asked," "just didn't want to get involved" and "fear of negative reaction by non-movement significant others." An open-ended option under "Others" was included. A frequency count was conducted to ascertain the most common reason for not participating in activism given by political bloggers in Singapore.

***Use of Internet technologies for activism.*** Adapting the instrument developed by Stein (2007) in her content analysis of social movement organizational websites, the questionnaire included a question which measured respondents' attitudes towards using the Internet and their blog for activism purposes. Using a five-point Likert scale (with 1 being "strongly disagree," to 5 being "strong agree"), the questionnaire required respondents to indicate their level of agreement with nine statements pertaining to the use of Internet technologies for connection (i.e., "use the Internet to identify and seek out other individuals or groups whom you feel share similar political beliefs and interests as you"), information provision (i.e., "use your blog to provide information pertaining to the activist activities you participate in"), mobilizing online participation (i.e., "use your blog to encourage direct action online through online petitions and providing action alerts etc."), organizing and coordinating

offline participation (i.e., “use your blog to coordinate, organize or plan offline actions through calendars of events, descriptions of specific campaign actions or volunteer opportunities”), promoting discussion of issues (i.e., “use your blog to promote dialogue and discussion, e.g., via comment and email functions”), use of hyperlinks (i.e., “use your blog to hyperlink to other individuals whom you think share similar interests as you,” “use your blog to hyperlink to sites dealing with movement issues to facilitate interaction among movement supporters” and “use your blog to hyperlink to national or international social movement organizations to facilitate interaction among movement supporters”) and fundraising (i.e., “use your blog for fundraising, e.g., solicit donations, sell merchandise, sell subscriptions, or carry advertising”).

### **Social networks and relational characteristics.**

*Number of social contacts.* Gould (1991), and McAdam and Paulsen (1993) examined the roles of informal and formal social networks involved in the recruitment and mobilizing processes of a social movement. Their operationalizations of network ties were used for this study. Informal ties were defined as knowing someone from interpersonal networks such as family members, peers, acquaintances and neighbours. Formal ties referred to relationships established in organizational settings, e.g., at work or membership with voluntary organizations. To measure online social networks, this study operationalized one’s online network as comprising individuals whom the blogger hyperlinked to in his or her blogroll. Measuring online networks by tracing hyperlinks among individuals found on blogrolls is a common technique used in hyperlink studies (see, for example, Garrido & Halavais, 2003; Rogers & Marres, 2000; Park & Thelwall, 2008). Perma links to other blogs or websites are typical on

blogs and are uploaded by bloggers themselves. As such, based on the premise that decisions are made by bloggers to include or exclude links to specific individuals and organizations, this study traces a blogger's online social network through links from his or her blogroll.

Using free recall, the questionnaire included questions which asked respondents to list up to 10 people from each network (informal, formal and online) whom they knew participated in activism. For political bloggers who were involved in activism, they were asked to list people whom they knew were involved in the same activity as them within each network. Political bloggers who did not participate in any activism were asked to list up to 10 people they knew were involved in at least one activist activity. Because of privacy concerns, the respondents were not required to list their contacts using their real or full names, but were given the option of listing their contacts by their initials or first names. Since the study measures a blogger's structural proximity to other activists by the number of ties he or she has in informal, formal and online networks, numerical values sufficed.

***Tie strength.*** Granovetter (1973) defined the strength of a tie as a “combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding) and the reciprocal services” which characterizes the tie (p.1361). Using frequency of communication to measure strength of tie was the approach used by Stevenson and Greenberg (2000) in their analysis of choice of strategies used by central and peripheral actors in four environmental issues. A five-point Likert scale was included in the questions on social networks concerning political bloggers' communication frequency with other bloggers who participated in the same activism activity or in at least one activism activity (for non-activist bloggers), with 1 being

“never,” and 5 being “very often.” Respondents had to indicate a score on the scale for each of the social contacts they listed.

***Perceived social influence.*** Stevenson and Greenberg (2000) also used social influence as a variable to understand the nature of relationship among actors in environmental campaigns and measured it using a Likert scale. Similarly, a question was posed to political bloggers to ascertain their perception of social influence exerted by other bloggers who were involved in the same activism activity or in at least one activism activity (for non-activist bloggers). On a Likert scale with 1 being “no influence at all,” to 5 being “very strong influence,” political bloggers had to indicate a score for each of the social network contacts listed in the three networks.

***Trust, information-seeking and social selective incentives.*** Existing studies posit that social networks exert positive influence on individuals’ decision to participate and stay in a movement due to presence of trust (Pfaff, 1986), selective incentives (Klandersman & Oegema, 1987; Zhao, 1998) and provision of information (Snow, Zurcher & Ekland-Olson, 1980). However, the actual measurement of levels of trust, information-seeking and selective incentives remain elusive in current studies. Therefore, grounded in social network theories, this study further identified these three network variables (in addition to tie strength and social influence) and developed questions for testing. Five-point Likert scales were used for the following questions which required respondents to:

- (i) Rate the level of trust they have in each individual who participated in the same activism activity or in at least one activism activity (for non-activist bloggers) in all three social networks (with 1 being “none at all,” and 5 being “strong level of trust”);



- (ii) Rate the frequency of information-seeking from each individual who participated in the same activism activity or in at least one activism activity (for non-activist bloggers) in all three social networks (with 1 being “never,” and 5 being “very often”);
- (iii) Rate the level of selective incentives (defined as “the influence of the individuals’ expected reactions if you don’t participate on your decision to join/not to join”) for each individual who participated in the same activism activity or in at least one activism activity (for non-activist bloggers) in all three social networks (with 1 being “no effects at all,” and 5 being “very strong effects”).

### **Interviews**

A qualitative method such as in-depth interview holds certain advantages over surveys. As a technique which engenders greater insight into a relatively new phenomenon of study, a semi-structured interview provides flexibility and allows room for the further exploration of doubts or issues raised by survey responses (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). This technique was also useful in enabling me to uncover nuanced responses pertaining to the intricate dynamics of blogging as a personal activity, the perception of a collective identity and the relationships among bloggers. Thus, when used in combination with quantitative techniques such as the survey, qualitative methods (interviews in this study) facilitate data collection by making access to sensitive topics easier (Miles & Huberman, 1984). In addition, as studies on political blogging using social movement theoretical frameworks are still at a nascent stage in authoritarian regimes, a qualitative methodology will guide the development of new research variables for future work. In Atkinson’s (2009) study

involving 20 activists affiliated with one or more social justice organizations in a northeastern part of the U.S., open-ended questions in his interviews provided “a framework for the participants to describe a particular communication phenomenon according to their own autonomous perceptions and interpretations” (p.53).

A semi-structured interview thus enabled me to obtain qualitative descriptions of the life world of the bloggers as well as their interpretation of their meaning (Kvale, 1996). According to Kvale (1996), a semi-structured interview affords “openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up the answers given and the stories told by the subjects” (p.124). Interviews provided me with an effective mechanism to uncover details concerning bloggers’ opinions, values, motivations and experiences (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

### **Procedure**

The semi-structured interview guide was organized according to themes which guide data collection and they are: (see Appendix C for the semi-structured interview guide.)

- (i) Bloggers’ participation in activism;
- (ii) The usage and roles of Internet technologies for activism;
- (iii) The presence of social networks and nature of network ties with other activists;
- (iv) Perception of self as a blogger; and
- (v) Perception of solidarity and collectiveness among bloggers.

The interviews were conducted in March 2009, and from February to April in 2010. Conducted in English, the *lingua franca* and the medium of instruction in all Singapore schools, each interview session lasted on average 60 minutes, with the

shortest interview lasting 45 minutes and the longest interview 120 minutes. The venues for the interviews, selected by the informants, ranged from cafeterias, coffee-houses and school grounds. Meeting times on both weekdays and weekends varied to suit the informants' schedules as they were either employed or studying. All the interviews were audiotaped with informants' permission. They also had to sign a consent form granting me their consent to publish interview material. The face-to-face interviews proved to be effective in establishing rapport and trust between the informants and me. This was particularly essential, given the sensitivity of several questions. As a result, most of the informants were expressive and candid in their responses and did not require much prompting. They also did not manifest much inhibition when asked about their motivations for starting their blogs, the gratifications they derived from blogging, their attitudes towards other bloggers, and their perception of how blogging may engender collective action in the Singapore context. Political bloggers who identified themselves as activists were also forthcoming in sharing information about the nature of their activism work as well as their experiences as activists. In the case of political bloggers who were located outside of Singapore during the time of study, email interviews and follow-ups were conducted to include responses from this geographically distant group.

### **Sample**

As described in the earlier section, potential participants were approached either via email or the comment page on their blogs. Bloggers who agreed to participate in the survey were also asked if they would like to participate in a face-to-face interview. In addition to following the same ethical guidelines for the survey, I also assured participants that any references to them in write-ups will be the

pseudonym or moniker of their choice and that I was the only person who had access to the recordings. The participants were also informed that interview recordings would be stored for three years (the period approved by the IRB), following which all transcripts and recordings will be disposed off safely. The final sample of interview informants, 41 bloggers, comprised those who agreed to assist with the interview in addition to participating in the survey. The informants, four females and 37 males, were contacted via emails to arrange for interview dates and timings. Five out of 41 interviews were carried out via email because the informants were either working or studying overseas at the time of data collection. They were included in this study as they were blogging regularly on Singapore social and political issues. The informants comprised 26 political bloggers who were engaged in activism and 15 who were not involved in any form of activism activities. The group breakdown was established after the fact since there was no discrimination in selection between activist- and non-activist bloggers when these political bloggers agreed to the interview process. Appendix D provides brief background information on each of the informants. The types of activism activities that these informants participated in will be discussed in the following chapter.

### **Transcription and Analysis**

Each interview took three to four hours to transcribe, after which open coding by hand was conducted (Charmaz, 2004). I approached the interview data from Seidman's (2006) perspective that "the participants' thoughts become embodied in their words" (p.114) as well as Holloway and Jefferson's (2000) principle of *Gestalt*. Transcribing interviews verbatim was chosen because pre-selection of parts of the tapes for transcription would have led possibly to the omission of others, and hence,

could result in premature conclusions about what was important and what was not (Seidman, 2006).

As such, all 41 transcripts were studied in their entirety and coded sentence by sentence. To answer Research Question 1 for example, phrases and words were marked according to themes suggested by the text itself, guided by the theoretical constructs for collective identity. Other than using collective identity concepts as a guide, the marking out of interesting texts from the transcripts also followed Seidman's guideline of areas to look out for: conflict between and within people; hopes and fulfillments (or the lack thereof); processes (beginnings, middles and ends); frustrations and restrictions; isolation, collegiality and community; issues of class and how people are affected by hierarchy and power. Condensation of meaning (Kvale, 1996) where bodies of interview text were compressed into brief statements, representing various themes raised during the interviews, preceded the categorization and clustering of themes. Meta-codes or meta-themes were then allocated to clusters of themes which facilitated the analysis of similarities and variances among bloggers' responses. The meta-themes and sub-themes were used to classify the text by appending them to the margins of the transcripts. The following are examples of themes which emerged from the interview data on the theme of bloggers' feelings about the blogosphere and about one another:

- (i) "sharing similar views on issues in Singapore";
- (ii) "dedication and commitment in blogging";
- (iii) "overarching ideological similarity";
- (iv) "improve society by bringing out different perspectives and provoking thoughts";
- (v) "blogging under the blanket and comfort of anonymity";

- (vi) “objectivity and rationality versus rants and raves”;
- (vii) “frustration with other bloggers who blog irresponsibly”;
- (viii) “do not blog about personal life”; and
- (ix) “sense of accountability”.

During the process of clustering and categorization of themes, codes (i) to (iv) were clustered under the meta-theme “similarities among political bloggers,” and codes (v) to (ix) were clustered under the meta-theme “differences between activist political and non-activist political bloggers.” The comparison of these codes and meta-themes elucidated on the presence and nature of a shared consciousness among activist bloggers, and comparisons with non-activist bloggers could be made. Pertaining to boundary markers and identity signifiers, phrases and words which political bloggers used to describe how they blogged, what they blogged about and the approach with which they took to writing their blog posts, were also coded. This enabled me to identify specific practices which reflect a collective of activist bloggers as well as to ascertain the presence of “others.” My analysis of the data also brought to the surface bloggers’ articulations of feelings and perceptions about one another in the political blogosphere. This enabled me to tease out differences between activist and non-activist bloggers. Bloggers’ opinions and feelings expressed towards what they perceive as their adversary, i.e., the object of their criticism and challenge through blogging, were also marked out in the coding process. Again, similarities and differences among respondents were compared to ascertain the presence of a collective identity experienced by political bloggers. With regard to identity multiplexity, any references made by respondents pertaining to how they viewed themselves as a blogger or as part of a larger collective were marked out, as well as references to strategies or tactics used to promote their blog or a group agenda. The

process of manual coding, clustering and categorization was repeated for interview data pertaining to bloggers' social networks comprising other activist bloggers (or lack thereof) and how they deployed Internet technologies for their activism work for Research Questions 2 and 3. See Appendix E for some examples of codes and meta-themes. To establish the reliability and trustworthiness of the interview data, I obtained feedback from ten respondents. These respondents were provided with a summary of the data analysis as well as relevant quotes from their interview transcripts. They were asked if the interpretation matched their perceptions on collective identity, role of social networks and use of Internet technologies for activism purposes. All 10 respondents concurred with the interpretations.

The data gathering process detailed in this chapter offered some insights into methodological issues. The procedures in establishing contact with political bloggers and collecting data from them as described above enabled me to overcome methodological limitations and constraints. As discussed earlier in the literature review section, existing work which explains the role of collective identity in galvanizing collective action in offline settings typically employ ethnographic techniques in collecting data on cultural practices, articulations of identity and collectivity among members of a community under the researcher's lens; see for example, Castells (1997), Cohen (2000), Dong (2006) and Kaldor-Robinson (2002). Through observations and from first-hand account insights into the perceptions of individuals from the same community and group, these studies identified key cultural practices and dimensions of identification with others which provide shape and form to the nebulous and intangible conception of a collective.

However, a shift in methodology occurred when these studies migrated to the online context. A primary reason was the nebulous nature of the subjects. Participants

in virtual communities typically are separated geographically and usually difficult to identify. In addition, one of the main affordances of computer-mediated communication is anonymity, a privilege valued by many online citizens. As a result, prevailing methods used to examine collective identity in online venues typically focused on available online content such as textual analysis, content analysis and framing analysis (Ayers, 2003; Adams & Roscigno, 2005; Mamadouh, 2004; Nip, 2004; Van Summeren, 2007; Wall, 2007). Although these methods provide illuminating findings on collective identity, validation of interpretations based on accounts originating from content posters themselves was missing. Hence, much of the analysis on cultural practices and collective identity remained at the inference level. By eliciting autochthonous or first-hand accounts through in-depth interviews and surveys, the cognitive and affective processes articulated by respondents themselves could confirm and strengthen interpretations of online data. The following chapters (Chapters 4 to 7) present background information on political bloggers and findings for the three research questions.



## CHAPTER 4

### POLITICAL BLOGGERS AND ACTIVISM PARTICIPATION

To foreground the findings on collective identity, social networks and technology use among political bloggers in the following chapters, this chapter depicts the Singapore political blogosphere by presenting data on political blogs' content, their organizational membership and participation in the political and civic sphere (or lack thereof). For greater succinctness, the terms “activists” and “non-activists” are used as references to political bloggers who took part in activism and who did not take part in any form of activism respectively. Supporting excerpts from interview transcripts are used to maintain the authenticity and integrity of data interpretation. Pseudonyms are used for confidentiality reasons. For brevity, ellipses (...) indicate material that has been omitted from the transcripts.

#### **Blog Content of Political Blogs**

The earlier chapter presented demographic profiles of Singapore political bloggers. Regardless of their gender and socio-economic status, all bloggers provided commentary and analysis regarding social and political issues in Singapore. Their blog content took on a wide gamut of topics, such as minority rights issues, government policy issues, human rights-related issues, education, labour, healthcare and religion issues. V5 described his blog as a media platform for the sharing of news and alternative perspectives on political, societal and cultural issues, focusing on the Singapore milieu.

The majority of the information on my blog is news and alternative views on Singapore society, politics and culture. Other than that, it will be videos that others and I made on many issues, and my views on socio-political and art events. The most minor thing will be news on international human rights issues like poverty and starvation. (V5, male, late 20s, visual artist and video editor)

It is basically a platform for me to write about my opinions and perspective about issues we face. I gain a lot of inspiration from the local media, providing commentaries and rebuttals as well concerning the political issues we face in Singapore. (Guan Yin Miao, male, early 20s, National Serviceman)

Several bloggers also used their blog as a one-stop archive or resource for the public to access information from varied sources (e.g. media reports). One example is Chong, an academic whose teaching and research interests revolve around journalism, and June, a graduate student active in migrant workers' rights movement. Both of them archived writings and news commentaries pertaining to journalism and the plight of migrant workers living in Singapore. They also linked extensively to external sources to provide additional information sources to their readers.

I think it will benefit people who are interested in the issue. I can imagine that someone may say "June, I didn't know that all these things are happening." And I'll say "Ok, go to this blogspot and you can get an understanding of a wide range of issues." For people who

are not clear about these issues, such as fellow researchers, if they want to see some of the problems that are happening or they missed out some of the news stories, they can log on to my site to find out more. (June, female, 36 years old, a doctoral candidate and member of Transient Workers Count Too)

In spite of the common focus on social, economic and political issues related to the Singapore society, it is evident that many bloggers focused on specific issues or “pet topics.” These include gay rights issues, censorship issues, religion, labour and population issues, education, and healthcare issues. The choice of pet topics or areas of interest was usually related to the blogger’s professional background, personal experiences and/or activist agenda. For instance, among the minority of female political bloggers who participated in this study, Lynn, a trainer in an insurance company and a member of an opposition political party (Workers’ Party) in her early 30s, shared that most of her blog posts tended to revolve around women’s issues, issues that were meaningful to her personally. When asked for examples of topics that she blogs about, she gave the following response.

Women-related topics and welfare, like healthcare costs.

Sometimes I may not know what I am into until I read a particular issue which evokes some emotion. But I am mainly more concerned with women’s issues... An example will be when I read about articles on child abuse... So when I read something like that, I want to share and tell everyone that this is happening, and ask

what we can do. (Lynn, female, early 30s, insurance trainer and opposition party member)

John, also a member of an opposition political party and was self-employed in the telecommunications industry, spoke about how his blog focused on education issues and policies in Singapore, a topic that has strong personal relevance to him as his children were in the local school system.

80% of my blog content is related to education. I talk about our school system which is not very healthy. The emphasis on elitism is unhealthy, and the aggressive streaming, the ranking of schools are not right... I follow education very closely as I have two school-going children and I have gone through the experience myself. The implications of education are far reaching, and you build the next generation. (John, male, late 40s, self-employed in telecommunications industry)

Furthermore, the interview data also revealed that non-activists tend to post more about non-social and political issues, whilst activists made a conscious attempt to stay away from personal issues. This difference will be further discussed in Chapter 5. Examples of non-socio-political topics included their personal life, sports and philosophy on life in general. For instance, when asked about the topics that they blogged on, Bert, Benedict and Ghost emphasized the “multi-faceted nature” of their blog and how their blog did not focus on one particular issue or cause.

In the past, I focused on social and political issues in Singapore. Over time, it changed. It has a lot more personal matters now. For example, in the past, I may talk about the property market, now I may talk about the property and my own house or where I am moving to, and link the topics up. Previously, I would leave out all the personal things. I was also more dedicated to reading the newspapers and writing about socio-political issues. Now I don't, I just write whatever I feel like writing and I put my personal stories into it. (Gilbert, male, late 30s, banker)

I write about everything and anything I want to write about. I have a wide variety of interests... I write about sports, books I read and movies that I watch. Sometimes I write about politics, the economy, anything that interests me. (Ghost, male, early 30s, customer service officer in telecommunications industry)

This study reveals that Singapore political bloggers' interest revolved around political, social and cultural issues that emerged in the local context, and were hot topics of the day. Comparing bloggers who were involved in activism and those who were not involved in activism, it appears that blogging about personal issues and experiences are a possible differentiation point between the two.

### **Political Bloggers' Activism Participation**

As presented in Chapter 3, 40.8% of the survey sample held membership or served as volunteers with non-governmental and civil society organizations, and

65.8% participated in some form of activism activity. The data collected from the survey and questionnaire generated insights into political bloggers' organizational affiliations, the types of organizations they belonged to and the activism work they were involved in. An open-ended question in the questionnaire and interviews uncovered further details on the nature of their involvement in the organizations they were part of and their experiences in activism (e.g. whether they held leadership or ordinary membership positions, the length of their membership, and their roles and responsibilities).

Qualitative and quantitative data indicate that activist bloggers took part in a wide spectrum of activism work. Defined by Locher (2002) as alternative movements, some of these campaigns aimed to change people's attitudes and opinions regarding specific issues, such as the rights of marginalized sexual communities and migrant workers. Other campaigns and activism initiatives were more reformist in nature (Locher, 2002) as they sought to effect changes at the policy level that would lead to constitutional changes. These reformative movements included political campaigning by opposition political parties such as Workers' Party and Singapore Democratic Party, Repeal 377A as well as Bloggers 13 campaign. In addition to their different nature, the activism work which Singapore political bloggers were involved in also varied in terms of duration, from prolonged campaigns (e.g. opposition party activism) to temporal causes (e.g. Repeal 377A, Free Burma Campaign and JBJ Commemoration). Refer to Appendix F for the profile of these organizations and campaigns. Table 1 lists survey findings of the different types of activities that political bloggers engaged in.

Table 1.  
*Types of Activist Activities Engaged in by Activist Bloggers*

Types of Activities	Yes n(%)	No n(%)	Total N(%)
Donated money to organization	16 (32%)	34 (68%)	50 (100%)
Wrote a letter	25 (50%)	25 (50%)	50 (100%)
Signed a petition	34 (68%)	16 (32%)	50 (100%)
Participated in organized activity	31 (62%)	19 (38%)	50 (100%)
Attended a meeting	31 (62%)	19 (38%)	50 (100%)
Attended a rally or protest demonstration	20 (40%)	30 (60%)	50 (100%)
Participated in an information campaign for the public	26 (52%)	24 (48%)	50 (100%)
Advertised in the mass media	4 (8%)	46 (92%)	50 (100%)
Made a presentation to a public body	12 (24%)	38 (76%)	50 (100%)
Gave a lecture to schools or organizations	10 (20%)	40 (80%)	50 (100%)
Participated in press release or conference	16 (32%)	34 (68%)	50 (100%)
Served as a representative on an advisory board	8 (16%)	42 (84%)	50 (100%)
Purchased merchandize	16 (32%)	34 (68%)	50 (100%)
Wrote or called the media	21 (42%)	29 (58%)	50 (100%)
Displayed a banner or sign on website or blog	26 (52%)	24 (48%)	50 (100%)
Others	11 (22%)	39 (78%)	50 (100%)

Signing a petition was the most often cited activity (68%), followed by participating in an organized activity (62%) and attending a meeting (62%). The least often cited activity was advertising in the mass media (8%), probably because, unlike in the U.S. where the scale for measurement was developed, activists in Singapore rarely used the mass media to agitate change due to the socio-political and media landscape. As discussed in the literature review, traditional media in Singapore played the role of nation building by promoting social harmony and stability. As will be elaborated on later, activists also perceived traditional mass media to be their common adversary. 22% of political bloggers who took part in at least one activist activity also listed other activities in the open-ended field. Responses indicate that Singapore political bloggers engaged in myriad activities at both offline and online settings. “Other” offline activities include speaking out in Parliament, distributing flyers and information pamphlets, giving public speeches, conducting classes in schools and setting up civil society organizations (e.g., Think Centre). “Other” Online activities encompassed advocacy via social networking sites, blogging about an issue, posting on and commenting on others’ blog posts.

The data also suggests the presence of a “trigger factor” behind political bloggers’ activism. Among activists, frustration and anger engendered by what they perceived as political injustice was a push factor. The trigger factor appeared to be linked to the nature of activism work in which these bloggers engaged, which were typically more controversial and confrontational in nature. For instance, V5, a member of Singaporeans for Democracy and a high profile activist who was once arrested by the police for street protest, described the work he did to canvass for support for the Malaysian (Yong Vui Khong) who was sentenced to death.



We made a flyer for Yong Vui Khong and we have been going around Singapore to give this out. We printed a few thousand of this and we have already given out 1000. The appeal happens in March so we want to tell Singaporeans about this issue. This is what we do, we raise the money, we print the flyer and we go around giving it out. That's one of the things, public education on the street. We get into police trouble for this kind of things. They come to us and say it is illegal assembly and we cannot give out flyers [but there are others around us giving out commercial flyers].  
(V5, male, late 20s, visual artist and video editor)

The interview data revealed that among activists, differences existed in terms of how they defined activism which was reflected in the activities they engaged in. Activist bloggers who were involved in what Van Laer and Van Aelst's (2010) termed as high threshold/Internet-supported collective action defined activism as organizing and/or participating in a set of change-oriented activities at the public level specific to a cause or an issue. Their activities typically involved them challenging the status quo or the authorities in power. The following quote from Zazzi, a veteran gay rights activist, best encapsulates what "activism" meant to activists involved in high threshold/Internet supported activism. Rachel, a pre-school teacher who was a member of Singaporeans for Democracy and was involved in myriad causes such as Free Burma Campaign and Singapore Anti-Mandatory Death Penalty, described some of the activities she was involved in.

Activism would be a situation of kinds of things a person might do when he has an impulse to contribute to or affect some kind of change that is more at a public level than at a private level. In other words, somebody who wants to do something the way his company works is not activism. But somebody who wants to change the way the industry works would be activism [sic] even though it may be commercial or business-oriented...It would require again, standing up, speaking out, helping to some extent even if it is to stand at the door and hand out leaflets, in other words something active as opposed to passive. (Zazzi, male, mid-50s, gay rights activist).

I am mostly part of the organizing committee and I organize events at the Speakers' Corner, flyering and things like that. We are flyering to educate the public about the anti-death penalty issue, like what is going on and what will happen. I am also involved in the brainstorming of ideas. (Rachel, female, late 20s, a preschool teacher and human rights activist)

The data gathered through interviews with 41 political bloggers generated insights pertaining to both the nature and the extent of their involvement in political and civil society organizations, or lack thereof in the case of non-activist bloggers. In the case of activists who took part in high threshold/Internet-supported activities, their ideological opposition to the current form of governance is manifested by their organizational memberships in the real world. These activist bloggers are what I

would term as “*offline-based*” because first, they were members with prominent offline organizations, and second, most of their activism work took place at the offline setting. Sixteen out of the 41 informants belonged to this group and six of them held leadership positions in their organizations, as in the case of James, Alan and Madcow. Most of the organizations offline-based activists belonged to were registered with the Singapore Registry of Societies. Some of these organizations were opposition political parties such as Workers’ Party, Singapore Democratic Party, while others were civil rights and non-governmental organizations (e.g. Think Centre, Singaporeans for Democracy and Transient Workers Count Too).

A significant number of activists from this group were opposition political party members contesting against the incumbent government and engaging in regular and frequent grassroots activities (e.g., Madcow, The Pen, Lynn and George). Their activism work included organizing and taking part in weekly walkabouts at residential areas, door-to-door visits, selling party newsletters on weekends as well as staging protests (e.g., minibonds protest) at the Speakers’ Corner. Besides opposition party members, offline-based activists also included high-profile individuals involved in myriad causes such as human rights, gay rights equality and anti-censorship; several of these activists have been featured in mass media reports as well as invited by broadcast media and schools to give interviews (e.g., Andrew, Alan, Michael, James and Zazzi).

The second group of political bloggers comprises “*online-based activists*” whom started their activism work in the online context and limited most of their involvement online. Ten out of the 41 informants belonged to this group. Several of them joined online groups such as Free Burma Campaign Singapore, Singapore Queer and Straight Alliance (SinQSA) and No To Rape Campaign. These online groups

were different from offline groups in terms of their lack of formalized membership structure and their reliance on Internet technologies for carrying out group activities and facilitating communication among fellow participants. Unlike offline groups, these online groups took on a more temporal nature and were not registered with the government authorities as societies or groups. While several online-based activists confined their activism involvement to online activities only, such as signing e-petitions, displaying campaign logos on their blogs and posting links to campaigns and activities, others in this group saw their involvement spilling over to the offline setting when required. Based on Van Laer and Van Aelst's typology, these bloggers would be internet-based/high threshold.

Stan, co-founder of the Singapore Queer-Straight Alliance (SinQSA) and an activist for lesbian, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals (LGBT), described his activism work which was based mostly online. Besides updating the group's website, he actively engaged in what he called "information activism". His involvement in the offline context was limited to attending annual events such as Pink Dot which promotes collegiality among heterosexuals, homosexuals and transsexuals.

I consider myself an information activist. I would go to different blogs that provide a view that I do not agree with or a view that is full of misinformation and myths, and I would post a comment and tell them (not in a confrontational way) "maybe there is another way of looking at this". I also try to get aggregated as much as possible, as frequently as possible, and I will write to The Straits Times. So it is communication and information-based, not physical. (Stan, male, mid 20s, graduate student and co-founder of SinQSA)

Although differences were observed in terms of the types of organizations and activism activities they were part of, a commonality was shared by all activists (offline-based and online-based). Regardless of the nature of the organization they belonged to, activists challenged the state while opposing what they perceived to be political and media hegemony, and advocating the rights of marginalized populations such as homosexuals and migrant workers.

Finally, both quantitative and qualitative data established a third group of political bloggers. These were non-activists (15 out of 41 informants) who did not belong to any types of organizations and kept their political participation to blogging. Their motivations and gratifications for blogging remained at the intrinsic level, such as being read and cited by others. The reasons given by these bloggers for their non-participation were that they didn't know anyone (11.5%), had no time (34.6%), wasn't asked (11.5%), did not want to get involved (26.9%), and others (34.6%). Some of the other reasons given by non-activist bloggers included the lack of interest, fear of government censure, and a lack of identification with civil society organizations.

In the above sections, I presented the key findings pertaining to the content type of blogs maintained by political bloggers in Singapore, as well as their activism involvement and group membership. The next chapter presents key findings and themes for the first research question.

## CHAPTER 5

### ACTIVIST BLOGGERS AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

This chapter discusses the qualitative findings, supported by quantitative data for the first research question: **Does a collective identity exist among activist bloggers and if so, what is the nature of the collective identity shared among them?** While the survey data depict trends and patterns pertaining to the sample and sub-sets in the sample, qualitative data validate, clarify and interpret quantitative findings (Miles & Huberman, 1984). In this chapter, findings are grouped into these thematic categories: (i) shared consciousness among political bloggers; (ii) identity signifiers and perception of “the others”; (iii) articulation of an adversary; and (iv) dichotomy between community and individualism.

#### **Shared Consciousness among Activist Bloggers**

A commonality which emerged from the interviews with 41 political bloggers is that they perceived a need to fill a void which they thought existed in civil societal, political and media discourse, regardless of whether they were involved in activism or not. It appears that political bloggers have an inherent need to express and share their perspectives and views on pertinent issues of the day. Regardless of their level of participation in activism, Singapore political bloggers used their blogs as a platform to communicate and disseminate views which they deemed to be alternative perspectives absent in mainstream discourse. Political bloggers prided themselves on contributing to online discourses since offline discourse traditionally faces greater curtailment and censorship. To them, their blogs serve as an additional information

outlet which disseminates news stories and commentaries that were omitted and downplayed in mainstream media such as print and broadcast news.

TM, a croupier in his early 30s, started blogging in 2008 about policy issues from an environmentalist's perspective. He described how his blog constituted an important vehicle for him to put across and make available perspectives and opinions that are not presented by mainstream media. In his case, he critiqued and commented on regulatory issues pertaining to population growth, housing policies and the employment of migrant workers through the perspective of peak oil theories. Similarly, Stan attested to the effectiveness of his blog in "getting the word" out on the LGBT movement and his organizational activities. In Xavier's case, he published the letters he had written to both the mainstream media and the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (also known as Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura, MUIS) criticizing religious regulations imposed on the local Muslim community on his blog when they were not published by the mainstream press.

I have been reading about this issue [peak oil] for a few years, as far back as 2006 or 2005. What I read is totally contradictory to what the Singapore government is promoting, and I didn't read any differing opinions on this, or alternative viewpoints. That is why I started the blog, to be heard, to share my views with other people.

(TM, male, early 30s, croupier)

What I write about are not rants and raves, they are not off the cuff. They are important issues. An example of an issue I feel strongly about. I feel very strongly about what I feel is a violation of my civil rights in

Singapore as a result of the administration of the Muslim law act... This is an issue I feel very strongly about and I would engage civil society to address and rectify. (Xavier, male, early 40s, self-employed financial analyst)

However, despite this commonality which seemed to unify political bloggers, a further analysis of their opinions pertaining to blogging revealed that activists shared a distinct consciousness which distinguished them from non-activists. For instance, there was shared knowledge among activists as to what being political bloggers entailed; they were also aware that they were a part of a larger collective of “socio-political bloggers.” The term, “socio-political blog” was self-ascribed and consistently used by offline-based activists and online-based activists, when I asked them to explain why they blogged and what they blogged about. In spite of their different backgrounds (for instance, graduate students, gay rights activist, academic, entrepreneur, national serviceman, visual artist, preschool teacher and technology consultant), bloggers such as Daryl did not shy away from the term “socio-political blogger.”

I can identify with some Singapore bloggers whose blogs are mainly socio-politically oriented, given the limited amount of space they are allowed in the physical sphere in Singapore. Usually these bloggers have the same concerns as I have about the current state of politics in Singapore and the future of the country. (Daryl, male, early 20s, student and member of Amnesty International)



This echoes findings by Ceren (2006) and Custard (2007) that Internet-enabled networks bring together people from diverse backgrounds to converge in cyberspace and cultivate a shared or collective goal. In the case of Chong, when probed on the similarities he perceived existed between him and other political bloggers, he made specific references to bloggers as a collective. To quote him: “I know them because we are part of the same blogging community.” There was an acknowledgment of a group membership and explicit references to the self and other political bloggers as part of the same “community.” This was illustrated in the case of George and Jack, both of whom describing how blogging heightened awareness of specific topics and issues and participating in online debates engendered the feeling of being part of a collective. This supports Jenkins’ (2002) argument on how shared consciousness among movement actors includes the ability to identify themselves as members of a group as well as others belonging to the same group.

I see myself as part of a collective socio-political blogging community that is collectively informing Singaporeans of what’s going on. So I’ve seen the level of discourse going up since I’ve started. (George, male, early 30s, technology consultant and opposition party member)

For example, there was this article on TOC opposing nuclear power. I disagreed with it on several fronts and I aired my views. People commented and told me I was wrong, but I refuted and engaged in a debate with them online. It does make me feel part of

an online community. (Jack, male, late 20s, graduate student and took part in JBJ Commemoration and TOC Year End Review)

Echoing Nip's (2004) argument that a shared consciousness is based on shared goals and means of engendering change, activists were also bound by their vision for blogging. Although expressed in varied ways, beyond filling a void in civic discourse as in the case of non-activists, one common goal that pervaded activist bloggers' motivation to blog was to foster a greater interest among the citizenry. Not only did they aim to increase awareness of issues and alternative perspectives, activists also wrote to provoke conversations and discussions. By providing alternatives to the information and perspectives disseminated by the mainstream media, these bloggers hoped that their blogs would empower citizens to take charge of their own lives by playing an active role in a specific issue, reflecting a clear desire to mobilize their readers. For instance, V5 derived a sense of gratification when his blog encouraged his readers to take action on the death penalty by lending their support to the anti-death penalty campaign.

When I write my personal pieces, I like reflect on my engagement with activism, why I am involved and whom I look up to. I encourage people to get involved and to get in touch with me, and we build something from there... We blogged about the anti-death penalty campaign. We built up something from there. We asked people to come forward and people did. Not only did they participate in the campaign but they helped out, and attended the

forums that we post on our blog and Facebook. (V5, male, late 20s, visual artist and video editor)

What was also evident from the interviews is that in addition to engendering social and political change through the process of informing and educating the public on political and social alternatives, activists were also bound by their similar focus in bringing about specific changes in policies. Madcow, a prominent actor in the opposition politics scene, shared his insights on how he was able to increase awareness of specific issues through his blog and, in the process, helped influence local politics by eliciting reactionary measures from the ruling party on transport issues. Andy explained how he and other activist bloggers were bound by a common ideology although he also alluded to differences in terms of approach.

My blog also has certain influences on my political opponents' [the ruling party] directions. Recently, I blogged about the inadequacies of public transport, and yesterday they reacted and made some amendments to the policies they have, such as adding 150 trips to the MRT system and the over issuances of COEs. (Madcow, male, late 30s, member of opposition political party and self-employed businessman)

It is ideological. We believe in the freedom of speech. Freedom of speech comes in different shades and there are different situations. V5 and others may believe in absolute freedom, and you must be allowed to say or post anything you want. I have spoken to them

and I don't believe in that. That must be, there have always been, and in any country, self censorship because of societal norms and you need to have decorum in certain situations. While we believe in the same thing, there may be different shades to it. (Andy, male, early 40s, activist and co-founder of TOC)

On the other hand, although bloggers who did not participate in any form of activism also blogged about similar topics and shared a similar desire to contribute to civic discourse, they lacked a common vision and did not see themselves as being part of a community of socio-political bloggers. Although they blogged about social and political issues, they stressed that their main objective for blogging was for personal reasons, with their blogs serving as a medium for them to pen down their thoughts, and to cultivate introspection and self-development rather than to bring about any political or social changes . When asked about his motivation for blogging, Benedict stressed the personal dimension of his blog.

My blog is more personal and it is more for me than for anyone else to read my blog. I created this blog to document my own journey and learning, and I am not sure how long this will last. This blog is more like a personal diary for me. (Benedict, late 20s, student)

Similarly, when asked why he decided to start a blog, Ink Horn explained that he always had an interest in literary writing and his blog provided him an accessible

platform to hone his writing skills, indicating that his blog served a self-nurturing function.

Initially when I started blogging, it was purely for fun. But when I started this blog, I wanted to improve my writing. I have always wanted a career in writing, not so much of journalism, but writing columns and commentaries. When I first started the blog, I wrote a lot of fiction to cultivate my creative writing skills. I don't think it was exceptional or good but it helped me understand what sort of language and style I wanted to write in. (Ink Horn, male, early 20s, localization artist)

As such, the goal of pushing for regulatory changes, a primary motivation which bound activists, was missing among non-activists who blogged clearly for personal gratifications only. According to Nip (2004), commonality, an important component of shared consciousness, goes beyond a common goal and recognition of others as members belonging to the same group or community, but also includes the use of similar means to achieving the goal of collective action. Thus, a correlational analysis was conducted to determine if there was a correlation between using their blogs as a means to engender change and political bloggers' activism involvement. The above qualitative findings were validated by quantitative data obtained from the survey questionnaire (see Table 2).

Table 2.  
*Correlation Coefficients between Personal Motivations, Political Motivations and Activism Participation*

	Active participation	Political motivations	Personal motivations
Active participation	-	.283*	-.085
Political motivations		-	.002

\* $p < .05$  (2-tailed significance)

Using Spearman’s rho measurement, a positive correlation between political motivations and participation in activism, ( $\rho=0.283, p=0.014$ ) was observed. On the other hand, personal motivations were negatively correlated with participation in activism ( $\rho=-0.085, p=0.472$ ). This suggests that activists were more likely to use their blogs for political means such as “opposing dominant discourse” and “providing alternatives,” and vice versa. On the contrary, non-activists were more likely to use the blog for social and non-political reasons such as to “document life” and “inspire writing.”

In summary, the identification of the self as a socio-political blogger, the acknowledgment of being part of a larger collective of socio-political bloggers and perceived similarities shared with other socio-political bloggers suggested that a collective identity exists among activist bloggers in Singapore. The recognition of a shared vision to bring about policy changes by empowering readers to gain an awareness of important issues and alternative perspectives and influence people to take action; as well as similar deployment of their blogs as a means to engender change clearly excluded non-activists from the collective of activists.

### **Identity Signifiers and Perception of “The Others”**

As discussed in Chapter 2 on literature review, a boundary marker or signifier of collective identity is the perception of an “us” versus “them,” which emerges from processes of self-identification and external recognition (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). What emerged from the interviews was that the perception of who they were was defined by the perception of who they were not. The establishment of clear identity boundary markers created shared definitions for members of the collective (Ayers, 2003). Based on the interview findings, “the others” who were not seen as part of the same collective of activists comprised both personal (or social) bloggers and non-activists, whom in their deliberate disengagement from political activities, became the bystander public (Benford & Hunt, 1994).

A main difference which activists felt differentiated them others was the type of information they posted. Unlike personal bloggers, all activists did not post information on their private lives. When they did so occasionally, it was related to their activism experiences. Della Porta and Diani (2006) posited that the production of identity is rooted in particular symbols, practices and rituals unique to a group. In the case of activists, the collective identity which they perceived to share was grounded in their deliberate choice not to blog about personal or “trivial” matters. Activists drew the line at blogging about their own lives unless the subject matter was related to their activism work. Lynn, a member of an opposition party, echoed a common sentiment shared among this group of political bloggers. In her case, she resorted to setting up different blogs for different purposes, activism and personal.

I don't blog about my personal life. I have a separate blog for my personal life. That is purely for me and my husband where we talk

about our marriage, our house, etc. I have three blogs. I disseminate my information through three blogs with different objectives. (Lynn, female, early 30s, insurance trainer and opposition party member)

Other distinctions in blogging practices were also identified by activists between them and the rest of the political bloggers “out there.” Two key differentiators lay in the use of their real identity and the approach they adopted with regards to writing. When asked about the differences which set them apart from other bloggers, bloggers who were involved in activism mentioned that anonymity was a key differentiator. Offline-based and online-based activists blogged using their real names, while the majority of bloggers “out there” blogged anonymously. For instance, Zazzi started posting articles concerning gay rights as early as 1996 using his real name when being gay in Singapore was a taboo subject. He took pride in being one of the first few online contributors who posted content using their real identity. When asked if he shared any similarities with other political bloggers, Tan, an offline-based activist who was active in an opposition political party and civil society organizations, said that blogging using his real name identified him with bloggers who were involved in activism as opposed to non-activist bloggers.

First of all, I use my real name. That confines me to people who are active in the circle (activists and political party members) and blogging is their part time activity. Many people who are not active in the circle use pseudonyms. They are online commentators only



and they don't use their real names. (Tan, male, late 30s, property maintenance officer and opposition political member)

The revelation of their identity on their blogs was contrasted with non-activists who preferred to blog behind the comfort of anonymity. Epilogos, a polytechnic lecturer in his early 40s, admitted that he enjoyed the unbridled freedom which anonymity provided him with. To quote him: "One of the things about hiding behind a pseudonym is that you feel that you have the freedom to express yourself, even in the most extreme ways." Similarly, SA, a Singaporean who works as a consultant in the U.S. but who travels home regularly to visit his family, mentioned that the key difference between him and other political bloggers was "the lack of a real identity, unlike, say, The Online Citizen, which is quite upfront." Once again, the practice of blogging, in this case blogging with one's real identity, is a marker of identity.

Another key differentiator was the approach or style in writing adopted by most of the activists when they blogged about political issues. Della Porta and Diani (2006) posited that one of the success factors of social movements was the ability of the organizers to frame issues in such a way that resonates not only with the participants they hoped to attract, but also with constituencies whose support they hoped to garner. In the case of Singapore political bloggers, activists perceived a strong demarcation between them and non-activists. For one, the latter were perceived by activists as irrational, irresponsible, and instinctively biased in the way they critiqued political issues. Activists shared a common understanding that objectivity and reason were key to reaching out to their target audiences and changing attitudes of their target constituency. There was a heightened awareness among activists that

self-moderation in terms of writing and commentary style was important to doing well in the “marketplace” in the blogosphere. Objectivity and rationality was closely linked to fact-finding and substantiating one’s critique with relevant and credible facts, as expressed by Vienna who was a co-founder of the now defunct Singapore Angle and member of Bloggers 13.

I like about is there is a constant challenge among us (Singapore Angle) to make sure you produce the evidence. If somebody said something, you better have the evidence or the paper to back you up, otherwise it is constituted as you are not credible and you are just one of those guys out there who don’t do their analysis.

(Vienna, male, mid 30s, a chief operating officer and co-founder of Singapore Angle)

The belief in deploying reason and rationality in their online discourse was expressed by other interviewees such as Andrew, George, The Pen and Zazzi who felt that a common phenomenon in the blogosphere was for people to engage in knee-jerk analysis rather than provide quality analysis that is based on facts and supported arguments. They attested that there was a clear difference between writing intelligently and ranting, and some informants even expressed frustration and resentment at how irresponsible and irrational bloggers were undoing the work that they were doing.

Sometimes when I read their views, I feel a little disturbed. When we oppose, there must be a moral high ground to oppose, that’s

one. And number two, when you oppose, there must be a good reason for the opposition. It is easy to lament, everyone can lament and oppose. But when you don't have an alternative to that, you find that the opposition is just sounding an empty gong. Sometimes it gets too personal in terms of how the person is blogging about his or her thoughts. I feel that such emotions should be kept in check. (The Pen, male, mid 30s, businessman and opposition political member)

The tacit reason and objectivity was juxtaposed with the irresponsibility and extremity of the majority of bloggers who blogged on social and political issues in Singapore. Andy, TOC's co-founder who campaigned for migrant workers and the homeless in Singapore, shared how the blogging style adopted by the TOC evolved over time as editors and writers realized that rationality and objectivity were critical to changing mindsets and convincing target constituents.

We realized that if we want to engage the government and make what we do worthwhile (because we spend so much time and effort on it), we need to be effective. The only way to do that is to be rational and intelligent when you say things... You will make people listen to you if you say something rationally and intelligently even though you are very upset. (Andy, male, early 40s, activist and co-founder of TOC)

Among activists, there was a strong sense of mutual respect for one another as bold and fearless individuals in their candid critique of the government, its policies, and backing these words with what they called “real world action.” The collectiveness that they shared were engendered by recognition of similar practices in blogging that defined them as a specific type of political blogger – activist bloggers – whose contribution to the political and civic sphere transcended posting commentaries online. Over and above this deep-seated respect for one another, these two groups also expressed disapproval of, and distanced themselves from, “other” bloggers whose approach towards blogging was seen as irresponsible and instinctively anti-government.

### **Articulation of a Common Adversary**

The articulation of a common adversary was another dimension advocated by new social movement theorists as a marker of collective identity. In the case of Singapore political bloggers, the government and mass media emerged as two common adversaries when they spoke about their reasons and objectives for blogging. Political bloggers turned to their blog as a tool to challenge hegemonic discourse propagated by the government and the mainstream media, resonating with the earlier finding that filling a void in political and civic discourse was a similarity shared by different categories of political bloggers. They perceived themselves to play an important role in exposing or filling in the cracks in mainstream media content, and pushing the boundaries of what was deemed as acceptable discourse.

For instance, Adrian, a non-activist, started his blog due to his unhappiness with the authorities and referred to his blog as a channel for dissension.

It started with the removal of a particular columnist from the local newspaper which I liked—Mr. Brown. He had written an article titled "We are fed, up with progress." Of course, it was a satire but the title did not sit well with a particular ministry. He spoke a truth which had been in the hearts of the people for a long time. This is a knee-jerk reaction from the authorities. And I was surprised at my own frustrations. What was worse was that I realized I could not voice my opinions... So one may say that my blog came out of dissent. (Adrian, male, late 30s, project manager)

However, a key finding which differentiated non-activists from activists was that although blogs provided the former with a platform to express their opinions, they were generally satisfied with the status quo. Although they expressed negative sentiments about political issues and the government at times, they did not express a desire to change political and social realities in Singapore. SA explained that his blog provided a means for him to vent his frustration but admitted that he was willing to abide by the current governing system and had no impetus to change the current system.

I'm perfectly happy with how the government has handled things (give and take a few). Any country needs a system good or bad and this is what we have and we make lemonade. (SA, male, late 30s, consultant)

This lack of desire to bring about change and be part of the process was in stark contrast to offline-based and online-based activist bloggers. Activist bloggers' activism extended beyond posting their criticisms of existing regulatory curtailments. The impetus to bring about, or be a part of, a collective that changes the existing governing system was felt by most of them. It was evident from the interviews that a "trigger factor" to challenge both the government and media existed among activists. Their blogging activities became an extension of their activism work as they articulated their dissension with established authorities and traditional media. The challenges activists posed to the authorities are categorized under three overarching aims—lobbying for greater plurality in the existing political (parliamentary) system, campaigning for the repeal of what they perceived to be objectionable regulations, and circumventing existing regulatory and publishing curtailments posed by mainstream media. For instance, both George and Michael specifically referred to the ruling party as a common subject whom activist bloggers oppose and stood up against.

One overarching issue probably will be our opposition to the hegemony of the PAP. So you would notice that in a lot of the articles (I don't know what the percentage is but it is the majority of the articles), the posts that the bloggers put up generally center around the idea that the ruling party thinks that they know the [sic] best and they are dominating everything, and we don't like them to dominate everything. (George, male, early 30s, technology consultant and opposition party member)

The common agenda across the board is that we want a freer society; we want a less authoritarian government. Regardless of where our political principles are, I think we all share a common goal. We may disagree on many things such as gay issues or human rights issues, but all of us agree that we need a much more open Singapore. (Michael, male, late 30s, filmmaker and political activist)

Activists challenged hegemonic discourse by highlighting issues they thought were either not covered or were given biased coverage by the mainstream media. For instance, according to Alan who was the co-founder of The Online Citizen, the group blog played the role of “the watchdog’s watchdog” and he described the incident which sealed his decision to start a community blog in order to challenge mainstream media through providing an alternative source of news and information.

So the most obvious incident was picture coverage during election time. When *The Straits Times* covered opposition rallies, you would notice that they always took frontal shots of the candidates on stage to not show the crowd no matter how big the crowds are. When they covered a PAP rally, they would take the picture from a low angle. It won’t be a high angle shot so you can’t see the whole field where there were patches of empty spaces. (Alan, 23 years old, undergraduate)

Blogs hence constituted a form of grassroots movement and challenged dominant discourse by highlighting issues or perspectives that were either not covered or downplayed in mainstream media (Jenkins, 2006b). June also emphasized that opposing mainstream media bound her to other activists:

Take TOC for instance, they don't just cover migrant issues, they also cover other issues. They will investigate certain issues when they feel that something is not right or not covered by the mainstream press...I feel for those issues too so I visit. So I feel that the similarities are not so much with the blogs, but with the people who run them. Like Zazzi, I like him because he is forthright and we share a similar sense of justice. When something upsets us, because we feel it is not right, we feel we have to expose it, we have to challenge it, and we have to make it public. So that's what I feel would be the similarity, that we all feel a sense of justice and the need to provide an alternative platform for views that are censored in the mainstream press. (June, female, 36 years old, a doctoral candidate and member of Transient Workers Count Too, a non-governmental organization)

Activists also used their blogs to challenge and retaliate against real world regulatory curtailments posed to them by the ruling authorities. Michael started his blog in 2004 to promote his film on Singapore politics which was banned by the government. The focus of his blog content was human rights and censorship issues in Singapore, particularly pertaining to the Films Act. After his film was banned by the



then Ministry of Information and the Arts, he became the subject of police investigations and his blog soon became an important platform for him to inform “the international community of what was going on and to allow human rights groups to keep track of the investigation process and the issues around it”.

Zazzi, a veteran gay activist in his mid 50s and one of the founders of People Like Us (PLU), started the PLU website because the group’s application for a publishing permit was not approved by the authorities. Besides the PLU website, his blog has played an integral part in documenting civil society activities and gay rights issues that were not published by mainstream media, thereby enabling him to reach out to the gay community in Singapore.

When I first started in 1996, my motivation was very narrow. It was to replace a print magazine that we had to abort because Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) refused to grant us a license. I was a member of a gay group called People Like Us, I still am... MITA refused to grant us a license, obviously they referred to our Internal Security department file and they thought that we were seditious. So we brainstormed a bit and thought we still needed to get our word out. So it was started off with one very clear purpose—gay equality. (Zazzi, male, mid 50s, gay rights activist)

As such, blogs were a means to an end for these activists to challenge existing regulations set by the ruling government as well as hegemonic discourse propagated by mainstream media. Common adversaries united them although they had different

activism agenda. This was best summed up by Alan who described his relationship with other activist bloggers as “comrades in arms, fighting the same battle”.

### **Dichotomy between Community and Individualism**

Linked to the sense of being a part of a collective of political bloggers, the majority of bloggers perceived themselves to be part of a political blogging community. Supporting the claims made by new social movement theorists Castells (1997) and Melucci (1996), Singapore activists sought out and connected with those whom they perceived shared the same goal of advancing human rights issues and political pluralism in a one-party governing system. Instead of being class-based and involving people from the same demographic or societal strata, activism campaigns in Singapore saw the participation of individuals from different walks of life, brought together by the desire to effect intangible changes such as equal rights for marginalized communities and freedom of speech. Madcow described the socio-political blogosphere as a community, one that worked together to bring alternative information to the Singaporean public, where the feeling of belongingness was reinforced by the exchange of opinions and information.

Other than posting on my own blog, I read other blogs. That is part of blogging because you have to be aware of what people are talking about. It becomes a community where we share ideas. Sometimes we copy ideas—it is like “I like this idea and I want to spread the message. I endorse such ideas and they ride on my blog.” I think that is important because I don’t think anyone has the capacity to monopolize ideas. (Madcow, male, late 30s,

member of opposition political party and self-employed  
businessman)

On the contrary, non-activists did not feel a part of this community and, in some cases, even deliberately distanced themselves from socio-political bloggers. Gilbert and TM expressed a sense of self-distancing between themselves and other bloggers, due to their desire to remain independent.

I see myself as an independent and free spirit. I don't tie myself to groups of bloggers and I am not influenced by their views. I don't know if I influence them but they don't influence me, I write whatever I want to write. (Gilbert, male, late 30s, banker)

I have never met them personally. I won't know what to talk about when I meet them. I am quite an introvert, I rarely go out and maybe that is the reason why. (TM, male, early 30s, croupier)

On the other hand, activists, especially offline-based activists, expressed a sense of solidarity and professed that they felt that they were part of a larger community or movement. There was tacit acknowledgment that they, on their own, did not have all the answers or solutions as to what they perceived were political, social and economic conundrums that existed in the Singapore society, and the sharing and testing of ideas with one another constituted a form of collective intelligence. The feeling of solidarity was more evident among offline-based activists who expressed support and close affinity to fellow activists from the same

organization, as in the case of Bill. The sense of community fostered by teamwork and cooperation was reiterated by Evan.

We are working towards similar, if not the same goals. And because we tend to think the same way, and knowing each other personally helps a lot. In my perspective, solidarity occurs when people believe in the same ideas, when people are working towards similar goals and taking the same approach, and when they actually know one other personally as opposed to knowing each other through books, blogs and so on. So in that sense, it's very much about personal relationships, knowing each other and what you can do together. (Bill, male, early 20s, National Serviceman and member of Bloggers 13 and TOC)

It certainly makes me feel part of a larger body, a larger movement. Well, I participate in these activities because my friends are involved, and because I know many of these people. So it's natural for me to help them out, especially when our views are pretty similar. (Evan, male, early 30s, founder of SG Human Rights and member of opposition party)

Among offline-based activist bloggers, their sense of collectiveness and solidarity often stemmed from the organizations they were part of. They expressed a strong identification with fellow members and volunteers, and this was distinctly

observed among offline-based activists from opposition political parties. John and Tan specifically referred to political bloggers who were also members from the same organization as people whom they identified with and experienced solidarity with. John mentioned others from the same opposition political party when asked if he could relate to other bloggers. Tan expounded on what solidarity with other bloggers meant for him, which meant adopting the same stance in line with his party's philosophy.

We may have different thoughts and opinions, but with the party, we should move according to the direction of the party. We have this understanding within the party. The party on the whole can only have one position or one voice. For example, the gay issue is quite sensitive. The party prefers to leave it to the community to moderate and not turn it into a political issue. (Tan, male, late 30s, property maintenance officer and opposition political member)

However, the articulation of collectiveness and solidarity was underpinned by activist bloggers' assertions of their individualism. Their individualism existed on various levels—interest in specific issues, definition of ideological principles, and choice of methodology or strategy in achieving their agenda. The findings suggested that the perceived commonality felt by the majority of political bloggers engaged in some form of activism was underscored by the recognition of differences among them. The recognition of their differences was more prevalent among online-based organizations. Although there appears to be clear demarcations between “us” and them,” the interviews also suggested that differences lay within the group of activist

bloggers. Although they shared an overarching vision of promoting freedom of speech and expression on the Internet, what is also evident is that these political bloggers had diverse interests in terms of specific issues that they championed (“pet topics,” in Chong’s words). For instance, Stan campaigned for LGBT, Michael for the repeal of Films Act, and Vienna tried to influence policy-makers by providing policy analysis from economic perspectives. These differences were aptly articulated by Vienna as well as Brian (a final-year law student who participated in online petitions for the Repeal of 377A and advocated the legalization of homosexuality).

I’m sure we have our similarities – we want change. Singapore’s socio-political blogosphere happens because of the necessity for change. I think inside everyone, we are activists in our own way but the approach is different. I think there is democracy of approaches. (Vienna, male, mid 30s, a chief operating officer and co-founder of Singapore Angle)

I focus on socio-political issues in Singapore and I try to inject my own viewpoints as a law student. So I tend to pick issues that are related to law and the legal profession. The issues that I blog on are usually related to constitutional rights as well as the government’s policies that are more political than economic in nature. So my blog doesn’t focus on for example, HDB subsidies and so on. That isn’t the perspective that I am immersed in on a day-to-day basis, so I don’t blog on those issues. (Brian, male, early 20s, final-year law student)

Within Bloggers 13, Chong spoke about how, although they were united in the campaigning for greater Internet freedom and de-regulation, there were undercurrents of conflict pertaining to other issues such as gay rights due to religious beliefs. The interviewees were also very candid in admitting conflicting interests within the group. Another member of Bloggers 13, Zazzi, doubted on whether the group will work together again. This resonated with Evan's admission that individual interests and pursuits was one of the reasons why SG Human Rights disbanded.

Why did we disband? I guess we were to some extent too individualistic, we wanted to do things ourselves on a completely ad hoc basis. So I guess we disbanded because we didn't want to be tied down, we just wanted to do our own thing at our own pace... on our own terms, I guess. (Evan, male, early 30s, founder of SG Human Rights and member of opposition party)

I guess the common ground is that more political space is basically good, for us as well as for Singapore. In fact, that's probably the only common ground. Beyond that, there are different interests, although not necessarily clashing interests. The rest of us are as interested in Michael's agenda but are obviously not as passionate about it as he is. Similarly, some of us would be on board Zazzi's gay rights agenda although not as passionately as he is... although for gay rights, that's where there could be divergent interests because I wouldn't be surprised some are opposed to Zazzi's agenda for religious reasons

even within Bloggers 13. (Chong, male, mid 40s, professor in journalism studies and member of Bloggers 13 and Maruah)

A tension or dichotomy thus existed between what bloggers perceived as their individuality and their being part of a collective. For instance, although activists who took part in Bloggers 13 acknowledged that they were driven by a shared goal, they also admitted that the group was marked by heterogeneity and took pride in their strong sense of individualism. All bloggers who were interviewed admitted that one of the main desires for blogging was to be read and known, and to cultivate a following. Another difference lies in the strategy they adopted when blogging, which could be due to the differences in the specific causes they advocate. For instance, in their push to promote active citizen journalism, TOC placed a premium of cultivating professional journalistic standards among its group of bloggers. Bloggers such as Andrew and Zazzi alluded to the undercurrent of competition for readers and, in Zazzi's case, "marketing" techniques were used to attract and maintain his readership.

Since everybody was online and giving their two cents' worth and sharing their opinion, I wanted to put my voice inside as well and be part of this whole discussion and public sphere idea, where everybody contributes something to the table and let's see who has the best ideas, the best discussions and hopefully it can do something for the better of the society. (Andrew, male, mid 20s, graduate student)



I am a marketing man and I do deploy certain marketing features. Number one - headlines. You must learn to write headlines that grab people, I'm sure you understand exactly what I mean, we've been through it, copywriting and all that kind of thing. So the headlines must catch people. And once in a while, you must catch people unawares, just for fun, just to make life interesting. Secondly, once in a while, change the style of writing, so I don't often use humor but once in a while I do. (Zazzi, male, mid 50s, gay rights activist)

Despite the deeply entrenched differences in the bloggers' activism agenda and strategy, mutual respect and admiration for one another as dedicated political bloggers clearly existed in this group. Their coming together as bloggers were founded on a common political ground—that of democracy, although this construct takes on layered meanings for activists, such as Michael's quest for anti-censorship, Evan's belief in the necessity of opposition politics, , and Alan's vision for citizen journalism to be a sustainable alternative to the mainstream press. Despite different responses to the outcome of Bloggers 13, it was an example of how people with different political convictions could converge and work collectively in a team. It was a concerted effort by disparate individuals who felt the need and responsibility to respond to the government when the opportunity presented itself. Such issues-based advocacy and ad hoc solidarity was best summed by Bill who used the analogy of the Venn diagram:

Let me draw you an analogy. Imagine that every person is a circle and inside that circle are the ideas, interests and beliefs that he or she has. Where all the circles intersect, you will find common values and common interests. It's very much like a Venn diagram with many circles, all intersecting at one point. At that point, you'll find common beliefs and approaches. In that sense, that's how we work together and find solidarity. (Bill, male, early 20s, National Serviceman and member of Bloggers 13 and TOC)

This chapter points to the presence of a collective identity which was shared among activists. The collectiveness, from which non-activists were excluded, was one that was founded on a common vision for a politically vibrant Singapore and a democratic society where the freedom of speech and expression was upheld. Blogging practices such as the use of one's real identity, refraining from writing about personal issues, and deploying rationality in one's commentary and analysis of socio-political issues functioned as boundary markers that facilitated activists' identification with others in the same community. Sharing common adversaries - the ruling elite and traditional media - further galvanized them to cast aside their differences to pursue a common agenda when the need arose. However, the findings also indicate that the degree of collectiveness experienced by activists was underscored by organizational affiliations and individual agenda.

## CHAPTER 6

### SOCIAL NETWORKS AND ACTIVISM PARTICIPATION

By including in the analysis bloggers who were involved in activism as well as those who were not, this chapter presents findings to Research Question 2: **What roles do social networks play in engendering political bloggers' participation in activism?** To answer the first sub-question—do social networks influence political bloggers' participation in activism?—the chapter first examines the relationship between structural proximity in three types of social networks (informal, formal and online) and political bloggers' participation and non-participation in activism. Secondly, an analysis of the five relational characteristics (tie strength, social influence, trust, information-seeking and selective incentives) between activists' and non-activists' social networks will ascertain whether, other than structural proximity to other activists, relational variables in the different networks were linked to participation. Following which, to answer the third sub-question—what roles do different social networks play in political bloggers' participation in activism?—I compared each relational characteristic among informal, formal and online networks to establish whether networks played different roles in political bloggers' activism.

The questionnaire required activists to select one activism activity in which they participated and list the people in their informal, formal and social networks who participated in the same activity. For non-activists, they were required to list people in the three networks whom participated in at least one activism activity. Of the total sample ( $n=76$ ), 92% responded to questions on social networks. The remaining 8% (6 respondents) did not respond to these questions, citing privacy issues. Out of the 70 respondents who answered questions on social networks, 46 participated in at least

one activism activity while 24 did not. Qualitative and quantitative findings for this research question are presented for each sub-question.

### **Structural Proximity and Activism Participation**

To investigate the influence of social networks on social movement, this study examined whether structural proximity to other activists was related to activism involvement. Pertaining to informal ties, most activists professed that familial ties did not have any direct influence on their decision to participate in activism. However, a few offline-based activists, James, Madcow and The Pen, spoke about their fathers who were involved in union work. As James explained in the following excerpt, although their exposure to politics during their early years in the family setting could have shaped their perception as to what active citizenry entailed, family members did not exert direct influence on their activism work.

I can always go back to the fact that my father was a labor leader. He was the founder of the Singapore Mercantile Labor Union. He was involved during the formation of Singapore in 1959 to 1961. I know that someone in my family was politically active in the labor union. That is a family connection but I don't think it has direct influence as such. (James, male, 40s, university lecturer and member of Singaporeans for Democracy)

The presence of parental support is in stark contrast to non-activists such as Ghost who expressed concerns that he would be a laughing stock in his family should he decide to participate in activism or engage in some form of voluntary work.

Sometimes I read about volunteers going to other countries to build houses and schools in newspapers. I think it is great. If you ask me would I go? No... If I tell my parents that I am going to take no-pay leave for a few months and go to Cambodia to build schools, they would laugh at me. To them, it sounds ridiculous and I understand where they are coming from. Why are you building schools for people you don't know in a country you have not been to, and in a culture that you don't understand? (Ghost, male, early 30s, customer service officer in telecommunications industry)

Among activists, their friends and peers exposed them former to civil society work in school. The collegial environment within education institutions introduced activist bloggers to peers who were active in civil society. Other than offline-based activists who became involved politically during their university years, several online-based activists also spoke about how their university education not only fostered critical thinking, but also exposed them to others who were active in the civil society. Daryl who participated in the Climate Change demonstration in London in 2009 helped to organize a demonstration on Women's Rights attributed his involvement to his university classmates who were concerned about similar issues.

The interviews also explained why structural proximity to other activists was low for non-activists. Most of them did not know anyone involved in activism activities, which was one of the most often cited reasons provided by non-activist bloggers for not taking part in any causes or campaigns. Voiceless, a student in his early 20s who consented to an email interview to preserve his anonymity shared that

he did not know of any family members, friends and schoolmates who were involved in any form of activism. This was similar in the case of Recalcitrant and Epilogos:

I don't mix a lot except with my group of friends. I am socially limited to my convivial group, we drink and we fish. This is my social group. Outside this group, I seldom mix with others. (*Researcher: Have you thought of joining NGOs as a volunteer?*) No. I don't think I have the ability to do that. I know my limits. You have to contribute if you join, and I don't think I will be able to contribute more. For instance, some of the activities require a lot of time... The time I have is spent on newspapers, reading books and going on the Internet. If you join an NGO [sic], it means you have to widen your social contacts and I am not interested. (Recalcitrant, male, 80s, retiree)

I don't join them or participate in their activities, largely because of inertia. I never started; I don't want to start it. Sometimes getting involved in these things depends on who you know, and I don't know anybody who is active in any of these organizations. (Epilogos, male, early 40s, polytechnic lecturer)

Pertaining to formal networks, offline-based activists belonged to either registered civil society groups or opposition parties, as detailed in Chapter 4. The groups online-based activists belonged to were of a temporal or online nature. An example of a group of a temporal nature was Bloggers 13, formed solely for the purpose of lobbying for greater Internet de-regulation in response to the government's

initiative to re-evaluate regulatory measures pertaining to online discourse. The group disbanded when the project was completed and the 13 bloggers continued to pursue their own activism campaigns. On the other hand, non-activists were not members or volunteers with any civic or non-governmental organization. They cited reasons such as fear of conflict and unhappiness resulting from organizational politics, and not wanting to be associated with a specific cause. Ghost was very candid in expressing his disdain for organized groups. Although he knew of several activists, Ink Horn preferred to remain independent and unaffiliated to any specific group. As such, there was a deliberate distancing among non-activists from any form of institutionalized or organized civil society activity due to their fear of entanglement in organizational politics:

For such organizations, you need to put in time and effort. I am not interested in them. You need to have an organization in which you believe in, and frankly, I don't have that belief. You can say that I am quite a cynical person. I am sure there are groups out there which are good, but in all groups, there is a certain amount of politics and group dynamics involved, and I am not interested in them. (Ghost, male, early 30s, customer service officer in telecommunications industry)

As far as NGOs are concerned, I have always preferred to be on my own. I understand that it is useful having people to support you regardless of whether they agree or disagree with you, simply because you belong to the same organization. I don't want that. I

want people to agree with me solely because they agree with what I think, and not because they are under an obligation to do so. I always like standing alone and defending myself because I feel that it is less troublesome, I have only myself to look after. (Ink Horn, male, early 20s, localization artist)

Pertaining to online networks with other activists, activists knew of more individuals involved in activism compared to non-activists. However, qualitative findings shed light on a causal relationship between political bloggers' participation (and non-participation) in activism and their online connections as represented by their hyperlink networks. Activists had a greater number of online ties because the majority of them leveraged hyperlinks to establish online connections with others whom they shared similar activism interests with or were involved in the same activity. This explains why activists' online networks were significantly larger than non-activists' as the latter. Therefore, in the case of online networks, activism participation affected online network size instead of vice versa due to the deliberate use of hyperlinks to extend their reach to like-minded individuals and organizations.

On the contrary, non-activists intentionally refrained from doing so for fear of possible association with activism. The main reason cited for not doing so was to avoid being seen as endorsing particular individuals or organizations, as in the case of Voiceless. In fact, some of them did not have a blogroll at all in order so that they would not feel obliged to reciprocate hyperlinks. Gilbert, one of the earliest adopters of blogging technology in the Singapore context, shared how he used to hyperlink when he felt like he was a part of the blogging community, and how that had since changed.



No, and no I don't know them in real life. I think exchanging links suggests identification with or some sort of singularity of purpose or intent that I don't really have with other blogs or bloggers.

(Voiceless, early 20s, a student who consented to an email interview to preserve his anonymity)

The reason is that maybe I have lost the community feeling with other bloggers. I don't read other blogs now and I don't keep in touch. In the past, bloggers helped one another by hyperlinking. If you like a certain blog and you want to tell others about this blog and recommend others to read it too, you will hyperlink to it.

People who like your blog will be curious to know what you like to read and follow your links and go to those blogs. I have grown past that. (Gilbert, male, late 30s, banker)

The qualitative findings provided insights into activist bloggers' structural proximity to, and their relationships with, other activist bloggers in their informal, formal and online networks compared with non-activist bloggers. These findings were validated by survey data. For quantitative analysis, the sample was divided into two groups (activists and non-activists) and I examined whether activists had a greater number of network ties with other activists than non-activist bloggers. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the number of contacts for each social network type per political blogger.

Table 3.  
*Statistics for Social Network Contacts for Activist Bloggers and Non-Activist Bloggers*

Networks	Activist Bloggers M(SD)	Non-Activist Bloggers M(SD)	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
Informal	5.15(3.55)	1.75(2.64)	17.08*	1
Formal	4.93(4.15)	-	-	-
Online	4.35(4.05)	0.54(1.25)	20.06*	1

Note: \* $p < 0.001$  level (2-tailed significance)

Activists knew of a greater number of people involved in activism activities than non-activists in their informal networks (M=5.15, SD=3.55; M=1.75, SD=2.64), formal networks (M=4.93, SD=4.15; M=0, SD=0), and online networks (M=4.35, SD=4.05; M=0.54, SD=1.25). Using the number of activists known in the three networks as the dependent variable, I performed MANOVA and the results showed that activists had significantly higher numbers of informal, formal and online contacts with other activists than for non-activist bloggers, Wilk's  $\lambda = 0.606$ ,  $F(3,66) = 14.32$ ,  $p < .001$ . To compare the difference for each network type for participation and non-participation, follow-up univariate ANOVAs were performed. Table 3 shows the results for ANOVAs. The analysis indicated that the differences among activists and non-activists in terms of network presence are significant for informal social networks,  $F(1,68) = 17.08$ ,  $p < .001$ , and online social networks  $F(1,68) = 20.06$ ,  $p < .001$ . ANOVA was omitted for formal networks because non-activists did not belong to any organizations. These quantitative findings affirmed what qualitative findings have established, that activists knew of more people in their informal, formal and online networks who were active in political and civic spheres, which suggests that structural

proximity to other activists may influence activism participation. For online social networks, quantitative data supports interview findings, suggesting that activists had larger online social networks because of their deliberate attempts to forge connections with other activists.

In summary, both qualitative and quantitative data confirmed that a greater number of social ties to other activists (i.e., structural proximity) were linked to activism participation, supporting existing studies on collective action and social networks. Within informal social networks, friends and peers rather than family members played a significant role in shaping activists' consciousnesses in active citizenry, imbuing in them an interest in civil society work and opposition politics. The presence of formal social networks was a stark difference that separated the two groups of bloggers. Finally, pertaining to online social networks, the findings indicate that a relationship of a different directionality existed, that activism participation positively influenced online network size, supporting previous studies on the use of hyperlinks.

### **Relational Characteristics in Activist Bloggers' and Non-Activist Bloggers' Social Networks**

The above section presented findings pertaining to the relationship between structural proximity to other activists and political bloggers' activism. This section compares findings on relational variables in activists' and non-activists' social networks to ascertain if there were differences in tie strength, perceived social influence, trust, information-seeking and social selective incentives in different networks for the two groups. With the exception of selected mixed-mode studies (e.g., Dixon & Roscigno, 2003; Klandermans, 1984; Zhao, 1998), existing arguments on

how social networks influence activism reside in the premise that structural proximity to other activists cultivate strong ties, trust and exert social influence and social selective incentives effects. This part of the study confirms whether there are indeed differences between the two groups in terms of the five relational variables they shared with other activists. In doing so, the findings will elucidate why or how structural proximity to other activists influenced participation in social movement.

### **Strength of Ties**

The strength of ties between a political blogger and other activists in his/her social contacts was measured by the frequency of communication on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “never,” to 5 being “very often”). Based on the comparison of mean scores for frequency of communication, activists communicated more frequently with other activists in their informal and online networks compared to non-activists (see Table 4). Univariate ANOVAs tested the differences in tie strength in social networks between activists and non-activists. The results indicated a significant difference for informal social networks ( $M_{diff}=1.01$ ,  $F[1,53]=9.82$ ,  $p=.003$ ), and an insignificant difference for online social networks, ( $M_{diff}=0.39$ ,  $F[1,36]=.41$ ,  $p=.523$ ). The test was omitted for formal networks as non-activists did not belong to any organizations and hence did not have any formal ties.

Table 4.  
ANOVA of Network Variables by Activism Participation

Network Variables	Activist Bloggers M(SD)	Non-Activist Bloggers M(SD)	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Informal Network</i>					
Tie strength	3.31(0.89)	2.30(1.35)	9.82	1	0.003
Perceived social influence	2.56(1.19)	1.81(1.06)	4.01	1	0.05
Trust	4.05(0.82)	2.76(1.47)	16.05	1	0.000
Information-seeking	2.98(0.94)	2.35(1.27)	3.73	1	0.059
Selective incentives	2.09(1.16)	1.37(0.99)	4.01	1	0.05
<i>Formal Network</i>					
Tie strength	3.15(0.94)	-	-	-	-
Social influence	2.72(1.24)	-	-	-	-
Trust	3.90(0.95)	-	-	-	-
Information-seeking	3.27(1.13)	-	-	-	-
Selective incentives	2.49(1.33)	-	-	-	-
<i>Online Network</i>					
Tie strength	2.61(1.30)	2.22(0.47)	0.41	1	0.523
Social influence	2.36(1.16)	1.66(0.71)	1.68	1	0.202
Trust	3.41(1.31)	2.71(1.13)	1.27	1	0.266
Information-seeking	2.75(1.17)	2.34(0.83)	0.56	1	0.458
Selective incentives	2.03(1.18)	1.60(0.54)	0.63	1	0.429

Note: There are no scores available for non-activist bloggers in their formal networks because they did not belong to any organizations and hence had no formal contacts.

Interview data showed that the majority of activists (especially among offline-based activists) met and communicated offline with one another in addition to their online interaction. These activists spoke about how their communication often spilled over to non-virtual settings on a regular basis. For instance, George, who was involved in both ad hoc activism campaigns and opposition politics, talked about his regular meet-ups with different groups and individuals to discuss and brainstorm on how to advance their activism agenda. He also described social gatherings with other activists fondly. Such frequent communication within informal networks was starkly absent among non-activists, whom in the first place, knew significantly fewer individuals in their informal networks.

Majority of them are people I meet up with to discuss political issues, but nothing personal. Some of the meetings are purely discussions, just to bounce ideas off each other. Others, like those for Bloggers 13, are to come up with some tangible output. Also, The Online Citizen organizes barbeques and get-togethers.  
(George, male, early 30s, technology consultant and opposition party member)

The insignificant difference in tie strength between activists and non-activists' online social networks was explained by interview data. In their interviews, activists Evan and Tan emphasized that a spillover of interaction from the online to offline context (i.e., "onto the ground") must take place in order to carry out activist work. This suggests that they communicated and interacted with their fellow activist bloggers more frequently in the offline context than in the online context. This finding

supports the earlier finding of how activists' online networks were extensions of their offline networks.

### **Perceived Social Influence**

Based on the comparison of mean scores for perceived social influence among both activists and non-activists, the analysis shows that the former perceived greater social influence from others (“a little influence” to “significant influence”) who participated in the same activism activity when compared to non-activists (“no influence at all” to “a little influence”) in their informal and online networks (see Table 4). The results of univariate ANOVA showed a significant difference in social influence between the two groups in their informal networks, ( $M_{diff}=0.75$ ,  $F[1,53]=4.01$ ,  $p=.05$ ). When it came to online social networks, the difference in perceived social influence between the two groups was not significant, ( $M_{diff}=0.70$ ,  $F[1,37]=1.68$ ,  $p=.202$ ).

The significant difference in perceived influence in informal networks between the two groups of political bloggers could be explained by qualitative data. As presented earlier, offline-based and online-based activists were introduced to activism through their peers. For instance, Hercules, a law undergraduate in his early 20s, admitted to getting involved in ad-hoc campaigns such as Bloggers 13 and the anti-mandatory death penalty campaign when asked by a fellow schoolmate.

They are usually my schoolmates. Alan has pulled me into at least two things, Bloggers 13 and the anti-mandatory death penalty campaign. (Hercules, male, early 20s, law student and member of Bloggers 13)

In comparison, when asked why they did not participate in any activism activity, a common reason given by non-activists was that they did not know anyone within their social networks to be involved in such activities. More than half of non-activists who participated in the survey did not have any informal contacts at all (13 out of 24). Among those who knew of people in their informal networks who were involved in activism, perceived social influence was low ( $M=1.81$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ). Their resolve in staying away from any form of activism and its negative association explained this, as in the case of Adrian and Ink Horn. Hence, the fear of being associated with activism mitigated any social influence their peers might have on them.

Depends on what you define as activism. If you are referring to the extreme ones, Singapore is a pretty authoritarian society with laws against “illegal gatherings.” She has been called a Nanny State and I tend to agree... probably the fear of losing everything (or close to everything) because of your belief. (Adrian, male, late 30s, project manager)

I don't see any of the causes as worthy of my time. Not to say this is in an elitist way, there are things that I believe are more important to address than certain events that are being hosted... Having said that, because of the association of civil disobedience with activism, I cannot deny that I don't like being viewed as someone involved in civil disobedience. (Ink Horn, male, early 20s, localization artist)



On the other hand, for both activists and non-activists, social influence in online networks did not exert any significant effects on activism participation. Activists spoke about the need for online connections to spillover to the offline context. For instance, when asked about if the individuals he met online imposed any influence on him to participate in activism activities, Hercules explained that it depended on whether or not the online connection developed into a stronger tie, for instance friendship. Non-activist Chip who knew of activists in his online networks expressed a similar sentiment, a lack of closeness or intimacy in his online relationships. The lack of closeness accounted for the lack of influence of his online contacts on him.

The people I meet online? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. It depends on whether we become friends. (Hercules, male, early 20s, law student and member of Bloggers 13)

Not recently and no one has actively tried to get me involved. I am generally not close enough to any of the people I meet online that they have tried to get me involved. (Chip, male, late 30s, research scientist)

## **Trust**

To ascertain the level of trust political bloggers had in their social contacts in the three different networks, they had to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “none at all,” and 5 being “very strong level of trust”) for each of the contacts they listed in all the networks. As shown in Table 4, activists had higher trust levels in other people

who participated in the same activity compared to non-activists. Univariate ANOVAs tested the difference in trust levels in different networks between the two groups. It showed that there was a significant difference in trust level between the two groups in their informal social networks ( $M_{\text{diff}}=1.29$ ,  $F[1,53]=16.05$ ,  $p<.001$ ). However, the difference was insignificant for their online social networks ( $M_{\text{diff}}=0.70$ ,  $F[1,37]=1.27$ ,  $p=.266$ ).

Political bloggers who were involved in activism work were more likely to have strong trust in other activists whom they worked with and whom they treated as friends. Trust and friendship were important ingredients in activism work, as attested by offline-based activist V5, who had gotten into confrontations with the police. He was also in trouble with the law for distributing flyers without permit and participating in street protests that were deemed unlawful assemblies.

I think the most important thing is friendship. Many people think that activism is very serious. It is serious when you get down to the work, but you have to be very good friends or things will fall out of place very quickly. You have to be friends and be ready to stand by each other. (V5, male, late 20s, visual artist and video editor)

Compared to activists, trust level was significantly lower in non-activists' informal networks. A plausible explanation is that deliberate distancing on the part of non-activists from other activists combined with low structural proximity to other activists deterred the cultivation of trust. The lack of significance for trust in online networks between the two groups was explained by qualitative data. The interviews uncovered that, although Internet technologies played an integral role in helping

activists establish new connections with other who shared a similar agenda or interest, face-to-face meetings were essential for the development of trust among activists. A spillover of interaction from the online to the offline sphere was necessary in order for online connections to lead to more open communication and meaningful partnerships. Stan described how face-to-face interactions with other activists in the sexuality minority rights movement established trust. TL also emphasized that it was important for him to take his online connections into the face-to-face context.

The first time we met, we had a very open communication established, and we could tell each other everything. None of them shied away from the questions I asked, like how long they have been doing this, why are they doing this. (Stan, male, mid 20s, graduate student and co-founder of Singapore Queer-Straight Alliance (SinQSA).)

Some of them (other activist bloggers) I know in real life first, and the communication continued online. Some of the contacts moved from online to offline, and some of them are purely online. For me, I do think that it is important to know your online friends offline, I treasure face-to-face interactions. (TL, male, mid 20s, mass communication undergraduate and writer for TOC)

### **Information-Seeking**

Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency with which they obtained information on activism-related issues from the social contacts they have listed for

each of the social network ranging from “never,” to “very often.” Comparing the two groups, activist bloggers sought information from their informal and online social contacts more frequently than their non-activist counterparts (see Table 4). Univariate ANOVA analyzed information-seeking levels between two groups of bloggers for their informal and online social networks, and found significant difference for informal networks ( $M_{diff}=0.63$ ,  $F[1,53]=3.73$ ,  $p=.059$ ), but insignificant difference for online networks ( $M_{diff}=0.41$ ,  $F[1,37]=.56$ ,  $p=.458$ ).

Activists participated in information- and opinion-exchange with other bloggers in their informal networks pertaining to activism-related issues, as in the case of Alan. Both described activists, with whom they interacted in the offline setting, as friends, and recounted how they tapped on these contacts for their knowledge, expertise and opinions pertaining to their activism work.

*(Researcher: Do you know other bloggers in the real world context?)* Yes, they are largely socio-political bloggers, for instance, Bloggers 13 who did the AIMS paper. We meet in real life and we are actually good friends... Chong helps me a lot with my website and gives me advice. I'm good friends with most of them. (Alan, male, 23 years old, graduate student in law school and one of the founders of TOC)

On the other hand, among the 11 non-activists (out of 24) who knew of activists in their informal networks, all, with the exception of Ink Horn, said that they did not communicate frequently with their informal contacts for information-seeking and other purposes. a2ed, who was previously a part of an activist network, recounted

his negative experiences with other activists, thereby leading to his current lack of communication with them.

I interacted with people in Singapore and I realized that the moment you challenge or contradict people, they will remain silent or they just look away. It happened nine out of ten times... They would talk about democracy, but the moment I say, “You talk about democracy, but have you thought about this or consider that?” they would refuse to respond. They would keep quiet and turn away... People now are not capable of real-life information processing, especially in the case of novel and contradictory ideas. (a2ed, early 40s, photographer and artist)

Interview data explained the lack of significant difference in information-seeking in online networks for both groups. Information-seeking from one’s online social contacts traced through hyperlinks bookmarked in their blogrolls and blog aggregators was a common blogging activity for both activists and non-activists. They read other blogs to establish the parameters and common themes of online discourse pertaining to particular issues. In doing so, they were able to identify perspectives dominant in online discourse and offer unique or different views. For instance, Bill (an online-based activist) and Chip (a non-activist) shared how finding out what other people were saying online is a significant part of framing their own posts and analysis.

Sometimes I find a long essay on a website that describes a specific theory, so I hyperlink to that website within my blog post

to save myself the trouble of explaining what it's all about, and to prevent any sticky issues concerning copyright laws. Sometimes I also hyperlink to other blog posts when I want to comment on them or to other news articles for the same reason. Other than posting on my own blog, I read others' blogs. (Bill, male, early 20s, National Serviceman and member of Bloggers 13 and TOC)

I do visit sites that are strongly biased, 'ranty,' closed to outside opinion and with views opposed to my own. These blogs help me gain a perspective and can be entertaining when they become ludicrously out-of-line with reality. (Chip, male, late 30s, research scientist)

### **Social Selective Incentives**

Social selective incentives refer to the effects of a political blogger's expectations of how others would react (should the blogger not participate) on his/her decision to join an activism activity. Political bloggers were required to rank on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being "no effects at all," to 5 being "very strong effects") for all the contacts they have listed in their networks. Based on the comparison of means, selective incentives experienced by activists were higher for informal and online networks compared to non-activist bloggers (see Table 4). Univariate ANOVAs indicated a significant difference in terms of selective incentives between activists and non-activists in their informal social networks ( $M_{diff}=0.72$ ,  $F[1,52]=4.01$ ,  $p=.050$ ). However, the difference was insignificant for the online context, ( $M_{diff}=0.43$ ,  $F[1,37]=.63$ ,  $p=.429$ ).

Activists such as offline-based activists spoke about how they were often expected by others to be part of a campaign or to assume leadership roles in social networks were linked to selective incentives (see page 167 where findings on social selective incentives among activist bloggers' networks are presented in greater depth). As for non-activists, their decision on not to get involved in activist activities was largely due to their disinterest and resolve in staying away from the socio-political blogging community, as in the case of Adrian. This was compounded by the fact, as indicated by both quantitative and qualitative findings, that non-activists had very few informal contacts who were involved in activism and had no formal contacts. They stressed that their decision to participate largely depended on their own interest, such as Ink Horn.

When activities are held, I will usually look them up and search, find out what the cause is about and decide whether or not to go for it. Most of the time, it is a no. (*Researcher: How about the people whom you know are involved in activism, have they tried to get you involved?*) They have not been forceful about it. They have been open about it, like: "If you can come, come. But if you don't believe in it or don't want to come, no worries." What I appreciate if that they don't force it on people. (Ink Horn, male, early 20s, localization artist)

I read updates and notifications on their blogs and Facebook regularly. They do inform readers of their activities. I have taken a rather passive approach like using my blog or writings to voice my

opinions. Even coffee shop talks with Singaporeans. But I have never joined any of the more publicized activities. (Adrian, male, late 30s, project manager)

Hence, the findings show that all five relational variables were significantly higher for activists than non-activists in their informal networks. On the other hand, differences in these variables between the two groups in their online networks were not significant, which raises the question as to the importance of online networks in influencing activism participation. Table 5 summarizes key social network findings pertaining to structural proximity and social network variables for activist and non-activist bloggers.



Table 5.  
*Summary of Social Network Variables for Activist Bloggers and Non-Activist Bloggers*

Activist and Non-Activist Bloggers	
Is structural proximity related to activism participation?	Yes for informal and online networks - Significant difference in number of informal and online contacts observed between activists and non-activists
Is tie strength related to activism participation?	Yes for informal network - Significant difference in tie strength observed between activists and non-activists; No for online network, insignificant difference between activists and non-activists
Is perceived social influence related to activism participation?	Yes for informal network - Significant difference in perceived social influence observed between activists and non-activists; No for online network, insignificant difference between activists and non-activists
Is trust related to activism participation?	Yes for informal network - Significant difference in trust observed between activists and non-activists; No for online network, insignificant difference between activists and non-activists
Is information-seeking related to activism participation?	Yes for informal network - Significant difference in information-seeking observed between activists and non-activists; No for online network, insignificant difference between activists and non-activists
Is social selective incentives related to activism participation?	Yes for informal network - Significant difference in social selective incentive observed between activists and non-activists; No for online network, insignificant difference between activists and non-activists

Note: Comparisons for formal networks are not available as non-activist bloggers did not belong to any organizations and hence had no formal contacts.

## **Relational Characteristics among Activist Bloggers'**

### **Informal, Formal and Online Networks**

This section compares relational variables among activists informal, formal and online social networks to analyze which network played the most important role in building tie strength, building trust, fostering information-seeking, and exerting social influence and selective incentives. As this part of the study examines whether there were significant differences among the three networks for activists, non-activists were excluded from the analysis.

#### **Strength of Ties and Trust**

Univariate ANOVAs compared tie strength across the three types of networks among activists and showed a significant difference in tie strength,  $F(2,46)=5.54$ ,  $p=.007$ . Tie strength was the strongest for their informal networks ( $M=3.37$ ,  $SD=0.99$ ), followed by their formal networks ( $M=3.09$ ,  $SD=1.01$ ), and online networks ( $M=2.63$ ,  $SD=1.39$ ). Similarly for trust, univariate ANOVAs compared the levels of trust within activists' social networks and found a significant difference across the three networks,  $F(2,48)=4.15$ ,  $p=.022$ . Similar to tie strength, trust was highest for informal social networks compared to formal and online networks (see Table 6).

Table 6  
*ANOVA of Network Variables by Networks for Activist Bloggers*

Network Variables	Informal M(SD)	Formal M(SD)	Online M(SD)	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Tie strength	3.37(0.99)	3.09(1.01)	2.63(1.39)	5.54	2	0.007
Perceived social influence	2.54(1.22)	2.84(1.22)	2.39(1.28)	1.18	2	0.173
Trust	4.20(0.68)	3.93(1.06)	3.51(1.44)	4.15	2	0.022
Information-seeking	3.15(0.88)	3.23(1.14)	2.72(1.21)	3.04	2	0.057
Selective Incentives	2.15(1.23)	2.55(1.35)	2.09(1.19)	2.68	2	0.079

Regular meet-ups with fellow activists in the same group was a quintessential part of activist work, for instance in the cases of TOC and SinQSA. Andy and TL, who have served as TOC editors and writers, met with fellow members on a regular and frequent basis to discuss editorial directions for articles and organization of work to cover offline events. However, an important finding which emerged from the data was that years of working together led to the development of friendships, especially in the case of offline-based activists. Formal ties cultivated over the years among those who had been members from the same organizations set the foundation for enduring friendships among them. As such, there appears to be an unclear demarcation between informal and formal social networks. For instance, when asked about the nature of his relationship with fellow activists, Evan (founder of SG Human Rights and a member of an opposition party) described it as “pretty close” as he had “known many of them for a long time, at least a couple of years.” What began as strictly professional in nature, progressed to more personal and social interactions. Activists Andrew and Madcow alluded to a sense of solidarity and comradeship in his relationship with

fellow activists when they recounted how frequent interaction led to the building of friendship and their conversation topics extended to the personal realm. These qualitative data account for why means score for tie strength was the highest between activist bloggers and other activists whom they treated as friends.

There's a group of us who are part of the Singapore Angle group. We meet fairly regularly, many of them are academics and a number of them are in the university. So that's the Singapore Angle group... We are not a political group. When we meet up, we usually talk about all sorts of things, of course social and political issues. We are friends, we also talk about our private lives, what we are doing and our work, all kinds of stuff. (Andrew, male, mid 20s, graduate student)

Most of the time, we agree to disagree. There a many different views but they do help me. They are becoming my good friends in real life. We celebrate birthdays and Christmas together. (Madcow, male, late 30s, member of opposition political party and self-employed businessman)

The interviews also revealed that sustained communication took place between activists and their friends even after a campaign had ended. This was observed among online-based activists who took part in adhoc campaigns organized by groups of a temporal nature. They continued to stay in touch and communicated

with one another on activism-related issues. Reciprocity and mutuality in such communication was expressed by activists Michael and June.

We do sms [sic] each other on major issues. (*Researcher: What kind of major issues?*) Like elections, just discussing when elections will be held that kind of thing, once in a while or... with gay issues, sometimes if I find out something that I think Zazzi will not know, I will text him. (Michael, male, late 30s, filmmaker and political activist)

It is a kind of thoughtfulness. We don't have to cooperate with one another. Like Zazzi doesn't have to keep forwarding me articles even though it has been so long since it happened. We are mindful of how one another operates and try to support one another outside our boundaries. So if I see an article which I think he will be interested in, I will also forward the article to him. On issues like Chinese workers... whenever there is an article in the newspaper, he will forward it to me. He knows that I have trouble accessing *The Straits Times* sometimes, so he will cut and paste the entire article, and send it to me, so it is easier for me to upload. (June, female, 36 years old, a doctoral candidate and member of Transient Workers Count Too)

As mentioned above, regular communication and meetings in both activism and social settings played a part in fostering closer ties and building friendships

among activists. These friendships led to the development of trust which most activists attested to as being an important ingredient in their activism work.

We are friends, we meet up and go for coffee. I just met Prema last week and also Singapore Anti-Death Penalty campaigners three weeks ago to talk about the campaign. I am good friends with V5. It is not just fighting together for a cause, we are friends as well. In that way, we trust each other. (Andy, male, early 40s, activist and co-founder of TOC)

These qualitative findings were supported by information collected from the survey pertaining to the number of activists with duplicate contacts in their informal and formal networks. Out of 50 activist bloggers, five cases were invalid due to missing data. Based on the remaining 45 cases, 21 did not have either informal or formal contacts involved in the same activism activity. Excluding these 21 cases, 15 out of 24 activist bloggers (62.5%) had duplicate contacts in their informal and formal networks. Activists named and referred specifically to activist bloggers whom they related to as friends (as opposed to mere fellow partners or members from the same organization) when they spoke about their relationships with other activists and how frequent interaction and trust were critical ingredients of these relationships. These findings explain why informal social networks provided strongest tie and generated highest trust among the three networks.

## **Information-Seeking**

Pertaining to information-seeking, univariate ANOVAs confirmed that there was a significant difference among informal, formal and online networks  $F(2,48)=3.04, p=.057$  (see Table 6). Based on a comparison of means, information-seeking was the highest for activists' formal networks ( $M=3.23, SD=1.14$ ), followed by informal networks ( $M=3.15, SD=0.88$ ) and online networks ( $M=2.72, SD=1.21$ ). Qualitative findings presented below explain why formal networks could have played the most important role in information dissemination.

The interviews revealed that when activists needed to find out more information relevant to their activist work and organizational information, they turned first to fellow members from the same organization. John, a member of an opposition political party, kept himself updated on the positions adopted by his fellow activists on party issues and policies by regularly reading their blogs. His objective was to stay informed on their perspectives and positions on different issues, and in so doing, he could keep abreast of the party's direction. These findings confirmed existing social movement studies which found that formal ties served as important channels for information dissemination.

I read George's blog because he is very active. I only read my fellow activists' blogs at this moment because of time...

(Researcher: Why do you read them?) It is because they are relevant and I want to know what my party members are thinking and their philosophy. (John, male, late 40s, self-employed in telecommunications industry)

Formal contacts also played an important role in providing updates for several activists who stayed outside their home country. One example was June who was completing her Ph.D. studies overseas at the time of this study. She was active in non-governmental work advancing the rights of migrant workers in Singapore and kept herself updated with policy debates and social issues surrounding migrant workers through other members from Transient Workers Count Too and Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME).

Through contacts like people in TWC2 (Transient Workers Count Too) and HOME whom I still keep in touch with, and some people from The Online Citizen. And Zazzi too, sometimes he forwards me articles because he knows that I am maintaining this blog. So if an article comes up, they will alert me or send me the link. (June, female, 36 years old, a doctoral candidate and member of Transient Workers Count Too)

Qualitative data revealed an interesting finding which suggests that information-seeking through formal ties was not only with fellow members from the same activist organization but also with others whom activists worked with on an ad hoc basis. Although activists came from different backgrounds and had different activism agenda, they sometimes became involved in the same organizations when their interests overlapped. Bloggers 13 and Maruah were two examples of instances where offline-based Zazzi and online-based Chong, whose interests are in gay rights equality and media de-regulation, converged to work on a common project and



towards a shared goal. Seeking and sharing information then became part of their communication and interaction process.

Although the finding that information-seeking is the highest for formal networks may appear contradictory to the earlier finding on highest tie-strength for informal networks, this could be explained by the nature of communication content. When activists needed to obtain news and information relevant to their activist work, fellow members involved in the same organization or related causes were the first source of information to whom they turned. As discussed earlier, frequent communication in informal contexts may relate to topics outside activism work, as expressed by informants who described their relationship with other activists as friendship. This was illustrated by the earlier examples of Andrew and Andy who were engaged in frequent communication with their informal contacts and sharing personal information which may not be directly related to their activism work.

### **Perceived Social Influence and Social Selective Incentives**

Comparing perceived social influence across three types of networks for activists, the tests revealed that perceived social influence mean scores for informal social network, formal network and online network were not significantly different,  $F(2,48)=1.18, p=.173$  (refer to Table 6). This suggests that the three types of social networks did not differ significantly in terms of perceived social influence on activists. Qualitative findings presented below account for the insignificant difference in perceived social influence across the three networks for activist bloggers. Two possible reasons explain the lack of significant difference— some activists perceived greater social influence from one network type while other activists perceived greater

social influence from another network type; and other activist bloggers experienced uniformly low perceived influence across networks.

Firstly, activists who were young or were young when they were exposed to activism attributed positive social influence to their peers. These bloggers attributed their involvement in activism to their peers in raising their awareness of activism and myriad causes. These peers were usually friends from the same school. In an earlier excerpt from the interview with Hercules (an online-based activist) presented in this chapter (see p.156), he revealed that he became involved in Bloggers 13 and the anti-mandatory death penalty campaign because of his schoolmate, Alan. Hercules' experience was shared by Daryl, an offline-based activist who was inducted into activism was by his peers in the United Kingdom.

I have friends and classmates within my university who were very concerned about socio-political issues such as the lack of government action on climate change or democracy around the world, just to name a few. I generally have good relationships with people who are more opinionated, outspoken and who engage in regular activist activities. I'm always encouraged by them. I consider some of them to be good role models because some of these people have been brought up in environments where they are not fearful of repression, and will act upon something that they consider as unjust or incorrect. (Daryl, male, early 20s, student and member of Amnesty International)

These findings suggest that social influence among informal networks may exert a greater effect on activists during their adolescent and young adult years, when they were relatively new to the activist scene and were more likely to be influenced by their friends. In other cases, activists made specific references to their formal networks when they spoke about why they got involved in specific activism activities. What emerged from the qualitative data was that perceived social influence from formal networks exerted a greater influence among activists who got involved in activism after their school going years, as in the case of June who volunteered to help with refugees after completing her undergraduate studies.

First of all, my experiences with the refugees make me look at marginalized communities very differently... When I came back, before my PhD started, I had four or five months of time. I met up with the TWC2 president at that time. She asked me to help up with the research project at TWC2 concerning debts and deduction for foreign workers when they came here to work. So I got involved with that project. Since that project, I stayed and volunteered with TWC2. (June, female, 36 years old, a doctoral candidate and member of Transient Workers Count Too, a non-governmental organization)

In addition, for activists who did not know of friends or family members involved in activism when they were younger, formal networks exerted an influence when they met activists from established organizations. For instance, given the one-party state in Singapore, veterans such as prominent opposition party leaders were

cited as sources of inspiration for fledging activists. Interactions with veteran activists whom political bloggers admired and respected for their dedication to activism, politically-oriented or civil society-oriented, were key to igniting their interest in specific causes and playing an active role as opposed to being mere supporters, as attested to by V5.

The most important person is Dr Chee Soon Juan. Although I am not a member of any political party, he inspired me as an activist by his determination, will power, standing by his principles despite the odds. These are qualities and values that I find inspirational not just to me, but to any activists in any field, whether it is animal rights or ecological preservation. (V5, male, late 20s, visual artist and video editor)

The above findings suggest that among offline-based activists and selected online-based activists, some perceived greater social influence from their friends while others perceived greater influence from their fellow activists who came from the same organizations. However, interview findings also uncovered that among activists, there were those who perceived low social influence from all their social networks. These activist bloggers emphasized that their decision to participate in a campaign or activity depended on whether or not they thought they could add value to the cause. Social connections with other activists—although an important part of their activist life—did not exert social pressure to participate. This finding was observed for majority of online-based activists. For instance, Chong spoke about how knowing who were the others involved in a specific cause served more as a signpost to the

nature of the activity and a guide to decision-making on his participation in both Bloggers 13 and Maruah.

It is important to know who else are on board because that gives a sense of credibility or seriousness to the approach. Before I decide to invest in something, a major part of that decision is looking at who else are involved, not because they are the ones who approached me or have influence on me; it is more of wisdom of the crowds, not the mass crowd but a particular crowd. It is a form of internal recommendation. (Chong, male, mid 40s, professor in journalism studies and member of Bloggers 13 and Maruah)

Chong's sentiments reflect TL's and Vienna's, both of whom shared that the reason they joined TOC and Bloggers 13 respectively was because the cause appealed to them and they found it meaningful and warranted their participation. In the case of TL, an undergraduate student in journalism studies, he joined TOC due to both a practical and civic agenda.

[I joined TOC] to beef up my portfolio and resume. That is the practical reason. It is also something meaningful and I see value in contributing to alternative discourse. You know about the media situation in Singapore and people don't hear about the other side of the story. These are the reasons why I joined TOC. What made me stay is I see the meaning behind what I am doing. (TL, male, mid 20s, mass communication undergraduate and writer for TOC)

They called for a meeting, Zazzi, Alan and a few others called for a meeting. I went on my own accord as an individual who is interested in change... My motivation was to be able to put in some ideas which may be possible for policy changes. (Vienna, male, mid 30s, a chief operating officer and co-founder of Singapore Angle)

Similar findings emerged for social selective incentives. Table 6 showed that the mean scores across the three social networks for social selective incentives were between 2 to 2.5, which meant that all three networks exerted a little effect on activist bloggers participation. Univariate ANOVA showed that there was an insignificant difference in social selective incentives among all three social networks,  $F(2,46)=2.68$ ,  $p=.079$ . Qualitative findings explained this uniform low level of social selective incentives.

Activist bloggers' decision to take part in a campaign or contribute to a cause depended more on whether or not they thought they could add value and not due to social pressure from individuals in their informal, formal and online networks. As such, social selective incentives were uniformly low for three networks. Similar to the sentiments expressed earlier for social influence, online-based activists in particular explained that their decision to participate or not depended on their interest in the specific issue. This is illustrated by the case of Brian whose involvement in activism was limited to online settings.

The people who are involved in activism are at the third or fourth level if I were to draw a concentric circle. They are not in the core

of my social network. From time to time, I meet them or converse with them via Instant Messaging and email. I suppose because they are only on the third or fourth level, they might involve me in activist events occasionally. A handful is schoolmates, either in law or in NUS. There are a few whom I met online, and there are a few whom I only know online... they are casual acquaintances. A few of them are deeply involved in activism. As I said, I am not inclined in that direction, but it is interesting to know these people and see their passion for activism. (Brian, male, early 20s, final-year law student)

However, some variances were observed in other activists, particularly offline-based activists who were well-known personalities and/or held leadership positions. Their experience in activism work led to others' expectations of them to participate in specific activism activities and to provide leadership. This was illustrated by James's case.

Because I have name recognition and a certain branding, there is an expectation from people for me to do more. There is an expectation from a lot of people for me to participate in the next election. I think there will be quite a lot of disappointment if I don't. (James, male, 40s, university lecturer and member of Singaporeans for Democracy)

What this chapter has established is that structural proximity to other activists in informal, formal and online networks is linked to political bloggers' activism (or non-activism). In addition, beyond establishing a link between structural proximity and activism participation, this study also found that, other than knowing a greater number of people who were activists in their social networks, activists also experienced higher levels of tie strength, perceived social influence, trust, information-seeking and social selective incentives compared to non-activists in their informal social networks. In addition, compared with informal social networks, it appears that online social networks were limited in terms of influencing one's decision to participate in activism. This is because differences in tie strength, perceived social influence, trust, information-seeking and selective incentives between the two groups of bloggers are not significant for online networks. Differences in formal networks between activists and non-activists could not be ascertained due to the absence of formal ties for the latter group.

In addition, this chapter also presented findings on if and how different social networks performed different roles for activist bloggers. Informal social networks were key to activist bloggers as they were sources of strong ties and trust between activists and their friends who were also involved in activism. Formal social networks fulfilled information-seeking needs among activists. Inconclusive results were found for perceived social influence and selective incentives in this study due to various underlying factors. While several activists experienced significant differences in terms of perceived social influence and social selective incentives among networks (especially among offline-based activists), others experienced uniformly low perceived social influence and social selective incentives across networks (as in the case of online-based activists). This finding suggests that other conditions such as



demographic profile (e.g., age group and familial background), the nature of their activism work, and length of involvement, will have to be considered when evaluating the impact of social ties.

## CHAPTER 7

### INTERNET TECHNOLOGIES AND ACTIVISM

This chapter presents findings for Research Question 3: **What roles do Internet technologies play in activism?** Quantitative findings are substantiated by qualitative data which provide rich and descriptive accounts of how activists used Internet technologies for party and grassroots work. Guided by the questions listed in Chapter 2, the findings will be presented based on these themes: (i) information dissemination and organizing activities; (ii) community-building and networking; and (iii) social media and mobilization. Apart from presenting data on how activists leveraged Internet technologies for these purposes, responses from non-activist bloggers are included to elucidate how activists and non-activists deployed Internet technologies differently.

#### **Disseminating Information and Organizing Activities**

One of the most significant contributions of Internet technologies resides in how they provided activists with tools to reach out to their target constituencies. For those who were involved in opposition politics, their target constituencies included members of the electorate as well as potential party members. Lynn and James explicated how Internet platforms such as blogs and organizational websites helped them to reach out to their electorate by heightening awareness of party philosophy and activities, and even recruited potential members.

I am a member of the Workers' Party and we are always involved in some grassroots work. For example, every year we have been

bringing Hougang residents out of Singapore to Malaysia for day-trips. I remember I wrote about that in the blog once... During the Christmas party, Mr. Low will give the money to students... Many people don't know that these things are going on. I get good feedback from people who said "we didn't know that these things are going on and it is good that you mentioned it." So the blog is a good way to let people know and it attracted good feedback. (Lynn, female, early 30s, insurance trainer and opposition party member)

It is again about identity management, managing the identity of the organization. The mainstream media's aim is either not to give you profile or cast you in a negative light. For instance, we had a full showing with the UN Rapporteur [sic] yesterday... We spoke and we sent out a media release, but all media was silent as if we were non-existent. Because I know how the media game is played and this is where I value add, I have my Annual General Meeting the next day. The media is coming tonight to the AGM. I will use the opportunity to respond to what the government said about the UN Rapporteur... If you go to the SFD website, you will see us standing next to the UN Rapporteur and talking to him. That is believable. You have seen the press release we sent out in the last couple of days, people know of the fact that we have an AGM. What you get now is the view something is happening here, it is alive, there are activities, they have an AGM and I even know what the agenda is! You feel connected. I have just released the AGM

report. You can read clearly how the organization was formed.  
(James, male, 40s, university lecturer and member of Singaporeans  
for Democracy)

Offline-based activist Rachel also attested to how her blog enabled her to share vital information about the activism work she was involved with in the anti-mandatory death penalty campaign. This held great significance to her because she was able to share information that was otherwise unavailable to the general public and she expressed a sense of satisfaction when her readers were appreciative of the information she published on her blog. Rachel's gratification was echoed by V5.

I was blogging about Yong Vui Khong who was going to be executed last year. We were campaigning to help him with M. Ravi who was his lawyer... I met up with his brother and we heard his story. I received first-hand information and I put it on my blog, almost ahead of the mainstream media. People were reading my blog. Singapore Daily, TOC, and other aggregators like Singazine put up my updates. People were interested. A lawyer came up to me saying that he read this from my blog and he said he was grateful that he got this first-hand information. (Rachel, female, late 20s, a preschool teacher and human rights activist)

The most important to me is the sharing of information and it acts as a database or bank of information... Young people, like the 16 year-olds who come to events, told me they read some very old

articles on my blog about issues that they are interested in. (V5, male, late 20s, visual artist)

Blogs were also used to publicize specific activities to garner interest and participation. For instance, in the case of Bloggers 13, the initiative for launching a proposal for greater Internet freedom was spearheaded by Chong, Alan and Zazzi. The announcement of the initiative and call for the first face-to-face meeting to bloggers was advertised on their sites, three prominent blogs in the Singapore blogosphere. What resulted was the formation of a group of thirteen bloggers from diverse backgrounds whose work was covered by mainstream media and noticed by AIMS. Based on Zazzi's account, more than 20 bloggers turned up for the meeting after finding out about it through the Internet.

We stuck a big advertising logo on Yawning Bread and The Online Citizen for about three weeks – time, date and place...it was open invitation, everyone's invited. Twenty over showed up. (Zazzi, male, mid 50s, gay rights activist)

Jack, currently a graduate student in Australia, said he found out about activities and meetings organized by opposition parties and human rights organizations via the Internet when he was still based in Singapore. One such meeting was an education seminar organized by a newly formed opposition party, the Reform Party, which was publicized on TOC's site and Facebook page. Attending the meeting proved to be an educational experience for him as he learned more about the fledging political party.

I learned about it from TOC, it was posted on their Facebook group because their website was down at that time. There was an interview and one of the party representatives gave a preview of what they would be talking about. There were a few articles which gave more information on what they would be talking about. It caught my interest and I went down. (Jack, male, late 20s, graduate student and member of Animal Concerns and Research & Education Society)

Internet technologies also played an important role in organizing and distributing work among activists, enabling them to circumvent real world constraints posed by their individual commitments. The ease of connection and relatively low cost increased the ease and speed with which activists could come together, pool their resources and work as a team to realize their activist agenda. In the case of Bloggers 13, after the initial meeting, most of the work done in drafting their proposal was done via email and the shared editing platform on Google. In addition, bloggers were adept at deploying various technologies as organization tools to facilitate their teamwork in Bloggers 13. Bill spoke about how the Internet provided a useful and effective platform for bloggers to work together after the initial face-to-face meeting, making it possible for bloggers who had their own professional and student commitments to collaborate build on one another's input to the Bloggers 13 proposal.

The 13 of us sat down to discuss Internet deregulation and new media. We spent a couple of hours discussing what to do next, our strategy and our approach, another two to three hours on the paper

itself. So we worked together to create this paper online. (Bill, male, early 20s, National Serviceman)

Given their different backgrounds and commitments, technologies reduced the barriers to participation and facilitated teamwork among activists. The ease of participation afforded by Internet technologies also encouraged action on the part of online-based activists who were more comfortable with contributing to activism efforts online instead of offline. This was observed in the case of Brian, who took part in the Repeal 377A campaign through signing petitions.

If online activism qualifies, I signed a petition for 377A and migrant workers issue. That is almost the extent of my involvement. (Brian, male, early 20s, final-year law student)

Besides providing efficient and effective means to activists in coordinating and organizing online work, Internet technologies also enabled them to coordinate and manage offline activities. For instance, during the 1997 Singapore General Election, the Internet made it possible for Madcow and several other activists to work together and gather and publish information that was not available in the mainstream media to the general public through Soc Culture Singapore (a bulletin board which has ceased operations). Other than facilitating cooperation among a group of people who have not met one another, the Internet also made it possible for them to schedule and coordinate their reporting activities effectively and produce daily updates on political rallies during the general election. As for Bloggers 13, the proposal that was

eventually released to the public was created online through a series of drafting and redrafting after an initial face-to-face meeting.

I think we just had one meeting before we came up with our paper, just that one face-to-face meeting, and after that everything was done over emails. (George, male, early 30s, technology consultant and opposition party member)

The convenience and speed accorded to activist bloggers was also a factor that lowered barriers to participation in activism. Chong admitted candidly the ease of communication and information-sharing through emails made it more difficult to reject overtures for help and easier to agree to lending one's expertise and knowledge, especially when compared to times prior to the advent of Internet technologies.

For example, a typical thing I might be asked to help with would be to take a look at press release or brochures on ways to write things better for any groups that need advice. Without the Internet, if someone were to call me and say, "I have this one-page document which I would like you to go over," I would have to stand by a fax machine. If they don't trust the fax and you have to have a physical meeting, there would be a very high chance that you would say "No" because you are busy. Now the automatic response would be to say "Yes." They just email it to you and you can look at it at midnight after you have done everything else. (Chong, male, mid 40s, professor in journalism studies)



As such, not only did Internet technologies and social media connect these activists to their target constituencies, they also aided these groups in publishing organizational information, disseminating details on specific campaigns and activities, and garnering support for events and organizing activist work. However, as Table 7 indicates, the mean scores for using Internet technologies for various activism purposes (e.g. identify and seek out others, provide information, encourage direct action and coordinate and plan activities) are around  $M=3.70$  for activist bloggers.

Table 7.  
*Statistics for Internet Use by Activist Bloggers and Non-Activist Bloggers*

Internet Use	Activist Bloggers M(SD)	Non-Activist Bloggers M(SD)	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Identify and seek out others	3.77(1.18)	2.77(1.30)	11.16	1	0.001
Provide information	3.77(1.24)	2.08(1.29)	30.47	1	0.000
Encourage direct action	3.69(1.30)	2.23(1.36)	20.30	1	0.000
Coordinate and plan activities	2.60(1.30)	1.85(1.12)	6.29	1	0.014
Promote discussion	3.85(1.11)	3.88(1.14)	0.01	1	0.912
Hyperlink to individuals	3.90(1.27)	2.85(1.48)	10.14	1	0.002
Hyperlink to sites	3.25(1.37)	2.42(1.41)	5.95	1	0.017
Hyperlink to international SMOs	2.98(1.29)	2.31(1.35)	4.39	1	0.040
Fundraising	1.96(1.16)	1.77(1.10)	0.45	1	0.50

This was explained by qualitative data suggesting that variances existed among activists. Whilst offline-based activists and several online-based activists used their blogs for strategic reasons to meet specific campaign objectives such as raising awareness for a specific campaign or event, coordinating activities and calling for action, there were some in the group (specifically those from the online-based activists category) who placed a greater emphasis on using their blogs at the level of shaping opinions, to influence how people think about specific issues and events by providing what they thought were unexplored perspectives without explicitly calling for specific action. This was illustrated in the case of Brian. Although he supported the Repeal of 377A movement by signing an online petition, he preferred to maintain a non-partisan position. Such responses were held in stark contrast to that from offline-based activists such as The Pen who summed up the three-prong objectives of his blog succinctly:

Basically is it a political blog and it does a few things. One, it archives events that happen during the course of my activism. Number two, it is a platform for me to air my opinions with regards to policies and certain happenings in the context of the Singapore society. Three, it is a forum for me to interact with netizens and perhaps the media to some extent. (The Pen, male, mid 30s, businessman and opposition political member)

As for non-activists, they tended to be anonymous and emphasized that their blog was non-activist in nature and focus, and operated more as a personal medium that recorded their personal journey and experiences. These differences were

validated by quantitative data. Comparing the two groups of bloggers, activists' responses to the question of whether they used the Internet to provide information ranged from "neither agree nor disagree" to "agree" ( $M=3.77$ ,  $SD=1.24$ ). On the other hand, non-activists generally disagreed or were neutral with the statement, clearly because they did not participate in any activism activities ( $M=2.77$ ,  $SD=1.30$ ). See Table 7 for a comparison of mean scores.

To ascertain the significance of this difference, univariate ANOVAs were conducted. The results in Table 7 show that the difference between the two groups in terms of sharing information about their activism is highly significant,  $F(1,72)=30.47$ ,  $p<.001$ . In addition to providing information about their activism work, the survey findings also indicated that activists used Internet technologies to encourage direct action through online petitions and providing action alerts ( $M=3.69$ ,  $SD=1.30$ ), while non-activists did not ( $M=2.23$ ,  $SD=1.36$ ). Univariate ANOVA confirmed the significance of this difference,  $F(1,72)=20.30$ ,  $p<.001$ .

### **Fostering Connections and Building Networks**

Another important contribution of the Internet in activism is connecting activists to one another, a finding that emerged across the groups of offline-based and online-based activists. Question 11 on the questionnaire measured political bloggers' response to the networking aspects of Internet use. In terms of using the Internet to identify and seek out other individuals or groups whom they feel shared similar political beliefs and interests as them, activists generally agreed that they did so ( $M=3.77$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ) while non-activists were neutral ( $M=2.77$ ,  $SD=1.30$ ), and this difference is significant ( $M_{diff}=1$ ,  $F[1,72]=11.16$ ,  $p=.001$ ). See Table 7.

Being able to connect to other like-minded individuals through the Internet was, in many cases, an unintended positive consequence of blogging. Prior to the proliferation of the blogging technology, most activists established connections with one another through Internet forums and discussion boards. Some of the chatrooms and forums included the Sammyboy forum and Soc Culture Singapore. Evan spoke about how participating in online forums enabled him to meet up with others with similar interest which led to the founding of the organization as well as taking part in activities organized by an opposition political party, Singapore Democratic Party. Andy, one of the founders of TOC, also met other activists in similar online forums, and participated in opposition politics prior to TOC.

We met up through Internet forums like the Sammyboy coffee shop. We met face-to-face and then some time later, we decided to get involved in the Singapore Democratic Party's activities because we found that their views and ours were very similar actually. (Evan, male, early 30s, founder of SG Human Rights and member of an opposition party)

Such incidental and unintended bonding was also experienced by Rachel whose first foray into activism was sparked by other activists establishing contact and recruiting her via her blog. Madcow also attested to the effectiveness of the Internet in bringing together people who shared similar perspectives and ideologies but had not had the chance to meet one another offline. The effectiveness of the Internet as a social networking and connecting tool was reiterated by Vienna. Singapore Angle was created out of interaction among Singaporeans living in different countries who

connected with one another via the Internet. Prior to Singapore Angle, the founders communicated via the Internet and commented on one another's blogs. A meeting offline led to the formation of the Singapore Angle.

My blog used to be hosted on Multiply. What happened was I wrote something and on that night, TOC contacted me to ask me to write for them. In the same week, V5 messaged me on Multiply telling me about an event and said that I may be interested to join. (Rachel, female, late 20s, a preschool teacher and human rights activist)

The interviews also revealed that, other than chatrooms and forums, blogs were effective means for bloggers to connect to one another. The blog as well as other Internet technologies such as discussion forums and social networking sites enabled activists to seek out and be connected to like-minded people, especially those who shared a common political ideology in civic agenda. Cyberspace became a fertile meeting ground for activists such as Bill and Hercules to get to know people whom they otherwise may not have had a chance to meet offline. Majority of the relationships among activist bloggers were forged through blogging.

I got to know them (bloggers) through their blogs first. Sometimes you get to work together, usually because of coincidence, on various issues. I did approach Zazzi for an interview once and we wrote a paper on that. After that interview, we met each other

during a talk at my college. And when he organized Bloggers 13, I decided to join. (Bill, male, early 20s, National Serviceman)

I got involved in the death penalty cause through the Internet. Alan posted that M Ravi needs help with the case on Facebook. I saw that and I sent him a message which said “if he needs help, ask him to call me”. So he called me the next day. That was a connection made through the Internet. I didn’t know all these people, Ravi and people from Bloggers 13. We read one another’s blogs and then finally we meet one day. (*Hercules*, male, early 20s, law student and member of Bloggers 13)

Other offline-based activists such as opposition party members also attested to the effectiveness of their blog in terms of networking. Other than enabling them to build bridges with potential fellow activists, their blogs also served as critical publicity tools which connected them to other constituents such as media and policymakers.

The satisfaction for me is mostly gaining an unexpected audience for some posts, especially in recent times. It was also through blogging back in 2003 that I met some very intelligent people [here and overseas] who are now good friends of mine. (Daryl, male, early 20s, student)

This is something I didn't expect when I started blogging but blogging has apparently started a whole new world for me, in terms of the people I am meeting. I wouldn't be talking to you right now if I haven't been blogging. And I meet a whole lot of other people, like other bloggers and news media people, and decision makers. (George, male, early 30s, technology consultant and opposition party member)

In Michael's case, his blog served as a record for his experiences and enabled him to reach out to networks that extended beyond Singapore's borders. He was able to communicate his experiences to sympathetic international audiences such as international human rights organizations and galvanized support for himself and his film during the time he was being investigated by the police:

My blog enabled the international community to know what was going on and allowed human rights groups to keep track of the investigation process. So in that sense, it saved my ass [sic] because it actually turned the spotlight on the police and the government... So at the end of 15 months, they issued me a warning in lieu of prosecution. I think that the fact that I went public with it on my blog helped me in averting prosecution... There were statements put up by Reporters without Borders who protect journalists, and even Amnesty International. So it actually elicited public statements from these groups, so it worked. (Michael, male, late 30s, filmmaker and political activist)

Conversely, activists' blogs also served as an effective vehicle to inform others about the blogger's profile and the nature of his or her activism, allowing fellow Internet users involved in a similar campaign to come forward and connect with the blogger. The unanticipated reach garnered by the blog was surprising even to activists themselves. Zazzi alluded to the unanticipated opportunities generated by his online writing, which allowed him to further his goal of advancing issues pertaining to human rights and gay equality. It was through his blog posts that other people within and outside Singapore became aware of his work in gay rights equality. This awareness then created more networking opportunities when his readers got in touch with him and invited him to speak at conferences, deliver talks in schools and give media interviews with foreign media Radio Australia and Al Jazeera. Through these networks, Zazzi was able to raise greater awareness for gay rights equality among different segments of the population.

However, some differences were observed among activists. While all of the offline-based activists and online-based activists who were part of groups formed online purposefully leveraged Internet technologies' affordances to widen their activism networks, any connections between themselves and other like-minded individuals were perceived by bloggers who did not belong to any organizations to be incidental outcomes.

Sometimes I write to them. One or two of them have written to me via email. From time to time, I take part in discussion forums on the more well-known blogs such as The Online Citizen.

*(Researcher: Have any of these contacts spilled over to the real world where you met up with them?)* Yes but not that many, maybe



about half a dozen or so, to have a chat about stuff and so on.

(Brian, male, early 20s, final-year law student)

The interviews also revealed that, other than networking with other activists, political bloggers tapped on one another and built on one another's contributions and, in doing so, added greater diversity to the blogosphere. The majority of political bloggers also hyperlinked to other blogs and Internet sites. The survey measured their responses to various hyperlinking usages and the results confirmed significant difference between activists and non-activists (with the former having higher mean scores) in terms of: (i) using their blog to hyperlink to other individuals whom they think share similar interests as them ( $M_{diff}=1.05$ ,  $F[1,72]=10.14$ ,  $p=.002$ ); (ii) using their blog to hyperlink to sites dealing with movement issues to facilitate interaction among movement supporters ( $M_{diff}=0.83$ ,  $F[1,72]=5.95$ ,  $p=.017$ ); and (iii) using their blog to hyperlink to national or international social movement organizations and activities to facilitate interaction among movement supporters ( $M_{diff}=0.67$ ,  $F[1,72]=4.39$ ,  $p=.04$ ). See Table 7.

Other than identifying and recommending good reads to their blog visitors, what differentiated activists' motivations for hyperlinking from that of non-activists' was the deliberate use of hyperlinking to endorse fellow activists or support causes similar to theirs. Thus, hyperlinking through blogrolls reinforced and strengthened their existing networks. Activists hyperlinked to frame their blog discourse and support related causes and issues. The sense of community and camaraderie was also manifested in some bloggers' desire and willingness to share traffic, especially among activists, as in the case of Hercules.

The only one that I have is to Maruah. That's at the lower bottom, all the way to the bottom, that's a permanent link. Because Maurah was set up by Siew Kum Hong and Prema Marthi. Kum Hong is another friend of mine, he wasn't on Bloggers 13 but he's one of my closer friends. (Alan, male, 23 years old, graduate student in law school and one of the founders of TOC)

I hyperlink because I think that certain things are worth reading. People come to my space on the Internet and I don't want their experience to end there. I want to give them other places to go if they think that what they read on my blog is interesting and have some connection with them, to show them where else they can get similar discussions. Sometimes I get traffic, I want to share traffic too. (Hercules, male, early 20s, law student and member of Bloggers 13)

As mentioned earlier in the findings for Research Question 2, social networking sites was one of the most frequently used media by activists to communicate with one another. The interviews found that these sites were used to strengthen networks and build communities among fellow activists. Gatherings for members of Facebook groups were organized to foster a sense of community and camaraderie among activists and their supporters. Vienna spoke about how a Facebook group was set up primarily for the purposes of organizing social events for members; Rachel attended events organized by other activists publicized on Facebook group. The personal touch of the social networking site where one was likely to know,

or at least be aware of, the identity of others, enhanced the ease of fostering social ties among activists.

### **Social Media and Viral Activism**

Qualitative data revealed that as the level of activism increased, the extent to which activists used social media like Facebook and Twitter, particularly Facebook, for activism purposes also increased. Within the context of Singapore bloggers, Facebook was the primary social networking site used. On the other hand, non-activists related to social media such as Facebook and Twitter as a personal medium strictly for social uses and professional reasons. Epilogos started his Facebook and Twitter accounts solely to keep up-to-date with new technologies used by his students who were pursuing a diploma in business. Using Facebook was thus a mechanism for him to fulfill his teaching needs.

The reason why I set up a Facebook and Twitter account is because I am in the education line and my students are doing it. If they do it, I would have to do it to understand where they are coming from and explore the possibilities of the media for various purposes including education. As I am in the business school, there is also the issue of how to use these media for business. (Epilogos, male, early 40s, polytechnic lecturer)

By asking informants questions pertaining to their use of social media, the interviews uncovered that one of the main uses among activists for Facebook was for publicity and organization. Offline-based activists such as Alan, June and James

attested to using the social networking site as a platform to gather like-minded people, people who were involved in related causes or were sympathizers of their campaigns. However, unlike other platforms such as blogs, forums and organizational websites, the main benefit Facebook accorded to activists was that it enabled them to identify a ready pool of supporters. For instance, the Fanpage feature in Facebook provided an avenue for activists to communicate and share information with their supporters, as well as obtain feedback on their work. Both June and Lynn spoke about how Facebook groups provided them with a means to gather and identify supporters for their campaigns.

My friend, Isabel and I started Project Humane Transport as a Facebook group to promote safe transport for workers. You know how many workers are transported on the back of lorries? Recently there was a major accident and four workers died. We were quite upset because this is not a new issue. We started the Facebook group to connect people who are concerned about the issue. It's about gathering like-minded people together. (June, female, 36 years old, a doctoral candidate and member of Transient Workers Count Too)

Through Facebook, we have gathered many volunteers. The WP Youth Wing Facebook has gathered many "supporters". You can see their Facebook account and pictures. Whether or not they are real supporters, we don't know. Buy we are quite sure if an election is to be called, we can activate this group of people to ask

for their help. How many of them will really help, we don't know, but at least we have a ready pool. (Lynn, female, early 30s, insurance trainer and opposition party member)

Using Facebook was thus akin to viral or guerilla activism as activists leveraged Facebook's immediacy and social networks to assemble supporters, publicize and garner support for events. As such, several of them suggested that Facebook was an even more effective medium to reach their target constituency compared with blogs for which they had no idea who their readers were. As such, compared to the blog, Facebook provided a means by which activists could carry out more targeted publicity and galvanizing, especially through fan pages and groups in which the activists were members. Mandy and James described in the excerpts below how Facebook enabled them to deliver targeted communications pertaining to their campaign work.

Whatever you put on your blog, you don't know who it goes out to. Whereas on Facebook, you know who you are talking to and these are the people who are interested as well. (Mandy, female, early 30s, health researcher and a volunteer with the Association of Women for Action and Research)

Facebook is used mainly as a mailing list. We have a Facebook group. I am not sure how effective it is but we keep our headlines tight and short, and people can see what it is. Today when I sent out the AGM report to 790 people on our list, I put "SFD AGM

report, please read". Hopefully they know it is a report and they will read... I think the Facebook networking site certainly brings more like-minded people together. Whether they are like-minded enough to do political work is different, but they certainly want to consume the information on your political work. (James, male, 40s, university lecturer and member of Singaporeans for Democracy)

Facebook helped activists to galvanize and mobilize support for specific campaigns, by leveraging one's personal networks which were linked to others' social networks. Activists also used fan pages and groups to disseminate information to their followers or fans. Madcow and V5 lauded the viral reach afforded by social networking sites.

Social networking sites like Facebook is the frontline for activism... You post all these things on social networking sites where you have 800 or 900 friends. And these friends when they log in, they will see your post and click to check it out. And over time, if they are convinced, they will find out more. (V5, male, late 20s, visual artist and video editor)

How it goes from here will depend on Facebook which is a powerful networking media. Instantaneously, you can share your views with many of your friends and you link to their networks. So it is a multinomial networking system. For example, if I put up my views on my account, my friends who agree with me will repost

the link which will show up on their networks. That is how it spreads. (Madcow, male, late 30s, member of opposition political party and self-employed businessman)

Cognizant of the wide reach of messages and activities posted on Facebook due to multi-linkages of networks, activists were quick to harness the medium to their advantage by publicizing events. Andy described an incident which demonstrated the unanticipated impact of publicizing TOC's Year End Review online, complemented by Facebook.

We spread by word of mouth to our friends, send out emails, put up the information of the event on Facebook and our website. For instance, the Year End Review that we held in December was very successful as the whole place was packed. Shi Han who organized the event was expecting 60 people to turn up. I told her that we will get more than a hundred people but she didn't believe me.

When the day came, there were 120 to 130 people. We didn't have enough space for people, some of them had to leave because they couldn't get into the room. Some came and left because they saw so many people. (Andy, male, early 40s, activist and co-founder of TOC)

Through Facebook, Mandy found a convenient way to keep up to date with the events and gatherings organized by other activists. The RSS feeds activists received on their Facebook home pages after logging in increased the speed and ease

of getting updates of activities that other activists were participating in. Tan revealed that the main reason he joined fan clubs belonging to non-governmental organizations and even his opponent's was that it enabled him to be regularly updated of various political and civic campaigns.

After a while, they add you on Facebook and whenever something like that comes up, at least one person on your Facebook will join and it will pop up on your news feed. And you would go, "Hey, this is an interesting event," or they will ask you, "Are you going for this one" once they know where your interests lie. It's just common interests. (Mandy, female, early 30s, health researcher and a volunteer with the Association of Women for Action and Research)

I join fan pages and groups who will email to members, and I will receive emails. When people ask me to join groups, I will reject some and join some...The minute I log in, I will see the whole list of groups and fanpages that you join, and all the updates will be compiled in a list. There is a purpose for me subscribing to all kinds of groups although I don't believe in some of them. I joined to find out more information. (Tan, male, late 30s, property maintenance officer and opposition political member)

In spite of the different functions and uses blogs and Facebook have for activists, bloggers spoke about the complementary roles these two media played. For



instance, offline-based activists synced their blog to their Facebook account. By posting a link to a particular blog post, they directed traffic from their contacts in their Facebook network to their blog. Madcow highlighted a particular incident related to the public transport cost issue which demonstrated the Facebook's effectiveness in increasing readership for the blog.

The public transport issue is an example. My blog used to have less than 200 views per day. Ever since I posted this link to my blog on Facebook on the public transport issue, the daily viewership grew to 400 to 500, which is more than double. Sometimes if there is a hot button issue, it can go up to 600 to 1000. (Madcow, male, late 30s, member of opposition political party and self-employed businessman)

What somebody will do is post on Facebook a link to that person's blog. So because I want to read that article, I will go to the blog and read just the article. (June, female, 36 years old, a doctoral candidate and member of Transient Workers Count Too)

As they were aware of the different attributes of both media, activists leveraged both Facebook and their blog in their activism work. The blog was typically used by them to share their thoughts and views on issues in greater depth via detailed analysis and commentary, what Hercules referred to as "extended discussions." On the other hand, what Facebook achieved for activists was to present a more multi-faceted and personable side to their activist persona through their status updates,

photographs and “Likes”. Facebook was thus used as a personal branding mechanism especially by offline-based activist bloggers to add a personal touch to “soften” their hardcore activist image.

Social networking sites are the way to go. It is the frontline where you share information and people pick it up. ... it is targeted and immediate, and it is very personalized contact. I may have 900 readers for my blog but not many of them contact me, say maybe 5% of them contact me. But on Facebook, people can click “like” or “comment,” and they can go to sites, it is very immediate. And they know who you are and you know who they are, they feel safe.  
(V5, male, late 20s, visual artist and video editor)

The majority of informants either did not use Twitter or found it limited in terms of impact. Activists’ deployment of Twitter remained at the very basic level of disseminating or “spreading” information, as a tool to share political information. Offline-based activists used Twitter to complement their communication repertoire with their target constituents in addition to their blog and Facebook account. The 140-word limit, which many found to be a constraint, was used mainly to publicize activities and events. Interestingly, a form of viral activism appears to be taking place when activists such as Lynn “re-tweeted” fellow activists’ tweets to increase the message’s reach.

Our chairman, Sylvia Lim, has just started tweeting. For the past one week, if she tweets on any national issues, we will just retweet.

Or if anyone of us tweets on national issues, the rest of us will retweet because we want to spread the word. (Lynn, female, early 30s, insurance trainer and opposition party member)

The findings indicate that the majority of political bloggers had little or no use for Twitter. However, offline-based activists were more likely to adopt an experimental approach with the medium to gain another touch point with potential supporters.

I know how it works but I don't understand why it is so popular. What we do is we link our Twitter account to TOC. So whenever we put up an article on TOC, it is automatically tweeted. We have about 400 over people following us. (Andy, male, early 40s, activist and co-founder of TOC)

The interest and experimental approach adopted by the majority of offline-based activists was missing from online-based activist bloggers whom either did not use Facebook or used it only for personal reasons.

Personally, I don't understand Twitter. I understand it but I don't understand its appeal. Facebook hasn't caught on for me yet. Even if I use it, I won't use it for activism and blogging because I see it more as a more personal medium. (Brian, male, early 20s, final-year law student)

In summary, this chapter presented quantitative and qualitative findings on how activists leveraged and benefited from the ease of use and low cost of Internet technologies. By enabling them to circumvent traditional constraints such as a lack of access to the mainstream media, Internet technologies such as blogs, forums and chat rooms enabled like-minded individuals to meet others who shared similar political and civic agenda. Among offline-based activists, the connections forged online led to enduring partnerships in opposition politics as well as civil society groups. This was observed for the majority of online-based activists as well. Other than helping activists widen their activism networks and, at times, crossing geographical boundaries, Internet technologies are becoming integral tools in their activism work to increase awareness and publicize their causes and activities. The ease in transmitting information which they may otherwise not be able to publish also helped in garnering support from the constituencies they target. In addition, Internet technologies provided a time saving and cost-effective means for activists to coordinate and publicize both online and offline activities. Through social media, activist bloggers were able to engage in viral activism by leveraging social networks. In Singapore, Facebook was becoming an important part of activists' repertoire of tools by gathering potential supporters, providing additional contact points with their supporters, publicizing activities and revealing a more personable side to the activists' personalities. However, this chapter has also presented findings which suggest that there were variances in terms of harnessing Internet technologies and social media among activists. The next chapter discusses the findings and proposes a conceptual framework that unites collective identity, social networks and involvement in activism.

## CHAPTER 8

### DISCUSSION

Chapters 5 to 7 presented findings for the three research questions which guided this study on collective identity and social networking dynamics among political bloggers in Singapore, as well as their use of Internet technologies and new media for activism purposes. This chapter first begins with a discussion of the findings for the research questions, followed by a discussion on implications for existing theories on collective identity and social networks, further research and methodology.

#### **Collective Individualism as a Galvanizing Force**

One of the research aims explores the presence and nature of collective identity among political bloggers. **Research Question 1 is: Does a collective identity exist among activist bloggers and if so, what is the nature of the collective identity shared among them?** This research aim reconciles personal genesis of blogging with collective action among disparate and demographically different individuals. Existing literature on blogging points to blogging as an egocentric and narcissistic activity in that the reinforcement of personal identity triumphs over a collective one (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus & Wright, 2004; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht & Swartz, 2004; Papacharissi, 2004; Trammell, 2005). By testing the key dimensions of collective identity in the area of blogging and ascertaining the extent to which existing findings concerning collective identity in online collectives apply to the personal medium of blogs, this study proposes a new line of investigation for further studies as user-generated content becomes more prevalent.

Although current foci includes a prolific body of research pertaining to political blogging on the uses and gratifications of blog use, as well as the networking patterns among political bloggers, scant attention has been given to whether, and how, political bloggers experience collective identity and how that is linked to their involvement in activism. This study thus extends collective identity theories to the context of blogging. By applying the four dimensions of collective identity in analyzing perceptions held by political bloggers with regards to blogging, other political bloggers as well as activism, this study sheds light on the nature of collective identity among activist bloggers. This study establishes that a distinct collective identity exists among activist bloggers, compared with political bloggers who do not engage in activism at all. The findings support claims made by social movement scholars such as Della Porta and Diani (2006) that collective identity is developed based on common values, orientations and ideology, which form the basis for the establishment of a shared consciousness within a group. In addition, the findings also point to the existence of a dichotomy between collectiveness and individualism, and how such a dichotomy paves the way for collaboration and partnership in activism which spans varied themes and issues.

Firstly, this study confirms that the presence of a shared consciousness based on common political ideologies galvanizes political bloggers. To quote Buechler (1993), ideology plays a binding role as it “performs multiple functions, including transforming vague dissatisfactions into a politicized agenda, providing a sense of collective identity” (p.222). In the case of Singapore political bloggers who were involved in activism, the findings clearly indicate that activist bloggers shared a strong sense of collective identity as well as an understanding of what that collectiveness entail. The shared goal and common political vision for greater

political diversity and representativeness in the government binds individuals with different interests. Qualitative data indicate that the shared goal encompasses opposing hegemonic discourse, promoting plurality in perspectives, cultivating a more vibrant and politically aware electorate, and empowering citizens. What also emerged from the interview findings is that offline-based activists articulated explicitly a common vision and sense of purpose that is linked to their organizations' goals. In contrast, non-activist bloggers did not share any shared consciousness with other bloggers as their motivations to blog and blogging activities were intrinsically driven.

The collective identity experienced by activist bloggers was also manifested in their shared consciousness, in terms of being part of a larger group, through the use of the term "socio-political blog." This label was used by political bloggers who were offline- and online-based activists. Not only was the term "socio-political blogger" used as a reference to themselves, it was also used as a reference to other bloggers with whom they felt they shared similarities. Seeing themselves as part of a particular type of blogger (i.e., political as opposed to social or personal blogger), such self-identification was part of the manifestation of group attributes and member similarities. The findings also support Hollenback and Zinkhan's (2006) argument that common interests (social and political in this case) created a basis for the formation of virtual collectives. In the case of Singapore activist bloggers, the acknowledgement of being part of a larger group of socio-political bloggers; and the recognition of a shared vision of promoting a vibrant space for political deliberation is an integral part of their shared consciousness, a commonality in vision that was not shared by non-activist bloggers.

Building on existing literature on collective identity studies in the online context, this paper also identifies key blogging practices that act as both boundary markers as well as shared practices which identify members belonging to the same group or community, an area that is currently under-studied in the field of new media and collective action. A boundary marker or signifier of collective identity is the perception of an “us” versus “them,” which emerges from processes of self-identification and external recognition (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). What emerged from the interviews with activist bloggers is that the perception of who they were is defined by the perception of who they were *not*. The establishment of clear identity boundary markers thus strengthened shared definitions of who they are (Ayers, 2003). This study identifies specific blogging practices which functioned as identity signifiers for activist bloggers: an issue-centric instead of a person-centric style of posting which entails not posting about their personal life (unless the experiences were related to their activism work), blogging with their real identity (instead of pseudonyms), and adopting an objective and what political bloggers deem as a professional approach to writing.

Such shared practices not only differentiate activist bloggers from social and personal bloggers, but also from non-activist bloggers. Blogging practices thus demarcate the boundary between activist bloggers and the “others” which constituted non-activist bloggers and personal bloggers. This supports Melucci’s (1989) and Cohen’s (2000) argument about how boundary markers separate “members” from “non-members.” Activist bloggers’ emphasis on whom they are, also defined by whom they are not (i.e. non-activist bloggers) reflect a keen desire to be taken seriously as agents who contribute to tangible political and civic outcomes, thereby countering critics’ and the government’s accusations that bloggers are mere online



commentators who hide under a cloak of anonymity, whose words do not translate into real world action.

In addition, collective identity among activist bloggers was also reinforced by the sharing and articulation of a common adversary. In Singapore's case, although a common reason provided by all political bloggers for blogging was to contribute to civic discourse, what united activist bloggers was their common perception of the government and mainstream media as objects of opposition. The unifying opposition to the ruling elite and traditional media is explained by the political and regulatory landscape which characterizes the city-state's young history. As discussed in Chapter 2, since independence, local politics have seen the domination of a one-party system in which the People's Action Party occupies an overwhelming number of parliamentary seats. A strong and uncorrupt governance based on consensus-driven policy-making, supported by traditional media which maintain social and racial cohesiveness, has been the *raison d'être* of local politics. The marginalization of the opposition, coupled with the public's perception of traditional media as the mouthpiece of the ruling party, resulted in the migration of anti-establishment voices to the cyberspace.

What this study also established was in spite of a commonly articulated collectiveness by activist bloggers, a dichotomy between collectiveness and individualism exists. This dichotomy was reconciled when political bloggers pitched in with their expertise to activism campaigns. As presented in Chapter 5, activist bloggers' shared sense of collectivity was founded on common goals, similar practices and a common adversary (the ruling government and the mass media). The bloggers interviewed for this paper were candid in admitting that blogging helps them achieve self-actualization and individualism. Bloggers who contributed to the same

cause (e.g. TOC writers and deputy editors) also maintained their own blogs to showcase their individual personalities and promote different pet causes.

### **Organizational Affiliation and Collective Identity**

The implications of such a dichotomy can be understood when considering activists' organizational affiliations. Comparing offline-based and online-based activists, the findings suggest that the dichotomy between collectiveness and individualism was less pronounced for offline-based activists. As presented in Chapter 5, offline-based activists who were part of political and civil society organizations that had prominent offline presence and formalized membership structures professed a sense of solidarity with bloggers who were members from the same organizations. This observation applies to offline-based activists from opposition political parties and those from non-governmental organizations with an established track record such as People Like Us and Singaporeans for Democracy. The solidarity and kinship that offline-based activists shared with fellow activists could be attributed to the high-risk or high-threshold activism work which they engaged in.

Conversely, online-based activists were clearly more emphatic in asserting their individualism both in terms of purpose and approach. The collectiveness that they shared was based on ad hoc partnerships with other activist bloggers who happened to share a similar interest for a specific issue (e.g. Bloggers 13 and Repeal 377A). Although temporal by nature, online activist groups deal with broader movements with overarching ideals such as the freedom of expression and human rights. These online groups are founded on the overarching principle of advancing human rights in an authoritarian regime, thereby uniting online-based activists with

myriad agenda. The ad hoc nature of these issue-based groups also reduced barriers of entry and exit for online-based activists who were more comfortable with what Van Laer and Van Aelst classified as low-threshold activism. In spite of their temporal nature, online groups lay the foundation for sustained partnerships and collaboration among activists that take place even after campaigns end.

### **Different Networks and Different Roles**

Cognizant of copious scholarly work which examines the role of social networks in engendering and sustaining individuals' participation in social movements and collective action, Research Question 2 is: **What roles do social networks play in engendering political bloggers' participation in activism?** Originating from the field of sociology, social movement scholars have pursued answers to the question of if and how informal and formal social ties influence movement actors' decision to join and stay in a movement. Taking into consideration the widespread use of Internet technologies for activism, the premise for the second research question addresses how different types of social networks influence political bloggers. Three sub-research questions yield a finer-grained analysis of social network effects, and they are: RQ2i. **Do social networks influence political bloggers' participation in activism?** RQ2ii. **Are there differences in relational variables between activist bloggers and non-activist bloggers?** RQ2iii. **Do different social networks play different roles in political bloggers' participation in activism?** By analyzing the role different types of social networks (both offline and online) and network variables play in influencing bloggers' decisions to participate in collective action, this study bridges the gap between offline and online, and examines the overlaps between the two.

What this study found through qualitative and quantitative research is that although online networks helped to bridge like-minded individuals, pre-existing offline networks in the forms of informal and formal contacts was a key difference between activist and non-activist bloggers. This study also establishes two important findings pertaining to social networks and activism which have not been adequately addressed in current literature—how various relational dynamics in the three networks are linked to activism, and the roles of informal, formal and online networks in influencing activist bloggers' participation. As established in earlier chapters, existing theorization on the importance of network ties is underpinned by the assumption that structural proximity to other activists begets strong ties, trust and exerts social influence and social selective incentives effects. The findings from this study indicate that not only do activist bloggers know of a greater number of people in their social networks, they also experience stronger ties, higher trust, perceived social influence, information-seeking and social selective incentives with other activists in their networks. Differences between activist bloggers and non-activist bloggers in terms of these five relational variables thus validate and confirm existing theorizations on the impact of network ties. Furthermore, the study also establishes that informal networks are important for the establishment of strong ties and trust, while formal networks are critical channels for information-seeking among activists. By merging offline and online networks, and identifying the roles each type of network plays, this study proposes additional dimensions to social network theories for future consideration.

As for RQ2i, both qualitative and quantitative findings confirmed earlier studies by social movement scholars who examined collective action in the real world setting that there are significant differences between activists and non-activists in

terms of their structural proximity to other actors in both informal and formal circles (see for example, Dixon & Roscigno, 2003; McAdam, 1986; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Snow, Zurcher & Eklund-Olson, 1980). In the case of Singapore political bloggers, activist bloggers had greater structural proximity to other activists, which means they knew of a greater number of informal, formal and online social ties with other activists compared to non-activist bloggers. Statistical analysis using MANOVA confirmed that the difference in the number of activists for all three networks was significant. This establishes a correlation between the number of activists political bloggers knew of and their activism involvement. Political bloggers were more likely to engage in activism work when they knew more people in their offline networks. Not only did these findings confirm the findings from earlier studies, they also affirmed that offline networks do matter in the context of citizenry engagement and new media. In the context of blogging, for individuals to be active citizens, blogging and online activities such as commenting on others' blog posts and hyperlinking to other blogs and sites do not suffice; it is the presence of offline ties to other people involved in activism work which makes a difference between active citizenry through participation in civil society causes and organizations and passive engagement by contributing only to online discourse. This is an important factor which accounted for activist bloggers' involvement in offline activism activities.

Conversely, majority of the non-activist bloggers did not know of people who were involved in activism. As supported by interview findings presented in Chapter 6, the negative connotation of activism and its association with civic disobedience and disorder is one of the main reasons given by non-activist bloggers for distancing themselves from other activist bloggers and any forms of activism (e.g. Brian, Ink Horn and Epilogos). In addition, contrary to activist bloggers who enjoyed support

from their informal contacts pertaining to their activism involvement, non-activists such as Ghost had to contend with the fear of ridicule and criticism should he decide to get involved in activism work. Non-activists' social networks thus exerted negative reinforcement on them as they deterred them from getting involved in activism activities, offline or online.

Non-activists' dissociation from activism also explains their hyperlinking patterns where they deliberately avoided hyperlinking to activist bloggers on their blogroll. Such intentional selection of online contacts by both activist and non-activist bloggers supports Sunstein's (2009) argument on the segmentation effects of Internet technologies which occur when users of Internet technologies expose themselves only to those who share similar interests or opinions. Both non-activists' offline and online social networks were largely confined to other non-activist bloggers. Therefore, the implication is although Internet technologies have the potential to bond like-minded activists to one another, the same technologies can also exacerbate segmentation effects due to self-selection and exposure.

Beyond addressing the relationship between structural proximity to other activists and activism participation, this study also found that relational dynamics within social network ties differed for activist bloggers and non-activist bloggers. Informal networks exerted significant differences in terms of tie strength, trust, perceived social influence, information-seeking and social selective incentives on activism participation while online networks did not. Formal networks were omitted from this analysis as explained earlier. What this study established was that compared with non-activist bloggers, activist bloggers experienced significantly stronger tie strength, perceived social influence, trust, information-seeking and social selective incentives in their informal networks. As such, these findings show that structural

proximity to other activists in the offline context is a critical mobilization force as proximity begets stronger ties, trust, perceived social influence, information-seeking and social selective incentives that influence one's decision to participate.

This study uncovered an interesting phenomenon when incorporating online networks into the analysis of social network effects on participation/non-participation in activism. Insignificant results were observed between activist- and non-activist bloggers' online social networks, indicating that there are limitations pertaining to online connections. Extant literature advocate that seeking out similar others paves the way to possibilities for getting involved in activities organized by others (see for example, Biddix & Park, 2008; Kreimer, 2001; Nip, 2004). The findings from this study confirm that Internet technologies do play a critical role in connecting bloggers to other like-minded activists whom they had not met. In an authoritarian state like Singapore where the regulation of offline and online discourse has influenced individuals' willingness to engage freely in political talk and meetings, Internet technologies such as discussion forums and blogs enable activist bloggers (e.g. Hercules, Rachel, V5, Andy, June, Stan and Vienna) to "meet" other activists, thereby igniting their activism involvement. Herein lays the main contribution of Internet technologies to contemporary social movements. However, tie strength and trust between political bloggers and their online contacts were the lowest, compared to their informal and formal contacts. Online connections and interactions thus have to spill over into the real world context in order to exert influence and build trust necessary for activism participation. Face-to-face interaction, as opposed to communicating via online platforms only, is essential for the building of social capital that is vital for activism participation.

Extending existing theories on the roles of social networks in engendering collective action participation, this study contributes to current literature by specifying the roles different social networks played for individuals who were involved in activism (RQ2iii). Comparing three social networks in terms of the five relational dynamics among activist bloggers, this study established significant difference in terms of tie strength, trust, information-seeking. Confirming extant studies (see for example, Gould, 1991; Kim & Bearman, 1997; Pfaff, 1996), this study established that tie strength of ties and trust was the highest for informal networks. Activist bloggers' formal contacts were those from whom they sought information on activism related issues most frequently, compared to their informal and online contacts.

Pertaining to perceived social influence and social selective incentives, this study found no significant differences among the three networks. This was due to the variances in activist bloggers' experiences. Some activist bloggers experienced significant differences for selected social networks while others experienced uniformly low levels of perceived social influence and selective incentives across three networks. Qualitative data indicated that activist bloggers, especially offline-based activists, were inspired and motivated by veteran activists from organizations such as Workers' Party, Singapore Democratic Party and Singaporeans for Democracy. These were the same individuals who were expected to participate, or assume leadership positions in campaigns and organizations due to their prominent profiles and years of experience. In addition, activists who were exposed to activism work and became involved when they were young typically identified their peers as forces of social influence. On the other hand, activist bloggers who were content with



participating in only online forms of activism experienced little social influence and social selective incentives across three networks.

### **Organizational Type and Network Effects**

The findings from this study also point to how social network dynamics may vary for different groups of political bloggers and call for a more nuanced examination of existing claims concerning the effects of social ties. Offline-based activists, for instance, experienced strong ties and trust with other activists who were not just fellow activists but friends as well. Perceived social influence and social selective incentives appeared to influence their participation in activism compared with the other groups. Pertaining to online-based activists who joined groups with an online presence only, qualitative data suggests that their interactions with other political bloggers were limited to a need-basis when they had to work together as partners to advance a cause. As for online-based activists who did not belong to online groups, their networks to other activists were less extensive. The interviews revealed that these bloggers did not feel as strongly as online-based activists and much less so when compared to offline-based activists in terms of being part of a socio-political blogging community. They expressed detachment from the activist community compared with the first group, citing various reasons ranging from not being ready to take part in real world activist work and being constrained by the institutions that they were working for. Formal organizations require more commitment among members in terms of time and effort in participating in organizational activities (as members or volunteers). Over time, formal organizations build friendships and solidarity, and make the decision not to participate in an activism activity and leaving the organization a more difficult one. On the other hand,

although encouraging participation by reducing costs (such as time and fear of censure), online groups also exert less powerful mobilization effects due to low entry and exit barriers.

### **Internet Technologies as Instruments of Change**

This study contributes to filling a gap in existing literature relating to the use of the Internet for political participation and mobilization. Copious literature on cyber-activism exists but the dominant focus of these studies rests on how technologies are deployed by real world organizations (such as non-governmental or civic rights organizations) and marginalized political groups to achieve their objectives (e.g., Elin, 2003; Kreimer, 2001; O'Donnell, 2007; Stein, 2007). However, this line of investigation to date has largely excluded blogs, which have been identified as a force to reckon with in terms of promoting civic participation and shaping political landscapes. Forays in examining political participation by bloggers tend to be limited to studying their contributions to online discourses, and studies which have attempted to draw links between online participation and offline engagement have, at best, drawn correlations between the two. By obtaining political bloggers' first-hand accounts of how they use Internet technologies, this study establishes that blogs were a means to an end for political bloggers involved in activism. Activist bloggers tended to use their blogs, other Internet technologies and social media for three main purposes: disseminating information on their activism activities, organizing and coordinating activism work, and building networks with activists.

Vegh (2003) pointed out that Internet technologies facilitate collective action due to their organization and mobilization potentials. In the case of Singapore

political bloggers, blogs are a means to an end for the majority of bloggers interviewed. For example, in the case of Zazzi and Evan, their blogs were used to propagate their causes—to support gay equality and opposition politics respectively. Other than acting as a platform from which to share their perspectives with their target audiences, these bloggers turned to the medium as a tool to challenge hegemonic discourse propagated by the mainstream media and which pervades civil society. Blogs were deployed as tools that enabled them to expose or fill in the cracks in mainstream media content, and pushed the boundaries of what was deemed acceptable discourse. This study extends the investigation of technology use beyond blogs by bloggers by examining other forms of communication tools used. Both qualitative and quantitative findings from this study confirmed existing findings that Internet technologies play a critical part in activists' lives and work. Reaffirming propositions made by Diani (2000) and Tilly (2004) pertaining to the role of Internet technologies in social movements, this study confirms that political bloggers active in politics and civic society actively deployed Internet technologies as part of their movement or campaign repertoire. Quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire confirms that Internet technologies made it possible for activist bloggers to participate in a myriad of online activities. All of the activist bloggers used the Internet in one way or another to contribute to a specific cause or campaign such as displaying a banner or sign on their blogs. Interestingly, the study reported significant differences between activist bloggers and non-activist bloggers in Internet usage for activism-specific purposes. For instance, activist bloggers used Internet technologies to identify and seek out like-minded others, and to provide information to their visitors and encourage direct action. More importantly, Internet technologies were also used to coordinate and plan activities for their activism work.

In times of need, as observed in the case of offline-based activists who got into trouble with the law, networks established online also proved to be useful in terms of galvanizing publicity and support beyond Singapore. Other than disseminating information and promoting awareness of bloggers' activism work, Internet technologies also proved to be effective in terms of promoting oneself as an activist and increasing opportunities for participation and contribution to the civic society via invitations from unknown contacts such as other activists, mass media and organizations. In addition, although political bloggers are currently at an exploratory and experimental stage with social media such as Facebook and Twitter, this study shows that activist bloggers are increasingly using these media to generate awareness for their cause and activities, and to recruit a ready pool of potential supporters for future mobilization, organization and galvanizing support for the activities that they organized. Therefore, this study confirmed that, other than established and formal entities such as political parties, civil society and non-governmental organizations, bloggers were also actively harnessing Internet technologies to further their activist agenda.

In terms of building connections and networks, this study confirms that Internet technologies as well as social media, e.g., Facebook, bring people from diverse backgrounds together in cyberspace and cultivate a shared or collective goal, echoing proponents such as Ceren (2006) and Custard (2007). Qualitative data from the interviews explicated how activist bloggers leveraged Internet technologies and platforms such as discussion forums, bulletin boards, blogs and Facebook to forge connections with those sharing similar political ideologies and interests. This was especially so for offline-based activists who engaged in highly visible and sometimes controversial activist activities. In Singapore, the World Wide Web was a meeting

place for activists who were not aware of one another's interest or even existence. In contrast, the openness and deliberate attempts to seek out and connect with other potential activist partners was starkly missing among non-activist bloggers who were content to remain anonymous and kept to posting content online without further civic or political engagement.

This study also confirms existing studies on hyperlink networks as both qualitative and quantitative data confirmed that other than hyperlinking to what they deemed to be good reads, majority of the political bloggers hyperlinked to others whom they perceived share similar goals and activist agenda. These findings also confirm other hyperlink studies which found that hyperlink networks representing relational ties among individuals, organizations and parties are founded on homophily in terms of similar ideology (see for example, Adamic & Glance, 2005; Hargittai, Gallo & Kane, 2008; Park & Kluver, 2007) and organizational type (Soon & Kluver, 2007; Soon & Cho, 2010). By eliciting responses from political bloggers on their motivations for hyperlinking, this study confirms intentionality on the part of bloggers to leverage the hyperlink feature to foster and contribute to the community of bloggers.

In addition, by directing traffic to other blogs, specifically to those that share similar perspectives on political and social issues, bloggers used their blogs as gateways to enable blog readers to visit other recommended blogs or sites for more information. Political bloggers involved in activism also expressed that they hyperlink to fellow activists' websites as a form of support and endorsement. This mutual endorsement and support was also the reason given by non-activist bloggers for not hyperlinking. They did not hyperlink to other bloggers in order to avoid any association or fallacious assumption by their blog visitors that they were associated

with activist blogs. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis on the motivations and perceptions behind the usage/non-usage of hyperlinks indicate that hyperlinks were used to strengthen the sense of community experienced by political bloggers and as a way to express reciprocity.

### **Organizational Affiliation and Technology Deployment**

Similar to the findings on collective identity and social networks, qualitative findings indicate that a variance in terms of deploying Internet technologies for activism exist among activist bloggers. This was supported by quantitative results which indicated mean scores of around 3.7 for some of the items on Internet use for activism purposes. Activist bloggers, especially offline-based activists, were avid users of blogs and other online platforms as a means to an end, as tools which supported their activism work and helped them attain their activist goals. This was manifested through their openness to new technology and the ways in which they exploit different technological tools. Emails, blogs and social media are deployed to raise awareness for the campaigns they organized or were part of, organize work and facilitate teamwork among group members, publicize activities and mobilized supporters. Facebook also provided activists with a more effective way of identifying their target constituents, and thus many offline-based activists leveraged the medium's features to create gathering spaces (e.g., fan pages and fan groups) for their followers. In so doing, they gain access to a pool of potential supporters whom they can mobilize when the need arises. Such an avid and experimental approach was absent among most online-based activists who harnessed a more limited range of technological tools.

## **Theoretical and Methodological Implications**

The findings from this study have several theoretical implications. In this section, I will discuss the implications for collective identity theories and social network theories, methodological contributions and propose suggestions for future research.

### **Implications for Theory**

Firstly, building on the theory of identity multiplexity as proposed by scholars like Hall (1996), I propose that “*collective individualism*” as an alternative to understanding the complexities of collective identity experienced by adopters of user-generated content like blogs. Collective individualism took place as political bloggers transposed between the sense of collectiveness shared with other bloggers and their own individualism. Collective individualism begets answers to questions such as: “When do bloggers feel that they are part of a collective?” and “When do they assert their individualism?” The findings from this study indicate that bloggers asserted their individualism when they used their blogs to achieve their objectives, which took on myriad forms for different bloggers, and when they deployed tactics to increase their readership. Collectiveness took shape when political bloggers participated in activism work which involved other activist bloggers.

Collective individualism also entailed the meeting of minds which, in most instances, translated into face-to-face interactions. Based on the levels of shared consciousness and activism experienced by different groups of political bloggers, I further propose that collective individualism as a concept had to be evaluated and considered based on bloggers’ organizational involvement. The collectiveness experienced by offline-based activist bloggers was distinctively tied to the

organization of which they were members of. On other hand, online-based activist bloggers who took part in ad-hoc organizations which disbanded or became inactive after a campaign ended emphasized their identity as individual bloggers and alluded to experiencing less solidarity with other bloggers who took part in the same causes. Collective individualism was not applicable to non-activist bloggers due to their lack of activist intent, different blogging practices and deliberate distancing from activist bloggers, which were ways that enabled them to maintain their individuality and disassociation from the activist bloggers' community.

Secondly, existing studies examined the effects of multiplex ties (Gould, 1993, Sessions, 2010) on activism participation. However, the findings from this study have several implications for the theoretical distinction between online and offline networks, and between formal and informal networks. Various online platforms such as blogs and forums helped political bloggers to connect to other like-minded activists. However, this study shows that a spillover of connection to the real world context must take place in order to exert influence and build trust. Online ties became formal and informal ties when communication crossed over from cyberspace to the offline setting for activist bloggers. Between formal and informal networks, the study found that there was a migration of ties across networks among political bloggers who were involved in activism work, particularly those who had a longer experience in civil society and opposition politics work. Enduring informal ties that provide friendship and emotional support helped strengthen trust and sustain activism involvement. Theoretically, these findings challenge existing simplistic conceptions of network types and calls for a greater scrutiny of the amorphous and nebulous nature of network ties especially in high-profile or high-risk activism.



This study also challenges existing conceptions and assumptions pertaining to the roles movement organizations play. Grounded in qualitative data, the findings reveal dialectics that exist between offline and online, permanence and temporality. Although activists who belonged to offline-based organizations experienced greater social influence, solidarity, trust and collectiveness with one another, activist bloggers who belonged to online-based groups sustained their communication and participation even after ad-hoc issue-based campaigns had ended. Therefore, online movement groups, although temporal in nature, fostered what Sunstein (2009) termed as “enclave deliberation”, exhibiting the potential of eradicating Graber’s (2001) “communication ghettos” by facilitating participatory communication and expanding activist networks. Future work should examine how the convergence of different network and organizational types can mobilize and sustain activism involvement.

### **Implications for Research**

As established in the literature review, social movement theories have been part of an entrenched tradition of studying collective action and have illuminated the various dynamics which explicate how and why collective action arises. RM theories and the social network perspective explicated the micro-structural factors that result in a movement’s success or failure while NSM theories yielded macro-level analyses that focus on the origins and identity of movements. However, as pointed out by critics such as Langman (2005), most of these studies have, by and large, excluded the role of media in fostering ties and identity, thereby galvanizing collective action. On the other hand, scholarly attempts in understanding the roles Internet technologies play in facilitating collective action have yet to adequately address underlying

dynamics of different social networks and collective identity in influencing activism and activism level.

Grounded in qualitative data, a conceptual framework emerges and this poses as a step towards capturing nuanced variances among different political bloggers in terms of collective identity, social networks and technology use. For instance, it appears that among offline-based activists, there was a strong sense of being part of a collective, a collective that is defined as comprising credible activists who leveraged blogs and various Internet technologies to achieve their activism goals. They expressed strong camaraderie and recognition of one another as part of a socio-political blogging community, and much of the collectiveness they experienced stemmed from the organizations and the campaigns in which they were involved with other activist bloggers. As for online-based activists, what differentiates this group from offline-based activists is that their activism work originated and stemmed from the online setting. The findings suggest that bloggers from this group viewed themselves as bloggers first, and activists second. Unlike offline-based activists who professed that they shared strong bonds marked by solidarity, trust and frequent informal gatherings, the majority of online-based activists related to other fellow political bloggers only on the level of fellow activists. As for non-activists, they preferred to remain independent by not joining any groups or organizations and maintained a distance from activists, thereby shielding themselves from social influence and selective incentives effects.

Further research using a larger sample size of political bloggers will make for a more robust quantitative study to confirm and uncover distinct patterns among the different groups of political bloggers. In so doing, it will generate a theoretically coherent framework which brings together meso-level (social networks), macro-level

(collective identity) concepts and human agency (involvement of activism and strategies used) to elucidate on the “why,” “what,” and “how,” of political blogging as facilitating collective action, enhancing our understanding of diverse types of citizenry engagement. Furthermore, current findings suggest that different network ties and collectiveness are experienced by activists who belong to organizations with an established history and institutional structure and those who take part in transient groups. In-depth interviews with members of these two types of organizations, combined with frames analysis of their collective action rhetoric, will explicate how different types of movement organizations recruit participants and sustain their involvement in activism after a campaign ends.

This study points to an increasing adoption of social media by activists to engage with their publics and push for political and social reforms. For future work, content analyses of activists’ blogs, Facebook and Twitter accounts could be conducted to examine the ways in which activist bloggers use new media to propagate their causes, publicize their activities and mobilize their supporters. This line of investigation will enrich and supplement existing findings generated by first-hand accounts of activist bloggers. At present, there are promising lines of work pertaining to how blogs, social networking sites and micro-blogging sites are used for mobilization and organization (see for example, Fiore-Silfvast, 2009; Garrido & Halavais, 2009; Sessions, 2010). However, most of these studies remain in the Western context and are situated in libertarian regimes, resulting in an understudy of technology use in authoritarian regimes where the culture of political communication follows a top-down pattern. Further work along this trajectory situated in alternative political systems will provide insights on the interactions between political economy and technology use.

Another dominant trend in Internet research is the use of various crawling and mining methodologies, backed by visualization software such as Netdraw and NodeXL by Internet scholars and webometrics experts to examine webs of relationships among political entities in cyberspace. Webometrics scholars typically deploy network crawling technologies, large-scale hyperlink network and semantic analysis to examine technology use by individuals and political organizations (see for example, Barnett & Park, 2005; Bruns, Burgess, Highfield, Kirchhoff & Nicolai, 2010; Highfield, Kirchhoff & Nicolai, 2010; Kelly & Etling, 2008; Park, Barnett & Chung, 2010). The structural and relational dynamics uncovered through such analyses—such as the size of the network of a particular population, the main nodes of the network and changes in network characteristics over time—drew implications for political and social transformations. A lacuna in this line of research exists when one attempts to reconcile the meanings of these online maps and the political and social effects experienced by users themselves. This study thus provides the other side of the story through autochthonous by technology users. The next step that I would embark on is to map and analyze the online network of political bloggers as represented by their blogs and triangulate these findings with survey and interview data. For instance, in the context of political bloggers, online mapping techniques combined with social network analysis will identify central players as well as peripheral players in the blogosphere and the types of functions they play in the online network. Interview and survey data could then be used to uncover the factors which account for bloggers' positions in the network and whether their positions are linked to specific activism strategies or organizational roles held in the real world. Merging these two approaches of study will shed light on the overlaps between virtual and real world dynamics.

## **Implications for Method**

Current forays into studying social networking relationships by Internet users is usually based on the premise that these political parties, organizations and blogs are represented by their websites and blogs. As discussed in the literature review, the analysis of these hyperlinking patterns is characterized by assumptions of intentionality behind an individual's or group's use of hyperlinks. Although useful in depicting online relational ties among organizations and individuals, what these studies generally failed to account for social dynamics and personal motivations underpinning online connections.

By combining interview and survey, this study achieved two objectives. Firstly, it challenges existing assumptions behind hyperlink networks and measures political bloggers' social networks through personal descriptions to ascertain the significance of online social networks in influencing bloggers' participation in collective action. Secondly, through interview and survey, this study is able to ascertain the significance of offline social networks and elucidates the overlaps between offline and online networks. Furthermore, the review of current research work establishes that the primary methods used to examine collective identity in online venues are content and discourse analysis. Although providing illuminating findings on collective identity, these methods do not account for personal motivations and beliefs that contributed to the process of identity formation. Thus, this study fills a methodological gap and contributes to existing scholarly work by eliciting first-hand accounts from political bloggers with varying involvement in activism concerning their perceptions of identity.

The above are the strengths and rationale for the methodology, and at this juncture, I would discuss the key methodological contribution of this study. A

comprehensive survey instrument was developed for this study which captures information pertaining to bloggers' demographics, use and motivations for their blog, involvement in activism, levels of involvement, use of Internet technologies and communication modes used for interaction with other bloggers. Adapting existing scales used in seminal studies in the field of political sociology (e.g., Gould, 1991; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000; Snow, Zurcher & Eklund-Olson, 1980), the survey instrument was designed to measure structural proximity to other activists as well as five relational variables in three types of social networks. Existing social movement scholarship alluded to the importance of social networks in fostering trust (Pfaff, 1986), information-exchange (Snow, Zurcher & Eklund-Olson, 1980) and exerting selective incentives (Klandersman & Oegema, 1987; Zhao, 1998). For this study, I developed scales to capture bloggers' perceptions and attitudes towards each of these variables. In-depth interviews helped to explain statistical findings while generating deeper insights into participants' attitudes.

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION

Scholars from the fields of political communication, media studies and sociology examined the ways in which Internet technologies are becoming a part of the repertoire for collective action. The crossing of geographical boundaries and connection with like-minded individuals and the garnering of support from target constituencies, at times from unexpected audiences, have helped build new types of communities (Meikle, 2002; Roddick, 2001). The ease of publishing information, low cost of adoption, ease of coordinating online and offline activities are some of the plaudits granted to Internet technologies and give rise to what Bruns (2008) termed as “producers” who epitomize the democratization of user-generated media in the context of web 2.0 technologies.

Despite the promises held by Internet technologies and now, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, scholars have highlighted potential issues of Internet-based activism and questioned the ability of online aggregations to engender social and political change. Chase-Dunn and Gills (2005) argued that the diverse and ad hoc nature of transnational movements may lead to poor organization, and a lack of unity among social movements. In his analysis of 20<sup>th</sup> century movements, Charles Tilly (2004) discussed how media amplify audiences for movement actors and perform the role of an echo chamber for activists. In his observations of the increasing prevalence of media and technology use in social movements, Tilly questioned whether, and how, new technologies are transforming social movements, and called for a greater scrutiny of how new forms of organizations and tactics interact with 21<sup>st</sup> century movements.

This study establishes that, in spite of their different demographic profiles and activism agenda, political bloggers in Singapore take part in myriad forms of activism, many of whom are active in the political and civic spheres, while others participate only in online forms of activism. Although there are political bloggers who do not participate in any form of activism (i.e., non-activist bloggers), this study shows that users of user-generated media such as blogs have the capacity to be a part of collectives that work toward common goals and engender political and social change, as opposed to being mere echo chambers and passive citizens. Activist bloggers are also adept at harnessing their blogs, social media and other Internet technologies to achieve their activism goals by disseminating information about their causes, publicizing their activities and campaigns, forging connections and networks with other activists, and embarking on viral activism through social networking sites. As discussed in Chapter 5, blogging facilitates the building of a collective identity with specific blogging practices and a common overarching political ideology pulling disparate bloggers together. However, this study affirms the importance of social networks, particularly offline social networks comprising informal and formal ties which help to build strong ties and trust, exert social influence and social selective incentives effects, and facilitate information-seeking. As such, political bloggers' participation in activism is mitigated by their structural proximity to, and relational dynamics with, other activists.

### **Blogging as the New “The Personal is Political”?**

Cognizant of existing claims and questions arising in the field pertaining to technologies as stewards of political and social change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this study focuses on political bloggers as actors in collective action. Existing anecdotal



observations and scholarly literature discussed in earlier chapters provide ample evidence of how blogs are empowering regular citizens to become publishers and bearers of news and information. Technological features such as hyperlinks, comment and trackback functions, facilitate the building of communities of bloggers who survey “Who is saying what” online, who seek out, and interact with, one another. In Singapore, the comfort of anonymity and the low cost barriers to participation in online activities which focus on addressing social injustice and promoting parliamentary reforms (e.g., petitioning for Repeal 377A and No To Rape campaigns) are engendering greater political participation among the local citizenry. A spillover of activities from the online to offline context is also evident as activists leverage blogs to organize activities and mobilize supporters to lend their support, as observed by the protests at Speakers’ Corner for the mini bonds and transport cost hike issues, and annual events such as PinkDot, the latter an initiative to foster acceptance of sexual minority groups. This study sets out with the overarching objective of uncovering and explicating the dynamics which account for the different levels of activism involvement among political bloggers in Singapore. Without prejudicing against specific types of involvement, this study grounds the conception of activism on political bloggers’ operationalizations and experiences. What results is a study that investigates activism in both online and offline contexts.

Three groups of political bloggers emerged from the study—offline-based activists, online-based activists and non-activists. These bloggers are grouped according to their affiliation with different types of organizations. Although what binds all three groups together is their common interest in social and political issues in Singapore, and the devotion of time and effort in providing commentary and analyses on these issues, different levels of engagement in both online and offline

civil society activities are observed. Reconciling the seemingly paradoxical nature of collective identity and the individualistic nature of blogging as an activity, this study ascertains that a distinct collective identity characterized by well-articulated shared consciousness, distinct blogging practices and a common adversary differentiated activist bloggers from non-activist bloggers, and performed a galvanizing force for activist bloggers. A self-imposed separation from the community of bloggers on the part of non-activist bloggers is based on their unwillingness to be associated with the idea of activism and an “activist community.” Adding to the lack of interest to take part in civil society work, the negative association of activism with civil disobedience in Singapore is a further impediment. Writing about and expressing their views, under a cloak of anonymity, was the extent to which non-activist bloggers would go in terms of political participation. Extending existing theories on collective identity, this study proposes that “collective individualism” makes it possible for political bloggers to experience belongingness to a collective while striving to maintain their own individuality both in terms of blogging style and activist interest.

This study shows that social networks play an integral role among political bloggers involved in collective action. Incorporating both online and offline networks into the analysis, the study establishes that online networks play a critical role in establishing the foundation for the formation of alliances and friendships by connecting like-minded individuals who oppose political and media hegemony, and have the interest and determination to be agents of change. By exposing political bloggers who are predisposed to being active in politics and civic activities, Internet technologies build critical bridges initiating bloggers into activism when they meet activists online. Besides this, no qualitative and quantitative evidence suggests that online networks play a significant role in cultivating trust, information-exchange, and

exerting social influence and selective incentives. What matter are formal ties and informal ties which play important roles in terms of exerting social influence, fostering strong ties and trust. Strong ties and trust are critical to offline-based activists who risk running afoul of the law due to the nature of their activism work (e.g., flyering, holding protests and demonstrations). Enduring friendships that provide support and cultivate solidarity are critical to sustaining their activism work. Many informal and formal ties originate from the online context (as in the case of Evan, Madcow, Mandy, Rachel and V5), validating the significance of online networks in fostering connections among like-minded individuals. However, it is evident in the case of activist bloggers who have been active for some time, their online connections subsequently led to formal memberships. Over time, formal ties become friendships, which provide trust and strong tie. These findings challenge existing conceptions of network types and calls for a greater scrutiny on the degree of activism involvement and nature of activism (high-risk versus low-risk) which account for the migration of ties.

Through qualitative analysis, this study proposes a conceptual framework that identifies the factors involved in political bloggers' engagement with opposition politics and civil society work. Specifically, it elucidates the role of collective identity and social networks, and their links to different levels of activism participation among political bloggers in Singapore. The findings point to differences among offline-based activists, online-based activists and non-activist bloggers. Among offline-based activists, whose activism work primarily take place in the offline context and who belong to opposition political parties and civil society organizations, there was a strong collective identity and enduring network ties with other activist bloggers. The strong ties, trust and exchange of information present in their informal and formal

networks play important roles in their lives as activists. As for online-based activists, whose first foray into activism took place in the online context and who subsequently became involved in campaigns and activities in the offline context, their relationships with other activists are based on a professional basis and interactions take place on a need-basis only. Perhaps, given time, as online-based activities become more engaged in their organizations and activism work, they may experience a migration of social ties akin to offline-based activists. The degree of community is experienced to an even lesser extent by political bloggers who keep their activism participation to the online context only and do not even join online groups. In terms of using Internet technologies for activism purposes, this group adopts a more casual attitude compared with offline-based and online-based activists who articulate specific objectives for their blog and Internet use. Non-activist bloggers who deliberately stay away from any form of activism work do not experience any collective identity with other political bloggers. Their social ties with other activists are also limited, due to their unwillingness to be associated with activism and civil society organizations.

Beyond explicating the roles of collective identity and social networks in influencing participation in collective action, this study also sheds light on the nature of activism in Singapore. Firstly, given the size of the nation-state, it is perhaps unsurprising that the network of activists is a small one. What is more interesting is that political bloggers who are activists, especially online-based activists, are involved in myriad causes. It is a common phenomenon for activist bloggers who advocate and champion their pet causes to join hands and work together in new campaigns. Bloggers 13 is only one example of such an effort. Bloggers who are involved in myriad causes such as opposition politics, media censorship, and gay rights equality, cast aside their different interests and came together in an initiative advocating for

policy changes pertaining to Internet regulation. The support rendered during the AWARE Extraordinary General Meeting involved not just women who were members of the non-governmental organization, but also galvanized activists who were involved in causes that were not directly related to women's rights and equality issues in Singapore. The overlap of activist networks is also evident in the sustained communication that takes place even after specific campaigns come to an end as activist bloggers stay in touch and share information with one another. The fleeting and ephemeral nature of these issue-based groups reduces costs and barriers to participation; perhaps more importantly, these groups perform the role of intermediaries which galvanize politicized individuals with varied pet activism causes.

Secondly, unlike other countries, especially those with libertarian political systems where the majority of empirical work on social movements and networks were conducted, social networks were found to exert limited effects in terms of social influence and pressure in the local context. Political culture could account for why political bloggers who took part in online activism only reported low perceived social influence and selective incentives in their interviews, and why non-activists maintained a distance from the activist and socio-political blogging communities. As discussed in Chapter 2, in order to maintain social and religious harmony in the young nation-state, a set of laws and regulations were put in place to govern offline discourse and assemblies. These included Internet Security Act and Sedition Act. When Internet technologies became more ubiquitous due to successful government initiatives to develop an IT-savvy population, these regulations extended to the cyber sphere as well. Activists such as Seelan Palay were arrested and charged with taking part in unlawful activities such as demonstrations and protests without applying for a permit. As such, activism in Singapore has a negative connotation and is usually

associated with civil disobedience, and this is supported by interviews with non-activist bloggers. One's decision to take part in civil society campaigns and politics is hence based on one's assessment of the costs and risks involved, and one's perception of his or her ability to add value to the campaign, and less likely to be an outcome of social pressure.

Although this study concludes that online networks perform mainly a bridging role without yielding significant effects in affecting political bloggers' decision to take part in collective action, it establishes that Internet technologies are an important component of movement actors' repertoire of tools. As explained earlier, given the stigma and potential costs of involvement and association with organizations and activists in the real world context, the Internet has emerged to be both a useful and effective tool to circumvent constraints in the real world, to network with other individuals who believe in the same cause, and to foster a sense of community. However, that said, this study establishes that for one to become more involved as an activist, one's online social ties would have to extend beyond the virtual context. Only in the offline context, are trust and solidarity cultivated. For offline-based activists and several online-based activists who assume important roles in organizing public activities or being engaged in visible advocacy work, Internet technologies appear to be an indispensable part of their lives. In addition to leveraging their blogs and other technologies to publicize their causes and activities, activist bloggers are also quick to exploit the personal nature of blogs and social media to widen their reach to and recruit potential supporters. Social media such as Facebook are also emerging to be an important tool for activist bloggers to form communities of fans or supporters for future mobilization, allowing them to embark on viral or guerilla activism.

## **Limitations of the Study**

This section discusses the study's limitations and proposes directions for future work. One of the study's limitations resides in the method in which social network data was collected. Existing social movement studies typically selected a specific movement or campaign for analysis. To measure social networks and ascertain the effects of network variables, existing studies used the fixed-list method where participants were given a list of individuals who belonged to the same organization or who took part in the same movement activity. They then had to rate the listed individuals on various social network variables (see for example, Cable, Walsh & Warland, 1988; Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000; Tindall, 2002). Such a method of collecting data clearly minimized recall problems. Another common approach was the use of secondary data in the form of archival information, which included membership details and application forms collected by movement organizations (see for example, Andrews & Biggs, 2006; Fernandez & McAdam, 1988; Gould, 1991; McAdam, 1986).

In this study, the subject of study was political bloggers whose involvement in activism and organizational affiliations were unknown. As such, I adopted the approach of getting respondents to select one activist activity in which they participated and asking them to list individuals who were part of the same campaign. To capture similar data from non-activist bloggers, they had to identify individuals from the three networks who participated in at least one activity. Such an approach could have resulted in recall errors on the part of the respondents when identifying contacts for three networks. An alternative would have been to select a particular organization or campaign as the subject of study and, from there, to identify bloggers who were involved. However, the small population of political bloggers combined

with the nascent and ad-hoc nature of activism work in Singapore could have resulted in low or nil responses. In addition, pre-selection of a specific organization or campaign would have excluded non-activist bloggers from the study from the onset, as well as precluded information which sheds lights on the diversity of activism causes and involvements.

The other limitation of this study is its sample size. Although the response rate garnered for the survey was 33.9%, the sample size was admittedly small. Although mitigated by the small population size of political bloggers in Singapore, the breakdown of respondents into the three groups of political bloggers for further statistical analysis would not be feasible as the numbers would be too small to yield significant effects. Thus, the sample size inhibited further correlational analysis between social network variables and blogger types, as well as post-hoc analyses to determine differences among the three networks in terms of relational variables. In addition, there is an unknown degree of skewness or bias due to possible over-representation of specific groups (particularly among offline-based activists) within the sample. I also could not ascertain the sample's representativeness due to unknown characteristics of the population and the fact that personal profile information was not available on the majority of blogs.

In addition, causal directionality pertaining to network effects and political bloggers' participation in activism could not be established due to the nature of cross-sectional data. One could argue that the presence of social contacts in informal, formal and online networks influenced bloggers' decision positively to be part of a cause. Conversely, the presence of social contacts could be an outcome of one's involvement in collective action, which exposed the bloggers to other activists. However, interviews provided insights into the relationship between social networks



and activism participation and helped to overcome this limitation to some extent. Extensive interview data obtained from 41 in-depth interviews established that structural proximity to other activists is an important factor that influenced political bloggers' involvement in activism.

Finally, the generalizability of findings from this study must be considered, relative to other blogging practices and regime types in other countries. It is important to be explicit that the theoretical discussion and predictions in this study are conditioned by the historical and political variables in Singapore context within which blogging and activism developed. The authoritative stance adopted by the government in regulating societal discourse could have led to the burgeoning of anti-establishment voices and aggregations in the cyberspace. Anonymity and low barriers to publication cultivate a conducive environment and to a large extent safe haven for the expression of dissenting views. Preliminary observations of the Singapore blogosphere, substantiated by interview data in this study, suggest that the blogosphere in Singapore is characterized by bloggers assuming the role of alternative media, critics who provide commentary and analyses of Singapore politics and government policies. This is in stark contrast to the U.S. context where studies have shown the blogosphere to be a largely partisan one, split between the liberals and conservatives (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Hargittai, Gallo & Kane, 2008). The differences in political culture, regulatory regime and media system have also led to bloggers assuming different roles in both countries. Although set in the context of Singapore, this study nevertheless reflects a critical extension in a literature that is typically North American centric and calls for comparative analyses of how new media technologies interact with collective action in authoritarian and democratic regimes.

In conclusion, using the Singapore context as the site of study, this dissertation contributes to existing scholarship in new media and activism by generating empirically tested findings on bloggers and collective action. The evidence supports the utopist rhetoric pertaining to the transformative power of blogs as put forward by its proponents. However, the evidence also indicates that a strong sense of collective identity and the migration of online to offline social ties are necessary for bloggers to participate in active citizenry beyond blogging and other online actions. By developing a conceptual framework that merges collective identity, social networks and human agency, this study paves the way for the development of a theoretically coherent approach to examine new media and collective action.

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## Appendix A: Population List

No.	Name of Blog	URL
1	Mr. Brown: L'infantile terrible of Singapore	<a href="http://www.mrbrown.com/">http://www.mrbrown.com/</a>
2	The Online Citizen	<a href="http://theonlinecitizen.com/">http://theonlinecitizen.com/</a>
3	Singapore Angle	<a href="http://www.singaporeangle.com/">http://www.singaporeangle.com/</a>
4	The Singapore Daily	<a href="http://singaporedaily.net/">http://singaporedaily.net/</a>
5	My Sketchbook	<a href="http://seijieiga.blogspot.com/">http://seijieiga.blogspot.com/</a>
6	Siew Kum Hong	<a href="http://siewkumhong.blogspot.com/">http://siewkumhong.blogspot.com/</a>
7	Diary of a Singaporean Mind	<a href="http://singaporemind.blogspot.com/">http://singaporemind.blogspot.com/</a>
8	nofearSingapore	<a href="http://nofearsingapore.blogspot.com/">http://nofearsingapore.blogspot.com/</a>
9	To Fix a Mocking Peasant	<a href="http://mollymeek.livejournal.com/">http://mollymeek.livejournal.com/</a>
10	Yaw Shin Leong@WP	<a href="http://yawshinleong.blogspot.com/">http://yawshinleong.blogspot.com/</a>
11	Singapore Alternatives	<a href="http://singaporealternatives.blogspot.com/">http://singaporealternatives.blogspot.com/</a>
12	Only "objective" and "factual" political films please, we're Singaporeans	<a href="http://singaporerebel.blogspot.com/">http://singaporerebel.blogspot.com/</a>
13	Singabloodypore	<a href="http://singabloodypore.rsfblog.org/">http://singabloodypore.rsfblog.org/</a>
14	Sgpolitics.net	<a href="http://www.sgpolitics.net/">http://www.sgpolitics.net/</a>
15	The Anti Neo-Democracy Theorist	<a href="http://antineodem.wordpress.com/">http://antineodem.wordpress.com/</a>
16	Singapore Election Watch	<a href="http://singaporeelection.blogspot.com/">http://singaporeelection.blogspot.com/</a>
17	geraldgiam.sg	<a href="http://geraldgiam.sg">http://geraldgiam.sg</a>
18	Winter is Coming	<a href="http://nedstark.wordpress.com/">http://nedstark.wordpress.com/</a>
19	Singapore News Alternatives	<a href="http://singaporenewsalternative.blogspot.com/">http://singaporenewsalternative.blogspot.com/</a>
20	Singapore Politics	<a href="http://singaporegovt.blogspot.com/">http://singaporegovt.blogspot.com/</a>
21	Hear Ye! Hear Ye!	<a href="http://aaron-ng.info/blog/">http://aaron-ng.info/blog/</a>
22	The Lionheart	<a href="http://leounheort.blogspot.com/">http://leounheort.blogspot.com/</a>
23	The Students' Sketchpad	<a href="http://studentssketchpad.blogspot.com/">http://studentssketchpad.blogspot.com/</a>
24	A Singaporean	<a href="http://perrytong.blogspot.com/">http://perrytong.blogspot.com/</a>
25	My Singapore News	<a href="http://uk.asiancorrespondent.com/my-singapore-news">http://uk.asiancorrespondent.com/my-singapore-news</a>

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name of Blog</b>	<b>URL</b>
26	Useless Rantings of a Few Disgruntled S'poreans	<a href="http://disgruntledsporean.blogspot.com/">http://disgruntledsporean.blogspot.com/</a>
27	James Gomez News	<a href="http://jamesgomeznews.blogspot.com/">http://jamesgomeznews.blogspot.com/</a>
28	Illusio	<a href="http://akikonomu.blogspot.com/">http://akikonomu.blogspot.com/</a>
29	Singaland	<a href="http://singaland.blogspot.com/">http://singaland.blogspot.com/</a>
30	Tan Kin Lian's Blog	<a href="http://tankinlian.blogspot.com/">http://tankinlian.blogspot.com/</a>
31	Heavenly Sword	<a href="http://heavenly-sword.blogspot.com/">http://heavenly-sword.blogspot.com/</a>
32	Dansong	<a href="http://dansong.blogspot.com/">http://dansong.blogspot.com/</a>
33	Fearfully Opinionated	<a href="http://fearfullyopinionated.blogspot.com/">http://fearfullyopinionated.blogspot.com/</a>
34	The Police State	<a href="http://thepolicestate.blogspot.com/">http://thepolicestate.blogspot.com/</a>
35	In the land of the blind, one eye man is king	<a href="http://singaporepeasants.blogspot.com/">http://singaporepeasants.blogspot.com/</a>
36	Perspective Unlimited	<a href="http://perspectiveunlimited.blogspot.com/">http://perspectiveunlimited.blogspot.com/</a>
37	Chia Ti Lik's Blog	<a href="http://chiatilik.wordpress.com/">http://chiatilik.wordpress.com/</a>
38	Musings	<a href="http://magnezium.blogspot.com/">http://magnezium.blogspot.com/</a>
39	The Universe Within	<a href="http://tehsitalk.blogspot.com/">http://tehsitalk.blogspot.com/</a>
40	Urbanrant	<a href="http://urbanrant.blogspot.com/">http://urbanrant.blogspot.com/</a>
41	Die neue Welle	<a href="http://sturmdesjahrhunderts.wordpress.com/">http://sturmdesjahrhunderts.wordpress.com/</a>
42	SG Rally: The Singapore Elections Archive	<a href="http://sgrally.blogspot.com/">http://sgrally.blogspot.com/</a>
43	la nausea	<a href="http://etrepoursoi.wordpress.com/">http://etrepoursoi.wordpress.com/</a>
44	Pseudonymity	<a href="http://pseudonymity.wordpress.com/">http://pseudonymity.wordpress.com/</a>
45	Politics through the eyes of a heartlander	<a href="http://singaporepolitics.wordpress.com/">http://singaporepolitics.wordpress.com/</a>
46	Vox Leo - A Singaporean Voice	<a href="http://voxleo.blogspot.com/">http://voxleo.blogspot.com/</a>
47	The Singapore Commentator	<a href="http://sg-comment.blogspot.com/">http://sg-comment.blogspot.com/</a>
48	A Blog Day's Work	<a href="http://tankianhwee.wordpress.com/">http://tankianhwee.wordpress.com/</a>
49	Singapore Life and Times	<a href="http://singaporelifetimes.blogspot.com/">http://singaporelifetimes.blogspot.com/</a>
50	Singapore Kopi Talk	<a href="http://singaporekopitok.blogspot.com/">http://singaporekopitok.blogspot.com/</a>
51	Singapore and the stuff	<a href="http://singaporeandthestuff.blogspot.com/">http://singaporeandthestuff.blogspot.com/</a>
52	Seelan Palay's Blog	<a href="http://seelanpalay.blogspot.com/">http://seelanpalay.blogspot.com/</a>

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name of Blog</b>	<b>URL</b>
53	Ambiguity	<a href="http://theinkhorn.wordpress.com/">http://theinkhorn.wordpress.com/</a>
54	Feed me to the fish	<a href="http://feedmetothefish.blogspot.com/">http://feedmetothefish.blogspot.com/</a>
55	Times they are a-changin'	<a href="http://pngapore.blogspot.com/">http://pngapore.blogspot.com/</a>
56	Mathia Lee- Plans and Preoccupations	<a href="http://mathialee.wordpress.com/">http://mathialee.wordpress.com/</a>
57	Jacob 69er	<a href="http://jacob69.wordpress.com">http://jacob69.wordpress.com</a>
58	Power to the Singaporean People	<a href="http://power2thepeoplesg.blogspot.com/">http://power2thepeoplesg.blogspot.com/</a>
59	SingaporeSurf	<a href="http://www.myapplemenu.com/singapore/">http://www.myapplemenu.com/singapore/</a>
60	Bishan Busy Body	<a href="http://hochoonhiong.blogspot.com/">http://hochoonhiong.blogspot.com/</a>
61	Little People Press	<a href="http://littlepeoplepress.blogspot.com/">http://littlepeoplepress.blogspot.com/</a>
62	Mr. Wang Says So	<a href="http://mrwangsaysso.blogspot.com/">http://mrwangsaysso.blogspot.com/</a>
63	Kelvin Teo Writes	<a href="http://kelvinteowrites.wordpress.com/">http://kelvinteowrites.wordpress.com/</a>
64	Catherinelim.Sg	<a href="http://catherinelim.sg/">http://catherinelim.sg/</a>
65	Blowin' in the wind	<a href="http://www.pressrun.net/weblog/">http://www.pressrun.net/weblog/</a>
66	Singaporean Skeptic	<a href="http://singaporeanskeptic.blogspot.com/">http://singaporeanskeptic.blogspot.com/</a>
67	Sam's Thoughts	<a href="http://thinkingbetterthinkingmeta.blogspot.com/">http://thinkingbetterthinkingmeta.blogspot.com/</a>
68	Today in Singapore	<a href="http://todayinsingapore.wordpress.com/">http://todayinsingapore.wordpress.com/</a>
69	Rachel Zeng's Blog	<a href="http://rachelzeng.wordpress.com/">http://rachelzeng.wordpress.com/</a>
70	The Grand Moofti Speaks	<a href="http://imranwrites.blogspot.com/">http://imranwrites.blogspot.com/</a>
71	Singapore Social and Political Thoughts	<a href="http://singapore-lighthouse.blogspot.com/">http://singapore-lighthouse.blogspot.com/</a>
72	Singapore Recalcitrant	<a href="http://singaporerecalcitrant.blogspot.com/">http://singaporerecalcitrant.blogspot.com/</a>
73	Ravi Philemon	<a href="http://www.raviphilemon.net/">http://www.raviphilemon.net/</a>
74	The P65 Blog	<a href="http://p65.sg/newp65/">http://p65.sg/newp65/</a>
75	Under the willow tree – where we all like to be	<a href="http://utwt.blogspot.com/">http://utwt.blogspot.com/</a>
76	Journalism.sg	<a href="http://journalism.sg/">http://journalism.sg/</a>
77	Frankly Speaking	<a href="http://frankcomment.blogspot.com/">http://frankcomment.blogspot.com/</a>
78	Flaneurose	<a href="http://flaneurose.blogspot.com/">http://flaneurose.blogspot.com/</a>
79	Zach's Thought Blot	<a href="http://zachisaiahchia.wordpress.com/">http://zachisaiahchia.wordpress.com/</a>

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name of Blog</b>	<b>URL</b>
80	Groundnotes	<a href="http://groundnotes.wordpress.com/">http://groundnotes.wordpress.com/</a>
81	Random Thoughts of a Free Thinker	<a href="http://searchingforenlightenment.blogspot.com/">http://searchingforenlightenment.blogspot.com/</a>
82	Spotlight on Singapore	<a href="http://rogerpoh.wordpress.com/">http://rogerpoh.wordpress.com/</a>
83	Trapper's Swamp	<a href="http://callantham.org/">http://callantham.org/</a>
84	SilentAssassin's Archive	<a href="http://silentassassinarchive.wordpress.com/">http://silentassassinarchive.wordpress.com/</a>
85	Rojo Cancer	<a href="http://rojocancer.blogspot.com/">http://rojocancer.blogspot.com/</a>
86	Master of the Obvious	<a href="http://www.motochan.com/">http://www.motochan.com/</a>
87	Tattooed Banker	<a href="http://tattooedbanker.blogspot.com/">http://tattooedbanker.blogspot.com/</a>
88	Simply Gab	<a href="http://simplygab.blogspot.com/">http://simplygab.blogspot.com/</a>
89	This Lush Garden Within - Mr. Biao	<a href="http://www.mrbiao.com/">http://www.mrbiao.com/</a>
90	Sg Pirate Game	<a href="http://sgpirategame.blogspot.com/">http://sgpirategame.blogspot.com/</a>
91	Musings from the Lion City	<a href="http://hardhitting-nobs.blogspot.com/">http://hardhitting-nobs.blogspot.com/</a>
92	Who Moved My Singapore Cheese	<a href="http://whomovedmysingaporecheese.blogspot.com/">http://whomovedmysingaporecheese.blogspot.com/</a>
93	The one-dimensional island	<a href="http://onedimensionalman.wordpress.com/">http://onedimensionalman.wordpress.com/</a>
94	A Singapore Renaissance	<a href="http://sporenaissance.blogspot.com/">http://sporenaissance.blogspot.com/</a>
95	Bernard Aw's Blog	<a href="http://bernardaw.wordpress.com/">http://bernardaw.wordpress.com/</a>
96	Taikiew	<a href="http://taikiew.net/">http://taikiew.net/</a>
97	Miyagi.sg	<a href="http://miyagi.sg/">http://miyagi.sg/</a>
98	Kennethism	<a href="http://kennethism.com/">http://kennethism.com/</a>
99	Utopia8787	<a href="http://utopia8787.blogspot.com/">http://utopia8787.blogspot.com/</a>
100	Empty Vessel	<a href="http://iantan.org/">http://iantan.org/</a>
101	Chee Wai's Random Musing	<a href="http://houganger.blogspot.com/">http://houganger.blogspot.com/</a>
102	a2ed	<a href="http://www.according2ed.com/">http://www.according2ed.com/</a>
103	Jaslyn Go's Blog	<a href="http://jaslyngo.sgpolitics.net/">http://jaslyngo.sgpolitics.net/</a>
104	Readings from a Political Duo-able	<a href="http://aussgworldpolitics.wordpress.com/">http://aussgworldpolitics.wordpress.com/</a>
105	The Bosonic State	<a href="http://thebosonicstate.blogspot.com/">http://thebosonicstate.blogspot.com/</a>
106	On Nation and State	<a href="http://onnationandstate.wordpress.com/">http://onnationandstate.wordpress.com/</a>



<b>No.</b>	<b>Name of Blog</b>	<b>URL</b>
107	Chee Siok Chin's Blog	<a href="http://cheesiokchin.wordpress.com/">http://cheesiokchin.wordpress.com/</a>
108	Barnyard Chorus	<a href="http://barnyardchorus.blogspot.com/">http://barnyardchorus.blogspot.com/</a>
109	Carpe Diem	<a href="http://catscarpediem.blogspot.com/">http://catscarpediem.blogspot.com/</a>
110	I'm Getting Personal	<a href="http://imgettingpersonal.blogspot.com/">http://imgettingpersonal.blogspot.com/</a>
111	The Magic Within	<a href="http://benjamincheah.wordpress.com/">http://benjamincheah.wordpress.com/</a>
112	Singapore Dino	<a href="http://singaporedino.blogspot.com/">http://singaporedino.blogspot.com/</a>
113	Singapore Dissident	<a href="http://singaporedissident.blogspot.com/">http://singaporedissident.blogspot.com/</a>
114	Singaporegovt.blogspot	<a href="http://singaporegovt.blogspot.com/">http://singaporegovt.blogspot.com/</a>
115	A Xenoboy in Sg	<a href="http://xenoboysg.blogspot.com/">http://xenoboysg.blogspot.com/</a>
116	Singapore: New Media, Politics and the Law	<a href="http://singaporemedia.blogspot.com/">http://singaporemedia.blogspot.com/</a>
117	Simple is the Reason of My Heart	<a href="http://bleongcw.typepad.com/simple_is_the_reason_of_m/">http://bleongcw.typepad.com/simple_is_the_reason_of_m/</a>
118	Desperatebeep	<a href="http://desperatebeep.blogspot.com/">http://desperatebeep.blogspot.com/</a>
119	My Thoughts	<a href="http://gangasudhan.com/">http://gangasudhan.com/</a>
120	Furry Brown Dog	<a href="http://furrybrowndog.wordpress.com/">http://furrybrowndog.wordpress.com/</a>
121	Kaffein-nated	<a href="http://kaffein-nated.blogspot.com/">http://kaffein-nated.blogspot.com/</a>
122	Yawning Bread	<a href="http://www.yawningbread.org">www.yawningbread.org</a>
123	Tan Tarn How	<a href="http://tantarnhow.blogspot.com/">http://tantarnhow.blogspot.com/</a>
124	The Anti-Neo Democracy Theorist	<a href="http://antineodem.wordpress.com/">http://antineodem.wordpress.com/</a>
125	Beyond Sg	<a href="http://beyondsg.typepad.com/beyondsg/current_affairs/index.html">http://beyondsg.typepad.com/beyondsg/current_affairs/index.html</a>
126	Bernard Chen	<a href="http://bernardchen.wordpress.com/">http://bernardchen.wordpress.com/</a>
127	Dr John Yam	<a href="http://drjohnyam.blogspot.com/">http://drjohnyam.blogspot.com/</a>
128	Choongyong.com	<a href="http://www.choongyong.com/">http://www.choongyong.com/</a>
129	When I'm Bored	<a href="http://ngsb.blogspot.com/">http://ngsb.blogspot.com/</a>
130	Sylvia Lim's Blog	<a href="http://sylvialimsblog.blogspot.com/">http://sylvialimsblog.blogspot.com/</a>
131	Yi Qu Tong Gong	<a href="http://chenjianhui.wordpress.com/">http://chenjianhui.wordpress.com/</a>
132	Parka's Singapore Cartoons	<a href="http://parkatoons.blogspot.com/">http://parkatoons.blogspot.com/</a>
133	Made in Singapore	<a href="http://made-in-singapore.blogspot.com/">http://made-in-singapore.blogspot.com/</a>

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name of Blog</b>	<b>URL</b>
134	Mummy Monster	<a href="http://mummymonster.blogspot.com/">http://mummymonster.blogspot.com/</a>
135	James Gomez	<a href="http://jamesgomeznews.com/blog/">http://jamesgomeznews.com/blog/</a>
136	Convex Set	<a href="http://convexset.blogspot.com/">http://convexset.blogspot.com/</a>
137	The Young Republic	<a href="http://youngrepublic.blogspot.com/">http://youngrepublic.blogspot.com/</a>
138	Zuco's Blog	<a href="http://blog.gerek.org/zuco.php">http://blog.gerek.org/zuco.php</a>
139	Sgfrag.net	<a href="http://sgfrag.net/">http://sgfrag.net/</a>
140	Aussie Pete	<a href="http://www.aussiepete.com/">http://www.aussiepete.com/</a>
141	Ringisei	<a href="http://ringisei.wordpress.com/">http://ringisei.wordpress.com/</a>
142	The Kentang	<a href="http://thekentang.blogspot.com/">http://thekentang.blogspot.com/</a>
143	Singapore's Anti-Death Penalty Campaign Justice for Chee Soon Juan, Singapore's Prisoner of Conscience	<a href="http://changi-gallow.blogspot.com/">http://changi-gallow.blogspot.com/</a>
144	Roderick's Journal	<a href="http://cheesoonjuan.blogspot.com/">http://cheesoonjuan.blogspot.com/</a>
145	Roderick's Journal	<a href="http://rodsjournal.wordpress.com/">http://rodsjournal.wordpress.com/</a>
146	Singapore Peak Oil	<a href="http://sgentropy.blogspot.com/">http://sgentropy.blogspot.com/</a>
147	News Release by Uncle Yap	<a href="http://uncleyap-news.blogspot.com/">http://uncleyap-news.blogspot.com/</a>
148	Star Dr Anthony Ng	<a href="http://dranthonyng.blogspot.com/">http://dranthonyng.blogspot.com/</a>
149	The Matrix Island	<a href="http://matrixisland.blogspot.com/">http://matrixisland.blogspot.com/</a>
150	You Have A Choice	<a href="http://salemboy81.blog.friendster.com/">http://salemboy81.blog.friendster.com/</a>
151	My Life No Important	<a href="http://ghormax.blogspot.com/">http://ghormax.blogspot.com/</a>
152	I Came, I Saw, I Solved It	<a href="http://i-came-i-saw-i-solved-it.blogspot.com/">http://i-came-i-saw-i-solved-it.blogspot.com/</a>
153	Future of Singapore	<a href="http://derekwee.blogspot.com/">http://derekwee.blogspot.com/</a>
154	LeongSzeHian	<a href="http://leongszehian.blogspot.com/">http://leongszehian.blogspot.com/</a>
155	Citizzen	<a href="http://citizzena.blogspot.com/">http://citizzena.blogspot.com/</a>
156	Singapore Media Watch	<a href="http://mediawatchsg.blogspot.com/">http://mediawatchsg.blogspot.com/</a>
157	Singapore Watch	<a href="http://singaporewatch.org/">http://singaporewatch.org/</a>
158	Diary of an Island	<a href="http://diaryisland.blogspot.com/">http://diaryisland.blogspot.com/</a>
159	Air04 (Niece of Air39)	<a href="http://air04.blogspot.com/">http://air04.blogspot.com/</a>
160	Singapore Donkey	<a href="http://singaporedonkey.wordpress.com/">http://singaporedonkey.wordpress.com/</a>

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name of Blog</b>	<b>URL</b>
161	Black or White	<a href="http://blackorwhite2005.blogspot.com/">http://blackorwhite2005.blogspot.com/</a>
162	Reconsiderations	<a href="http://channel-x.blogspot.com/">http://channel-x.blogspot.com/</a>
163	Ed's Blog – Vox	<a href="http://according2ed.vox.com/">http://according2ed.vox.com/</a>
164	Ian on the Red Dot	<a href="http://ian.onthereddot.com/">http://ian.onthereddot.com/</a>
165	Cognitive Dissonance	<a href="http://cognitivedissonancesg.blogspot.com/">http://cognitivedissonancesg.blogspot.com/</a>
166	Singapore Perspectives	<a href="http://sgperspectives.blogspot.com/">http://sgperspectives.blogspot.com/</a>
167	Singapore Heartlander	<a href="http://sg-heartlander.blogspot.com/">http://sg-heartlander.blogspot.com/</a>
168	Seiksi Matashuyrmouf	<a href="http://sieteoch7-8.blogspot.com/">http://sieteoch7-8.blogspot.com/</a>
169	DominicSoon.com	<a href="http://www.dominicsoon.com/blog/">http://www.dominicsoon.com/blog/</a>
170	Whispers from the Heart	<a href="http://whispersfromheart.blogspot.com/">http://whispersfromheart.blogspot.com/</a>
171	Double Yellow's Musings	<a href="http://doubleyellow.blogspot.com/">http://doubleyellow.blogspot.com/</a>
172	Capitalist Infidel	<a href="http://capitalistinfidel.wordpress.com/">http://capitalistinfidel.wordpress.com/</a>
173	Cavelierio	<a href="http://cavalierio.blogspot.com/">http://cavalierio.blogspot.com/</a>
174	Blogger Samurai	<a href="http://bushidoblog.wordpress.com/">http://bushidoblog.wordpress.com/</a>
175	Majulah! Singapore through my eyes.	<a href="http://youngsingaporean.blogspot.com/2010/01/locals-lost-again-to-foreigners-talents.html">http://youngsingaporean.blogspot.com/2010/01/locals-lost-again-to-foreigners-talents.html</a>
176	Guanyinmiao's Musings	<a href="http://guanyinmiao.wordpress.com/">http://guanyinmiao.wordpress.com/</a>
177	Air-Conditioned Nation	<a href="http://cherian.blogspot.com/">http://cherian.blogspot.com/</a>
178	Bad News on the Doorstep	<a href="http://badnewsonthedoorsstep.blogspot.com/">http://badnewsonthedoorsstep.blogspot.com/</a>
179	Political Views of Singaporeans	<a href="http://www.politicaldiscussions.blogspot.com/">http://www.politicaldiscussions.blogspot.com/</a>
180	Waterchild	<a href="http://waterchild.blogdrive.com/">http://waterchild.blogdrive.com/</a>
181	Wertblog	<a href="http://wert-sg.blogspot.com/">http://wert-sg.blogspot.com/</a>
182	Angry Doctor	<a href="http://angrydr.blogspot.com/">http://angrydr.blogspot.com/</a>
183	Shafiie's Blog	<a href="http://shafiie.blogspot.com/">http://shafiie.blogspot.com/</a>
184	Vociferor	<a href="http://vociferor.wordpress.com/">http://vociferor.wordpress.com/</a>
185	The Itch to Write	<a href="http://leelilian.blogspot.com/">http://leelilian.blogspot.com/</a>
186	Article 14	<a href="http://article14.blogspot.com/">http://article14.blogspot.com/</a>
187	Leejuanpat World	<a href="http://leesjuanpatworld.blogspot.com/">http://leesjuanpatworld.blogspot.com/</a>

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name of Blog</b>	<b>URL</b>
188	Everyday's Life in a Snapshot	<a href="http://singaporecitizen.wordpress.com/">http://singaporecitizen.wordpress.com/</a>
189	Hung at Dawn	<a href="http://hungatdawn.wordpress.com/">http://hungatdawn.wordpress.com/</a>
190	Let's Go to Speakers' Corner	<a href="http://letsmentospeakerscorner.blogspot.com/">http://letsmentospeakerscorner.blogspot.com/</a>
191	Singapore Skeptic	<a href="http://singaporeanskeptic.blogspot.com/">http://singaporeanskeptic.blogspot.com/</a>
192	Gimme Some Truth	<a href="http://givemesometruth.wordpress.com/">http://givemesometruth.wordpress.com/</a>
193	Singapore in General	<a href="http://soojenn.blogspot.com/">http://soojenn.blogspot.com/</a>
194	Open Contours	<a href="http://opencontours.wordpress.com/">http://opencontours.wordpress.com/</a>
195	Icarus Flew too High	<a href="http://dlzj.wordpress.com/">http://dlzj.wordpress.com/</a>
196	Molitics	<a href="http://mollymeek.wordpress.com/">http://mollymeek.wordpress.com/</a>
197	Yours Truly Singapore	<a href="http://trulysingapore.wordpress.com/">http://trulysingapore.wordpress.com/</a>
198	Mindboggling Stuff	<a href="http://mindbloggingstuff.blogspot.com/">http://mindbloggingstuff.blogspot.com/</a>
199	The Lookout	<a href="http://thelookout.wordpress.com/">http://thelookout.wordpress.com/</a>
200	Where Bears Roam Free	<a href="http://wherebearsroamfree.blogspot.com/">http://wherebearsroamfree.blogspot.com/</a>
201	De Leviathan	<a href="http://de-leviathan.blogspot.com">http://de-leviathan.blogspot.com</a>
202	Irreligious	<a href="http://irreligiously.blogspot.com/">http://irreligiously.blogspot.com/</a>
203	Laicite	<a href="http://laicite.wordpress.com/">http://laicite.wordpress.com/</a>
204	The Sun Shines on Singapore	<a href="http://thesunshineson.wordpress.com/">http://thesunshineson.wordpress.com/</a>
205	My Little Corner	<a href="http://chantc.blogspot.com/">http://chantc.blogspot.com/</a>
206	The Lycan Times	<a href="http://www.nowhere.per.sg/">http://www.nowhere.per.sg/</a>
207	Covered in His Blood	<a href="http://inhisblood.blogspot.com/2010/03/anti-death-penalty-in-spore.html">http://inhisblood.blogspot.com/2010/03/anti-death-penalty-in-spore.html</a>
208	Sex sells, so does politics	<a href="http://politicssg.blogspot.com/">http://politicssg.blogspot.com/</a>
209	The Rot Within	<a href="http://rot.blogsome.com/">http://rot.blogsome.com/</a>
210	Anonymous X	<a href="http://anonymousxwrites.blogspot.com/">http://anonymousxwrites.blogspot.com/</a>
211	Pinkdot.sg	<a href="http://pinkdotsg.blogspot.com">http://pinkdotsg.blogspot.com</a>
212	The one-dimensional island	<a href="http://onedimensionalman.wordpress.com">http://onedimensionalman.wordpress.com</a>
213	Leona's Blog	<a href="http://leonalo.wordpress.com/">http://leonalo.wordpress.com/</a>
214	Chemical Generation Blog	<a href="http://chemgen.wordpress.com/">http://chemgen.wordpress.com/</a>

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name of Blog</b>	<b>URL</b>
215	Democracy, Equality, Social Justice	<a href="http://muhdkhalis.wordpress.com/">http://muhdkhalis.wordpress.com/</a>
216	Can!	<a href="http://challengedsalliancenenetwork.blogspot.com/">http://challengedsalliancenenetwork.blogspot.com/</a>
217	Singapore Aspirations	<a href="http://singaporeaspirations.blogspot.com/">http://singaporeaspirations.blogspot.com/</a>
218	En Bloc Block Blog	<a href="http://singaporeenbloc.blogspot.com/">http://singaporeenbloc.blogspot.com/</a>
219	Michael Fernandez	<a href="http://michaelfernandezthumba.blogspot.com/">http://michaelfernandezthumba.blogspot.com/</a>
220	voix.deviant	<a href="http://voixdeviant.wordpress.com/">http://voixdeviant.wordpress.com/</a>
221	A serial number on my vote	<a href="http://aserialnumberonmyvote.blogspot.com/">http://aserialnumberonmyvote.blogspot.com/</a>
222	It's all about amelioration	<a href="http://nabbedd.wordpress.com/">http://nabbedd.wordpress.com/</a>
223	The Sun Chair Critic	<a href="http://sunchair.blogspot.com/">http://sunchair.blogspot.com/</a>
224	Hazel Poa	<a href="http://hazelpoa.blogspot.com/">http://hazelpoa.blogspot.com/</a>

## Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire

To indicate your choices, you can bold, underline or highlight.

1) What is the URL for your blog: \_\_\_\_\_

2) When did you start blogging? \_\_\_\_\_

3) Can you describe in one sentence what your blog is about?

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4) How frequently do you blog?

- (i) Daily
- (ii) 2-3 times a week
- (iii) Once a week
- (iv) Two to four times a month
- (v) Once a month
- (vi) Less than once a month

5) Why do you blog? On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “strongly disagree”, 2 being “disagree”, 3 being “neither agree nor disagree”, 4 being “agree” and 5 being “strongly agree”), please rate the following reasons.

(i) To document my life	1	2	3	4	5
(ii) As a form of entertainment	1	2	3	4	5
(iii) To inspire my writing	1	2	3	4	5
(iv) For self-expression	1	2	3	4	5
(v) To connect with others online	1	2	3	4	5
(vi) To be read by family members and friends	1	2	3	4	5
(vii) To pass time	1	2	3	4	5
(viii) Provide information	1	2	3	4	5
(ix) For professional advancement	1	2	3	4	5
(x) Provide commentary and express my opinions	1	2	3	4	5
(xi) To communicate my ideas	1	2	3	4	5
(xii) To participate in an online political debate	1	2	3	4	5
(xiii) To influence other people	1	2	3	4	5
(xiv) To oppose the dominant political discourse	1	2	3	4	5
(xv) To provide alternative perspectives	1	2	3	4	5

6) Are you a volunteer or a member of any party, non-profit group or organizations (such as civil society or non-governmental organizations)?

(i) Yes, please state how many and name them?

(ii) No \_\_\_\_\_

7) Have you participated in any activism activity in the last three years? (some examples are: AWARE Extraordinary General Meeting, migrant workers' welfare, Bloggers 13, Repeal of/support for Section 377A of the Singapore Penal Code).

- (i) Yes: \_\_\_\_\_
- (ii) No

*If yes – go to the next question Q8 and then Q10. If no– please go to Q9.*

8) Can you tick the level of your involvement (please tick all that apply):

- (i) Donated money to the organization
- (ii) Wrote a letter regarding the issue
- (iii) Signed a petition for the cause
- (iv) Participated in an organized activity
- (v) Attended a meeting concerning the issue
- (vi) Attended a rally or protest demonstration to support the cause
- (vii) Participated in an information campaign for the general public about the cause
- (viii) Advertised in the mass media to promote the cause
- (ix) Made a presentation to a public body about the cause
- (x) Gave a lecture on the cause to a school group or voluntary organization
- (xi) Participated in a press release/conference regarding the cause
- (xii) Served as a representative on an advisory board formed around the cause or related issues
- (xiii) Purchased a book, t-short, mug, poster or other merchandize from the organization
- (xiv) Wrote or called the media to express your views
- (xv) Displayed a banner or sign on your website or blog
- (xvi) Others, please state: \_\_\_\_\_

9) What are your reasons for not participating in any activist activity?

- (i) Didn't know anyone actively involved
- (ii) Not enough time
- (iii) Wasn't asked
- (iv) Just didn't want to get involved
- (v) Fear of negative reaction by non-movement significant others
- (vi) Other reason(s): \_\_\_\_\_

10) Do you intend to participate in any activist activity in future?

- (i) Yes: \_\_\_\_\_
- (ii) No

11) Do you use the Internet for the following activities? Please indicate your response for each on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “strongly disagree”, 2 being “disagree”, 3 being “neither agree nor disagree”, 4 being “agree” and 5 being “strongly agree”).

- |        |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--------|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| (i)    | Use the Internet to identify and seek out other individuals or groups whom you feel share similar political beliefs and interests as you.                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (ii)   | Use your blog to provide information pertaining to the activist activities you participate in.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (iii)  | Use your blog to encourage direct action online through online petitions and providing action alerts etc.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (iv)   | Use your blog to coordinate, organize or plan offline actions through calendars of events, descriptions of specific campaigns, actions or volunteer opportunities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (v)    | Use your blog to promote dialogue and discussion (e.g. via comment and email functions)  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (vi)   | Use your blog to hyperlink to other individuals whom you think share similar interests as you?   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (vii)  | Use your blog to hyperlink to sites dealing with movement issues to facilitate interaction among movement supporters.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (viii) | Use your blog to hyperlink to national or international social movement organizations to activities to facilitate interaction among movement supporters.           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (ix)   | Use your blog for fundraising (e.g. solicit donations, sell merchandise, sell subscriptions, or carry advertising).  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |



Qn 12-17 concern your **informal social network**. Your informal social network refers to your friends, family members, schoolmates, colleagues, neighbours, acquaintances etc. **Their full names are NOT required.** You can list them by their first name or surname for confidentiality reasons.

<p>12) Pick ONE activist activity and list up to 10 people in your informal networks who participated in the <b>same activity</b> as you. Please list them and state their relationship with you (e.g. friend, family member, schoolmate and colleague).</p> <p><b>If you did NOT participate in any activist activity:</b> List 10 people in your informal networks whom you know participated in at least one activist activity.</p>	<p>13) <i>How often do you communicate</i> with each of these 10 people (e.g. through mobile phones, emails, face-to-face)? On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “never”, 2 being “seldom”, 3 being “sometimes”, 4 being “quite often” and 5 being “very often”), please rate the frequency of your communication.</p>	<p>14) On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “no influence at all” to , 2 being “a little influence”, 3 being “significant influence”, 4 being “strong influence” and 5 being “very strong influence”), please rate the <i>level of influence</i> of the people from your informal networks who participated in the activist activity on your decision to/not to join.</p>	<p>15) On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “none at all”, 2 being “a little”, 3 being “somewhat”, 4 being “strong level of trust” and 5 being “very strong level of trust”), please rate the <i>level of trust</i> you have in each of the 10 people from your informal networks.</p>	<p>16) <i>How often do you seek information</i> pertaining to activism issues from each of these 10 people? On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “never”, 2 being “seldom”, 3 being “sometimes”, 4 being “quite often” and 5 being “very often”), please rate the frequency of your information seeking.</p>	<p>17) On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “no effects at all”, 2 being “a little effect”, 3 being “significant effect”, 4 being “strong effects” and 5 being “very strong effects”), please rate the <i>influence of these individuals’ expected reactions (if you don’t participate)</i> on your decision to/not to join.</p>
1.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
2.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
3.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
4.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
5.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
6.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
7.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
8.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
9.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
10.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

Qn 18-23 concern your **formal social network**. Your formal social network refers to volunteers and members who belong to the same activist group or organization(s) as you. **Their full names are NOT required**. You can list them by their first name or surname for confidentiality reasons. If any of your informal contacts fall into this category, please list them as well.

<p>18) Pick ONE activist activity and list up to 10 people in your formal networks who participated in the <b>same activity</b> as you.</p> <p><b>If you did NOT participate in any activist activity:</b> List 10 people in your formal networks whom you know participated in at least one activist activity.</p>	<p>19) <i>How often do you communicate</i> with each of these 10 people (e.g. through mobile phones, emails, face-to-face)? On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “never”, 2 being “seldom”, 3 being “sometimes”, 4 being “quite often” and 5 being “very often”), please rate the frequency of your communication.</p>	<p>20) On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “no influence at all” to , 2 being “a little influence”, 3 being “significant influence”, 4 being “strong influence” and 5 being “very strong influence”), please rate the <i>level of influence</i> of the people from your formal networks who participated in the activist activity on your decision to/not to join.</p>	<p>21) On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “none at all”, 2 being “a little”, 3 being “somewhat”, 4 being “strong level of trust” and 5 being “very strong level of trust”), please rate the <i>level of trust</i> you have in each of the 10 people from your formal networks.</p>	<p>22) <i>How often do you seek information</i> pertaining to activism issues from each of these 10 people? On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “never”, 2 being “seldom”, 3 being “sometimes”, 4 being “quite often” and 5 being “very often”), please rate the frequency of your information seeking.</p>	<p>23) On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “no effects at all”, 2 being “a little effect”, 3 being “significant effect”, 4 being “strong effects” and 5 being “very strong effects”), please rate the <i>influence of these individuals’ expected reactions (if you don’t participate)</i> on your decision to/not to join.</p>
1.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
2.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
3.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
4.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
5.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
6.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
7.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
8.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
9.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
10.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

The following questions (**Qn 24-29**) concern your **online network**. Your online social network refers to bloggers you hyperlink to on your blogroll. Please list them according to their blog name. If any of your informal/formal contacts fall into this category, please list them as well.

<p>24) Pick ONE activist activity and list up to 10 people in your online network who participated in the <b>same activity</b> as you.</p> <p><b>If you did NOT participate in any activist activity:</b> List 10 people in your online network whom you know participated in at least one activist activity.</p>	<p>25) <i>How often do you communicate</i> with each of these 10 people (e.g. through mobile phones, emails, face-to-face)? On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “never”, 2 being “seldom”, 3 being “sometimes”, 4 being “quite often” and 5 being “very often”), please rate the frequency of your communication.</p>	<p>26) On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “no influence at all” to , 2 being “a little influence”, 3 being “significant influence”, 4 being “strong influence” and 5 being “very strong influence”), please rate the <i>level of influence</i> of the people from your online networks who participated in the activist activity on your decision to/not to join.</p>	<p>27) On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “none at all”, 2 being “a little”, 3 being “somewhat”, 4 being “strong level of trust” and 5 being “very strong level of trust”), please rate the <i>level of trust</i> you have in each of the 10 people from your online networks.</p>	<p>28) <i>How often do you seek information</i> pertaining to activism issues from each of these 10 people? On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “never”, 2 being “seldom”, 3 being “sometimes”, 4 being “quite often” and 5 being “very often”), please rate the frequency of your information seeking.</p>	<p>29) On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “no effects at all”, 2 being “a little effect”, 3 being “significant effect”, 4 being “strong effects” and 5 being “very strong effects”), please rate the <i>influence of these individuals’ expected reactions (if you don’t participate)</i> on your decision to/not to join.</p>
1.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
2.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
3.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
4.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
5.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
6.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
7.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
8.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
9.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
10.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

30) On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “no influence at all”, 2 being “a little influence”, 3 being “significant influence”, 4 being “strong influence” and 5 being “very strong influence”), please rate the influence of the following factors on your decision to/not to join the activist activity.

(i)	Time:	1	2	3	4	5
(ii)	Financial cost:	1	2	3	4	5
(iii)	Safety :	1	2	3	4	5
(iv)	Government censure:	1	2	3	4	5

31) On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “not effective at all”, 2 being “a little effective”, 3 being “neither effective nor ineffective”, 4 being “effective” and 5 being “very effective”), please rate your expected overall effectiveness of the activist activity which you joined.

1      2      3      4      5

32) On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “never”, 2 being “seldom”, 3 being “sometimes”, 4 being “quite often” and 5 being “very often”), please rate the frequency of your ongoing/regular communication with other bloggers using the following modes.

(i)	Face-to-face meetings	1	2	3	4	5
(ii)	Blogs	1	2	3	4	5
(iii)	Telephoning	1	2	3	4	5
(iv)	Text messaging via mobile phone	1	2	3	4	5
(v)	Email	1	2	3	4	5
(vi)	Instant Messaging tools (e.g. MSN)	1	2	3	4	5
(vii)	Social networking tools (e.g. Facebook and Twitter)	1	2	3	4	5

33) How old are you?

- (i) 18 to 21
- (ii) 22-25
- (iii) 26-30
- (iv) 31-35
- (v) 36-40
- (vi) 41-45
- (vii) 46 and above

34) What is your gender? Male/Female

35) What is the highest qualification you obtained?

- (i) Post-graduate (Masters, PhD)
- (ii) Degree
- (iii) Diploma
- (iv) College
- (v) Secondary school

36) Are you currently employed? Yes/No.

If yes, please state your occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

37) Which monthly income group are you in?

- (i) \$5000 and above
- (ii) \$3,501-\$4,999
- (iii) \$2,000-\$3,500
- (iv) Less than \$2,000
- (v) Not applicable

Thank you!

## Appendix C: Semi-structured Interview Guide

### Bloggers' uses and gratifications for blogging

1. Can you describe what your blog is about?  
Probe: When did you start blogging?
2. Why do you blog?  
Probe: How often do you blog?
3. Who would you identify are the target audience(s) for your blog?
4. What are some of gratifications (satisfaction) you derive from being a blogger?

### Activism

5. Do you belong to any non-profit organizations?
6. What does the word "activism" mean to you?
7. Are you involved in any activist activity?  
Probe: Can you describe your involvement?
8. What motivated you to get involved in activism?
9. How would you describe your experience so far?
10. What are your aspirations and vision as an activist?

### Internet and activism

11. How do you use the Internet to help you in your activism? Can you describe some of the ways in which you use the Internet to achieve your objectives?  
Probe: How about your blog? Does it play any role in your activism?
12. Who do you hyperlink to in your blogroll? What are the reasons or motivations for linking to them?  
Probe: Do you hyperlink to specific bloggers and organizations, and why?
13. Do you use web 2.0 technologies like Facebook and Twitter to help you in your activism?

If **no**, can you share your reasons for not participating in activist activities?

14. Are there any factors (e.g. time, cost, safety, political censure) which influence your decision to participate/not participate in activism activities?

### Social networks and activism

15. Who are some of the people whom you feel play an important part in influencing your decision to participate in activist activities?
16. How about the people you meet online? Do they play any role in influencing your involvement in activism?  
Probe: Do you hyperlink to them?
17. How would you describe your relationship with other activists?  
Probe: Do you feel or experience a sense of solidarity or empathy with other activist?

### Collective identity among bloggers

18. Do you read other blogs? Why?
19. Do you feel that you identify with other bloggers? What do you perceive are some of the similarities you share with other bloggers?

- Probe: How about those whom you hyperlink to?
20. What are some of the differences which you think set you apart from other bloggers?
  21. Do you feel that you share a common goal or vision with other bloggers? If so, what do you think is that goal or vision?
  22. Do you feel or experience a sense of solidarity or empathy with other bloggers? If so, what do you think this solidarity or empathy is based on?
  23. What about the bloggers whom you hyperlink to, do you think there is a feeling of solidarity among you and the bloggers whom you link to or communicate with?
  24. Do you take part in any specific activities that make you feel part of a larger group of bloggers?
  25. How would you describe your relationship(s), if there is/are, with other bloggers?  
Probe: Do you know them in other contexts, e.g. offline, work, school, party or organizational affiliations.

### Conclusion

26. What are some of the hopes and aspirations that you have for your blog?
27. What would you do more as an activist in future?

## **Appendix D: Profile of Interview Informants\***

### **(I) Offline-based activists (16)**

*Alan*, male, 23 years old, graduate student in law school and one of the founders of TOC

*Andy*, male, early 40s, activist and co-founder of TOC

*Daryl*, male, early 20s, student and member of Amnesty International

*Evan*, male, early 30s, founder of SG Human Rights and member of opposition party

*George*, male, early 30s, technology consultant and opposition party member

*James*, male, 40s, university lecturer and member of Singaporeans for Democracy

*John*, male, late 40s, self-employed in telecommunications industry and member of opposition party

*June*, female, 36 years old, a doctoral candidate and member of Transient Workers Count Too

*Lynn*, female, early 30s, insurance trainer and opposition party member

*Madcow*, male, late 30s, member of opposition political party and self-employed businessman

*Michael*, male, late 30s, filmmaker and political activist with Singaporeans for Democracy

*Rachel*, female, late 20s, a preschool teacher, human rights activist with Singaporeans for Democracy and volunteer with an opposition political party

*Tan*, male, late 30s, property maintenance officer and opposition political member

*The Pen*, male, mid 30s, businessman and opposition political member

*V5*, male, late 20s, visual artist and human rights activist with Singaporeans for Democracy and volunteer with an opposition political party

*Zazzi*, male, mid 50s, gay rights activist

### **(II) Online-based activist (10)**

*Andrew*, male, mid 20s, graduate student and member of Singapore Angle (now defunct)



*Bill*, male, early 20s, National Serviceman and member of Bloggers 13

*Brian*, male, early 20s, final-year law student

*Chong*, male, mid 40s, professor in journalism studies and member of Bloggers 13 and Maruah

*Hercules*, male, early 20s, law student and member of Bloggers 13

*Jack*, male, late 20s, graduate student and member of Animal Concerns and Research & Education Society

*Mandy*, female, early 30s, health researcher and a volunteer with the Association of Women for Action and Research

*Stan*, male, mid 20s, graduate student and co-founder of Singapore Queer-Straight Alliance (SinQSA)

*TL*, male, mid 20s, mass communication undergraduate and writer for TOC

*Vienna*, male, mid 30s, a chief operating officer and co-founder of Singapore Angle

### (III) Non-activist bloggers (15)

*a2ed*, early 40s, photographer and artist

*Adrian*, male, late 30s, project manager

*Angry Doctor*, male, late 30s, medical doctor

*Benedict*, male, late 20s, graduate student

*Chip*, male, late 30s, research scientist

*Epilogos*, male, early 40s, polytechnic lecturer

*Ghost*, male, early 30s, customer service officer in telecommunications industry

*Gilbert*, male, late 30s, banker

*Guan Yin Miao*, male, early 20s, National Serviceman

*Ink Horn*, male, early 20s, localization artist

*Recalcitrant*, male, 80s, retiree

*SA*, male, late 30s, working as a consultant in the U.S. who returns to Singapore regularly to visit family

*TM*, male, early 30s, croupier

*Voiceless*, early 20s, student who consented to an email interview to preserve his anonymity.

*Xavier*, male, early 40s, self-employed financial analyst

*\*Pseudonyms are used for all interviewees.*

## Appendix E: Examples of Codes and Themes

### *(Theme) Definition of blog*

(Code) Socio-political blog: EJ1, GG1, MS1, AN1, ZX1, BL1 (*blogger code, transcript page*)

Evolution from gay issues only to socio-political issues: AA1

International politics and philosophy: BC1

Community blog: ZX1

One-stop resource with focus on journalism and media: CG1,3

Personal blog as a general-purpose personal archive: CG1

Personal blog used as a review site: BL4

Singapore Angle as apolitical: BL24

### *Political stance*

Overall stance as anti-establishment EJ1,

Act as an alternative to mainstream media (news and perspectives) EJ2,6,

Liberal: AA2

Non-partisan and objective: AN1

Neutrality of Singapore Angle: BL22

Personal ideology is pragmatic idealist: BL

### *Motivation to start blog*

Blog to track activities of group that was started (SG Human Rights): EJ1

Interest in blogging about socio-political issues: GG1

To promote gay equality and bypass censorship: AA1

Alternative to mainstream media: EJ6

GE2006 a trigger to participate in growing online discourse: AN1

GE2006- expose and compensate for inadequacies and bias-ness of mainstream media: ZX1,2

Professional need and fill the dearth of resources on journalism in Singapore: CG1,2

Drafting articles through personal blog: BL1

Conflict of interest between entrepreneur blog and interest in politics: BL1

Practical reasons for starting a group blog: BL2

Partly to participate in intellectual exchange with others: BL6,26

### *Target audience*

Anyone who is interested in socio-political issues: EJ2, GG1, MS2, AN3

Interested in current affairs and philosophy: BC1

Evolution from gays to heterosexual Singaporeans: AA1

Middle-aged professionals who are politically aware: ZX3

Researchers, professionals and students interested in media issues, and policy makers: CG1,5

Policymakers and overseas educated Singaporeans: BL3

\*Knowing the target audience and using technology to track: AN10, CG16, BL2,8

Different target market for TOC and Singapore Angle: BL9

## Appendix F: Profile of Organizations and Campaigns\*

Group/Party	Description
Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) <a href="http://www.aware.org.sg/">http://www.aware.org.sg/</a>	Singapore's leading gender equality advocacy group that is dedicated to removing gender-based barriers. Since 1985, AWARE has carried out research into numerous issues affecting women: workplace sexual harassment, poverty of older women and Singapore's compliance with UN anti-gender discrimination standards. Four types of memberships are available: ordinary, associate, student, and life.
Free Burma Campaign Singapore <a href="http://freeburmacampaignsg.wordpress.com/">http://freeburmacampaignsg.wordpress.com/</a>	An independent network of Singapore-based campaigners dedicated to bring about peace, democracy and human rights in Burma through public education, leadership development initiatives, conferences, and advocacy campaigns at national and international levels. Visitors who want to volunteer or make contributions have to contact the administrator.
No to Rape <a href="http://www.notorape.com/">http://www.notorape.com/</a>	The campaign advocates that sexual violence by any person, against any person, is criminal violence. The premise for the campaign is: regardless of whether the victim and perpetrator are married to each other, non-consensual sexual penetration should be treated as rape. The online petition is coordinated by a team of concerned Singaporeans who came together to promote change on this issue. The group is not a formal organization and its members have no shared agenda beyond addressing sexual violence.
Repeal 377A <a href="http://www.repeal377a.com/">http://www.repeal377a.com/</a>	A website that was established to help Singaporeans gather information, debate the issue and act (Section 377a of the Penal Code of Singapore provides for a jail sentence for up to two years should a man be found to have committed an act of "gross indecency" with another man). Visitors can subscribe to the site's mailing list.
Singapore Anti-Mandatory Death Penalty <a href="http://sgdeathpenalty.blogspot.com/">http://sgdeathpenalty.blogspot.com/</a> <a href="http://www.facebook.com/groups/5081187633/">http://www.facebook.com/groups/5081187633/</a>	An online group on Facebook lobbying against the mandatory death penalty for drug trafficking.
Singaporeans for Democracy (SFD) <a href="http://sfd.sg/">http://sfd.sg/</a>	An independent non-governmental organization that focuses on citizen political activism, in particular to campaigning and advocating for civil and political reform that will be ultimately reflected through changes in legislation. A person wishing to join the SFD must submit his particulars to the Executive Secretary; a new member must be proposed and seconded by existing members of the SFD. The Board of Directors will decide on the membership, taking into consideration any objection raised.

Group/Party	Description
Singapore Democratic Party <a href="http://yoursdp.org/">http://yoursdp.org/</a>	An opposition, political party, the Singapore Democratic Party was formed in August 1980. The Central Executive Committee (CEC) governs the party. Its members are elected by the Party's cadre members at the Ordinary Party Conference held biennially.
Singapore Queer-Straight Alliance (SinQSA) <a href="http://sinqsa.wordpress.com/">http://sinqsa.wordpress.com/</a>	Founded by three individuals, SinQSA aims to bridge the gap between queer and straight people by providing an open and inclusive platform where queer and straight persons can engage in meaningful communication.
The Online Citizen (TOC) <a href="http://theonlinecitizen.com/">http://theonlinecitizen.com/</a>	Established in 2006, the vision of the community blog is to be the leading online source for socio-political news and views in Singapore. TOC was gazetted as a political organization in 2011.
Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) <a href="http://www.twc2.org.sg/site/">http://www.twc2.org.sg/site/</a>	Since its inception in March 2003, TWC2 has engaged government officials, migrant workers, employment agencies, partner organizations, and the general public. It has become a contact point for migrant workers who encounter problems with their employers, a source of information for employers and the public, and a centre for generating action-oriented research.
Workers' Party <a href="http://www.wp.sg/">http://www.wp.sg/</a>	An opposition political party established in 1957. Its then Secretary-General became the first opposition Member of Parliament in 1971. Membership in the party is confined to Singapore citizens only above the age of 18 years who are not members of any other political party in Singapore. Every applicant for membership must be proposed by a member of the party and the Executive Council may in its absolute discretion accept or reject or adjourn consideration of each application by simple majority of those present.

*\*Information obtained from websites and blogs.*