Governmental Discipline and the Limits of Agency: Singapore’s Developing National Identity, Facebook, and Generation Y

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Bachelor of Arts (Hons)

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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School of Social Sciences and School of Earth and Environment
Anthropology and Sociology
2017
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ABSTRACT

The internet has introduced many opportunities for change, especially in the Singaporean context. The limits to individual freedom that Singaporeans have been disciplined into accepting and that have been internalised as dispositions, have in recent times faced challenges from a more educated and discerning generation of young adult Singaporeans (Gen Y). Calling for increased freedom of speech and a more open society, the use of Facebook as a platform for the expression of views has resulted in more direct and expressive perspectives being voiced online.

Altering the ways in which social processes are negotiated, the uses and recognition of new media as an appropriate mode of communication in both formal and everyday activities contravene various control mechanisms the ruling elite has initiated. Still, it is unclear whether this change has resulted in new forms of the state’s disciplinary power.

Despite declaring a ‘light touch’ approach in its management of the internet, website bans and licensing requirements for news websites are still being imposed in Singapore. While the Singapore government still limits or even rejects citizen involvement in ‘civil’ affairs, it encourages ‘civic’ engagement, which is viewed as essential in strengthening community ties, developing social capital and an emotional and ideological attachment to ‘home’ as ways of developing the Singapore ‘soul’.

Case studies from Facebook also indicate netizens scrutinising the practices of others online. The practice of lateral surveillance, or peer-to-peer monitoring, implies the continuing internalisation of social order as a disciplinary norm. This transformation suggests the distribution of authorities’ omnipresent monitoring gaze into another form of disciplinary enforcement. Yet, while the willingness to engage and influence social outcomes on Facebook implies increased levels of participation, the meaning of engaging in online activism has been questioned. Using commitment and active involvement as primary indicators, participants in
this study indicated skepticism over the value of online activism, especially in its ability to initiate tangible action or change.

Practice theory emphasises observing the continuous dynamic relationship between social constraints – structure – and individual action – agency – and the variation in the extent of influence and effect each has on the resultant social outcome. Through the examination of primary conceptualisations of structure and agency, especially in today’s new media framework, this study highlights the importance of contextual understanding, as well as the changing meanings affected by new media’s intersection and alteration of social milieus.

In an attempt at differentiating structural constraint from the limits of agency, this study deviates from the usual analysis of Singapore’s political transformation or the effects of the top-down approach the PAP has asserted in managing the Singapore populace. Aimed at acquiring a deeper understanding of the viewpoints of Singapore’s Gen Y, this study examines the impact Facebook use has had on attitudes, the reproduction and/or transcendence of disciplinary procedures, as well as the effects such changes have had on social practices in Singapore.

Findings from the study’s mixed-methods approach, comprising a quantitatively analysed survey and semi-structured interviews, suggest that Singapore’s embrace of the internet and new media technologies, particularly the use of Facebook, has allowed greater information access, an avenue for the expression of views, and has expanded participation possibilities. However, new methods of engagement necessitate a re-examination of the meaning of participation in today’s new media context. Additionally, participants’ descriptions and attitudes toward the reproduction and transformation of dominant ideologies, as well as the emergence of resistance to state-enforced rules and regulations, suggest transitions from the strictly top-down paradigm of governance in Singapore to one where a more open democracy regulated by lateral surveillance could exist.
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<td>CCTV</td>
<td>Closed-Circuit Television</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIP</td>
<td>Community Involvement Programme</td>
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<td>CMC</td>
<td>Computer-mediated communication</td>
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<td>CNA</td>
<td>Channel NewsAsia</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPF</td>
<td>Central Provident Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>FtF</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
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<tr>
<td>GE2011</td>
<td>Singapore’s 2011 General Election</td>
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<tr>
<td>GE2015</td>
<td>Singapore’s 2015 General Election</td>
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<td>Gen Y</td>
<td>Generation Y</td>
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<td>HDB</td>
<td>Housing and Development Board</td>
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<td>ICOP</td>
<td>Internet Code of Practice</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communications Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDA</td>
<td>Info-communications Development Authority of Singapore</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPS</td>
<td>Institute of Policy Studies</td>
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<td>ISA</td>
<td>Internal Security Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender</td>
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<td>LKY</td>
<td>Lee Kuan Yew</td>
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<td>MBS</td>
<td>Marina Bay Sands</td>
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<td>MDA</td>
<td>Media Development Authority of Singapore</td>
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<td>MRT</td>
<td>Mass Rapid Transit</td>
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<td>MND</td>
<td>Ministry of National Development</td>
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<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
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<td>OB</td>
<td>Out-of-bound</td>
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<td>PAP</td>
<td>People’s Action Party</td>
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<td>Personal Digital Assistant</td>
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<td>PM</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
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<td>Prime Minister’s Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Permanent Resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSF</td>
<td>Reporters Sans Frontières</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARS</td>
<td>Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBA</td>
<td>Singapore Broadcasting Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS</td>
<td>Social networking sites</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPSS</td>
<td>Statistical Package for the Social Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOC</td>
<td>The Online Citizen</td>
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<td>TRE</td>
<td>TR Emeritus</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRS</td>
<td>The Real Singapore</td>
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<tr>
<td>WP</td>
<td>Workers’ Party</td>
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</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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April 2017
**GLOSSARY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bedek</strong></td>
<td>A slang term used in vernacular Malay language, meaning trying to bluff, con, to not tell the full truth or mislead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bf</strong></td>
<td>Shorthand for 'boyfriend'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coffee shop talk</strong></td>
<td>Casual verbal discussions that take place at coffee shops, which are located near housing estates and food shops, and are usually associated with groups of older, retired men, gathering to talk and discuss news, issues they felt were pertinent, or anything that caught their attention over coffee or beer. More often than not, the topic of discussion would be politics, governance issues and gripes about the struggles they faced in their daily lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cos</strong></td>
<td>An abbreviated form of the word 'because'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dis</strong></td>
<td>A slang term meaning to insult, to treat with disrespect or contempt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gung ho</strong></td>
<td>Derived from Mandarin, to be ‘gung ho’ is to be very enthusiastic, psyched, pumped up, and/or cannot wait to participate in something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Info</strong></td>
<td>An abbreviation for the word ‘information’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kampung</strong></td>
<td>Village or small community settlement in Malay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kiasu</strong></td>
<td>A Singlish term referring to the highly competitive, afraid to lose out to others behaviour commonly associated with Singaporeans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kpo</strong></td>
<td>An abbreviated form of the word ‘kaypoh’, which is a Singlish term referring to being a busybody, nosing or prying around other people’s business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lah</strong></td>
<td>A Singlish term commonly used at the end of sentences or phrases to indicate emphasis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leceh</strong></td>
<td>Difficult, inconvenient or troublesome in Malay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leh</strong></td>
<td>A Singlish term commonly used in the same manner as 'lah', at the end of sentences or phrases to indicate emphasis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lor</strong></td>
<td>A Singlish term commonly used in the same manner as ‘lah’, at the end of sentences or phrases to indicate emphasis.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Nasi Lemak**  A Malay rice dish made with coconut milk and pandan leaf. The fragrant rice is usually served with *sambal*, *ikan bilis*, cucumber and peanuts, alongside other Malay-style side dishes.

**U**  Shorthand for 'you'.

**Uni**  An abbreviated form of the word, ‘University’.
Chapter One
Introduction

1.1 Preamble

In the 2015 Networked Readiness Index (NRI), Singapore was ranked first, coming in 'tops for the efficiency of its legal framework and government services, business friendliness, strong intellectual property protection, high mobile broadband subscriptions and the quality of its Maths and Science education' (Tham 2015). After being ranked second for five years in a row, Singapore edged out usual frontrunners Finland and Sweden to take pole position 'as the top country in the world when it [came] to leveraging ICTs [Information and Communications Technologies] for social and economic impact' (World Economic Forum 2015). The 2015 NRI looked at 143 countries from various stages of development, calculating scores based on 53 indicators.

The 2015 NRI attributed Singapore’s success to a ‘clear digital strategy’ set out by its government. In terms of government usage, Singapore ranked second with regard to the importance of ICTs to government vision, third for government’s success in ICT promotion and second in the category measuring government online service. Singapore’s ICT use and government efficiency was also ranked second, while e-participation was ranked 10th. For indicators evaluating individual usage, Singapore ranked 14th in the category examining the percentage of households with internet access, first for the category examining the number of mobile broadband subscriptions in the Singaporean population, and 10th for the category indicating the use of virtual social networks in the city-state (World Economic Forum 2015).

Focused on establishing economic stability, the People's Action Party’s (PAP) pragmatic and unwavering approach to governance and future planning for Singapore has proven to be fundamental to Singapore’s success and development. The NRI clearly highlights Singapore’s investment in ICT and the advancements it has made. With first world infrastructure and a highly educated and technologically
savvy workforce, Singapore has leveraged the use of ICTs to further enhance the city-state's competitiveness in the global economy. However, when examining the influence ICT use has had on socio-cultural practices, Singapore's advancement has not been as rapid.

Urging Singaporeans to continue striving towards future success, Minister for Social and Family Development, Tan Chuan-Jin, articulated the need for Singaporeans to take on more responsibility in ensuring Singapore's continued growth:

It's no longer just about the economics...it's not just about the infrastructure, it's not just about the security and about healthcare. All these things are important, but the thing that's going to keep us going will be our values, our culture, our ethos, our soul as a nation...but these are things which are difficult to define, difficult to implement. It's not something that the Government can say and therefore it's going to happen. But it's something that needs to be grown and nurtured (cited in Othman 2015).

Continued emphasis on encouraging active civic engagement, the development of the 'Singapore Soul' and the government's 'light touch' approach to the management of the internet, 'as opposed its notoriously strict and censorious "lockdown" of traditional print and broadcast media' (Rodan 2000b), demonstrate the challenges Singapore faces in negotiating a flourishing public sphere. The widespread industrialisation programme implemented after independence to ensure Singapore's economic survival has resulted in the stunted growth of the nation's cultural development. Dictated by the logic of the economy, cultural features such as discipline at the work-place and by extension, generalised social discipline, as well as a deep sense of rivalry with others\(^1\), are predominant qualities

\(^1\) Being highly competitive, afraid to lose out to others, or otherwise known as being 'kiasu' in Singlish, has become a common Singaporean trait that has stemmed from the city-state's pragmatic focus on meritocracy and individual success. Yet, the fear of failure, or losing out to others has been highlighted by Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) Kuik Shiao-Yin as being a 'habit of self-limiting behaviours', which poses threats to Singapore's cultural development and would be of 'great cost to the economy' (Ong 2016). Kuik (cited in Ong 2016) added that the 'kiasu culture
and anxieties that characterise the everyday life-world of Singaporeans today (Chua & Kuo 1995, p. 105).

Singapore’s economic success has improved the entire population’s material life dramatically, resulting in the rise of a new middle class (Chua & Tan 1999, p. 154). Very high rates of inter-generational upward mobility have allowed the younger generation increased access to higher material consumption. More mobile and armed with greater exposure to a wider range of experiences, today’s younger generation embodies cosmopolitan aspirations, but is constantly reminded of the need to remain rooted to ‘home’.

With the creation of the nation and Singapore’s subsequent national identity being ‘exclusively concerned with the material conditions of the population’ (Chua & Kuo 1995, p. 119), prescribed notions of national identity outweigh socially produced identities, which are products of community engagement. Additionally, Lam and Yeoh (2004, p. 143) argue that besides family ties and friends, the younger generation is less likely to feel the need to construct notions of ‘home’ based on geographical presence, but are increasingly accepting ‘mobile and non-space specific concepts’.

Ultimately, to ensure sustainability amidst increasingly globalising processes, Singapore needs to develop a ‘Singaporean Singapore’ as a shared focus and value to retain its citizens’ attachment and sense of belonging. Scholars (see Barr & Skrbiš 2008; George 2000; Hill & Lian 1995; Kwok & Ali 1998; Wang 2002) have suggested various strategies Singapore could adopt in establishing values and in engaging with the citizenry. However, none of these studies touches on the specific impact new media have on personal choice and agency of individuals in Singapore, nor does any examine the rationale behind demands for change.

doesn’t give a damn about generating or sharing worth and value’ and was ‘too costly a culture to put up with’.
1.2 Civic Participation and Social Connections Online

The PAP has placed much emphasis on the need to cultivate a national identity that is rooted in socio-cultural connections. The need for an engaged citizenry, one that is concerned and interested in its civic responsibilities and actively participates in civic life, has been underscored as an essential part of establishing a community that is invested in the future of Singapore (Yeo 1991; Goh, CT 2001, 2002; Lee, HL 2010; Wong, cited in Lim, YL 2014).

Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong has consistently stressed the importance of active citizenship in Singapore. In his first National Day Rally after the watershed 2011 General Election, PM Lee HL (cited in AsiaOne, 14 August 2011) expressed the hope for both the government and people to continue working together ‘to build a bright future for Singapore’. The aim, he reiterated, was to build a ‘fair and just society that nurtures and inspires the human spirit and a society that encourages our people to go forth to do well for themselves and do good for their community’ (Lee HL, cited in AsiaOne, 14 August 2011). In 2014, stressing the significance of encouraging community spiritedness in Singapore, then Minister of Culture, Community and Youth, Lawrence Wong, said:

The government will support, encourage and lead the rally – but it comes down to whether Singaporeans believe that this nation is worth striving for. Each of us must recognise the value, as well as the fragility, of what our people have worked so hard to build (cited in Lim, YL 2014).

GE2011 saw the highest proportion of Parliamentary seats being contested since independence, with 82 of 87 seats (or 94.3%) being contested (Channel NewsAsia, 27 April 2011). The PAP also repeatedly reminded Singaporeans that GE2011 would determine ‘Singapore's next generation of leaders’, and the election saw ‘a significant number of young voters and new citizens at the polling booth’ (AsiaOne, 24 March 2011). The results of GE2011 also emphasised the electorate’s increased judgment of the PAP, while giving ‘the opposition a discount’ (George 2011), thus, forcing the PAP to ‘outgrow its dependence on a non-level playing field’ (George 2011). GE2011 was also considered a ‘watershed election’, as it was the first time a GRC was won by an opposition party (Channel NewsAsia, 27 April 2011).
Civic participation plays a central role in the strength and performance of democratic societies by channeling collective action toward community building (Shah et al. 2005, p. 533). Ostrom (1990) has contended that commitments to community involvement and voluntary work reinforce norms of reciprocity, as well as notions of trust (see Coleman 1988; Newton 1997, 2001; Uslaner 1999; Fukuyama 2001; Paxton 2002). Additionally, Brehm and Rahn (1997) have suggested that frequent cooperation and participation in society result in increased linkages and trust.

Haythornthwaite (2002), too, has contended that the exchange or sharing of resources results in the creation of a connection or tie. The strength of these ties affects the amount of interactions between individuals, which inevitably causes differences in social involvement and reciprocity in exchanges (Haythornthwaite 2002, 2005; see also Granovetter 1973, 1982; Wellman, Carrington, & Hall 1988; Wellman & Gulia 1999). Haythornthwaite (2002) further observed that as tie strength increased from weak to strong, increases in the motivation to connect, the amount and forms of information and resources exchanged, as well as the amount of support communicated intensified.

Research on social capital has found that the ‘virtuous cycle’ of civic engagement and interpersonal trust enables citizens to pursue common social objectives (Putnam 1995, p. 666). Putnam (1995, p. 665) asserted that ‘the more we connect with other people, the more we trust them and vice versa’. Social connectedness and interpersonal trust have thus, been essential components determining the amount of ‘social relations, interactions and values that have important implications for political life’ in a society (Shah 1998, p. 471).

Yet, Kiesler, Siegel and McGuire (1984, p. 1126) have indicated that computer-mediated communication (CMC) has ‘…a paucity of social context information, and few widely shared norms governing its use’. In early investigations of internet use, the attention placed on identity formation in anonymous environments such as online chat rooms also found that individuals tended to stage their presentations of
self, impersonated others, and/or displayed their deep-seated objectionable urges (Rheingold 1994; Turkle 1995).

Donath (1999) found that individuals were more likely to overstate gender rather than redefine or remove it. Moreover, Harman et al.’s (2005) study found that children between 11 and 16 years of age were inclined to falsify their behaviour and misrepresented themselves the most on online platforms.

With the lack of social cues and CMC’s characteristics enabling hyperpersonal interaction, anonymity and depersonalisation have been argued to increase in CMC, resulting in the display of anti-normative and uninhibited behaviours (Turoff & Hiltz 1978; Kim 2000). Baym, Zhang and Lin (2004) further suggest that the increased propensity for self-presentation and anonymity online permits the exploration of untried identities or the falsification of self.

Suler (2002), too, described the online anonymous environment as a platform for the expression of one’s ‘hidden selves’. Zimbardo (1969) also asserted that being unidentified and unaccountable resulted in reduced self-evaluation and evaluation apprehension, thus, weakening the concern for social assessment. This loss of personal identity would then encourage deviations from socially acceptable performances of the self, increasing the display of uninhibited behaviours (Festinger, Pepitone & Newcomb 1952; Zimbardo 1969; Diener 1980).

In less anonymous environments such as internet dating sites, indiviuuals were, however, observed to display different kinds of self-presentations, as compared to their interactions in other online settings, and when communicating face-to-face (FtF) (Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe 2006). Ellison, Steinfeld and Lampe (2006) found that participants mediated the tension between impression management anxieties and the desire to present a genuine and authentic sense of self.

Suggesting that ‘the online world was not monolithic, and online self-presentations varied according to the nature of the settings’ (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin 2008, p. 1817), the strategic management of impressions amidst the want to present realistic presentations of self supports the significance placed on online
interactions and the ultimate relational goals individuals possessed (Walther 1994; Toma, Hancock & Ellison 2008).

1.3 Interconnectivity and the Rise of the ‘Content Nation’

Interactivity and development are two key features associated with new media (Flew 2002, p. 21). The ‘multi-platform, collaborative face of the internet now commonly referred to as new media, or “Web 2.0”’ (Caudill 2008, p. 11), is characterised by ‘innovation and rapid change’ (Green 2010, p. 19). The pervasiveness of social media can be attributed not only to the development of technologies which have enabled increases in the propensity of personal publishing, but is also due to the advancements in search engine tools, and the availability of peer-to-peer networking services (Blossom 2009, pp. 22-24).

Boyd and Ellison (2007) have suggested three functions social networking sites (SNS) permit individuals to perform: construct a public or semi-public profile within a specific system, articulate a list of users with whom they are connected, and allow others to observe both their list of connections and the links made by others to whom they were associated within a specific system. Improvements to the internet’s basic peer-to-peer architecture has permitted newer forms of peer-to-peer networking services in the form of SNS to develop (Pennington, cited in Tosun 2012), allowing individuals direct connections to others and encouraging ‘people to share a little content to connect to a lot of people’ (Blossom 2009, p. 24).

The term ‘social networking’ is not a new term. Barnes introduced social networking in 1954 and defined it as the link between individuals with whom interaction occurred. Barnes (1954, p. 43) noted that such links ‘had no units or boundaries’, but were used to refer to people connected via areas of common ground. Today’s internet-based social networks are largely based on similar characteristics (Simmons 2009, p. 11). Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008, p. 169) have further defined SNS as ‘virtual places that cater to a specific population in which people of similar interest gather to communicate, share, and discuss ideas’.
Scholars have tried to explain the evolving nature of new media in numerous ways. Green (2010, p. 177) described the term as being ‘applied to digitally based information and communication technologies, which are increasingly mobile...has many facets, and applies to many technologies and practices’. Caudill (2008, p. 11) has suggested that ‘rather than internet users being “given” content online produced by a technically-savvy few, new technologies and interfaces has [sic] allowed ...[individuals] to use the Web in a collaborative, interactive way’. For Marshall (2004, p. 13), new media are:

...the media form [that] has some embedded notion of interactivity that transforms it from the relationship that traditional media forms have possessed...interactivity implies some sort of transformative relationship between the user of the media and the media form itself. Encoded into new media is the capacity to transform the actual flow and presentation of the material itself. The transformative relationship is critical in understanding the difference between active and interactive, and also provides the perceived superiority of the interactive media environment over the active media environment.

While the internet brought an extensive database of information to individuals, new media enabled individuals the ability to create content based on their own thoughts, ideas and perspectives. The major shift in technologies from analogue to digital formats made information assessable, empowering individuals to select the kinds of information on which they chose to focus. As Hart, Greenfield and Haji (2007, p. XV) have stressed, ‘Web 2.0 is a web where users generate content themselves, create communities, and connect around the world with people they may never meet but can connect with for causes they collectively support’. Similarly, Solomon and Schrum (2007, p. 8) have described Web 2.0 as ‘a new web’, where individuals ‘create and share their own [information] in real time’, resulting in ‘interactivity going from linking and clicking to creating and sharing’. 
Hodgkinson has observed that ‘networking platforms, profiles, blogs…and tagging make it easy to create a personalised presence on the internet’ (cited in Syameen & Khalili 2008, p.4). Turkle (1995, p. 9) has also proposed that the computer and its related technologies be regarded not just as a communication tool, but, rather, be viewed as ‘both new models of mind and a new medium on which to project our ideas and fantasies’ (Turkle 1995, p. 9). Flew (2002, p. 21) has contended that new media’s interactivity has given ‘users a degree of choice in the information system, both in terms of choice of access to information sources and control over the outcomes of using that system and making those choices’.

With individuals now playing a large part in creating content for others to consume (Tapscott & Williams 2006), Blossom (2009) posited that the development of new media technologies caused the rise of the ‘Content Nation’. Characterised by the significant number of people who now use online publishing tools via electronic communications networks to make ‘a statement about their outlook on life, their commitment, their values’, today’s ever-present publishing tools have led many to regard their publishing of content not as an infrequent activity in which they seldom partake, but rather as an indispensable part of their being (Blossom 2009, pp. 2-3).

Traditionally, publishing was controlled by ‘a handful of wealthy and powerful people’ (Blossom 2009, p. 2). With the use of publishing tools helping individuals realise ‘what it’s like to have an audience’, Blossom (2009, p.2) contended that publishing was now ‘a tool in the hands of the world’. Posting something on a website which could be viewed by many, with an added possibility of the audience responding or communicating with the publisher

...adds yet another new dimension to personal publishing....anyone who can access our global communications networks are now engaging with other people who have similar interests and [are] establishing appreciation for one another through their common publishing capabilities (Blossom 2009, p. 2).
Coupled with increasingly redefined notions of what individuals regard ‘quality sources of information, entertainment and interaction’, the Content Nation has rapidly become a source of ‘authority and trusted insight’ (Blossom 2009, p. 7). According to Blossom (2009, p. 2), ‘...we are beginning to look upon institutions that we used to rely on for providing us with cohesion and value in our lives as less valuable in the face of publishing technologies that allow us to organise ourselves and our lives more to our suiting’.

Deciding what information is passed on to others based on both personal interests and individual evaluations of content credibility, users are now more in control. By encouraging the publishing of text, webpage links, video, audio and other materials by everyday individuals, new media technologies and SNS, such as Facebook and Twitter3, ensure the swift dissemination of information and content from one individual to another. Once regarded as a secondary form of communication, today’s electronic communications networks are now rapidly becoming an increasingly powerful primary form of communication (Blossom 2009, p. 7).

Having created a new medium for public self-expression that enables increased connectivity whilst simultaneously possessing the authority to potentially shape public opinion, influence commerce, and alter social systems, SNS are changing the meaning and methods of social connectivity (Boyd & Ellison 2007; Klassen 2008; Wortham 2009). Cooke (2011, p. 271) has highlighted the impact social networking has had, specifically its ability to break down barriers ‘of geography, of culture, of social status, and has put in place building blocks of a more inclusive, more accessible, world’.

The concept of networking via the internet is what Castells has termed a ‘network society’ (Castells 1996, 2000). Castells (1996, p. 469) argued that ‘networks

3 Another social networking platform, Twitter allows users to post tweets of up to 160 characters, enabling real-time updates and communications to take place. Although similar to Facebook’s timeline post, tweeting is, however, considered a faster medium to disseminate information, and can reach greater audiences as tweets are not limited to friend networks (as in the case of Facebook), but are accessible by twitter followers. Tweets also have a much shorter lifespan than a Facebook update, as engagement rates are highly dependent on the relevance of the tweet’s content (Widrich 2011).
constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power and culture’. Moreover, Hodgkinson has suggested:

At the heart of social networking is a desire to interact with people you know or [are] introduced to you by people you know, rather than to interact with the anonymous general population of internet users. Social networking arises from the confluence of technology capability and people’s personal preferences to live and work within networks of trusted friends and associates (cited in Syameen & Khalili 2008, p. 4).

Blossom (2009) has likened this concept of familiarity, interaction and the crystallising of human power to Oldenburg's concept of the ‘third place’. In his book, *The Great Good Place*, Oldenburg (1989) noted the significance of traditional meeting places, such as the coffee house or café, in encouraging discussion and also in the transmission of information. The comfortable environment these meeting places provided enabled individuals to be exposed to various influential thoughts, aided the endorsement of certain ideas, hastened opinion formation and permitted individuals the ability to make their own choices. Applying this concept to contemporary circumstances, Blossom (2009, p. 208) suggested that

...the “cafes” of social media form themselves into whatever shape [that] makes people comfortable, which helps them to attract the community of people who will sustain its value on an ongoing basis. Like a coffee house, it takes work to make a social media service a success; rarely does it succeed just by having the right technology in the right place at the right time.

Social media offer many kinds of ‘third places’ where individuals can congregate, therefore allowing individuals the capability to be ‘present’ at these ‘third places’ in any physical space and at any given time. The increasing number of people who used multiple forms of social media tools simultaneously has also enhanced the
prevalence of ‘local personal influence’ becoming ‘global personal influence’, and has contributed to the increase in the pace at which individuals became part of the global coffee house (Blossom 2009, p. 208).

Although social networks are regarded as established forms of social organisation (Flew 2002; Mix 2010), Castells (1996, p. 471) has reasoned that such networks could also be used to elicit more centralised and hierarchical forms of organisation, resulting in the formation of a network that was increasingly authoritative and overly prescriptive of social relations. Blossom (2009, p. 201), too, has contended that ‘people using social media go unnoticed most of the time until they join forces to assume a common form for a common purpose’.

With multiple factors exerting an impact on the scope and type of information accessed via new media, the need to understand the impact such changes have on social processes is made even more pertinent. Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2006, 2007) have found that the use of SNS has increased social capital and community formation, as such use not only encouraged the deepening and maintenance of relationships, but also enabled opportunities for expression and increased the visibility of individual social networks. Boyd and Ellison (2007, p. 210) also observed that SNS's integration of information and communication tools supported diverse ranges of interests and practices, and facilitated the establishment of connections that would otherwise not be made.

Still, scholars have argued that by increasing accessibility and access to information, the internet has merely promoted engagement amongst individuals who were already interested and knowledgeable in political matters (Bimber 1999; Norris 2001). And, by creating ‘spaces for democracy as well as autocracy’, new media technologies have been associated with ‘empowering individuals for both good and ill’ (Schmidt & Cohen 2010).

The creation of new prospects for growth and development, as well as the rise of an interconnected, technologically savvy populace, has been proposed as having triggered intense challenges for established governing methods. Scholars such as
Roberts (2014) contend that while SNS like Facebook provide opportunities for users to communicate and perform social ties with others, encouraging increased freedom to participate in discussions online, online activism can be considered a form of resistance or dissent. The conscious adoption of an active stance opposing dominant ideologies, whether intentional or unintentional, in support of social activist causes can be considered a form of resistance against hegemonic structures (Roberts, J 2014, pp. 9-10).

Numerous other scholars have studied the use of the internet to further specific social and political causes (see Xenos & Moy 2007; Castells 2007; Kushin & Yamamoto 2010; Bennett & Segerberg 2011; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela 2012). The Arab Spring⁴ and the Occupy Movement⁵ are just two examples of the impact SNS have had in furthering socially and politically motivated activism.

Prompting the querying of the kind of public sphere that is being created in today's digital age, questions regarding the validity and understanding of new concepts of participation have surfaced (Bennett 2008). As Buckingham (cited in Bennett 2008, pp. 3-4) has argued, ‘...“media engagement” is not necessarily the same as “civic engagement”...how, in the end, are we defining what counts as “civic” and what doesn’t?’ Such querying is crucial in determining what constitutes civic engagement in today’s new media context.

⁴ The Arab Spring was a series of anti-government protests, uprisings and rebellions that began in Tunisia in December 2010 and later spread to other countries in the region. Common themes that united protestors in the Arab countries included 'greater democratic rights, an end to political corruption in Arab states and greater protection from socioeconomic inequalities' (Roberts. J 2014, pp. 158-160). Social media outlets were heavy utilised to mobilise protestors for revolutionary purposes against political regimes in these events. Highlighting the way individuals could now express their frustrations, mobilise others and coordinate movements and actions, scholars have argued that examining the relationship social movements and digital technologies can have is now more important than ever (Bräuchler 2013; Roberts, J 2014).

⁵ The Occupy Movement protested against the Arab Spring and the 2008 financial crisis. It started in New York in September 2011, but was quickly transformed into a global movement. Information about the movement was spread with the use of the hashtag #OccupyWallStreet. It attracted many who did not consider themselves ‘political’ activists (Roberts, J 2014, p. 173). Bessant (2014, p. 38) has observed that the movement was ‘inclusive, relatively broad and successfully managed to engage in “will formation”, ...inform[ing] public opinion in ways that shaped policy agendas, discourses, government policy and law’.
1.4 GE2011 and GE2015

The results of Singapore's 2011 and 2015 General Elections (hereafter GE2011 and GE2015) highlight the power of social media in affecting political participation and governmental discourse in the Singaporean city-state. The relaxation of rules on the usually strictly controlled media coverage of the election for GE2011 saw new media enabling the wider dissemination of ideas and criticisms, opening up new avenues political parties could use to reach voters directly. Allowing social media to be used as part of political campaigns also enabled the almost instantaneous sharing of views, access to multiple sources of information, especially that of alternative socio-political blogs, and increased political awareness amongst the populace.

Resulting in the crystallisation of thoughts and amplified voices, particularly that of the younger, more technologically savvy generation of Singaporeans, GE2011 witnessed an 'unprecedented surge' of dissatisfaction over policies and governance strategies (Bloomberg, 9 May 2011). Singapore voters aged 21 to 35 accounted for about 600,000, or one in four of the 2.35 million eligible voters in GE2011 (Tay, S 2011). The PAP also won just 60.1 percent of the vote (National Library Board 2014), the PAP's weakest result since participating in the 1959 elections (Low 2011).

The PAP's winning percentage could be considered a huge majority by comparative standards. However, having been in the dominant power since Singapore's independence, this political party has seen its winning margins decrease significantly from that of 77.7% in 1980, when the PAP was returned to power winning all 75 seats in the sixth General Election, to 64.8% in 1984, 63.2% in 1988 and then 61% in the 1991 General Election (Channel NewsAsia 2011).

Political commentators, such as Singapore-based author Catherine Lim, remarked that the results of GE2011 indicated both a shift in Singapore's political structure and the emergence of a 'new, sophisticated and more articulate people and opposition' (Bloomberg, 9 May 2011). Scholars such as George (2011) also asserted
that GE2011 ‘reshaped the political terrain’, making it clear that Singaporeans were ‘less willing to accept an unfair playing field’:

One of the positive developments we saw in this GE was ordinary citizens blowing the whistle on PAP politicians who displayed their intolerance and disrespect for opposing views and values. The public gave a strong signal that it would not stand for the kind of demonisation of the opposition and castigation of the electorate that had occurred in past elections.

Citing ‘tactical missteps of the PAP [being] dissected in detail, while the mismanagement of the Reform Party [went] unqueried...[thus] forcing the PAP to outgrow its dependence on a non-level playing field’, George (2011) highlighted the pressure and demands for accountability Singaporeans demanded of its government. With a citizenry ‘accustomed to freewheeling blogs and online forums’, George (2011) also contended that GE2011 emphasised Singaporeans’ intolerance of ‘being talked down to’.

Still, by returning the PAP to power in GE2011, Singaporeans indicated not only their acceptance of the PAP remaining ‘the natural party of governance’, but also their ‘favour of good governance... that they want[ed] the PAP to govern better’ (George 2011):

Singaporeans are evidently not immune to a dose of democratic common sense: government, they've concluded, will perform better when confronted with a threat of unceremonious eviction, a threat that must occasionally be realised if it is to be taken seriously. Democratisation, though, is more than [being just] about seats in the legislature going one way or another. It can also be measured by the progress made in values such as tolerance of diversity, as well as practices such as the exercise of public reason.
In the wake of GE2011, a post-election survey conducted by the Singapore-based think tank, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) found that support for political pluralism had increased with higher levels of socio-economic status. In comparison to the attitudes of voters in Singapore’s 2006 General Election, the largest increase in support for political pluralism was observed in the 21-29 age group (Institute of Policy Studies 2011a). In an IPS Post-Election Forum Report, Tan Ern Ser, a member of the 2011 IPS Post-Election survey team, also commented that the 2011 General Election ‘significantly revealed the frustrations from the “middle-class squeeze”’ (Institute of Policy Studies 2011b, p. 11).

Although traditional information media, such as television and newspapers, were still regarded as the top channels of communication and dissemination of information, the internet’s influence in shaping voter decisions was ranked third, an increase from 2006’s ninth ranking. Additionally, it was observed that the internet was more influential with some segments of the population, ‘especially with those younger in age, and higher in income and occupational class’ (Institute of Policy Studies 2011b, p. 13).

In the subsequent General Election, GE2015, the PAP received 69.9 percent of the overall popular vote, an almost 10 percentage point increase from GE2011 (Tan, S 2015). GE2015 was also the first time all 89 possible seats in parliament were contested, with some constituencies seeing ‘fierce’ three-cornered fights. Yet, the PAP managed to “win back” voters’ trust and confidence (Tan, S 2015).

Commenting on the ‘nationwide swing’ towards the PAP (Tan, S 2015), Defence Minister Dr Ng Eng Hen said that several factors stood behind Singaporeans’ increased support for the PAP. Some of the factors cited by Dr Ng included, Singaporeans being reminded of the country’s progress by events such as the year-long SG50 celebrations, the passing of founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (LKY) in March 2015, and the National Day celebrations held in August 2015.

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6 Pluralism in its most general sense is the acknowledgement of diversity.
7 SG50 was a ‘nationwide effort’ targeted at celebrating Singapore’s 50th birthday milestone in 2015 (Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth 2015).
Dr Ng also asserted that ‘Singapore’s progress was all the more stark in light of its neighbours’ current troubles...which helped bring home the message that Singapore is special...’, encouraging Singaporeans to reflect on why ‘we’ve done so well and what is it that has enabled...’ Singapore’s significant advancements over the years (Yong, C 2015). Among other reasons Dr Ng gave for the jump in the PAP’s popular vote was that ‘Singaporeans were in favour of high standards’ and saw the benefit or the ‘immediacy of [having] good MPs’ (Members of Parliament) who were ‘credible, honest, [and had] integrity’ (Yong, C 2015).

Dr Ng’s rationalisation of the GE2015 results suggests the PAP’s continued utilisation of the national survival rhetoric, as well as the positive outcomes of the policies and initiatives it has implemented to demonstrate its strategies and legitimacy as Singapore’s ruling elite. Yet, the PAP’s effort in addressing issues that were raised in the lead-up to GE2011, such as conducting a review of ministerial salaries, should not be viewed solely as an indication of the PAP’s acceptance and adaptation to the different context new media has affected in Singapore.

The intense pressure on the PAP asserted by netizens to address such issues of concern, coupled with the PAP’s desire to regain its citizens’ favour after having observed its weakest ever election result, need to be considered when examining the significance of such adjustments to long-standing governance methods in Singapore. The PAP’s continued use of new media as an interactive communicative tool, using SNS as a way to bridge the gap between citizens and the government, even after campaigning for GE2011 had ended, creating a more approachable method to access the ruling elite, should also be viewed with some reservation.

Ministers, including PM Lee HL, have embraced the use of Facebook, actively posting content and interacting with Singaporeans online. Communicating views and commenting on situations that occur both globally and locally, PM Lee HL has
made a point to post his own posts\(^9\) and even calls on netizens for input on his Facebook posts. Usually, PM Lee HL’s posts are casual and non-political in nature, especially when he asks netizens to guess the location of pictures he took himself and uploaded on his Facebook Wall. Still, the substantial number of ‘likes’, shares and comments such posts receive suggests netizens’s positive reception of PM Lee’s willingness to interact with them.

Scholars have, however, argued that the PAP’s involvement, management, surveillance and overt control over practically every facet of life in Singapore have branded Singapore a micromanaged nation (Cotton 1996; George 2000; Trocki 2006). The resultant ‘normalisation’ of internet regulation and control has therefore fostered ‘self-censorship’ (Rodan 1998; George 2000; Gomez 2000), or ‘auto-regulation’ (Lee, T 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2003), both terms connoting fear and the hegemonic grip over power the PAP has. According to Thomas (2000), Singaporeans do not regard the internet as a medium of ‘freedom’, as it is ‘circumscribed by rules and regulations that are intrinsically political in character’ (Lee, T 2003; see Resnick 1998). Contrasted with the outpouring of opinions on SNS and the willingness to engage online especially in the lead up to GE2011, the change in attitudes towards political engagement in Singapore is particularly noteworthy.

Jurgert et al. (2013) suggest that predictors of participation include: motivation for civic engagement, which involves volunteerism and collective action (Omoto & Snyder 2002; Klandermans 2004); peer and parental norms, or approvals received from their environments (Klandermans 1997; Da Silva et al. 2004; Oswald & Schmid 2006); and collective efficacy (Klandermans 1997; Kelloway et al. 2007), or individuals’ belief in their ability to attain meaningful collective goals (Bandura 1999; Berg, Coman, & Schensul 2009). Still, technology alone is unable to affect change. Socio-cultural contexts, political discourse and deep-rooted normative practices and ideals accepted within societies affect the extent to which new media

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\(^9\) To differentiate when it is PM Lee HL who is posting and not the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) that is posting articles on PM Lee HL’s Facebook page, the initials ‘LHL’ are added to the end of posts.
technologies can be used as ‘liberation’ tools in the advancement of democratic ideals.

Undoubtedly, the formal acceptance of new media as an accepted method of communication and information source in Singapore has generated shifts in government practices, citizens’ ability to ‘report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions...scrutinise government, deepen participation and expand horizons of freedom’ (Diamond 2010, p. 70). However, the practices surrounding the use of new media in Singapore cannot be understood without first comprehending the social systems in which such interactions take place.

1.5  Singapore’s Generation Y

The PAP government’s management of globalisation’s socio-cultural forces whilst engaging with the global economy to ensure Singapore’s competitiveness in what it portrays to be the contemporary economic climate has implications for the ways in which members of the younger generation negotiate and construct their social roles and identities. Singapore’s society has also become more and more complex. Increased opportunities in education, employment and exposure to Western influences have resulted in the emergence of social and economic stratification amongst its citizens (Chua & Kwok 2001, p. 86).

Re-forming the existing multiracial society to suit the needs of multinational capital, the strategic management of the citizenry as a ‘uni-dimensional function of economic development’ exemplifies the power and control engulfing Singapore’s society (Wee 2001, p. 988). Specifying Singapore’s orientation towards achieving global city status, this dichotomy further amplifies the contradictions encompassing Singapore. Despite having developed a modern capitalist society, which, on the one hand, practices ‘interventionism within its boundaries’ and, on the other, encourages liberal free trade externally (Wee 2001, p. 988), Singapore needs to rely on society itself to construct and re-invent a sustainable social culture, on top of developing its distinctiveness nationally (see George 2000).
Studies carried out on the impact the internet has had on social relationships have noted the disconnection of individuals from their local community, creating ‘an impoverished communication environment’ due to the limited ability of the internet to present non-textual cues in communication (Haythornthwaite 2005, p. 126). Robert Putnam (1995, 2000) has noted the internet’s contribution to the steady decline in social capital in America. Although Fisher, C (2001) argued that Putnam’s work was focused on organisational forms of social capital, overlooking networks of interpersonal social capital, Putnam did observe long-term decreases in individuals’ ability to articulate and organise requests for good government, declines in community engagement, and increased psychological alienation. Calhoun (1998, p. 381) has also suggested:

...the general tendency is not for the Web to produce a radical democracy of constant citizen participation and instant referenda...nor to empower the poor, weak, and dispersed against the rich, powerful and well-positioned. Computer mediated communication does a little of each of these things, but it does a lot to enhance existing power structures.

Since independence, Singapore’s governing elite has helped its people manage the issue it identifies as having ‘too much’ freedom. Even in the age of the internet, the use of regulatory licenses to safeguard acceptable conduct in the online realm ensures auto-regulation and the observance of regulations imposed from the top down. However, the limits to individual freedom Singaporeans have been disciplined into accepting and have since internalised and habituated, have in recent times faced challenges from a more educated and discerning generation of young adult Singaporeans. Calling for the freedom of speech, and a more liberal open society, the young adult generation in Singapore, normally referred to as Generation Y (Gen Y), has been noted to be more vocal and expressive online.

The term Gen Y is used to describe the demographic cohort following Generation X, the generation after the baby boomers. Mapping stereotypes onto large cohorts is not necessarily accurate, but according to McGlynn (2010), each generation is
named according to some aspect affecting their life structure. Millennials, or Gen Ys, have been named to reflect their coming of age in a new millennium.

Depending on social and economic conditions, members of Gen Y have been exposed to varying impacts of globalising processes and are generally regarded to have increased familiarity, use, and engagement with digital media and advanced communication technologies. This group was also the first to come of age just as interest in the internet and its associated technologies began to flourish (Sheahan 2005; Ellis-Christensen 2013). Familiar with things the generation before would regard as novelties, Gen Y grew up alongside internet surfing, cable television, cell phones and electronic organisers, just to name a few (Ellis-Christensen 2013). The rise of instant communication and social network sites, and especially the fact that Facebook’s largest demographic of users is made up of this group, may offer an explanation for the Gen Y’s reputation of being peer-oriented with the ease of communication through technology (Wolburg & Pokrywczynski 2001; Davie 2008; Schwalbe 2009; Smith 2012).

Still, the parameters of the term Gen Y vary greatly, with little or no consensus on the exact age range the term covers. In 2007, Time ran an article attempting to address pertinent issues older generations needed to grasp in order for them to understand individuals below 30 years of age, or Gen Y’s 20-something-year-olds (Trunk 2007). Using this age group as a reference point and taking into consideration the time lapse since 2007, references to Gen Y in this thesis denote individuals between the ages of 21 to 35 at the time of the research. More specifically, the rationale behind the age range used in this study is as follows:

Under Singapore law, the age of maturity and consent in Singapore is 18 years of age (Civil Law (Amendment) Act 2009, (No. 7 of 2009)). At this minimum age of contractual capacity, individuals are also eligible to drive and consume alcohol. However, individuals must be at least 21 years of age before they can become a Member of Parliament, make a will, vote or renounce citizenships (The Straits Times, 10 May 2008). In a response to a reader’s comments in The Straits Times Forum page, S Radha, Head of Corporate Communications at the Ministry of Law,
Singapore, also emphasised that ‘adulthood is attained through a gradual process, with a progressive increase in rights and responsibilities’ (*The Straits Times*, 10 May 2008).

Moreover, Radha (*The Straits Times*, 10 May 2008) stressed the seriousness of voting in elections and the need for voters to be able to make reasonable and sound judgments about national issues. With some working experience and greater maturity, the reasoning behind maintaining Singapore’s voting age as 21 years of age was clarified. Using this rationale, this study will adopt the lower limit of 21 years in its reference to Singapore’s Generation Y.

The upper limit of 35 years will also be utilised throughout this study, as in Singapore, single individuals are only allowed to apply for and purchase public housing from the Housing and Development Board (HDB) after 35 years of age. The practice of staying with parents even after marriage for reasons ranging from waiting for HDB flats to be developed, saving money to make the down-payment on HDB flats, to ensuring family values and ties are retained in families with adult children indicates the potential for dependency to be exercised until 35 years of age.

Having grown up in an age when social and political changes were managed peacefully without the turmoil experienced in the past, today’s Singaporean Gen Ys are the products of a rapidly modernising and westernising environment (Rasheed & Mahizhnan 1990, p. 83). Having experienced sustained economic growth, bringing about the widespread feeling of economic well-being and even affluence (Rasheed & Mahizhnan 1990, p. 83), these individuals are more highly educated, globally informed, well traveled and fluent in the English language as compared to the previous generations of Singaporeans. As they are more open to foreign influence and possessing different conceptions about the world, concerns about their discontent with a centrally managed political culture, largely devoid of the give-and-take of practical politics, have been raised (Rasheed & Mahizhnan 1990, pp. 80-81).
Scholars have asserted that the internet has created new spaces and possibilities for activism, alternate community building, and even resistance in Singapore (Calhoun 1998; Koh, S 1998; Neo 2000). The blurring of boundaries due to modernisation, the internet and increased mobility, the cognisance of alternative options and possibilities present in other parts of the world, as well as the rise of personal standards or goals motivating the testing of pre-set boundaries, have prompted Gen Y to look elsewhere for inspiration and more creative options to counter the constraints they feel in Singapore.

In a study focused specifically on Singaporean youths, their perceptions and aspirations, Kuo (1988, pp. 12-13) found that youths between the ages of 15 and 30 embodied social aspirations aimed at a better Singapore. They also hoped for more freedom and less restrictions (Kuo 1988, p. 13). Although participants acknowledged the progress Singapore has made since independence, they were critical of the government’s ‘control and over-regulation’. Participants expressed the ‘wish for a more flexible and liberal political style in the future...[and urged the] government to pay more attention to the way policies and regulations [were] implemented’ (Kuo 1988, p. 18).

Respondents’ education levels were found to have had an effect on the responses provided (Kuo 1988). And, despite the type of criticism aired against the government, ‘most of the participants indicated full confidence in the ability and integrity of the government and its leaders’ (Kuo 1988, p. 18). Participants in Kuo’s (1988) study also highlighted participation as a factor they felt was lacking in the way Singapore was being governed.

Kuo’s (1988) study, although dated, does indicate the relevance of Gen Y’s views, its members’ perceptions of the governing elite, as well as their concern for Singapore’s future. Furthermore, with the inclusion of new media as an appropriate channel of communication and engagement, the question of whether Singapore’s Gen Y still feels left out of the political process is difficult to overlook.
Conflicting interpretations about young people’s participation in contemporary democracies have been reported. Scholars have highlighted young peoples’ decreased interest and concern for both civil and civic engagement (see Fuchs & Klingemann 1995; Holmberg 1999; Pharr & Putnam 2000; Putnam 2000), while others have suggested optimistic interpretations of young peoples’ participation levels (see Hooghe & Dejaeghere 2007). Amna and Ekman (2014) have attributed this discrepancy to traditional notions of passivity not taking into consideration new forms of civic participation, which are manifested most notably in the ways young people engage online (see Loader 2007; Bennett, Wells & Freelon 2011).

Amna and Ekman (2014, p. 262) proposed a conceptual framework that considered three different varieties of political passivity, and argued that political passivity was ‘not a unidimensional phenomenon; rather, it encompasses unengaged as well as disillusioned young citizens, and also citizens who only appear passive, and in reality are prepared for political action, should circumstances warrant’ the need for it. The need to distinguish these kinds of citizens was crucial in the debate on political participation, civic engagement and democracy, as ‘seemingly “passive” standby citizens’ could in fact be assets to democracy because of ‘their particular combination of political interest, trust, and inclination to participate’ (Amna & Ekman 2014, p. 262).

Moreover, Dana Fisher’s (2012, p. 131) review on the ways young people participate in the American political system highlighted gaps in the understanding of ‘pathways to participation, the role of race and gender, and the ways that information and communications technologies are being used by young people to engage in politics’. The blurring of the differences between activism and electoral politics was also observed to have contributed to the lack of understanding and synthesis in the kinds of research that was being conducted on youth participation in activism and electoral campaigns (Fisher, D 2012).

Skelton’s (2010) research further verifies the importance of engaging young people in ‘public’ or ‘formal’ (Political) settings, as well ‘informal’ or ‘personal’ (political) settings. However, Skelton’s (2010) research was set in Montserrat, a British Overseas Territory in the Caribbean. Underscoring the bias of research on this topic
as being carried out mainly in Western contexts, this thesis will be focused on analysing the significance of new media, particularly the use of Facebook in formulating social constructions held by Gen Y in, specifically, the Singaporean context.

1.6 Facebook Usage in Singapore

In 2014, there were 3.8 million registered Facebook users in Singapore (Figure 1.1). Singapore’s social penetration rate for Facebook (91%), its most popular social media platform (Figure 1.1), was well above the averages for global social media use (29%), and also the average social media penetration rate for the Asia-Pacific region (27% – Figure 1.2). Social media users in Singapore were found to spend an average of 1.6 hours a day using the social media platforms (We Are Social Singapore 2015b). We Are Social Singapore also found that in the Asia-Pacific region, Facebook users between 18-24 years old had the most number of Facebook accounts. This was followed by Facebook users in the 25-29 and 30-34 age groups (see Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.1: Social media landscape in Singapore – August 2014 (Hashmeta 2014)
In 2009, the Info-communications Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) recorded the highest usage of internet communication activities for individuals in the 15-24 and 25-34 age groups (Info-communications Development Authority of...
Singapore 2009). The use of instant messaging to communicate increased from 25% in 2008 to 31% in 2009, and the use of social networking increased from 30% to 54% in 2009 for respondents in the 15-24 years age group (Info-
communications Development Authority of Singapore 2009; Info-communications Development Authority of Singapore 2010). Similarly, the 25-34 age group recorded an increase from 19% in 2008 to 35% in 2009 in its members’ usage of social networking for communication (Info-communications Development Authority of Singapore 2009; Info-communications Development Authority of Singapore 2010).

During the GE2011, statistics gathered by Brandtology, an online monitoring company, and Tribal DDB, an interactive media firm, indicated that there were ‘more than 44,000 blog postings, Tweets, and Facebook updates related to the General Election for the first 26 days of April – the day before Nomination Day’\(^\text{10}\), a figure almost double the total for the entire month of March 2011 (Channel NewsAsia, 8 May 2011). In the 12 days following Nomination Day, up until Results Day on 8 May 2011, mainstream media outlets such as MediaCorp, which have online content, saw significant increases in traffic and recorded over 49 million page and video views. Tweets on @ge2011 had over 12,500 followers (Channel NewsAsia, 13 May 2011). The 2011 IPS Post-Election Survey also indicated increases in younger Singaporeans’ use of the internet and social networking sites to communicate.

Research studies conducted on Facebook have varied greatly in its emphases. Studies that have attempted attaining deeper understandings of individuals’ thoughts, motivations, and uses of Facebook have largely been fueled by economic aims, with the intention of deciphering consumer patterns and branding strategies.

\(^{10}\) Candidates are required to present their nomination papers, statutory declarations and certificates personally to the nomination centre on Nomination Day. At the close of the nomination period, if more than one candidate (Single Member Constituency (SMC)) or more than one group of candidates (Group Representation Constituency (GRC)) stand nominated, the notice of a contested election would be issued. The date on which polls would be taken, otherwise known as Polling Day, would then be announced (Singapore Elections Department, 2014). In one of the most challenging contests in Singapore's political history, the 2011 General Election polls saw 82 out of 87 parliamentary seats being contested amongst seven political parties (Channel NewsAsia, 8 May 2011).
Facebook's potential to encourage political engagement (Hayes 2009; Utz 2009; Vitak et al. 2009), particularly the effect Facebook had in the 2008 USA Presidential Election (Dalsgaard 2008; Budak 2010; Hanson et al. 2010; Robertson, Vatrapu & Medina 2010; Vitak et al. 2011), and Facebook's influence on online and offline community engagement (Bryant & Marmo 2009; Mix 2010; Pennington, cited in Tosun 2012) have also been studied.

While a commonly revealed motivation behind the use of Facebook is the desire to gain information about others and to connect interpersonally (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2006; 2007; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke 2008), Sheldon (2008) has observed that certain demographic features amongst college students, which include age, gender, and level of education, affected the purpose of interactions on the social networking site.

Furthermore, although it is possible to create personal accounts on SNS based on inaccurate representations of one's self, or the 'hoped-for possible selves', Yurchisin, Watchravesringkan & McCabe (2005) proposed that SNS do not support anonymity in the same way earlier forms of CMC did. Facebook encourages the specification of identifiable information, such as profile pictures, the provision of names and email addresses, and has been used as a way of boasting about the happenings in one's social life. Undoubtedly, this does suggest the necessity for the display of truths in one's presentation of self, but it has been argued that this form of presentation could be exaggerated.

Scholars have suggested that the use of media platforms in this manner is purely an attention-seeking attempt (Rubin, Rubin, & Martin 1993; Martin & Rubin 1998), implying low levels of self-esteem and insecurity. Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin (2008) also contended that in non-anonymous online settings such as that of Facebook, users generally claimed their identities implicitly rather than explicitly, opting to display rather than narrate or describe their identities online. Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin's (2008) study further concluded that participants were more eager to stress group and consumer identities over personally narrated ones in the online environment.
Ferrell (2011) has raised the concern that most of the research conducted on Facebook has utilised user self-reports for measurement, highlighting potential biases in the self-determined nature of research thus far. Ferrell (2011, pp. 28-29) also noted that 'Facebook behaviours are self-determined, context dependent, and are interactions of intrapersonal processes and interpersonal relationships...[balancing] psychological needs, social needs, and social interactions'.

Miller's (2011) ethnographic research on the influence of Facebook in Trinidad supports this assertion, highlighting the immense impact Facebook has had on social relationships. Miller (2011) argues that Facebook can be a means by which individuals find, develop and destroy relationships; thus, having an immense impact on interactions and social processes individuals engage in. This, he suggests, has implications for the social networking processes individuals will engage in in the future (Miller 2011). Why We Post, a global anthropological research project in which Miller is involved, further examines the uses and consequences of social media (University College London 2017). While it attempts to take a global comparative perspective on the roles social media plays in affecting social relations, the nine fieldsites examined do not include any Southeast Asian countries11.

The effect new media technologies have had in Asian contexts have yet to be explored fully. Kuo et al. (2002) did examine the uses and impact of the internet in Singapore, but only drew out implications related to the formation of social relationships. Skoric and Kwan (2011) also observed the influence of Facebook and online gaming platforms in affecting online participation among Singaporean youths. Yet, the study was focused on the relationship between the intensity of use of online platforms in encouraging online sociability, not understanding participants’ perceptions and views when deciding to engage online.

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11 The fieldsites examined include: Industrial China, Rural China, Southeast Turkey, North Chile, Trinidad, South England, Northeast Brazil, South India, and South Italy (University College London 2017).
Other studies on Facebook usage in Singapore have taken either an educational (Hew & Cheung 2012) and/or psychological approach (Ong et al. 2011; Kwan & Skoric 2013) towards understanding reasons for youth engagement on Facebook. This further emphasises the lack of research focused on understanding the perceptions of Singaporean Gen Y from a sociological perspective.

1.7 Research Aims

The internet has introduced many opportunities for change, especially in the Singaporean context. However, it is unclear whether this change embodies new forms of the state’s disciplinary power (Rodan 1998; Gomez 2000; Lim, L 2000; Ho, Baber & Khondker 2002; Lee, T 2003, 2008), resulting in questions concerning the meaning and influence such changes have had in Singapore’s context. Is the PAP beginning to lose its all-encompassing grip over the nation, which previously caused the suppression of citizenry voice via auto-regulation and self-censorship? Or has the rise of new media platforms such as Facebook brought to light a new social phenomenon and model of democracy?

Addressing such questions requires differentiating structural constraint from the limits of agency. Thus, this thesis focuses upon that differentiation in its concern with the acquisition of deeper understandings of the viewpoints of Singapore’s younger generation, identifying the impact the use of new media, particularly that of Facebook, has had on the reproduction of disciplinary procedures and the construction of national belonging in Singapore. Additionally, the significance of practice theory in comprehending the formation of social practices in a world blurred by online and offline boundaries will be analysed. Amid shifting globalising processes, changes in the needs and aspirations of Singapore's Gen Y, Gen Y's negotiation of contradictory demands, and its members' implementation and exercise of agency and choice will also be examined.
1.8 Overview of Thesis

The remainder of this thesis is organised into seven chapters. Chapter Two will address the theoretical underpinnings grounding this thesis. Attempting to tackle the structure and agency dialectic from a practice theory perspective, this chapter will establish the theoretical underpinnings from which the effects of new media in Singapore will be examined. How the constructs of structure and agency affect social processes such as social capital formation and the willingness to participate in civic issues will be also addressed.

Chapter Three will focus upon at the context of constraint in Singapore, specifically the restrictions placed on the press freedom in the city-state. Shifts in the PAP’s policies and focus, especially those pertaining to the management of the internet and new media technologies, will be evaluated. Examples obtained from Facebook incidents, indicating netizens’ exercise of choice in opting to use social media as a platform for the expression of views will also be discussed.

The methodological approach adopted in this study, as well as data collection methods and sample characteristics will be exemplified in Chapter Four. Having utilised a mixed-methods design to examine Singapore’s Gen Y’s negotiation of contradictory demands and their implementation and exercise of agency and choice, both quantitative and qualitative procedures were implemented during fieldwork research. The results obtained in the survey and the semi-structured interview components that were conducted in this study will be presented in Chapters Five and Six respectively.

Chapter Five will detail the results obtained from the survey questions, which were clustered around such topics as: the uses and perceptions of Facebook, social relations and community engagement, voice and channel of expression, and national identity and attachment to home.

To ensure a more in-depth understanding of participants’ perspectives, topics paralleling those covered in the survey were addressed in the semi-structured
interviews. Topics addressed in the semi-structured interviews included: the uses and perceptions of Facebook, the dynamics behind governance and choice in Singapore from Gen Y’s perspective, notions of truth and accountability, participation in the age of new media, notions of belonging and community engagement. These results will be presented in Chapter Six.

Chapter Seven will further analyse the findings from both the survey and semi-structured interviews. Looking at the socio-cultural effects Facebook has had in Singapore, Chapter 7 will engage with two trends. Section 7.2 will examine notions related to the transformation of disciplinary procedures and the negotiation of limits to freedom in Singapore, and Section 7.3 will examine Singapore’s Gen Y’s engagement in activism, as well as Gen Y’s feelings of attachment to Singapore. In relation to the PAP’s consistent push towards developing an active citizenry, Facebook’s effectiveness as a democratisation tool will also be deliberated. Theoretical implications for the notion of structure and agency, concluding remarks, and implications for future research will be considered in Chapter Eight.
Chapter Two
Conceptualising the Structure and Agency Dialectic

2.1 Introduction

Through the generation of user-created content, social media have not only encouraged the development of new forms of engagement, but also the growth of a culture of participation. Going against established notions that theorise the agency of media recipients as being directly related to the type of medium encountered (van Dijck 2009, p. 41), the creative effort necessary for when engaging via social media has resulted in transformations to the way media are produced and circulated (OCED Report 2007). The way social behaviour is negotiated has also been altered.

Structure and agency are fundamental dimensions in ‘virtually all tendencies of social scientific thought’ (Sewell 1992, p. 1). Re-examining the primary conceptualisations of structure and agency, especially in today’s new media framework, is crucial to understanding the meanings produced by new media’s intersection and alteration of every aspect of socio-cultural life. By examining the perspectives put forth by practice theorists, this chapter will attempt to exemplify the dialectic between structure and agency.

Examining the theoretical and epistemological presuppositions underlying the approach this thesis will take, this chapter will set the theoretical basis needed to analyse the situation new media have effected in Singapore. In order to comprehend the effects new media use has had on social processes, as well as Gen Y’s negotiation of contradictory demands, concepts such as social capital and civic participation will need to be addressed from the outset.
2.2 **Social Capital and Community Engagement**

Social capital has been defined in terms of trust and social relationships (Fukuyama 1995), as community engagement (Putnam 1995), as the social fabric that generates the motivation to collaborate (Ostrom 1994), and as an aspect of social structure that facilitates action and cooperation (Greeley 1997). Focused on an actor’s relationship with others, scholars such as Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1995) have emphasised the significance of social capital for collective living and the attainment of common goals.

Bourdieu (1986, p. 248) defines social capital as being ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’, while Coleman (1988) defines social capital as referring to the resources accumulated through the relationships among people.

Premised on the establishment of networks and communities, as well as the social relations that are formed within them, Coleman (1988) asserts that social capital is purposeful, is informed by specific social contexts, and is produced by regular and recurrent social actions of individuals who are connected to each another by ongoing networks of social relations. Thus, embedded in the structure of relations between actors and among actors, social capital makes ‘possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible’ (Coleman 1988, p. S98):

Social capital cannot be defined on the basis of individual characteristics, or even on the basis of individual organisational memberships, because social capital is not possessed by individuals. Rather, it is produced through structured patterns of social interaction, and its consequences for individuals must be assessed relative to these patterns of interaction (La Due Lake & Huckfeldt 1998, p. 581).
Similarly, Putnam (1995, p. 66) describes social capital as the ‘features of social organisation such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit’. Drawing on Granovetter's (1973) strength of ties theory, Putnam (2000) distinguishes between two types of social capital – bonding and bridging social capital.

Bonding social capital refers to internal and external advantages and social support associated with stronger ties between family members and other closely knit relations of in-groups. Bridging social capital is related to weaker ties across groups, and thus, the diffusion of information amongst acquaintances or colleagues. For certain purposes, weak ties can contribute more to social capital as compared to strong ties, as these relationships allow the attainment of information from other networks, and also the flow of information about the trustworthiness of the individual to reach other networks.

Understanding the norms of reciprocity within social systems is essential to understanding the concept of social capital. The notion of reciprocity is not only one of the features Granovetter (1973) proposed as being a determinant of tie strength, but is also an important feature in relationship maintenance. Similarly, Haythornthwaite (2005, p. 127) has argued that the relationships between individuals and the strength of ties they share ‘reveal how resources flow and circulate among these individuals, and what subsets or cliques of individuals are more connected than others’ (Haythornthwaite 2005, p. 127).

Bourdieu has emphasised how individuals use social capital to achieve and reproduce status distinctions (Acciaioli 1981), but has also argued that understanding reciprocal norms within networks is essential for social capital, as individuals who anticipate benefitting from the actions of others, or who have engaged in such gestures in the past, will be more motivated to help others (Bourdieu 2001). Additionally, Lin (2001, p. 6) has suggested that social capital is an ‘investment in social relations with expected returns’.

Social capital thus, emphasises the value of networks and norms, describing the
benefits obtained from interpersonal interactions at both the individual and collective levels (Putnam 2000; Bourdieu 2001; Lin 2001). The relational nature of the concept of social capital is of vital importance as

...trust, obligations or information do not exist in absence of individuals exercising or transacting them...[and] individuals cannot get access to information, exercise trust, or enforce norms as isolated entities. Social capital is consequential because it makes possible a meeting of minds and wills towards accomplishing a common goal (Matei 2004, p. 27).

The internet’s extension of communication networks beyond geographical boundaries and known social networks indicates the benefits of CMC. Providing alternative, inexpensive and convenient ways to communicate and engage in social capital formation, communicating via new media technologies has transformed the way social contact is made, and also the way individuals participate in civic issues. Such CMC de-emphasises ‘local and group-based solidarities’ and moves more towards ‘spatially-dispersed and sparsely-knit interest-based social networks’, providing a means by which communities of shared interest can interact (Quan-Hasse & Wellman 2004, p. 116; see also Barlow et at. 1995; Wellman 2001).

Overcoming the limitations of time and space, new media have formed new methods of interaction and have encouraged a sense of community through the connecting of friends and family near and far, providing information on a vast variety of topics, and through the encouragement of individuals’ engagement in different group interests (Hiltz & Turoff 1993; Baym 1998; Jones 1998; Wellman 2001). By choosing to participate in online communities of shared interests regardless of physical location, the prevalence of social cues and identifying characteristics such as ethnicity, age and socioeconomic status are reduced significantly, leading to increases in the motivation to participate online. This feature of CMC highlights the community-multiplying effect of digital media, which helps foster civic engagement and, in turn, social capital (Sproull & Kiesler 1991; see also Baym 1998).
Still, some scholars have argued that the utilisation of digital media technologies have caused a decline in the establishment of relationships and individuals’ interest and motivation to engage in community activities and political matters (Putnam 1995, 2000; Nie 2001; Nie, Hillygus & Erbring 2002; Quan-Hasse & Wellman 2004). Such use can encourage the participation in solitary activities (Wellman et al. 2001), potentially alienating individuals from social interactions and civic matters.

In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (1995) argues that a decrease in social capital has occurred in the USA, specifically, a decrease in community participation. Citing television as being the primary cause of this decline, having privatised leisure time and eliminating the opportunities for interaction with others outside the home, Putnam (1995) contends that the significance and contribution of weak social ties has been forfeited, consequently affecting the norms of reciprocity, levels of trust and cooperation within the American society and inevitably leading to decreased levels of connection, cohesiveness and civic engagement within the community (Putnam 1995).

Even though Putnam’s proposition of the decline of social capital has been highly debated and contested, his theory highlights the significance of the effects of various media on social capital and civic engagement. Putnam also questions whether the changing nature of American society has been due to alterations in the way individuals socialised and established community ties or the increasing complexity societies exhibited was due to the deterioration of old institutions and the formation of what Putnam called vibrant new organisations (Putnam 1995).

Katz, Rice and Aspden (2001, p. 406) have stressed that each advancement in communication technology, from the telegraph to the internet, has had to deal with an assortment of apprehensions and oppositions particularly with regard to the potential upsetting and deterioration of community ties. Compared to FtF communication, CMC lacks the presence of nonverbal cues, which Lindblom (1990) contends as being a key component of human interaction. Additionally, CMC has been argued to be ‘depersonalising’, causing the decrease in personal accountability and identity, but increasing the significance of group-level social
identities and an individual’s conformity to specific social group norms (Reicher, Spears & Postmes 1995; Spears et al. 2002).

Nevertheless, scholars have emphasised the constructive environments promoting interactivity that social networks create (Boyd & Ellison 2007; Mix 2010). Resnick (2001), for example, underscored the internet’s effectiveness in maintaining relationships and facilitating participation in social and civic activities (see Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007; Valenzuela, Park & Kee 2009). Syameen & Khalili (2008, p. 4) also highlighted the ability of Web 2.0 technologies to construct links as well as online social networks regardless of ‘barriers [such as] race, sexuality, appearance, economic status and religion’.

Similarly, Chesbrough and Appleyard (2007) suggest that SNS such as Facebook have helped prevent further distinctions in inequalities. The use of social networking tools by one person does not deter its availability for another person’s use. Hence, the very nature of today’s social networking sites ensures equal access to all individuals who do have access to the internet. Kobayashi, Ikeda and Miyata (2006) have shown that participation in online communities is linked to increases in social capital, paralleling Haythornthwaite’s (2002) assertion that online media aid the creation of new relationships, as the internet reduces the cost of initiating social interactions.

Levy (2008) too, has discussed the positive impact Web 2.0 technologies have had on the political landscape in the USA. Observing the impactful use of social networking sites in the 2008 USA Presidential Election, Levy (2008, p. 15) noted the political influence SNS had, especially amongst the younger generation. During his 2008 presidential campaign, on top of physical campaigning, Obama made exceptional use of social networking sites to mobilise grassroots support and fundraise, and has since been labeled the ‘master politician of social networking’ (Cooke 2011, p. 149). Underscoring the capability SNS have in allowing civically engaged and discerning social network users to ‘become part of something larger
just by using their laptop or PDA\textsuperscript{12} (Levy 2008, p. 15), Cooke (2011, p. 152) indicated that besides politicians, activists at the grassroots level have realised the power of networking in promoting ‘charitable causes, social activism and grassroots political causes’.

Furthermore, La Due Lake and Huckfeldt (1998) observed correlations between education levels and levels of political participation. Individuals with higher education levels were found to be more likely to be ‘politically well informed’. The higher a person’s level of education, the higher the level of politically relevant social capital was found to be generated within networks of social relations (La Due Lake & Huckfeldt 1998, p. 576). Stressing the importance of observing structured patterns of interactions, shared patterns of interaction within personal networks were found to enhance the production of politically relevant social capital, which, in turn, contributed to increased levels of political participation (La Due Lake & Huckfeldt 1998).

This finding draws parallel to the PAP’s reasoning behind the significance it places on establishing an active citizenry. By promoting increased levels of participation in civic matters, stronger community ties and resources through the enhancement of social capital are anticipated, and subsequently would assist in intensifying citizens’ connection to the city-state. Civic participation has been regarded as a measure of liberty and democratic freedom within societies (Diamond 1999). However, scholars have advocated that participation in community matters does not necessarily lead to democracy, and instead, could result in the advancement of repressive regimes (Coleman & Blumler 2009; Papadopoulos 2013).

To properly comprehend participatory patterns and assess if new media can be considered a mechanism of democratisation, the relationship between the concepts of structure and agency within the context of the Singaporean city-state needs to be examined. As Coleman (1988, p. S98) has suggested, ‘...social capital inheres in the

\textsuperscript{12} A Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) is a handheld computing device ‘without a keyboard, but with a screen that reads the words written (drawn) on it with a pen-like stylus’ (Business Dictionary n.d.), which could be used to manage contacts, appointments and tasks.
structure of relations between actors and among actors. It is not lodged either in the actors themselves or in physical implementations of production’.

2.3  The Structure and Agency Debate

The relationship between individuals and society is a long-standing theme in sociological theory and is of primary importance to the social sciences. Despite numerous shifts in the attention placed on various themes that have emerged in sociological inquiry over the years, the emphasis scholars have placed on examining the relationship between individuals and society, as well as its contribution to the social construction of knowledge\(^{13}\), has repeatedly come to the fore.

Concerned primarily with the matter of social ontology, the structure-agency debate examines the effect of socialisation and individual autonomy in determining the influences and opportunities available for independent action. Contributors to the literature on structure and agency have proposed various theoretical perspectives, and the theoretical, ontological and epistemological issues involving the relationship between structure and agency have been highly contested.

Yet, despite these attempts at connecting, associating, negotiating and/or incorporating the levels of influence and relations between individuals and their societies, scholars have argued that the tension between the two terms has hitherto, not been ‘satisfactorily handled by any known theory’ (Musolf 2003, p. 1; see also Sewell 1992; Schatzki 1997; Berard 2005). The dual contribution of structure and agency in determining social phenomena has, undoubtly, been

\(^{13}\)According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), the sociological conceptualisation of knowledge acknowledges that individual realities are contextual and socially constructed. As such, the analysis of social processes that enables the construction of such phenomena is necessary before an accurate understanding of the sociology of knowledge can be obtained. Furthermore, although the definition of the sociology of knowledge is varied, Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 4) assert that the term is generally ‘concerned with the relationship between human thought and the sociological context with-in which it arises’.
recognised. What has yet to be resolved is the contestation over each concept’s relative importance.

Structure is largely referred to as the ‘social arrangements, social relations, and social practices, which exert enormous power and constraint’ over individuals (Musolf 2003, p. 1). Essentially, in explaining action that occurs in the larger social context, theorists of structural orientation reject the notion that individuals direct their social realities, and instead, focus on concepts such as emplacement and embodiment in their theorisation of social worlds. Structurally oriented approaches stress that action is situated, thus, acknowledging that specific contexts produce certain human actions. Highlighting the regularities and constraints in social interactions, individual action is therefore, regarded as the consequence of prevailing structural factors.

Agency, on the other hand, is the extent to which individuals have the capacity to make choices and decisions. Musolf (2003, p. 8) has declared that ‘agency emerges throughout the ability of humans to ascribe meaning to objects and events, to define the situation based on those meanings, and then to act’. Loyal and Barnes (2001, p. 507) have suggested that agency refers to:

...the freedom of the contingently acting subject over and against the constraints that are thought to derive from enduring social structures. To the extent that human beings have agency, they may act independently of and in opposition to structural constraints, and/or may (re)constitute social structures through their freely chosen actions. To the extent that they lack agency, human beings are conceived of as automata, following the dictates of social structures and exercising no choice in what they do. That, at any rate, is the commonest way of contrasting agency and structure in the context of what has become known as the structure/agency debate.
Acting independently of overarching social structures and constraints, agency, therefore, stresses individuals’ ability to enact the action they intend to undertake (Hogg 2010). Theoretical approaches highlighting the significance of agency in the structure-agency dichotomy also emphasise reflexivity and accountability for individual action.

Three main perspectives categorise the structure-agency debate; namely, the structural standpoint, the agency perspective, and the view that the concepts of structure and agency are, in fact, complementary, not opposing notions. Briefly, the structural standpoint supports functionalist ideals, structural determinism and macro-sociological theories, which argue that social worlds are largely determined by social structure. This standpoint views individual action as being the outcome of structural features and constraints.

The agency perspective underpins phenomenological theories, symbolic interactionism and micro-sociological concepts. These theoretical concepts stress individuals’ ability to overcome structural constraint, as well as their capacity to create, reconstruct, and accord meanings in the production of social realities. And, lastly, the theories that argue for the simultaneous observation of both the concepts of structure and agency suggest that social constraints and individual action are both influencing factors in the construction of social experiences. These theories highlight the continuous dynamic relationship between structure and agency and place greater emphasis on the examination of practices.

The ‘structure as constraint’ viewpoint is still a dominant concept within the social sciences (Shilling & Mellor 1996, p. 4). Nevertheless, contemporary scholars contest the idea of structure being the sole ‘cause’ of all social conduct, a domain of systematic relationships between specified entities (Zimmerman & Boden, 1991, p. 5), which is impervious to human agency (Sewell 1992, p. 2), and/or ‘social facts’ from which an individual is basically incapable of escaping or controlling (Musolf 2003, p. 1). Such scholars assert the need to give more weight to ‘social relations as the engine of production of social phenomena’ (Depelteau 2008, p. 52), and the
need to examine the relationship of both structure and agency in affecting social processes.

Although practice theorists still vary in their determination of the relationship between the two concepts, ‘practices as the fundamental unit of social analysis’ in specific domains has been recognised as providing ‘a sound basis’ for sociological research (Southerton 2012, p. 339; see also Ortner 1984; Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina & Savigny 2001; Rouse 2006; Bräuchler & Postill 2010). Understanding the way media are incorporated into everyday communicative socio-cultural practices, the ways practices are ingrained and/or transformed to suit contextual needs, and the meanings behind such practices are crucial in understanding the relevance of structure and agency’s relationship in today’s new media milieu.

2.4 The Practice Approach

[Structure and agency]...are inextricably intertwined as two salient features of everyday life. To say that humans are both shaped and shapers, means that structure and agency construct each other. We are the stuff of culture and institutions; humans construct the culture and institutions that shape them, this ongoing, interdependent process explains why culture, institutions, and the values, norms, beliefs and behaviours of humans change reciprocally, they co-evolve. There is no way to measure, in a quantitative sense, the force of either structure or agency – to say, for example, that structure explains 60 percent of the behaviour in the situation and agency 40 percent, or some other such percentages (Musolf 2003, p. 6).

Recognising that neither structure nor agency is the sole reason behind the determination of social realities, poststructuralist thought supports the view that structure and agency both affect the determination of social realities and argue for
the simultaneous observation of both concepts. Practice theorists\textsuperscript{14}, propose an alternative ‘practice approach’ towards conceptualising the effect structure and agency have on social realities. Analysing the ‘relationship between established structures of culture and how the people in reality act within that structure’ (Limov 2011), practice theorists suggest the existence of a circular relationship between individuals and society. Contending that individuals are not only influenced by their social structure, but affect their social structure as well, practice theorists consider ‘the human body as the nexus of people’s practical engagements with the world’ (Postill 2010, p. 7).

Practice theory scholars focus on the liberation of agency ‘from the constrictions of structuralist and systemic models while avoiding the trap of methodological individualism’ (Postill 2010, p. 7). Used in association with other theoretical standpoints (such as macro- and micro-sociological perspectives), practice theory views social culture as ‘...a thing that does not define people; rather the people define it by giving it meaning in their lives’ (Limov 2011). Claiming ‘human performances and activities are themselves meaningful, rather than have meaning imposed upon or infused within them by animating beliefs, desires and intentions’ (Rouse 2007, p. 504), practice theories focus on ‘outward’ performances, or what Geertz (1973), though not a practice theorist himself, refers to as ‘thick’ descriptive terms.

Elements of a theory of social practices can be found in the work of a multitude of scholars. Parker (2000, p. 13), for instance, has contended that the fundamental issue in viewing the notions of structure and agency as being interconnected is the creation of ‘a theoretical position that gives sufficient weight to both structure and agency’ (emphasis in original). Likewise, Fuchs (2001, p. 31) has asserted that once it is accepted that ‘the social is of one piece...it no longer makes much sense to assume the social world divides naturally, all by itself, into two separate and distinct

\textsuperscript{14} According to Postill (2010, p. 6), Theodor Schatzki identified four main types of practice theorists. They were: ‘philosophers (such as Wittgenstein, Dreyfus, or Taylor), social theorists (Bourdieu, Giddens), cultural theorists (Foucault, Lyotard) and theorists of science and technology (Latour, Rouse, Pickering)’.
realms that then must somehow be reconciled or reintegrated'. Moreover, Ortner (1984, p. 159) has declared:

The modern versions of practice theory appear unique in accepting all three sides of the...triangle: that society is a system, that the system is powerfully constraining, and yet that the system can be made and unmade through human action and interaction.

Such theoretical perspectives highlight the continuous dynamic relationship between social constraints and individual action, but vary in their determination of the relationship between structure and agency. In particular, what remains unresolved is the extent of the influence and the effect each side has on the resultant social outcome. As Rouse (2007, p. 509) has argued, practice theories aim

...not to reduce social wholes to individual performances or norms to non-normative causal interaction, but simply to articulate insightfully and in detail how human understanding is inculcated and developed through social interaction.

For Giddens, the essentially static nature of definitions of structure opposes the concept of structures being ‘dual’, or being both ‘drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action, and at the same time, the means of system reproduction’ (Giddens 1984, p. 19). Contending that the ‘structuration’ of society is the result of ‘social practices across space and time’ (Giddens 1984, p. 2), Giddens’s (1981, 1984) structuration theory pursues the injection of agency into the equation, whilst ‘preserving the ontological view of social structures as “social things”’ (Depelteau 2008, p. 52).

Giddens also suggests that human agency has an unconscious aspect that is the motivating force behind individuals’ need for ‘ontological security’ (Giddens 1984). Ontological security is achieved through reflexive examination of social interactions, and both the routinisation and regularisation of actions. For Giddens (1979, p. 72), the ‘routinisation of encounters is of major significance in binding the
fleeting encounter to social reproduction and thus to the seeming “fixity” of institutions’. Therefore, the predictability of interactions in ordered space not only creates stability, but is also the product of past uses of rules and resources that have been transformed into structural principles. The need for ontological security stems from the requirement of a ‘sense of trust’, without which, individuals ‘suffer acute anxiety in their social relations’ (Giddens 1984; Turner 1986, p. 973).

Arguably one of the most sustained efforts at reconceptualising structure in recent social theory, Giddens rejects any form of dualism and explains the relationship between structure and agency as being melded into a singular entity – in which ‘the notions of action and structure presuppose one another’ (Giddens 1979, p. 53). The ‘duality of structure’ conveys the notion that structural properties of social systems are ‘both the medium and outcome of the practices which constitute social systems’ (Giddens 1981, p. 27).

In interacting with one another, individuals draw on the rules and resources which comprise structure, in much the same way as an individual draws on the rules of grammar in uttering a well-formed speech act. Like the rules of grammar, structure is both ‘enabling’ and ‘constraining’; it enables us to act as well as delimiting the courses of possible action. By focusing on the generative character of rules and resources, we can see that structure is both constitutive of everyday action and, at the same time, reproduced by that action (Held & Thompson 1989, p. 4).

Maintaining that the duality of structure, or structuration, enables social relations to be structured across space and time, Giddens’s (1984, p. 376) structuration theory shows ‘how principles of order [can] both produce and be reproduced at the level of practice itself’, and are not simply imposed upon individuals by overarching structural restraints (Couldry 2004). For Giddens,

Social systems as reproduced social practices are not in themselves structures, nor are structures mere generalisations of recurrent
social practices. Rather, systems have structures, that is, sets of generative rules and resources which social agents draw upon and instantiate in practice (Livesay 1989, p. 265).

Giddens’s main criticism of structural determinism is that despite the socially constructed nature of subjectivity, the interplay of structure and agency underlines the abilities of knowledgeable subjects who are capable of action, and act based on reflexivity and their structured knowledge. Regarding the human actor as a relatively self-directed actor who is to a certain extent structured and whose actions are simultaneously constrained and enabled by structural forces, Giddens (1979, 1984) argues:

The production and reproduction of society...has to be treated as a skilled performance on the part of its members, not merely as a mechanical series of processes. To emphasise this, however, is definitely not to say that actors are wholly aware of what these skills are, or just how they manage to exercise them; or that the forms of life are adequately understood as the intended outcomes of action...The realm of human agency is bounded. Men produce society, but they do so as historically located actors, and not under conditions of their own choosing (Giddens 1976, p. 160).

The structural rules and resources actors draw on are part of a ‘practical consciousness’, or the unrecognisable conditions of action that are isolated from any conscious reflection and/or discursive articulation (Giddens 1976). Having defined structuration as the ‘conditions governing the continuity or transformation of structures, and therefore the reproduction of social systems’, Giddens’s (1984, p. 25) theory of structuration suggests that the rules and resources social actors draw on ultimately help reproduce or bind systems of interaction.

‘The properties which make it possible for discernably similar social practices to exist across varying spans of time and space and which lend them “systematic form”’ (Giddens 1984, p. 17) mean that an actor’s knowledge of their social reality
is always bound by ‘both unacknowledged conditions and unintended consequences’ (Livesay 1989, p. 266). Layder (1994, p. 133) has argued that as ‘ciphers of structural demands, people are condemned to repeat and reinforce the very conditions that restrict their freedom in the first place’. This brings to mind Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) argument that the relationship between structure and agency is in fact dialectical, endlessly repeated in a circulatory manner.

Consequently, despite the acknowledgement of agency and an actor’s ability to reflect and account for their actions in Giddens’s structuration theory, actions are still limited, as actors are ‘neither entirely free nor entirely determined’ (Berard 2005, p. 199). With action being only ‘conditioned and constrained by the very world of their creation’ (Giddens 1981, p. 54), some scholars have argued, however, that Giddens overstated the role of agency in this theory of structuration (Clegg 1989; Layder 1994).

Rather than adopt the linear causation of processes in the formation of social realities that earlier theories implied, Giddens’s structuration theory suggests a mutual constitution of structure and agency, emphasising the need to examine ‘how social meanings are “signified” (represented) and conveyed, and how particular social practices and relations are legitimised’ (Chouinard 1997, p. 367). The importance of both ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ concepts in understanding the processes of structure and agency is undoubtedly, accentuated by Giddens’s structuration theory.

However, contrary to the equivalence Giddens places on the notion of ‘macro’ phenomena as being made up of practices, as well as the knowledgeability of actors (Berard 2005, p. 200), Tucker (1998, p. 65) argues that Giddens fails to address the influence of social contexts in his theoretical analysis. Livesay (1989, p. 273) too, has commented that Giddens’s duality of structure theory lacked an account of how ‘structural conditions (as reproduced practices) influence the development of structural rules’. Additionally, Bourdieu (1990) questioned how practices are moderated in Giddens’s notion of agency. Giddens has also been criticised for not having properly established the notion of unacknowledged conditions of action or
developing a logical analysis of their interrelations in his theoretical work (Livesay 1989).

The notion that social realities are made up of various forms of structured agency suggests that structure is an a priori form of knowledge, a necessary and universal understanding that essentially needs to be present before any interrelation between structure and agency can occur (see Musolf 2003). As Cohen (1989, pp. 200-201) has argued,

...to concentrate upon the situated production of social systems does not immediately make clear the conditions that permit systemic patterns and models of organisation to be reproduced. Such conditions are absolutely vital, for in their absence systems would not and could not be maintained. Instead, social life would consist of an inconstant flux of events: an unpatterned and disorganised chaos in which social life in any recognisable form could not occur. Structural properties in social systems may not reproduce systems, but they shape, channel, and facilitate system reproduction whenever it occurs by providing agents with practical awareness of the practices, relations, and spatio-temporal settings they require in order to participate in the reproductive process.

Similarly, Gregson (1989, p. 245) has rejected Giddens's attempt at linking social theory and empirical research, suggesting that structuration theory has little value as it is concerned primarily with 'conceptualising the general constituents of society (structure, agency, time, space, etc)', not investigating or explaining 'specific events or contingencies of particular periods or places' (Gregson 1989, 245). Consequently, as important as Giddens's theory of structuration has been in influencing conceptualisations of structure and agency in contemporary sociological thought, scholars have argued that Giddens's theoretical propositions

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15 Attempting to determine the parameters and extent of human reasoning, Kant (2015) drew distinctions between a priori and a posteriori knowledge. A priori knowledge, which was independent of experiences, was commonly accepted knowledge that actors possessed. A posteriori knowledge was specific knowledge actors gained from experiences of their social worlds.
are more of a ‘reference point in theoretical progression’ (Berard 2005, p. 200), or ‘a general “checklist” of forces to be considered in analysis’ (Chouinard 1997, p. 367), rather than be viewed as an indication of progress in this area of sociological inquiry.

Several scholars have proposed alternative methods of explaining the way social interactions affect individual practices. For instance, based on four general principles – the rejection of any form of conflation, the dismissal of Giddens’s structuration theory, the advancement of analytical dualism, and the notion of internal conversation – Archer (1988) contends that by linking the terms structure and agency, the error of central conflation is committed. This results in diminished differences between the two notions, misunderstandings, and ultimately, the inability to observe the relationship between the two terms as ‘the elision of the two elements withdraws any autonomy or independence from one of them, if not from both’ (Archer 1988, p. xiii).

Additionally, Shilling (1997, p. 737) has argued that ‘while structuration theory and analytical dualism focus on the creative powers of human reflexivity, as part of their rejection of the “oversocialised agent”, the theoretical weight they place on consciousness neglects the socially shaped somatic bases of action and structure, and results in an undersocialised view of the embodied agent’. Neglecting the significance of internalising embodied norms and values thus, minimises creativity and hinders the analysis of social change.

Given the differences between the varieties of practice theories, there is an absence of an authoritative version of a theory of practice that can be used to characterise common features. Postill (2010) has, however, suggested that it is possible to distinguish the two ‘waves’ or generations of practice theorists. The first generation (e.g. Bourdieu 1977; Foucault 1977; Giddens 1979, 1984; de Certeau 1984) established the theoretical considerations underpinning what we now regard as theories of practice, while the second generation is ‘currently testing those foundations and building new extensions to the theoretical edifice’ (e.g. Ortner 1984, 2006; Schatzki 1996; Warde 2005) (Postill 2010).
The scope of this study does not permit an exhaustive treatment of the various versions of practice theory that exist in the literature. Nor does this thesis presume to do justice to the entire breadth of work scholars highlighted have produced. Using Postill’s (2010) characterisation as a guide, this study will however, take a closer look at the influence new media have had in the construction of practices in Singapore. By applying a practice approach in the examination of social practices, the dynamics and meanings of the changing patterns of everyday life will be examined.

2.5 Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice

Like Giddens, Bourdieu’s theory of practice seeks to transcend the structure-agency dichotomy. Bourdieu criticises subjectivist and objectivist notions as offering inadequate explanations of social processes, and argues that subjectivism focuses too intently on an individual’s immediate experiences and interpretations of the social world. Also, instead of accounting for individual actions, objectivism adapts individuals’ actions ‘to the social framework within which they functioned as virtual automatons’, and constrains actions within the ‘objective relations of social structure’ (Throop & Murphy 2002, p. 189). For Bourdieu,

The “objective truth” is not simply the sum total of the facts that happen to exist. Rather, what is “objectively” the deepest “reality” in social life is not the surface phenomena that we see all around us, but the underlying structural features that make these surface phenomena possible (Calhoun et al. 2012, p. 328).

Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice highlights actors’ practical mastery within a socially constructed world and their ability to act suitably, while strategically pursuing their interests in various contexts. Suggesting individuals internalise the distinctions and values that structure the social world, Bourdieu’s notion of structure asserts that domains of practice are codified according to the varying principles governing them (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 20-22). Groups accord meaning to
their own truths through the delineation of social norms, rules and roles (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 20-22; Turner 1994, p. 9), which in turn, result in the formation of objective relations that restrict actions in socio-cultural situations (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 21-27).

Negotiating the divergence between objective structures and subjective experience, Bourdieu observes how individual action influences social structure and cultural systems, as well as how those systems and structures in turn constrain social action (Moore & Sanders 2006, p. 12). This process, thus, prevents the mere absorption of social identities and constructs, but facilitates individual agency, allowing members of a community to exercise choice, transforming them into theoretically strategising members of society.

For Bourdieu, practices are self-perpetuating and are the ‘interwoven activities carried out in a specific domain of practice, or field’, which are constructed by dispositions obtained through ‘objective conditions characterising’ the specific field’ (Schatzki 1997, p. 287). A field as a domain of social life that has its own rules of organisation, produces a specific set of positions, and reinforces the practices associated with them. Action in a field is regarded as the result of many ‘contending projects of position-taking’, and not the ‘static reflection of established positions’ (Calhoun et al. 2012, p. 330).

As such, practices are ‘structured homologously with these objective conditions, which produce actions that perpetuate practices and conditions’ (Schatzki 1997, p. 287). Being generative principles or structuring structures of social actors’ practical action, while being shaped as structured structures by structural conditions of the social context (Livesay 1989, p. 274), Bourdieu views practices as a display of agency and choice in relation to the constraints actors face:

...Only by constructing the objective structures...is one able to pose the question of the mechanisms through which the relationship is established between the structures and the practices of the representations which accompany them, instead of treating these
'thought objects’ as ‘reasons’ or ‘motives’ and making them the determining cause of the practices (Bourdieu 1977, p. 21).

Utilising an analysis of the habitus to address the unacknowledged conditions of action left untreated in Giddens’s structuration theory, Bourdieu’s (1990, p. 53) notion of habitus presents individuals with ‘predisposed ways of categorising and relating to familiar and novel situations’. Defined as ‘...systems of durable, transportable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them...’ (Bourdieu 1990, p. 53) the habitus is characterised as a ‘conductorless orchestration’ (Bourdieu 1990, p. 59) providing ‘systematicity, coherence and consistency to individual practices’ (Throop & Murphy 2002, p. 187), ‘without being in any way the product of obedience to rules’ (Bourdieu 1990, p. 53). The regulation of responses to conditions through the habitus, or

...the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations...[integrates] past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions, and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to the analogical transfer of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 72-75).

The habitus is, thus, both a consequence of social structure and, simultaneously a factor contributing to the structuring of social systems. The relatively stable dispositions that ‘generate and organise practices and representations’ (Bourdieu 1990, p. 53), or what Bourdieu (1990, pp. 53-54) suggests is ‘the basis of the perception and appreciation of all subsequent experiences’, indicate that the habitus not only restricts, but also empowers individuals in shaping their lived realities.
Working as a loose set of guidelines, which individuals may not necessarily be aware of, the habitus roots dispositions in experiences and rules of social learning, and allows for flexibility and improvisations, especially when applied to new situations.

...Habituses are permeable and responsive to what is going on around them...thus, while habitus reflects the social position in which it was constructed, it also carries with it the genesis of new creative responses that are capable of transcending the social conditions in which it was produced...choice is at the heart of habitus...but at the same time the choices inscribed in the habitus are limited (Reay 2004, pp. 434-435).

Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of habitus captures ‘the permanent internalisation of the social order in the human body’ (Eriksen & Nielsen 2001, p. 130), while acknowledging ‘the agent’s practice, his or her capacity for invention and improvisation’ (Bourdieu 1990, p. 13). Bourdieu (1977) also suggests that the habitus is not an arbitrary sequence of dispositions, but operates on the basis of a logic of practice. This logic operates on simple dichotomous distinctions that are applicable to a large variety of fields and situations as unconscious regulating principles, aiding the characterisation of immediate environments, and the internalisation of a specific ‘set of determinate objective conditions’ (Garnham & Williams 1980, p. 213).

Additionally, Bourdieu (1989, p. 29) contends that ‘what exists in the social world are relations, ...objective relations which exist independently of individual consciousness and will’, and are hence, ‘not interactions between agents and intersubjective ties between individuals’. Transferred without conscious intention, the habitus is an ‘intentionless invention of regulated improvisation’ that constrains individual action as being an outcome of ‘a modus operandi of which [the individual] is not the producer and has no conscious mastery’ (Bourdieu 1977, p. 79).
Through the *habitus*, the structure of which it is the product governs practice, not along the paths of a mechanical determinism, but within the constraints and limits initially set on its inventions... the *habitus* is an infinite capacity for generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it provides is as remote from creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from simple mechanical reproduction of the original conditioning (Bourdieu 1990, p. 55, emphasis in original).

The *habitus*’s embodiment of history, ‘internalised as a second nature and so forgotten as history - is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. This is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of the immediate present’ (Bourdieu 1990, p. 56), while simultaneously imposing a sense of limits to agency.

The reproduction of pre-existing dispositions and practices despite the strategic modifications individuals ‘consciously carry out, presuppose[s] [the] mastery of a common code’ (Bourdieu 1990, p. 59), and suggests that ‘practices cannot be deduced either from the present conditions which may seem to have provoked them or from past conditions which have produced the habits’ (Bourdieu 1990, p. 56). The interrelationship between the social conditions in which the *habitus* is produced with the social conditions in which it is applied needs to be examined (Bourdieu 1990, p. 56).

For instance, in his analysis of gift exchange, Bourdieu highlights the significance of the interlude between gift and counter-gift, emphasising the exhibition of ‘elements of strategies’ that enable individuals to accrue symbolic capital (i.e. enhanced status) and social status within their social systems (Tucker 1998, p. 69). The interval between gift and counter-gift permits the display and performance of different bearings and schemes. With the compliance of social rules and the dominance of objective mechanisms serving the interests of the dominant group,
the reproduction of social order and power discourses will result (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 171-197).

The ‘circularity of agency and structure, and the circularity of causality’ in Giddens’s and Bourdieu’s theories view structure as both a medium and result of social action (Morrison 2005, p. 315). As such, there is a similarity, and conceivably, a mutual correspondence between Giddens’s and Bourdieu’s theories, despite their use of differing terminology. Giddens’s ‘duality of structure’ parallels Bourdieu’s conception of structured structures and structuring structures (Morrison 2005). The ability of respective agents to follow rules in the reproduction of social systems is the basis on which Schatzki (1997) suggests that both Giddens’s and Bourdieu’s theories are equivalent.

Nonetheless, Schatzki (1997, p. 285) argues that both Giddens and Bourdieu ‘overintellectualise practices and actions’ in their respective theories. Schatzki (1997) also cites distinctions in the way Giddens and Bourdieu explain the extent to which the common structure of practices and action are used to determine the practices of actors and the degree of agency allowed as being key differences in their respective theories. Giddens deals more with social trend formation, while Bourdieu focuses more on social reproduction. Moreover, although both Giddens and Bourdieu highlight practical understanding in their theories, both theorists have been criticised for de-emphasising other mechanisms, such as the influence of power over social realities.

Sewell (1992, p. 15), for instance, contends that Bourdieu’s theory has ‘fallen victim to an impossibly objectified and overtotallised conception of society’, adding that only in an artificially created world would it be possible for the habitus to produce all forms of thought, perception and action that abides by prevailing social conditions (Sewell 1992). Berard (2005, p. 204) has also suggested that despite Bourdieu’s intention of transcending the objective and subjective dualism, ‘the relationship [Bourdieu] describes between an agent’s objective structures of field and his or her habitus is not, strictly speaking, a dialectical one’.
With the habitus perceived as being unable to interact with ‘objective structures of fields as a force of equal standing’ as it is conditioned by an objective, structural position before being able to function as a medium in the reproduction of objective structural conditions, practices are perceived as being directed by structure (Berard 2005, p. 204). Berard (2005, p. 205, emphasis in original) also argues that Bourdieu’s theory of practice is merely a ‘reconception of objectivist methods so as to incorporate subjectivity as a crucial but secondary dimension of social reproduction’.

Moreover, Turner (1994) argues that the main function and meaning of practices in both Giddens's and Bourdieu’s conceptualisations are not that of individual action, but that of tacit rules, which individuals follow in the perpetuation of social systems. Acciaioli (1981) also indicates that Bourdieu’s concept of the mastery of a common code and the ‘logic of practice’ constitutes the adherence to common sense in the construction of reality. Thus, ‘...the dialectic of the objective chances and the agents’ aspirations, out of which arises the sense of limits, commonly called the sense of reality, i.e. the correspondence between the objective classes and the internalised classes, social structures and mental structures, which is the basis of the most ineradicable adherence to the established order’ (Bourdieu 1977, p. 164), highlights the notion of power in the organisation of social order (Acciaioli 1981, p. 42).

The regulation of behaviour in the deployment of habitus through an individual’s strategies may be analagised, to invoke a different theoretical idiom to how the presentation of self creates a particular impression (Jones & Pittman, 1982), communicates a particular image (Baumeister 1982), and depicts the presenter as a certain kind of person (Schlenker & Weigold 1989). The presentation of self and the impressions formed of others in various situations are thus, based on strategies, the acts and stance individuals choose to adopt in social circumstances. Highlighting the agency and choice individuals have in relation to the limits socialisations within societies place on them, Goffman’s (1959) theory of the presentation of self, conceptualising actors as having the ability to choose the way their behaviours and expressions are presented, despite being constantly
measured in relation to socially accepted norms, underscores Bourdieu's (1977, 1989) notion of a mastery of a common code and the logic of practice.

As Goffman (1967, p. 10) put it, socially appropriate behaviour, or ‘approved attributes and their relation to face make of everyman his own jailer; this is a fundamental social constraint even though each man may like his cell’. Still, it was the individual’s choice to observe such behaviours.

...The particular set of practices stressed by particular persons or groups seems to be drawn from a single logically coherent framework of possible practices. It is as if face, by its very nature, can be saved only in a certain number of ways, and as if each social grouping must make its selections from this single matrix of possibilities...in our society, this kind of capacity is sometimes called tact, savoir-faire, diplomacy, or social skill (Goffman, 1967, p. 13).

Using the framework of a theatrical performance to explain the presentation of self, the dramatic performance in front of a discerning audience is what Goffman (1959) believes has helped individuals understand themselves and also their social environment. In an effort to regulate and direct the kind of impression the actor wants the audience to form, changes are made to the manner and appearance of both the actor and the context of contact (Goffman 1959). Furthermore, as social roles have attached social duties and are presented to either the same kind of audience, or to an audience of the same kinds of persons (Goffman 1959, p. 27), ‘the intensity [of] our involvement and the shape of our initial actions allow others to glean our immediate intent and purpose’ (Goffman, 1983, p. 3), or in other words, the performer’s role in society.

The notion that saving-face, or controlling one’s embarrassment required poise and prior knowledge of how to react in various situations highlights the presence of habitual standardised practices that are akin to traditional games or dance steps (see Bourdieu 1977). Knowing how expressions presented to others would be
perceived and interpreted demonstrates the constraint group socialisations imposed on individuals. These repertoires of coordinated practice, thus, reveal the presence of underlying social rules.

### 2.6 Foucault's Concept of Subject Formation

Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the habitus and the limits to agency actors experience is similar to Foucault's (1977) concept of 'discipline'. Discipline for Foucault, is 'structure and power that have been impressed on the body forming permanent dispositions' (Eriksen & Nielsen 2001, p. 130). Subject formation through the exercise of discursive regimes poses limits to the display of individual agency and is interpreted in terms of social discipline, which helps perpetuate power discourses.

Foucault (1980, 1991) also argues that power is interconnected with knowledge (Dreyfus & Rainbow 1983, p. 203), and is a matrix of multidimensional force relations (Dreyfus & Rainbow 1983, p. 186). A regime of truth is predicted upon the type of discourse society accepts and allows to function as a truth –

> “Truth” is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements...[and] is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it (Foucault 1977, p. 133).

The technique and mechanisms used in according value and distinguishing true statements, together with sanctioning each statement in the acquisition of truth, amplifies the status of those who dictate what is considered true (Foucault 1991, p. 73). This perspective emphasises the multiple forms of constraint that are present in the construction of truth, and the kinds of power aroused during such processes (Foucault 1991, pp. 72-73).
According to Foucault (1980, 1991), notions of truth are discursively constructed and imposed through objectivist structures. He asserts that the production of truth is subjected to discourses of power and is embodied institutionally through regimes of truth, while the theory of right provides the definitional rules of power (Foucault 1980).

In any society, there are multifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth (Foucault 1980, p. 93).

As this power constructs, conveys, and replicates discursive regimes, penetration and influence over the social body are facilitated (Foucault 1980, p. 93). However, power cannot be independently established or implemented without the creation and operation of an all-encompassing discourse (Foucault 1991, p. 73).

Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accord value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true... (Foucault 1991, p. 73)

Individuals are hence subjected to the construction of truth via various forms of constraint, which stimulate power and prevent the implementation of power, except through the production of truth (Foucault 1980, p. 93).
Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application (Foucault 1980, p. 98).

Governments controlling education, language and socio-cultural practices through policy formation and implementation indicate the construction of regimes of truth within societies. Corresponding with the strategy the Singaporean government adopted after gaining independence, the rationale of creating a harmonious multiracial society is used to convince its populace of the benefits of adhering to policies the government introduces. As these hierarchies also exemplify the power of the ruling class elites in society, the Singapore government's control over Singaporeans is demonstrated, and will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

The necessity to comply with rules and social norms, which are accorded social meaning, together with the explicit constraint on individual agency, further implicates the imposition of structural constraints, reinstating the explicit relationship of power, truth and right (Foucault 1980, p. 93). Disciplinary paradigms normalise roles via technologies of power (Dreyfus & Rainbow 1983, pp. 192-196), and aid the perpetuation of class and hierarchical statuses. Methods utilised to prevent anomalies and ensure power discourses are adhered to in order to further constrain individual agency and inevitably translate into the construction of regimes of truth.

Foucault’s (1977, p. 201) use of the Panopticon to explain the production and sustenance of ‘a power relation independent of the person who exercises it’
emphasises the disciplinary modality of power relations in the formation of subjects. Arguing that discipline is ‘a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets’ (Foucault 1977, p. 215), Foucault asserts that panoptic mechanisms ‘make possible the exercise of power with limited manpower at the least cost; to discipline individuals with the least exertion of overt force’ (Dreyfus & Rainbow 1983, p. 192). The ‘continuous, disciplinary and anonymous’ nature of panoptic mechanisms (Dreyfus & Rainbow 1983, p. 189), thus, makes the surveillance mechanism it utilises ‘permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in action’ (Foucault 1977, p. 201).

Emphasising the visible and unverifiable nature of power, the automation and deindividualisation of power in the mechanics of the Panopticon disconnects ‘the see/being seen dyad’ (Foucault 1977, p. 201). Enabling the ‘homogenous effects of power’ no matter where the Panopticon’s mechanism is placed or viewed from, Foucault (1977, p. 200) explains:

> Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. The arrangement of his room, opposite the central tower, imposed on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility. And this invisibility is a guarantee of order (Foucault 1977, p. 200).

Bentham’s Panopticon, to which Foucault (1977) refers, highlights the significance of how multiplicities of separated individualities, instead of a crowd or collective mass, can be numbered and supervised. The scrutiny via an omniscient gaze induces ‘a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power’ (Foucault 1977, p. 201). Foucault suggests that this development serves as ‘an intermediary between [individuals], linking them together, extending them and above all making it possible to bring the effects of
power to the most minute and distant elements...[assuring] an infinitesimal distribution of the power relations’ (Foucault 1977, p. 216).

The inmate cannot see if the guardian is in the tower or not, so he must behave as if surveillance is constant, unending, and total. The architectural perfection is such that even if there is no guardian present the apparatus of power is still operative...Anyone could operate it as long as he were in the correct position and anyone could be subjected to its mechanism. The design is multipurpose, the surveillant in the tower could easily be observing a criminal, a madman, a worker, or a schoolboy. If the Panopticon functioned perfectly, almost all internal violence would be eliminated for if the prisoner is never sure when he was being observed, he becomes his own guardian (Dreyfus & Rainbow 1983, p. 189).

Foucault contends that the whole concept of a structured society is embedded in hegemonic power discourses that utilises mechanisms to ensure the transfer of meaning through roles, laws and norms. Such forms of symbolic power can shape meanings and thus, make actors acknowledge, desire, and adopt specific modes of conduct, guaranteeing truth's adherence to specific outcomes of power (Foucault 1977). Maintaining the circular relation of power and truth, as well as demonstrating the continuous distinction between truth and falsities through the establishment of rules (Foucault 1991, p. 74), the conformity demanded from such systems limits individual agency and increases the distinctions between classes in imposed hierarchies.

Extending, automating, and perpetuating the effects of power structures over the bodies ordered within it, the automation and continued functioning of such mechanisms results in the internalisation of the monitoring gaze by subjects ‘caught up in a power situation of which they are the bearer’ (Foucault 1977, p. 223). The internalisation of the ‘watchtower’s gaze', such that the prisoner becomes ‘his own overseer’ (Caluya 2010, p. 625), emphasises the power of surveillance in Foucault’s notion of the Panopticon.
Similar to Orwell's (1949) conceptualisation of power, surveillance is situated within relations of power, underscoring the significance of scrutiny in ensuring the disciplining of society. However, a key difference is that lateral surveillance, or the ‘monitoring of one another...in the asymmetrical, nontransparent sense’ (Anderjevic 2006, p. 397), makes it seem like the population is “naturally” dependent on multiple factors that may be artificially alterable’ (Foucault 1994, p. 70).

Foucault’s research regards subjects as products of regimes of power and knowledge and focuses on the relationship between social power and the individual. Allowing for the efficient expansion of power, Foucault’s Panopticon defines power relations in terms of everyday practices (Dreyfus & Rainbow 1983, pp. 188-189). Still, Foucauldian notions of power have been argued to neglect the impact actors have in altering realities and the possibility of viewing themselves as part of a universal world and, thus, have resulted in the questioning of Foucault’s classification as a practice theorist (Beck & Sznaider 2006, pp. 3-6). Nevertheless, Foucault does move beyond the use of subjective meanings to explain social actions, suggesting a shift in the way social life is understood, and challenges traditional approaches to the examination of social change (Eribon 2011).

2.7  **Context, Practical Understandings and the Presentation of Everyday Life**

de Certeau (1984) has proposed moving away from the emphasis on individuality. Instead, he focuses on the representations of action and the rationality that exists within dominant cultures. de Certeau’s (1984) focus on systems of operational combination rather than on individuals, who are the authors and vehicles in the operation of action, aims to decipher the methods everyday actors use to operate their everyday lives. Displacing academic assertions of passive consumption and spectatorship, de Certeau argues for the creative and tactical use of products. Specifically, de Certeau (1984, pp. xi-xii) has expressed his purpose as investigating ‘the ways in which users – commonly assumed to be passive and guided by established rules – operate’ and ‘the systems of operational combination...which
also compose a “culture”, and to bring to light the models of action characteristic of users whose status as the dominated element in society...is concealed by the euphemistic term “consumers”.

For de Certeau (1984), users consume goods, messages, spaces and institutions that are shaped by others, the producers of the product. He highlights having to operate within these spaces, the influence of power, which users have to navigate. Asserting that ‘consumption is a form of production...a poiesis or way of making, albeit one that leaves no record of its activity’ (Bogue 1986, p. 368), de Certeau distinguishes between two nodes of power – strategies and tactics – placing emphasis on consumers rather the producers and product. By labeling user’s rules as ‘tactics’, de Certeau distinguishes ‘strategies’ as being the systems employed by governing powers. A strategy is, therefore,

...the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed... (de Certeau 1984, pp. 35-36, emphasis in original).

de Certeau views strategies as a ‘specific kind of knowledge’ that seeks the establishment of place through the development of a locus of predictability and visual inspection (de Certeau 1984, p. 36). Helping to ground, transform and manage 'the uncertainties of history into readable spaces' (de Certeau 1984, p. 36),

a certain power is the precondition of this knowledge and not merely its effect or its attribute. It makes this knowledge possible and at the same time determines its characteristics. It produces itself in and through this knowledge (de Certeau 1984, p. 36, emphasis in original).
Thus, strategies as described by de Certeau, are not limited to overarching political powers that govern action, but are the basis of ‘any totalising system or theory of knowledge’ (Bogue 1986, p. 368). By contrast, a tactic is regarded as ‘a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus’ (de Certeau 1984, p. 37), or a ‘temporal intervention within the space of the other that disrupts predictability and obscures visibility’ (Bogue 1986, p. 368). Being context-specific and not replicable, tactics, unlike strategies, are performative. They are the ways in which individuals negotiate strategies that have been arranged for them by “higher powers”, skills that are not utilised as formal knowledge. Such everyday practice does not directly involve individuality, but offers an operational logic.

de Certeau (1984, p. 58) suggests that Bourdieu is largely concerned with the origin or the ‘genesis’ of practices, or what produces the practices, while Foucault is primarily interested in examining the ‘mode of generation of practices’, or what practices produce. Additionally, despite both Foucault’s and Bourdieu’s works being theoretically insightful, offering variations in their analysis of everyday practices, de Certeau argues that both theorists are essentially referring to ‘two variants of a “way of making” the theory of practices’ (de Certeau 1984, p. 64).

Using the imperatives that punctuate the steps in a recipe, we could say that this theorising operation consists of two moments: first, cut out; then turn over. First an “ethnological” isolation; then a logical inversion. The first move cuts out certain practices from an undefined fabric, in such a way as to treat them as a separate population, forming a coherent whole but foreign to the place in which the theory is produced (de Certeau 1984, p. 62).

Hence, de Certeau contends that the ‘cut-out’, or the removal of specific elements from the whole and then regarding them as ‘foreign’ and ‘separate’, as in the case of Bourdieu’s ‘strategies’ and Foucault’s Panoptic surveillance (de Certeau 1984, p. 62), and thereafter undergoing a ‘turn over’, suggests the reversal of these very same elements in such a manner that their insignificance ‘illuminates [the] theory and sustains discourse’ (de Certeau 1984, p. 63).
Having conducted his research based on three dimensions in order to determine the rules with which actors engage, or the formal structure of practice, de Certeau examines: the kind of usage or consumption consumers have in relation to the products that are imposed upon them; the procedures of everyday activity; and the fundamental logic for these operations. de Certeau’s (1984) penetration of the ‘obscurity’ that is social activity, so as to be able to ‘articulate’ everyday life, essentially is an attempt to determine the procedures that influence the mechanisms of discipline, the procedures that conform to rules so as to be able to evade them, and also the possible ways of operation from the consumer’s point of view. Thus, he emphasises that despite suppressive aspects, there exists an element of creative resistance that is asserted through the production of everyday practices.

Similarly, Ortner posits that understanding social practices requires more than an examination of power relations, as in the case of Foucault’s theoretical argument. Understanding needs to give more weight to the practices that are carried out, rather than depend solely on explanations such as Bourdieu’s and Giddens’s propositions in their respective theorisations of social life. For Ortner, past attempts at explaining the significance of practices have lacked ‘a recognisable concept of culture’ (Ortner 2006, p. 11) and have not adequately elucidated the relationship between social practices, power and history. Arguing that ‘practice theory need[s] a much more fully developed conception of culture and its role in the social process’ (Ortner 2006, p. 11), Ortner (1989, p. 200) contends that a theory of practice

...is a theory of conversion, or translation, between internal dynamics and external forces...[and] one dimension of the theory concerns the ways in which a given social order mediates the impact of external events by shaping ways in which actors experience and respond to those events.

With practice theorists primarily concerned with the interpretation of the ways in which individuals create their social relations and the extent to which these social relations affect individuals, the correlation between structure and individual action
is always set within a specific temporal and spatial context, thus demanding the awareness of issues of power. Hence, 'asymmetry, inequality, domination and the like' (Ortner 1989, p. 12), are intrinsic to the relationships in which practice theorists are interested. Ortner also suggests that 'a theory of practice is a theory of history' (Ortner 1989, p. 193), and thus, social practices can only be understood in their articulations alongside historical events or specific contexts. For Ortner (1989, p. 193), practice theory

...is a theory of how social beings, with their diverse motives and their diverse intentions, make and transform the world in which they live...Why does a given society have a particular form at a particular moment – that form and not some other? And how do people whose very selves are part of that social form nonetheless transform themselves and their society? It is a theory that allows social and cultural analysts to put all their various methodological tools to work – ethnographic and historic research, structural, interpretive, and 'objectivist' analytic approaches – in ways that enhance and enrich the effectiveness of each.

Focusing on the relationship between individuals and the overarching social and economic structures that shape their lives, Ortner concentrates her research on deciphering how individuals’ daily behaviour adds to the perpetuation or alteration of the "hegemony", or dominant social order. Ortner asserts that in the modern world, all cultures are part of the same 'ethnoscape'\(^{16}\), and thus, centres her work on the boundary areas, the spaces different classes or cultures ‘clash or come together’ (Levine 1996).

The dynamic nature of practices indicates that the transformation, modification and/or the replication of practices are influenced by both internal and social pressures, as well as by external pressures applied from outside an individual’s social grouping. Ortner is also attentive to both subjectivity and agency, and does

\(^{16}\) Ethnoscape is a term borrowed from Arjun Appadurai. It refers to the movement of people across cultures and borders, presenting the world, as well as its many communities and networks as fluid and mobile, rather than being static (Appadurai 1990).
not neglect power in its structural and situational forms. By recognising that individuals influence their own practices, and through the observation of such practices in both the field and in public culture, more interpretations and analyses can then be made about agency, subjectivity and power. Considering the context, as well as specific practices at any given time, also provides a clearer notion of the dynamics of power, and, thereafter, the relationship between structure and agency can be determined.

Additionally, Schatzki (2001, p. 12) argues that ‘the social is a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices centrally organised around shared practical understandings’. Characterising practices as a presentation of ‘pluralistic and flexible pictures of the constitution of social life that generally oppose hypostatised unities, root order in local contexts, and/or successfully accommodate complexities, differences and particularities’ (Schatzki 1996, p. 12), he asserts that activities and individuals are ‘embedded’ and ‘constituted’ within practices (Schatzki 2001, p. 12).

Schatzki also stresses that the continuation of practices over time is reliant on ‘the successful inculcation of shared embodied know-how’ (Schatzki 2001, p. 12). The coordinated entity is described as

A temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings... To say that the doings and sayings forming a practice constitute a nexus is to say that they are linked in certain ways. Three major linkages are involved: (1) through understandings, for example, of what to say and do; (2) through explicit rules, principles, precepts and instructions; and (3) through what I will call “teleoaffective” structures embracing ends, projects, tasks, purposes, beliefs, emotions and moods (Schatzki 1996, p. 89).

The dependence on shared skills or understandings highlights the importance of symbols, meanings and socialisations in practical understandings, which permit the maintenance of practices (Schatzki 2001, p. 12). The ‘skilled body’ therefore supports an ‘array of activities’, and ‘commands attention in practice theory as the
common meeting point of mind and activity and of individual activity and society’ (Schatzki 2001, p. 12).

Warde (2005, p. 138) too has suggested that ‘social practices do not present uniform planes upon which agents participate in identical ways but are instead internally differentiated on many dimensions’. The performance of an action is dependent on ‘past experience, technical knowledge, learning, opportunities, scalable resources, previous encouragement by others, etc.’ (Warde 2005, p. 138). The development of practices is thus, caused by changes in behaviour, such as actors’ capabilities, variations in their understandings, skills, goals, and roles, or ‘the structure of their positions in the practice’ (Warde 2005, pp. 138-140):

The concept of practice inherently combines a capacity to account for both reproduction and innovation. At any given point in time a practice has a set of established understandings, procedures and objectives. Such formal and informal codifications govern conduct within that practice, though often without much reflection or conscious awareness on the part of the bearers. This has the potential for the reproduction of that practice, which indeed transpires much of the time, for practices have some considerable inertia (Warde 2005, p. 141).

Practices, therefore, ‘contain the seeds of constant change...as people in myriad situations adapt, improvise and experiment’ in their performance of practices (Warde 2005, p. 141). By considering actors’ ability to learn, reflect and innovate in their reproduction of practices, contemporary practice theories, such as those put forth by Ortner, Schatzki and Warde, highlight the capacity for variation in actors’ reproduction of practices.

Broadening and enriching the concepts established by the first generation of practice theorists, the incorporation of new elements and of the effect they have on practices facilitates the theorisation of the evolution of practices. The features of more contemporary practice theories can thus be used to better comprehend the
meaning associated with the performance and incorporation of the new elements, such as those new media have introduced. Understanding the changes in the everyday practices of Singaporean Gen Ys will help decipher the influence new media have had on practices in the city-state.

2.8 Negotiating a Culture of Participation

The distribution and content-sharing practices the internet and social media have introduced have contributed to the dissolving of distinctions between private and public domains, as well as between amateur productions and professional media outputs. The relationship between producers, distributers, regulators and consumers of the media have, therefore, been altered drastically. Highlighting the blurring of ‘the once clearly demarcated role of “audience” (as receivers of media contents), becoming ‘less obviously distinguished in everyday life from [that of] the role of the media industry (as the producer of contents)’, Ambercrombie and Longhurst (quoted in Ardevol et al. 2010, p. 264) maintain that ‘people are [now] simultaneously performers and audience members’.

Vejby & Wittkower (2010, p. 99) have argued that what individuals ‘watch, buy, and consume’ is increasingly becoming individuals’ sole defining characteristics. Drawing on Guy Debord’s (1994) definition of the ‘spectacle’ and critique of society in his book, The Society of the Spectacle, Vejby & Wittkower (2010, p. 107) suggest that

…the “new spectacle” is even more difficult for the user to see through because it’s interwoven in a technological platform which tricks the user into believing that he controls his own life while it actually involves only virtual control, virtual agency, and virtual community.

Debord (1994) defines the term ‘spectacle’ as a mass of superficial relationships that exist between individuals, which are mediated by commodities and images,
and maintains that the spectacle generated ‘separation and bombard[ed] the viewer with images of activity, actual participation, and actual belonging’ (Vejby & Wittkower 2010, p. 100). Facebook gives users the experience of what it is like to be with others, but at the same time, it has been argued to isolate users behind their respective screens and devices. Despite SNS encouraging interactivity amongst users, the virtual nature of such exchanges has been likened to an ‘illusion of virtual action’, which is part of the ‘inauthentic experiences’ in which modern passive spectators engage (Vejby & Wittkower 2010, pp. 100-107), making it difficult to determine if online participation is ‘subversive, and how much [of it] is passive’ (Vejby & Wittkower 2010, p. 108).

Influenced by semiotics, research on audience practices is focused on determining the production of meaning through analyses of media texts, which has been argued to be a confining trait of audience research arenas (Couldry 2004). Expanding on this perspective, Couldry (2004) suggested focusing on media-related practices and the way they affected cultural actions. However, scholars have argued that Couldry’s media analysis focus is narrow and static (Rao 2010).

Instead of examining the way local practices affect the position of media in various cultural settings, Couldry suggests observing cultural practices as influencing the way individuals utilise the media (Rao 2010, p. 150). Despite paralleling Bourdieu’s notion of the habitus, Couldry’s suggestion of a hierarchy, or ‘demarcated sets of ordered practices’ affecting each other ‘in a domino style, with media practices in pole position’, does not account for the centrality of media (Rao 2010, p. 149). Alternatively, Bird (2010, p. 86) suggests understanding how media are ‘incorporated into everyday communicative and cultural practices’ as being vital to comprehending the relevance of the relationship between structure and agency in the context of new media.

We cannot really isolate the role of media in culture, because the media are firmly anchored into the web of culture, although articulated by individuals in different ways (Bird 2003, p. 3).
Ardevol et al. (2010 p. 261) further contend that experiences and ‘the process of media production and consumption’, coupled with how the ‘process is articulated with cultural production and the media system’, are essential to understanding new media practices. Examining local, grounded activities, therefore aids the understanding of how media outlets are entrenched in ‘everyday communicative and cultural practices’ (Bird 2010, p. 86). Doing so will also allow such activities to be viewed as ‘an interplay between media models and people’s cultural performances’, and not be ‘regarded merely as ‘audience response practices’ (Bird, cited in Ardevol et al. 2010, p. 262).

Additionally, Jenkins (2004, 2006) has proposed that the notion of a convergence culture, one that is characterised by the development of a participatory culture, be used to understand current media contexts. For Jenkins, convergence occurs when content moves across multiple media platforms, there is collaboration between multiple media industries, and when media audiences dictate where, what and how they wish to consume information. The circulation of content then becomes greatly dependent on the active participation of the user (Jenkins 2006). Representing a shift in cultural logic, where consumer participation in seeking out new knowledge and making connections between dispersed media content are encouraged, Jenkins (2004, 2006) asserts:

> Convergence is both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process...consumers are learning how to use these different media technologies to bring the flow of media more fully under their control and to interact with other users. They are fighting for the right to participate more fully in their culture (Jenkins 2004, p. 37).

Contrasting participatory culture with older notions of media spectatorship, the emergent system Jenkins (2006) proposes indicates a transformation from the one-way limiting relationship between media producers and media audiences of traditional media, into one where participants are expected to interact and engage each other. Moreover, Jenkins (2004, p. 37) posits that the core distinguishing
feature of new media culture is that it comprises ‘more or less contemporary emergent norms, values and patterns of activities that blur the boundaries between media production and media consumption’.

The participatory culture Jenkins (2004, 2006) articulates supports civic engagement, collaboration, sharing and creativity. Although members are not required to contribute, the belief that they are free to contribute is significant:

    Many will only dabble, some will dig deeper, and still others will master the skills that are most valued within the community. The community itself, however, provides strong incentives for creative expression and active participation (Jenkins et al. 2009, p. 6).

Highlighting the social connection amongst members, Jenkins et al. (2009, p. 8) observed how such forms of participatory culture eliminated social barriers and created opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and community involvement (Jenkins et al. 2009, p. xii-xiii). Inevitably altering cultural practices, Jenkins et al. (2009, p. 11) argued that

    The media landscape will be reshaped by the bottom-up energy of media created by amateurs and hobbyists as a matter of course. This bottom-up energy will generate enormous creativity, but it will also tear apart some of the categories that organise the lives and work of media makers...A new generation of media-makers and viewers are emerging which could lead to a sea change in how media is [sic] made and consumed (Jenkins et al. 2009, p. 11).

Encouraging involvement and connections to community and civic matters, convergence culture suggests new media’s positive stance in inculcating in Gen Y the value of participation in their communities. Yet, differing social norms, structural constraints and degrees of social learning influence the outcomes that could be gained from the use of social media. For instance, responsibility framings or norms of what should be done to maintain social order as being regulators of
social behaviour have been suggested as having an effect on the outcomes of socio-cultural processes and individuals’ interests with political participation (see Janoski 1998; Sandel 1998; Hechter & Opp 2001; Lister 2003; Inglehart 2008).

Motivations of new media use, such as the use of new media technologies as an empowerment tool in the pursuit of liberation and the negotiation of new governance spaces, have also been observed to affect both forms and levels of participation differently (see Diamond 2010; Taylor, Howard & Lever 2010; Bakker & de Vreese 2011; Kyriakopoulou 2011). Emphasising the embeddedness of the concepts of structure and agency in the everyday lives of technologically mediated societies, the importance of examining context when deciphering the relationship between structure and agency is reiterated. Singapore’s history of constraint is, hence, an important factor to consider when interpreting practices and their evolving presentations.

Besides broadening and enriching understandings of the reasons why individuals act, the application of practice theory will enable an evaluation of the impact new elements, such as new media, have had on social processes. Having outlined the theoretical groundings of the thesis, which will be useful for later engagement and discussion, the following chapters will explore these issues in relation to the Singaporean context. Going beyond these theoretical debates, the next chapter will examine the situation surrounding the use of new media technologies in Singapore.
Chapter Three
Governmentality, Media and Openness in Singapore

3.1 Introduction

Having placed the rhetoric of ‘national survival’ at the core of all of its policies, and using such a narrative to distil a sense of fear as well as to enforce compliance amongst its people, the PAP has successfully orchestrated the basis upon which the city-state functions. However, Singapore’s embrace of the internet and new media technologies has allowed its citizens greater access to information, and has expanded participation possibilities online.

Recognising new media as an appropriate mode of communication in both formal and everyday activities goes against various control mechanisms the ruling elite has initiated. The introduction of new media technologies has also altered the ways in which social processes in the Singaporean city-state are negotiated.

Setting the context of structural constraint and the limits of agency in Singapore, this chapter will look at Singapore’s development background, its approach towards governance and the restrictions the ruling elite has placed on both the media and netizens. The various policies restricting the openness of expression, especially in the online sphere, will also be examined. Case studies will also be presented as a means of considering how new media platforms such as Facebook have affected the interlocking fabric of social and cultural life in the Singaporean city-state.

3.2 Singapore’s Socio-political Discourse

There’ll be different voices, different standpoints, but I stand by my record. I did some sharp and hard things to get things right. Maybe some people disapproved of it. Too harsh, but a lot was at stake and I wanted the place to succeed, that’s all. At the end of the day, what
Lee Kuan Yew (LKY), Singapore’s first and longest-serving Prime Minister, has been unswervingly unapologetic about his iron-fisted governing style and willingness to suppress personal freedom in Singapore. Since its ascent into power, the PAP has been laying the foundation for Singapore’s ‘successes’ through the implementation of its pragmatic practices, controlling all mechanisms and cores of power while firmly rejecting the growth of political pluralism (Vasil 2000, p. 51).

Singapore was unceremoniously expelled from Malaysia on 9 August 1965, and overnight, become ‘a sovereign, democratic and independent nation’ (cited in Lee HL 2015). Forced to fend for itself, the unprepared newly independent city-state had a myriad of issues to tackle. Top concerns included apprehensions over the worsening of already tense and fragile ethnic ties, high unemployment rates, the nonexistence of natural resources, an economy that was not yet viable, and the lack of an army to defend itself.

When speaking at a televised press conference on 9 August 1965, LKY broke down, describing the separation from Malaysia as ‘a moment of anguish’ (cited in Lee, HL 2015). By the end of the press conference, LKY had promised Singaporeans ‘a bright future’, one that was based on meritocracy and multicultural harmony. LKY and his party then began work on nation building, laying the foundations for Singapore’s success (Lee, HL 2015). And, according to PM Lee Hsien Loong, ‘that moment of anguish [for LKY] turned into a lifetime of determination to forge a path for this island nation’ (Lee, HL 2015).

Viewing itself as the ‘natural ruling party of Singapore’ that intends to rule at length (Vasil 2000, p. 35), the PAP’s ‘capacity to recognise hard facts and form its theory from them and not the other way round’ has been the premise upon which it has attributed its success (Brief History of the PAP, cited in Vasil 2000, p. 37). Believing that in order to be ‘fully effective and beneficial, policies and programs have to be based strictly on rational considerations’ (Vasil 2000, p. 43), coupled with its
leaders’ ‘intellectual and technocratic nature’ backing them, the PAP felt that ‘they alone understood the problems facing Singapore and had the requisite capabilities to devise rational solutions’ (Vasil 2000, p. 43).

The PAP has established the entire character and course of politics, as well as the direction of socio-economic change in Singapore (Vasil 2000, p. 17-24). The PAP formulated an 'economic strategy of self-reliance', and ‘articulate[d] for its citizens the difficult circumstances in which it found itself as part of a nation building exercise’ (Hill & Lian 1995, p. 19). Having adopted the philosophy of ‘multiculturalism, pragmatism and meritocracy’ (Hill & Lian 1995, p. 62), which subsequently became the core founding principles upon which the city-state was developed, the PAP’s primary plan was to ‘create social and economic advancement, constituting the essential foundations of a democracy’ (Vasil 2000, p. 47).

This strategy came after the occurrence of two racial riots in 1964 that caused deaths, public despair, fear, disunity and chaos in Singapore. Emphasising the importance of equality and unity, the PAP was adamant about developing a unified Singaporean identity and encouraged its development as a single polity. This approach has been characterised as an ‘ideology of pragmatism’ (Chan & Evers 1973, cited in Hill & Lian 1995, p. 19), one which the PAP chooses to regard as the approach it had to take to develop a ‘rugged society’ (Hill & Lian 1995, p. 19).

The government also takes great pains to constantly remind the Singapore populace of the importance of multiculturalism17, and the need to actively work towards the maintenance of racial and religious harmony. As articulated by PM Lee Hsien Loong,

Now we are a harmonious multi-racial and multi-religious society. But

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17 Since independence, race has been a fundamental issue for Singapore. Historically an immigrant society, the importance placed on observing multiculturalism not only served to unite a racially diverse populace, enforcing meritocracy and equal treatment regardless of language, race or religion, but also helped promote peace and harmony amongst Singapore's Southeast Asian neighbours (Lee, HL 2017).
how did we go from riots and people getting killed and injured to where we are, happily mingling and enjoying ourselves, being friends with one another? Not by chance, but because of the way we developed our politics... (Speech delivered on 21 July 2012).

Having established a powerful image of its being ‘efficient, incorruptible, decisive and totally dedicated to the well-being of Singaporeans’ (Vasil 2000, p. 23), it was of utmost importance to the PAP that it be permitted to govern without any form of impediments and constraints (Vasil 2000, p. 43).

With state power being ‘systematically harnessed to consolidate and extend ruling party interests and obstruct any challenges to them’ (Rodan 2004, p. 15), the PAP was resolute in learning from the mistakes of other Asian states and overtly modelled Singapore after certain aspects of the Western model of liberal democracy18 (Vasil 2000, p. 50). Still, Singapore’s rapid development, respect for order and the rule of law, high efficiency levels, and economic achievements did not come easily: Many challenges stood in Singapore’s path. Many pragmatic but effective government polices were, thus introduced to overcome these challenges.

More recent challenges, such as SARS19, the Asian Financial Crisis and the Global Financial Crisis have also threatened the stability and security to which Singaporeans have become accustomed. Those situations have, nonetheless, been used as opportunities to further engage the Singaporean populace, eliciting support for the PAP and also citizen participation in the preservation of Singapore’s position as a global metropolis.

18 Determined to establish a thriving Singaporean state, the government only emulated aspects that were considered successful (Shandu & Wheatley 1989).
19 The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus. It was first reported in Asia in February 2003 (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention 2013). The 2003 global SARS outbreak spread to more than twenty countries in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia before it was contained (Chew 2016). In Singapore, 238 people were infected, 33 of whom died (The Straits Times, 16 March 2013). The outbreak in Singapore began in February 2003 when a young woman who had been infected while holidaying abroad returned to Singapore. After the implementation of various stringent measures, including home quarantine, blanket screening of incoming travellers and school closures, the outbreak in Singapore was finally contained in May 2003 (Chua, MH 2004).
Constantly using the national survival rhetoric and especially the importance of maintaining multicultural harmony when rationalising policy and ideology today, the PAP validates its power by reminding its citizens of its past successes:

> When you're Singapore and your existence depends on performance – extraordinary performance, better than your competitors – when that performance disappears because the system on which it's been based becomes eroded, then you've lost everything...I try to tell the younger generation that and they say the old man is playing the same record, we've heard it all before. I happen to know how we got here and I know how we can unscramble it. (Lee Kuan Yew, quoted in *Agence France-Presse*, 26 June 2008).

The PAP has justified the pragmatic constraint and structural control enforced upon Singaporeans as the only way forward for Singapore, or the only way Singapore can progress. The self-censorship and observance of out-of-bound (OB) markers restricting individuals from addressing ‘sensitive’ topics (Kampfner 2009, p. 33), especially those related to ethnicity and religion, significantly limits the freedom of expression within the city-state. The tight controls engulfing the Singaporean state are also far-reaching, extending to restrictions placed on the chewing of gum, government initiatives telling couples whom they should marry, the number of children they should have, and even the restrictions placed on the development of the creative industries.

### 3.3 Active Participation and the Singapore ‘Soul’

Having penetrated deeply into the everyday practices of Singaporeans, the ideals surrounding multiculturalism, meritocracy and pragmatism have contributed significantly to the continued enforcement of the ‘national survival’ rhetoric, and the development of the Singaporean national identity (Hill & Lian 1995, pp. 23-34). Aimed at inculcating both an emotional and ideological attachment to ‘home’ through the establishment of a viable national identity, citizen participation and
involvement have become a crucial part of the Singapore government’s nation-building effort.

By placing emphasis on emboldening Singapore’s ‘soul’, while simultaneously creating associations and connections to ‘home’, fostering participation and engagement amongst Singaporeans was viewed as a way of giving the Singapore community increased leeway to nurture its own distinctive characteristics. The emphasis placed on Singaporeans’ active involvement in the creation of a ‘Singapore soul’ stresses the state’s acknowledgement and aim of getting Singaporeans to engage and actively participate in civic life.

Participating in community activities would result in greater stakeholdership and the formation of connections that would ultimately contribute to the bonding of citizens to the Singaporean city-state. Strong community ties and social relationships would help foster strong social networks, increasing citizen interest and engagement in civic life. Augmenting social capital resources, the establishment of a ‘nationalistic and deep emotional attachment to Singapore’ would foster the principles underscored in the PAP’s nation-building paradigm (Yeo 1991, pp. 2-3).

However, the government’s thrust towards active participation and the development of Singapore’s ‘soul’ was not only an indication of the move towards democratisation, but was primarily intended to ensure social harmony whilst instilling morals and values amongst the Singaporean populace. Additionally, the kind of socio-political involvement in which the PAP wanted individuals to participate was still being directed and controlled from the top-down.

‘Civil society’ refers to ‘the quality of human experience and exchange’ (Lee, T 2010, p. 80), or the social relations and associations individuals pursue alongside their economic interests (Wapner 1997, p. 21). ‘Civic society’, on the other hand, is used to indicate the ‘socio-political aspects of civility and/or decency’ (Lee, T 2010, p. 82). However, in Singapore, the term civic society has ‘been (loosely) applied to anything and everything requiring state, non-state and/or grassroots involvement
As compared to the term ‘civil society’, which emphasises citizenship rights, the term ‘civic society’ connotes citizens’ civic responsibilities and is favoured over the former by the Singaporean government (Chua, BH 2000, p. 63).

Chua, BH argues that the Singapore government’s preference for using the term ‘civic society’ indicates the language of politics to which the PAP adheres, highlighting the political stance the PAP has adopted in its approach towards appropriating ‘balance in the relationship between state and society’ (Chua, BH 2000, p. 63). The PAP’s interchangeable use of the two terms in both public and political discourse was further stressed in a speech delivered by then Minister George Yeo (1999, p. 12), who asserted that it was up to each person’s own judgment as to how they chose to use the two terms for their own purposes.

Yet, a clear distinction was made when Yeo indicated that rather than engage in ‘parliamentary, partisan or lobbyist politics’ (Yeo 1991, pp. 2-3), individuals were encouraged to only enhance and boost civic life so as to ensure Singaporeans would treat the city-state like home and not a hotel where individuals had no attachment or connection to such spaces (Lee, T 2010, p. 73). Yeo’s description of the concept of civil society in Singapore further stresses the way social organisation is used to embed a regime of truth in Singapore (Rodan 2003).

As discussed in Chapter Two, Foucault’s regime of truth is ‘a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and functioning of statements’, which is connected ‘by a circular relation to systems of power which produce it and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which redirect it’ (Foucault 1976, pp. 112-114). By constructing regimes of truth through national campaigns and public policies, the PAP has been able to ‘demand a constant vigilance and social discipline’ from its people (Koh 2003, pp. 233-234). This, in turn, has allowed the PAP the power to govern the city-state and reinstate its dominance and authority, as well as ability to dictate the kind of participation it has preferred Singaporeans engaged in.
The simultaneous discourse of ‘crises’, which offers rationales for implementing policies, has also ensured the maintenance of control over its people (Koh 2003, pp. 233-234). The surveillance and disciplining of society through the ruling elite’s power and control has resulted in a regime of truth that provides justifications for its actions and commands adherence to its rules and policies and has been ‘internalised by Singaporeans through a variety of mechanisms of socialisation’ (Hill & Lian 1995, p. 31).

Although the entrenchment of the political into the social is often not addressed, mentioned or is taken for granted (Rodan 1996, 2000a, 2000b; Lee & Birch 2000), such comments underscore the profound entanglement of both structural constraints and personal agency in Singapore. Lee, T (2002, p. 102) has also contended that ‘every discourse on civic and/or civil society in Singapore is highly politicised for the act of depoliticisation, if at all possible, is always-already political’.

Described as a challenge for both the Singapore government and its people to ‘bind’, ‘optimise’ and ‘exist together’ (Yeo 2000, p. 26), civil society in Singapore is not just about citizenship and goes beyond the mere granting of voting rights and the right to carry a Singapore passport. In Singapore, the link between civil society and citizenship duties as expected of its citizens ‘is more veraciously about emotional and ideological attachment to Singapore’ (Yeo 1991, p. 2; see Yeo 2004). Koh, TA (1998) also contends that the Singapore model of civic society is clearly aimed at preventing any potentially de-stabilising lobbying or campaigning activity, distinctly specifying the behaviour and conduct expected of citizens in the public sphere.

Correspondingly, participation in the arts and other more socially enhancing activities that could foster the deeper entrenchment of values, connections and ties to Singapore are the kinds of civic activities the Singapore government wants to encourage. However, reaffirming ‘our membership and allegiance to our fellow citizens, our community and our country’ (Lim, R 2004, p. 11) is not the only possible outcome that could result from the encouragement of active civic
engagement. Quoting Foucault (1978, p. 102), Terence Lee has suggested that the PAP’s increasing support for active participation in civic society is ‘not so much to enable a thriving public sphere, but [is more] to advance and perfect the regulative apparatuses and technologies of governmentality’.

Scholars have criticised the constant construction of truths around the discourse of ‘national survival’ to curb the social and cultural effects of Singapore’s past as authoritarian, outdated and restrictive of personal agency. Kampfner (2009) has even suggested that this method of governance has resulted in Singapore developing its own version of democracy. Adopting the mindset that current difficulties are temporary, while being pragmatic safeguards future gains and long-term prosperity, Kampfner (2009) has argued that the PAP has used its success as a means to prove its legitimacy and to demonstrate to its people the worth of their policies. Kampfner (2009) asserts that the subsequent success enjoyed by Singapore’s adherence to government polices has, thus, come at a cost.

Although the adherence to governmental rhetoric has resulted in minimised feelings of unhappiness or unfairness amongst the populace, Kampfner argues that such compliance suggests that the Singapore government has made a pact with its people. Arguing that the restrictions overwhelming Singaporeans are much more than just government policies dictating what individuals should be doing, Kampfner (2009) has described this arrangement as the ‘freedom for sale’ pact. Kampfner (2009) further contends that what the government does is simply offer ‘what every citizen wants – the good life, security, good education, and a future for their children’ through the implementation of its policies, and in exchange for these ‘comforts’, the populace simply ‘removes itself from the public realm’, accepting entirely, not confronting or questioning the government and its initiatives in any way (Kampfner 2009, pp. 30-32).

In essence, Kampfner’s argument suggests the government’s taking on the responsibility of ‘delivering the good life in return for the endorsement of the electorate’, where the people simply give up their freedoms so as to prevent the outbreak of ‘havoc and chaos’ (Kampfner 2009, p. 26 & p. 32). Although ensuring
peace and stability, this pact removes individual agency from the equation, and transfers full power and control to the ruling party.

Conversely, Chua Beng Huat (cited in Kampfner 2009, p. 33) has argued that it is the limits to freedom, as dictated by social norms specific to various societies that constrain individual action. The ability of the state in implementing control and ensuring the systematic operation of society cannot depend solely on force or pressure. The state requires the agreement of its citizens in ensuring the acceptance and success of its policies (Hill & Lian 1995, p. 21). Being the subjects of discourses as impressed upon them, 'Singapore' and 'Singaporeans' are subjects created by discursive practices that have specific characteristics and attributes in their explicit social spheres (Chua & Kuo 1991, p. 4).

Moreover, Chua BH (cited in Kampfner 2009, p. 33) contends that 'understanding the limits to freedom is what makes freedom possible'. Practices such as acceptable behaviour and appropriate decorum need to be upheld if order is to be maintained in social settings – 'The greater good is impossible without some constraint on individualism. The weakness of liberalism is the unwillingness to pay the cost of membership' (Chua, BH, cited in Kampfner 2009, p. 33).

Chua BH’s argument accentuates Bourdieu’s (1984, 1990) argument about individuals’ practical mastery of their socially constructed world. The way social practices become ‘deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them’ (Wacquant 2005, p. 316), is highlighted in Bourdieu’s (1977) argument for a logic of practice. Bourdieu's theory of practice also emphasises the space individuals have to creatively express themselves, which is simultaneously juxtaposed against their roles as strategising members of society.

In the context of Singapore, individuals’ choice to adhere to OB markers so as to prevent embarrassment when interacting with members of other ethnic groups could be the reason behind the general acceptance of government rhetoric about the need to be sensitive to the needs of other ethnicities and religions. The
regulation of responses in relation to conditions through the practice of habitus underscores the way agency influences social culture and vice versa. Understanding acceptable limits to agency, according to socialisation and norms accepted by society, ensures the maintenance of social order and the appropriate presentation of self. Personal restraint and the preference to not engage in political issues are therefore, forms of agency and should not be automatically assumed to be a consequence of overpowering restraint and control.

Such situations also underscore Ortner's (1989) assertion that history and cultural context need to be considered when examining the relationship between structural constraints and the display of agency in the study of practices. Moreover, the role of the state in affecting subject formation is important in Singapore’s context, especially since there have been two distinct phases in Singapore’s development: The economic focus on growth from 1965 to the 1980s and the focus on the development of the ‘Singapore soul’ from the 1980s onwards (Ortmann 2009). Singapore's embrace of the internet and its constant strive towards technological advancement have also made the government’s top-down approach to encouraging national development problematic.

The next two sections will examine the restrictions the PAP has placed on the press and the internet, further highlighting underlying Foucauldian conceptions of the ruling elite’s power, the construction of an all-encompassing discourse and the production of truth in the Singaporean city-state.

3.4 Restrictions on the Printed Press

The last time Singapore witnessed the full force of the government’s might against the press was in 1971, when the PAP took action against three newspapers (George 2005a, p. 12). LKY accused the Chinese-language newspaper Nanyang Siang Pau, the English-language newspaper Eastern Sun, and the English-language tabloid Singapore Herald of participating in ‘black operations’ and undermining Singapore’s security (George 2005a, p. 12).
In April 1971, the Chinese-language press was criticised for fueling chauvinism in its reporting on the decline of Chinese-medium schools in Singapore (George 2005a, p. 12). According to the government, the editors of *Nanyang Siang Pau* were ‘glamourising the Communist system and also working up communal emotions on issues over Chinese language and culture’ (Singapore Government Statement, 22 May 1971). On 2 May 1971, four senior *Nanyang Siang Pau* executives were detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA), and in a statement addressing the arrests, the government said:

The *Nanyang Siang Pau* had made a sustained effort to instill admiration for the communist system as free from blemishes and endorsing its policies, while highlighting in the domestic news pages the more unsavoury aspects of Singapore life (cited in Seow 1998, p. 42).

At around the same time the *Eastern Sun* was accused of receiving Communist funds from Hong Kong and for “stoking up heat” over language, culture and religion’ in Singapore (Seow 1988, pp. 52-53). With the manipulation of Singapore’s local media being viewed as a means of ‘influencing public opinion and creating political situations favourable’ to outside interests, the *Eastern Sun* was deemed to have been involved in ‘black operations’ (Seow 1988, p. 53). Rajaratnam, then Minister for Foreign Affairs, further suggested that the government’s ‘tussle with some newspapers did not involve freedom of the press but the freedom of Singapore’ (Seow 1988, p. 53).

At that time, there was no law prohibiting foreign participation or the involvement of foreign funds in the media. In fact, foreign involvement was in line with the government’s plan of attracting foreign capital and expertise to Singapore. Still, the PAP was eager to cement its control, maintain its credibility and ensure continued peace and stability were maintained in the city-state. The series of events that unfolded between the PAP and the *Singapore Herald* was another instance demonstrating the constraint experienced by the Singapore press.
The idea of ‘livening up’ the local press with an alternative to *The Straits Times* (*The Straits Times*, 11 June 1971, cited in Seow 1988, p. 56), was approved by the government, albeit reluctantly, in July 1970 (Seow 1988, p. 56). Nonetheless, soon after its launch, the *Singapore Herald* ran into distribution issues and had insufficient advertising revenue (Seow 1988, p. 57). LKY’s attack on the “politically feisty” *Singapore Herald*, accusing it of being influenced by foreign investors’ interests, which were ‘aided and abetted by the international news media’ (Seow 1988, p. 56), resulted in the eventual withdrawal of the newspaper’s license on 28 May 1971 and the expulsion of its senior journalists from Singapore (George 2005a, p. 12).

LKY’s reservations concerning the *Singapore Herald* were mostly over his suspicion of the newspaper’s chief editor, Francis Wong, ‘playing a role for someone else’ (Seow 1988, p. 57). Wong’s editorial direction purported questionable integrity and journalistic credentials, as well as links to ‘two prominent PAP dissidents’ who had formed the opposition party, the Barisan Sosialis, which LKY had ‘branded as “pro-communists”’ (Seow 1988, p. 57), intensified the suspicions the PAP had of the newspaper’s intentions. Wong’s ‘free spirited approach and insouciant treatment of matters held sacred and inviolate by the establishment’ only served to reinforce the increasing distrust the PAP had (Seow 1988, p. 58).

The *Singapore Herald*’s reporting of the Nanyang Siang Pau arrests further agitated the PAP with its lack of cooperation with authorities in reserving its political judgment in the interest of social security. The deliberate questioning of the PAP’s intentions and its use of the ISA was also considered ‘taking on the government’ (Seow 1998, pp. 58-59). And, unlike other local newspapers, the *Singapore Herald* ‘took a lively independent stance on matters of public moment’ (Seow 1988, pp. 56-58).

In stark contrast to the rest of the local press, which had a ‘habit of filling its pages with endless government speeches’ (Seow 1988, p. 56), the *Singapore Herald* ‘attracted quite a following, with its lively, entertaining, refreshingly irreverent approach’ (Turnbull 1995, p. 291). The *Singapore Herald*’s popularity was viewed
as a threat to the ‘national survival’ rhetoric the PAP had worked so hard to maintain. The government also continued to accuse the newspaper of being involved in black operations:

The fact that the paper [Eastern Sun] has been friendly with us has not deterred us from revealing that it is a weapon being kept in the cold for future use. This should give the lie that our revelations in regard to the [Singapore] Herald is because it has been critical of us. We are a tough political party. We are quite capable of coping with criticisms...We had our doubts but decided to give it [Singapore Herald] a chance...As it turned out, it became clearer to us that criticism had become a cover for eroding the will and attitudes of people in regard to certain fundamental matters (Rajaratnam, quoted in The Sunday Times, 16 May 1971, cited in Seow 1988, pp. 61-62).

Questions continued to loom over the Singapore Herald’s purported questionable use of foreign funds and the motives behind foreign investors’ interests in the loss-making paper. Eventually, the newspaper’s debt became overwhelming, and public sympathy towards the newspaper was stimulated. The Singapore Herald’s staff even pledged to work without pay to help keep the paper going. On 21 May 1971, the “Save the Herald” campaign was launched by the Singapore National Union of Journalists, and members were urged to give a day’s wages or subscribe to the paper to keep it going. Donations were also received from the public, and tertiary students sold the paper to help raise funds (Seow 1988; George 2005a).

The allegations against the Singapore Herald attracted international and regional attention. Editors from other respected newspapers condemned the PAP’s control over commercial and editorial restrictions of the local press, and called on LKY to retract his accusations. The Singapore Herald’s management also stressed that ‘on top of violating press freedom, the government had decided to interfere in a commercial enterprise’ (quoted in Seow 1988, p. 83). Still, LKY defended his party’s position on the need for tight press control, arguing:
The danger of outside influence on newspapers through money from outside Singapore depended on whether the money came in openly or from unknown owners who slanted their news, headings and editorials claiming that they were the voice of the people (cited in Seow 1988, p. 89).

LKY’s address to the International Press Institute Conference in Helsinki, on 9 June 1971, further reiterated the PAP’s argument that nation building and national survival were vital and of the utmost importance, especially for new countries such as Singapore:

...We want the mass media to reinforce, not to undermine, the cultural values and social attitudes being inculcated in our schools and universities...foreign agencies from time to time use local proxies to set up or buy into newspapers, not to make money, but to make political gains by shaping opinions and attitudes. My colleagues and I have the responsibility to neutralise their intentions. In such a situation, freedom of the press, freedom of the news media, must be subordinated to the overriding needs of Singapore, and to the primacy of purpose of an elected government – Lee Kuan Yew (cited in Seow 1988, pp. 89-92).

Despite the government maintaining that it was acting solely against ‘black operations’ in the interest of preserving racial and religious harmony and ensuring continued progress for Singapore, critics have argued that the move on the Singapore Herald was one of deliberate censorship. Seow (1988, p. 99) has maintained that the Singapore Herald was targeted, as it had created ‘unwelcomed “pressure points on the government”’ by publishing articles attempting to influence readers against “administrative sacred cows”, such as the national service policy and the ISA. Such arguments seem especially valid when observing LKY’s stand on his style of governance:
If you are a troublemaker... it’s our job to politically destroy you...
Everybody knows that in my bag I have a hatchet, and a very sharp one. You take me on, I take my hatchet, we meet in the cul-de-sac...

– Lee Kuan Yew (quoted in Han, Fernandez & Tan, S 1998, p. 146).

The effects of the events that happened in May 1971 sent ‘shock waves through Singapore and raised concerns about press freedom’ (Turnbull 1995, p. 291). Clearly demonstrating the exercise of top-down surveillance alongside the restraint and control that was already engulfing the city-state, the action taken against the three newspapers not only damaged Singapore's ‘democratic credentials’, but also injured ‘its reputation as an investor-friendly economy’ (George 2005a, p. 13).

Since the uproar following the events of 1971, the PAP has moved away from the colonial legacy of reserve powers that Singapore inherited from the British. Allowing for discretionary licensing and preventive detention, Singapore's colonial legacy was ideal for a ‘state content to rule by force’, as it guaranteed the government would win any fight (George 2005a, p. 13). But, for a party with a ‘hegemonic mission’, Singapore's colonial legacy was not conducive or supportive of the nation-building project on which the PAP had embarked; it would be ‘far better to win without a fight than to fight and win’ (George 2005a, p. 13).

The introduction of new press laws after the 1971 onslaught against the press began the restructuring of Singapore’s entire press establishment. By the 1980s, Singapore's press system had been completely transformed. Unlike other authoritarian governments, Singapore chose not to take over ownership of newspapers and, instead, set in place mechanisms allowing the press to 'remain politically neutral' (Lee, KY 2000, p. 218). Including the business interests of other stakeholders also ensured the stability and growth of Singapore's press system (George 2005a, p. 14).

Nevertheless, Seow (1988) has maintained that ‘the press has become the mouthpiece of the state, using invidious self-censorship to distort the news’. Alternatively, George (2005a, p. 14) argued that such characterisations of
Singapore was ‘profoundly misleading’, severely undervaluing the

...sophisticated calibration that has been built into press controls. The PAP has [essentially] achieved what possibly no other authoritarian state has done: Effective, near-watertight supervision of the press without either nationalising ownership of the media or brutalising journalists (George 2005a, p. 14).

The ‘dynamic equilibrium’ that balances the ‘political interests of the PAP government, the profit motives of publishers, the professional and pecuniary needs of journalists, and the public’s demand for information and analysis’ was another factor contributing to the success of Singapore’s unique press system (George 2005a, p. 14). Additionally, George (2005a, pp. 14-15) has suggested that because none of the stakeholders in the equilibrium have been so outraged or ‘so unhappy as to opt out of it’, the system the PAP put in place was somewhat satisfactory in terms of attending to each of the stakeholders’ interests.

Although alternative news websites and sources are accessed today, the main newspapers in Singapore still supply information and have not yet lost their appeal and credibility (George 2005a, pp. 14-15). News media consumers, the main victims of the lack of press freedom in Singapore, have not rejected the mainstream media completely. Moreover, George (2005a, p. 15) has claimed that the public is now more disposed to directing blame at the press for adopting a self-censorship approach, rather than accusing the underlying system of laws and regulations for the lack of a more open-minded standpoint in press reportage (George 2005a, p. 15).

Attributing this outcome to being part of the PAP's political strategy, George (2005a, pp. 15-16) further contended that it was the PAP's realisation that global capitalist forces would affect journalism’s impetus, making it more profit-driven that helped propel this strategy. Rather than impose direct subversion of the press, all that was needed was the mere tweaking of ‘its incentive structure and [the installation of the] right barriers’ (George 2005a, p. 16), which corroborates
Rodan’s (2004) proposition that market developments affect information regulation.

Rodan (2004, p. 16) contended that due to the profit-seeking mentalities of capitalist markets, stakeholders could suppress the free flow of information, coercing ‘widespread self-censorship to avoid confrontation with authoritarian regimes and to protect access to those markets’. Arguing that other factors could be used as instruments to affect the transformation of the state, Rodan (2008, p. 231) posited that the ‘pervasive social and economic roles assumed by the PAP’, have helped the ruling elite in Singapore maintain its strong hold.

George’s (2005a, 2005b) argument that the PAP’s clever use of calibrated coercion ensured continued power in the city-state also supports this claim. Maintaining that there are varied ways in which a regime could perpetuate its dominance, the PAP’s choice of ‘the right tools of repression for the right job’ (George 2005a, p. 4, aided the success of its soft authoritarian system. The arguments put forth by George (2005a, 2005b, 2006), and Rodan (2004) are no doubt compelling, and do not deny the significance of the two other pillars of the PAP’s hegemonic rule – ‘Sound economic policy-making, and a compelling ideology of nation-building’ (George 2005a, p. 4) – but they do highlight the PAP’s strategic foresight and responsiveness to changing contexts. These measures put in place by the PAP also further exemplify the ruling elite’s construction of regimes of truth, highlighting Foucault’s (1980) notion of truth being discursively constructed and imposed through objectivist structures, as well as the operation of an all-encompassing discourse.

The significance of the Singapore government applying constraints already enforced in their surveillance of traditional media to online media is vital to understanding the issues surrounding the freedom of expression in Singapore. Highlighting the brilliance of the PAP’s policy of implicit control, the imposition of self-censorship to prevent overt governmental influence and also to guarantee stakeholders’ intentions and motives are met, exemplifies the dynamic relationship between social structures and individual agency in Singapore. In the age of new
media, where information flows quickly and freely, the limitations enforced by the PAP are significant; not only for the way they are implemented, but also for the impacts such constraint produces.

3.5 The Internet and a ‘Light Touch’ Approach

Economic development was the key reason behind Singapore’s push for technological advancement and turning Singapore into an intelligent island. Seeing the value of restructuring Singapore’s ‘economy toward higher value-added production’ (Rodan 2001, pp. 69-70), the various IT (Information Technology) plans implemented were aimed at developing new competitive advantages for the city-state. Acknowledging the internet’s economic advantages, coupled with the need to remain relevant, and increase the country’s ‘overall effectiveness, influence and competitive advantage in the world’, the various IT strategies launched in the city-state were aimed mainly at attracting investors and retaining Singapore’s position as a global hub (Rodan 2001, pp. 70-71).

Singapore’s far-sightedness in recognising the effect internet technologies would have in propelling its economy forward resulted in the city-state embarking on various initiatives to ensure Singapore remained ‘a junction for goods, services, people, information and ideas’ (Rodan 2001, p. 70). Singapore’s IT2000 strategy, initially focused on establishing a ‘nationwide, not international, interactive information service’, was, for instance, changed to focus primarily on ‘interconnecting all Singaporean households, businesses, government departments, and institutions with an interactive medium – Teleview’ (Rodan 2001, p. 71).

Teleview received and responded to instructions given by users through a phone line, sending messages in the form of ‘text, graphics, or photographs through phone or radio waves’ (Rodan 2001, p. 71). However, as the Teleview technology did not allow for the free flow of information and the formation of networks, or systems of connections and recurrent interactions especially from multiple users or systems, the full adoption of Teleview would not have been advantageous to Singapore’s
aspirations of being a progressive, innovative and open economy. Singapore subsequently switched its focus from investing in Teleview to the development of the internet.

By March 1996, three separate commercial internet service providers had begun operations in Singapore (Rodan 2001). The adoption of the internet meant greater ‘challenges to customary levels of political control over information flows’ in the city-state (Rodan 2001, p. 71). Being interactive, instantaneous, non-hierarchical and global, the new communication medium accorded ‘unprecedented access to information and new avenues for individual political expression’ (Rodan 2001, p. 64). Additionally, the internet allowed ‘democracy of a more participatory nature’, as it bypassed the ‘strictures of formal political organisations and the scrutiny of government authorities’ (Rodan 2001, p. 64).

The thrust towards technological advancement did not, however, alter the PAP’s firm stance on actively engaging in surveillance, so as to ensure social harmony was upheld in Singapore. Neither did the change imply that the ruling elite was willing to surrender political control in any way. The knowledge and ability to cope with the wealth of information and the freedom the internet brought were a key issue for the Singapore government.

LKY was adamant that “the right to free expression, when carried to excess, [had] not worked” in other societies (quoted in Gardels 1996). The effects of unrestrained freedom in Western societies, especially that of America’s cultural corruption, the ready access to destabilising social and political qualities like ‘the OJ media circus, Calvin Klein’s proto-porn teen ads, hyperviolent films, gangsta rap and the descent of the mainstream press into tabloidism’ were the causes of the difficulties faced in maintaining cohesiveness in America, asserted LKY (cited in Gardels 1996). LKY also argued that only ‘the top three to five percent of a society can [sic] handle this free-for-all, this clash of ideas...[and thus,] if you do this with the whole mass...you’ll have a mess’ (quoted in Gardels 1996).
Censorship was for the PAP, ‘a symbolic act, an affirmation to young and old alike of the values held by a community...’ (Yeo, quoted in Gardels 1996). As such, ‘we don’t want the Playboy channel to play here because it is offensive and contrary to what we believe in’ (Yeo, quoted in Gardels 1996). Described as ‘an anti-pollution measure in cyberspace’, the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) was tasked with regulating the internet in Singapore (Rodan 2001, p. 80).

Focused on aspects that could ‘undermine public morals, political stability or religious harmony in Singapore’, Yeo (cited in Rodan 2001, p. 80) further emphasised that rather than ‘narrowcasting’, or using the internet for private electronic communication, the SBA was concerned mainly with websites and the “broadcasting” of information to millions of users at one time.

New broadcasting laws formally extending the government’s influence to electronic communication were introduced in 1994. And in 1996, Parliament initiated new regulations that were specific to the internet (Rodan 2001; George 2005a). Three main features of the 1996 regulations included the licensing of local internet operators and content providers under a collective class licensing system, the registration of all political parties, religious organisations and individuals with webpages discussing religion or politics online, and also the added responsibility assigned to service providers over inhibiting the accessibility of ‘objectionable content’ (Rodan 2001, p. 81). Once again, the PAP’s desire to control the content accessible by its citizens highlights Foucault’s (1980) argument for power and the imposition of multiple forms of constraint, which contribute to constructing regimes of truth.

Rationalising the government’s approach, Yeo said that such measures were to ensure Singapore’s survival as a morally grounded multicultural entity. Also, even though online ‘censorship can [sic] no longer be 100 percent effective...even if it is [sic] only 20 percent effective, we should not stop censoring’ (quoted in Rodan 2001, p. 80). Service providers and the international press were, however, discontented over the announced need for a proxy server barrier. In response, the
government stressed that the barrier was meant only to inhibit pornographic sites and not political sites (George 2005a, p. 17).

The government also clarified regulation criteria with the revision of the Internet Code of Practice. Placing emphasis directly on 'sexual content and material harmful to racial and religious harmony' (George 2005a, p. 18), the government tried to 'exert as much pressure as possible to foster self-censorship and caution', so as to prevent the prevalence of unacceptable content online (Rodan 2001, p. 81).

As explicit restriction, intimidation and blatant censorship of the press did not reflect well on Singapore as an open, investor-friendly economy, the government declared that it would adopt a 'light touch' approach in its management of the internet. Encouraging self-regulation on the part of both the content provider and user, the PAP wanted to inculcate the responsible use of the new medium, while simultaneously sustaining the favourable development of the internet in Singapore.

Individual and public users welcomed the government's light touch approach, as it appeared to uphold the liberal ideology the internet was believed to represent (Lee, T 2005a, p. 79). Bringing them a step closer to an 'utopian and unregulated state of liberty and democratic freedom' (Lee, T 2005a, p. 80), individual and public users saw the internet as the medium they could use to express themselves. For government administrators, self-regulation meant that licensees were categorised collectively, utilising a uniform set of rules, which ultimately meant that tasks like 'surveillance, accounting and reporting' were made much less arduous (Lee, T 2005a, p. 80). More importantly, being obliged to simply ‘...“agree” to operate responsibly and in accordance to the laws of the land, the fear of legal or political reprisal’ helped to ensure compliance (Lee & Birch 2000, p. 160).

Terence Lee has argued that the light touch approach compelling self-regulation rather than the direct exertion of force from the government has in fact, encouraged the practice of auto-regulation in Singapore. Contrary to removing restrictions placed on the populace, Lee, T (2005a, p. 78) contended that the PAP actually relied on ‘aspects of illiberal governmentality’, where internet users were
governed and guided ‘towards making “correct” choices and decisions via the joint application of legislative codes with other subtle mechanisms of “discipline”’. Using Foucault’s (1977) notion of discipline, Lee, T (2005a, pp. 78-79) asserted that this self-regulatory strategy was used to coerce the Singapore populace into making the ‘exercise of power more effective and efficient’ (Foucault 1977, p. 136), creating self-disciplining subjects among the Singapore populace.

By influencing, normalising and instrumentalising the ‘conduct, thought, decisions, and aspirations of others’ (Miller & Rose 1990, p. 82), Terence Lee (2005a, p. 79) maintained that the reason behind the success of the government’s method of internet policing was not because of ‘its functionality or the inherent ability of individuals or internet industry players to discipline or conduct themselves’, but was due to the ‘cryptic and arbitrary policies and legal codes’ that have been employed as surveillance technologies. Automating and deindividualising power enabled the indirect deployment of surveillance mechanisms on the internet.

Lee (2005a, pp. 83-84), suggested that akin to the Panopticon Foucault used in his governmentality discourse, which is ultimately a form of government, such mechanisms were ‘calculated to attain policy compliance and political subservience’ or what Foucault described as the shaping of disciplined and ‘docile bodies’ (Foucault 1977, p. 138). This form of disciplining also highlights Foucault’s notion of discursive regimes posing limits on the display of individual agency.

Rodan (2001, pp. 76-80) has pointed out contradictory elements in the PAP’s dual strategy on the internet: Whilst remaining ‘determined not to concede any more media control than absolutely necessary’, the government still went to ‘extraordinary lengths to demonstrate [its] technical capacity to monitor usage of the internet’. Additionally, George (2005a, p. 17), has contended that making it compulsory for internet service providers to route traffic through proxy servers so that objectionable sites could be filtered out was ‘an example of how the “architecture” of the internet [could] be modified by regulators’ to suit their own specific intentions. Opposing Lessig’s (1999) argument that the internet cannot be
managed, such practices make the control and regulation of the internet ever more ‘efficient and less visible’, argued George (2005a, p 17).

Moreover, the transference of regulatory responsibilities to the SBA denotes similarities in the way the government treated the internet and other forms of media. With the absence of legal distinctions and the ‘licensing of content powers’, the SBA reinforced the notion that ‘the laws of Singapore such as the Penal Code, Defamation Act, Sedition Act and Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act’ applied to communications on the internet in the same way they did in traditional print and broadcast media (SBA statement, quoted in Rodan 2001, p. 81).

In 1999, the SBA\textsuperscript{20} imposed a symbolic ban that restricted access to 100 pornographic websites. The proxy servers of the three main internet service providers (SingNet, Pacific Internet and Starhub, which was then known as Cyberway Internet) were used to block access to these objectionable websites. Becoming the world’s ‘first instance of en bloc internet censorship’ (Lee, T 2005a, p. 80), the government was unapologetic and firm about its actions, maintaining that the blockage was simply ‘a gesture of concern’ (Lee, T 2005a, p. 80), an effort aimed at ensuring that content available on the internet remained moral and just, in line with the city-state’s ‘Asian’ social and cultural values (Tan, J 1997; Lee & Birch 2000, p. 149).

Singapore has been described as a ‘policed state’, an ‘illiberal democracy’ (Chua, BH 1995; Mutalib 2000), as being authoritarian, and even being under draconian rule, where the media play a ‘limited but often supportive role in reporting on governmental activity’ (Detenber & Rosenthal 2014, p. 109). Scholars have also described Singapore’s media as utilising a ‘development model’, where national development is constantly emphasised as an underlying rhetoric, and where the media generally experienced reduced freedom in news reportage (Detenber & Rosenthal 2014).

\textsuperscript{20}In 2003, the SBA, together with the Films and Publications Department (FPD) and the Singapore Film Commission (SFC) were merged to form a new statutory board, the Media Development Authority of Singapore (MDA) (Tan, B 2010).
Singapore's media outlets observing restrictions placed on Singapore's multicultural and multi-religious discourse, practising sensible judgment and 'report[ing] unfolding events sensitively and in a manner which informs, educates, and unites, not divides' (Goh 2005) also suggest the media's continued support and legitimisation of governmental interests and rhetoric. George's (2005a, 2005b, 2006) description of media in Singapore being a 'calibrated cohesion', where Singapore's news media adopt widespread self-censorship, further suggests the government's creation of an 'auto-regulation' framework that works continuously without any direct involvement from the ruling elite (Lee, T 2005a).

3.6 The Internet Class Licence Scheme

Being 'endowed with both the tools for controlling insurgency and a hypersensitivity towards organised dissent', the Singapore government has since independence shown its ability to dominate legislative and judicial branches of the state, forcibly inhibiting dissidence and impeding the efforts of opposition parties in the organisation and mobilisation of the populace (George 2005b, p. 905).

Having 'committed itself to the principle of strategic self-restraint, calibrating its coercion to get the job done with as little force as necessary' (George 2005a, p. 20), the government's restraint and reduced imposition on online exchanges meant that the internet in Singapore was now 'considerably more hospitable to contentious journalism than print and broadcast media' (George 2005b, p. 911).

George (2005b, p. 907) defined contentious journalism as 'the reporting and commenting on current events with at least some intention of serving a public purpose...with the explicit objective of challenging the authority of elites in setting the agenda and forging a national consensus'. Dissenting comments and views opposing the prevalent rhetoric the PAP endorsed and reinforced did not equate simply to extremist, Communist, or simply opposition-led viewpoints, as the term suggests, but was used to indicate alternative viewpoints in general. This meant that as long as the perspective was deemed to have at least some intention of going
against the ruling elite's policies, or any degree of opposition, it was deemed dissenting.

Unlike print and broadcast media, the internet was the first medium that could be publicly utilised for mass communication without the acquisition of an official government license (George 2005b, p. 907). With a lesser degree of explicit governmental regulation, the PAP's 'light touch' approach towards governmentality on the internet meant that individuals now had substantial breadth and openness to express themselves online, facilitating and even encouraging the 'flowering of dissenting communication on an unprecedented scale' (George 2005b, p. 907).

Open online forums, such as soc.culture.singapore, which predated the worldwide web, functioned as newsgroups used by the first Singaporean participants of contentious journalism (George 2005b, p. 907). Set up mainly to enable dialogues online, these sites occasionally ventured into 'free-for-alls on politics and current affairs' (George 2005b, p. 907). As people realised the potential freedom the internet offered, these open online forums gradually evolved into internet communities and later socio-political blogs.

In 1994, Sintercom, an internet community aimed at providing a platform where discussions about national issues and alternative ideas could be expressed freely, was established (Computer Times, 22 August 2001). According to Sintercom's founder, Dr Tan Chong Kee, the internet gave users the freedom of anonymity to speak up. The fear created by not knowing when 'someone's listening' and having to 'always [look] over our shoulders when we say something sensitive' was unwarranted, said Dr Tan (Computer Times, 22 August 2001). Sintercom was thus, 'created to let people say “that's what I think”' (Computer Times, 22 August 2001).

Moreover, unlike newsgroups like soc.culture.singapore, where posts were deleted after a few weeks, messages posted on internet communities could be permanently kept online, enhancing the possibility of having subsequent debates (Computer Times, 22 August 2001). The creation of such internet communities also produced new avenues of expression where individuals could openly voice perspectives.
Simulating a debate, perspectives were discussed and were subject to public scrutiny, enabling interaction between users.

Despite the intensification of contentious journalism and dissenting sites such as socio-political websites, which are otherwise regarded as sites of resistance, the Singapore government refrained from banning, blocking or taking down any of these sites. Besides the symbolic ban on the 100 pornographic sites carried out in 1999 to signal the types of content which the community regarded offensive or harmful, dissident websites were allowed to publish their views online. Alternative socio-political websites even gained added popularity in the lead-up to the 2011 General Election. Nonetheless, the government has been incessant in expecting these sites to observe auto-regulation or self-censorship and ensure socially sensitive topics are addressed morally and in a socially acceptable way.

Held accountable via the internet Class Licence scheme, any individual or group posting content on the internet is a de facto licensee. Under the Class Licence, anyone who sets up a webpage or published online instantly became a content provider. These individuals are automatically placed under the jurisdiction of the authorities, without having to apply to the Media Development Authority of Singapore (MDA) for any license (Lee, T 2005a, p. 81). This scheme made it easy for the government to indirectly enforce restraints on any behaviour it found inappropriate online. In addition to the automatic Class Licence scheme on the internet, any content provider that sought to promote religious or political causes relating to Singapore was required to register with the MDA (Lee, T 2005a, pp. 81-82).

This ensured that the basic principles and necessity of maintaining racial and religious harmony, which was continually enforced by the government, would be maintained instinctively through auto-regulation and self-censorship. Without specific or direct regulatory force from the government, surveillance systems and the fear of punishment ensured individual practices were socially acceptable and paralleled the ruling elite’s national survival rhetoric. These systems also correspond with Foucault’s (1977) notion of the Panopticon where disciplinary
paradigms extend power structures and surveillance mechanisms over the social body. This, in turn, demands the automation of order, conformity and restriction in the display of individual agency.

In 2001, Sintercom, which had 'become a hotbed for discussions ranging from government policies to where the best food places were' (Computer Times, 22 August 2001), was asked to register as a political website with the MDA. The MDA had deemed Sintercom to be 'engaged in the propagation, promotion or discussion of political issues relating to Singapore on the internet' (Goh 2001).

The site’s founder, Dr Tan, stressed that the site was created to ‘encourage candid discussions of social, cultural and political life in Singapore’, but eventually shut the site down, citing ‘the arbitrariness of political terms within the Class Licence’ as the reason behind the decision (Lee, T 2005a, p. 82). Before terminating the site at the end of August 2001, Dr Tan said civil society in Singapore was a ‘lost cause’ (Tan, TH 2001).

It could be argued that Dr Tan’s decision to shut down Sintercom was a decision he was forced into making. Still, it was a decision the authorities did not directly order.

### 3.7 Press Freedom in Singapore

The automation of self-censorship for the sake of social order, and in Singapore’s case, advancement, highlights the importance of an upstanding and reliable press system. Conversely, this acceptance of government rhetoric and adoption of a multicultural mindset so as to safeguard social harmony in Singapore could be viewed as a successful outcome of social conditioning, subject formation and the internalisation of structural dominance. Yet, Singapore’s second Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, has maintained that ‘Singapore needs a media model where the players practiced press freedom in a responsible way’ (Goh 2005). Encapsulating the city-state’s rejection of a ‘subservient press’, Goh (2005) said:
An unthinking press is not good for Singapore. But press freedom must be practiced with a larger sense of responsibility and the ability to understand what is in or not in our national interests. Editors need to understand what their larger responsibilities entail and to demand them of journalists...Our editors and journalists must [know] what works for Singapore and how to advance our society’s collective interests...having our media play the role as the fourth estate cannot be the starting point for building a stable, secure, incorrupt and prosperous Singapore.

Emphasising that ‘the media is [sic] free to put across a range of worthy different viewpoints to encourage constructive social and political discourse’, Goh (2005) underscored the PAP’s view that the press ‘should not parrot the government’s position’. Nevertheless, freedom on the part of the press in Singapore has been described as an illusion, with the press simply playing a ‘subordinate role given to it by the Executive’ (Tey 2008, p. 882).

According to Detenber and Rosenthal (2014, p. 112), socio-political attributes can affect both the media landscape, as well as how the press operates. The association between press freedom and suppressed liberties due to structural restraint does not adequately account for the socio-political attributes that are specific to each country. While the media function as the ‘fourth estate’ in some countries, exercising both ‘social and political influence independent of the government’, governments can command total control over the media in other situations (Detenber & Rosenthal 2014, p. 112). Determining the roles and obligations the media play in specific societies is, thus crucial to properly appreciate the context surrounding press freedom in different countries.

Understanding the entire ‘enabling environment’ in which the media function through the examination of each country’s socio-political situation is especially significant in Singapore’s context. With a unique developmental history and relationship with its ruling elite, coupled with Singapore’s multicultural make-up, the situation in Singapore should not be overlooked when classifying the media
environment as restrictive. As Ortner (1989) has asserted, such aspects of culture and context need to be highlighted when examining the relationship between structural constraint and individual agency. Moreover, with political legitimacy now increasingly being associated with the morality of governing (Hunt 1999, p. 17), it is not hard to understand why despite feeling regulated and restricted, individuals still chose to support measures aimed at restricting harmful and objectionable content.

In 2014, out of the 197 countries examined, Freedom House ranked Singapore 152nd with a total press freedom score\(^2\) of 67, thus categorising the city-state as having an environment where the press was ‘Not Free’ (Freedom House 2014). Freedom House evaluated international press freedom based on scores obtained from three broad categories: The legal environment, the political environment, and the economic environment (Freedom House 2014). This approach was intended to ‘provide a picture of the entire “enabling environment” in which the media in each country operate’ and, thus, assist in establishing the varied ways in which pressures could be applied to limit the flow of information, enable journalists to operate without the fear of repercussions, and ensure the diversity of news and information access from both local and global sources (Freedom House 2014).

Although the overall media environment in Singapore was reported to have ‘remained largely unchanged’ from previous rankings, Singapore’s press freedom ranking was reported to have been affected by the city-state’s recent implementation of new licensing requirements for news websites, which sought to regulate online media in accordance with print and broadcast media (Freedom House 2014), suggesting a contradiction in the previously announced light touch approach the PAP said it would adopt in its dealings with the internet.

Moreover, in response to questions posed in Parliament, in 2004, about Singapore’s poor ranking for press freedom, then Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts, Dr Lee Boon Yang explained that the index used by Reporters Sans

\(^2\) Scores from 0 to 30 indicate that the country was ‘in the Free press group; 31 to 60 in the Partly Free press group; and 61 to 100 in the Not Free press group’ (Freedom House 2014).
Frontières (RSF) was ‘based largely on a different media model which favours the advocacy and adversarial role of the press’ (Ministry of Communications and Information, 16 November 2004). He explained:

[...]

Scholars have highlighted the contradictions in the notions of openness and freedom in Singapore, especially in relation to the press. George (2005a, p. 12) asserted that the PAP’s press system is ‘one of dozens of authoritarian models’ the world over that claims ‘the suspension of press freedom is in the public interest’. However, what made Singapore’s suspension of press freedom ‘exceptional’ was the system’s ‘sheer longevity and stability, maintained with declining levels of overt repression’ (George 2005a, p. 12).

In a world concerned about terrorism and the public display of ethnic (in Singaporean terms, racial) violence, Singapore has successfully maintained a harmonious societal model – one that sees value in nurturing the cultural infrastructure of its populace on top of ensuring the maintenance of public order, security, and morality. Gardels (1996) has also asserted that ‘the issue of our time is no longer which limits to erase, but where to draw the boundaries’. Still, such

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22 Singapore was ranked 154 out of the 180 countries in the 2016 World Press Freedom Index produced by Reporters Sans Frontières (Reporters Without Borders 2016). Looking at ‘media independence, self-censorship, the rule of law, transparency and abuses’ (Agence France-Presse, 20 April 2016), the measurement used in developing this indicator of press freedom is slightly different from that used by Freedom House, as it focuses more on the level of freedom journalists have in different countries.
rankings and responses from the PAP suggest the pervasiveness of governmental control over the Singaporean populace, invoking questions about the extent of liberty permitted in the city-state.

### 3.8 Contradictory Notions of Openness in Singapore

Despite the government's light touch approach towards the internet, automatic self-censorship is still expected of the press, contributing to Singapore’s repeatedly poor ranking in the World Press Freedom Index (Singapore was ranked 135th in 2012, 149th in 2013 and 150th in 2014). Described as being ‘a snapshot of the media freedom situation based on an evaluation of pluralism, independence of the media, quality of legislative framework and safety of journalists in each country’ (Reporters Without Borders 2015), the 2015 World Press Freedom Index cited the MDA’s policies, the government’s censoring of overly-critical bloggers and the common occurrence of defamation suits as factors restricting the free flow of content in Singapore (Reporters Without Borders 2015).

Singapore has a history of defamation suits being filed against individuals and companies for violations made against laws and for allegations that impugn the authority and integrity of the PAP. LKY, who was for a significant length of time the most prominent member of the PAP, filed most of these lawsuits. The focus on maintaining the PAP’s reputation and integrity to justify its clean record has been the fundamental element in all of these lawsuits. Yet, LKY has been criticised for using such lawsuits as a way to assert societal discipline and compliance in Singapore.

The various instances of libel suits filed against individuals for comments or allegations made against the ruling elite[^23] were resolved with settlement

agreements or apologies accepted and arranged out of court. However, Ngerng, who had attacked PM Lee in his blog post and publicly vowed not to be silenced, was the first blogger to have been taken to court for defamation by a political leader in Singapore (Jaipargas 2014).

On 15 May 2014, Ngerng published on his blog, *The Hard Truths To Keep Singaporeans Thinking by Roy Ngerng*, an article accusing Singapore’s current PM, Lee Hsien Loong, of engaging in the ‘criminal misappropriation of the monies paid by Singaporeans to the CPF’ (Ngerng 2014). A letter of demand from PM Lee’s lawyers was later issued, threatening to sue Ngerng if he did not comply with the terms stated.

PM Lee’s defense attorney accused Ngerng of making a malicious, ‘false and baseless allegation’ in the blog post entitled, *Where Your CPF Money is Going: Learning From the City Harvest Trial*, and demanded the deletion of the blog post, a public apology, as well as the payment of damages and legal costs incurred by PM Lee (Ngerng 2014). ‘Replicating a *Channel NewsAsia* chart on the City Harvest Church trial’, and replacing founder Kong Hee’s photo with that of PM Lee’, were evidence of Ngerng’s malicious intent, said PM Lee’s lawyer (Sim 2015b).

After the defamatory online post was uploaded, Ngerng continued to publish a series of posts claiming both PM Lee and the Singapore judiciary were persecuting him (Sim 2015a). Ngerng also continued to publish lawyers’ letters and other updates on the legal process between PM Lee and himself on his blog, stating that his doing so was ‘simply a matter of freedom of speech’ (Sim 2015a). Also, besides

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24 The CPF (Central Provident Fund) is a compulsory savings plan for all working Singaporeans and Permanent Residents. It is administered by the Central Provident Fund board, a statutory board under the purview of the Ministry of Manpower, and is a subset of the Singapore government. CPF monies are used primarily to fund Singaporeans’ and Permanent Residents’ retirement, healthcare and housing needs.

25 At that time, the City Harvest Church trial was an ongoing trial in Singapore. First heard in 2013, the trial investigated the alleged misappropriation of church funds by the church’s founder, Kong Hee and five other church members. Kong and the five others faced various charges, all of which revolve around ‘an alleged plot to illegally pour millions of dollars of church funds into [Kong’s] wife Ho Yeow Sun’s pop music career, and then to cover up the misdeed’ (Feng 2015). On 21 October 2015, all 6 were found guilty of misappropriating 24 million worth of church funds and received their sentences on 20 November 2015. Kong was sentenced to 8 years imprisonment, while the other 5 church members faced jail time ranging from 21 months to 6 years (Cheong et al. 2015).
refusing to remove the published content, Ngerng sent two emails to local and international journalists, informing them of the location of the two blog posts he had been asked to take down, and privatised\textsuperscript{26} a related YouTube video instead of removing it entirely (Sim 2015b).

PM Lee cited Ngerng’s continued attack and subsequent blog posts as indications of his lack of remorse or repentance, and refused to accept Ngerng’s apology (Sim 2015b). Ngerng has maintained that he never meant to defame PM Lee and believed that he was being ‘silenced’: ‘We all know that I’m being persecuted. I do not hate the PM, but we need to speak up for the people’ (Law 2015). On 17 December 2015, Ngerng was ordered to pay $150,000 in damages to PM Lee (Chelvan 2015). The judgment read:

The allegations that the plaintiff had criminally misappropriated monies paid by citizens to a state-administered pension fund was one of the gravest that could be made against any individual, let alone a head of Government. It struck at the heart of one’s personal integrity and severely undermined the credibility of the target, and was a grave defamation that a fair-minded person would react with indignation to (cited in Chelvan 2015).

The presiding judge, Justice Lee, added that ‘public leaders in Singapore hold positions of trust and confidence and their reputations are vital to their ability to lead and to be given the mandate to govern’ (cited in Chelvan 2015). Similarly, former Law Minister Professor Jayakumar asserted that the defamation suits filed by LKY in the past were not to prevent opposition parties from running against him in the elections, but were a way of making any source that wished to question his integrity justify their accusations:

...In the cut and thrust of politics, all sorts of accusations are hurled... [LKY wanted to] establish a threshold here that you have people of integrity, including himself, in government, in Cabinet and they are

\textsuperscript{26} In this context, to privatise a post online is to restrict access to the online post.
prepared to defend their integrity (Jayakumar, quoted in Teo 2013).

Nevertheless, the RSF has proclaimed that the defamation suit brought against Ngerng highlights the ‘Singapore government’s abhorrence towards any direct or indirect challenges brought against its leadership’ (Reporters Without Borders 2015). Benjamin Ismail, the head of the RSF Asia-Pacific Desk, also said that the case was ‘nothing but a diversionary tactic and a deterrent’, intended to ‘deny the blogger [Ngerng] the ability to publish or the chance to defend himself...[as well as] divert public attention from the revelations in Ngerng's article’ (Reporters Without Borders 2015).

The introduction of licensing requirements for news websites that had Singapore Internet Protocol addresses (IP addresses) or local domain names (i.e., web addresses ending with .sg) was another development that contributed to Singapore’s continued drop in rankings in the World Press Freedom Index. RSF, the France-based international non-profit, non-governmental organisation that promotes and defends the freedom of information and the press, and which developed the index, argued that the move of the MDA, Singapore’s media regulating body to regulate news websites in Singapore was indicative of the government ‘trying to increase their ability to censor websites...and have a significant impact on public opinion’ (Reporters Without Borders 2015).

Moreover, the new licensing requirements were ‘highly questionable’, denoting not only the ‘desire to exercise prior control over news and information’, but also the enforcement of ‘self-censorship’ through the imposition of a performance bond27, especially on sites that did not charge viewers and whose revenue barely covered their operating costs (Reporters Without Borders 2015). However, the MDA said that the new licensing requirements would place news websites under ‘a "more

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27 The new licensing requirements would be renewed annually and included a performance bond of $50,000 for each individual site. Online news sites originating from Singapore also needed to ensure that material published did not go against ‘public interest, public security, or national harmony’ (Wong 2013a). Any content found to be ‘in breach of MDA standards’ would need to be removed within 24 hours of being notified by the MDA (Wong 2013a).
consistent regulatory framework" [in line] with traditional news platforms like newspapers and television stations, which are individually licensed’ (Wong 2013a). Even if news websites were owned by foreign companies, as long as these news sites regularly reported on Singapore news and current affairs, published more than one entry a week over a period of two months, and had more than 50,000 unique visitors a month, the new licensing requirements would be applicable (Wong 2013a). Effective from 1 June 2013, MDA identified 10 sites\(^{28}\) that were immediately affected by the new licensing requirements. Singapore Press Holdings, the main media group in Singapore, ran seven out of the 10 identified sites (Wong 2013a).

RSF argued that subjecting radio and TV stations to licensing rules was understandable ‘because of the limited number of broadcast channels and the need to regulate frequencies, [but] imposing a licensing system on news websites is [sic] utterly absurd’ (Reporters Without Borders 2015). Bloggers of socio-political sites\(^{29}\) also reacted strongly against the new requirements, citing suspicions that MDA’s move was an attempt to further restrict press freedom in the city-state.

Editors of the blog, The Online Citizen (TOC) expressed disappointment with MDA’s lack of clarity in articulating how the new regulations were to be applied. Suggesting that the new licensing requirements were ‘opaque and arbitrary’, Andrew Loh (cited in Jaipragas 2013), editor of the socio-political website Publichouse.sg, said:

> It is obvious that the new rules are to set and control the tone of discourse online, a concern which the government has had for a while now...The rise of social media, as an increasing number of Singaporeans get their news online, has now prompted the

\(^{28}\) The 10 identified sites included: Straitstimes.com, Asiaone.com, Businessstimes.sg, Omy.sg, Stomp.com.sg, Tnp.sg, Zaobao.com as well as the sites for the Today newspaper, Channel NewsAsia and Yahoo! News (Wong 2013a).

\(^{29}\) Internet service providers and websites are automatically granted class licences, but under the new regulations individual licences obtained via registration with MDA are required for sites such as those considered socio-political in nature, or sites involved in the ‘propagation, promotion or discussion of political issues relating to Singapore’ (Koh, V 2015a).
government to let go of its promised “light touch” on the Internet.

On 30 May 2013, just two days after the announcement by MDA was made, more than 20 activists and bloggers behind alternative socio-political sites such as TOC, Publichouse.sg and TR Emeritus (TRE), called on MDA to withdraw the licensing scheme, citing the impact it would have on citizens and their right to ‘receive diverse news information’ (Chiu 2013). The group claimed that the new regulations ‘had not gone through the proper and necessary consultation and had been introduced without clear guidance’: ‘In a typical public consultation exercise, a government agency will publish a draft regulation with detailed explanation and issue a press release to invite members of the public to send in feedback for consideration’, but this was not the case when introducing the licensing regime, the group said (Chiu 2013).

Responding to the criticisms in a post on its Facebook page, MDA stressed that there was ‘no change in content standards’ with which websites already had to comply. Also, the new licensing regulations applied only to websites concentrating on Singapore news reportage; thus, bloggers’ individual sites were not subject to the new regulatory requirements. MDA asserted that ‘the framework is not an attempt to influence the editorial slant of news sites’ or ‘internet freedom’, but was aimed at providing ‘greater clarity on prevailing content standards in the Internet Code of Practice’ (Chiu 2013). A spokesman for MDA also clarified that the new regulations helped explain what was regarded as ‘content against public interest, public morality, public order, public security, national harmony’ in the Internet Code of Practice (ICOP), to which all existing news sites were already expected to adhere (Yahoo! News, 30 May 2013).

MDA’s clarifications did not appease critics and sparked even more outrage. Unsatisfied by the responses received, activists and bloggers started the #FreeMyInternet campaign, urging netizens30 to join them in the protest against MDA’s new licensing requirements for news websites. Protests were held both

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30 According to Urbandictionary.com (n.d.), the word ‘netizen’ is derived from ‘internet’ and ‘citizen’, and refers to ‘a person who interacts with others on the internet’. 

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online and offline – a rally was held at Speakers’ Corner on Saturday 8 June 2013, and netizens were urged to shut down their blogs and websites for 24 hours on 6 June 2013 (Wong 2013b). ‘Everyone should be concerned that our constitutionally-protected right to free speech can be summarily regulated down by an unelected authority’, said Choo Zheng Xi, co-founder of the socio-political news site, TOC (Tan, J 2013).

On Facebook, users were observed to have changed their profile pictures and cover photos to either an entirely black image, an image of the text ‘#FreeMyInternet’, which was presented in a white font set against a black background, or as a picture of themselves holding a note with the campaign’s hashtag, #FreeMyInternet. Some netizens added additional comments on top of the campaign’s hashtag in the note they were pictured carrying, while others purposely held the note over their mouths to signify the muting the new regulations would cause.

The following screen captures show examples of the pictures Facebook users uploaded (Figure 3.1), and also the black-out page with which netizens were greeted if they tried to access any of the participating websites or blogs during the 24-hour shutdown (Figure 3.2).

31 Speakers’ Corner is located within Hong Lim Park and is a designated area where citizens and permanent residents of Singapore ‘may demonstrate, hold exhibitions and performances, and speak freely on most topics after prior registration on a government website’. Engaging or conducting such activities are otherwise, heavily restricted in other parts of the Singaporean city-state (Sim 2014).
Figure 3.1: Examples of images uploaded by Facebook users with protest messages (FreeMyInternet, 5 July 2013c)

Figure 3.2: Screen shot of the #FreeMyInternet blacked-out page websites replaced their homepages with in protest of MDA’s new online regulations (Tan, J 2013)
In total, more than 130 websites took part in the online protest, blocking access to their content and providing a redirect link to a page which had the header #FreeMyInternet. The name of the online movement, #FreeMyInternet, was also the name of the group, Free My Internet, that was behind the online and offline protests, started by prominent socio-political bloggers. The blacked-out screen page to which netizens were directed also carried the line, ‘This is what it feels like if you are not able to read or know’, and stated details of the offline protest that was to be held at Speakers’ Corner two days later (Figure 3.2).

A recap of the 24-hour shutdown was compiled by YouTube user Rachel Zheng and was linked via the group, Free My Internet’s Facebook page. The message the video\(^{32}\) carried was one of collective power that individuals exercised in an attempt to ensure their right to a free internet was heard. Comic drawings and posters carrying messages emphasising the impact a controlled internet would have, having the ‘right to know’ the real meaning behind the new online regulations, and the significance of opposing MDA’s new requirements were also circulated on Facebook (see Figures 3.3 – 3.7).

\(^{32}\) The YouTube video can be accessed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZ4UVP7WPqw. [accessed 26 August 2015].
Figure 3.3: One of the comic drawings and posters carrying messages emphasising the impact of MDA's new regulations that was circulating online (FreeMyInternet, 5 July 2013b)
Figure 3.4: Another of the comic drawings and posters carrying messages emphasising the impact of MDA’s new regulations that was circulating online (FreeMyInternet, 5 July 2013a)
**Figure 3.5:** Another of the comic drawings and posters carrying messages emphasising the impact of MDA’s new regulations that was circulating online (Cartoon Press, 10 June 2013)

**Figure 3.6:** Another of the comic drawings and posters carrying messages emphasising the impact of MDA’s new regulations that was circulating online (Demon-cratic Studio, 7 July 2013)
Figure 3.7: Another of the comic drawings and posters carrying messages emphasising the impact of MDA’s new regulations that was circulating online (Cartoon Press, 11 July 2013)

Over 1500 people turned up at the Free My Internet rally at Hong Lim Park (Soh 2013). Repeatedly calling for the new regulations to be revoked, protesters held signs with anti-MDA sentiments (Figures 3.8 – 3.11), and listened to ‘strongly worded speeches’ delivered by bloggers of socio-political sites (Soh 2013). Choo, TOC’s co-founder, who is also a practicing lawyer, commented that the rulings revealed the government’s lack of trust in Singaporeans’ ability ‘to handle the truth’ (cited in Soh 2013). Describing the regulations as being ‘high-handed’ and ‘lacking in transparency’, the rally’s organisers emphasised that the protest was ‘just the beginning’ in a ‘sustained campaign for the withdrawal of MDA’s regime’ (Soh 2013).

Protesters at the rally also expressed frustration at the new regulations. Danny Yeo, 34, a marketing consultant (Soh 2013) declared:

I think it’s ridiculous how they just dropped this entire set of new
laws on online news sites from nowhere and expect us to accept it. Honestly, I think it's an insult to the intelligence of Singaporeans. Why was the public not consulted? If these regulations are truly meant to protect us, how come no one asked us what we wanted?

Molly Lee, 64, a retired teacher, also said:

Regulations should only be set after the public has been consulted, and the issue debated in Parliament. Why this lack of transparency? I am strongly against the idea that the government should be allowed to decide what we can or cannot read (cited in Soh 2013).

**Figure 3.8:** A sign displayed at Hong Lim Park during the Free My Internet rally on 8 June 2013 (Chong, 8 June 2013)
Figure 3.9: A protester stands with a place card during the Free My Internet rally at Hong Lim Park on 8 June 2013 (RT.com, 8 June 2013a)

Figure 3.10: The scene at Hong Lim Park during the Free My Internet rally on 8 June 2013 (RT.com, 8 June 2013b)
Since the June 2013 protests, the MDA has asked socio-political sites such as TOC, Mothership.com, The Real Singapore (TRS), The Independent Singapore, and The Middle Ground to register for individual licenses\(^{33}\) (Koh, V 2015a). An MDA spokesperson has reiterated that a site’s registration will not affect what is published, and also does not ‘entail changes to the content standards as set out in the Internet Code of Practice’ (AsiaOne, 30 July 2015). The licensing scheme, which comes under the Broadcasting Act, requires sites ‘to register with the MDA...[if they] promote or discuss political or religious issues relating to Singapore, and those of registered political parties’, said the MDA spokesperson (AsiaOne, 30 July 2015). In addition, under the Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification, editors behind the websites are required to agree ‘not to receive foreign funding “for its provision, management and/or operation”’ (Today, 6 December 2013).

In reference to the registration of The Independent Singapore, the office of the Minister for Communications and Information released a statement:

> By submitting the registration forms, The Independent [Singapore] is

\(^{33}\) All the sites required to register have complied.
accepting an important and fundamental principle that foreign entities should never engage in Singapore politics nor should foreign interests be allowed to control or influence our local media platforms, offline or online...This is how we ensure Singapore politics remain a matter for Singaporeans alone. Any attempt to directly or indirectly circumvent this principle is wrong, must be resisted by any responsible media platform, and will not be condoned by the Government (cited in *Today*, 6 December 2013).

The Singapore government's continued attempts at controlling the kind of information circulated online via the exertion of content standards that apply to material published on the internet are clear. The 'national survival' rhetoric that was introduced years ago, when Singapore was struggling to survive after having independence suddenly thrust upon it, is also still ever-present in present-day Singapore.

Nevertheless, the willingness to stand up against contradictory and/or vague government directives via the #FreeMyInternet rally and online campaign suggests the increasing use of social media for the exercise of agency and assertion of contrary viewpoints. No doubt, constraints imposed by the ruling elite and mechanisms ensuring the legitimacy of the PAP are still in place. However, the creative use of strategies by Singaporean citizens to negotiate the influence of power alongside the display of individual agency underscores Bourdieu's (1977) notion of the habitus. Highlighting a practical mastery of the social system in which they operate, the abilities of such strategists to act appropriately while pursuing their own interests underscore the relationship between structure and the exemplification of agency (Bourdieu 1977).

Another important point to note about such public declarations of opinion is the context in which such actions are being displayed. Ortner's (1989) call for context to be fully integrated into practice theory is evident when observing the significance Singapore's history plays in affecting the relationship between structure and agency. Singapore being considered 'not free' by international press
standards (Freedom House 2015), coupled with the climate of fear prevalent in Singapore, which is based on disciplinary and surveillance mechanisms implemented by the PAP, and the resulting automatic self-censorship that has occurred thus, make actors’ willingness to express contrary perspectives and act on their objections in such a context particularly noteworthy.

Multicultural and religious harmony remains at the core of the reasons provided for coercing the responsible and sensible use of media platforms especially in today's new media environment. The move towards applying the same restrictions to which press reporting in traditional media are held accountable and enforcing the same standards on online media not only highlights the PAP’s position on the importance of controlling technology, but also accentuates the government’s persistence in ensuring its power and control over the Singaporean city-state is maintained.

On 3 May 2015, TRS was ordered by MDA to disable access to its online platforms and applications, citing the website’s ‘spreading [of] untruths and plagiarism’ as reasons for its suspended statutory class licence (Channel NewsAsia, 3 May 2015). TRS editors, Singaporean, Yang Kaiheng and his then Australian girlfriend (now wife), Ai Takagi, were given six hours to comply with the orders and were banned from resuming operations under any other name (Channel NewsAsia, 3 May 2015). This was the first time the MDA exercised action and clamped down on a news website’s operations since the new regulations were implemented on 1 June 2013. In a press release, MDA, said:

Ai and Yang have contravened the Internet Code of Practice. They have published prohibited material as defined by the Code to be objectionable on the grounds of public interest, public order and national harmony...The MDA has noted that TRS has deliberately fabricated articles and falsely attributed them to innocent parties. TRS has also inserted falsehoods in articles that were either plagiarised from local news sources or sent in by contributors so as to make the articles more inflammatory...The MDA believes this editorial strategy
of deceiving readers and doctoring articles was an attempt to increase traffic to TRS, and thus boost advertising revenue...seeking to profit at the expense of Singapore's public interest and national harmony (cited in Channel NewsAsia, 3 May 2015).

TRS has described itself as a ‘user generated content site for all Singaporeans to express themselves freely and without any form of censorship’, stating that its website was hosted in Sweden, USA and Switzerland (cited in Channel NewsAsia, 3 May 2015). Running their operations outside Singapore meant that Takagi and Yang were ‘out of the jurisdiction of the Broadcasting Act’ (Channel NewsAsia, 3 May 2015). However, since December 2014, the TRS was run from Singapore, and, thus, brought the editors within the jurisdiction of the Act (Channel NewsAsia, 3 May 2015).

In its report on the MDA’s ordering the shutdown of TRS, the Today newspaper (Koh, V 2015a) cited examples of TRS’s objectionable content:

In 2013, The Real Singapore posted an article titled "PAP MP Irene Ng: We should not play the blame game over the haze problem", prompting the Member of Parliament to file a police report, saying she did not write it. In the same year, the website published a Straits Times report on a Singaporean teenager found guilty of growing cannabis at home with the inaccurate headline “Indian national grew two pots of cannabis at Yishun home after learning it online”...Yang, 26, and Takagi, 22, were [also previously] charged in court with seven counts of sedition. In one charge, the duo was accused of publishing an article alleging that a Filipino family's complaint had led to a dispute between the police and Thaipusam participants.

Additionally, TRS’strustworthiness as a source of reliable, unbiased content had been questioned by netizens. Blogger, Alex Au, who authors Yawning Bread, said in

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34 This Hindu festival celebrated by Hindus of Tamil descent 'is probably the single most important public rite observed by the community every year' (Tan, B 2016).
a statement published on his blog, that he has ‘not bothered to look at its articles for a very long time’, as the site

...tended to engage in hyperbole and seemed to revel in intolerant speech. It was not worth my while to spend time on that site. From mentions by others on Facebook over the years, I believe my opinion is shared by many. People often criticised the site for its inaccuracies and exaggerations. I even remember an instance when someone urged a boycott (Yawningbread.com, 6 May 2015).

Au’s statement was echoed by other socio-political bloggers on their own sites, as they indicated agreement with his views on the quality of TRS’s articles. Yet, a day after MDA ordered the shutdown of TRS, the Free My Internet movement, which is made up of the same group of bloggers that led the #FreeMyInternet campaign in June 2013, of which Au is a member, criticised MDA’s actions against TRS as being one of ‘blatant censorship’ (Koh, V 2015b). Calling for the release of TRS’s suspended class licence, the group also claimed that the MDA had ‘acted “without due process’” and that its guidelines for actions against objectionable content [were] unclear’ (Koh, V 2015b).

‘Would it not be sufficient to request the removal of specific articles, rather than the termination of an entire website? Shutting anyone down for disagreeable content...is a trigger-happy approach’, the group asserted (cited in Koh, V 2015b). Au further elaborated on the group’s position (Yawningbread.com, 6 May 2015):

...It’s no contradiction to disagree (strongly) with the MDA’s action, while holding a low opinion of TRS. In fact I would argue that precisely because many people find credibility problems with TRS, there is no danger to the public. It appears that few take them seriously anyway. In any case, despite MDA’s accusation “several articles that sought to incite anti-foreigner sentiments in Singapore”, I don’t know of anyone being found guilty of anti-foreigner violence from being incited by this site. For all its sins, TRS is a lesser threat
than the MDA. That MDA is the greater and more insidious threat to us all can be seen from this very action. Shrouded in a non-transparent process, it goes out to ban a website. It flings accusations without offering proof. More dangerously, it plants the idea that it has the right to adjudicate truth and falsehood.

According to another socio-political website, SMRT (Feedback), a key takeaway from the ‘latest regulatory run-in’ would be that the online media have to take responsibility for their content and ‘practice responsible journalism’ (Koh, V 2015b). Citizen journalists would now also be more likely to think twice about associating themselves with articles addressing “sacred cow” topics such as ethnicity or religion, said the group behind SMRT (Feedback) (Koh, V 2015b). Associate Professor Eugene Tan from Singapore Management University’s School of Law also commented that the MDA’s action against TRS

...Demonstrates that the MDA does have the legislative tools for them to ensure that social media will not be a source of discord, division, tension or even violence in the local context...it is a reminder to the other social media sites to ensure that they remain responsible, remain accountable for what they post and recognise that they do have a social responsibility in putting forth accurate and reliable information (Channel NewsAsia, 3 May 2015).

3.9 Facebook and the Freedom of Expression

The effect of power relations and structural constraint enforced upon individuals in the online media is very different compared to when such measures of control were implemented in traditional forms of media. The instantaneity and diverseness of information found on new media, the immediate widespread dissemination of views, personalisation and the added credibility of messages conveyed online have empowered alternative sources of information, rejecting the cold, impersonal and imposed top-down restrictions dictated by the government.
Switching from being solely receivers of content, new media’s interactivity has altered the process of information flows, enabling the audience to negotiate the kinds of content they were exposed to, accepted, produced, and even contributed to. Opening up new channels and avenues of expression and participation, new media platforms like Facebook have caused changes in social practices within the city-state.

Scholars have argued that in Singapore, the internet is constrained by political rules and regulations and, thus, is not a medium that could be used as a tool for democratisation (Resnick 1998; Thomas 2000; Lee, T 2003). Still, individuals’ outspokenness and ability to express their thoughts and desires online is now much more profound, especially when compared to the limited possibilities they had previously. Before the internet, it was only possible to publicly voice opinions at Speakers’ Corner or in newspaper forums such as *The Straits Times* Opinion section, where letters had to be written in and sent to the editor and, thereafter, be selected for publishing at the discretion of the editor. Additionally, publishing could only occur if authors stated their full name, national identification number and contact details.

The addition of SNS like Facebook to the list of spaces individuals could use to express their personal thoughts greatly changed the notion of freedom of expression in Singapore. On Facebook, messages posted were shorter than the articles published on websites, required less time to compose, and reached specific audiences made up of personal social networks. Facebook’s digital mapping of an individual’s real-world social connections, otherwise known as the social graph, also created a reliable environment where interactions were with people individuals knew (Mashable.com 2012).

Knowing who was commenting and posting viewpoints not only added credibility to the content being circulated, but also safeguarded the authenticity and believability of posts. The tone on Facebook being more informal, making it more approachable, inviting and even encouraging, garnered participation, interest, and engagement in discussions online. Moreover, Facebook posts did not come under
the jurisdiction of the Class Licensing scheme. Thus, commenting and posting on Facebook seemed so unthreatening and “safe” that the usual self-restraint and cautiousness could be overlooked.

Content on Facebook varies greatly in length, depth, subject and purpose, ranging from paragraphs of well thought out arguments, activist statements and calls for participation, individual reactions or rants, and even one-line status updates informing personal networks of the user’s activities and/or deliberations. Examples of individuals’ frivolousness in taking to Facebook to express their views in Singapore’s context include the incidents surrounding Facebook comments made by Amy Cheong and Anton Casey.

Both Cheong and Casey worked and lived in Singapore at the time of their posts and did not immediately think much about the consequences of openly publishing their immediate thoughts on the social media site. In separate incidences, both Cheong and Casey were insensitive about their feelings towards Singaporeans and their usual practices, posting thoughtless comments and remarks about their experiences on their own Facebook Walls.

On 7 October 2012, Cheong published a public post on her Facebook Wall about her displeasure over the noise a Malay Wedding that was being held at her HDB block’s void deck was causing and linked the perceived cheaper costs of such weddings to the high divorce rates in the Malay community (Figures 3.12 and 3.13) (Yahoo! News, 8 October 2012a). Casey, a British expatriate, was blasted online after posting a series of photographs on Facebook referring to public transport commuters as ‘poor people’ (Leonal 2014). The outrage that ensued after both incidents was unprecedented, resulting in both individuals losing their jobs and fleeing from Singapore.
Figure 3.12: Screen capture of Amy Cheong’s Facebook post that was posted on 7 October 2012 (Yahoo! News, 8 October 2012)

Figure 3.13: Amy Cheong’s replies to comments and remarks posted on her Facebook Timeline in response to her initial profanity-filed post about Malay Weddings being held at HDB void decks (Ngjuann.com, 8 October 2012)
Hours after Cheong’s comments were first published on Facebook, the post went viral, garnering interest from local newspapers and even the Singapore government. Petitions set up on Facebook had also surfaced, calling for her dismissal from her job at the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), a public institution closely linked to the Singapore government. Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam and at least three other Cabinet Ministers, including then Minister for Foreign Affairs and Law, K Shanmugam (Figure 3.14), also weighed in on the issue, condemning Cheong’s insensitivity, and cited her ignorance over the importance of maintaining racial and religious harmony, especially in Singapore, as being entirely unacceptable (Fang 2012; Yahoo! News, 8 October 2012).

Figure 3.14: Minister K Shanmugam’s remarks about Amy Cheong’s Facebook comments posted on his Facebook Timeline (AsiaOne, 10 October 2012)
Figure 3.15: Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s comments on his Facebook Timeline about the incident caused by Amy Cheong’s insensitive Facebook remarks (AsiaOne, 10 October 2012)

PM Lee’s comments on the situation expressed shock and discontent over the occurrence of such an incident, and urged Singaporeans to treat this episode as ‘an isolated case that [did] not reflect the strength of race relations in Singapore’ (Figure 3.15) (Fang 2012). PM Lee also drew attention to the need to be constantly vigilant and unwavering in the efforts placed on ensuring multiculturalism in the city-state, adding that the incident was a distinct reminder of how easily the racial and religious harmony in Singapore could be undermined (AsiaOne, 10 October 2012; Fang 2012).

By noon on Monday, 8 October 2012, less than 24 hours after Cheong’s Facebook post started circulating on the internet, her employer, the NTUC, had dismissed her from her position as Assistant Director of Membership. Mr Lim Swee Say, then Secretary-General of the NTUC, released a statement reiterating that
...inclusiveness remains at the heart of the Labour Movement...the NTUC takes a serious view on racial harmony in Singapore. [The NTUC] will not accept and have zero tolerance towards any words used or actions taken by our staff that are racially offensive (AsiaOne, 8 October 2012).

By that time, grassroots leader Lionel de Souza, secretary of the Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circle in Hougang, had also made a police report against Cheong for attempting to cause damage to the peace and multiracial harmony in Singapore (Lim, J 2013).

Cheong later took to Twitter to apologise for her lapse in judgment and tactless remarks on Facebook. Yet, despite her efforts, Cheong was labeled a racist and was incessantly criticised online. Cheong’s release of an official apology in the mainstream media also did not help abate the situation (Figures 3.16 and 3.17). As netizens continued denouncing Cheong’s actions, eventually Cheong, who was originally from Malaysia and at the time a Singapore Permanent Resident and an Australian citizen, fled for Perth, Australia (AsiaOne, 10 October 2012). After investigations conducted by the Singapore Police were concluded, Cheong was administered a stern warning for her offensive actions online, instead of having criminal charges, a fine and/or jail time enforced upon her (Lim, J 2013).
Figure 3.16: Amy Cheong’s apology on Facebook after her initial post about Malay Weddings being held at HDB void decks went viral (AsiaOne, 10 October 2012)

Figure 3.17: Amy Cheong’s official apology released in the mainstream media after her initial post about Malay Weddings being held at HDB void decks went viral (AsiaOne, 10 October 2012)

In a separate incident, Anton Casey took to Facebook to post pictures of his son in an MRT train with the caption, ‘Daddy where is your car and who are all these poor people?’ (Figure 3.18). Following this, Casey posted another picture of his son in his silver Porsche with the accompanying caption, ‘Ahshhhhhhhhh reunited with my
baby. Normal service can resume, once I have washed the stench of public transport off me...!' (Figure 3.18) (Yahoo! News, 26 January 2014; AsiaOne, 28 January 2014). The screenshots of the Facebook posts were quickly disseminated across social media platforms and netizens responded with outrage and fury, deeply condemning the demeaning and elitist remarks made.

![Figure 3.18: Screenshots of Anton Casey's posts on Facebook (Yahoo! News, 26 January 2014)](image)

Minister Shanmugam also took to Facebook to criticise Casey's posts, describing them as ‘deeply offensive, wrong and unacceptable’ (Cheong, K 2014). He added:

> Those who have done well in life should always be looking out for others - especially the less well-off or needy. It is basic human decency. Instead Mr Casey showed contempt. Having money and a Porsche does not automatically mean that one is superior. Character is important...I am glad the community has come together to condemn what he has said (quoted in Cheong, K 2014).
Casey, a British expatriate wealth manager with a boutique investment firm, Crossinvest Asia, tried to apologise for his Facebook posts by issuing a statement through Fulford PR, a public relations firm he hired (AsiaOne, 28 January 2014). However, the move was slammed as being insincere and subsequently, Casey received death threats targeting both him, and his family. Casey was eventually fired from his job and forced to relocate to Perth.

Being married to a Singaporean and having lived in Singapore for more than 11 years, calling it ‘home’, made his pompous remarks even more outrageous, as netizens felt he did not respect Singapore and its social values (Prynne 2014). Additionally, Casey’s expatriate friends said he had ‘a very British sense of humor, which can be very scathing’ (quoted in Prynne 2014). One of Casey’s friends also said that he ‘had to defriend [Casey] on Facebook because [he] couldn’t stand the rubbish he was writing about all sorts of people’ (quoted in Prynne 2014).

The vocal and angry responses generated by netizens over Casey’s posts resulted not only in discussions about Casey’s disrespect for Singapore, the public transport system and Singaporeans in general, but also stirred deliberations about the propriety of views expressed by netizens online. Moreover, with the assimilation of foreigners and new immigrants in Singapore being a key issue of debate, netizens were concerned about the negative impact even well-educated and talented individuals such as Casey would have on Singapore’s social and cultural values (Ng, JY 2014).

The public lashings Casey’s Facebook posts attracted also prompted responses from PM Lee (Today, 28 January 2014). Cautioning Singaporeans against subscribing to lynch mob mentalities, PM Lee urged netizens to address issues in a civil manner:

Yes, somebody has done something wrong, repudiate it, condemn it, but do not lower ourselves to that same level to behave in a way which really makes us all so ashamed of ourselves [as] to become abusive, hateful mobs, especially online and anonymously...We risk
having an over-reaction, we risk having unrestrained, anonymous viciousness on the Internet...You scold, you swear, you curse — all the wrong instincts get fed and in a group, there are certain group dynamics and it is like a pack of hounds hunting, which is bad...We have to be better than that, to deal with situations civilly, patiently, tolerantly. Hold a stand, but remain a civilised human being (cited in Ng, JY 2014).

Noting how social media had complicated society's fault lines, which in this case was the difference between the haves and the have-nots (Ng, JY 2014), PM Lee added that 'society must work harder to maintain shared purpose and mutual responsibility', so as to ensure Singapore’s core principles are maintained (Today, 28 January 2014). PM Lee also reiterated that such instances of public outlash emphasised the continued need for rules and regulations on the internet (Ng, JY 2014).

Again, the PAP could be seen to be making an example out of such episodes. Demonstrating not only its disapproval towards behaviours and attitudes that counter Singaporean values and belief systems to emphasise its own legitimacy, the PAP used such incidents as a reminder of the effects of countering the multicultural principles that order the Singaporean social sphere. The importance of the PAP’s rhetoric of ensuring the maintenance of multicultural ideals for Singapore’s continued success was, thus, underscored.

These examples emphasise Foucault’s (1980) notion of truth and its relation with power and right. The replication of discursive regimes and the normalisation of disciplinary paradigms in the shaping of the social body are also apparent in these incidents (Foucault 1980). Having internalised the PAP’s rhetoric, netizens were now participating in surveillance mechanisms, contributing their judgments and aversion to sentiments they felt were disparaging and morally unjust.

Nonetheless, besides the intense criticism both Cheong and Casey faced online, the fact that both individuals were able to exercise agency and express themselves with
such impulsiveness on Facebook, does indicate openness and an expansion of the limits of freedom in Singapore. And, despite both being held accountable for their insensitive remarks, neither Cheong nor Casey was legally prosecuted or brought to court, unlike the situation they would have faced should they have, for instance, published similar views in the press or had targeted members of the government in their published posts. Other notable aspects of this increased freedom brought about by Facebook include the vast audience reach the published Facebook comments received, the speed at which the information was disseminated, and the kinds of reactions generated by netizens regarding these posts.

It could be argued that because both Cheong and Casey were not Singaporeans by birth, and were not brought up in Singapore, they might not have been properly socialised into Singapore’s society and did not adequately understand its practices and values and, thus, were not aware of the need for self-censorship, especially when dealing with topics of race and religion. In another incident, two 17-year-old male Singaporean Chinese were arrested after police reports were made about the racist comments they posted on Twitter and Facebook.

Screenshots of their posts went viral, and infuriated netizens expressed outrage, calling the pair ‘racist’ and ‘shallow’ (Lim, V 2012). According to the police, the two youths had made derogatory comments about a minority race and were arrested on 28 and 29 June 2012 because their remarks ‘could promote ill-will and hostility between different races in Singapore’ (AsiaOne, 1 July 2012). Under Singapore’s Sedition Act, ‘anyone found guilty of promoting feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or class of the population of Singapore can be fined up to $5,000 or jailed up to three years, or both’ (AsiaOne, 1 July 2012).

Then Deputy Assistant Commissioner of Police, How Kwang Hee, reiterated that ‘the right to free speech does not extend to making remarks that incite racial and religious friction and conflict’ (temasektimes.com, 1 July 2012), and although the internet could be used as a convenient medium to express one’s viewpoints, it was important for individuals to remember that they were very much accountable for their actions, even in online spaces (AsiaOne, 1 July 2012).
Although adherence to the law for offenders of the Sedition Act have been observed to be inconsistent – these two 17-year-olds were arrested, while Amy Cheong and Anton Casey did not face any legal ramifications for their offensive posts online – the increased openness social networking sites like Facebook has enabled has given individuals the opportunity to voice their opinions with more ease. This avenue to express viewpoints and perspectives online has also encouraged the growth of online activism, especially the garnering of support for causes via Facebook’s platform.

For instance, on 9 April 2011, a Facebook event, *1,000 peeps to Holland V in Singlets, Shorts and Slippers Day*, was organised in Singapore in response to a rant by a woman named 'Samantha' on a live radio talk show (*The New Paper, 28 March 2011*). The Facebook event page had the following text:

> This is not commercially motivated and was started in the spirit of 'being able to go where ever you want to, wearing whatever you feel comfortable with’…what you've responded with has been heartening because it shows that as a society, we really do look beyond these artificial barriers...Samantha may be a real person, she may be a troll, but that doesn't change the spirit of why we're really doing this (Stomp.com.sg, 26 March 2011).

On 23rd March 2011, ‘Samantha’ had called local radio station 91.3FM to complain about ‘uncultured [heartlanders]...[who had] no manners’ and who dressed in ‘shorts and slippers’ (*The New Paper, 28 March 2011*). She also told them to ‘stay away’ from her upmarket neighbourhood, Holland Village. Highlighting issues regarding social barriers in Singapore, many netizens were offended by Samantha’s remarks and took to forums and social media sites to express their outrage. The Facebook event page was set up to protest Samantha’s remarks, and about 2,700 netizens said they would attend the event (*The Straits Times, 10 April 2011*).
In a separate incident, the Facebook event, *Cook A Pot of Curry!*, was created in response to a report which was published in *Today*, a local newspaper, on 8 August 2011. The report highlighted a family of Chinese nationals complaining about their local Indian neighbours cooking curry. After negotiation at the local Community Mediation Centre, the two families reportedly reached a compromise: the Indian family would cook curry only when the Chinese national family was not in, and the family of Chinese nationals would try a curry dish at least once (*The New Paper*, 8 August 2011).

Many netizens were upset over the fact that locals had to conform to the likes and dislikes of new immigrants, instead of the situation being the other way round. By 15 August 2011, 42,037 netizens had gone to the *Cook A Pot of Curry!* Facebook event page and had indicated that they would participate in the mass curry-cooking event, which was held on 21 August 2011. The Facebook event further exemplified how social media in Singapore helped individuals express their sentiments via the online media, was used to mobilise the populace in short periods of time, and also how Facebook could be utilised as a way of mobilising support for specific sentiments.

The Pink Dot event, held at Hong Lim Park, is another example of social media being used to create greater awareness and motivate active participation in support of specific causes. The annual, nonprofit event aimed at promoting ‘openness, understanding and tolerance’ in support of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community in Singapore, was first organised in 2009 (*Pink Dot SG 2015*). Using social media platforms such as Facebook to rally support for ‘the Freedom to Love regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity’ (*Pink Dot SG 2015*), organisers disseminated updates and information about the event, organised campaigns online to get individuals to pledge their support for the event’s cause and appealed for donations to help fund the event.

The annual event features concert performances, speeches by organisers and celebrity ambassadors, as well as community booths in support of the LGBT community. The event cumulates with attendees gathering to form a giant pink dot
to show their support for the freedom to love. According to Pink Dot’s website, the event is not in a way ‘a protest’, but

...is a congregation of people who believe that everyone deserves a right to love, regardless of their sexual orientation. Fear and bigotry can get in the way of love – between friends, family and other loved ones – so this is an event for everyone who believes that LGBT individuals are equally deserving of strong relationships with our family and friends (Pink Dot SG 2015)

The first Pink Dot event held in 2009 was mentioned in the press with conflicting numbers reportedly in attendance. The Today newspaper said that more than 500 people had turned up, while The Straits Times reported that there were more than 1000 supporters at the event (Pink Dot SG 2015). The BBC, however, said that more than 2500 had gathered at Speakers’ Corner in Singapore’s ‘first public rally’ (Pink Dot SG 2015). Nonetheless, the number of supporters who have turned up over the past seven years has greatly increased. In 2015’s edition of the event, a record 28,000 people turned up dressed in pink to support the event and its cause (Figures 3.19 and 3.20).

Figure 3.19: Aerial shot of the turnout at the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Pink Dot events held in 2009, 2010 and 2011 at Hong Lim Park (Pink Dot SG 2015)

35 In September 2008, rules governing activities conducted at Singapore’s Speakers’ Corner at Hong Lim Park were relaxed, allowing demonstrations organised by Singaporeans to be held at the park, providing that all participants are either citizens or permanent residents (Sim 2014).
Figure 3.20: Aerial shot of more than 28,000 people who attended Pink Dot 2015 in support of inclusivity and diversity in Singapore (Pink Dot SG 2015)

The alternative nature of Pink Dot’s cause\(^{36}\) made it challenging for the event’s organisers to get its message across to the Singaporean populace. At present, Penal Code Section 377a of Singapore’s constitution criminalises homosexual relations. PM Lee has also commented that the city-state’s unique multicultural and multireligious make-up makes it a conservative one. As such, although the LGBT community has a place within the Singaporean society, ‘they should not push the agenda too hard because...there will be a very strong pushback’ (quoted in Wong, SY 2015). Moreover, despite the fact that Singapore is changing, ‘most Singaporeans would not want the LGBT community to set the tone for Singapore society’ (quoted in Wong, SY 2015).

\(^{36}\) Pink Dot SG is a non-profit movement that supports ‘the belief that everyone deserves the freedom to love’ (Pink Dot SG 2017). On the About Pink Dot SG page, the movement describes itself as standing ‘for an open, inclusive society within our Red Dot, where sexual orientation represents a feature, not a barrier’ (Pink Dot SG 2017).
3.10 Concluding Remarks

In summary, this chapter has examined the socio-political discourse in Singapore, observing the various policies the PAP has implemented to ensure not only obedience from the Singaporean citizenry, but also the facilitation of an all-encompassing discourse. By controlling the accessibility of content through restrictions placed on traditional media and the press, as well as asserting pressure via MDA’s enforcement of legislation demanding accountability from news and socio-political sites, the PAP successfully orchestrated a regime of truth that further legitimised its power.

Economic-centric goals and the desire to encourage the development of the Singapore ‘soul’ have, however, resulted in the Singapore government declaring its adoption of a light touch approach towards its management of the internet. Still, contradictory notions of openness exist.

Netizens calling out their peers for irresponsible remarks posted on Facebook and the MDA ordering the shutdown of the TRS suggest the pervasiveness of surveillance mechanisms online. Nevertheless, the success of new media platforms in enhancing understanding, awareness and support for issues an alternative community is facing, as portrayed by the large growth in turnout numbers at the yearly Pink Dot events in Singapore, is evidence of the positive impact social media have had in encouraging participation and engagement even in an auto-regulated state such as Singapore.

Actively supporting an alternative cause, a notion that goes against social norms of self-censorship, requires individual agency and the exercise of choice with the intention to break away from governmentally imposed practices. Other examples of individuals’ assertion of agency were also apparent in the #FreeMyInternet campaign and the Cook A Pot of Curry! events organised via Facebook. However, the ability to participate in such events should not be regarded as a clear indication of Singapore’s increasing openness and progress towards becoming an open democracy.
Online campaigns are easy to support – a simple click of a button ‘likes’ a page and demonstrates support for an idea on Facebook. External factors, such as peer pressure and the trendiness of the topic, could also inspire individuals to engage in online activism. And, as seen in the kinds of responses Cheong and Casey received online, the influence of perceived norms of acceptability could also substantially affect public displays of resentment.

With new media creating new methods of engagement, the meaning of participation and the types of involvement considered acceptable in today's contexts need to be re-examined. Aimed at observing the practices of Singaporean Gen Y in relation to the change that is taking place in Singapore, the next chapter will look at the methodological approach this study adopted.
Chapter Four
Methodology and Sample Characteristics

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter will present the research methodology and data collection methods adopted in this study. After restating the aims of this study, the rationale behind the mixed-methods research design employed in the study will be explored. The chapter then goes on to describe the qualitative and quantitative method utilised in this study, following which sample characteristics are detailed. The chapter ends with a description of processes used in the management and analysis of the data collected. Chapter Five will present the results obtained from the Survey, and Chapter Six will detail findings obtained from the semi-structured interviews. Chapter Seven will present a discussion of the findings from both the survey and semi-structured interviews.

To facilitate understanding of the qualitative and quantitative aspects of this study, please refer to Appendix A for details of the survey questionnaire and Appendix B for a list of guiding questions used in the semi-structured interviews. The codes used to distinguish the interviewed participants who participated in this study can be found in Appendix C. Appendix C also provides a brief description of each interviewee's background.

4.2 Focus and Design of Research Carried Out

In differentiating structural constraint from the limits of agency, this study departs from the usual analysis of Singapore’s political transformation or the effects of the top-down approach the PAP has asserted in managing the Singapore populace (Tremewan 1994; Rodan 1996, 1998, 2004; Lee, T 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2003). As discussed in Chapter Three, the PAP’s approach towards engineering Singapore towards economic success has resulted in many accomplishments for the young, previously economically unviable city-state. However, these economically focused
policies and governing methods have resulted in the neglect of social ties and the development of socio-cultural processes within its community. Rootlessness and a lack of attachment to home, as well as the changing demands of a new generation of young adult citizens, have highlighted new concerns and issues the city-state needs to address to ensure its relevance in the era of new media.

Using grounded theory as a basic premise of investigation, this study is focused on acquiring a deeper understanding of the viewpoints of Singapore’s younger generation and in identifying the impact new media have had on social structures and the construction of social identities in Singapore. Examining the use of new media and its relation to attitudes, the reproduction and/or transcendence of disciplinary procedures of Singaporean governmentality, as well as the resultant effect such changes have had on social practices in the Singapore city-state, this study is focused on:

• Determining how new media have impacted the motivations behind Singaporean Gen Y’s use of Facebook, specifically the crystallisation of ideas, the development of individual empowerment, and the construction of national belonging;
• Assessing how practice theory can be utilised to understand social practices and norms in Singapore’s new media sphere; and
• Evaluating how Singaporean Gen Y’s negotiation of its own observed limits to freedom has been affected by the increasingly widespread use of new media, the reproduction of disciplinary procedures, and aspects of political transformation in the city-state.

While scholars concerned with research on the internet have developed numerous methods of analyses and data collection, the limitations on the kinds of

37 The internet has drastically changed the ways in which interactions and social practices online are inferred. For instance, the methods of inquiry in deciphering social practices online now need to consider situations such as the disruption of social boundaries and the complex ethical complications of the blurring of private and public spheres. Arguments such as traditional methods of inquiry preventing proper understandings of ‘real’ situations have also surfaced, resulting in calls for a more ethnographic styles of investigation (Green 1999; Hine 2000; Boellstroff 2008; Bräuchler
methodology allowed during fieldwork\textsuperscript{38} necessitated a more traditional mixed-methods approach be utilised in carrying out research for this study. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were carried out concurrently in this study’s examination of Singapore’s Gen Y’s negotiation of contradictory demands and its implementation and exercise of agency and choice.

Field research was conducted in Singapore from March to July 2012. Participants were invited to take part in both aspects of the study, which included a survey whose responses provided the basis of the quantitative aspect of the study and also a semi-structured interview, which realised the qualitative aspect of this study. In both aspects of the study, participants were assured that their anonymity would be protected and the responses collected from them would not be used in any way that could identify them. In accordance with approved protocol from UWA’s Human Research and Ethics Office, informed consent was sought from all participants before the commencement of any research with them. Participants were not offered any compensation for contributing to this study and took part voluntarily.

The statistical programme, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), was used to analyse the data obtained in the surveys. Interviews were transcribed manually, and thereafter, categorised based on recurrent themes identified in the transcripts. After the data from the both components were collected, organised and examined, the findings obtained were analysed together.

\textsuperscript{38} When seeking permission to gain access to participants during fieldwork in Singapore, the respective university education providers emphasised multiple restrictions on the kinds of research they found acceptable. With more creative methodologies dominating the list of unapproved methods for research, adopting more traditional kinds of methodology when conducting fieldwork in Singapore was the only option. This resulted in the decision to use interviews and surveys to gather data. Although this limited the application of more innovative ways of gathering data online, the chosen methodology did prove favourable, providing rich data sets that were analysed in significant detail.
4.3 Grounded Theory

According to Creswell (2009, p. 13, 229), grounded theory is ‘a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants’ in the study. Identified by Glaser and Strauss (1968), the process utilises a systematic set of procedures that includes several stages of data collection and the constant refinement and negotiation of data based on emerging information categories (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998; Charmaz 2006; Creswell 2009). Resulting in an inductively derived theory about a phenomenon, the ‘theoretical sampling of different groups to maximise the similarities and differences of information’ is carried out (Creswell 2009, p.13; see also Chesebro & Borisoff 2007).

Investigating the facts and realities of practices in the real world, grounded theory analyses data collected with no preconceived notions or hypothesis (Glaser & Strauss 1968). Involving the formation of theory through the examination of data, grounded theory is often adopted to frame and decipher participants’ concerns based on existing phenomena and practices (Glaser 1992). Closing the gap between theory and empirical research, grounded theory’s approach is effective in translating and understanding new experiences, building new theories, and also supporting the conduct of future investigations.

4.4 A Mixed-methods Approach

‘Grounded in the fact that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient, by themselves, to capture the trends and details of a situation’ (Ivankova, Creswell & Stick 2006, p. 3; see also Hanson et al. 2005), the complementary nature of data from both qualitative and quantitative approaches enables a more robust analysis that takes advantage of the strengths of each research paradigm, permitting a deeper understanding of the research problem at hand (Greene, Caracelli & Graham 1989; Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998; Creswell 2003, 2009; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004). Furthermore, by acknowledging the complexity of
novel research questions, the potential to address ‘dynamic interconnections that traditional research methods have not’ or cannot adequately address is augmented in mixed-method paradigms (Hesse-Biber 2010, p. 2).

Greene (2008, p. 7) has asserted that mixed-methods research enables the conveyance of the ‘magnitude and dimensionality as well as [the] results’ that promote the comprehension of lived experiences based on actual contextual situations. Adding ‘meaning to numbers’ (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004, p. 21; see also Brewer & Hunter 1989; Greene, Caracelli & Graham 1989), this non-purist approach offers researchers ‘the best chance of answering their specific research questions’ (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004, p. 15).

The opportunity to explore quantitative results in more detail increases in the range, scope and type of research questions addressed, thus resulting in better-informed research outcomes, expanding the understanding of findings previously limited by mono research methods (Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2004). Critics have, however, argued that combining mono research processes could result in an “anything goes” attitude (Denscombe 2008, p. 274), further fragmenting the inconsistency of mixed-method research. Nonetheless, scholars such as Denscombe (2008, p. 280) have contended that rather than be guided by an overarching philosophy or ‘preconceived biases about which research paradigm should have hegemony in social sciences research’ (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004, p. 23), the expansiveness of a mixed-method paradigm that is framed by practical issues and demands is, in fact, a key strength of such a method of inquiry (Greene 2008; Denscombe 2008; Hesse-Biber 2010).

Mixed-methods designs allow researchers the ability to test the reliability and validity of their research, as well as generalise their findings to encompass larger samples or groups (Greene & McClintock 1985; Greene, Caracelli & Graham 1989; Hesse-Biber 2010; Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil 2002). Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches within and across the various stages of research also allows researchers the ability to decide on paradigm emphasis (whether to focus on a dominant paradigm or not), and time ordering (whether the phases are
conducted concurrently or sequentially) of the qualitative and quantitative phases (Morse 1991; Morgan 1998; Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998; Creswell, Fetters & Ivankova 2004). This enables the construction of mixed-method designs that have complementary strengths and that circumnavigate the complexity of phenomena restricting research and the expansion of knowledge (Johnson & Turner 2003; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004; Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2004).

With different disciplines aligned with ‘different paradigms, each with its own associated ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions about the social nature of society’ (Huiberts 2016, p. 4324), the increasing resort to interdisciplinary research studies has brought to light the greater need for understanding and compatibility between concepts and understandings in various disciplines (Wang 2014; Chouliaraki 2015). Moreover, the development of new technologies and the internet, novel and alternative methods are needed to explore new uncharted research areas, as well as topics that were previously problematic or impossible to examine.

The mixing of traditional research methods and the use of traditional tools in new innovative ways enhances researchers’ ability to answer and understand diverse and complex issues. Stressing the significance of ‘a multifocal understanding of social reality that gets at the subjective experiences of the researched’ (Hesse-Biber 2010, p. 215), mixed-methods research offers a ‘generative model of understanding’, which ‘is open, expansive, and subject to revision’ (Hesse-Biber 2010, p. 216).

4.5 Survey Sampling

A survey aimed at acquiring a deeper understanding of the viewpoints of Singapore’s young adult generation through their use of new media was conducted in Singapore. Questions were clustered around such topics as: The uses and perceptions of Facebook; social relations and community engagement; voice and channel of expression; and national identity and attachment to home.
Young adult Singaporeans between the ages of 21 to 35 were approached at four different university education providers in Singapore and asked if they would be willing to participate in the research project. As such, university-going Singaporeans were the primary group of survey respondents. Additional participants were sought through snowballing methods and via social networking. Appropriate approvals and consent were obtained from the respective education providers beforehand. Written consent and approvals to conduct research at the university education providers were obtained from either the university education provider and/or the lecturer in charge of the various tutorial classes or lectures before any attempt at accessing participants was carried out.

At each tutorial class or lecture, participants were given a brief introduction covering the purpose and voluntary basis of participation in the research project. Willing participants were then handed the surveys and thereafter given some time to complete the survey before the tutorial or lecture commenced. Collection of the completed surveys was done after the tutorial or lecture had ended. Participants who were unable to complete the survey on the spot were given the option to submit the survey at a later time at a designated collection point, which was set up within their campus compounds. Alternatively, participants were also given the option of going online to fill in their responses to the survey questionnaire. Participants were also encouraged to share the link to the online survey with their friends via social media.

Besides the way participants were sourced to complete either of the two available versions of the survey, the only two distinctive differences between the survey types were the way responses were submitted and the process involved in accessing the survey. Participants who completed the surveys did so either via a physical hardcopy handout or via an online version of the survey. The Facebook application, Surveys, was used as the delivery platform for the online version of the survey.

The content of both types of surveys was identical and took participants about 20 minutes to complete (see Appendix A for the contents of the survey questionnaire.
used in this study). Participants were asked to answer a total of 43 questions in the survey, which consisted of 36 multiple-choice questions, two scaled questions (Questions 24 and 25) requiring respondents to indicate a number in their responses, and five open-ended questions where respondents had free rein to respond as they wished (Questions 6, 18, 37, 41 and 43).

There were also a few questions requesting background information at the start of the survey. Participants were however, not asked for any identifying information, with the exception of their living situations, which was used as a proxy to determine participants’ socio-economic background. Nevertheless, because the online survey required participants to log into their personal Facebook accounts before they could access the Facebook application, Surveys and submit their completed surveys, a link to the participant’s personal Facebook profile was attached to their responses. Although it would have been possible to gather additional information on participants by accessing their Facebook accounts, this prospect was not exploited, ensuring participants’ privacy and anonymity were maintained.

Participants were instructed to answer all of the questions stated in the survey. Most of the participants who completed the hardcopy version of the survey filled in the surveys on the spot. Some participants also submitted the surveys at a later time, at the designated collection point they were informed of during the brief introduction participants received before the surveys were handed out.

For the online version of the survey, participants were able to complete the online survey at any time, which was at their convenience. However, this meant that the researcher was not physically present when participants completed the survey online. Nonetheless, participants were able to contact the researcher via various means – via email, Facebook messages, social networking applications, and the telephone at any time should queries surface, or while completing the survey.

To ensure consistency with the instructions given to participants who completed the hardcopy version of the survey, the online survey was set up requesting all
questions in the survey be answered. If any question were left blank, the completed survey would instantly be rejected and not be accepted as submitted. Additionally, despite efforts at minimising nil responses, a few participants who submitted the hardcopy version of the survey were able to leave blanks and still submit the survey to the researcher.

After assessing for validity and omitting outliers, a total of 271 usable survey response forms were collated. 200 participants completed the hardcopy version of the survey and 71 submitted online versions of the survey. No significant difference (p>0.05) was found between the responses collected from the hardcopy or online versions of the survey.

4.6 Characteristics of the Survey Sample

To verify the representativeness of the sample accessed in the survey, statistics released about Singapore’s population in the year 2012, by the Singapore Department of Statistics, were used as a the primary standard of comparison. Although more recent statistical results have been published by the Singapore Department of Statistics, the findings of the 2012 Population Trends report have been highlighted, as fieldwork was conducted in 2012. Comparing statistics obtained during the same time frame allows for more accurate evaluations, representative of the Singapore population at that particular point in time.

Of the 271 surveys completed, 166 participants were female (61.3%) and 105 (38.7%) were male. Of the total number of surveys completed (N = 271), 257 participants were Singaporeans by birth (95%), 12 participants were naturalised Singaporeans (4%), and 2 participants were Singapore Permanent Residents (PRs - 1%).

Singapore’s resident population includes citizens and Singapore Permanent Residents (PRs). As such, PRs were included in the survey sample. In 2012,
Singapore's resident population\textsuperscript{39} was comprised of 3.29 million Singapore citizens (86\%) and 0.53 million Singapore PRs (14\%) (Ministry of Social and Family Development 2012, p. 2; Singapore Department of Statistics 2012a, p. v).

The median age of Singapore's resident population was 38.4 years in 2012 (Figure 4.1), and Gen Y made up 21.3 percent of the resident population (Table 4.1). Seven respondents did not indicate their age. The average age of the remaining 264 participants in this study was 23.59 years, with the mode of respondents indicating being 21 years old at the time the survey was conducted (Figure 4.2).

\textbf{Figure 4.1:} Age Pyramid of Singapore's resident population in 2012 (Singapore Department of Statistics 2012b)

\textsuperscript{39} Singapore's non-resident population is made up of individuals who are ‘working, studying or living in Singapore on a non-permanent basis’. Singapore's total population in 2012 (5.31 million) was made up of 3.82 million (72\%) residents and 1.49 million (28\%) non-residents (National Talent and Population Division 2015).
Figure 4.2: Distribution of survey respondents by age in years

Table 4.1: Proportion of Singapore’s resident Gen Y population by gender in 2012, 2014 and 2016 (Singapore Department of Statistics 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group (years)</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>132,675</td>
<td>131,831</td>
<td>132,902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>123,056</td>
<td>131,526</td>
<td>129,304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>140,686</td>
<td>154,710</td>
<td>138,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen Y population by gender</td>
<td>396,417</td>
<td>418,067</td>
<td>401,160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Gen Y population</td>
<td>814,484</td>
<td>821,864</td>
<td>826,386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Gen Y resident population by gender</td>
<td>48.67%</td>
<td>51.33%</td>
<td>48.81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total resident population by gender | 1,880,046 | 1,938,159 | 1,902,410 | 1,968,329 | 1,929,526 | 2,004,033 |
| Total resident population | 3,818,205 | 3,870,739 | 3,933,559 |
| % of total resident population classified as Gen Y | 21.33% | 21.23% | 21.00% |
Statistics compiled by the Singapore Department of Statistics from the four main university education providers in Singapore\textsuperscript{40} indicated that in 2012, male graduates accounted for 48.3 percent of graduates, while females made up 51.7 percent of graduates from university with their first degree (Singapore Department of Statistics 2012d). Based on 2010 data, the Singapore Department of Statistics released another report in 2012 indicating that females in the younger ages groups of 25-29 years and 30-39 years outnumbered the number of males who graduated with university degrees in the five most popular fields of study\textsuperscript{41} (Singapore Department of Statistics 2012c, pp. 4-5).

These statistics further indicate that the higher proportion of females as compared to males who participated in this study’s survey component in 2012 (61.3% were female and 38.7% were male), is characteristic of the higher proportion of females in Singapore’s overall resident population in 2012 (Figure 4.1 and Table 4.1), and accounts for the higher proportion of females enrolled in university programmes in Singapore.

The majority of survey respondents were educated entirely in Singapore (86.7%), having completed their Primary, Secondary, Tertiary, and University education locally. A small proportion of respondents (3.3%) was educated entirely in Singapore, but participated in exchange programmes overseas while pursuing their University degrees. Another seven percent completed their Primary, Secondary and Tertiary education in Singapore, but thereafter went overseas to complete their University education. Respondents who indicated studying overseas at some point before their University degrees made up 3 percent of the respondents in the sample.

\textsuperscript{40}The four main university education providers in Singapore exclude private university education providers. They include the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore Management University and Singapore Institute of Technology.

\textsuperscript{41}According to the March 2012 report released by the Singapore Department of Statistics, the five most popular fields of study included: Business and Administration; Natural, Physical, Chemical and Mathematical Sciences; Humanities and Social Sciences; Engineering Sciences; and Information Technology (Singapore Department of Statistics 2012c, pp. 4-5).
As mentioned above, the type of housing in which participants resided in was used as a proxy to determine socio-economic background (Table 4.2). The 2012 Population Trends report cited the 4-room HDB flat as being the most common housing type amongst resident households, with 33.9 percent of the population living in such dwellings (Singapore Department of Statistics 2012a, p. 59). This particular type of housing has consistently been ranked the most common type of dwelling since 2000 (Singapore Department of Statistics 2014, p. 18).

Comparatively, the most common housing type amongst survey respondents was the bigger, more expensive 5-room HDB flat (Table 4.2). A large proportion of survey participants also indicated living in private housing. The survey respondents sampled were, thus, from average to above average socio-economic backgrounds (middle to middle-upper class).

Table 4.2: A comparison of the percentage distribution of Singapore's resident population dwelling type as released by the Singapore Department of Statistics in June 2012, and the responses survey participants indicated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Housing</th>
<th>Department of Statistics Singapore Figures (As of June 2012)*</th>
<th>Survey Participants (Survey conducted in 2012)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-room HDB</td>
<td>16.28%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-room HDB</td>
<td>33.91%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-room HDB</td>
<td>28.29%</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private - Condominium</td>
<td>10.16%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private - Landed Property</td>
<td>6.58%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil response</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Singapore Department of Statistics figures obtained from Population Trends 2012 (Singapore Department of Statistics 2012a, p. 59).

* Table highlights only the residential categories with which participants were presented in the survey. The housing type categories of ‘1- & 2-room flats’ and ‘Others’, as indicated in the statistics released by the Department of Statistics, are omitted in the Table presented.
4.7 Semi-structured Interviews

A total of 28 semi-structured interviews were carried out in Singapore (see Appendix B for a list of guiding questions used). Out of the 28 interviews conducted, 27 interviews were face-to-face sessions while one interview was conducted online, via Facebook Messenger, Facebook’s chat function. Of the 27 face-to-face interviews that were conducted, data collected from one interview was omitted from the final interview dataset as the audio recording was inaudible (see Appendix C for the codes used to distinguish interview respondents, the type of interview conducted, and also brief descriptions of each interviewee’s background).

A total of eight interviews were conducted in groups of more than two persons, while the remaining 19 interviews were individual sessions. Views were sought from a total of 45 individuals, ranging from 21 to 35 years of age. A total of 28 out of the 45 individuals interviewed completed the survey, which made up the other part of this study, either before or after their interview sessions.

Participants from a range of backgrounds were invited to participate in the study. Social media were used to publicise the interview component of the interview. Information about the interviews was posted on the Facebook pages of student-run university societies and also on willing participants’ own Facebook pages. The brief introductory speech given at the various tutorial classes and lectures when sourcing participants for the survey component of this study was also used as a platform to publicise the interview section of the study.

Snowballing techniques were also utilised to gain access to participants. Interview participants were sourced via contacts obtained from university academic staff. Contacts provided by participants who had taken part in the semi-structured interviews were also approached and asked if they would like to participate.

In all instances, participants who were interested and willing to participate in the interview segment of this study replied to the various outreach methods, and
contacted the researcher themselves. Arrangements were then made for the interview sessions to be carried out. All the interviews were conducted in a relaxed setting at a location and timing of each participant’s choosing.

Out of the 26 valid face-to-face interview sessions conducted, 25 interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder with the permission of each participant. One participant had however, requested that the interview session not be recorded. The interviews all varied in length, ranging from 55 minutes to two hours and 20 minutes.

The interviews covered various topics and were aimed at acquiring a deeper understanding of the viewpoints of Singapore’s young adult generation. Topics such as the uses and perceptions of Facebook, the dynamics behind governance and choice in Singapore from Gen Y’s perspective, notions of truth and accountability, participation in the age of new media, and notions of belonging and community engagement were brought up to varying extents during the conducted interviews. These topics parallel those covered in the survey component of this study, and were addressed in the interviews so that a more comprehensive understanding of participants’ perspectives and thoughts could be obtained.

While participants’ responses dictated the general flow of each interview session, these topics guided the type of content covered. The use of open-ended questions during the interviews not only encouraged a positive rapport between participants and the interviewer, but also offered a simple yet practical way of observing feelings and emotions, enabling insights and a better understanding of participants’ perspectives on various issues (see Appendix B).

All of the participants interviewed were Singaporeans and had been enrolled in Singapore’s education system for most of their educational careers. Half of the participants interviewed indicated having studied abroad at some point in their educational careers, having either participated in study abroad programmes, or having obtained their undergraduate and/or postgraduate degrees from overseas
institutions. Participants also had varying degrees of work experience in both the local and overseas context.

Participants in these interviews were either at various stages of completing either their undergraduate or postgraduate studies at various institutions of higher learning in Singapore, or had completed their university degrees and had entered the Singapore workforce, contributing to various fields and sectors in both the government and private sectors. Nine of the interviewed participants had either previous experience or were directly involved with the use of Facebook in their work, which included utilising the social networking site for various purposes in their professional careers.

4.8 Data Management and Analysing the Data

As indicated earlier, the statistical programme, SPSS, was used to analyse the data obtained in the surveys. After collecting the responses from the 271 usable survey responses, data from the multiple-choice and scaled questions were coded and subsequently entered into a database created in SPSS.

After official statistics released by the Singapore Department of Statistics were used as a comparison to verify the dataset’s comparability with the relevant part of Singapore’s population distribution, descriptive statistics in the form of frequency distributions were obtained and examined before further statistical tests were carried out. For some of the survey questions, response categories were collapsed to enable further examination of the relationships between variables. For instance, the ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ response categories were combined into a single ‘agree’ category to highlight the effect of participants’ responses. This collapsing of categories allowed for a more meaningful examination of the results, as well as the observance of more statistically significant results in the cross-tabulation analyses that were carried out.
Cross-tabulations were carried out to analyse the relationships between the responses to various survey questions. Pairs of questions that had presumptive associations were in particular, assessed. The Pearson chi-square test was used to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationships between the pairs of questions. Statistical significance was defined as a $p$ value of $\leq 0.05$. Results of some of these cross-tabulations relevant to this thesis’s argument are presented in Chapter Seven.

Being a parametric measure, the Pearson chi-square test measured associations between pairs of categorical variables and not causation. However, due to the categorical nature of the variables used in the survey, this limitation was not viewed as a restriction in carrying out data analysis.

Answers to open-ended questions were sorted and categorised based on themes that emerged from the survey data collected. These themes were then used to present a summary of the findings, as depicted in Chapter Five. Similarly, after the manual transcription of all semi-structured interviews was completed, interviewees’ responses were categorised based on themes that emerged from the dataset. Excerpts from the various interviews were split into broad categories such as: Usage and purpose of Facebook; attachment to home; social engagement and community involvement; and impact of Facebook on socio-cultural processes.

After the results from both components of this study were organised and examined, the findings were evaluated together. Statistically significant results from the survey analysis were compared with the responses participants provided in the semi-structured interviews. As the survey questions were clustered around central themes that were echoed in the semi-structured interviews, cross-referencing based on themes was carried out. Chapter Seven will present the analysis and discussion of the findings obtained. Before that, the following two chapters will present in detail the results obtained in both aspects of this mixed-method study. Survey results will be detailed in Chapter Five, while findings from the semi-structured interviews will be specified in Chapter Six.
Chapter Five
Findings: Part 1 - Survey Results

5.1 Introduction

A survey constituted the basis of the quantitative aspect of the mixed-methods approach this study adopted (see Appendix A for details of the survey questionnaire used). After assessing for validity and omitting outliers, a total of 271 valid survey responses were collated and analysed. As detailed in the previous chapter, young adult Singaporeans were approached at four different university education providers in Singapore and asked if they would be willing to participate in the research project. Additional participants were sought through snowballing methods.

The survey was aimed at identifying the impact the use of new media had on social relations, communication methods and the construction of identity in Singapore. Participants were asked to answer a total of 43 questions in the survey. Of these, 36 questions were multiple-choice, two were scaled questions, and five were open-ended questions.

The survey questions were clustered around such topics as: the uses and perceptions of Facebook (Questions 1-17); social relations and community engagement (Questions 18-25); voice and channel of expression (Questions 26-31); and national identity and attachment to home (Questions 32-43). This chapter will present the patterns observed from descriptive statistics obtained after the data collected from the valid survey responses were coded and examined. Results of statistical tests involving relationships between variables, as well as further analysis and discussion of both the survey and semi-structured interview results will be examined in Chapter Seven.
5.2 The Uses and Perceptions of Facebook

Clustered around four broad topics, the survey component of this mixed-methods study examined Singapore's young adult generation's relationship to the nation, and their formation of values signifying Singaporean-ness. The first cluster of questions, Questions 1-17, were targeted at understanding participants’ Facebook usage patterns, their purpose and rationale behind using Facebook, as well as the impressions participants had of Facebook as a platform that could be utilised for various purposes.

When asked how often they used Facebook (Question 1), the majority of respondents (62.73%) said they used the social networking site more than once a day, everyday (Figure 5.1). Another 11.4 percent of respondents indicated using Facebook once each day of the week; five to six times a week (9.2%); four to five times a week (3.7%); three to four times a week (3.7%); two to three times a week (2.6%) and one or two times a week (5.3%). Based on the responses participants indicated about their Facebook usage patterns (see Figure 5.1), participants were then classified into four categories: frequent users, average users, infrequent users and non-Facebook users (Non-FB).

This classification of participants based on their Facebook usage patterns further emphasised participants’ extensive use of the social networking platform in their everyday lives. Amongst the 271 participants who took part in the survey, 226 participants (83.4%) said they used Facebook more than five times a week and were categorised as frequent Facebook users. Participants who reported using Facebook between three to five times a week were classified as average users (7.4%) and respondents who used Facebook between one to three times a week were classified as infrequent users (8.1%). 1.1 percent of survey respondents indicated that they did not use Facebook and were categorised as Non-FB.
Some 20.1 percent of respondents said they spent more than six hours each week on Facebook (Question 2), while the largest proportion (26.2%) indicated spending less than an hour each week on Facebook (Figure 5.2). When asked to indicate how often they posted comments or updated their Facebook profiles (Question 6), the largest proportion of respondents said they did so only two to four times a week (16.76%). Another 16.05 percent of participants said they rarely engaged on Facebook, and 15.88 percent of participants said they posted and commented on Facebook ‘all the time’ (Figure 5.3). These findings suggest that although a large proportion of respondents spent significant amounts of time on Facebook, time spent on Facebook did not necessarily imply active engagement on the social networking site.

Figure 5.1: Percentage distribution of respondents’ weekly Facebook usage (Question 1)
Figure 5.2: Percentage distribution of the time respondents spent on Facebook each week (Question 2)

Figure 5.3: Participants’ responses to the open-ended question inquiring the frequency with which they engaged on Facebook (Question 6)
Compared to participants’ responses to Questions 1 and 2, the results for Question 6 suggest that participants consistently practised self-restraint when posting or commenting on Facebook. Choosing to absorb content more than produce content online, the respondents indicated the greater likelihood of participants practicing self-surveillance and choosing not to engage on Facebook.

Only 21.67 percent of respondents said that they posted or commented on Facebook ‘every day’ or ‘every 1-2 days’, while the majority (56.69%) indicated reduced interest, restraint and even disinterest in engaging on Facebook, suggesting that they engaged on Facebook less frequently, and describing their posting frequency as being anywhere from once ‘every 1-2 months’ to ‘rarely; once a year, once in a blue moon’ (see Figure 5.3). Participating when they felt it was necessary or when they found things were worth responding to suggests discernment and actual concern for the subjects in which these participants chose to engage online.

When asked about their motivations for using Facebook (Question 4), the most common reason participants cited was ‘to see what your friends are doing/saying/thinking’. In this question, participants were presented with a list of nine options and were allowed to select more than one option in their responses. Communicating with friends and family and keeping up-to-date on news and current affairs were the next most popular options participants indicated as reasons for their use of Facebook. Using Facebook as a means to make new friends was the option participants selected the least (Figure 5.4).
Participants were also asked to select the kinds of activities they engaged in most frequently on Facebook (Question 5). Participants were allowed to select more than one option when answering this question. Of the nine response options offered, participants specified checking their News Feed, Facebook surfing and commenting on Facebook posts as being the most common activities in which they engaged on Facebook. Again, looking for more friends to add to their friend network was indicated as the activity participants least engaged in on Facebook (Figure 5.5).

In both Questions 4 and 5, besides the social aspect participants indicated as being their primary purpose for using the Facebook platform, Facebook’s purpose as an information platform was underscored. This could explain the finding that despite spending substantial amounts of time on Facebook, participants preferred to absorb rather than produce content (see Questions 1, 2 and 6).
The majority of participants (69.7%) felt that when using Facebook, individuals were more forthcoming and willing to engage in more delicate and reflective issues (Question 7). Only 10.3 percent of respondents specified feeling that individuals were less forthcoming when expressing their opinions on Facebook (Figure 5.6). Nevertheless, 38 percent of participants felt that comments left on Facebook Walls were true reflections of individual thought (Question 8). Another 35.8 percent of participants said comments on Facebook Walls were not accurate representations of individual thought (Figure 5.7).
Figure 5.6: Willingness to engage in more delicate and reflective issues via the social networking site Facebook (Question 7)

Still, 43.54 percent of respondents felt that Facebook allowed young adult Singaporeans the ability to accurately express their opinions (Question 11 – Figure 5.8). Moreover, the proportion of respondents disagreeing (31.37%) and indicating a neutral stance (24.35%) in response to this question (Question 11) was observed to be similar to the responses obtained for Question 8 (Figure 5.7), where
participants were queried about their thoughts on the accuracy of Facebook posts and comments. This finding will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

![Accuracy of Views](image)

**Figure 5.8**: Facebook permits young adult Singaporeans the ability to express their views accurately (Question 11)

Participants displayed an awareness of the possible influencing forces and pressures engaging in Facebook activities could have, with the majority (78.23%) indicating being conscious of the possibility of Facebook activities influencing individual thought and perception (Question 10 – Figure 5.9). Additionally, 62.4 percent of participants said they did not feel compelled to comment or respond to posts on Facebook (Question 9 – Figure 5.10). Still, almost one quarter of participants (24.7%) articulated feeling pressured to respond to Facebook posts or comments (Question 9 – Figure 5.10).
Figure 5.9: The possibility of activity on Facebook influencing individual thought and perception (Question 10)

![Bar chart showing the possibility of activity on Facebook influencing individual thought and perception.]

Figure 5.10: Percentage distribution of the amount of pressure to comment or respond to comments respondents felt on Facebook (Question 9)

![Bar chart showing the percentage distribution of pressure on Facebook.]

For 18.45 percent of participants, information found on or exchanged via Facebook played an important role in their everyday lives (Question 14 – Figure 5.11). However, the majority of participants (46.49%) said that information obtained from Facebook was only moderately important, while 26.94 percent said information from Facebook was of little importance to them (Figure 5.11).
Compared to the most common reasons respondents cited for their use of Facebook, these results suggest that participants do not see Facebook as a significant information source. This finding seems to contradict participants’ responses that indicate getting updates on news and current affairs was the third most common reason for their use of Facebook (Question 4 – Figure 5.4). While participants do use Facebook to access news and current affairs, such information does not seem to affect their everyday lives extensively.

![Importance of Information Obtained from Facebook](image)

**Figure 5.11**: The importance of information found on or exchanged via Facebook (Question 14)

Respondents’ primary use of Facebook as a social and communicative tool was highlighted in both Questions 4 and 5. Coupled with the generally moderate level of importance placed on information obtained via Facebook (Question 14 – Figure 5.11), it appears that participants do not view Facebook as a ‘serious’ platform where political and other more pressing issues should be discussed.

The motives behind the use of Facebook amongst Singapore's Gen Y seem to be aligned with the primary purpose for which the social networking site was started – to share and connect with friends. Participants’ divided views over the accuracy of Facebook posts (Question 8 – Figure 5.7), and their views about Facebook
assisting Gen Y in articulating viewpoints truthfully (Question 11 – Figure 5.8), further emphasise participants’ indecision over Facebook’s validity as an appropriate platform for the exchange of perspectives in Singapore.

When queried on their impressions of Facebook as a platform that could be utilised to advance various objectives and means, participants clearly distinguished between online and offline interactions. For 65.7 percent of respondents, Facebook could be used to enhance communication methods and strengthen social relationships between individuals (Question 12 – Figure 5.12). However, the majority of participants (77.9%) felt that online and offline relationships were not equivalent (Question 13 – Figure 5.13). Only 10.7 percent said that online relationships were equivalent to offline relations (Question 13).

**Figure 5.12:** Percentage distribution of Facebook’s influence on communication methods and the effect it has on social relationships (Question 12)
Nonetheless, despite the majority of participants indicating that online and offline relations were not comparable (77.86% – Question 13), the majority of participants, or 73.43 percent of respondents believed social media outlets like Facebook could aid the development of bonds and relations (Question 17). The stark contrast in participants’ views on the equivalence of online and offline relations and Facebook's ability to further develop relations is indicated in Figure 5.14.

Comparing these findings to the low value participants placed on Facebook as a platform they utilised to initiate new relationships (Question 5) suggests that Facebook could be used to further relationships and ties, but not initiate them. Additionally, this notion corroborates the responses participants indicated for Question 12, where the majority of participants (65.7%) agreed with Facebook being able to enhance communication methods and strengthen social relationships.

**Figure 5.13**: Percentage distribution of the equivalence placed on online and offline relationships (Question 13)
Figure 5.14: Contrast in respondents’ views on the equivalence of online and offline relations (Question 13) and Facebook’s ability to aid the development of bonds and relations (Question 17)

Figure 5.15: Facebook’s ability to help participants distinguish their unique personalities online (Question 16)

Participants were split when asked if associating with groups and/or pages on Facebook helped define their unique personalities (Question 16). More respondents felt that such associations did not distinguish them from others (43.9%), while 36.5 percent felt that associating with groups and/or pages on
Facebook helped differentiate and define their individual personalities online (Figure 5.15).

The most common groups or pages participants said they followed or ‘liked’ were groups or pages created by themselves or their friends (Question 15 – Figure 5.16). Groups or pages supporting artists were the next most popular groups or pages respondents followed on Facebook. Groups or pages related to political issues, charitable organisations, environmental issues and industry-related groups or pages were the least followed or ‘liked’. Again, more social and recreational content was preferred over the more tangible and ‘serious’ topics.

**Figure 5.16:** Frequency distribution of the kinds of groups or pages respondents followed or ‘liked’ most frequently on Facebook (Question 15)
5.3 Social Relationships and Community Engagement

The next cluster of questions in the survey questionnaire was centred on the topic of social relations and community engagement (Questions 18-25). Touching on issues related to social capital in Singapore, these questions asked participants about their views on their connections with their community, their views on the current state of relationships within their communities, and also their level of engagement within their communities. As an indicator of the strength of ties participants had with their communities, Questions 24 and 25 also queried participants about their perceptions of trust and their views on the reliability of information obtained from various sources.

A neighbourhood refers to the locality immediately surrounding an individual’s residence. To make the notion of community more relevant and immediately relatable for participants, the neighbourhoods in which participants were residing were used as specific points of reference in this cluster of questions.

Most of the participants specified having lived in the same neighbourhood for a substantial period of years (Question 18 – Figure 5.17). The average amount of time participants indicated having lived in the neighbourhood in which they currently resided was 15 years. The most frequently indicated length of time respondents specified having lived in the neighbourhood they currently resided in was 20 years. The longest length of time participants said they had lived in their current neighbourhood was 32 years. Using the formula:

\[
\text{Years lived in neighbourhood} \times 100 \quad \text{Respondent’s Age}
\]

the proportion of lives participants had lived in the neighbourhoods they currently resided in was calculated. The largest proportion of the participants (39.48%) were found to have lived in their current neighbourhoods for the majority of their life, while 23.99 percent of respondents were found to have lived in their current
neighbourhoods for about three quarters of their life. Another 16.61 percent had lived in their current neighbourhoods for half their life (Figure 5.18).

![Figure 5.17: Number of years respondents have lived in the neighbourhoods in which they currently reside (Question 18)](image)

![Figure 5.18: Percentage distribution of the proportion of lives respondents have lived in the neighbourhoods in which they currently reside (Question 18)](image)
Using the length of time participants had lived in their current neighbourhoods as a gauge, high levels of community belonging and rapport were anticipated. However, only 53.9 percent of participants said they identified with their immediate neighbourhood, and 26.2 percent said they did not identify with the area they lived in (Question 19 – Figure 5.19). Compared to the proportion of participants who had lived in the same neighbourhood for about half their lives and longer (80.08% of respondents – Question 18), the proportion of participants indicating identification with their neighbourhoods was considerably lower, thus suggesting detachment from their communities.

![Figure 5.19: Percentage distribution of participants’ ability to identify with their immediate neighbourhoods (Question 19)](image)

When asked if the neighbourhood in which they lived was a place where people from different backgrounds got along, even less agreed (Question 20). Only 48 percent of respondents felt that their neighbours who were of different backgrounds got along (Question 20 – Figure 5.20). The proportion of participants who believed people in their neighbourhoods shared the same values as they did was even lower – only 7 percent of participants specified sharing common values with others in their neighbourhood (Question 21 – Figure 5.21).
Figure 5.20: Percentage distribution of the propensity for people from different backgrounds getting along in the neighbourhoods respondents lived in (Question 20)

Figure 5.21: Percentage distribution of the commonality of values people in respondents’ neighbourhoods shared (Question 21)

These results highlight Singapore’s multiracial and multicultural makeup and the issues such kinds of societies face. Officially classified as consisting of four racial groups, Chinese, Indian, Malay and Others, the harmonious balance necessary for Singapore’s continued success and survival, as insisted by the PAP, which was
discussed earlier in Chapter Three, has been the main driving force behind the need for multiracialism in the city-state. However, a recent nationwide survey that polled 2,000 individuals above the age of 21 suggests that despite the ‘rosy picture’ of Singaporeans as generally possessing a healthy attitude towards ‘race relations and attitudes towards racial issues...with people striving to uphold multiculturalism and lauding policies in place to promote it’, more still needs to be done ‘in terms of deepening interracial ties’ (Tan, WZ 2016).

As emphasised in participants’ indecision over their opinions and beliefs regarding community belonging and rapport amongst their communities (Questions 19, 20 and 21), the findings of this study parallel those of the recent nationwide study that was conducted between June and July 2016 (Tan, WZ 2016). Indicating that the superficial practice of tolerance and respect for other members of other ethnic groups is insufficient for developing the strong ties the Singapore government hopes to inculcate amongst its populace, the study underscores the importance of developing a sturdy structure based on social interactions and networks of connections within the Singapore populace, in order for the realisation of collective living and the attainment of collective goals (Putnam 1995, 2000; Coleman 1988; La Due Lake & Huckfeldt 1998). Granovetter’s (1973, p. 1360) strength of weak ties theory, where the importance of weak as well as strong ties within a community is vital in affecting levels of reciprocity, as well as the ‘diffusion of influence and information, mobility opportunity, and community organisation’ is also highlighted.

When asked if people in their neighbourhood came together to improve the area or community in which they lived in (Question 22 – Figure 5.22), participants were mostly undecided (49.45%), with more participants indicating that their neighbours did not come together to improve their neighbourhood (31.37%). Only 18.82 percent felt that their neighbours did come together to improve their neighbourhood (Question 22 – Figure 5.22).
Validating the Singapore government’s current emphasis on developing social capital and a Singapore ‘soul’, this notion helps rationalise the kinds of responses participants indicated in relation to the degree of association and the kinds of connections they felt with their communities. These findings also foreshadow the kinds of responses participants were most likely to indicate when queried about the extent of their community engagement, as well as their perceptions of trust and views on the reliability of information obtained from various sources within their communities.

The largest proportion of participants (44.65%) indicated that they rarely involved themselves in their community (Question 23 – Figure 5.23). A miniscule proportion said that they engaged themselves in community work very frequently (0.37%), and just 4.06 percent said they did so frequently (Question 23 – Figure 5.23). A further 27.31 percent indicated that they never volunteered or helped out in community-related events or situations, while 23.62 percent said that they occasionally did involve themselves in their community.
Participants were also asked to use a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least agreement and 5 being the most agreement, to rate how much they trusted information obtained from their family, friends, neighbours and elected government representatives (Question 24 – Table 5.1). Overall, participants identified information obtained from family (88.6%) and friends (70.8%) as being the most trusted sources of information.

Information obtained from neighbours and government representatives in contrast, was treated with significantly more distrust and uncertainty (Table 5.1). The increasing proportion of respondents indicating ‘strongly disagree’ as the question moved from trusting information obtained from family towards governmental representatives also emphasises this point. Thus, relationship strength was an important factor affecting the amount of trust participants placed in the information obtained from others. Haythornthwaite's (2005) argument that the strength of relationships affected the way resources were shared and circulated amongst individuals is reflected in these findings.
Table 5.1: Participants’ responses to the question on how much they trusted information obtained from their family, friends, neighbours and government representatives (Question 24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust in Information Obtained From:</th>
<th>% of Participants’ Responses</th>
<th>Total % (N=271)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>45.80%</td>
<td>42.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>10.70%</td>
<td>60.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbours</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Representatives</td>
<td>1.10%</td>
<td>18.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Respondents’ views on the reliability of information obtained from newspapers, radio, television, the internet, social networking sites and government announcements (Question 25)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliability of Information Obtained From:</th>
<th>% of Participants’ Responses</th>
<th>Total % (N=271)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>9.60%</td>
<td>37.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>4.10%</td>
<td>32.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>31.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>10.30%</td>
<td>32.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networking Sites</td>
<td>1.10%</td>
<td>19.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Announcements</td>
<td>8.10%</td>
<td>33.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Likewise, Question 25 asked respondents to use a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least agreement and 5 being the most agreement, to indicate their views on the reliability of information obtained from local newspapers, local radio, local television, the internet, social networking sites and government announcements.
(Table 5.2). The largest proportion of respondents strongly agreed and/or agreed with information obtained from newspapers as being the most reliable (46.9%). This was followed by the internet (42.8%), government announcements (42%), local radio (36.9%), and local television (34.7%). Information obtained from social networking sites was seen as the least reliable, with the smallest proportion of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with its credibility (20.7%).

These findings suggest that participants still relied on traditional news sources for information they could trust. And, despite 39.4 percent of respondents indicating that they disagreed and/or strongly disagreed with trusting information obtained from their government representatives (Table 5.1), the reliability of information disseminated by official government statements was still highly regarded (Table 5.2). This indicates participants’ confidence and belief in the credibility and legitimacy of the PAP government.

Additionally, corresponding with participants’ primary use of Facebook as a social interaction tool (see Questions 4 and 5), the information obtained from social networking sites was accorded less weight and, thus, treated with more uncertainty (Table 5.2). Still, 71.96 percent of participants indicated that Facebook has helped raise their awareness of current issues and events in Singapore (Question 28 – Figure 5.24). These findings further corroborate the notion that despite using Facebook to gain access to news and information, participants only placed moderate importance on the information obtained from Facebook (see Question 14 – Figure 5.11).
Figure 5.24: Facebook’s ability to raise awareness about current issues and events in Singapore (Question 28)

5.4 Voice and Channel of Expression

Questions 26-31 in the survey were focused on issues related to the articulation of views online, as well as the appropriateness of using Facebook as a platform for the expression of perspectives in the Singaporean context. A total of 84.13 percent of participants felt that social media gave them an avenue for public expression that was previously unavailable in earlier forms of media, such as the television, radio and newspapers (Question 26 – Figure 5.25). Only 4.43 percent of respondents disagreed (Question 26 – Figure 5.25). Compared to other forms of public expression, 50.9 percent of respondents felt more comfortable expressing certain viewpoints on Facebook, while 31 percent of respondents said they were not comfortable voicing their opinions online, especially via social media (Question 27 – Figure 5.26).
Figure 5.25: Social media has provided an avenue for public expression that was previously unavailable (Question 26)

Figure 5.26: Percentage distribution of respondents’ comfort level in expressing viewpoints on Facebook (Question 27)

These results parallel participants' responses regarding Facebook allowing young adult Singaporeans an avenue to accurately express their opinions online (Question 11), individuals being more forthcoming and willing to engage on Facebook (Question 7), and comments posted on Facebook being true reflections of individual thought (Question 8). Indicating consistency in the responses obtained
from respondents, participants’ generally positive view of social media in encouraging discussions and the expression of views is underscored.

![Figure 5.27: Percentage distribution of respondents’ views on social media being an appropriate avenue to express various viewpoints (Question 29)](image)

Still, the majority of respondents (72.32% agreed and/or strongly agreed) felt that social media are appropriate avenues to use when expressing various viewpoints, such as those that arose in the *Cook A Pot of Curry* event held in August 2011 (Question 29 – Figure 5.27). Only 7.8 percent of respondents felt that social media were not an appropriate platform to discuss more ‘sensitive’ viewpoints (Figure 5.27). Also, when asked if public criticism directed at the Singapore government via social media was excessive (Question 31 – Figure 5.28), 52.03 percent of respondents agreed, while 27.68 percent of respondents found the disparagement directed at the government to be acceptable (Figure 5.28).
With the majority of participants having indicated feeling more comfortable expressing viewpoints on Facebook, as compared to other forms of public expression (see Question 27), notions of increased openness in the Singaporean public sphere is suggested. Moreover, the acceptance of new media as a legitimate communication platform, its increased use in political discourses such as GE2011 and GE2015, as well as the increase in opportunities for genuine dialogue social media have created, have all altered participants’ notions of social constraint in Singapore. The largest proportion of respondents (45.02%) agreeing with the accuracy of views and issues discussed on social media platforms as being representative of public sentiment in the lead-up to GE2011 (Question 30 – Figure 5.29), corroborates this point.

**Figure 5.28**: Public criticism directed at the Singapore government via social media has been excessive (Question 31)
Figure 5.29: The views and issues discussed via various social media in the lead-up to the 2011 General Election were accurate representations of public sentiment in Singapore (Question 30)

5.5 National Belonging and Attachment to Home

Singaporean Gen Y's views on national belonging and rootedness were surveyed in Questions 32 to 43. Focused on acquiring deeper understandings of Gen Y’s viewpoints and the impact Facebook has had on these notions, participants were asked about their feelings and connections to ‘home’, the characteristics they identified as being Singaporean, and also their feelings and concerns about living in the age of new media, whilst having to navigate a centrally managed political culture.

In general, participants portrayed positive associations towards Singapore. The majority of participants (70.11%) agreed with feeling a strong sense of belonging in Singapore (Question 34 – Figure 5.30). The majority of respondents (81.92%) also said that they were proud to be Singaporeans (Question 32 – Figure 5.30), and 89.67 percent of participants said they felt lucky to be living in Singapore (Question 35 – Figure 5.30).
Question 33 asked participants to indicate what they associated as being representative of Singaporean-ness. Given a list of 35 options from which to choose, of which multiple options could be selected, respondents ranked speaking Singlish as being the most representative trait of Singaporean-ness (Figure 5.31). HDB flats were indicated as the next most representative attribute of being Singaporean, followed by being surrounded by a large variety of local hawker foods, living in a clean and green city, and having a diversity of races co-existing in Singapore.
Figure 5.31: Participants’ responses indicating the options they associated with being representative of Singaporean-ness (Question 33)
When respondents were asked about needing to be physically present in Singapore to be able to call it home (Question 36 – Figure 5.32), only 16.24 percent agreed. For the majority, or 71.96 percent of respondents, physically being in Singapore was not a prerequisite for attachment to their homeland.

Question 37 asked participants to indicate their understandings of the meaning of ‘home’ (Figure 5.33). The most common response cited in this open-ended question was that ‘home’ was a place that was familiar and comfortable, a place to which participants could relate and felt attached to (32.59%). This was followed by 19.31 percent of respondents saying that ‘home’ was where their family was, where they had support, got emotional strength and felt warmth and closeness. Another 12.93 percent of respondents said that ‘home’ was where they were accepted, could be themselves, felt relaxed and at ease, and had the freedom and openness to exercise their own personal choices. For 11.55 percent of respondents, ‘home’ to them was where they felt safe, secure and protected.

Stability, peacefulness, familiarity and comfort were common themes that ran through the most common responses indicated by participants. Feeling secure and attached to a place was important for respondents, suggesting the significance...
participants placed on having strong social and community ties in their development of meaning and attachment. The significance of relationships and the strength of ties in affecting connections and levels of community engagement have been highlighted in theories such as those put forth by Granovetter (1973), Coleman (1988), Putnam (1995) and Haythornwaite (2005). Bourdieu (2001) has also indicated the importance of interpersonal interactions and norms of reciprocity within social systems, which are necessary for trust, communication and the encouragement of social capital.

Figure 5.33: Percentage distribution of the meaning of ‘home’ categorised thematically based on the open-ended responses participants indicated (Question 37)

Still, when asked about feelings of constraint in Singapore (Question 40), 56.83 percent of respondents said they felt constrained in Singapore. Some 14.39 percent of respondents said they did not feel as if their actions and choices were inhibited in the city-state (Figure 5.34).
In another open-ended question, respondents were asked to indicate their opinions on the desires of Singapore's young adult population (Question 41 – Figure 5.35). Most participants indicated that Singapore's Gen Y wanted freedom and to not be restricted or controlled. These sentiments were further exemplified in the next most common response participants cited – Singapore's Gen Y's desire for increased choice and expression, as well as the reduction of restraint they currently felt. Another commonly given response was Singapore's Gen Y wanting instant gratification, which was followed by them wishing to be accepted and recognised for their talents and abilities. Participants also indicated that Singapore's Gen Y wanted to be heard, to have a voice and have their views considered seriously.
Figure 5.35: Participants’ responses, categorised thematically, to the question inquiring their opinion on the desires of Singapore’s Gen Y population (Question 41)

When asked what distinguished Gen Y from other generations of Singaporeans (Question 43 – Figure 5.36), participants’ open-ended responses most commonly characterised Gen Y with such phrases as being ‘more willing to depart from tradition, not afraid of change, and willing to listen to and appreciate different
points of view'. This was followed by the view that Gen Y was ‘IT savvy and comfortable online’. Still, contrasting views were observed, with participants denoting Gen Y as being ‘influenced by trends, conforming to the majority view’ (Figure 5.36).

The notions that Gen Y was ‘entitled, complacent, lacked social responsibility and detached’, and that Gen Y was ‘vocal, outspoken, opinionated, more skeptical’ were also voiced (Figure 5.36). Other notable responses, though coming from a minute proportion of participants, included: Gen Y being ‘willing to give back to their community’ and Gen Y being simply ‘keyboard warriors’ and only seeming like they were willing to challenge the status quo because they could hide behind their computer screens and be relatively anonymous when they voiced their opinions online (Figure 5.36).
Figure 5.36: Participants’ thoughts on what distinguishes Singapore’s Gen Y from other generations of Singaporeans (Question 43)
5.6 Concluding Remarks

In summary, the majority of participants used Facebook frequently and were still utilising the social networking platform primarily as a social tool. Despite increasingly using Facebook to gain access to a broad range of news and information channels, participants felt that Facebook was a less reliable information source. Participants’ level of engagement and connection with their immediate neighbourhoods was also found to be low, suggesting low levels of social capital, norms of reciprocity and community attachment levels.

Nevertheless, participants were largely in agreement with the appropriateness of Facebook being used as a platform for the expression of views. Having opened new avenues of communication and expression, which were previously not available, participants also felt that views expressed on Facebook could be viewed as accurate representations of individual sentiments. However, ambivalence was observed across the range of responses indicated, suggesting that participants were still skeptical of the truth and the accuracy of the views and information observed on Facebook.

The next chapter will detail the results obtained from the semi-structured interviews. The topics covered in semi-structured interviews parallel those addressed in the survey component of this study and were aimed at acquiring a deeper understanding of the viewpoints of Singapore’s young adult generation.
6.1 **Introduction**

Semi-structured interviews made up the qualitative aspect of the mixed-methods approach this study adopted (see Appendix B for a list of guiding questions used). Topics paralleling those covered in the survey (see Appendix A) were addressed in the semi-structured interviews so that a more comprehensive understanding of participants’ perspectives and motivations could be obtained. For participants who had completed the survey before their interview sessions, the interview sessions provided an opportunity for follow-up questions to be asked. This enabled a more in-depth understanding of participants’ perspectives.

Topics addressed in the semi-structured interviews included: The uses and perceptions of Facebook, the dynamics behind governance and choice in Singapore from Gen Y’s perspective, notions of truth and accountability, Gen Y’s propensity to participate in civic issues in the age of new media, notions of belonging and community engagement. Interviews were either conducted individually or in groups of two or more individuals, and a total of 45 participants participated in this phase of the study.

Once all of the interview sessions were transcribed, the data were sorted and categorised based on themes that emerged from the data set. Each participant was also assigned a code to ensure his or her anonymity (see Appendix C). The following chapter will present the data obtained from the conducted interviews thematically. To facilitate the flow of argument, different aspects of the topics addressed in the interviews will be attended to in several sections in this chapter. A more in-depth examination and discussion of the findings obtained from these semi-structured interviews will be conducted alongside the results of the survey questionnaire (see Chapter Five) in Chapter Seven.
6.2 *Facebook Usage and Changing Patterns*

When asked about their Facebook usage levels, responses indicated high levels of use. Responses such as Facebook ‘is always on in the background’, I am ‘practically connected all the time...I just leave it open...’, and ‘my friends and I stalk each other’, indicate participants’ consistent Facebook use. The addiction-like, almost automatic action and ‘natural desire’ to be logged on and constantly connected to Facebook were also apparent. Participants attributed the ease of logging onto Facebook via mobile devices and apps as contributing to their tendency to log on to Facebook repeatedly throughout the day, every day.

Participants specified Facebook’s functionality as being a primary reason for their continued Facebook use. Unlike previous forms of social media, Facebook allowed access to a wide variety of information. Besides having to sieve through ‘irrelevant material’, the information obtained from Facebook was considered valuable. For instance,

> ...if you talk about parenthood, parenthood in general on Facebook, the info I get ranges from very useful tips on how to take care of your baby, very good articles on child upbringing and development...[to] the posting of photos of babies...so, it can be both useful and somewhat irritating...it is like useful information but also the reality show part, you know, the “Hey, look at my baby”, “Come see what is going on” thing... [Z]

Other participants concurred with this viewpoint. Unlike earlier forms of social media, participants felt that Facebook transmitted more succinct and digestible bites of information. With Facebook status updates limiting the number of words each post carried, users were forced to get ‘feelings out there in quick, sharp, yet strong manners, and people actually read [all of this] because it is so concise...’.

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42 An app is ‘a software application developed specifically for use on small, wireless computing devices, such as smartphones and tablets, rather than desktop or laptop computers’ (TechTarget 2016).

43 ‘Info’ is an abbreviation for the word ‘information’.
Participants also described Facebook as being a ‘resource base’ where Facebook could be used ‘to ask for help’, and as being a platform ‘to express my feelings...[and] views, to share information, to share pictures, to share things that I have read...’. Instead of just connecting with friends, Facebook allowed access to an unprecedented amount of information that has enhanced the breadth, depth and speed at which news and information were spread. Additionally, participants described Facebook as being a filter, facilitating the collection of particular kinds of information on specific topics of interest.

One participant also said that she now used Facebook to get a sense of the kinds of reactions or sentiments her friends had in relation to issues that surfaced in other forms of media and used such information to formulate her own thoughts and ideas:

...I have friends who are very vocal, very well read and very updated about current news, so they would constantly post their opinions and thoughts and feelings on certain issues that are affecting Singaporeans...and then you’ll see a whole bunch of replies almost instantaneously, right after something had been posted on their Walls, [with others] adding their own opinions...and then you get to engage in some kind of discussion with each other, especially when we find that our opinions don’t exactly match or when we agree with one another...(Mi)

Another participant added that the virality\textsuperscript{44} of posts helped him pick out the ‘important stuff’. ‘I more or less get updates about the world around through Facebook because it is so instant and everyone shares what’s important’. Yet, other participants said that they increasingly did not take information circulating on Facebook too seriously.

\textsuperscript{44} The word ‘viral’ is used to describe how rapidly and widely something (e.g. a picture or a post) becomes very popular and gets circulated or shared on the internet.
When asked to reflect on Facebook usage patterns from the time participants first began using Facebook up to the present, participants collectively noted that their usage patterns had changed. Reasons participants cited for such changes included the transformation of Facebook functions, changes in life stages and personal motivations for using Facebook, as well as the amount of engagement in which participants were willing to partake on social media itself.

A general decline in the attention participants paid to the social networking site was noted. Participants said they did not want to get updates on the everyday happenings of their friends’ ‘mundane lives’ and deliberately chose not to log onto Facebook as often as they used to. Participants who had already begun working also said they did not need Facebook as a platform to facilitate group projects anymore, unlike when they were still studying and needed to coordinate assignments with classmates. As such, they did not need to log on as frequently as before.

Another participant added that, initially, he ‘was very idealistic’ and would ‘shoot [people and their comments on Facebook] down’. He later realised that it was ‘pointless’ to be articulating ““serious” viewpoints or trying to initiate discussions on Facebook as ‘...there are [sic] so many opinions online...’, and these online exchanges were typically ‘very emotive’, consequently defeating the purpose of using Facebook as a platform for ‘real discussions’. Other participants who articulated similar viewpoints said they now regarded Facebook as a ‘very superficial thing’ and did not bother ‘filtering through [and deciding] which [article] is important and which is not’. For these participants, Facebook was a platform they used purely as a way ‘to connect with friends’ on a very casual basis.

Other participants, however, were still ‘addicted’ to Facebook and said that their logging on to Facebook had become second nature, or so much of a ‘habit’ that they ‘never really think [sic]’ about what they did on Facebook. ‘It’s almost as if you were to ask, “What do you do with a mobile phone?” – I just turn it on!’, said a participant. Some participants also said that realising Facebook’s capability in advancing various agendas was another reason they changed the way they utilised
Facebook. These participants said they now used Facebook as a tool to advertise events, products, and even to further activist causes.

...When you first started out, you post stupid shit like “Oh, I am going for lunch now”, “I am doing this, I am doing that”...but, after using it a bit more, you start to understand that people can or have started utilising Facebook and the power it has in connections to drive a product or an idea forward...[the] “Oh I am going to uni45 now” or “tonight’s dinner in hall was crap”, that was just the basic status update and no one really was utilising Facebook at that point to drive an idea...[Jn]

Besides the emphasis apparent on the value of using Facebook’s functions in going about their daily lives, realising the extent of Facebook’s capabilities and understanding how to optimally utilise Facebook’s functionality, responses also stressed how an individual’s circle of friends and their collective Facebook usage exercised an effect on the ways participants experienced Facebook.

The reason why our usage is different is essentially because it centres around our friends...his friends use it a lot to connect, and that is why it is user-centric...there is something to connect to, there is something to comment on, there is something to reply to...for me, my friends don’t do anything...they don’t do anything on Facebook, I mean occasionally there will be one picture, one comment, but that’s it, they rather text me...[E]

The change in the way participants consumed Facebook extended to the way participants involved themselves on the social networking site. Participants noted their having become more conscious of what they posted online and were now less willing to divulge emotions that they considered ‘too personal’. Attributing this change to maturity, having started work and thus, wanting to convey a different kind of image, one participant said

45 ‘Uni’ is an abbreviated form of the word, ‘University’.
...[I used to post] mostly personal stuff...but, I tend to be more private now...like before, where ever I went I would just post about it, check-in, that kind of thing...post photos...I don’t know why, but now I have become a bit more private, and I don’t really post photos of my family or my husband...sometimes when he [my husband] posts and it’s a bit mushy, I would feel like “Aiyooooo, why like that? Why you post!??!!...Don’t do that...oh my God!!! Nooooooo!!”...I don’t know if it is because of age, but ya, I am getting more private nowadays...(Id)

Likewise, other participants said they have become increasingly more reserved on Facebook - ‘When I first joined Facebook, it was very open, I didn't have to think a lot...but now I actually do have to think quite a bit about what I want to post...’.

Participants’ concern with the presentation of self, as expressed in these quotes, suggests the presence of underlying social rules that participants felt they had to adhere to. Ensuring social order and the continuation of socially valued practices, Bourdieu’s (1977, pp. 72-75) notion of the habitus as internalised structure denotes the reproduction of social rules and norms alongside the practice of individual agency. Bourdieu’s (1977) suggestion of a logic of practice forming the basis structuring practices acted out by individuals in his notion of the habitus also suggests a restriction on the kinds of actions actors were able display. This conceptualisation illuminates participants’ descriptions of how they consumed and engaged on Facebook, and can be further explained by Goffman's (1959) theory of the presentation of self, as further explored in Chapter Seven.

Goffman’s (1959) theory of the presentation of self suggests the presence of habitual standardised practices, analogous to dramatic scripts, that influence how individual expressions and actions are presented to others. Goffman (1959) contends that how actions are displayed, interpreted and perceived by society demonstrates the constraint imposed upon individuals who have been socialised within the social group. These repertoires of coordinated practice and their enforcement upon individuals reveal the presence of underlying social systems that affect the display of individual practices.
Additionally, participants’ descriptions of concern and the types of considerations they process before deciding to engage on Facebook suggest the transference of practices from the face-to-face realm to that of the digital. The same standards and restraints used to order society were being applied to interactions in the digital realm.

6.3 Communicating via Facebook

Participants said they used Facebook as a means of communication, as it was convenient and helped bridge physical boundaries that were difficult to overcome when using other methods or platforms of communication. Facebook’s approachability also made it less intrusive, allowing Facebook interactions to remain casual and less intimidating. However, despite being able to facilitate interaction, communicating via Facebook was considered impersonal.

Participants also indicated that they chose to connect with others via Facebook mostly because they were not familiar with these people in real life. Comments such as ‘...if I don’t really know the person, I might use Facebook...but if the person is in my so called inner circle of friends, then I would probably use Whatsapp’ and ‘chatting on the phone is very personal...only the closest friends or bf and family do that...social media is for the most distant...online, u could just switch it off if u don’t feel like entertaining...', emphasise this point.

The convenience of using Facebook to communicate has resulted in the impersonalisation of communication. Although Facebook helped reach large audiences almost instantaneously, participants felt that the social networking site

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46 Whatsapp is another social media platform that is more similar to a messaging system, allowing users the ability to send messages and share photos, links, voice memos and ascertain users’ geographic locations with friends. Whatsapp also has a group function, allowing individuals to create groups where they can simultaneously participate in a ‘Group Chat’. Recently, Whatsapp began offering voice calls and rolled out their web platforms. Prior to that, Whatsapp could only be used on smart phones after users downloaded the application. Details such as the other party’s phone number are needed before a ‘chat’ can take place.

47 Shorthand for ‘boyfriend’, as observed in an online Facebook chat.

48 Shorthand for ‘you’, as observed in an online Facebook chat.
had become soulless – ‘...It is so convenient now that you lose that personal touch...’: Communicating via Facebook lacked verbal cues and body language, increasing the propensity for miscommunication and the distortion of the actual messages being conveyed. ‘People might think that we are being harsh, when we actually are not...or being bitchy, when we are not’. Moreover,

You could be thinking one thing, but the moment you post something online, it is out there for people, the world, to see, and you could very well have something else in mind, but if people interpret whatever you posted in a certain way, then you could very well [be misunderstood]...(AT)

The tendency to misjudge posts and the insensitivity participants observed in online interactions was attributed to individuals not being able to respond directly to others’ feelings when communicating via Facebook. ‘When you type stuff, you don’t really like think about the person’s reaction to the stuff that you type...’ especially since the reaction ‘is not immediate [or in front of you]...’.

Additionally, the speed and ease at which comments could be posted on Facebook could sometimes cause individuals to react faster than they had time to properly process the information they wanted to convey:

...It is so fast, it’s like click and it’s up there...it is instantaneous and in a sense it is actually faster than speech...because speech you can still try and censor yourself, but sometimes we type really fast and bam it’s up there and then you go – ok, hmmm, this might have been read wrongly...(AT)

Because of the lack of emotion, tone and sensory cues when interacting via Facebook, participants said such methods of communication were not considered ‘a proper form of communication’. Participants described Facebook interactions as being ‘more of an add on’, ‘a stepping stone’, ‘an ice breaker’, something that made it ‘easier to talk to someone you [did not] know online, rather than have to find the guts to come up and speak to the person in person’. 
Making initiating or continuing interactions easier, Facebook was viewed as a way of deepening relationships. Yet, Facebook was not viewed as an acceptable replacement for actual face-to-face contact. ‘...It’s first face-to-face interaction and then getting to know each other and then Facebook, rather than the opposite of Facebook then get to know each other in real-life...’. Real-life relationships and interactions were still considered essential in establishing associations with others.

6.4 Assumed Knowledge: Acceptable Behaviour Online

The rules dictating appropriate decorum online were not explicitly articulated or specified, but participants expressed a mutual “assumed” understanding of what was considered acceptable behaviour when interacting on Facebook. For instance, participants reported the incongruity they felt when they received inappropriate comments or reactions from individuals with whom they were not well acquainted:

I find it weird that people I don’t know start commenting on my posts or pictures, whatever I post...like, “Do I even know you??!!”...Sometimes like you know, you don’t know me, so please don’t pretend that you know me...(Ma)

Real-life relationships and the norms associated with the performance of social interactions were identified as the basis to which actions were deemed appropriate or inappropriate when interacting on Facebook. ‘It’s like there are some people you can ‘like’ but you don’t comment...’, it all depends on ‘how well you know the person’, your ‘traditional relationship, face-to-face kind...’. This notion of needing to know, to a certain extent, with whom you were interacting when communicating via Facebook contradicts other perspectives participants expressed. Earlier, participants were noted saying that Facebook communication was impersonal and was used as a way to strengthen or deepen weak relationships.

The social nature of Facebook’s use, described by participants as being their primary purpose in engaging on Facebook, indicates the need to establish contact
via the social networking platform at a certain point. The specific point, at which it became appropriate to contact others and/or find out more about acquaintances, especially when the relationship that was first formed offline was still new, was, however, difficult to determine. Besides indicating vagueness in the strength of real-life friendships before it was ‘ok to interact online’, participants consistently described the need to respect other people’s privacy and the need to practise restraint, when they, for instance, ’Facebook surfed’.

When talking about Facebook surfing, participants in various interview sessions were particularly insistent on asserting the difference between Facebook surfing and Facebook stalking. Although Facebook was repeatedly described as ‘...useful because I get to see how my secondary school friends are doing, how my primary school friends are doing, how my overseas friends are doing...’, and suggesting that contacting others via Facebook ‘takes away the awkwardness of approaching people you hardly know, participants were very clear in stressing that Facebook surfing, their going ‘around and look[ing] at everyone’s profiles...’, was harmless and not equivalent to stalking people. Facebook stalking or having an unhealthy obsession with watching others and wanting to find out things about them was, however, not tolerable.

...I used to be very addicted to Facebook...as in I had to go online everyday just to see what people were up to, and my friends called me kpo49...but it was like no, I’m not kpo, ok...it’s more of you already know someone and if you know what is going on, then it makes things easier...you don’t have to say “Oh! How you doing?”, you know, that kind of thing...[but] I knew people found [my doing this] weird, so I stopped...or I [would], like, go check their profiles out, but I won’t tell them...nowadays I don’t lah, it’s more of like two or three days, then I will log on and then start looking at things on Facebook... (Id)

49 ‘Kpo’ is an abbreviated form of the word ‘kaypoh’, which is a Singlish term derived from the Chinese dialect, Hokkien, and refers to being a busybody, nosing or prying around other people’s business (Singlish Dictionary n.d.).
Participants indicated there being a fine line between getting ‘legitimate’ updates on friends or acquaintances and being kpo. Obsessively watching others and intentionally discovering too much information that was not ‘public knowledge’ was explained as being socially inappropriate. Nevertheless, the stronger the real-life relationship, the more acceptable it was to be watching another’s Facebook profile.

Despite acknowledging that they would be judged if their friends found out they were actively looking at other people’s Facebook pages in detail, participants described using Facebook as a tool to ‘check up’ on others. Yet, being discrete about engaging in such an activity was key, they stressed. All of the participants who admitted to habitually taking to Facebook and looking at other people’s profiles said they did so only in private – ‘it’s all there, the information is all posted for you to see...and they didn’t privatise the posts!’.

Some participants also said they have since stopped obsessively looking at other peoples’ Facebook pages. However, they still continue to do so particularly when trying to make decisions about individuals they did not know much about – ‘...like, for group projects, or choosing hall mates, that kind of thing, I will go on Facebook and check out the person’s background’, ‘...otherwise how to know if the person is a psycho?’.

An understanding of prevailing social rules and the need for tangible relationships before direct interaction was acceptable online, as indicated in such narratives, further suggests the transference of practices used in the structuring of the offline realm to that of the digital. Nevertheless, agreement on the kinds of acceptable practices governing the presentation of self online had not yet been established. This is evident in the differing views participants described about communicating

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50 By setting privacy settings on individual Facebook posts, users are able control who had access to their posts or comments. The different privacy levels ranged from ‘public’, where everyone on Facebook’s platform could access the post, ‘friends of friends’, which allowed all of their friends in their friend lists and the friends of these friends to see the post, or ‘custom’, where the user was able to choose the specific individuals who had access to that specific post on Facebook.
on Facebook, as well as the kinds of behaviour they felt was acceptable on Facebook being different from those of their friends.

Participants’ exposure to scrutiny and judgment by other Facebook users, resulting in their imposition of restraint and discretion when continuing their practice of Facebook surfing, also suggests apprehension concerning their going against social norms and practices. Such apprehension exemplifies Bourdieu’s (1977), as well as Goffman’s (1959) notion of an underlying logic or script that structures actions and practices, despite individuals having the agency to decide how they want to strategise within the bounds of that logic or to present themselves. The underlying notion of action being affected by being watched, scrutinised and judged by others also underscores similarities with Foucault’s (1982) notion of surveillance as social control in his theory of subject formation.

6.5 Alternative Information Sources and the Prevalence of Choice

When discussing the influence Facebook has had in terms of its relevance as a news and information resource, respondents highlighted the effect interest, newsworthiness and the applicability of the content being shared, discussed, and/or commented on had in affecting the amount of attention specific posts garnered. Trending, viral, or “hot” topics that were highlighted on individual Facebook News Feeds reflected the differing attitudes accorded to articles of varying significance. Participants also repeatedly said that they only shared information they found interesting, were directly affected by, or which they felt their friends could benefit from.

Coupled with the way social media platforms such as Facebook were set up, participants highlighted the influence social circles or friend networks had in directing the kind of information users received. A key difference between social media and traditional media was that now friend networks and their preferences and perspectives were dictating the kinds of information seen on Facebook: ‘It is kind of never going to reach you if your friends don’t know about it...’. This design
feature could, in fact, aid in broadening the scope of information and articles to which users were exposed or could restrict the kinds of articles users saw.

By encouraging the expression of individual viewpoints, and especially the perspectives articulated by alternative socio-political sites, Facebook has highlighted the ease with which views that ran contrary to the standard government rhetoric could be accessed. The appeal of having options has contributed to increased interest and probing from the bottom-up.

...TOC has given a very intelligent voice, very good articles, they don’t look one sided...they try and give very good arguments, which are contradictory to the mainstream media...and so, that’s why people are like... “Ohhhhh, I didn’t think of that”...and once you say “Ohhhhh, I didn’t think of that”, immediately the mainstream news, the legitimacy of the mainstream news, or its credibility, is corroded...you start to think how come the mainstream media didn't say that...(Sh)

Alternative information sources ‘poke holes’ at the material received from the mainstream media and individuals can now ‘make [their] own judgment’ about which sources to believe and accept.

Previously you've only got one Straits Times which tries to look objective, but its all bedek lah...they try to be objective lah – they try to take different opinions, but in the end its just agree with the government, take the bitter pill, take the bitter medicine...perhaps Singaporeans don't want to take the bitter medicine anymore and they are looking for second opinions, other doctors' opinions, other perspectives...(Sh)

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51 Reference to the socio-political website, The Online Citizen, which claims to have ‘made significant inroads in the area of cyber activism in Singapore’ (Theonlinecitizen.com 2012).

52 A slang term used in vernacular Malay language, or Melayu Pasar (meaning market, or commoner language, as compared to formal Bahasa Melayu, which is more refined) with the meaning trying to bluff, con, to not tell the full truth or mislead.
The shift in the role social media such as Facebook now play highlights the ‘democratisation of the internet...[where] previously the internet was just a repository of information...[but] now it’s not, you can do things, I can add things...everyone has a stake in it...’. This is in stark contrast to the previous submissive and uncomplaining approach participants indicated existing towards the acceptance of government rhetoric, as displayed in the way traditional media in Singapore were disseminated (see Chapter Three). The openness and alternatives available online have encouraged more expressions and the articulation of views online – ‘...previously, you had this one opinion being forced down your throat... now, there are other answers to the questions...’.

The increase in agency and choice to explore alternative information sources and then formulate conclusions about the information with which social media presented them has enhanced the feeling of independence amongst participants. With Gen Y being ‘...a more educated generation’, and their being willing to ask questions and not ‘...be confined, constrained and so held-by-the-hand, or accepting of the you-do-as-I-say-with-the-rattan kind of thing...’, the use of social media platforms such as Facebook has inculcated the preference for the co-production of knowledge, the notion of ‘consumer-based creation, or people-centred creation...’.

Participants also credited Facebook with providing ‘variety’ and ‘depth’, highlighting Facebook’s capability of classifying information, sieving out unnecessary noise and untrustworthy perspectives, as well as steering attention towards specific pieces of information.

It is like windows of information lah and people help filter it for you...it used to be if you wanted something you had to go through everything on the web and sieve out what you wanted [all by yourself]...but now, if you know that a certain person has this certain interest as well, you can follow him [on Facebook] and then he becomes a filter lah...he narrows or highlights the specific kind of info
that I am looking for...[and] it creates depth in whatever subject matter that I am looking at...(Z)

The ability to cultivate curiosities, define specific interests, and even boost pre-existing inclinations has never been so accessible. Highlighting the opportunities for agency in the way participants were exposed to social media, the purpose and use of social media platforms and the kinds of information sourced and absorbed from Facebook have played a part in determining the impact social media have had on Singapore's society. Yet, participants highlighted the need to discern the accuracy and credibility of articles and the content circulated online, as the reliability and believability of content were an issue they constantly had to negotiate.

6.6 **Voice and the Expression of Views**

You can express yourself to a certain or limited extent, [which is] better than nothing...you can't unleash yourself fully, but at least you can...(Q)

When reflecting on how much Facebook had helped increase their voice online, one participant said that he didn't feel Facebook made much of a difference:

At least for me, I don’t think I’ve become...a lot more expressive, whether it is political or on any other issue using social media...but, it has helped me to be sort of more aware of what other people are saying...(Ki)

Participants felt that the openness of views expressed on Facebook was dependent largely on an individual’s perception of the effects articulating opinions would cause. The willingness and desire to voice opinions on Facebook was affected not only by the context of control that was prevalent in Singapore, but also by the level of comfort and entitlement Singaporeans had become accustomed to:
...With regard to the basics, they are contented so I guess the mentality is why get into trouble and risk all of that...unless their basic needs are being threatened or their jobs are at stake, and they are going to lose everything right away, then perhaps they would be more active, but when everything is ok and peaceful, they have secure jobs, people won’t do much to rock that stability (JJ).

Negotiating the possible implications of voicing their perspectives suggests the way in which the habitus not only limits actions, but also actors’ empowerment in making decisions that shape their lived realities (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 72-75). Moreover, as Ortner (1989, 2006) has argued, by taking into consideration the role culture and contextual discourses have in influencing social practices, better understandings of the relationship between structure and agency can be obtained.

Yet, another participant argued that because of the constraint overpowering individual choices in Singapore, individuals would jump on any opportunity to oppose the controlling dynamics they were constantly subjected to.

The whole environment is like just keep quiet and just get on with your life, don’t like re shi sheng fei ⁵³...it’s like an environment where you are encouraged to just, as long as there is food on the table, just be contented and live on...I think precisely because of this backdrop that there are people who will want to go against this and there will be eruptions of voices in this peaceful calmness...a pseudo-calmness, it is like being repressed...some people think that because there is more deviance, you need more control...my take is that because there is more control, that’s why there is more deviance...(Q)

Nevertheless, participants were of the opinion that social media helped individuals feel more at ease when contemplating publicly expressing their views. ‘You are more comfortable when so many people are saying it at one go...’. And, because ‘it is not like it is a small group of people saying it...’, ‘...you won’t be like the only

⁵³ A Chinese idiom that means 'to stir trouble'.
person’ saying these things, [so, the government] ‘can't keep track lah…’, and thus, making it hard for you to ‘get singled out and get into trouble…’.

The new-found ‘courage’ and the ‘safety in numbers’ individuals felt when engaging online was the main reason participants adduced for the increase in people using social media to voice their views. By hiding behind a computer screen and assuming anonymity, acting within a group not only made voices louder, but also significantly reduced the fear of punishment.

This reduction of individuality having an impact on individuals’ willingness to go against social norms underscores the significance of Foucault’s (1977, pp. 201-215) panoptic mechanisms. By acting within groups, individuality is greatly reduced and the perpetuation of the all-encompassing effects of power structures over the bodies ordered within it, which demands conformity and limits individual agency, decreases significantly. The automatic deindividualisation of actors encouraging the inclination participants described to utilise Facebook as a platform for the articulation of views also emphasises the increased power individuals had when acting in groups.

However, despite individuals being ‘behind a screen’, helping spur them to speak up, opinions voiced online were regarded differently when compared to communicating challenging perspectives face-to-face. Additionally, participants questioned the effectiveness and purposefulness of voicing views and expressions online:

...I know of very educated individuals who make comments you'd associate with lesser educated people, people who don’t see things in a broad perspective...so it's not necessarily the case that all educated people would have the same sort of response...for instance, there are some more balanced perspectives, and they tend to be more logical, but at the same time you hear some really emotional ones where the logic just flies out the window and it becomes this emotive rant about why we shouldn't have foreigners in Singapore or how the
government is evil, and this, and that...they just complain about everything! (AT)

Because Facebook has allowed for greater voice and expression from the populace, the extrapolation of opinions, translating ‘personal troubles...into community troubles...’ has resulted in overgeneralisations, irrational remarks and individuals losing sight of Facebook's purposefulness when used as a platform for discussion.

The expectation is that if you are more educated you would tend to see things with a broader perspective, you won’t immediately say “Oh down with the government, the government is evil”, but then obviously that’s not the case...even if I don’t agree with what you are saying, we should be respectful and have some meaningful discussion...in a sense it is like we are “too educated” and we expect everyone else to be like us, and we are so-called “rational beings” and we can engage in meaningful discourse, we can agree to disagree and not result in fist fights, but I think that is an unstated expectation...(AT)

And, although it was good that people could ‘vent’ online, as it indicated the ‘freedom of speech’ and ability to decide to do something online, having ‘just people venting...is not people having an educated discussion on the policies or the topics...it is just people saying “I am not making enough money” or “I can’t afford this, I can’t afford that”’ – It is mostly about ‘venting out frustrations of repressed freedom’. The emotive aspect of online ‘rants’ also made participants question the significance of views expressed on Facebook.

...you don’t really think twice about [posting] because it is so easy...it’s so easy just to be angry about something and then express it online...at that point in time, yes [it might truly be what you feel]...but, if that person takes time to cool down, he may realise that when he posted the comments, it might not have been a good time to have spoken about his feelings...(An)
In stark contrast to participants’ increasing concern over the presentation of their own self-image when interacting on Facebook, participants noted the ease with which judgments without thought of consequences could be expressed online. Suggesting the general lack of concern individuals had for accountability when engaging in the virtual realm, especially when voicing views in a group, a participant lamented:

...there is nothing to stop them or make them pause for a while and think about what they are saying...everything is just, you know, a, few keys away, you just type and it is instant...and even if they realise that something inappropriate has been said, the damage has already been done...(Mi)

The sentiments involved in expressing personal viewpoints online, coupled with the higher propensity for misunderstandings because of the subjective nature of interpretations, as well as the added expectations people placed on each other, have resulted in participants proposing that Facebook stick to its original social characteristics and not be encouraged as a platform that could facilitate political discussion or activism. ‘...There are so many opinions online it kind of becomes very confusing...you become overwhelmed by the flood of opinions...’. And, ‘cos it’s just the keyboard and the screen, you don’t have your friends in front of you, ..your emotions become heightened and you just type in whatever...you are not thinking...’ and you end up losing all ‘objectivity’.

Nonetheless, another participant felt that the emergence of expressiveness online is an indication of the change in ‘the nature of our voice...instead of it being perhaps one-to-one or one-to-a-few, it’s one-to-many now...but it’s still the same voice, and it is still subject to the same scrutiny and accountability pressures...’.

Corroborating with the responses of other participants who said that Facebook helped communicate viewpoints, amplifying voices that have been there all along, the intensification of personal commentary was underscored. Still, yet another participant commented that ‘the testing of the borders or boundaries [was still something that was] left to the brave’:
...Like the TOC guys, these are the brave guys who are willing to test the markers first, they put their neck on the line and test the waters...you’ve got to be a bit crazy to do it right, but these people stick their necks out for the rest of us, so a lot of credit goes to them for doing that...you need these guys first, the first movers, the guys who don’t mind getting their necks chopped, and that’s how you test the OB markers lah...that’s only way to test it and find out what we can do and what not...(Sh).

Nevertheless, Facebook’s ability to spread information instantaneously, permitting direct access to government figures, ensured comments were directed and seen by specific individuals. Such forms of empowerment helped increase Facebook’s value as a legitimate platform for the expression of views.

When people want answers this is the fastest way...cos if you were to direct [your grievances] to The Straits Times, most probably your letters won’t be published...so [this way], it’s straight to Vivian\textsuperscript{54} [Balakrishanan], and it’ll go to him...people are more aware of their power and that this is an avenue to turn to...(Sh)

\section*{6.7 Accuracy, Accountability and Trust}

The ‘exponential growth’ in the way information was shared online and how viral a topic was has contributed to the speed and volume at which information travelled in social networks. One participant explained the extent and reach of information spread on Facebook:

\begin{quote}
...I put something on my Wall...out of 800 friends, maybe 100 ‘like’ the thing, out of the 100, maybe 50 [of their friends ‘like’ or share the thing], each 50 have another 100 [‘likes’ or shares]...things spread
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{54} Dr Vivian Balakrishnan was, in 2012, the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources. When severe floods occurred in various locations in Singapore in 2011 and 2012, outraged citizens used Facebook to directly communicate their grief and demands for answers from the minister.
very fast...and that’s the thing, last time we never had this...we had the newspaper, the physical copy of the newspaper only and you have to spread everything through word of mouth... you talk to me about it, I’ll tell you or someone else, something else or whatever, and then no one remembers properly right - the idea gets corrupted along the way...here, it is online – I just have to press ‘like’, my 800 friends will see that I ‘like’ it, and the exact info is shared...(Sh)

The ease and convenience of social media has encouraged an influx of articles and perspectives that are shared and circulated online, and participants highlighted the need to discern the accuracy and credibility of articles and the content they saw and conveyed on Facebook. The majority of participants interviewed stressed caution, emphasising that they would read more than one source to determine the accuracy and extensiveness of information, especially for the articles in which they were interested, so that they could ‘...form an opinion or to make sure [they got] the full story’ – ‘...To just accept one side of the story only is quite narrow thinking...’, they said.

Participants stressed that when it came to opinions, it was difficult to decipher what individuals were really thinking and the motives behind their posts. Truths, influencing factors and accuracy were difficult to pick out:

Some people just want to show that they know politics, while I know friends who are really into supporting one side of the government or the other...telling the difference between the two, that is the problem because you can’t really tell...they might share stuff like, “Oh, this rally is happening, let’s go and watch”, or you see pictures of friends at these rallies, but you don’t know whether that is just to show that they are aware of what is going on or they are really very interested in the rally...knowing the person personally will definitely help in discerning if it is a truth, whether it is what they really think or not...(Mk)
Participants also observed that on social media, it was easy to sensationalise matters, distort truths, and/or draw attention to specific issues just to make them seem ‘fashionable’. For instance, in the build-up towards GE2011, ‘...everyone was talking about it on social media, in the coffee shops, everywhere...[and] if you were not involved then something was wrong...’, making you feel compelled to know and engage in at least something related to politics. The extent and influence social media had was highlighted by another participant who noted that even lifestyle bloggers, who usually blogged about things that ‘don't usually matter’, were suddenly interested and started commenting on Singapore’s political situation during the lead up to GE2011.

Moreover, as indicated earlier, by acting in groups, the added courage social media gave individuals made participants feel that ‘people just do not understand that what they say online can affect other people...’ and that there are repercussions, just like in the offline world – ‘You can’t just, you know, criticise someone online and then meet him the next day and pretend or expect to behave like nothing happened...’. Needing to be accountable for what was posted online, as well as simultaneously maintain their own social roles and positions were reasons participants cited for their practice of self-censorship.

When reflecting on their own use of Facebook as a platform for the expression of views, participants said they felt responsible for the views they aired or shared online. Observing that Facebook, unlike online forums, was ‘linked to your own account...so, people can actually identify you by name’ was a thought that helped ensure individuals upheld proper decorum when interacting online. Furthermore, the fact that posts on Facebook were going out to ‘the group of people that are in your social network...and these are people that probably will matter to you, that’s why they are your Facebook friends...[also added] pressure to be sort of accountable for the views that you express...’.

The personal responsibility participants felt about the content of their posts made them stop and ‘think for a while’. Additionally, respondents said they repeatedly asked themselves, ‘Should I actually post this?’ before posting or commenting on
anything online. Echoing the need to be careful about what they chose to post, respondents said they posted comments ‘only when appropriate’, or ‘when it is something I am involved in or something that I am implicated in…or, when I get pissed off by what I think is some morally outrageus thing…’.

Respondents who were working in the public sector also highlighted cautiousness when voicing views on Facebook. The impressions posts on Facebook conveyed, as well as the judgments others passed on the content of each Facebook post, were thus, significant factors affecting participants’ considerations of what to post and when to engage on Facebook.

Facebook is a representation of ourselves, it reflects who we are…all of us are aware of that…so, whether we are vocal, how vocal or what you put up there is really a reflection of who you are…(Mu)

The constant need to reflect on the propriety of their actions and their feeling compelled to ensure the observance of acceptable social practices even in interactions on Facebook had, however, aroused personal tensions and conflicting thoughts on Facebook’s purpose:

Facebook is supposed to be my freedom, my right to have freedom of speech, right; if not then there is actually no point in having a Facebook account, at least for me lah…and if I have to hide my thoughts even further, then it’s kind of pointless…but, at the same time, I realise that everything I say will be reflected to people in my social network…and so there is this sort of fear, accountability that I feel…[what I post] might get shared, or it might get passed on, so the sphere of influence might get bigger than my social network…so there is still that sort of self-censorship in that sense to preserve some sense of accountability, at least to myself…(Ki)

When discussing the amount of trust participants placed on information obtained from Facebook, participants said having a pre-existing personal relationship
allowed them insights into the friend’s interests and curiosities, and enabled them the ability to assess the friend’s reliability and the credibility of the article posted. Participants indicated that having background knowledge of a person’s character made them feel less skeptical and more accepting of the information their friends shared with them. Compared to accessing information from sources to which one did not have a personal connection, information shared by friends was more relevant and was considered to be more significant and dependable.

This is your friend who is recommending it to you, and you trust your friend more than the TV or newspaper...you trust your friend cos your friend won't give you crap...they won't recommend you crap and you know this guy, this guy is a serious person and he is recommending this article...like, I 'like' this thing right, and you know I am a very serious person...so you are curious, why would this guy recommend that thing...it's like as if I've endorsed that thing...and I've checked it through and I think it is legit and I think that it is interesting for you to read, and because of that you will believe it more...(Sh)

The trust participants placed in their friends to circulate accurate and trustworthy articles online not only highlights the importance participants placed on accountability and the presentation of self (Goffman 1959), but also the effect ties had on the flow of resources (Haythornthwaite 2005). These recurring concepts were observed in the survey results and will be further discussed in Chapter Seven.

6.8 Surveillance Online

The Singapore government’s adoption of the use of social media in its method of governance, especially since GE2011, signaled to participants the government’s acknowledgement of the immense power social media have, the increase in

55 ‘Cos’ is an abbreviated form of the word ‘because’.
accessibility and interaction social media enabled, and social media’s usefulness as a communicative platform. Still, participants questioned the motives behind using social media platforms such as Facebook as a platform for the expression of views.

Participants acknowledged the PAP’s effort in embracing change, the modifications it made to its approach and its attempts at listening to the needs and demands of its citizenry. However, participants felt that this willingness to embrace new media should not be commended too highly. Finally succumbing and admitting to social media’s power and influence, especially after persistent resistance and numerous attempts at controlling social media content, could be viewed as the PAP attempting to appease its populace and, thus, ensure sustaining its power and control over the Singaporean populace.

I guess they are making more effort to go on the ground and interact with such groups…but my personal opinion is that is it more reactionary than anything else cos for the past 10-15 years, if you have not done anything about it, why now? Suddenly, you want to do something about it? ...Why wait till now, only now when the opposition comes and says “Hey, there is a widening gap, I am going to help these people if I get elected” and then suddenly this joker from the PAP comes up and says “Oh, I am going to do the same thing, if not even better”...(Im)

Participants felt that the PAP’s embrace of social media only just before GE2011 was a desperate attempt at salvaging a dire situation. With the highest proportion of Parliamentary seats being contested since independence in GE2011, the stakes were high. Moreover, Gen Y voters made up a significant proportion of new voters. It thus seemed that it was largely because the PAP wanted to establish a viable communication link with Gen Y voters, and hopefully secure their vote that the PAP allowed campaigning on social media platforms.

Nonetheless, the PAP’s continued adoption of new media technologies, as part of its strategies, despite being delayed, does indicate a shift in the PAP’s approach and
commitment towards creating viable channels of communication in the city-state. Still, participants felt that the government’s use of social media encroached upon their personal space, which was previously regarded as a ‘safe’ place, ‘a space for us to relax and not be political’. Some participants even said they viewed the PAP’s presence on Facebook as yet another way of the government ‘consolidating [its] influence and power’ through the use of social media as a ‘mode of surveillance, a mode of control and also a way of getting people to [perform] self-surveillance’.

People like to say, “Oh it’s anonymous”…so people are more daring [online], but really…the MORE social media gets credibility and attention, the more the government is going to look at ways to control social media...they have to, they have to find out what these people say! (Sh)

Participants also expressed the view that social media have created ‘a façade of choice’, and have given the ‘impression of freedom’:

...there are so many things going on under the hood that most people don’t realise...they think [commenting on Facebook] is equivalent to complaining to your taxi driver uncle on your way home...because they think that they are never going to be held accountable for it, but then obviously it is not the case...they can be tracked...they can be traced very easily...(Vk)

Despite being given the impression that the government was re-examining its commanding position with its ‘light touch’ approach towards the internet (see Chapter Three), dissatisfaction over the persistent presence of surveillance and constraint in Singapore was evident in participants’ responses. Emphasising the misleading measures the Singapore government introduced to suggest increased freedom in the city-state, one participant said:

...The state is damn weary about such alternative movements and they try to clamp down on it, but at the same time you know that the
state doesn’t really want to show it has an iron fist…it considers notions of livability…like if Singapore were to be seen as such an authoritarian state, then who would come lah…it’s this whole like marketing of the state, marketing of the nation also...so there is this treading the fine line between allowing alternative voices to flourish, but at the same time, having strong surveillance to make sure that they don’t go overboard...the state is trying to say that “Oh we are opening up” and shit, and we are trying to allow more voices to flourish and blossom and stuff, but I am not sure if it is just an engineering of the state to give people the impression or assumption that there is a little bit more freedom, [that] it is all crap and that they are just eyeing you 24/7...(Q)

Participants agreed that Facebook has helped amplify voices, highlighting sentiments that were already being expressed in other ways, such as during coffee shop talk\(^56\). However, the decision to exercise freedom of choice and expression by articulating views on Facebook in Singapore’s context was argued to be one that was still very much shrouded in constraint.

The fear that has resulted from the surveillance and control engulfing the Singapore state was described by participants as being ‘a very real fear even though it is imagined and it might not have a real tangible effect…’. Akin to ‘having CCTVs\(^57\) everywhere’, these ‘eyes of the state’ follow you ‘...where ever you go, you don’t know when and whatever you say could be used against you...’.

Furthermore, ‘...you have all these isolated cases of people getting into trouble for posting certain things...cyberspace laws are not exactly very defined either, so there is always this sort of additional fear...you don’t know exactly what should be and what should not be posted...’.

\(^56\) Casual verbal discussions that take place at coffee shops, which are located near housing estates and food shops, and are usually associated with groups of older, retired men, gathering to talk and discuss news, issues they felt were pertinent, or anything that caught their attention over coffee or beer. More often then not, the topic of discussion would be politics, governance issues and gripes about the struggles they faced in their daily lives.

\(^57\) In reference to closed-circuit televisions.
If you are talking about it in an entirely social context, then, yes, it is freedom of expression...but, if you are talking about it in a social-political context, then there is always going to be mutes...no matter if you are using Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, traditional writing a letter to forums...there is always going to be a little bit of censorship...(An)

The concern over public backlash for views expressed had an effect on the extent of opinions articulated. Participants also warned that it was imprecise to judge general sentiments solely on comments found online – Comments, especially those in response to online posts were ‘only one aspect of what I am unhappy about...the medium does not encapsulate my feelings, all my feelings into that one comment...’.

Some participants felt that self-censorship limited the extent of truth and real feelings expressed online. Exemplifying Foucault’s (1977) argument for power and constraint in the construction of regimes of truth, participants described this kind of censorship as being a form of social discipline that had been internalised by Singaporeans through the PAP’s engineering of the state via the implementation of its discursive regimes. The presence of structural constraint in the influence of social norms and practices, even though it might impede individual agency, was deemed necessary so as to allow society to function:

Every society has to live by a certain set of rules. I hate the fact that the rules exist, but without the rules there will just be a lot of chaos...it is not so much that our government is at the point whereby they are just going to go “Shut up, shut up, shut up” – I know [Singapore] is not the highest in freedom of expression...freedom in press, for example, [Singapore] is actually very, very, very, ...ok, we are top from the bottom...like it is not exactly the most free place to be, but like you see a lot of examples of freedom of expression, controlled freedom of expression...Mr Brown 58 is a perfect example...he is always talking about the government in a negative light, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that the government is going to

58 This allusion was made in reference to a local blogger who frequently publishes commentaries on socio-political issues on his blog Mrbrown.com.
shoot him or anything like that because what he says is controlled and knowledgeable and is a reasonable expression...reasonable is the keyword...even in places where the freedom of speech is valued, there still are laws...(An)

A key difference, however, was that now, participants were noting the presence of lateral surveillance, or scrutiny coming from their fellow netizens. One participant even revealed getting into trouble for posting her thoughts about a class she had attended on her Facebook Wall:

...I was being sarcastic and saying that the lecturer or tutorial was very boring and stuff [in a Facebook status update]...[and] because of that, I got into trouble with the tutor...it was just my view, but then it still got me in trouble...[and] I didn’t find out that [people had] told on me...they had all the stuff printed out and they went to his office and gave it to him...when I went to his office I got the printout and was told, “Explain!”...(Ma)

Furthermore, the topics allowed to flourish online were very regulated. In contrast to traditional media, where the Singapore government enforced constraint through its laws and governance tactics, the most noticeable restrictions and surveillance carried out online were now being implemented by the masses. As participants noted, ‘...the moment someone posts something about being pro-PAP, immediately you’ll get like 50 comments about why PAP is not good...’, ‘...you get lambasted for posting a particular point of view...if you say something against what the masses, the collective wants to hear, you’ll be stifled’.

...friends and society itself is the biggest watchdog...there are social rules that govern our physical world, our everyday lives...we don’t just go up to a person and slap the person...in cyberspace you could to a certain extent...still, there is a limit to what you can do in cyberspace...there is still a limit and there are social conventions that
govern these limits…and people will not hesitate to tell you that you have crossed that limit...(An)

When reflecting on their use of Facebook to express viewpoints during the lead up to GE2011, rather than being afraid to be singled out for speaking up, participants referred to the criticism with which they potentially would have had to deal for posting uninformed views, as being the main cause of their apprehension.

...I wasn't really scared of posting my views, but more of posting a view which could be slammed by others, in the sense that it was not an informed enough view...I am not that into politics, so I might make a mistake or may not actually know what I was saying...so I was more afraid of the responses to my viewpoints, so I just kept my responses to myself and [instead] sparked debates offline amongst my personal circle of friends...(V)

In line with respondents describing their Facebook usage as being passive, participants repeatedly attributed their preference for non-participation to their being 'more private' from the onset. Some participants also said that 'rather than posting my own views online', their 'passive absorbing' of views was a way for them to reflect and inform their own perspectives. Instead of mistaking such actions as a sign of intimidation, or participants being silenced and constrained by structural repercussions, participants stressed that the caution they exercised online was mainly due to the concerns they had about posting inaccurate views or information.

In another example, participants said they specifically censored themselves out of 'respect for others' because the intentions of their posts, which were meant to start 'proper discussions' on social issues in Singapore, were misunderstood and taken as them trying to overstep OB markers. They said the decision to 'remove their posts' stemmed from them not wanting to cause 'trouble'. Such experiences have led these participants to conclude that Singaporeans are 'just not ready' for such openness online, and that Facebook's approachability has rendered it
inappropriate when it came to conducting proper, well-informed discussions online.

Despite participants' insistence they were exercising agency in their choosing to absorb rather than assert their views and self-censor, these examples indicate the internalisation of structural constraint and the effect social rules have on individual agency and practices. As suggested in Bourdieu's (1990, p. 53) theory of practice, rules and norms form the underlying structure that is incorporated as embodied dispositions that make up the habitus.

Thus, with individuals’ increasing access to social media platforms via mobile phones, the increased mobilisation of social media has enabled even more direct modes of constraint. Messages can now be pushed ‘directly into our faces’ and pressures were not being enforced only in a top-down direction. The ‘fear of repercussions’ has also resulted in many choosing to remain silent despite them ‘really want[ing] to say [something]...’. Participants also noted individuals having adopted self-censorship as a way of life so as to ensure self-preservation, propriety and pragmatism were maintained. Nevertheless, participants said it was encouraging to see individuals commenting and trying to express themselves on Facebook.

6.9 **Community Identity and Social Engagement**

The importance of social ties in ensuring the development of attachment and bonds to a community have been emphasised by Putnam (1995, 2000) and even the Singaporean government in the emphasis it has placed on inculcating a Singapore ‘soul’. Putnam (1995, 2000) has contended that strong social networks and civic engagement norms are needed for the establishment of trust within a society. Based on participants’ positive view of Facebook facilitating the development of relationships online, positive notions of belonging and attachment to Singapore were expected in participants’ responses. However, when reflecting on themes
such as nationhood, Singaporean-ness, social and community identity, and meaning and connections to Singapore, participants were divided in their responses.

Most participants felt that Singaporeans had something in common, citing Singlish and local foods as key aspects that made up their feelings about being Singaporean – ‘It is the menial stuff that matters...not about attending the National Day Parade’ and showing your loyalty and national pride there, said participants.

When you go overseas, how do you identify or recognise other Singaporeans? By the way they speak...you hear them saying lah, leh, lor...even online when they type, like “Let’s go lah”, ...the natural reaction [you have] is “Are you Singaporean?” ...[Singlish] is a very cohesive force but it is turned away because we tend towards economic pragmatism...most national identities are based on culture or history, but we lack both...actually we don’t lack it, we just didn’t let it prosper... (013)

The observed idiosyncrasies Singaporeans possess and the specific situations only living in Singapore could bring about were also recognised as significant characteristics representing Singaporean-ness. By describing the distinctiveness of Singaporean traits, or the “confirm Singaporean kind” of characteristics, participants expressed an innate knowledge, an intrinsic way of identifying fellow Singaporeans from just observing mannerisms or even speech patterns. Participants said that they just had to ‘hear people speak and instantly [they would] know...[they could] distinctively pick out...traits and characteristics that belonged to Singaporeans...’. The manifestation of such forms of mutual association, which was so unique to Singapore, denotes a deeply embedded sense of identity and connection.

Still, participants’ explanations of what being Singaporean meant to them revealed the tension between governmental discourse and everyday practices. Specifically, the negativity and backdated notion associated with “so Singaporean” traits and
those characteristics being stuck in the past, labeled as 'bad', and not being in line with Singapore's economic-centric focus, was highlighted

...there is this sort of dichotomy that is being established between the heartlands, and that is really Singaporean cos that is where the average aunty lives, versus MBS\textsuperscript{59} cos this is like where the tourists come and is like the global city part...so there is this tension here because Singapore wants, or at least the government wants to make Singapore some sort of a nation...but you cannot be everything at the same time...[AT]

Also, the defining “so Singaporean” traits as being 'some sort of local, ...things to do with the \textit{kampung}\textsuperscript{60}, you know, somewhat dated things...' that ‘modern Singaporeans’ who are more global and cosmopolitan in their outlooks find it difficult to relate to, makes categorising or identifying with a Singaporean culture very difficult.

We need to be proud of who we are, but they [the government] say don’t use Singlish, and that indicates that we are not proud of who we are ...if you want to be proud of a country, of your own country, it cannot be based on material things...but what we can be proud of about Singapore is only material things, and it is very hard to inculcate commonness like that...what can we be proud of? Our world-class airport, being a hub for everything, being the best...it’s not personal! When it is not personal, you can’t build a national identity...you can’t tell a kid in school “Hey, you must be proud of Singapore”. Why? “Cos we are the best, we have the best airport!” [Jf]

For participants, being Singaporean was defined by notions of familiarity, shared experiences, and the things they related to – the ‘everyday kind of experience’. The

\textsuperscript{59} An acronym for Marina Bay Sands, one of two integrated resorts in Singapore, which is commonly used as an indication of development and Singapore’s economic success.

\textsuperscript{60} ‘\textit{Kampung}’ means village or small community settlement in Malay.
comfort of being familiar evoked feelings of security and comfort - ‘You won’t feel like, “Oh my gosh! I am lost!”’.

...Living in a HDB flat...eating at a hawker centre...it is intimately tied to my everyday life...it is tied to the places that are close to my life, and it is tied to my everyday practices, the everyday mundane routines of being in Singapore...it is tied to the whole notion of being familiar, of being familiar with the people, of being familiar to the place, and it has nothing to do whatsoever with state discourse...like it has nothing to do with singing the national anthem... it’s not like that...(Q)

Participants’ description of their social and community identity as being based primarily on common experiences, the notion of togetherness and social bonds, highlighted their connection and sense of belonging to Singapore. However, despite indicating that the meaning and connection to Singapore were embedded in their personal values, memories and relationships, most of the participants said that family and friends were the ‘only things keeping them in Singapore’.

The Singapore government has stressed the importance of community engagement as being essential to inculcating the rootedness, community ties and attachment needed to develop the Singapore ‘soul’. Through countless policies and initiatives, active civic participation and community involvement have been stressed as being vital for the growth of social capital in Singapore. Yet, participants were largely indifferent to the notion of involving themselves in their communities regularly.

Time constraints, personal commitments and distance were main obstacles preventing participants from regularly involving themselves in community activities such as volunteer work. In the twelve months prior to being interviewed, less than half of the participants interviewed said they had engaged themselves in some form of community engagement activity, without the influence of external pressures such as company policies or school programmes. Only a handful of
participants said they actively involved themselves in volunteer activities on a regular basis.

Participants said their involvement in volunteer work was ‘a personal choice’, and their decision to engage in their community was for ‘personal fulfilment’. Being able to help others, experience the satisfaction of contributing to society, and having the knowledge that their actions were actually helping others were important aspects motivating their continued involvement in community activities.

It’s personal fulfilment...the giving back to the community thing doesn’t concern me, not in the way the government wants us to give back, but more in the way that I can have an impact in people’s lives and help the less fortunate...really, whatever community you put me in, I will still try to find a way of helping people and see how I can contribute...it’s really personal, a personal thing which has nothing to do with what the government is trying to push...and doing so, it doesn’t make me feel more attached to Singapore in any way...it’s more of a social responsibility (A)

Still, motivating others to want to participate in community activities was key in inspiring continued interest in community involvement. Participants said there was a need to create interest, encourage participation and awareness, as well as help individuals realise and appreciate what they had in Singapore before being able to inspire contribution to society. When discussing the Community Involvement Programme (CIP), the compulsory community engagement programme to which participants were all exposed while studying in the Singapore education system, participants highlighted two kinds of motivations for engaging in such community activities:

There are people who really come here to do CIP work because they really want to give back...they find it meaningful...but there is also another half which is there...to show people, “Hey, I’m the leader of the Youth Executive Committee”, “I am the Chairman”, “I have what it
takes”, “I am capable”...they just want to feel good about themselves, [and] it looks good on their resumes...(JJ)

As part of the government’s National Education programme, CIP was launched in 1997 with the aim of developing social cohesion and inculcating civic responsibility in students (Ministry of Education 2014). Yet, the meaning of engaging in the community was lost on such individuals, as described by participants. And, by perpetuating values contrary to those intended by developing close community ties and attachment, the significance of civic engagement in the expansion of trust and social networks in communities was misplaced. These notions highlight the significance of ties and the effect they have on social capital, as put forth by scholars such as Granovetter (1973) and Putnam (1995).

To overcome this predicament, participants felt that focusing first on attracting participation and, thereafter, instil awareness about the need to contribute to one’s community was a possible way forward. Going overseas was ‘not that bad an option’, they said.

The overseas CIP programme has the overseas element so it [attracts them and] gets them onboard first, which is important cos you want them to participate in the first place, then getting them aware is the second [stage] and then after that, when they come back, exposing them to the local situation...[if that is the case,] then I think it [overseas CIP] would be more ideal...it helps them see things in perspective...(A)

What made it difficult to convey the message behind getting involved in CIP locally was the greater appreciation received for helping others overseas. The experience was ‘so different’ and meant so much more, as compared to when

...giving a dollar to a kid here [in Singapore], who say comes from a really low-income family...he’ll be like “Huh? Only one dollar ah?! Can give more or not? What can I do with one dollar?”...in a third world
country, [if I gave you a dollar] you will take me as someone that has helped so much, [as if I had] changed your life... \( (Jf) \)

The draw of overseas CIP trips, the ‘status’ it had, the ‘wow factor’, and the trip’s location forming ‘...an important aspect of the trip, much more than the meaning of what is going to be accomplished...like, I get to go on a holiday and at the same time I feel good about it...’, has raised concerns over the motivations and merits of encouraging such programmes. While local CIPs were ‘just not exotic, not packaged like “wow, there is so much meaning or worth”, Singapore still had less fortunate individuals who would benefit’ from volunteerism.

...Like if you were to tell people you were going to Cambodia and then people will think “Wah, you are going to be a savior, you are going to do so much, you are going to help humanity, help mankind...” as compared to “Eh, are you free to give free tuition?” ...there is like no wow factor, you’ll be like “Oh, like that only ah”...people don’t see the value...’ \( (JJ) \)

Still, participants felt that the experiences gained by participating in such programmes and the impact of volunteering overseas could be used to inspire the desire to participate in local volunteer work. Participants also reiterated the benefits such as overseas CIPs putting you ‘out of your comfort zone’ and being somewhat like ‘an exchange programme’ where individuals could gain other skill sets – ‘It is also supposed to be a service learning project...you provide a service to the villages while you learn something about them too...’. Translating such experiences and realising the need to establish strong community ties, beyond government rhetoric, was necessary when trying to impress the importance of social engagement amongst Gen Y, said participants.

When asked about using Facebook as a tool to encourage connection to ‘home’ or greater participation amongst Gen Y, participants said that such a ‘feat would be difficult’. Additionally, tangible commitment to active engagement was indicated as being imperative to ensuring the development of a vibrant society in Singapore.
‘...We are sort of like cowards lah...like we say a lot, blow a lot of hot air, but the follow-through or the necessary and subsequent actions are not there...’. And, because ‘you can say things [online]...but nothing changes’, ‘I feel activism on Facebook is really overrated’.

‘There is a real difference between you sitting behind your computer and clicking ‘like’ versus you turning up and showing your face...’, doing something about what you say you support. Moreover, situations on online platforms were not “real” – ‘...there are no real discussions, lah, it is not a real online community where we really discuss issues lah...’. Most of the posts online are:

...not really aimed at anything other than a generalised discontent with how things are run [in Singapore]...they don’t actually propose any other alternative other than saying “Get rid of the current regime!”...a lot of people post crap...most of these things are not really justified, this is the irony – they are not made with rational arguments, and there is no evidence to substantiate most of it...(AT)

Other participants, however, were of the view that besides being a platform for communication and an avenue to express previously suppressed views, social media such as Facebook could be used to encourage ‘real engagement’ and awareness. ‘It could be a stepping stone...create the consciousness and then habit first, and then work on other aspects later...’ . Encouraging engagement in social media helped individuals relate their personal experiences to other users, creating a ‘temporary imagined community’ that ‘revolved around certain core issues’. The influence of connecting like-minded people and allowing individuals the realisation that there were others who shared similar opinions was important in establishing community ties and notions of belonging.
6.10 Online Participation: The Meaning of ‘Likes’

Social media have increased awareness and the ease of access to a viable platform for the communication of ideas, whether personal or simply the spread of general sentiment. Nevertheless, participants cautioned that the reasons for engaging online were not always positive or noble. If individuals were keen on reading alternative viewpoints and wanted to read negative sentiments about the PAP, the negative comments available online would gain popularity and be the ones being accentuated and heavily circulated on Facebook.

Everyone on Facebook is very, very anti-PAP and pro-opposition and if we were to go on Facebook and do a poll, there would be no PAP right now...and that is very interesting because despite the huge support for the opposition, most GRCs are still PAP-run...so you wonder if the things you read online are they true to life, is that really what people are thinking, or is that really what people want to say...(Ab)

Because interest and appeal were critical in gaining viewership and attention to posts, the popularity or virality of posts due to the hype associated with the posts’ contents made certain pieces of information seem more important than they actually were, highlighting the plausibility of social media encouraging an echo chamber of comments and perspectives. Additionally, participants suggested that ‘...people don't have their own opinions, they can't form their own ideas and thoughts...they just latch on to what is out there...’.

The significance of Facebook ‘likes’ was also questioned. Participants noted that there were no set rules guiding their decisions regarding when or why they should click the Facebook ‘like’ icon. The reasons participants described as to why they clicked ‘like’, was highly subjective and meant different things to different participants at different times and contexts. One participant said his ‘liking’ a post were an indication that he had read the article, or was a way of showing he
appreciated his friends having shared the article online. Other participants said that 'likes' meant they agreed with the content of the posts.

When asked what made them decide to 'like' or support 'serious events, causes, or pages calling for support or awareness about issues online, participants were unanimous in emphasising their personal values and beliefs as being the guiding principles behind their Facebook 'likes'. 'Serious' matters included petitions, messages that were political in nature, events supporting alternative causes, online campaigns, or anything that seemed 'sensitive' in Singapore's context, which required individuals to exercise self-censorship and discretion on their part. Such matters were distinguished from casual matters, which were more trivial and light-hearted in nature. Examples of casual matters included: Liking pictures in support of a friend’s entry in a photography contest; liking status updates, comments, or articles posted by friends; and also liking posts to acknowledge approval or to indicate acknowledgement of friends’ posts.

When it came to engaging and committing action to a cause, the meaning of 'likes' on Facebook was depicted differently. While some participants said social media have increased awareness and the willingness to show support and participate online, the majority of participants said that online 'likes' did not mean anything. ‘...I can just like lah, just to share and spread the awareness...but ultimately, that is still not taking action...you are still not doing anything, not contributing to the cause at all...’. Participants reiterated that activism and supporting causes required an assertion of commitment, no matter whether the cause was proposed online or offline.

The reduced need for explicit commitment by supporting causes online through the mere ‘liking’ of content or Facebook pages meant that accountability was now problematic. Participants found that, increasingly, individuals were supporting ideas ‘superficially’ online, without wanting to commit or ‘actually doing anything for it...’.
There is no commitment on Facebook because even if the thing is serious, it is not applicable to me so I’m liking it because it is my friend who asked me to do so or because everyone else likes it and I agree with the point, like the curry thing\textsuperscript{61} – like why are the immigrants saying things like that? So, ok lah, agree...but, because I don’t feel like cooking curry, I won’t cook curry on the day I am supposed to and no one will know that I clicked ‘like’, but am not cooking curry...(Sa)

The ease of clicking ‘like’ on Facebook also meant that the requirements expected of each individual in terms of personal commitment to specific standpoints were greatly reduced.

...If you want to support, you just have to click ‘like’...it’s just a click away, you don’t have to write anything or even sign anything...and it’s not really a commitment...I don’t think people when they ‘like’ something or support a campaign by clicking ‘like’ [on Facebook], they really commit to it...it’s not like a petition that you have to sign where you put yourself out there and actually do something about it...[JJ]

Actual action was severely lacking – ‘It’s like you can just press ‘like’ and then it is like “Oooohhhhh I’ve participated...yayyyyy!!! I am politically active!!!...”’. Similarly, other participants noted that when indicating support for activist causes on Facebook, ‘people [would] say “Oh ya, ya, ya, support!!!” and they are so gung ho\textsuperscript{62} about something, but in actual fact they don’t know nuts about it...just saying it for the sake of saying it...or just riding on the wave...’. When actual commitment was needed, like, for instance, the Occupy Raffles Place campaign\textsuperscript{63}, where individuals

\textsuperscript{61}This allusion was made in reference to the \textit{Cook A Pot of Curry!} event that was first publicised on Facebook in 2011. This event was discussed in Chapter Three.

\textsuperscript{62}‘Gung ho’ means to be very psyched, pumped up about something that one cannot wait to participate (Urban\textit{dictionary.com} 2015).

\textsuperscript{63}Similar to the Occupy Wall Street protests in New York, this local ‘peaceful movement’ was launched on Facebook and called for the public to take part in a rally to ‘demand accountability and change’ (\textit{AsiaOne}, 16 October 2011). However, despite have over 3000 ‘likes’ and 75 people
were asked to turn up at Raffles Place, in Singapore’s Central Business District, on a specified day and time to show their support, ‘...nobody went! [It was] all hot air lah…nothing happened…’.

If you are concerned about children being abused, go to the Children’s Society and volunteer, then you’ll really be walking the talk and not just clicking, clicking, ‘like’, ‘like’, ‘like’, and for what? ...you can ‘like’ it but that’s all...you press the button on Facebook, but is it really considered a signature? Now, they do this - 1,000 ‘likes’ and then they’ll save the dolphins, so it’s like a petition, no more signatures, just ‘like’...traditionally, when you ask people for petitions, you go to the person and explain it, say why are we doing it and the person is allowed to ask questions...on Facebook, you just click ‘like’...it is very superficial, these people don’t understand what they are doing...they are not really into it...when the going gets tough and you really need to do something, they will come up with excuses, like “Oh, I can’t do it lah, I’m busy, but I’ll support it on Facebook...you have my full support, you’ll always be in my heart...” – it brings nothing to the cause! (Kh)

The dissimilarity between online action and real-life action was repeatedly underscored. Participants highlighted the ease and convenience of clicking ‘like’ or ‘share’ on Facebook, but later described reluctance when asked about translating virtual clicks into actual action. The hesitation and reserved responses displayed when asked about actual commitment and personally investing time and effort into doing something about the issues supported online were unsettling. One participant, who worked in a non-profit organisation and who actively endeavoured to raise awareness and support for alternative causes in Singapore, felt that the general lack of understanding and shortage of open dialogue in the city-state was the root cause of Gen Ys’ unwillingness to engage.

indicating they would attend, less than 20 people turned up, most of whom were either foreigners or the press (AsiaOne, 16 October 2011).
The notion that social media could be used as a tool, ‘a catalyst’ or an ‘enabler’ to highlight what was already happening on the ground, was also discussed with respondents. One participant felt that individuals in Singapore were ‘...looking for tools to express their opinions and [social media] seems to be the safest way...cos [in Singapore] you don't go on the street, you don't protest, you don't go to Speakers Corner – Why? Cos leceh64 ...so, this is the best way, and a legit way...’. Moreover,

...in Singapore, what can you do? The only way is to have an online campaign and create awareness...other than that there is nothing else...I think online awareness in Singapore is the most effective way of getting some ideas across to people...it is still something...it is our way of protesting when you click the 'like' button...(Z)

Other participants suggested that the prevalent climate of fear has contributed to the dismissive attitude of not wanting to fully engage in issues that did not immediately affect them.

Logically thinking, you know that there is no threat, but somehow psychologically you end up thinking “Oh what if I say this, will it get me into trouble, is it worth it?”...I didn’t vote for the opposition [during GE2011] ...cos I don't find them very credible...yet, one very strong nagging question at the back of my mind is, “If they are strong, will I vote for them?”...and until now, I can’t answer that question...I still do feel the element of fear...(Jf)

Additionally, the relevance of the views expressed on social media and the applicability of these views to individual experiences, was cited as necessary when encouraging individuals to get involved and contribute to causes.

One of the events that I went for, ...I really supported the idea and...what they were trying to achieve, and so, I went for it...for me, it

64 Derived from Malay, leceh means difficult, inconvenient or troublesome.
is about how much I feel for it, and is dependent on my level of interest in it...if I really feel for it then I will take steps to, like, show my support, my interest and my view...but if I am only, like, ok only, or alright lah, can lah, that kind of thing, the not really there, the I agree with your idea but I won't go all out and fight for your idea kind, then I won't physically support it through action, I'll like click 'like' online only lah...(Za)

6.11 Facebook and Changing Dynamics in Singapore

Participants noted social media’s ability to surpass traditional media platforms in terms of information transmission and dissemination as having allowed more scrutiny over the way the government operated. Holding the government accountable for its actions, particularly having direct connection to Ministers via their own Facebook pages to raise concerns, has not only increased communication channels between the government and Singaporeans, but has also amplified demands for transparency and answerability.

It used to be that things were not as transparent or things could be left not answered, but now because of the concerns brought up by the netizens and all that, they [the government] are being forced to address them lah...social media played a big role especially in terms of the GE2011 results – the news reports came out like half an hour later than the Twitter tweets or the Facebook posts about the GE2011 results...people are not dumb, they are connected and they know where to get real, credible information sources lah...(Z)

Backdated approaches to policy implementation that subscribe to pragmatic attitudes or required ‘blind faith’ did not sit well with participants. Riddled with dissatisfaction and unhappiness over the current ruling party's governing methods, participants repeatedly called for change and an update of the processes used to implement policies. Being more discerning and ‘active in pursuing knowledge’,
participants felt that, unlike their parents, who had to deal with threats to their livelihoods, their comfortable living circumstances allowed them the ability to question the government and its policies.

The incessant reminders from the governing elite, urging Singaporean Gen Y to be thankful and not take current comforts for granted was an issue participants highlighted as being overbearing and unnecessary. ‘Stuffing down our throats’ the need to appreciate what we have ‘will not work’, they said.

...It doesn’t mean that just because now we start to question, it means that we don’t respect your [the PAP’s] authority...but, you’ve got to give us answers, and we will keep on asking the questions...(Lk)

Participants felt the top-down approach the PAP has utilised since it came into power lacked transparency and accorded immense authority and control to the ruling party. Participants highlighted the need to distinguish between being ungrateful and being critical. Wanting to improve situations did not mean they were taking Singapore’s success and stability for granted. Citizenry involvement and the persistent want to ‘humanise the PAP’ were perspectives participants echoed when discussing ways they could engage the government to increase individual stakeholdership and voice when negotiating the future of their country.

Moreover, having core guiding principles such as meritocracy and pragmatism being imposed upon them via social disciplinary measures, participants felt that their government should also be subjected to the same kinds of rules and ideology. ‘They are also human but they get paid like bloody hell a lot lah...it’s like a super human salary man...’, said one participant, when discussing his dissatisfaction over the extremely high salaries Ministers in Singapore were getting. The feelings of injustice, unequal treatment and the seeming lack of meritocracy the PAP was exploiting were also echoed by other participants. One participant even described

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65 The queries and rejection of the government’s rationale explaining the need for high ministerial salaries began on social media and resulted in PM Lee Hsien Loong calling for a formal review and the eventual reduction in the wages accorded to each Minister in the PAP’s cabinet.
the great disparity in ministerial salaries as going against what it meant to be Singaporean:

...I think what makes us really Singaporean is that we are efficient...most Singaporeans are hard workers lah, we know the focus on meritocracy, we need to work to earn money, to get what we want...you want more money, you work harder lah, that is the essential idea that meritocracy brings lah...and one issue I think as to why Singaporeans are mostly unhappy is that we don't feel that this meritocracy is being practised by certain parties or certain authorities...I guess people feel that if a certain individual is paid millions, he must be bloody good lah, you know, he must work 48 hours a day to be worth that amount of money, that kind of thing...so, it goes against the grain of what we have been taught and that is why there is so much unhappiness...(Lk)

Participants also felt that the government did not properly understand the issues that needed to be addressed on the ground. Coming mostly from privileged families, a very different background as compared to the average Singaporean who lives in HDB flats, participants expressed the view that it was because of this gap that policies implemented by the government were sometimes either not helpful or did not address concerns appropriately, thus causing unhappiness amongst the populace. Proper understanding and the experience of how issues affected individuals were necessary before adequate policies could be implemented.

Yet, despite the unhappiness and unconstructive sentiments about the government being voiced online, the notion of having a situation similar to that of the Arab Spring occurring in Singapore was seen to be mostly improbable. According to participants, the context that stirred emotions leading up to the beginning of the Arab Spring uprising was ‘different’, as ‘...in Singapore we have a very thick middle class and these are the best kind of people to have in the country because they have way too much to lose...they won’t really do anything...’. Still, another participant cautioned that an uprising such as the Arab Spring was not entirely improbable.
Using the Bersih rallies\textsuperscript{66} in Malaysia as an example, this participant suggested that should sentiments on the ground continue to deteriorate, an uprising in Singapore could definitely occur.

The context in Singapore, commonly described as being one of restriction and constraint, has resulted in participants automatically voicing futility when thinking about exercising individual agency and choice on Facebook. The tradeoff of putting in effort to introduce change was described pragmatically as being ‘not worth it’. Participants explained that the outcomes of supporting alternative movements were minute or insignificant, highlighting the constant vigilance the government imposed on them as reasons for their reluctance to engage ‘too much’, let alone translate online ‘likes’ into real, actual action.

Nonetheless, other participants were quick to point out the increased autonomy they have felt online. These participants felt that social media had opened up new and convenient avenues for them to voice their perspectives, and were an easy way around the constraints and limitations they experienced daily. Facebook has enabled greater interaction and has increased the propensity for previously unfathomable processes of communication. Still, the significance and extent of change initiated by the use of social media platforms like Facebook in Singapore remained uncertain.

...You can’t say a lot of stuff [online] but at least you are saying it, it is better than not saying it entirely...if you don’t get the opportunity to say it, how then are things going to get done? At least now you are one step further, nearer towards getting things done, to really try and get things sorted out...(Mk)

\textsuperscript{66} Bersih means ‘clean’ in Malay and refers to the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections, which is a civil society movement made up of 84 non-government organisations calling for a complete reform of the electoral process in Malaysia (The Straits Times, 27 August 2015). It was launched in November 2006. Since its inception, the Bersih movement has organised several high-profile rallies in Kuala Lumpur, as well as around Malaysia.
Another participant felt that the reason why individuals chose not to exercise their voice on social media was due to the lack of ‘better alternatives’ or solutions to suggest. The lack of inspiration to think of solutions to issues, to participate and engage fully in causes, and/or support alternative viewpoints or perspectives that countered the national rhetoric or socially accepted norms was attributed to the habit Singaporeans had of constantly complaining, the high levels of comfort and wellbeing they enjoyed, and also the ‘lack of individual resolve’ predominant in Singapore’s Gen Y population.

The ‘tension [between] not wanting to conform to state discourses and being critical of them, but also being afraid that your rice bowl would be affected…’ held participants back when they expressed their own views online. And, for that reason, participants felt that others were also only stating half-truths or censored versions of actual sentiments online - ‘...We have to think about tomorrow...people are afraid to take certain reactionary or active steps to sort of jeopardise the future lah…’. Such views, therefore, suggest that opinions expressed on Facebook should only be taken as partial verbalisations of individual thought.

Moreover, the increase in peer surveillance was highlighted as one of the reasons for participants’ decisions to refrain from engaging too much on Facebook. Facebook is ‘restrictive’, as it prevents us from ‘really post[ing] our feelings, our thoughts...cos you never know when they may come back to haunt you...whatever you share, it is out there...people can re-share it…’, and they ‘can call you out’.

Social media were, however, described as having bestowed immense power upon individuals. Heightening the value of individual viewpoints and drawing attention to any kind of individual expression published online, individuals’ role as producers of content online was a crucial factor in affecting the growing influence individuals had online.

Online you are exposed to thousands and thousands and thousands of people, in the coffee shop it is just four or five uncles sitting together making a lot of noise ...the fact that you have thousands and thousands
of eyeballs reading something, whether or not they comment on it, it doesn't matter, they are reading it and that gives immense power to people…(An)

Individual authorship and personal publishing by amateurs was now being celebrated and regarded as truths, participants said. The mishmash of online content and the liberty to address any and every topic possible, subject to personal whims and fancies, as well as subjective individual knowledge and thoughts has resulted in the need to scrutinise the motives behind individuals' choosing to express themselves on social media. Specifically, participants said that when voicing their perspectives on Facebook, it was crucial to figure out whether individuals were acting entirely on their own accord or there were other factors influencing their decisions to join online discussions.

For instance, participants said ‘you can’t trust everything online lah’. One participant even said that despite the flurry of activity online before GE2011, he chose not to post anything about GE2011, as he felt that too many people ‘had an alignment to one another’, and were repeating sentiments that were too alike, which he thought ‘was strange’ and defeated the purpose of asserting his wanting to join in the discussion online.

Nonetheless, the collectiveness aroused because of the highlighted commonalities in experiences and sentiments expressed was beneficial in inciting mutual support and gaining the motivation needed to embark on projects that went against the norm:

...you can feel very lonely trying to do something that is different...I think seeing other people do things, especially things that you are nervous about, does help me feel better about embarking on it, doing it, doing something about it...friends do give me support...even having just one of these friends who would take action...saying that an idea you have is a good idea, that is already better than having a friend who doesn't take action, but says that is a good idea...if you are
surrounded by people who are taking action on something, ...the group support increases the net benefit of everybody...(D)

Collective agency, where groups of individuals came together and supported each other’s ideals was a way to encourage the implementation of intent, and also strengthen the courage individuals needed to practice their own choices.

6.12 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, participants in the interview segment of this study expressed sentiments similar to those collected in the survey component, which was discussed in Chapter Five. Facebook has increased the accessibility of information, enabling access to voices and alternative information sources previously difficult to reach. Still, participants were cautious in ensuring the reliability and truth of such pieces of information. And, as in the survey results, personal, pre-existing relationships were used as indicators of truth and accuracy when discerning the validity of viewpoints observed on Facebook.

Social capital and community engagement levels were also described as being low. Specifically, the need to inculcate commitment and actual involvement in social issues were highlighted as lacking in the use of Facebook to further causes online. Nevertheless, the various ways participants described feeling connected to ‘home’ and the ways CIP could be further utilised to foster the practice of contributing back to society suggest hope for the development of community attachment.

Facebook’s use as a platform for the expression of views and encouraging the voicing of perspectives was emphasised in the responses collected from the interviews as well. However, lateral surveillance mechanisms originating from peers watching one other was highlighted by participants as yet another factor to take into account when considering the appropriateness of actions online. These findings, together with those obtained in the survey, will be analysed and discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, Chapter Seven.
Chapter Seven
Analysis and Discussion

7.1 Introduction

As this thesis has examined the results of both the survey and semi-structured interview aspects of this study separately in the previous two chapters, this chapter will integrate the findings detailed in Chapters Five and Six and analyse the implications these results have in relation to the impact new media have had on social practices in Singapore. Similar to the way the findings of both the survey and semi-structured interviews were presented, this chapter will be presented thematically.

Research on the use of Facebook has encompassed several broad areas, ranging but not limited to personality traits influencing the purpose, use and behavioural outcomes of Facebook usage (Sheldon 2008; Skues, Williams & Wise 2012; Toma & Hancock 2013), privacy and risks of information disclosure (Livingstone 2008; Christofides, Muise & Desmarais 2009), and even the effect Facebook has had upon political discourse (Vitak et al. 2011; Tang & Lee 2013). The focus of this thesis has, however, been centred on two areas: The perceptions and motivations of Facebook usage, as have been studied previously by scholars such as Lampe, Ellison and Steinfield (2008), Cheung, Chiu and Lee (2011), Smock et al. (2011), Hunt, Atkin and Krishnan (2012), and Tosun (2012), and the effects social networks have on social capital and communication methods (Steinfield, Ellison & Lampe 2008; Valenzuela, Park & Kee 2009; Junco 2012; Kross et al. 2013).

Using a practice theory lens and focused specifically on the aims this thesis has set out to achieve, this chapter will be split into two parts. Section 7.2 will examine notions related to the reproduction of disciplinary procedures and the negotiation of limits to freedom in Singapore. More specifically, themes such as trust, Gen Y’s expression of views and the pervasiveness of lateral surveillance will be discussed. Addressing themes pertinent to the construction of national belonging in Singapore, Section 7.3 will examine Singapore’s Gen Y’s engagement in activism, as well as Gen Y’s feelings of attachment to Singapore.
Much of the analysis and discussion of themes presented in this chapter are based on the examination of statistically significant associations between variables obtained from the survey results, as well as noteworthy responses obtained in the semi-structured interviews. Using the results from both the qualitative as well as the quantitative aspects of this study to better inform analyses underscores the significance of the mixed-methods approach this study has adopted. Further analyses in the form of cross-tabulations were also carried out to investigate the relationships between responses to questions that had presumptive associations.

7.2 **Transforming Disciplinary Procedures and Negotiating Limits to Freedom**

Being succinct in the communication of messages, Facebook has enabled the timely dissemination of information, confirming the SNS’s capability as an effective mode of interaction and source of knowledge. Unlike earlier forms of social media, participants felt that Facebook’s interface allowed for the transmission of more concise and digestible bites of information. Also, accessing Facebook whenever and wherever they wished, especially on their mobile phones through the use of the Facebook app, added to convenience, and thus increased the frequency and amount of time participants spent on the social networking site.

Although the amount and purpose of Facebook use varied across participants, the core reasons and attraction participants in both the survey and interviews indicated as reasons for their consistent Facebook access were similar. Participants in both the surveys and interviews highlighted social interactivity as the primary purpose for their use of Facebook. Activities such as checking News Feeds, Facebook surfing, connecting online, as well as getting updates on news and information were the most common purposes indicated. The seamless integration of participants’ utilisation of Facebook into their daily lives was also highlighted when participants said they were constantly logged on to Facebook throughout the day, and that their use of Facebook was ‘second nature’ to them.
These findings are similar to Lampe, Ellison and Steinfeld's (2008) results, which signpost Facebook as being widely considered to be part of daily routines, and its utilisation as being mainly for social purposes such as maintaining contact with friends and family. In this study, besides the use of Facebook for connecting with others, the effectiveness of Facebook's functions was highlighted when participants specified Facebook's usefulness in advancing specific ideas, causes, products and messages.

Participants also said that individuals had to go beyond the basic status update to really utilise Facebook's abilities. Facebook's influence in effecting change was highlighted in the increased awareness respondents indicated having about news and current affairs, and also in their use of Facebook to express viewpoints supporting ground-up initiatives, such as the *Cook A Pot of Curry!* event (Questions 28 and 29).

### 7.2.1 Social Interactions Online

There are generally two schools of thought that have emerged in the research carried out on the influence of the internet. The first posits the negative socially confining effects of social reclusion, encouraging loneliness and negating the need for human interaction or community involvement because of the ease and convenience of being connected from behind computer screens (see Turkle 1995). The other more positive implication of internet use suggests increased communication, increased information access and also increasing opportunities for the establishment of relationships. Community engagement and interest in social issues is regarded more positively in this second school of thought, as opportunities for interaction and engagement are enhanced by the advancement of internet technologies.

In Shah, McLeod and Yoon's (2001) research, the amount of time spent online was found to be less important, as compared to the kinds of activity in which individuals were involved when interacting online (Shah, McLeod & Yoon 2001).
Kraut et al. (2002) further observed that the more social resources individuals had, the more internet use was associated with increased social benefits. Suggesting increased social capital enabled better community relationships and intensified the amount of resources individuals had, Kraut et al.’s (2002) study also argued that the amount of influence online opportunities had on individuals’ offline lives was largely dependent on internet usage patterns.

Using the internet mainly for communication purposes exerted a positive impact upon a broad range of variables measuring social involvement, such as community engagement, trust, greater self-esteem, greater social support, more communication with family members and enhanced computer skills (Hiltz & Turoff, 1993; McKenna & Bargh 2000; Wellman et al. 2001). Although the exact kind of social impact internet use has had on social involvement has yet to be determined, the quality of relationships has been argued to have a significant influence on the social outcomes of internet use (Wellman & Wortley 1990; Kraut et al. 2002).

The findings of this study highlight that interactions on Facebook have occurred mainly with individuals with whom participants had prior relationships. Stressing the importance of connections and links in the formation of relationships, participants noted the sustained prevalence of traditional methods of communicating, even in the online sphere. The importance of ‘actually knowing a person’ and having confidence in the individual was portrayed by interview participants as being vital to the development of associations with the other person.

When asked if Facebook could be used to aid the development of connections and relationships, 73.4 percent of respondents in this study believed Facebook was able to enhance the development of bonds and relations between groups of people, while the minority (10.7%) of respondents felt that Facebook did not assist in establishing such links (Question 17). When further statistical analyses was carried out to examine the relationship between respondents’ usage levels (Question 1) and their thoughts on Facebook’s ability to develop bonds and relations (Question 17), a significant relationship was observed (p<.05).
Figure 7.1: Percentage distribution of respondents’ identified Facebook usage patterns (Q1) in relation to their views on Facebook encouraging the development of bonds and relations between groups of people (Q17)

Cross-tabulating the responses obtained in Question 1 with that of Question 17 shows how the distribution of participants’ views on Facebook relates to the development of bonds and relations between groups of people in relation to their classified Facebook usage category. In the case of participants who were classified as frequent Facebook users, 6.2 percent of frequent Facebook users strongly agreed with Facebook encouraging the development of bonds and relations between groups of people, while 69.5 percent agreed, 10.2 percent of respondents disagreed, 0.4 percent strongly disagreed, 13.3 percent were undecided and another 0.4 percent did not indicate a response (Figure 7.1).

In general, most of the respondents in each classified Facebook usage level indicated agreement with Facebook enabling the development of bonds and relations (Figure 7.1). These findings underscore Lampe, Ellison and Steinfield’s (2008) findings that accentuate the social character of Facebook use. However, participants in this study said that connecting online usually had specific purposes, such as the facilitation of group projects or getting information specifically for research purposes, and was not purely used as a way to initiate communication or
begin relationships. Moreover, participants in this study felt that Facebook was an unsuitable platform for the conduct of serious discussions because you ‘can’t always tell how truthful’ individuals are online.

Miller and Slater (2000) contend that online and offline lives should not be separated, but should be considered extensions of each other. However, in this study, despite the increasing normalisation of Facebook use in daily interactions having amplified the blurring of online and offline interactions, the majority of participants (77.9%) said online interactions were not equivalent to offline interactions (Question 13). Only 10.7 percent of respondents said communications and relations on Facebook were equivalent to offline relationships (Question 13).

Indicating that traditional methods of establishing relations was still practised and valued, this finding suggests a distinction between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’. Additionally, this finding indicates that the less well participants knew someone, the more reserved their interactions would be. Norms of propriety in social interaction were proposed as the reason for this reticence. Stemming from participants’ reluctance to engage too deeply with unfamiliar individuals, the need to observe social etiquette or ‘common sense’ when interacting online further points to the unspoken social norms and practices participants felt they needed to observe when negotiating appropriate behaviours online.

### 7.2.2 Facebook as an Information Tool

Acting within specific social domains, where rules of social organisation and social roles restrict practices, the choices individuals have to exercise their own agency and engage with others are noteworthy, especially since understanding reciprocal norms is necessary in comprehending the concept of social capital. Furthermore, participants in both the survey and interviews reiterated their decreasing use of Facebook to ‘stalk’\(^{67}\) others. Gradually turning to Facebook more as a way to

\(^{67}\) Facebook stalking is similar to stalking in the physical realm, except that Facebook is used as the platform on which the monitoring takes place online. According to Techopedia.com (2016),
broaden their access to ‘interesting pieces of information’, such descriptions highlight the changing ways in which participants use Facebook and its many functions.

Although some participants said that they still relied upon newspapers for ‘concrete information’, or information they ‘knew they could trust’, the majority of survey and interview participants said they no longer considered newspapers as their primary news and information source. Citing government controls and the resultant media reportage giving mere echoes of government rhetoric as reasons for their rejection of the local press, participants explained their embrace of alternative new media platforms as having offered them more ‘real’ and quality information. Access to alternative viewpoints was also described as enabling the realisation that there were ‘other options’ to consider, thus empowering their ability to choose the kinds of information participants wanted to accept.

Besides emphasising the changes in participants’ Facebook usage, their increasing use of Facebook as a significant news and information source highlights the value and credibility accorded to content found on Facebook. Juxtaposing the primarily casual and social use of Facebook as an interaction source against using Facebook as a news and information resource, participants said that the access to alternative news sources was a way Facebook’s functionality had helped increase the amount of openness they felt in the Singaporean city-state.

Facebook’s News Feed function, having enabled the sharing of content, has provided users access to articles they found applicable, allowed individuals the ability to dig deeper into specific issues, and also ensured individuals received direct updates on specific content in which they were interested. This function has facilitated increased control over the types of stories circulating in individual Facebook networks.

Facebook stalking refers to the use of Facebook to ‘follow the online actions of another Facebook user...[and] may include excessive viewing’ of another user's profile and pictures. Urban Dictionary.com (2016a) defines Facebook stalking as a ‘covert method of investigation...good for discovering a wealth of information about people you don't actually know’. Ultimately, this online activity was considered frivolous, insignificant and unimportant, and was not something that was usually bragged about (Technopedia.com 2016; UrbanDictionary.com 2016a).
I more or less get updates about the world around through Facebook because it is so instant and everyone shares what’s important, so it is like a way for, or an avenue for the most important stuff to like rise on the News Feed...you keep on seeing repeated posts about it, and that is how you get to know what’s important that is happening in the world...(Mk)

Depending on the social network of friends connected via Facebook, content individuals accessed on Facebook differed drastically. Some participants described receiving only updates on their friends’ lives, while others received thought-provoking pieces of information that they considered carefully. If their network of friends used Facebook to spread valuable, pertinent information that was applicable to participants themselves, they were more likely to indicate the substantial nature of information found on Facebook.

Questioning the scope and quality of information found on Facebook, some participants even suggested the possibility of individuals skewing the kinds of information others accessed on the SNS: ‘Because my friends are into updating the world about the everyday happenings of their lives, I keep getting pictures of their Nasi Lemak or the “awesome” dessert they just had [on my News Feed]’. Participants also said that because their friends were interested in politics, their News Feed was constantly ‘flooded’ with snippets of news articles or commentaries, especially those highlighting alternative viewpoints. And, contrary to the flooding of GE2011 material others described, some participants said that because their close friends or friends who usually posted content they accessed on Facebook were not bothered by the hype in the lead up to GE2011, they saw minimal articles pertaining to the elections online: ‘There was no interest...my friends are not interested in such things...so I really did not see anything about GE2011 on Facebook’.

68 A Malay rice dish made with coconut milk and pandan leaf. The fragrant rice is usually served with sambal, ikan bilis, cucumber and peanuts, alongside other Malay-style side dishes.
Other participants, however, argued that social media’s empowering of users who were once solely content consumers to now become both producers and consumers of knowledge has encouraged increased awareness and interest in news and current affairs, which was by itself an indication of increased openness in the city-state. Moreover, the interactivity Facebook allowed enabled the questioning of an article’s validity ‘on the spot’.

You might say something and skew someone else’s opinion, but if another person doesn’t agree, that other person will say something against your idea...so, there will be a few opinions there and people can choose which one to make a valued judgment on, [they can choose] what opinion they have or would like to have or follow, or come up with their own opinion...(Sh)

Influencing the flow of resources viewed on Facebook, participants were interacting and engaging each other through the sharing of content on Facebook, transforming the one-way relationship traditional media had with their audiences (Jenkins 2004, 2006). Accentuating the reduced roles newspaper editors or the press have in dictating the type of content circulating on Facebook, the top-down surveillance of Singapore’s social sphere, as well as the use of the media to supplement policies and government rhetoric, no longer seems to be as effective as in the pre-internet era.

The ‘exponential growth’ in the ways news and information were being circulated on Facebook has therefore, not only increased the expression of individual agency, but has modified discourses of power within the city-state. Facebook has, thus, not only altered resource flows, affecting the types of articles frequently circulated on participants’ News Feeds, but has also given individuals the ability to access alternative ideas running contrary to the one-sided government rhetoric, which participants associate with information disseminated by traditional media sources. This has given users the power to dictate the kinds of information to which other Facebook users had access. Nevertheless, participants’ cautiousness and
reservations when describing their patterns of Facebook use suggest limits to the amount of freedom they actually had online.

7.2.3 Reliability of Content

While the visibility of shared content has made the sharing of direct links and viewpoints easier, emphasising the capacity participants have in directing the content seen on Facebook, the magnitude and variation in the quality of content accessible via Facebook have made participants skeptical, compelling them to take steps to discern the reliability and truthfulness of the information they have seen online. When asked about the reliability of information sources, participants said newspapers, the internet and government announcements, in descending order, were the most reliable sources of information (Question 25). And, despite participants specifying that they increasingly used Facebook as an information source, social networking sites were regarded as the least reliable source of information (Question 25).

The categorisation of all social networking sites together into one category when assessing the reliability of information obtained from social networking sites could have heightened the general distrust participants indicated towards social networking sites. As various social networking sites functioned differently, had differing purposes, and used several distinguishing methods to spread information, participants could have based their responses on a generalisation of those impressions, underscoring the variability in the type of material encountered across social networking platforms.

For instance, not all social networking sites (see Figure 1.1 for list of popular social media networks in Singapore) can be used for the spread of information and news updates. Twitter and Facebook are known for their short and sharp delivery of content due to the limits upon the number of characters allowed in posts. Links to articles could also be shared because of the functions available on both platforms. YouTube’s platform, on the other hand, is based on the distribution of original
videos that are created by users, and Instagram is a mobile app that promotes the sharing of photos and short videos amongst users. Pinterest also does not facilitate the timely dissemination of news and other objective matters. A visual bookmarking tool, the photo sharing nature of Pinterest’s social networking application is targeted more towards inspiring creative interests.

Furthermore, the rise of personal publishing and citizen journalism online has enhanced and simplified the process of highlighting alternative content on Facebook’s platform. Direct links to socio-political blogs, lifestyle blogs, parenting advice blogs and even home decoration articles can now be openly indicated on individual Facebook Walls. The volume of material accessible from Facebook Walls has, thus, become wide-ranging, augmenting the variability of content available, but also now requires more effort in discerning dependable content.

Using the example of prominent local bloggers, participants stressed that not all had the relevant expertise or experience necessary to provide credible opinions or insights, let alone comment publicly and suggest alternative viewpoints on significant social topics. Some blogs publicised their editorial list, ‘so you can tell what kind of background’ the authors had, making it possible to ‘assess the worth’ of that article’s content, but others do not. Some blogs and/or bloggers were known to have a tendency to voice views that ‘could sometimes be a little extreme...so, you have to take it with a pinch of salt’. However, the credibility of other bloggers’ views was not so easily deciphered.

Having established the credibility and reputability of blogs based on the blog’s area of specialty, the blog’s popularity was taken to be all encompassing, and was applied to all types of content published on it. Without considering external pressures and contextual influences that could have affected the content that was published, indiscriminate readers could assume that the blog was contributing sensible and informed viewpoints, when in fact, it was just ‘adding fluff’ and ‘joining in the hype’ of existing situations, ‘just for the sake of it’.
It’s interesting how the number one blogger\textsuperscript{69} in Singapore is a lifestyle blogger, talking about things that don’t really matter – about hair or plastic surgery - Xiaxue...like a million plus\textsuperscript{70} people [follow and read her blog]...[and] even she, the nonsensical blogger, came in and “entered politics”...it shows how people who are normally not even political, but during the GE, [will try and] enter politics\textsuperscript{71}...[it shows] how people during that time “got interested” in politics suddenly...but really, where is the substance? (Sh)

The need to revert to traditional news sources, such as newspapers, to ‘check facts’ and ensure validity was how participants described their continued reliance on traditional news sources. Still, the value of having access to an assortment of content was emphasised as being imperative for obtaining a diversity of viewpoints. This accorded participants the ability to exercise their own choices and decide on the reliability of content.

I don’t trust Facebook at all...no lah, cannot...still need to read newspapers and get information from other sources...I mean when my friends post, they post from news sources too lah, so it is just a lead lah...for example, I can have an app on BBC news and it gives me news of what is happening around the world...that helps me be updated on what is happening, but that is still news based on the BBC's kind and style of reporting, whereas what I get on Facebook, I get different people reposting or sharing very, very different kinds of feeds or articles...it is that variety lah...that is why Facebook is useful...\(Z\)

\textsuperscript{69} Xiaxue is considered one of the ‘power bloggers’ or top social media influencers in Singapore. Widely considered the ‘queen of blogging’ with her huge following, Xiaxue’s influential lifestyle blog was ranked the 8\textsuperscript{th} most popular blog in 2015, coming in behind food blogs, which topped the list. The ranking was based on monthly readership, or the number of site visits and traffic flow recorded for each blog site for the year (Alvinology.com 2015; Thesmartlocal.com 2015).

\textsuperscript{70} This estimate is an expression indicating the huge following Xiaxue has and is not a reference to the exact number of followers or monthly page visits she has. Factual numbers for the exact number of followers bloggers have are hard to determine, as they are not publicly released. Based on blog popularity rankings, an indicative number of monthly visits or blog views Xiaxue gets in a month is 295,000 (Alvinoiology.com 2015, as of April 2015).

\textsuperscript{71} ‘Politics’ as used by this participant in this context was in reference to political debate and not political office.
The confidence placed by such respondents in the information obtained from newspapers, despite the view that newspapers in Singapore are state-led and are subject to multiple restraints and OB markers, some of which are imposed willingly by newspaper editors themselves, does apparently endorse the objectivity, authority, and the virtuousness of Singapore’s press system. Besides the pragmatism of participants’ reliance on established news sources, participants’ need for evidence and proof of authenticity when accessing articles online also implies their conservative orientations.

Participants’ conservatism should, however, not be misunderstood as their being reluctant to embrace change or exercise agency. The embedded notion of trusting established systems could be attributed to the socialisation prevalent in Singapore’s society. In addition, as the sample of participants accessed in this study was highly educated and knowledgeable, rather than accepting subjective articulations of personal thoughts and comments as they were posted on Facebook, participants’ scholastic training and personal backgrounds could have influenced their preference for the factual verification and authentication of content.

The need to consider such backgrounds accentuates Ortner’s (1989) argument for the importance of going beyond an understanding of power relations and including a concept of culture when examining social processes. Warde’s (2005) account of innovation in the reproduction of practices also denotes shared understandings codifying practices and the ability to exercise agency in the performance of action. The changing context in which practices are performed, therefore needs to be considered when comprehending the influence new media have had.

7.2.4 Passivity and Social Responsibilities

Practice theorists have emphasised the need to understand actions within the specific contexts in which they are practised (see Ortner 1989, 2006). Interpreting practices as practical understandings embedded in social processes highlights the importance of specific contexts in explicating the relationship between structure
and agency (Schatzki 2001, p. 12). Such notions are particularly important when considering the actions participants described when interacting on Facebook.

Although the decision to share, comment on or repost articles on Facebook was described as being personally subjective, participants emphasised the accountability they felt when selecting which articles they posted or shared – ‘I only express an opinion if I really feel for it; if not, I won’t say anything’. The authenticity, meaning and purpose of articles had to be significant enough for participants to want to share the post, as sharing it was akin to publicly displaying their own values and morals.

When participants were asked what they normally posted or shared, a distinctive pattern of reserved caution was observed – ‘it is the life experiences which have taught me to discern what to say and what not to say...’. They emphasised and alluded to implicit and innate social norms and understandings when asked about the social decorum that was acceptable online. They also cited ‘common sense’ and social norms established in the offline realm as the basic standards individuals needed to observe when deciding what and when to post on Facebook. Fundamental in guiding their decisions and actions online, this accountability participants felt was observed to be both conscious and unconscious, playing an important part in affecting the attention and response accorded to various types of information seen on Facebook.

Participants explained that not just anything could be posted at any one time. Propriety and tact were still necessary. Stressing the need to be perceptive and know that ‘there are consequences’, participants said that ‘it doesn’t mean that just because the person is not physically in front of you when you type comments and then click send, that you can say anything you want and it won’t come back and bite you’. Another respondent described the thoughtlessness he observed online as a childish attempt at seeking attention:

...sometimes I do question why [my friends] want to [raise or post controversial issues on Facebook] lah, because it is not wise
lah...Facebook is permanent lah, right, and all you need to do is screenshot, and that is it, you know...I think people don’t realise the magnitude of whatever they say online, or whatever they post...I think it is just like a kid who didn’t get the attention they wanted last time and now this is a way for them to thrust themselves into the limelight...(Z)

Many respondents indicated becoming increasingly more cautious of what they chose to post online and lamented that individuals around them did not seem to share the same concerns. Citing reasons such as social roles and responsibilities as mature members of their community, respondents highlighted the far-reaching impact Facebook had in disseminating information as being a main cause for their increasing concern about self-presentation when interacting online. Participants also cited social expectations as being a significant influencing factor in their deciding not to use Facebook as a platform to invoke sensitive topics.

You just want to discuss the politics of religion [and pose a question on Facebook] like, for example, “Should mega churches be taxed?”...And then [people see it and] go like “Ohhh!!! How could you!!!??”...The idea is for you to trigger some sort of neutral discussion, but it comes off the wrong way, it comes off as offensive...and people go “Ahhh...why you posting this? I thought you were more educated to know otherwise”...like you expect the guy to be educated and therefore not post such things and you are also expecting the other guy to not get offended and dis72 these kinds of things...so it's like this double expectation and there is always a gap there...(AT)

Participants choosing not to engage in discussions online can be viewed as them understanding that it was socially inappropriate to publicly discuss certain matters, such as ethnic or religious views, which could, using the PAP’s language, threaten the peace and harmony Singapore enjoys. Singapore’s Gen Y might be more open to

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72 ‘Dis’ is a slang term meaning to insult, to treat with disrespect or contempt.
having frank discussions online, but that did not mean the rest of Singapore’s population was ready for such candidness. Furthermore, emotions, misunderstandings and assumptions could cloud judgments, making the effort needed to conduct sensible conversations seem both meaningless and pointless.

It is not that the government says we cannot talk about this, therefore we cannot talk about it...it is more like, OK, some people are going to get offended...it’s not about the government, I don’t care about what the government thinks, I am not censoring myself...I actually deleted the entire post [where I was trying to incite discussion about religion on Facebook] altogether, not because I was afraid that the government was going to kill me or lock me up, but because I thought, OK, if I offended one religious person [by posting that online,] then I might have offended a few more...so I just deleted it...(AT, emphasis in original)

Sleeper et al. (2013) found that individuals self-censored content because they wanted to preserve social images and decorum online, indicating that if it were possible to target specific audiences, they would have shared about half of the content they chose to self-censor (Sleeper et al. 2013). Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert (2009) also found that undergraduates considered Facebook as part of their daily routine. However, despite indicating that they did take to Facebook to share content, participants in Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert’s (2009) study chose to spend more time observing information rather than posting articles.

Participants’ stressing that the topics they decided to engage in were chosen out of ‘respect for others’ and not because they felt controlled by what was deemed publicly appropriate to talk about, underscores the agency participants felt they had. The decision to remain silent and passively absorb views expressed online can be comprehended as Gen Y asserting their agency to choose the most effective method of voicing their opinions. Furthermore, this finding suggests the expression of internalised control and consideration for social norms, rather than participants’ mere observance of governmental constraint.
Alternatively, the personal restraint participants described in their interactions on Facebook could be argued as constraints imposed on them by power structures, thus, limiting their expression of views. The preference to passively use Facebook as an information source rather than readily produce content all the time (Questions 4, 5 & 6), does make it seem as if the dominance of overarching power structures was still constraining the exercise of agency in Singapore. Nevertheless, 69.7 percent of respondents said individuals were more forthcoming and willing to engage in more delicate and reflective issues on Facebook (Question 7).

When examining the relationship between the Facebook usage levels (Question 1) and the pressure participants felt to engage on Facebook (Question 9), a significant relationship (p<.05) was observed. With the majority of respondents in each of the classified Facebook usage categories indicating not feeling compelled to comment or post on Facebook, individual choice and the practice of personal agency when deciding when and what to post on Facebook was underscored (Figure 7.2).

![Figure 7.2: Distribution of participants' Facebook usage levels (Q1) in relation to the amount of pressure respondents felt when commenting or responding to comments on Facebook (Q9)](image-url)

Conclusion

The study findings highlight the complex interplay between personal constraints and the exercise of agency on Facebook. While power structures may impose limitations on what individuals feel compelled to express or share, there is also evidence of individual agency in the form of choice in Facebook usage. This duality suggests that the platform both enforces and facilitates expression, depending on individual and contextual circumstances.
However, the more participants used Facebook, the more pressure they felt to comment on the social networking site (Figure 7.2). Interview participants echoed this sentiment, saying that the longer the time spent online, the more they felt they needed to engage in communicative processes. These results underscore the social norms of reciprocity by which participants were bound when deciding whether to comment on or respond to Facebook posts.

Having been transferred from FtF communicative processes into that of CMC via the use of SNS such as Facebook, and with participants describing most of their relationships on Facebook as extensions of FtF interactions, traditional communicative norms were still valid, making it impolite to ignore all comments and posts, especially when content was personally addressed to users. The personal responsibility participants felt in needing to ensure accountability when describing the need to follow appropriate social practices when interacting online implies the pervasiveness of underlying social rules that discipline and constrain actions (see Bourdieu 1977, 1989, 1990).

Exemplifying the use of strategies and a logic of practice while navigating social structures in their exercise of agency (Bourdieu 1977, 1989, 1990), interview participants also noted that they chose not to engage their friends online when they were aware of their own lack of knowledge in the subject area and/or because they knew their friends were not interested in such matters. Emphasising sensibility, maturity and the kinds of methods actors used when determining ways of expressing their thoughts, participants’ creativity in choosing specific occasions and audiences to articulate their views further indicates their mastery of a common code (Bourdieu 1977). Participants’ possession and control of social skills permitting the negotiation of socio-cultural constraints also underscores de Certeau’s (1984, pp. 36-37) concept of ‘calculated action’.

The agency involved in choosing and deciding on actions, moves which could advantage or disadvantage actors in their expressions and presentation of self underscores the resourcefulness and strategies participants utilised in their navigation of their social worlds. As de Certeau (1984) has argued, it is through the
understanding of methods utilised by individuals in their practice of everyday life that the relationship between structure, agency and culture is exemplified. Warde's (2005, p. 138) assertion that the performance of action is affected by a range of factors, including individual abilities, previous experiences, social roles, available resources and personal interactions, also substantiates the need to account for situational influences when accounting for the innovation and reproduction of practices.

Viewed in light of the context of constraint and institutional disciplining upon which the Singaporean society was established, coupled with the restrictions on the printed press and the specification of Speakers’ Corner as the only legitimate location for the public articulation of views, the use of Facebook as a platform to voice perspectives indicates participants’ eagerness to engage in a previously heavily restricted and controlled domain. The significance of participants indicating that they could decide for themselves when to engage on Facebook also outweighs the social pressure to maintain socio-cultural communication norms and processes, which participants described.

Without situating the dynamic nature of practices within the Singaporean context, the interrelationship between participants’ behaviours and the influence overarching social structures have had on individual action would be hard to determine (Ortner 1989). Moreover, the influence ‘shared embodied know-how’, or the pervasiveness of collective meanings and understandings had on individual practices emphasises Schatzki’s (2001, p. 12) argument for the dynamic nature of practices.

7.2.5 Expressing Views and Negotiating the Limits of Freedom on Facebook

Having been accorded options, particularly the ability to decide what to think and to not have to accept what ‘we’ve been told to accept’, the overwhelming majority of respondents agreed with social media having provided an avenue for public expression that was previously unavailable (Question 26).
I think social media is [sic] making voices louder...I think people already had the ideas, but they didn't really have a proper platform to voice their views and so social media helps a lot...it also makes people realise that there are actually a lot of people who share the same views as me, they have the same opinions as I when I actually thought that I was the only one feeling this way...(Za)

Being able to access information previously unobtainable has resulted in participants becoming more aware of the various perspectives other Singaporeans have and has also demonstrated that they 'are not alone' in their thoughts and reactions about Singapore's social situation. As respondents put it, because 'Singapore is small', and we had to ensure our survival, we had to listen, but now, it is possible to look for alternatives and other perspectives. Most alternative socio-political sites, having not been banned, blocked, or prevented from continuing to publish unconventional content, have also strengthened participants’ disdain for the facade of the “objective press” that has constantly been imposed upon them. ‘We know [this] is all bedek lah – they [the press] try to take different opinions, but in the end it's just agree with the government...’.

Participants in both the interviews and survey stressed the ease with which individuals could now choose to get involved in societal discourses via social media, and contribute their opinions. Facebook is

...quite democratic where anyone can post...you don’t have to be like highly educated to write a very informed kind of statement about something...it is quite available to everyone...(V)

Despite being mostly passive in their Facebook usage, when asked about their thoughts on the use of Facebook to express viewpoints such as those raised by the Cook A Pot of Curry! event (Question 29), and the accuracy of views discussed in the lead up to GE2011 (Question 30), respondents felt Facebook was an appropriate medium to use when articulating various viewpoints. Allowing for the accurate representation of thoughts, the majority of respondents said Facebook permitted
young adult Singaporeans the ability to express their views accurately (Question 11). The overwhelming majority of respondents also indicated that when using Facebook, individuals were more forthcoming and willing to engage in more delicate and reflective issues (Question 7) These results underscore the increased inclination participants have to participate in online discussions, and the openness Facebook has enabled in Singapore.

The statistically significant (p<.05) relationship between respondents’ views on Facebook enabling more forthcoming attitudes and the willingness to engage in more delicate and reflective issues online (Question 7), and the amount of pressure respondents felt when responding to various comments or posts on Facebook (Question 9) further verifies this point (Figure 7.3). Amongst participants who felt that engaging on Facebook enabled more forthcoming attitudes, the majority specified not feeling pressured to partake in interactions or discussions on Facebook, hence, implying the increasing comfort levels participants felt when interacting and expressing viewpoints on Facebook.

![Figure 7.3](image)

**Figure 7.3:** Facebook’s ability to encourage engagement in more delicate and reflective issues online (Q7), in relation to the pressure participants felt about commenting or posting on Facebook (Q9)
A significant relationship (p<.05) was also observed between Facebook enabling individuals to be more forthcoming and willing to engage in more delicate and reflective issues (Question 7), and comments on Facebook being true reflections of individual thought (Question 8). Amongst participants who felt that individuals were more forthcoming on Facebook, the plurality felt that posts online were true reflections of individual thought (38.1%). However, 34.9 percent of respondents who indicated individuals were more forthcoming on Facebook also said that comments left on Facebook were untrue reflections of individual thought (Figure 7.4).

**Figure 7.4**: Distribution of respondents’ views on Facebook encouraging individuals to be forthcoming and willing to engage (Q7), in relation to their views on Facebook Walls being accurate representations of individual thought (Q8)

The bimodal result suggests participants’ general ambivalence when describing their views on Facebook’s ability to accurately convey individual thoughts. With the majority of participants having indicated agreement with individuals being more forthcoming and willing to engage in more delicate and reflective issues on Facebook (69.7%), the split in views implies a general lack of agreement as to how much Facebook had increased Gen Y’s ability to express views openly in Singapore.
Signifying uncertainty over Facebook’s ability as a platform to support the precise expression of unreserved perspectives, the passivity, auto-regulation, and uncertainty regarding the acceptability of online behaviours that participants described, coupled with the anxiety associated with ‘putting yourself out there’, being scrutinised, needing to observe OB markers and being weary of consequences even when interacting online, contradict the notion of openness on Facebook, or at the very least, suggest limits to such openness. Moreover, these results highlight the power of structures over the social body.

Yet, the prevalence of the view that Facebook has enabled individuals the ability to be more forthcoming and willing to engage in more delicate and reflective issues indicates the pervasiveness of participants’ belief that Facebook has encouraged an inclination, at least online, to participate in civic issues. This finding also suggests a reduction in the manifestations of fear that have permeated Singapore’s social sphere via the implementation of various surveillance and disciplinary strategies.

The magnitude of peer or lateral surveillance occurring online, as highlighted by Facebook incidents such as the Amy Cheong and Anton Casey episodes, as well as participants recounting the consequences of ‘letting your guard down’ and indulging in unrestrained behaviour on Facebook, even amongst trusted friend networks, could have added to the doubt participants expressed about the freedom they had to express themselves on Facebook. Feeling as though their actions were constantly being monitored and judged by other netizens, whether it was just family members trying to find out ‘who I am hanging out with or what I am doing’, or friends reporting comments made online to lecturers, made participants feel ‘unsafe’, and, thus, made them reconsider the amount of freedom they had on Facebook.

The ease with which misunderstandings occurred and the discomfort of being the target of scrutinising eyes also made participants feel the need to enforce appropriate privacy settings on their Facebook profile pages as a way to safeguard themselves from getting into trouble unreasonably. Knowing that they were being watched heightened participants’ exercise of self-restraint when interacting on
Facebook. Subsequently, this could have deepened the hesitation participants indicated when commenting on Facebook’s validity as a platform that could be utilised to accurately express perspectives.

Suggesting various pressures that could affect the display of actions and expressions online, skepticism shrouding the presentation of unrestricted perceptions was also highlighted. Participants described the effect the perception that other netizens were holding back and not being entirely truthful in their expressions, were giving in to emotion when commenting, or were being influenced by others to engage on Facebook had on their opinions about the extent of truthfulness they felt was being expressed online.

In Questions 8 and 11, which asked participants for their views on the accuracy of comments expressed on Facebook, the majority of respondents to both questions felt that the articulation of views was generally truthful. However, a bimodal split in the responses obtained for each of these questions was, again, observed. The large proportion of participants indicating that comments on Facebook were not accurate representations of individual perspectives in both questions implies the lack of agreement in the way views expressed online should be treated. Underscoring the caution and guardedness in the way interview participants described needing to be mindful of what they posted and engaged in, participants’ concern about not overstepping boundaries was also evident.

Nevertheless, with a larger proportion of participants indicating that Facebook permits members of Gen Y the ability to express themselves accurately online (43.5% – Question 11), as compared to 38 percent of respondents indicating that individuals in general were able to articulate opinions that were true reflections of individual thought on Facebook (Question 8), participants suggested Gen Y was more daring, outspoken, and willing to participate and engage in issues online (see also Question 43, Question 7). Rationalising the accuracy of viewpoints expressed on Facebook with thoughts such as, ‘Why go through the trouble of putting up a point of view that is not your own?’, participants justified Facebook’s validity as a platform for the accurate expression of views.
By positively evaluating views on Facebook as expressions that were ‘short, sharp, [and] concise’, participants agreed that Facebook was an appropriate way to enhance activist voices (Question 29). These previously suppressed voices were described as being effective, and as having the ability to highlight issues, getting ‘the message out there quickly’. Considered a less daunting way of expressing perspectives, participants further asserted that ‘when you cannot let it go offline, you let it go online…’.

When examining the relationship between the influence activity on Facebook had on individual thought and perception (Question 10), and the pressure participants felt when commenting or posting online (Question 9), a significant relationship (p<.05) was observed (Figure 7.5). These results indicate that amongst respondents who strongly agreed and/or agreed with activity on Facebook having an impact on individual thought and perception on various issues and topics, the majority of participants specified disagreeing with feeling compelled to comment on Facebook.

![Figure 7.5: Distribution of respondents’ views on the effect activity on Facebook had in influencing individual thought and perception on various issues or topics (Q10), in relation to the pressure respondents felt when commenting or responding to comments posted on Facebook (Q9)](image-url)
Accentuating the autonomy participants said they experienced online, the interest and conviction participants felt in wanting to engage in civic matters suggest the positive effect increased awareness brought about by the use of Facebook as an information tool has had. Furthermore, participants who expressly said that they usually did not post comments on Facebook said they specifically chose to use Facebook as a platform to contribute their thoughts in the lead up to GE2011.

Believing that their voice mattered, these participants said they made extra effort to pay attention to news and articles concerning GE2011 and participated in the discussions, as they felt they ‘needed to’ engage. Commenting and sharing articles about issues that concerned them, participants voiced their feelings about the government and policy shortcomings, weighing in on political discussions that were taking place on Facebook. Common ‘bread and butter’ grievances, such as the rising cost of housing, transportation and infrastructure issues, as well as the injustice and disadvantage citizens felt they were experiencing, were key topics brought up by participants, echoing the concerns netizens were highlighting online.

When asked why and what made them decide to abruptly engage in online discourse, responses such as ‘I just felt it was right’ and ‘there is nothing wrong in adding my two cents worth ... I wasn’t saying anything bad, just my thoughts on the opposition ... and everyone was doing it, so why shouldn’t or couldn’t I’, were observed. With politics considered a delicate topic in Singapore, the courage these participants specified is striking, particularly since they described themselves as usually passive Facebook users. The motivation to engage online starkly contrasts with the passive approach these participants said they usually adopted in their use of Facebook.

The climate of fear, surveillance and disciplinary measures prevalent in both Singapore’s online and offline sphere, and the resultant widespread adoption of auto-regulation as a way of life in Singapore, has led other participants to assert that besides daring to articulate and make their views known, individuals were willing to make the effort to actually go onto Facebook, type out and then post their thoughts openly. Personal accountability and the consequences that could ensue,
especially in Singapore's context, were enough of a deterrent to prevent the publishing of content that was not truly reflective of individual thought in the view of many participants.

However, when reflecting on their motivations to engage on Facebook, participants who took to Facebook to voice their views in the lead-up to GE2011 highlighted the knowledge that their expressing views on Facebook at that point in time was not entirely unusual. These sentiments underscore the effect influences online, such as mass opinion and echo chambers can have on individuals’ decisions to post on SNS. The next section will examine the effect online influences can have on the behaviours of individuals on SNS.

7.2.6 Mass Opinion Online

Facebook’s causal and approachable setting has created new, unobtrusive avenues participants could use to indicate their sentiments in an environment they felt was not intimidating or overpowering. Still, social order and personal constraint were evident in each public expression of opinion. By bypassing the strict controls surrounding the public display of viewpoints in Singapore’s offline public sphere, participants exercised their agency in the creative displays of seeking out new and socially acceptable avenues that could be employed to counter the physical restraint of having limited platforms for the expression of views via the local press. Such exercise of agency highlights Bourdieu’s argument:

Social behaviour is not to be accounted for in terms of a code given as a static representation, but as a continual accomplishing of actions in the implementation of natives’ strategies in accordance with their practical mastery of situations (Acciaioli 1981, p. 26).

The strategy of both manipulating established order, and yet, preserving it through perpetuating practices of continuity and regularity, such as observing OB markers and social norms in the presentation of multiple forms of the self, demonstrates the
operation of what Bourdieu has labeled the habitus. According to Bourdieu (1984), the habitus functions as the generative base of ordered, objectively constructed practices. The lack of an overall agreement on Facebook’s power in enabling Singaporean Gen Y’s ability to navigate the structure-agency dialectic, however, highlights the influence other factors and mechanisms, such as the effect group dynamics and the exposure to varying views on Facebook, could have on participants’ willingness to engage in Singapore’s civic sphere.

When asked if activity on Facebook could influence individual thought and perception on various issues and topics, the majority of respondents strongly agreed and/or agreed with Facebook having an effect on individual thought (Question 10). When examining the relationship between Facebook’s ability to influence individual thought and perception on various issues or topics (Question 10), and Facebook permitting young adult Singaporeans the ability to express their views accurately (Question 11), a statistically significant relationship was observed (p<.05).

![Figure 7.6: Percentage distribution of respondents’ views on Facebook’s ability to influence individual thought and perception on various issues or topics (Q10), in relation to Facebook permitting young adult Singaporeans the ability to express their views accurately (Q11)](image-url)
Some 45.2 percent of respondents who strongly agreed with Facebook influencing individual thoughts and perception, agreed with Facebook permitting members of Gen Y the ability to express their views accurately. And, 40.9% of respondents who agreed with Facebook influencing individual thoughts and perception also agreed with Facebook permitting members of Gen Y the ability to express their views accurately (Figure 7.6). These results suggest Facebook’s influence in affecting mindsets, while enabling members of Gen Y an avenue to accurately express their views.

Participants have asserted that Facebook has raised their awareness and interest in social issues (Question 28), which has, consequently, affected their desire to contribute their own views in the exchange of ideas online, as well as encouraged their involvement in causes to which they felt connected to, or for which they felt strongly, such as in the case of Pink Dot. Still, more than half of the respondents surveyed felt that there were deficiencies in the display of personal restraint and propriety in the airing of public criticism directed at the Singapore government on Facebook (Question 31).

The Facebook incidents involving Amy Cheong and Anton Casey attracted intense outrage online, with the latter attracting public lashings that included death threats to both Casey and his family, a situation not normally observed in pragmatic and rule-abiding Singapore. The extent of such reactions further indicates changes in the way netizens are behaving. Furthermore, participants remarked that because ‘...I am now allowed to have a lot of opinions, and I can make my own judgment...’ and because it is ‘anonymous, OK, somewhat anonymous’ on Facebook73, it is ‘OK to say things I usually would not dare to say face-to-face’.

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73 When comments or content are posted or shared on Facebook, the user’s profile picture and user name are indicated alongside the post. Other users can click on either the profile picture tab or the name of the user who posted the Facebook post to see information about that user on the user’s own Facebook profile page. Privacy settings can be set to limit the amount of information other users can access, and individuals are able to create multiple Facebook accounts. However, Facebook’s platform, being one that works on social connections between individuals and their networks of friends, prevents individuals from being entirely anonymous when engaging on the social networking site.
Participants’ sudden decisions to express views on Facebook could be perceived as participants having been coerced by situational circumstances into adopting a false sense of boldness. Being persuaded by the excitement playing out on Facebook to contribute to the hype of the situation, the interest generated by the desire to fit in, engage in trending topics online and be part of the in-group was highlighted by respondents who specified wanting to participate because ‘everyone was talking about it’: ‘You at least had to know what was going on...never mind you don’t talk about it [GE2011]...it was everywhere...you just had to find out what it was all about …’, if not, ‘you would feel left out’, and ‘not be able to join the “conversation”’ or ‘understand what was so interesting that everyone was talking about’.

Vicario et al. (2016, p. 558) found that social network users ‘aggregate in communities of interest, causes reinforcement and fosters confirmation bias, segregation, and polarisation’ at the ‘expense of the quality of information’. Thus, such behaviour results in the ‘proliferation of biased narratives fomented by unsubstantiated rumours, mistrust, and paranoia’, as well as the formation of homogeneous clusters and polarised communities (Vicario et al. 2016, p. 558). Moreover, because interest and appeal were critical in gaining viewership and attention to posts, the possibility of social media encouraging an echo chamber was high.

Echo chambers occur when a network of like-minded people share information and content that are accepted as fact and are repeated back at them without hesitation. This phenomenon has been given as the reason behind the widespread occurrence of conspiracy theories spreading misinformation and also why unreliable information could become viral online (RT.com 2016; Vicario et al. 2016). The influence of groups fueling sentiments that appealed to and/or concerned group members, regardless of their rationality, was highlighted by a participant who touched on the ease with which everyday gripes and grievances connected people in Singapore:

The problem of the Singapore experience in social media is that it is most effective when the issue is some problem with the government
or some social ill like the MRT\textsuperscript{74} breakdown or like the curry issue or something like that...(Ki).

If the content was not a ‘hot topic of concern’ that attracted the attention of large numbers of Singaporeans, nor was linked to something undesirable, something that could garner ‘the same kind of intensity as like say the MRT breakdown’, people were ‘not interested’ and would not engage in any sort of way, participants said. The hype created by social media and the interest generated by specific situations or hot topics such as GE2011 were also depicted as having a significant effect on the behaviour and actions of participants on Facebook.

In the case of GE2011, because it was the first time social media were allowed as part of campaign strategies, the concern over the various viewpoints was heightened when netizens realised how accessible content published by opposition parties was. The pervasiveness of alternative ideas, feeding the commonly resented notion of repression in Singapore, coupled with the context of an impending GE making it acceptable to openly express opinion and engage in the otherwise inhibited area of politics, also enhanced the attractiveness of engaging in such matters.

Ortega (1932) has argued that the rise of mass opinion has placed power in the hands of the users, giving them control to decide what was important, and thus, what went viral on social media. This argument suggests social media have a much greater influence than simply altering the way individuals communicate and access information. Individuals now had a say in how they wanted to get involved online, what others saw, and also the type of information they received and accessed at any given point in time. Allowing ‘like-minded people to establish a connection, and in that sense, fuel their interests, their passions and their ideologies...it becomes so convenient...it is very easy to reach out to people with common agendas, to reach a common ground...’. The difficulty then would be teasing out fact from exaggeration.

\textsuperscript{74}An abbreviation for Mass Rapid Transit, Singapore’s public train transportation system.
Some people might be just following the crowd and pick up on what others say...plus, if everyone is saying it, unless you disagree strongly, you could just go with the flow and accept what is being said without thinking much about it...and so you can’t really know if they are telling the truth...maybe they might just be following the popular opinion at that time or maybe it is because they might want to put up a front to show that they are for the Workers’ Party\textsuperscript{75} [WP] and start commenting and supporting WP stuff, sharing articles and notes or whatever just to show that they, like other Singaporeans, are for alternative voices, that they are for WP, they are anti-PAP, not submissive and want change just to show people that they can do it too...it depends, because it might just be a front and them doing it just because it is the popular thing to do, not that they really hate the PAP...(G)

The immersion of the individual within a crowd or group removes individuality, encourages the lack of individual awareness, and renders personal and moral restraints less necessary (Festinger, Pepitone & Newcomb 1952; Zimbardo 1969; Diener 1980). However, Alberici and Milesi (2015, p. 44) argue that exchanging and conveying common understandings of social realities assist individuals in the transformation of subjective personal ideas into socially validated norms and identities, resulting in the development of new collective identities that are linked to social change action. Participants said that acting in a group and assuming anonymity helped shroud individuality, giving individuals more courage than they normally would have or would feel comfortable displaying.

If some other person is saying it, and then there are a lot of people saying it, so why can’t I say it...so it is sort of like a gang mentality lah...if the government is going to take action on that guy, they will

\textsuperscript{75} The Workers’ Party is an opposition political party in Singapore. Since 2011, the Workers’ Party has been the only opposition party in Singapore to have elected Members of Parliament in Singapore’s Parliament (The Workers’ Party n.d.).
have to take action on everyone else, but will they take action on everybody? No, because there will be a big hoo-ha...but if it's just one person, it's easy to single you out...it's like a reinforcing kind of thing lah...if that guy can do it, then why can't I do it...the government is not going to take action on a whole lot of us lah...(Im)

Being relatively unidentifiable amidst a crowd of voices – acting within a group of like-minded individuals who expressed similar ideas – spurred participants who usually did not post on Facebook, but still took to Facebook to post their opinions in the lead up to GE2011, to participate in social discourse. Being anonymous encouraged their willingness to exhibit the audacity needed to publicly specify their opinions on Facebook.

If you ask [people] to say it face-to-face, to someone they are targeting, I don’t think they will do it...because now, they are behind a screen...like given a chance, if I am face-to-face with someone important, say a politician or something like that, I won't dare tell him "Look, your policies are wrong...you shouldn't be doing this...no, no, no..."...I won’t dare do that man...but, if I have a Facebook page and all, than I can go, “OK, sir, look, you should do this, this, this...”, but in front of him, I'm not going to say a single thing! (L)

Additionally, interview participants said that it was hard to have an informed, measured or ‘intellectual conversation on Facebook’ because ‘personal troubles are being translated into community troubles...’ Facebook was being used as an insincere posturing tool in the promotion of interest in civic issues. Ranting and emotions were also observed to be obscuring the objectivity of using Facebook as a method of articulating opinions and discussing views that could contribute to civic progress.

Participants felt that such undesirable Facebook etiquette specified a less committed way of making assertions – ‘...They say things for the sake of saying things...they are keyboard warriors...when you challenge them or try to get them to
actually understand what is going on, they disappear and they don't ever commit to taking action’. Moreover,

Nobody has ever interrogated me [about my views online], cos I don’t have to commit to respond to their posts or whatever rhetoric that they intend to pursue and propagate, so in that sense I don’t have to commit myself to a certain kind of viewpoint...I am able to shift around based on whatever I think is right at that particular time...(Ki)

Participants reiterated that before this, if you wanted to voice views in public, there was only Speakers’ Corner, or ‘...you had to go to the forum, write in to the forum and engage in debates and what not there...it was so much harder, but it was more fruitful and it had more weight...’ as you had to ‘really think things through’. According to participants, the process of articulating viewpoints was now so relaxed that sometimes individuals ‘don’t do it properly’, and many netizens have the perception that Facebook is their ‘own space’, where they ‘can do whatever [they] want’:

A lot of people post crap, and it is quite obvious...look at Stomp76...most of these things are not really justified, and this is the irony – they are not made with rational arguments and there is no evidence to substantiate most of it...so I think this is where the problem comes...on the one hand, you have the flattening of public discourse because the avenues for discussion are more democratic, so you don’t actually have to be very highly educated to make some sort of statement, as long as you have some sort of idea of how to use technology...so you can make very simplistic arguments and people will go “Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!”...(AT)

76 According to Stomp’s ‘About Us’ page, Stomp is ‘Asia’s leading citizen-journalism website with user-generated material fuelling its success...Stomp connects, engages and interacts with Singaporeans in a style and approach that is different from conventional news websites’. The content found on the site consists of netizens’ contributions in the form of pictures, videos and reports on stories netizens witnessed, found interesting and then directly uploaded on the site. The site is a Singapore Press holdings Website (Stomp.com.sg n.d.).
By acting within a group and adopting its ideals, anxiety over the presentation of self diminishes. Practices were no longer assessed based on individual roles and responsibilities (see Goffman 1959; Bourdieu 1977). The indistinctness of individuals identifying with the group’s notions and acting within the safety of numbers reduces the immediate concern of consequences or the method of expressing these views. Although this could mean that individuals would now be more willing to engage and express sentiments online, other arguments suggest the increase of more radicalised or extremist views (see Helliwell & Putnam, 2004), socially harmful perspectives, and even the occurrence of trolling.77

7.2.7 Lateral Surveillance

Incensed online sentiments observed in Singapore’s context have not led to uprisings or chaos. Unlike uprisings such as the Arab Spring that were propagated via social media, activism in Singapore is still nonaggressive. Although the LGBT community in Singapore is determined to attain equal rights, and activism for these causes has resulted in numerous campaigns online and offline, protests such as the annual Pink Dot event have been aimed mostly at creating awareness. Further action supporting the verbal outpouring of rage that has been observed online, such as in the case of the Cook A Pot of Curry! event, amounted to personal declarations and alignment with the message the Facebook event was trying to emphasise through cooking curry on one’s own on a specified date. Even in the Cheong and Casey incidents, netizens did not act out on their incensed remarks, but called on the government to address the insensitivity of the Facebook posts.

Participants’ articulating views such as ‘you have to be careful’ about what you post, especially since Facebook was ‘so public’ and individuals have gotten into trouble for their posts, suggests the perpetuation of underlying notions of fear and restraint online. Despite participants’ suggestion that the expressions of self-restraint when interacting online were mostly personal determinations at ensuring

According to Urbandictionary.com, trolling online refers to ‘being a prick on the internet...typically unleashing one or more cynical or sarcastic remarks on an innocent by-stander, because it’s the internet and, hey, [because] you can’ (Urbandictionary.com 2016b).
social decorum and order, the transference and continuation of the climate of fear from Singapore’s offline sphere to that of the online realm implies the extension of influence social disciplining mechanisms have (see Foucault 1980).

Moreover, despite the large amounts of time participants indicated spending on Facebook (Question 2), participants in both the survey (Questions 5 and 6) and interviews said they usually passively absorbed information on Facebook. Participants said that the indistinct definitions and vagueness surrounding the acceptability of practices online added to the apprehension and uncertainty over what was allowed and considered appropriate behaviour online. Such anxieties were underscored by participants’ consistent allusion to needing to be aware of consequences, and their preference for first finding out what others felt instead of being the first to indicate their own opinions when interacting on Facebook. Respondents’ preference for initiating discussions with friends in face-to-face contexts, rather than communicate opinions online because the former was not ‘set in stone’, also corroborates this point.

The effect of having their actions scrutinised or reproached by other netizens for making uninformed remarks online, for sharing inaccurate content that was not credible or not befitting of their intellect as educated members of society, and for broaching unacceptable or controversial topics was constantly presented by participants as being the main cause of their trepidation in overstepping socially ascribed boundaries. Unlike previously, where top-down governmental surveillance and the associated fear of punishment ensured the perpetuation of social discipline, the motivation for ensuring proper decorum and social order online was attributed to the fear of being reported on by other netizens (see Orwell 1949).

By highlighting erratic behaviours they felt did not correspond with socially agreed upon notions of propriety, netizens were scrutinising, monitoring and judging actions and content they saw online. The ambiguity of not knowing when such gazing occurred, the extent of such inspection, or who was being targeted, added to
the fearfulness and uncertainty participants described when reflecting on their exchanges online.

Going beyond Foucault’s (1977) singular, omnipresent panoptic central command centre, the disciplinary power moderating social behaviours had now been transferred to ‘multiple, dispersed, even competitive eyes that in their totality add up to a system of surveillance more pervasive than that imagined by Orwell’ (Whitaker 1999, p. 140). Similar to what Norris and Armstrong (1999, p. 7) postulate about camera surveillance, such systems are ‘a series of discrete, localised systems run by a myriad of different organisations rather than a single state monolith’. In addition, this ‘assemblage’ (Haggerty & Ericson 2000) is constantly adapting, expanding and mutating.

The practice of lateral surveillance or peer-to-peer monitoring has displaced “Big Brother” by proliferating “little brothers” who engage in distributed forms of monitoring and information gathering’ (Andrejevic 2006, p. 405). Proposing the model of a ‘participatory panopticon’, Whitaker (1999) contends that such monitoring also ‘represents a form of consensual submission to surveillance in part because the watched are also doing the watching’ (Andrejevic 2006, p. 405). Big Brother’s decentralisation has thus, magnified panoptic control, suggesting the amplification, extension and automation of governmental power:

The panoptic schema makes an apparatus of power more intense…it assures its efficacy by its preventative character, its continuous functioning and its automatic mechanisms (Foucault 1977, p. 206).

Foucault’s (1994, p. 67) reference to social discipline as ‘an activity that undertakes to conduct individuals throughout their lives’ emphasises the argument that surveillance is “designed in” to the flows of everyday life’ (Rose 1999, p. 234). Techniques of control and governance rely on the formation of subjects that internalise the monitoring gaze and are ‘caught up in a power situation of which they themselves are the bearer’ (Foucault 1977, p. 223). As such, these techniques
have been described as having being ‘animated by the desire to ‘govern at a distance” (Rose 1996, p. 43).

Lateral surveillance does not displace top-down forms of monitoring, but transforms ‘the goals of political, social, and economic authorities into the choices and commitments of individuals’ (Rose 1996, p. 58; see also Atkinson 1999; Morison 2000; Newman 2005). The emulation and augmentation of scrutiny has, thus, distributed the monitoring gaze of the authorities into another form of disciplinary enforcement (Andrejevic 2006, p. 406), fostering the ‘internalisation of government strategies and their deployment in the private sphere’ (Andrejevic 2006, p. 479; see also Rose 1996).

Moreover, Hay (2006, p. 334) has argued that risks identified and targeted by authorities, such as the necessity of ensuring ‘racial’ and religious harmony for Singapore’s survival, ‘can be said to have formed around on-going insecurities’ that promote adherence to government policies and rhetoric. For instance, the desire to continue enjoying the safety and comforts of developed Singapore, and not regress and then have to deal with the kinds of unrest and developmental problems that plagued Singapore’s early years, was described by participants as being a fundamental motivation for their adherence and adoption of OB markers and self-censorship in their daily lives.

The incentive to become ‘responsible citizens’ and ensure that not only participants themselves abided by the “rules”, but also that their fellow citizens also behaved appropriately, underscores the indirect control such mechanisms, as set out by the PAP government, have over the populace. The subjection of not only monitoring for the sake of ensuring political and economic goals are met, but also the personal interest participants have in ensuring social order is maintained, indicates how the management of threats and risks are being used and offloaded onto the citizenry (Hay 2006).

Due to technological infrastructure being a ‘central means of coordination and exchange’, an outcome of information societies, or what Castells (1998) refers to as
network societies, the development of surveillance societies has therefore, occurred (Lyon 2002, p. 248). Lyon (2002) has also contended that online surveillance has become an increasingly significant form of governance. However, unlike the maximum surveillance societies to which Orwell (1949) refers to, online surveillance societies ‘are not characterised by a single all-embracing and all-penetrating system’ (Lyon 2002, p. 248).

The amplification of panoptic monitoring through the distributed surveillance methodologies of peer-to-peer monitoring is still reliant on the internalised discipline of both the watched and also the watchers. According to Andrejevic (2006, p. 405), without the ‘internalisation of norms of conduct and governing imperatives by the watchers, distributed surveillance would amount to little more than the pluralisation of control rather than a strategy for its centralisation and amplification’.

In both the Cheong and Casey Facebook incidents (see Chapter Three), netizens were still adhering to the government rhetoric of preserving harmony, particularly multiracial harmony, which has persistently been indoctrinated as a core value necessary for Singapore’s progress and continued survival. Using such values as the basis of shaming social deviants, netizens were not the ones determining the underlying standards that were being applied to the enforcement of their powers of surveillance on public behaviour. Instead, netizens were perpetuating regimes of governance already prevalent in the city-state.

Taking on the responsibility of being active subjects in safeguarding the preservation of social harmony in Singapore, netizens’ interactive participation exemplifies the asymmetrical power relations and influence the PAP has in asserting indirect control. Using this method of scrutiny as a way to instil a sense of association with the goals of the government, and simultaneously boosting the legitimisation of the state, further echoes Foucault’s (1994, p. 40) assertion that ‘the population appears as ‘naturally’ dependent on multiple factors that may be artificially alterable’.
Yet, the reactions Cheong and Casey received from netizens were intense. The escalation of increasingly scornful sentiments observed on Facebook signifies the lack of restraint netizens had when expressing their views about both incidents. The resentment and increasingly vicious expressions observed online, also did not suggest that netizens were concerned about being monitored. Foucault’s (1991) contention that society is disciplined through the adoption, legitimisation and perpetuation of regimes of truths can be used to explain part of the situation that occurred in the Cheong and Casey incidents.

Through panoptic surveillance measures, the continued disciplining of society and, thus, the inscription of objectivity, as displayed in the way participants are socialised to discern and tease apart fact from fabrication, as well as participants’ conservatism in terms of the values and morals they observe, have served to ensure the maintenance of order in the city-state. Specifying the entrenchment and continuation of the PAP’s all-encompassing discourse, as well as the continued replication of such structural constraints on the social body, such practices also contribute to the PAP’s self-justification as a legitimate body of authority.

Netizens exhorting the PAP to act still upholds this notion of governments being legitimate bodies of authority that can effectively address issues. Yet, the recklessness and condescending comments netizens targeted, especially to Casey, suggests that the restrictions on the articulation of views because ‘Big Brother was watching’ or because one could be ‘targeted and traced’, no longer seemed to be effective or be of primary concern. Netizens’ reactions to these Facebook incidents do suggest that there is a limit to the kinds of freedom acceptable online, thus implying a transference of social values from the offline world to the online sphere. But, the dynamic of power being solely top-down was, however, no longer the case; instead, in such instances power is exercised laterally.

The fact that the Cheong and Casey incidents, and even the incident involving the 17-year-old Singaporeans who had articulated discriminatory remarks on Facebook would have had very different outcomes had they not played out on Facebook indicates the presence of different undercurrents being applied to
practices online. A different form of authority was now enforcing the unspoken restrictions individuals experienced in the regulation of their social behaviours online.

Netizens were signaling out issues they found socially offensive, amplifying the hype and virality of such instances online. By stressing the disparity of such socially offensive issues from the practices and beliefs accepted and administered in Singapore's social sphere, the disciplining of society was now being taken on by netizens themselves. Having internalised the regimes of truth created by the PAP, netizens turned on other users and enforced their agency so as to ensure social order, exemplifying the effectiveness of the PAP's disciplinary strategies and the continued perpetuation of structural constraint (Foucault 1980).

Lateral surveillance in Singapore has taken the form of netizens recording video clips of socially undesirable behaviour on public transport, such as able-bodied individuals not giving up their seats reserved for those in need. Controversial driving behaviours witnessed on the roads being uploaded online with calls for the government to take action have also increased (see Cheam 2007; Cheng 2013; Lim, YL 2013; Lin & Sih 2013; Mokhtar 2013; Zaccheus 2013; Channel NewsAsia, 20 June 2016). Contributing to the uproars of public discontent observed, authorities' reactions to such posts, using them as evidence for prosecution purposes have further legitimised the significance of such posts online (Chiu 2014; see also Tang 2014; Cheong 2015; Channel NewsAsia, 20 June 2016).

Participants’ use of socially agreed upon rules, values and meanings as benchmarks in the scrutiny of online practices indicate the internalisation, modification and thereafter reproduction of practices in the Singaporean state (Warde 2005). Highlighting the influence structural discourse has had in affecting the kinds of restrictions imposed on actions, as well as the significance of understanding specific socio-cultural situations when observing practices, the relevance of practice theory in understanding social practices and norms even in today's new media context is underscored. The next part of this chapter, Section 7.3, will look at
the use of Facebook as a tool in encouraging participation, as well as notions of national belonging in the city-state.

7.3 Active Engagement and the Construction of National Belonging in Singapore

The Singapore government’s focus on establishing and maintaining a sustainable national identity, or a ‘Singapore soul’ rooted in cultural ideals such as multiculturalism, meritocracy and pragmatism, which is intended to attach the Singaporean citizenry to the Singaporean city-state, underscores the importance placed on participation especially in the Singaporean context. Highlighting the significance of social capital, active engagement is, thus, being used as a form of community bonding that undergirds citizens opportunities to become stakeholders in Singapore’s socio-cultural and economic discourse (Koh & Ooi 2000).

Singapore’s constant focus on civic engagement and the building of social capital to safeguard its continued ‘survival’ in an ever-changing global society echoes Putnam’s case for the importance of connections and social relations amongst individuals in the advancement of civil life (Putnam 2000). Putnam’s argument for the need to sustain an engaged citizenry, one which is not only concerned about social issues, but whose members are willing to actively involve themselves in their community, focuses on the importance of strong ties and relationships within a society, as well as the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that result from such connections (Putnam 1995, 2000).

Based on the assumption that communities are made up of individuals, their feelings, and behaviours in relation to each other, the quality of social networks and social trust within a society affects the quality of civic life, as well as citizens’ ability to cooperate on joint issues (Brehm & Rahn 1997; Uslaner 1998, 1999; Shah, McLeod & Yoon 2001). Social capital, denoting resources that are gathered via relationships between individuals (Coleman 1988), also accentuates the significance of active civil participation and engagement in the prevention of
further declines in the already reduced rates of civic participation, especially amongst the younger generation (Putnam 2000; Chan & Wong 2001; Henn, Weinstein & Wring 2002).

Placing focus on the internet as a possible solution to combat the issue of declining social capital (Resnick 2001; Wellman, Boase & Chen 2002; Wellman et al. 2003; Shah, McLeod & Lee 2009), scholars have argued that the way the internet is used is vital in determining the relationship between the internet and social capital creation (Shah, McLeod & Yoon 2001). Wellman and Gulia (1999) have suggested that the internet could be the solution needed to restore distressed social ties and encourage the development of common social relations. Shah, McLeod & Yoon (2001) have also argued that individuals who used the internet to get information via emails, rather than use the internet for other social reasons, were observed to be marginally more involved in their communities and were significantly more likely to trust others. Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) have further contended that the internet is a great leveler of differences and could affect participation in civic society.

By feeling less restrained when interacting with strangers (Tranvik 2000, pp. 13-14), internet use has been argued to initiate greater connections with others who have similar interests and with whom it would otherwise not be possible to interact (Hiltz & Turoff 1993; Baym 1998; Wellman et al. 2001; Uslaner 2004). Studies have observed online connections to have had positive effects on both civic and political participation (Zhang & Chia 2006). Strong social bonds and relationships formed online have also been transferred to real-life interactions (Parks & Roberts 1998).

As physical spaces disappear, virtual communities and online communications are increasingly being used to satisfy the basic need for community in the online realm (Rheingold 1994). Overcoming limitations of space, new forms of community are developed online. Virtual communities have the capacity to overcome traditional social divisions and can assist in the reinforcement of community ties through the fostering of inclusiveness online (Norris 2002). Contending that online
participation has the ability to deepen linkages and bonds between individuals with similar beliefs and values, Norris's (2002) argument corroborates Kavanaugh et al.'s (2005) assertion that the internet can ‘strengthen social contact, community engagement and attachment’.

7.3.1 **Relationships Online**

The efficiency and social character of interactions carried out online have been a focus of research done on CMC. As CMC enables interaction that does not require another’s immediate physical presence, studies have focused on the positive effects CMC has had on relationships and sense of self (Nowak, Watt, & Walther, 2005; Heisler & Crabill, 2006). The view of many participants in this study that their continued use of Facebook was mainly for social interactions suggests online interactivity and engagement, and thus, accentuates the findings of such studies. Highlighting participants’ embrace and utilisation of Facebook’s many functions, as well as the effect Facebook use has had in increasing online interactivity and engagement, emphasises the value of Facebook’s functions in contributing to the fostering of social interconnections is emphasised.

Having observed the influence social trust has on sociability in interactions online, Sabatini and Sarracino (2014) highlighted the effect participation in online networks had on aspects of social capital. Ellison et al. (2011) have also shown how social media provide flexible and customisable methods of sociability to facilitate the sustenance of strong and weak ties via various online tools and strategies.

Interviewed participants were, however, undecided about Facebook’s use as a tool to enhance communication and connections. While some participants said Facebook’s platform helped reduce social awkwardness and could be used to initiate or encourage social links, and/or maintain and strengthen strong social ties, such as connecting with family when they were overseas, other participants said that the existence of a real-life relationship was necessary when facilitating connections online. Many participants did not regard commenting on the Facebook
Walls of individuals with whom they were not well acquainted as an acceptable form of behaviour.

A significant relationship (p<.05) was found when examining the relationship between the equivalence of online and offline relationships (Question 13) and the use of social media outlets such as Facebook in encouraging the development of bonds and relations between groups of people (Question 17). Amongst participants who felt that online and offline relationships were not equivalent, the majority of respondents (65.4%) were observed to agree that Facebook could help in the development of bonds and relations (Figure 7.7). Additionally, irrespective of participants’ views on the comparability of online and offline relationships, most participants said Facebook could strengthen the deepening of bonds and relations.

**Figure 7.7**: Distribution of respondents’ views on online and offline relationships being considered equivalent (Q13), in relation to respondents’ views on the use of social media outlets such as Facebook to encourage the development of bonds/relations between people (Q17)

Such responses imply distinctions between the types of relationships that could develop on Facebook. Corresponding with Granovetter’s (1973) strength of ties
theory, which suggests stronger ties elicit greater interaction and reciprocity, this finding also highlights the significance relationships have in determining connections and the flow of resources between groups of individuals (Haythornthwaite 2005).

When reflecting on the appropriateness of using Facebook to engage others on a personal level, respondents in both the survey and interviews indicated the strength of ties as having an effect on decisions regarding the trustworthiness and reliability of information obtained online. The distinction between Facebook surfing and stalking, or being kpo and too nosy when using Facebook, also reveals the significance of the relationship between individuals and the overarching social structures that shape their lives.

These findings suggest that relationships can be developed and deepened online, but generally could not be initiated online. Respondents indicating that they usually interacted only with individuals they knew online supports this conclusion. Keeping in touch with friends and family was the second most popular purpose participants indicated for using Facebook, being ranked just below using Facebook to see what their friend networks were doing, saying and thinking (Question 4). Such ranking further implies the significance placed on utilising Facebook as a tool in the maintenance and development of ties and connections.

However, Cummings, Butler and Kraut (2002) have argued that online relationships are less valuable than offline relationships when building and sustaining close social relations. Cummings Butler and Kraut (2002) suggested that the worth of relationships formed online depended considerably on whether online interactions were generated to supplement or substitute for offline interactions. Similarly, Wellman and Gulia (1999), and Uslaner (2002, 2004) have contended that being willing to interact online did not indicate trust, as the individuals engaged in online interactions were essentially still strangers, upon whom individual netizens had no background information (see also Rosenblum 1998).
Nevertheless, Lampe et al. (2012) found that changes in the behaviours of Facebook users were closely related to users’ perceptions of Facebook being an appropriate platform for purposes beyond social interactions. And, information-seeking behaviours on Facebook were observed to increase social capital outcomes because of the multiple outlets through which information could be sought (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007). Results from these studies parallel those obtained from interviewed participants, who suggested that engaging in social media helped individuals relate their personal experiences to other users.

...What Facebook does is it is able to relate your personal experiences with others... the "Oh ya! That’s a similar experience" kind of comments acknowledge that you have similar kinds of grievances and then you start to realise that there is a kind of community out there which shares the same views as you...(Kh)

Creating a ‘temporary imagined community’ that ‘revolved around certain core issues, the formation of a community based on the articulation of views, even if they were mostly complaints or grievances experienced by netizens, does suggest a move towards a more open democracy in Singapore. Undoubtedly, this shift might not be immediately apparent or considerable, especially when observing the various types of surveillance and disciplinary mechanisms occurring in the city-state. Nonetheless, the effortlessness participants described when taking to Facebook to join in discussions or state their perspectives with Facebook 'likes' is indicative of an increased ability to express viewpoints.

7.3.2 Trust

Keen (2007) has asserted that the increasing access to various alternatives and the neglect of fact checking, together with social media’s encouragement of personal publishing and the production as well as the consumption of knowledge, has led to the rise of the amateur. Stressing the importance of scrutinising the quality and
source of information before accepting information with which they were presented, participants said:

You have to take into account that this is only one opinion, one perspective and there are other articles which say other things...[and those articles] might back things up, assert different things...you cannot take things for granted...you cannot just take it as it is...(Sa)

Participants repeatedly emphasised the need to validate the sources of information and the credibility of individuals and articles found on Facebook. Indicating sensitivity and awareness of the irregular quality of articles available online, participants explained that they usually used prior relationships and social ties as a benchmark when assessing the dependability of information obtained on Facebook. Past experiences and social occurrences, which served as contextual background knowledge, were also taken into consideration when the source was not a personal acquaintance.

By indicating that they trusted family members the most, participants underscored the importance of strong social relationships in the acceptance and confidence placed in the type of information presented to them (Question 24). Paralleling Putnam’s (1995) notion that strong bonding social capital connecting individuals promoted the sharing of similar values and beliefs, and increased feelings of trust, the high level of trust participants indicated they had in their family denotes the strength of these ties. The similarity such close knit-networks shared also promotes in-group solidarity, and thus, strengthens identities and homogeneous units (Putnam 2000), contributing to the level of confidence participants placed in the information obtained from such associations.

Nonetheless, participants said that they trusted information obtained from their neighbours the least (Question 24). The largest proportion of respondents was undecided about how much they trusted their neighbours. This view implies weak and unconvincing community relationships or relationships involving people from
diverse social groups in Singapore. The reduced levels of trust observed could suggest a lack of understanding between the various social groups in Singapore, thus resulting in the lower levels of confidence participants indicated when referring to information obtained from their neighbours.

When examining the relationship between the degree to which respondents trusted information obtained from their family and the amount of trust they placed on information obtained from their neighbours, a significant relationship was observed (p<.05). The more distrust participants had when dealing with information obtained from family members, the more likely participants were to indicate distrust when dealing with information obtained from neighbours. Explained via the strength of ties participants had, the less bonding social capital or strong ties present, which translates into the amount of trust participants placed in members of their family, the more likely participants were to indicate deficiencies in the development of bridging social capital with other more distant members of their communities (Figure 7.8).

Figure 7.8: Percentage distribution of the degree to which respondents trust information obtained from their family, in relation to the amount of trust they placed on information obtained from their neighbours (Question 24)
According to Granovetter (1973, p. 1378), while bonding is essential in the cultivation of trust and the establishment of personal values, bridging social capital is needed as a collective resource to boost the development of a more inclusive institutional structure, and also to ensure social harmony. Kraut et al. (2002) also found that despite the internet predicting increased social benefits for individuals with greater social support, the benefits experienced were dependent on the extent to which individuals were able to make use of online opportunities to enhance their daily lives. With less social support being associated with reduced social benefits, the importance of social relations in the advancing of social capital underscores the need for strong ties within social networks before the trust that is associated with such relationships could be developed (Putnam 1995).

The high level of trust indicated with regard to trusting information obtained from friends implies actual personal relationships, as well as having at least some knowledge of their friends’ characters and backgrounds were necessary before participants could comfortably place their trust in information they came across (Question 24). Paralleling Sheldon’s (2009) finding that the more interaction users had, the less anxiety they experienced and the more they were able to trust individuals online, these results highlight the higher levels of trust and significantly less skepticism participants noted when reflecting on the trustworthiness of information shared or posted by their friends.

The strong bonding ties prevalent among these groups were also exemplified in participants’ comments about knowing ‘who these people were’ and, thus, trusting their judgment and discernment. Knowing their friends’ backgrounds, as well as their individual dispositions, and being able to trust their perspectives were essential components in participants’ judgment of the credibility of information obtained on Facebook. Friends’ circulation of specific pieces of information on Facebook through the sharing and reposting of articles was also regarded as a personal validation of the articles’ worth, credibility and authenticity.

However, not all of those interviewed felt that posts and comments from individuals they knew were always dependable. Some participants felt that because
Facebook allowed people to post anything they wanted, coupled with the accessibility of Facebook's platform, any- and everyone were able to add 'their two cents worth'. Participants also expressed the view that the circle of friends on Facebook made a huge difference in the tone and types of topics they saw or were exposed to on Facebook.

The tendency for individuals to associate or bond with others who shared common characteristics could strengthen the connection between these individuals and perpetuate the likeness of thoughts and actions. While such associations could be positive and encourage greater receptiveness to a broader scope of alternate perspectives, such like-mindedness could result in a closed-in community that was not forward-looking and could further isolate and separate closely bonded units (Putnam 2000). By increasing distinctions and separateness between homogeneous groups within a society, the development of divergent identities could exasperate social cleavages, and in the case of Singapore, be detrimental to the city-state's ethnic and religious harmony, to use the PAP’s terminology.

**Figure 7.9**: Percentage distribution of the degree to which respondents trust information obtained from friends in relation to the reliability of information obtained from social networking sites (Question 24)
When examining the relationship between the amount of trust respondents placed in the information obtained from their friends and the reliability of information obtained from social networking sites, a statistically significant relationship was found ($p<.05$). The results suggest that the discernment described by respondents in both the survey and interviews was actively being carried out when respondents engaged on Facebook. Still, participants were mainly undecided about how trustworthy social media platforms were, irrespective of the amount of trust they placed in information obtained from their friends (Figure 7.9). Nevertheless, the more participants trusted their friends, the more likely they found information obtained via social networking sites reliable. The presence of pre-existing ties and relationships gave more weight to the acceptability of information obtained from such sources further highlighting the significance of established connections, even in the digital realm.

7.3.3 The Meaning of Facebook ‘Likes’

Prescribed as the way to safeguard Singapore’s continued ‘survival’ in an ever-changing global society, active engagement and participation in community activities have been a key focus of the Singapore government. Endorsed as a way to inculcate citizens’ feelings of stakeholdership and belonging to the city-state, the form of engagement encouraged by the PAP has, however, only been limited to the civic sphere (see Chapter Three).

Participants’ responses also describe participation as needing to be tangible, in measurable terms. Similar to traditional forms of participation, such as turning up in-person for a rally or signing a petition in-person in support of causes, distinguishing such notions of participation from that of online participation is problematic. This is especially so when considering the blurring of the online and offline realms and also the lack of new definitions of participation and engagement that have been affected by new media technologies.
New media have changed the way content is produced and circulated. New ways of participation have emerged, allowing netizens to engage other users in various different ways. Besides contributing to content flows, the ease of ‘liking’ pages and articles to show support has also emerged as a new way of showing engagement, interest and concern for issues raised online. While such methods of engagement could aid the establishment of connections and the strengthening of social relations, which are important for social capital (Putnam 2000), the ease with which perspectives could be voiced has also raised issues regarding the meaning of participating via online methods.

When determining the significance of activist stances, particularly those indicated online, participants noted the variable motivations behind individuals’ decisions to click Facebook’s ‘like’ button. Participants said there were no set rules guiding their decisions over when or why they clicked ‘like’ on Facebook. Highly subjective and meaning different things to different individuals at different times and contexts, a ‘like’ could imply having received or having read the article, a way to show agreement with the article’s content, indicate appreciation to friends for sharing that article, as a way to highlight the article so that others could read it, and also as a way to remind oneself of the information the article carried. Participants also said they could ‘like’ an article because a friend had requested they do so or because participants wanted to specify their support for ‘more serious’ causes.

Even participants who felt that Facebook could be used as a way to accurately express their thoughts felt that the subjective nature and unpredictability of intentions behind individuals clicking the ‘like’ button on Facebook were too varied for them to earnestly consider online ‘likes’ a serious assertion of views.

...Our culture is like, as long as it is easy, not troublesome, doesn’t get us into trouble then ok, it’s fine, we can do it...but once it requires commitment, a bit more action, then people will just walk away...(JJ)

The main subject of participants’ skepticism over ‘likes’ being associated with genuine pledges of support was the ease with which individuals could choose the
‘simple way out’, not ‘take action’ or back out from doing things they pledged to do. Participants said that although social media had increased consciousness, enabling individuals the ability to ‘express their complaints and gripes online, ...ultimately they leave it as that...they won’t go one step further...’. Participants repeatedly highlighted the superficiality indicated by the mere display of viewpoints via online ‘likes’, stressing the lack of commitment and the convenience of clicking the ‘like’ button as reasons for the lack of authority they felt online ‘likes’ had.

Scholars have also contended that the ease with which individuals could participate in civic issues online and not be obliged to engage in action has resulted in the occurrence of ‘slacktivism’ (Rotman et al. 2011; Knibbs 2013). Contributing to the mistrust participants displayed with regard to the significance placed on Facebook ‘likes’ as activist standpoints, the resulting awareness raised and personal satisfaction individuals got from the mere clicking of Facebook's ‘like’ have been argued to have no real impact on social milieus. Without any real action being taken to address social issues, this disparity in the extent of support indicated online and the actual commitment received to affect social change was characterised by Knibbs (2013) as ‘feel-good back patting’.

Participants also described the superficial support of causes online as misleading, especially since the perception of engagement in activism online, despite not resulting in any substantial action leading to change, has resulted in the individuals’ belief that they were actually involved in causes that could affect social change. Clouded by the mistaken excitement of the person who felt they had finally managed to participate in political activity, the resultant feeling of accomplishment was inevitably criticised as being insincere and unfounded.

Participants emphasised that actualising online ‘likes’ into ‘real support’ and commitment was crucial in boosting the meaningless spread of awareness via social media to a level of purposeful contribution. Purposeful contribution to causes required ‘real action’ and a thorough understanding of the basis warranting the protest. Real and active participation in civic life did not imply just clicking the
Facebook ‘like’ button and then feeling like they had contributed towards or engaged in civic issues.

Moreover, participants felt that the false sense of security, increased bravery and initiative experienced when engaging via online media had propelled individuals to endorse causes without properly appreciating their purposes. Ultimately, acting only in the safety of groups, which was discussed earlier in this chapter, individuals were giving the impression that they were now more spontaneous in expressing sentiments. However, in actual fact, they were not being more spontaneous and still did not appreciate the meaning or influence their actions had. Alternatively, participants declared that individuals gave in to popular action and chose to engage online because it was easier to do so rather than resist and be singled out for not adhering to or supporting prevailing norms and sentiments. Participants also highlighted this tendency as a reason Facebook ‘likes’ should not be taken ‘too seriously’.

The uncertainty and insignificance participants attributed towards Facebook ‘likes’ could also have been affected by the extensive marketing and branding campaign strategies brands have engaged in online. Because of the intense pursuit of ‘likes’ as a reflection of audience reach for brand marketing, companies have engaged in tactics such as brands tailoring strategies to suit consumer preferences, offering free gifts and other incentives in exchange for Facebook ‘likes’. This practice has resulted in the meaningless engagement and ‘likes’ obtained from individuals who probably did not care much for the brand (Roberts, T 2012; Coursaris, van Osch & Balogh 2016). Such meaningless pursuits of ‘likes’ could, therefore, have led to the dramatic decrease in the significance of ‘likes’, and their not being regarded as an accurate reflection of online campaign success (Roberts, T 2012).

Devaluing the meaning and value of ‘likes’, these kinds of online marketing tactics have contributed to the habitual clicking of the Facebook ‘like’ icon, to which participants alluded when explaining their reluctance to accept ‘likes’ as a form of ‘real’ engagement. Not requiring emotional investment or awareness of the significance of such actions, the frivolousness of clicking ‘likes’ just because it was
possible to do so has resulted in the escalation of negative impressions and the unconstructive associations participants displayed. Trivialising the meaning of ‘likes’, the action of clicking ‘like’ has therefore been described as a reflex action, further contributing to the blurring of ‘liking for fun’ and liking to indicate support for causes. Subsequently, such reflex actions have added to participants’ doubt over ‘likes’ being considered valid reflections of individual opinion.

Yet, research on the meaning of Facebook ‘likes’ has found that ‘likes’ do, in fact, demonstrate individual sentiment and could be used as indicators to determine individual character traits. In Kosinski, Stillwell, & Graepel (2013) study, Facebook ‘likes’ were linked to results of psychometric tests and detailed demographic profiles, resulting in automatic and accurate inferences of individuals’ personal attributes, which were predictable with a high degree of accuracy. Using highly sensitive personal attributes ranging from sexual orientation to intelligence, the computer programme used in the study correctly predicted 73 percent of smokers and 88 percent of gay men in the sample accessed (Kosinski, Stillwell, & Graepel 2013), underscoring the significance and value of ‘likes’ in conveying precise sentiments.

The significance of understanding the relationship between social practices in Singapore and the meaning of ‘likes’ is further underscored when observing the culture of participation surrounding the city-state. Participants’ use of Facebook ‘likes’ as a way to indicate even the slightest amount of voice and assert an opinion is noteworthy, especially when considering the context of constraint the PAP has consistently enforced (Ortner 1989, pp. 11-12). Having had restricted platforms to voice views, OB markers having been inculcated in daily practices, the willingness to exercise choice and express perspectives not only suggests a practical mastery of social contexts (Bourdieu 1990, p. 53), but also emphasises the significance of participants’ bold move towards publicly standing up for issues about which they felt strongly (Ortner 1989).

Despite ‘likes’ being considered by participants in this study to be a generic indication of personal associations, the finding that ‘likes’ can be used to determine
personal attributes and can be considered accurate representations of individual motives highlights the significance of online actions in the ever increasing blurring of online and offline realms. Although no formal Court ruling has been passed regarding the use and implication of Facebook ‘likes’ in Singapore, the libel suits brought against bloggers such as Ngerng indicate the significance placed on views, even though they might have been indicated online, thus inviting the same kind of consequences as if such views had been published in other forms of media.

Moreover, the implication such displays of agency have, especially in Singapore’s context, is accentuated especially when considering the tight structural constraints engulfing the Singapore populace, particularly the fear of repercussions that continues because of both top-down and lateral forms of surveillance. Looking at Singapore’s historical setting, being so closely associated with discipline and tight structural control, low rates of civic engagement have traditionally been the norm in the city-state. In contrast to the immense attention and curiosity netizens have displayed with regard to social issues in Singapore, the voluntary involvement in online discourses makes netizens’ interest in such matters even more noteworthy. This notion is even more notable when considering the fact that the majority of participants said they rarely involved themselves in their community (Question 23), and usually did not engage in social activism.

Notwithstanding participants’ disagreement with Facebook ‘likes’ being considered a concrete indication of individual sentiment, the willingness to assert opinions and click the Facebook ‘like’ button to indicate support and agreement with causes seen online, is still a form of action, an expression of personal belief, and should be viewed as a valid act of participation. The effortlessness and eagerness to click ‘like’ on Facebook for various reasons, so much so that the meaning of ‘likes’ has to be questioned, is an immensely different situation from the previous inability to publicly voice any kind of perspective in the Singaporean context.

Contrasted to just a decade earlier when citizens had to apply for police permits before they could express their thoughts at Speakers’ Corner, the only legitimate location they were allowed to publicly air viewpoints, the spontaneity and
inclination netizens now display when taking to Facebook to express themselves emphasise the freedom participants have to indicate their perspectives. Netizens were actively involving themselves in social discussions and were trying to assert their views, playing their part in engaging in democratic discourses through their public indication of preferences and opinions.

In accordance with the importance of context in the interpretation of situations and meanings (Ortner 1989, pp. 11-12), only after Singapore’s context of restraint is understood can the extent of change and the significance of such shifts in the practices of Singapore’s Gen Y be comprehended appropriately. Also, as simplistic and as meaningless as participants might suggest ‘liking’ things on Facebook might be, clicking the ‘like’ button still requires a willingness to engage and, thus, needs to be recognised as a new way of participating in civic life. Civic engagement cannot be limited exclusively to traditional definitions such as partaking in formal volunteer work or carrying out social responsibilities, such as voting or paying taxes. New meanings and definitions of participation in the digital age need to be incorporated, and perceptions need to be adjusted to accommodate these changes brought about by new media technologies.

7.3.4 The Need for Commitment and Involvement

The ease with which ‘likes’ could be indicated online has caused debates on the extent of commitment and the meaning of participating online. The effortlessness with which individuals could align themselves with ideas and motions mooted online was also a reason participants indicated for needing a clear indication of involvement before participation could be considered valid. As such, participants in this study repeatedly stressed that before sentiments seen online could be regarded as accurate, the need for specific action, or ‘concrete action’ as a verification of commitment to causes was necessary.

The extent of participants’ commitment when supporting causes was found to be directly associated to the relevance of the article’s content in relation to
participants’ own personal situations. Take for instance the KONY 2012 Facebook incident and the Cook A Pot of Curry! event. Both incidents were circulated on Facebook with promises of an actual event occurring. However, participants interviewed were found to have expressed more interest in the latter incident, as it concerned the questioning of the very multiracial values and meritocratic principles they believed, practised and subscribed to.

Although situated overseas, the KONY 2012 incident eventually reached Facebook networks in Singapore and was circulated amongst participants’ Facebook Newsfeeds. However, the relevance and meaning of the KONY 2012 movement prevented participants from fully supporting and engaging in it. Centred on the forced recruitment of child soldiers in Africa by rebel militias, the producing charity, Invisible Children, aimed to make the African cult and militia leader, indicted war criminal and the International Criminal Court fugitive Joseph Kony globally known in order to have him arrested (Cauterucci 2016). Participants said they were unable to fully connect with the viral video’s message, but felt that the main reason KONY 2012 went viral in Singapore’s online sphere was because it had an appalling subject matter.

Suggesting that it was the injustice the video highlighted that encouraged their eventual interest, participants described a situation where ‘...everyone was talking about it...’ both online and offline. And, even though these participants were initially not interested in KONY 2012’s message, its consistent appearance and the ensuing discussions that took place amongst their friends eventually persuaded them to ‘take a look’ and ‘see what all the hype was about’. Participants, were however, quick to point out that the primary objective of the KONY 2012 movement ‘had little to do with [them]’.

Still, the interest surrounding the article led participants to do their own research on the topic. Only after participants furthered their initial interest did they realise that the incident was not a recent occurrence and neither was the video an accurate representation of the situation currently occurring in Africa. There were also not many options available for participants to actively contribute to, to actually do
something about the situation in Africa. As such, participants said they could only ‘like’ and share the KONY 2012 video on Facebook, which contributed to the resulting lack of follow-up action observed in response to the emotions the viral video elicited.

...Via this method, there is awareness…but the level of action or the progression of transforming awareness to action is not processed lah...if you see things like KONY, if it had like for example 1999 likes...and you go, ok, I will like this, and [think that] probably the other 1999 people will actively go out and do something about it lah...so it's ok, I can just like lah, just to share and spread the awareness...but ultimately, you are still not doing anything, not contributing to the cause at all...(Im)

The lack of concrete action and engagement in the KONY 2012 movement contrasted significantly to the responses observed in the Cook A Pot of Curry! event that also went viral on Singapore’s Facebook platform. Singaporeans were enraged by the mediation outcome, which requested the local Indian family to cook curry only when their foreign Chinese neighbours were not at home (Lim, KW 2011). Outrage ensued as netizens deemed such an outcome entirely unsatisfactory, slamming the Community Mediation Centre’s compromise as being contrary to Singapore’s multiracial and inclusive values (Lim, KW 2011).

In reaction to the newspaper article's reportage of the mediation outcome, a Facebook event calling for solidarity against the dispute settlement result was started. More than 60,000 netizens indicated support for the cause and said they would cook curry on 21 August 2011 (Teng 2015). Encouraging the celebration of curry, the event was also commented on and received support from various celebrities, and even the PAP government.

Then minister for Law and Foreign Affairs, K Shanmugam, added that it was ‘heartening to see so many people come together to affirm a key aspect of...Indian culture’ and defend it as a way of life in Singapore (Shanmugam 2011, cited in Lim,
D 2011). However, the Minister cautioned netizens about the need to establish the accuracy of information they were spreading and/or reacting to. Drawing attention to the fact that ‘the incident took place about seven years ago and that the settlement was suggested by one of the two parties [involved] – and not the mediator’, Shanmugam stressed the ease with which negative sentiments could develop into xenophobic mentalities (Shanmugam 2011, cited in Lim, D 2011).

Interviewed participants remembered the incident vividly. They recounted not only ‘liking’ the event on Facebook, but also actually cooking of curry in their own homes. Undoubtedly, some participants said they did not make a ‘big deal about it’, such as uploading pictures as proof of their having cooked curry or inviting friends to have a ‘curry party’. Nonetheless, taking the extra step and physically displaying their support was merited, as participants felt that the cause ‘was meaningful’ and ‘worth the effort’. The physical act of participants taking to cooking curry is even more noteworthy, as this act was done willingly, on their own accord, in their own private spaces, without having others coaxing, pressuring or holding them accountable to their word and/or making sure they actually cooked curry when they said they would. Actively turning online ‘likes’ into real action was a key factor in gauging the meaning of ‘likes’ and the value of such petitions submitted online, participants said.

Physically cooking curry on 21 August 2011 as an expression of dissatisfaction over the injustice to which the local Indian family was subjected parallels the principles displayed in the participation and support of more traditional activist activities. Traditional forms of activist expression, such as those generated by participation in rallies, protests or demonstrations and even the signing of pledges or petitions, hold participants accountable for their articulation of views and efforts in promoting, inhibiting or targeting social, political, economic or environmental change within society.

Indicating explicit support for causes via various forms of public protests makes individuals identifiable and accountable for their actions. Regarded as a public declaration of personal positions on an issue, the commitment participants
described and displayed by actually participating in cooking curry emphasises the relevance and significance of the issue at hand. This is so, particularly in Singapore, where the historical context of suppressed freedom of speech makes the sudden willingness to assert perspectives very significant. The internal and external pressures influencing the modification, replication and transformation of such practices highlight the varied dynamics and contexts influencing the display of practices (Ortner 1989).

Coupled with the fact that the mediation outcome for the Curry Incident had occurred several years prior, netizens’ reactions substantiate the claim that if the topic of concern was personally relevant, or was something in which individuals genuinely believed, the article’s appeal and the interest accorded to it would intensify exponentially. The resultant show of support could then become exaggerated, possibly even violent, as in the case of the Arab Spring, and even if there were structural constraints preventing individuals from supporting the cause, innovative ways around the restrictions would be found. The yearly Pink Dot event at Speakers’ Corner is an example of such a situation.

Set up on 1 September 2000, Speakers’ Corner was the first and only designated venue in Singapore where individuals could publicly give speeches (Sim 2014). Yet, use of the space was still subject to various restrictions. Up until 2008, a police permit was required before speakers could legally voice their views at the outdoor venue (Sim 2014). Today, although Singaporeans or Singaporean PRs need not apply for a police permit to use the space, an online application with the National Parks Board (NParks) is still necessary. And, individuals are still reminded repeatedly not to incite public chaos or address any topic that could upset Singapore’s multiracial and multireligious harmony.

Despite the limitations placed on the freedom of expression in a designated ‘unrestricted’ space such as Hong Lim Park, more and more Singaporeans have been turning up for the yearly family-friendly carnival-like Pink Dot event. In an effort to raise awareness and gain support for the promotion of an inclusive society, which embraces ‘the freedom to love regardless of sexual orientation’ (Pink
Dot SG 2015), Pink Dot’s organisers used Facebook to circumnavigate the social restrictions they faced when publicising their ‘socially problematic’ cause.

In a largely conservative and tightly controlled space such as Singapore, the use of social media platforms reveals the creativity and passion the Pink Dot organisers have for the advancement of their cause. Netizens’ willingness to circulate the information about the Pink Dot events and physically turn up at Speakers’ Corner is also indicative of their conscious decision and commitment towards supporting the rights of the LGBT community.

Moving forward from Schatzki’s (2001) argument that the continuation of practices is reliant on the embodiment of practices interwoven in the shared understandings and meanings embedded within practices, participants’ clarity in describing the maintenance of social order while negotiating suitable ways of expressing alternative sentiments, stresses not just the internalisation of established social norms but their modification as well. Perpetuating structural discourses and the reproduction and innovation of practices, actors’ ability to modify practices to suit various contexts and needs underscores the capacity for variation in the performance of practices (Warde 2005, p. 141).

Furthermore, such displays of active participation and engagement in civic issues both online and offline indicate Facebook’s ability to advance social activist stances in Singapore. Having had publicity conducted entirely via social media, and still having managed to observe exponential growth in the number of supporters turning up for each successive Pink Dot event highlights the increasing desire Singaporeans have to involve themselves in alternative social issues. Juxtaposed against the restrictions placed on the kinds of topics permitted for discussion at Speakers’ Corner and government sentiment that Singapore is still a conservative society, not ready to embrace same-sex marriage (Channel NewsAsia, 5 June 2015), the interest and awareness of such alternative issues, as well as the willingness to express opinions publicly on a traditionally taboo subject, underscore the changing dynamics the Singaporean city-state is experiencing.
Participants said they felt that using social media to create awareness about issues was ‘the only way’ possible for them to campaign or show displeasure for concerns raised in Singapore. Describing this use of social media as ‘our way of protesting’, limits to the increasing openness of Singapore’s civic sphere were implied. Revealing the persistent presence of an underlying climate of fear, the importance of not overstepping boundaries and acting amidst the safety of a larger group of individuals further suggests the continuing existence of limits to the increasing openness observed in Singapore.

7.3.5 Motivating Active Engagement

Participants highlighted the continued lack of commitment and the deficiency in the display of actual, tangible and helpful activities when observing activism online. For participants, the propensity to engage in activism might seem stronger online, but the blurring of the physical and virtual realms has affected individuals’ perceptions of what is considered constructive action and also the actual engagement in issues supported online.

...For the Cook A Pot of Curry! [incident], so much was being said online and so much was said amongst friends...but what is actually being done in real life? There was actually no real action taken in the real, physical world except quiet individual signs of protests, if you call cooking curry, yourself, at home, a protest...(Mk)

Participants commented that real activism in Singapore was difficult as the convenience of social media has led to ‘laziness’, and reduced the want to take physical action, or ‘ownership of their views and lives’. Moreover, Gen Y’s upbringing has contributed to the desire for the ‘comfortable and convenient’:

...People are just too lazy to go down for the real thing...it is all about being too comfortable...we were brought up to be around convenience, and everything was within reach...it is always about
what is within earshot, easy reach, what is easy to access, what is convenient...(Mk)

Being ‘comfortable’ also meant that individuals were satisfied with the lifestyles they were leading and did not ‘want to rock the boat’. Not being ‘ready to translate’ online gripes into ‘one big action that might significantly alter how we live our lives...’ was another reason indicated by participants for not wanting to involve themselves in actual causes. The fact that ‘...many Singaporeans are happy to live a life where they get what they want and where their family and friends are happy...’ further explains the general reluctance participants described when talking about Singaporeans’ preference to not ‘cause trouble’.

Participants said social backgrounds, having too much to lose, having more important ‘real life concerns’ to deal with as compared to involving one’s self in ‘ambitious concerns such as political and governance issues’ were reasons for the bleak outlook Singapore had when it came to encouraging and developing the exhibition of personal agency and active engagement in civic issues in Singapore.

...If you were to look at the slightly lower or lower income groups, I guess they would be involved in more of the everyday stuff lah...like how do I survive today, how do I get food to put on the table rather than get so caught up with such political dealings, or political rallies or the big hoo-ha and the shenanigans of it lah...their thinking will be more real world rather than more aspirational...(Im)

The pragmatism described in such sentiments further indicates the internalisation and replication of government rhetoric that was focused on economic success. The lack of community support stemming from strong social ties is evident in participants’ description of loneliness when describing the lack of motivation they felt when trying to engage in civic matters.

...You can feel very lonely trying to do something that is not the norm, that is different...seeing other people do things, especially things that
you are nervous about, does help me feel better about embarking on it, doing it, doing something about it...these friends do give me support...(D)

The fear of being socially ostracised and alone was indicated as affecting the level of participation and commitment participants were willing to display. Consequently, the ease of going with the flow and adopting pre-established norms and social practices instead of choosing to be unique or insisting on expressing views that clearly contradicted majority opinion for fear of punishment suggests the effectiveness of surveillance and disciplinary measures in Singapore’s social sphere. ‘It is a very thin line...people are very conscious especially when it comes to identity...being anonymous online versus showing support physically in person, it’s two extremely different things...’ said participants.

They may be interested to know and hear more, but they may not be interested in putting themselves out there...something is lacking in the motivation for a person...to take on more responsibility...maybe it is because we are too used to looking to someone else for direction, whether it is our fathers, or our government...(D)

This notion was further emphasised when participants reflected on Singapore’s education system as not having inculcated the skills or mindsets fundamental to instilling the importance of social activism in its populace. Participants explained that enthusiasm to engage was not a trait that has been ingrained in Singaporeans:

We are not big on issues lah, we are not big on environmental issues, we are not big on things...I think we are not trained to be so interested, I mean in school were you trained to promote causes, exercise your opinions and beliefs like “Oh, how we need to love trees”, “how we need to save the earth”? No! We were not! (Z)

The effect of socialisation in being taught to focus on individual merit and achievements clearly exposes the pragmatism and practicality instilled in the
Singaporean populace. As a participant noted, being in a position that privileged the ability to concern one's self with social matters was 'not the norm':

Yes, I have to admit that because I am not worried about how to put money in the bank all the time, I have the resources freed up, the resources to spare to be able to engage in these things...my friends and I who have opinions, we tend to come from upper-middle class backgrounds...yup, we have that ability, we don't have to worry about meeting basic needs...we are still pretty spoilt and pampered no matter how worldly we are in our thinking...(D)

Without basic instruction cultivating the interest, awareness and motivations needed to encourage the belief and support for rights and/or causes, civic issues would be dismissed as unimportant. As a result, Singaporeans have become apathetic, and instilling the desire to contribute to civic matters has become challenging. And, although participants indicated being aware of how important engaging in civic matters was, particularly giving back to society via social work and volunteering their time and effort, participants collectively said that job demands prevented their regular involvement in such activities. Such practical views were also displayed when the majority of respondents said that they rarely involved themselves in their community (Question 23).

The pragmatism of such an approach towards partaking in civic matters, which is a vital trait in the creation of a vibrant economy, stresses the practicality that has been engrained in Singaporeans' practice of everyday life. Overruling personal desires to give back to society, such scenarios suggest the internalisation of the PAP's core principles, which highlight the importance of engaging in economic practices that could contribute towards Singapore's continued success.

Panoptic mechanisms, constraining actors’ actions are also underscored in such situations (Foucault 1977). At the expense of social relations needed to bind and root its citizens, the normalisation and perpetuation of such pragmatic practices have become a truth that has been accepted as part of the habitus of Singapore's
citizens. Serving as a logic of practice, such notions inevitably limit the display of personal agency.

Furthermore, participants said that their unwillingness to appear physically at real-life protests was due to the contentment they felt with their current living circumstances. Forfeiting the lifestyle they currently enjoyed with hardship and struggles, such as those experienced by their parents’ generation, was not ideal and definitely ‘not worth it’. Juxtaposed with the increased lateral surveillance that was observed to be occurring online, participants’ description of Gen Y being more outspoken and willing to engage in discourse, coupled with Facebook having provided a platform for the articulation views (Question 11 & 41), as well as the need to fulfil social roles and responsibilities, the need to balance the fine line between social acceptability and condemnation was now even more pertinent.

Having to negotiate the desire to engage, whilst maintaining social order and the adherence of social norms so as to not be called out by other netizens for dissenting, participants reported that the appeal of supporting causes without putting one’s self in the limelight was on the rise. The fear of repercussions, which was constantly referred to by participants in this study, supports this assertion. Additionally, these observations could help explain why survey respondents indicated that Facebook enabled members of Singapore’s Gen Y to express their views accurately (Question 11) and, yet, still felt that their actions and choices were constrained in Singapore (Question 40).

Participants did assert that slacktivist forms of engagement lacked personal declarations and, thus, were meaningless, as no concrete action would result. Still, the desire to involve oneself in social issues is significant when considering Singapore’s context of restraint. Being able to participate in issues traditionally regarded as taboo and doing so without getting into trouble signified an individuals’ triumph over the daily constraints they encountered, turning limitations into avenues that could be utilised to satisfy personal desires, which in this case, included greater voice and stakeholdership and also exemplified participant’s practical mastery of their social sphere (Bourdieu 1977).
The extent of participation was, thus, not as important as the act of being able to contribute in any way possible. Using Facebook to spread activist causes and then getting netizens to click 'like' was not only a convenient way of increasing awareness, but was an ideal way Singaporeans could utilise to feel as though they had engaged themselves in issues in which they would otherwise not have had the opportunity. Clicking 'like' was harmless. It did not require a huge personal sacrifice or commitment, hence, removing the risk of publicly associating oneself with various campaigns.

Warning of a possible detrimental impact slacktivism could have on subsequent civic action, scholars have suggested that such forms of ‘low-cost, low-risk online activism’ could displace engagement in offline activities (Lee, YH & Hsieh 2013), and affect the cultivation of social bonds, links and associations to communities (Putnam 2000). Yet, other scholars have argued that new media have ‘rewired civic society, propelling collective action into a radically new dimension’ (Polonski 2016).

The pressures online voices can assert on governments are enormous. Now, netizens can assemble online. And, with new media being able to spread information more quickly than official news sources, the force of netizens’ discontent can disrupt governments, which have been shown to have been unable to keep up with ‘digital expressions of citizen sentiment’ (Polonski 2016).

Jenkins’s (2004) notion of convergence culture has highlighted the participatory nature of new media culture. Reshaping resource flows and blurring distinctions between media production and media consumption, new forms of participation have emerged. Supporting civic engagement, collaboration, and creativity, this emergent system highlights the transformation of traditional media forms to one where interaction and social connections was possible (Jenkins et al. 2009, pp. 6-8). Yet, the definition of what was considered participation in civic matters in Singapore’s context is still highly contested.
When discussing committed action with participants, the physical act of volunteering was almost always immediately cited as an example of active civic engagement. Participants said that ‘knowing was not enough...’; it was important that individuals were willing to commit themselves and were invested in social work whilst not forgetting the real meaning behind their desire to participate in such activities in the first place. That way, the value of such activities would be better understood and appreciated.

I think the difference between volunteering on your own accord and being told to volunteer [as in CIPs] is you care about getting to know the people at the heart of it all, and you build a relationship with them...and you get the feeling that you belong also...and that is a key motivating aspect that encourages you to keep giving your time and energy to helping and interacting with these people...(D)

According to Adler and Goggin (2005) the definition of civic engagement is vague and ‘there is a considerable range of definitions of the term’ (Adler & Goggin 2005, p. 237), ranging from denoting community service, being associated with collective action, active citizenship, political involvement, and social change. Adler and Goggin (2005, pp. 238-239) posit that the definition of civic engagement is dependent on the ‘perspectives and interests of the definer’ and can encompass a wide range of activities. With George Yeo (1991, pp. 2-3, cited in Lee, T 2010, p. 73) indicating that Singaporeans are encouraged to contribute to civic life rather than ‘parliamentary, partisan or lobbyist politics’, Singapore’s form of civic engagement is clearly aligned with broader definitions of the term, such as those put forth by Putnam (1995, 2000) and Diller (2001).

Putnam’s concern with social capital has led his definition of civic engagement to ‘refer to the entire gamut of activities that build social capital’ (Adler & Goggin 2005, p. 239). While Diller (2001, p. 22) uses an even broader definition, referring to civic engagement as ‘experiencing a sense of connection, interrelatedness, and, naturally, commitment towards the greater community'.

Community engagement and civic participation have been enhanced by the increase in new media usage, opening up new avenues for citizens to engage in public life. New spaces have been created for interaction, collaboration and deliberation with both the government and other netizens. Due to Gen Y being considered more active online, as compared to previous generations, Gen Y’s use of new media has, thus, been a focus in the study of civic engagement, particularly the effects the medium has had on political engagement (Conroy, Feezell & Guerrero 2012).

While concerns have been raised about the reduced engagement levels associated with internet use (see Putnam 2000; Nie 2001; Vitak et al. 2011), scholars have depicted positive outcomes when examining the ability of political internet use in increasing traditional offline forms of political participation (Shah et al. 2005; Xenos & Moy 2007; Cho et al. 2009), awareness and knowledge of social issues (Xenos & Moy 2007), and civic engagement through social capital (Norris 2001; Shah, McLeod & Yoon 2001; Jennings & Zeitner 2003; Valenzuela, Park & Kee 2009). Warren, Sulaiman & Jaafar’s study (2014) also revealed that activists are increasingly using Facebook as a tool to enhance and shape the traditional civic engagement landscape.

Graeber (2002, p. 14) has further argued that activists help reinvent democracy through the creation of new forms of organisation, such as ‘...creating and enacting horizontal networks instead of top-down structures’. And, as compared to previous internet-based methods of information dissemination (via websites and mobile phones), Juris (2012, p. 260) has contended that social media are now being ‘incorporated into the ongoing practices of core groups of activists’, helping to ‘diffuse new dynamics of activism’. In his research on the Occupy Movements, Juris (2012) emphasised the effect online activist activity had in encouraging offline displays of resistance. The role social media had in circulating sentiments and views, as well as its ability to elicit immense participation in protests, suggests a transformation in the way social protests are being organised (Juris 2012, p. 260).
Volunteering and concerning one's self with the social aspect of community service is, thus, just one aspect of what civic engagement can encompass. The influence activist notions spread online have on social fabrics and the encouragement provided by social media for more individualised forms of participation have, however, raised divisions between newer and more seasoned activists (Juris & Razsa 2012). Actions, intended meanings and commitment to causes now need to be carefully deciphered. These new realities, such as the blurring of online and offline realms and the constant presence of social networking technology in our daily lives, thus, call for the reassessment of the meaning of civic engagement.

7.3.6 Changing Notions of Civic Engagement?

Emphasising the variable patterns of civic engagement (Bolzendahl & Coffe 2013), Norris (2002) stressed the influence structural conditions, agency, and cultural norms, such as attitudes and values surrounding political participation, have in affecting and regulating individuals’ forms and levels of engagement. Likewise, Boje’s (2009, p. 247) assertion that ‘associative organisations and civic participation...are all embedded in the prevailing social and economic structure’ of a nation’s makeup, further highlights Schatzki’s (2001) argument for the perpetuation of practical understandings being dependent on socialisations and shared meanings.

While it may seem that new media in Singapore have initiated shifts towards a more democratic form of governance in Singapore, especially when considering the tight restraints imposed on the Singapore press and the PAP’s internet policing methodologies, scholars such as Gary Rodan (1996) and Terence Lee (2002, 2010) have argued that this impression of increased online freedom is but a pretence on the part of the Singapore government. Lee (2010) has argued that the notion that the PAP listened to its citizens’ calls for more freedom to express themselves and be allowed more leeway to be creative and discover their ‘soul’ on their own was a smokescreen, merely a form of gestural politics. Considering the negative implications of being too economic-centric in its outlook and also of being
considered too controlling and restrictive as a government, the PAP worked to foster the perception of increased freedom as a calculated move (Rodan 2001; George 2005b; Lee, T 2010).

TA Koh (1998) has also posited that Singapore’s model of civic society was a novel approach adopted as a way to deter civil society’s disruptive political schemes. Suggesting how Singaporeans should behave and conduct themselves, Koh (1998) argued that the ‘trick’ in Singapore’s version of civic society was ‘to keep citizens occupied with activities that are deemed civic, “cultured” and civilised so that they will keep a safe distance from real political activities such as political lobbying, protests, campaigning, and even politically-induced violence’.

Although the ideas stressed by Singapore’s assertion of civic society supports the ‘positive attributes of civility, kindness and public orderliness’ (Lee, T 2002, p. 100), the PAP’s promotion of active subjects for economic and political purposes indicates the reinforcement of constraint, rather than the shift towards a real democracy. With the PAP still very much in control of the disciplining and social conditioning of the city-state, the moves to open up and increase development in the creative industries and allow discussions on previously socially unacceptable topics, such as issues related to the LGBT community that have been raised in the yearly Pink Dot events, were perceived by scholars as merely creating the perception that Singapore was open, so as to attract more investors and international economic activity (Rodan 1996).

Terence Lee (2010) has also contended that the government had all along planned this strategic move with the aim of attaining the bigger goal of creating a more connected community, binding state and society together, and ensuring the city-state had enough resources to sustain itself. By enhancing the Singapore ‘soul’ so that Singaporeans would treat the city-state as home, the establishment of a national identity and of the attachment to place was anticipated.

The influence of acting in the safety of numbers, being less identifiable and just ‘a face in the crowd’, has played a part in contributing to the pressures observed
online, as well as the observed increase in netizens’ ability and willingness to engage and partake in discussions online. Yet, the notion of a climate of fear perpetuating the city-state, triggering the necessity to properly consider consequences before acting was still a concern for participants. Similarly, participants felt that individuals were still holding back and stating only half-truths or censored versions of actual sentiments online.

Because, we have a lot to lose...the mentality whereby “Oh, if I vote for the opposition party then my job is not secure”, that kind of thinking is still very much imbedded in our mentalities today... it is like people are afraid to take certain reactionary or active steps and sort of jeopardise the future lah...(Im)

Kou et al. (2002) posited that despite the significant number of Singaporeans indicating that the internet was a viable platform for learning about politics, the existing restrictions surrounding traditional political activities in Singapore have perpetuated Singaporeans’ weariness when associating the internet with real empowerment. Thus, despite the Singapore government’s attempt at fostering greater community spirit through grassroots activities and community events, as well as the continued emphasis on building a shared collective identity, the results obtained in this study denote Singapore’s Gen Y guardedness and reluctance to freely engage in social issues.

However, Singaporeans choosing not to translate online support into tangible acts has been attributed to the ease of engaging in ‘armchair activism’, where individuals read all the alternative socio-political sites, critique the content and complain about the PAP’s policies, transmit anger and disgruntled views to others, but eventually, do not ‘do anything...to take action and affect change’. When it came to individual agency and the display of purpose, influence and rationality, the motivation to commit and stand up for one’s values and beliefs was ‘non-existent’ – ‘it is easy to say, but hard to put into action’, participants said.
Besides the various reasons indicated for not wanting to endanger themselves and publicly sacrifice their positions in society, participants reiterated that the consistent noise coming from individuals voicing disapproval and unhappiness online was ultimately, ‘nothing but noise unless something [was] done to address the obvious lack of solutions’ being proposed. ‘...You can’t just shun [sic] away from it or not do anything and just keep complaining’ (D). Although ‘...people are just more unwilling to disrupt the status quo...’, action needs to be taken before something ‘concrete and beneficial’ can be observed. Taking ‘ownership of their views and lives’ was vital in ensuring commitment to a cause.

Participants’ repeated articulation of the need for the materialisation of sentiments through the physical display of action to prove commitment and intent indicates the largely unchanged perspective that prevails in relation to active civic involvement in Singapore. Using traditional methods of engagement as the benchmark of validity, coupled with the mixed feelings displayed over the outcomes of going online to garner support of various causes, stresses the “newness” the notion of activism has in the Singaporean city-state.

Still, in Singapore's context, voices expressed online have not led to social unrest or instability. And, amplified voices on Facebook have forced the government to respond and address numerous issues they had or would have previously neglected. As noted earlier, in Chapter One, repeated calls for transparency and a review of Ministerial salaries in the lead-up to GE2011, resulted in PM Lee convening a committee to assess the matter. PM Lee later adopted the committee’s recommendations and cut the wages of his cabinet members. In the Cheong and Casey incidents, governmental involvement was also not necessary, and yet, several cabinet ministers and organisations felt the need to take to Facebook to intervene and urge action to be taken against these individuals. Cheong and Casey’s employers were inevitably forced to dismiss their employees and subsequently distanced themselves from Cheong and Casey in an effort to protect their own interests.
In another incident, the Assistant Director at NParks, Bernard Lim, was charged in court after an internal audit conducted by the Ministry of National Development (MND) found that he had lied to public officials and had controversially awarded a tender to purchase foldable bicycles to his friend (Hussain 2013). A total of 26 foldable bicycles, each costing S$2,200, were bought in July 2012 for NParks officers (Hussain 2013). The accused had also coerced his supplier friend to lie to the MND auditors about their friendship. The audit was ordered by the then National Development Minister Khaw Boon Wan after members of the public questioned the high price of the branded foldable bicycles (Yahoo! News, 1 August 2012). Again, the government, having been held accountable for its actions, had to find ways to appease its citizenry, and had to answer its citizens’ demands.

Moreover, despite Singapore’s focus on developing its ‘soul’ being argued to be politically motivated and simply gestural, respondents reported a strong sense of belonging. Some 70.1% of respondents strongly agreed and agreed with feeling a strong sense of belonging in Singapore (Question 42). Respondents also ranked speaking Singlish as being the most representative characteristic of being Singaporean (Question 33). Having been adapted and mixed with Malay, Chinese dialects and Tamil, Singlish has been defined as an English creole, or a mixed language (Tan, S 2016). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, Singlish is only spoken in Singapore (Lee, MK 2016), and has been described as ‘a secret code, which locks the rest of the world out’ (Tan, S 2016). Being unique to Singapore, this finding highlight the identification participants have with the city-state and their community.

In transiting from a society focused entirely on pragmatic strategies associated to survival and success to one that is increasingly embracing openness and the value of a nation’s soul, the desire to give back and engage in social issues should be accorded more importance as compared to measuring the level of commitment or the formality of such forms of participation.

...Like the Curry thing...people do get affected by such sensitive issues, and so, to show support for such things they will ‘like’ it lah...but
again, ‘liking’ is not indicative of how strongly you support or how little you support the cause lah, because it is just a yes and no response…it is not like a Likert Scale where you can put yes, I strongly support it, or no, I don’t support it, or I am no neutral…it is just yes and no response…(Im)

Encouraging the motivation to participate should be the first step in inculcating a culture of participation, instead of jumping straight into trying to get individuals to pledge their commitment to formal acts of civic engagement. Even encouraging discussions to understand the challenges facing individuals’ ability to commit time and energy to civic issues as a first step would be useful, participants said: ‘…Just for them to discuss things, maybe reveal why they are not interested in something or why they are passionate about something else…that is a really great start to begin with…’. Nonetheless, participants were hopeful of the changes that were already occurring in Singapore’s social sphere.

…I do feel that generally Singaporeans do give back in various ways…it is just that formal volunteer numbers might be low so the government has to do something what, so they have to make it sound like volunteering only via the official channels is counted…but to me, how big or small the act is doesn’t matter, what matters is you are helping others...(Id)

Participants felt that current situations were not as bad as they seemed. Despite participants having highlighted the deficient meaning of Facebook ‘likes’ in accounting for real change, the value of such participation in spreading information and viewpoints that went against dominant ideologies was significant. The interest, concern and ability to indicate individual sentiments, no matter the form or extent of commitment, still counts towards a stand being taken.

The fact that vast increases in awareness had been raised about issues though the use of social media was a triumph in itself. Without social media and campaigns online, many would still be ignorant, unaware and oblivious to the issues occurring
around them. And, apart from the ongoing debate surrounding the extent of action needed to indicate commitment and active participation, participants were hopeful about the increasing confidence and readiness netizens displayed in signaling their disapproval, especially when they saw offensive posts such as in the instances surrounding the Amy Cheong and Anton Casey incidents.

7.3.7 Social Capital and Belonging

Although the internet has made participation, at least the virtual sort, in civic life easier, scholars have argued that the link between technology and engagement levels is not as straightforward as it may seem. Nie and Erbring (2000) have suggested that increased internet use has resulted in reduced social ties, leading to shrinking social participation rates (see Putnam 1995, 2000; Norris 1996, 2001; Bimber 1998; Uslaner 1998, 2004). Yet, Chadwick (2006) and Livingstone, Bober & Helsper (2005) observed individuals who utilised the internet for civic activities being active in civic issues offline and vice versa.

Uslaner (2004) has also argued that the use of the internet ‘neither destroys [n]or creates social capital’. Arguing that the contribution of trust, civic engagement and socialisation in the enhancement of social capital is misplaced, Uslaner (2004, p. 229) posited that ‘trust reflects an optimistic world view and a belief that others share your fundamental values’, and does not necessarily reflect similarity in life experiences and values. With little trust and association with their communities in the offline realm, it is difficult to anticipate participants displaying high levels of trust, association and understanding in the online sphere.

Respondents’ positive replies to questions about their feeling a strong sense of belonging in Singapore (Question 34), being proud to be Singaporean (Question 32), and feeling lucky to be living in Singapore (Question 35), support the notion that this segment of Singaporean Gen Y espouses attachment and a sense of connection to their community. However, when observing respondents’ perceptions of the commonality of values they shared within the neighbourhood,
only 7 percent of respondents felt people in their neighbourhood shared the same values as they did, while the majority of respondents were undecided (Question 21). The indecision and belief that people in the same neighbourhood did not share the same values as they did suggest a deficiency of trust and understanding, implying the fragility of ties amongst the Singapore populace.

When examining the relationship between the amount of trust respondents placed in the information obtained from their neighbours and the trust they placed in information obtained from the government, a significant relationship was observed (p<.05). The more participants agreed with trusting their neighbours, the more they felt information obtained from their elected government representatives was trustworthy. The reverse was observed for participants who indicated not being able to trust information obtained from their neighbours (Figure 7.10).

Participants’ ability to trust information from these sources indicates the confidence they placed in social resources. There is a positive relationship between participants’ acceptance of government rhetoric stressing the need to maintain harmony in the city-state and their willingness to trust their neighbours. The relational nature of the concept of social capital is of vital importance as

...trust, obligations or information do not exist in absence of individuals exercising or transacting them...individuals cannot get access to information, exercise trust, or enforce norms as isolated entities. Social capital is consequential because it makes possible a meeting of minds and wills towards accomplishing a common goal (Matei 2004, p. 27).
Figure 7.10: Percentage distribution of the degree to which respondents trust information obtained from their neighbours in relation to the amount of trust placed in information obtained from the government (Question 24)

However, besides the casual salutation when respondents saw their neighbours at the lift lobby or void deck when returning home or leaving for work or school, respondents said they preferred not to pry or be kpo, ask too many questions and mind their own business. Such descriptions suggest dissociation from communities. The fear of overstepping social boundaries by coming across as wanting to intrude on their neighbours’ lives has been described by participants as an outcome of the structure of constraint prevalent in Singapore.

Having been taught to be tolerant of other ethnic groups, the observance of OB markers has helped maintain the harmony and order that dominate the Singaporean social sphere. Yet, by accepting the regimes of truths set up by the ruling elite, the disciplining of society has perpetuated the individualistic pragmatism and lack of concern for social issues or social engagement, which participants articulated (Foucault 1980).

In a survey jointly conducted by Channel NewsAsia (CNA) and IPS, more than 90 percent of respondents were reported to endorse ‘features of multiculturalism such
as according respect, equality and value for people of other races'. Still, 'two-thirds of the respondents found ethnic discussions disconcerting in that it could be offensive' (Channel NewsAsia, 17 August 2016). Some 66 percent of respondents also agreed or strongly agreed with talking about racial issues causing distress that was uncalled-for, while ‘64 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that it was “very hard to discuss issues related to race without someone getting offended”' (Channel NewsAsia, 17 August 2016). Mathews, the lead researcher in the study, commented that the reservation participants in the CNA-IPS survey displayed was due to the opinion that such exchanges had ‘the potential to cause tension’, and, thus, ‘a small portion of respondents continued to have unanswered questions about the cultural practices of other races’ (Channel NewsAsia, 17 August 2016).

The results obtained in the CNA-IPS survey parallels the results obtained in this study. With a lack of contact with their neighbours, participants said they usually ‘only said hi in passing’ when they chanced upon their neighbours at lift landings on their way home or when leaving for work, seldom making the effort to interact or ‘get to know my [sic] neighbours better’. Unlike in the past, when their parents lived in the kampung, where everyone knew everything about each other, interaction was now at a minimum: ‘we go home and immediately close the door and do our own thing’; ‘I’m not like my dad – he talks to the neighbours and knows everything about what’s going on in the neighbourhood…I feel that’s being kpo’. ‘I rather mind my own business’, participants said.

Singaporean netizens having been socialised by structural forces dictating the observance of pragmatism, meritocracy and social harmony for the advancement of society, have had parameters preventing the development of social ties set for them. Out of respect for their neighbours and their possible differences, the fear of overstepping boundaries has regulated social interactions, making it the norm not to engage with neighbours too deeply, except for the friendly passing greeting. Such conduct suggests the acknowledgment that personal space and distance are necessary in ensuring multiculturalism in the city-state. Participants’ internalisation of the PAP’s constantly recurring national survival rhetoric,
therefore, seems to have produced the perception that minding personal matters and not being perceived as being excessive when interacting with others is the way to ensure social harmony.

The conditioning Singaporeans have undergone to ensure the maintenance of the city-state's racial and religious harmony has encouraged an unwillingness to stir unwanted sentiments. This has resulted in the automatic preference participants displayed in not wanting to discuss 'touchy issues'. Consequently, this avoidance could lead to the neglect of actual understandings of the different practices and values individuals of different backgrounds have and, thus, the prevalence of superficial forms of tolerance that have allowed racism to persist because of the lack of proper understandings of Singapore's minority 'races' (Channel NewsAsia, 18 August 2016).

Additionally, the fundamental principles of multiculturalism, pragmatism and meritocracy, on which Singapore was established, could be used to explain the high levels of individualism and lack of community association participants conveyed in their responses. Emphasising the reduced need for participants to establish links or place confidence in their community, the achievement of success based solely on individual merit could have contributed to the choice individuals displayed in not accepting information they felt was associated with government rhetoric. This assertion is further supported by the uncertainty the majority of participants indicated when asked about their neighbours sharing the same kinds of values they had (Question 21). Respondents indicating having little contact with their neighbours and, thus, not knowing what their neighbours were like further substantiates this point.

Having specified wanting more freedom of expression and autonomy, and not be constantly told what to do, the link between top-down structural constraint with the rhetoric of needing to bond with their communities could have led to participants preferring to disassociate themselves from both. The weak ties amongst the Singaporean citizenry coupled with the Singapore government's consistent emphasis on the necessity of developing inclusive communities could
have contributed to the general distrust participants indicated with regard to their neighbours.

The reduced association participants indicated having with their community could explain the irregularity of participants’ involvement in their community (Question 23). Likewise, the mostly undecided responses participants indicated about their community's willingness to come together to improve their neighbourhoods points towards the presence of weak social ties and relationships in the Singaporean city-state (Question 22).

Putnam’s (1995, 2000) contention that weaker ties are formed between socially heterogeneous groups, allowing for different groups to share and exchange information and ideas mirrors Granovetter’s (1973) argument for the strength of weak ties. Connecting with others outside the strong tie network enables exposure to information and resources that travel in other networks (McPherson & Smith-Lovin 1987; Burt 1992). The wider access weak ties support extends communication possibilities, providing a means for simultaneous information flow, and increases access to a larger base of contacts that includes more peripheral participants (Sproull & Kiesler 1986, 1991; Turkle 1995; Constant, Sproull & Kiesler 1996). Sustaining weak ties via CMC reduces the presence of social risks (Sproull & Kiesler 1986, 1991), helps broaden individuals’ knowledge base, and increases the identification and maximisation of new opportunities (Allen 1977; Cohen & Levinthal 1990; Haythornthwaite 2002).

Skoric, Ying and Ng (2009) observed positive associations between online bridging capital and online political participation (Skoric, Ying & Ng 2009). The positive increase in participation observed was, however, limited to the online sphere, as no relationship was found between attention paid to news and information obtained online and traditional political participation (Skoric, Ying & Ng 2009). Skoric, Ying and Ng (2009) explained this result as being due to the absence of trust in online bridging relationships, which supports Cummings, Butler and Kraut’s (2002) view of online relationships being less valuable than offline face-to-face interactions.
Still, weak ties could be positively valued when the medium used expanded the ‘reach and basis for initiating and maintaining ties, providing a means through which previously unconnected individuals [could] now initiate contact’ (Haythornthwaite 2002, p. 386; see also Constant, Sproull & Kiesler 1996; Wellman et al. 1996). The recurrent tension between maintaining different kinds of ties with various groups of individuals and the range of strengths of ties individuals have to navigate suggests an ‘ongoing ebb and flow in ties: They grow in strength as people get to know each other better and decline as the reason for the strong association reaches its conclusion’ (Haythornthwaite 2002, p.387). This difference in ties would then affect access to resources and the motivation to accomplish aims.

Williams (2006) has also claimed that previous research has been fixated primarily on assessing offline bonding capital, focusing solely on determining how internet use has affected offline relations. Focusing on the possible effects internet use could have on bridging relationships, Williams (2006) suggests that online and offline relations are different and should not be approached with the same kinds of assumptions and measures. Contending that the internet could be used to promote weaker ties such as bridging social capital, Williams (2007) further argued that the internet could be utilised to facilitate the development of new forms of social capital.

7.4 Concluding Remarks

The results obtained suggest that Singapore’s aim of encouraging national belonging through participation in civic matters, as a way of establishing links to the city-state, has created uncertainty over the definition of participation in the online sphere. The meaning of participation in civic matters, as preferred by the government, has been taken to mean avoiding opposing, offending sentiments and social practices. The climate of fear circulating in the city-state has also resulted in participants’ preference to not engage others in the first instance, but to ensure social acceptance before interacting or expressing sentiment. This was observed not only in the way participants described their use of Facebook, but also their
habitual practice and utilisation of OB markers, as well as the way participants interacted with their communities.

The validity and use of Facebook as a platform for the expression of views highlight participants’ agency and creative navigation of their social circumstances. Still, it is clear that the disciplining and ordering of society through the regime of truth enforced by the PAP have not only been internalised, but have been reproduced in the form of netizens imposing social rules and norms on other Facebook users. The observed lateral surveillance occurring in Singapore’s online sphere highlights the all-encompassing discourse prevalent in Singapore, and also the transmission of power to netizens themselves. Embodying the power to regulate interaction and social processes, individuals were now enforcing social norms and rules while perpetuating the ruling elite’s structures of control.

Nevertheless, Facebook ‘likes’, the sharing of articles on Facebook, the ability to articulate views and contribute to discussions online, as well as the ability to call other netizens out for inappropriate behaviour online, indicate participants’ capacity to involve themselves more freely in social issues. The maintenance of social order despite the increased displays of agency and the need to situate these practices amidst Singapore’s unique developmental history underscores the relationship between context, structural forces and individual agency.

While participants welcomed the observed change in increased openness online, suggesting shifts towards a more participatory democracy in Singapore, based on traditional definitions of civic engagement, the culture of participation in Singapore has remained very much muted. Jenkins’ (2004, 2006) notion of convergence culture has argued that the capacity of new media networks will increase engagement levels and empower individuals in their dictation of information resource flows. Improving engagement, contribution and relationship strength, the interaction needed in commanding control over the circulation and flow of resources was viewed as a positive element in enabling the deepening relationships with communities online (Jenkins 2004, 2006).
Yet, the ability to participate in social issues via the clicking of the ‘like’ icon on Facebook or being given the ability to share interesting content on News Feeds has merely masked the superficial relations between people. Instead of resource flows creating stronger relationships, the superficial nature of online interaction has been, in actual fact, further isolating individuals. Nonetheless, despite participants indicating indecision over the kinds of values they shared with their neighbours, participants said they felt a strong sense of belonging to Singapore.

With participants indicating distinctions between the types of relationships that can be developed online, the need for new definitions of participation in the online sphere is even more crucial in Singapore’s continued development in the age of New Media. In the final chapter in this thesis, theoretical implications for the notion of structure and agency, concluding remarks, and implications for future research will be examined.
Chapter Eight
Change, Transitions and Practices in the Singaporean City-state

8.1 Introduction

Focused on acquiring a deeper understanding of the viewpoints of Singapore’s Gen Y, this thesis has demonstrated the influences new media have had on social structures and the construction of national belonging in Singapore. Amidst globalising processes, negotiations of contradictory demands, and their implementation and exercise of agency and choice, changes have been observed in the ways Gen Y negotiates various social processes in Singapore.

Modifications, especially in the attitudes displayed towards engaging in civic society, reveal participants’ increased interest in social issues and indicate their increased willingness to involve themselves in virtual activism on Facebook. Participants’ descriptions and attitudes toward the reproduction and transformation of dominant ideologies, as well as the emergence of resistance to state-enforced rules and regulations, also suggest transitions from the strictly top-down paradigm of governance in Singapore to one where a more open democracy co-exists with heightened surveillance by peers. Moreover, the occurrence of lateral surveillance, a disciplinary mechanism that has intensified in Singapore’s online sphere, has directed power into the hands of netizens, further transforming the ways power discourses operate in the city-state.

8.2 The Relevance of Practice Theory

In an effort to develop Singapore into the modern metropolis it is today, the PAP enforced strict controls over the Singapore populace. Since independence, various policies constraining the actions of Singaporeans have been introduced and have been justified as being essential in ensuring the city-state’s survival. Pragmatic structural constraint and the various disciplinary measures the PAP has enforced
have resulted in a climate of fear, as well as the perpetuation of auto-regulation, self-censorship and the observance of OB markers amongst the populace.

Recent studies have highlighted Singaporeans’ acceptance of policies without properly understanding the rationale behind them. For instance, the importance of maintaining multiracial harmony, which was introduced as part of the national survival rhetoric, is now observed universally, but citizens have not properly comprehended the differences that exist between the different ethnicities in Singapore, let alone question the appropriations of a framework of ‘races’. Tolerating other ethnicities and avoiding discussions about race or religion because they brought about the possibility of tension were reasons cited in the CNA-IPS survey on race relations for the lack of understanding between the different ethnicities in Singapore.

The preference to avoid addressing issues because they were perceived to be too troublesome and could cause problems for individuals was also reflected in this study. Participants cited preferring to discuss GE2011 issues offline, as they were afraid of the repercussions their doing so online would bring. Specifically, participants said they were unsure of how their friends would react to their comments and could not tell who could access their comments, and thus felt it was ‘safer’ not to indicate their views online. And, just as in the CNA-IPS survey, the automation of ideals that echoed governmental rhetoric was observed in the survey results, with the majority of respondents supporting the notion that people of different backgrounds got along well in their neighbourhoods. This result was observed despite participants indicating that they were mostly undecided about the similarity of their own values to those that their neighbours espoused.

Actors’ acceptance of structural constraints and internalising them as part of everyday practices suggest the power that structure has in dictating outlooks and actions within a society. Imposing limits on the practices of actors, Foucault (1980) argues that it is through disciplinary measures and surveillance mechanisms that subject formation occurs, resulting in the disciplining of the subject. The all-encompassing discourses perpetuating regimes of truth ensure facilitation and
replication of discursive regimes, as well as their continued penetration and influence over the social body. Regimes of truth and the legitimisation of power sources are, as core aspects of structure, essential in assuring actors’ adherence to imposed constraints. However, without the acceptance of power regimes, the disciplinary forces and fear-induced conformity by the omnipresent panoptic gaze would not be effective and nor would it ensure the continued reproduction of such limits to agency.

Similar to Foucault’s notion of truth and subject formation, Bourdieu’s theory of practice contends that a circular relationship exists in the relationship between structure and agency. According to Bourdieu (1977), a logic of practice constrains the kinds of actions that are acceptable within a society and that are practised as generated by the habitus, thus, allowing for the perpetuation of such controls over social action and the maintenance of social order. However, unlike Foucault, who argues that it is through the disciplining of society that actors learn to comply with rules and norms that are accorded social meaning, Bourdieu asserts that the freedom to act, however constrained by structure, is observed through actors’ practical mastery and comprehension of their limits to freedom.

The construction of the habitus or ‘spontaneity without consciousness or will’ is influenced by structure or the social norms that have been set forth by society (Bourdieu 1990, p. 56). The self-perpetuating notion of norms and practices is highlighted by Bourdieu’s assertion that actors generally sought the choices that would aid the reinforcement of their habitus. As members of a society unconsciously want to avoid questioning or doing anything that might disturb the equilibrium of their social worlds and practices, Bourdieu suggests that such self-defense mechanisms are part of the habitus. Such mechanisms were exemplified in this study by participants’ constant concern over the validity of comments they voiced online, as well as the presentation of appropriate behaviour when interacting on Facebook.

Through the understanding of social norms dictating the presentation of self, actors’ negotiation of structure and agency in their navigation of the social sphere
result in actors making their own decisions about how they want to present themselves and be perceived by society. The limits imposed by such ideology and structure, hence, reproduce the structure that has set its parameters. The need to examine the relationship between structure and agency concurrently is, thus, underscored by practice theory’s assertion that individuals are both influenced by their social structure and also play a part in influencing their own social structures.

The interrelationship between social conditions in which the habitus is produced and the conditions by which it is applied underscores the agency and choice individuals have in determining their own social realities. As Ortner (1989, p. 200) has suggested, the understanding of the interplay between structure and agency in the display of social practices requires more than an examination of power relations, or the mere theorisation of social life. By relating practices to social processes and cultural beliefs, as well as situating social action amidst larger structures, Ortner (2006, pp. 11-12) contends that the evolution, adjustment and/or the reproduction of practices is subjected to internal, external and social pressures. Likewise, Schatzki (2001) has contended that the embodiment of practices is organised around shared meanings and understandings, highlighting the importance of symbols and socialisation in the maintenance of practices.

With structure and agency both affecting the determination of social realities, the simultaneous observation of both concepts is augmented by Ortner’s (1984, p. 159) assertion that society is a system that is powerfully restrictive and, yet, can be ‘made and unmade through human action and interaction’. As Rouse (2007, p. 509) has argued, practice theory aims ‘to articulate insightfully and in detail how human understanding is inculcated and developed through social interaction’.

Underscoring the significance of practice theory in understanding social practices, the preceding chapters focused mainly on Foucault’s, Bourdieu’s and Ortner’s conceptualisations of the notions of structure and agency. The importance of examining the interplay between structural forces and individual agency simultaneously, as well as the need to situate actors’ practical engagements within specific contexts, so as to be able to accurately determine the effect such notions
have on social realities, was underscored. Even in the age of new media, where online and offline realities are blurred, underlying structural systems, as instantiated in social norms and practices, were observed to have an effect on the actions participants displayed and observed on Facebook.

The underlying influence of structural constraint and of the fear induced by the PAP in order to establish order within the Singaporean society is evident in the way participants described the constraint they felt when negotiating social interactions. The preference to passively absorb information online rather than immediately assert their views, willingly self-censoring so as to prevent offending their friend networks, and participants’ suggestion that their social responsibilities and roles as highly educated young adults restricted their use of Facebook as a platform for expression highlight the influence social structures have on individual agency. The ambivalence noted in participants’ views regarding the accuracy of comments viewed on Facebook further highlight the influence power structures have in restraining individual agency.

By not wanting to cause ‘trouble’ so as to ensure the maintenance of social order, the perpetuation of a climate of fear formed the basis of participants’ habitus. Self-regulation and the suppression of viewpoints through the adherence to OB markers, as well as lateral surveillance being utilised as a conflict management strategy that permitted the stability of social discourses, all have contributed to the maintenance of structure and the continued effect it had on Singaporean netizens.

However, the use of Facebook as a means to counter both the restrictiveness of the PAP’s policies regarding the public articulation of perspectives and the limitations it has imposed on the access to alternative information sources, as well as the use of Facebook as a platform to spread knowledge and awareness, also indicates the creativity participants demonstrate in using Facebook to negotiate the constraints they face. Moreover, the use of Facebook’s ‘like’ button to assert perspectives and support causes online can also be viewed as participants taking the opportunity Facebook has provided as an accepted platform for the expression of opinions, to speak up and actively involve themselves in civic issues. The significance of such
displays of personal agency and conviction to assert individual perspectives online would be lost if such actions were not situated in the contextual foundation of constraint upon which Singapore was established.

The translation of online activism into offline activism, with clear displays of commitment and active involvement, was still not a common occurrence in Singapore. Participants’ highlighting the difference between clicking ‘like’ on Facebook as an indication of support, as compared to traditional forms of engaging in activism, such as signing petitions and personally turning up at rallies emphasises the unchanged perception of active participation being equated to tangible change. Facebook ‘likes’, participating in lateral surveillance, and sharing views online were different ways individuals could engage in social discourse. However, the fact that these actions were displayed online and did not guarantee physical action resulted in participants indicating doubts over the kinds of influence online activism could have in Singapore. Nevertheless, these actions emphasise participants’ ongoing negotiation of their limits to agency.

The perpetuation of structure, presenting the continuation of restraint in participants’ actions, masks the influence assertions of individual choice and opinion have on social practices. By comprehending the influence that the PAP’s mechanisms of constraint have had on the Singaporean populace and the effect such power structures have had on the formation of participants’ habitus, the guardedness participants described when interacting on Facebook, as well as the occurrence of lateral surveillance in Singapore’s online sphere, can then be understood as an evolution in the relationship between individuals and society in Singapore’s context.

Netizens’ internalisation of the PAP’s omnipresent disciplinary gaze and subsequent imposition of constraint over other netizens through peer-to-peer monitoring underscres the dynamic nature of practices, with their transformation, modification and/or replication being influenced by social pressures. By taking into consideration historical contexts, the creativity participants displayed in their willingness to engage in social issues, as well as the shifts towards increased
openness in the city-state, though minimal, when assessed based on international indices such as Freedom House’s international press freedom index, can then be viewed as improvements and change in the reproduction of practices in the Singaporean city-state.

8.3 Facebook as an Empowerment Tool

Having creatively navigated the prevailing restrictions surrounding the public display of sentiments, which up until the emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook had been restricted to Speaker’s Corner and the controlled publishing of opinions in newspaper columns, respondents demonstrated their ability to choose and decide for themselves how and when to engage in discourses online. Indicating being more forthcoming and willing to engage in more delicate and reflective issues online, and not feeling compelled to respond to comments on Facebook, participants also said Facebook permitted Singapore’s Gen Y the ability to accurately express their views.

Participants felt that social media’s promotion of ‘the idea of co-creation…the co-production of knowledge, co-production of everything…’ has encouraged the increased use of Facebook as a platform to communicate views and opinions. The receiving of feedback and the possibility of conversing with others about a variety of opinions online further contributed to the formation of more informed perspectives. Moreover, the embrace of new media has allowed new interaction methods and the accessibility of alternative information sources. Participants’ choosing to passively absorb opinions and not immediately voice their perspectives on Facebook, so as to gather insights and perspectives about issues whilst exposing themselves to alternative ideas, emphasises the expansion of outlooks and depth of knowledge, but also demonstrates a cautious reticence to express some opinions for fear of the feedback that such voicing might elicit.

By broadening the scope and depth of information and knowledge to which netizens have access, Facebook has contributed to the increased control individuals
have over the kinds and type of information they encountered on social media. Increasing awareness and interest in social issues, the majority of respondents corroborated this point by indicating how Facebook had increased their knowledge and interest of current issues and events in Singapore. Encouraging the development of more informed individuals, the use of Facebook as an information source has certainly contributed to the opening of Singapore's social sphere.

The speed at which information was disseminated via social media platforms and the breadth of information attainable online also stress two key differences between online and offline media – the almost instantaneous distribution of content and the immense audience reach Facebook has. Access to news and information was now increasingly being generated, curated, and ordered by the interests and perceptions of Facebook friend networks. No longer restricted exclusively by the limits dictated by the Singapore government or its press control measures, the relevance of an article’s content to participants’ current circumstances was key in influencing the amount of attention it received.

The influence of friend networks was demonstrated in this study as being crucial in determining the variety of information to which individuals were exposed. The attractiveness of an article's topic subject significantly impacted upon an article’s popularity or virality, highlighting the effect such networks had on the viewership of specific kinds of articles seen, shared and commented on on Facebook. By selecting to share viewpoints that appeared to correspond with public sentiment and were personally attractive and/or relevant to individual interests, it was possible for individuals to tailor, as well as limit the scope and quality of the material circulating on Facebook. Coupled with the hype and subsequent emotions the topic matter was able to elicit, participants’ specificity in choosing to share information that garnered curiosity and which appealed to the sentiments of their friend network highlights the authority individuals now had to dictate the content that was seen and spread on Facebook.

Dalsgaard (2010 p. 9) has argued that ‘Facebook has you in the focus’, allowing individuals to exhibit their point of view, which is then associated with the
connections and relationships embraced with friends to form a representation of the individual's identity. This further augments individualities, highlighting character traits that ultimately made posts on Facebook come across as being more real, personal and authentic. Also, the personal endorsement of content was observed to have played a part in influencing the way content was circulated online. Emphasising the power individuals now had online, actually knowing who was conveying the viewpoint observed online was shown to have positively affected participants' inclination to accept online expressions as reliable pieces of information. Using background knowledge of the individual's character as a reference, respondents said they paid more attention to information shared by friends they knew and felt they could trust.

Correspondingly, every 'like', share or comment that articles on Facebook received intensified the credibility, weight and importance of the article's content, especially when shared by friends participants knew personally. Ortega's (1932) assertion that individuals with uninformed opinions who previously would only have been engrossed in what was in close proximity and to which they were accustomed were now profoundly affecting the perspectives of others on a much larger and, possibly, even on a global scale. Through the use of Facebook, individuals had increased influence in affecting their own social lives and the perspectives of others.

Yet, the convenience of clicking on links and sharing of content on Facebook, which was found to have had an effect on individual thoughts and perspectives, was argued by participants to have created a false sense of openness. Acting in crowds, the eagerness to articulate viewpoints could be overstated. Participants described observing pointless verbalisations of views on Facebook just because individuals wanted to have a part in the excitement playing out online, or because netizens felt it was safe to voice their views because everyone else was doing so. Other participants also said the emotional rants observed online, netizens not taking online discussions seriously, the misinterpretation of well-meaning intentions as being contentious, and/or netizens being unappreciative of the
nature and purpose of their expression of views online deterred them from wanting to engage in serious deliberations on Facebook.

Participants stressed their ability to decide when they wanted to engage in online discourse when they specified using guiding principles, such as the relevance and applicability of content, to decide when to ‘like’ and support causes online. The exercise of individual agency in such instances was encouraging, highlighting the increased control participants had over their own actions as well as their desire to involve themselves in community matters. Additionally, participants said that there was no harm in supporting causes online, especially when the causes were legitimate and the message the cause was asserting was applicable to them. This ‘no harm’ outlook, however, demonstrates continuing reticence to engage in activism offline.

Nevertheless, the interest and desire participants had in concerning themselves with civic issues emphasises shifts in the attitudes regarding engaging in social matters. In contrast to the impression of their parents’ generation, where articulating viewpoints or believing that their voice mattered was a pointless exertion of personal agency, because everything was considered to be controlled by the government, the ability participants in this study had to exercise choice and willingly participate in civic issues online implies a change in the attitudes surrounding social involvement in Singapore. Even if this participation remained specific to the online sphere, the increased interest and awareness Facebook elicited are noteworthy and should be highlighted.

Feeling empowered to engage in matters they felt strongly about, were connected to, and felt they could contribute to underscores the ability and conviction participants had to proclaim their views openly on Facebook. Moreover, the increase in attention placed on activism and respondents’ indicating that they were interested in engaging in social causes further underscores the increased use of Facebook as an enabling tool. Being aware of causes such as the *Cook A Pot of Curry!* event and supporting the cooking of curry as a form of protest, as well as physically going down to Hong Lim Park to support the Pink Dot event, are
examples of the concern and willingness participants expressed when illustrating their increased interest and support of civic issues in Singapore.

Taking to Facebook to involve themselves willingly and without pressure was observed in the lead up to GE2011. Although some participants said they felt more comfortable discussing the situation in-person with their friends, others said they felt more at ease when they took to Facebook to declare their opinions online. Furthermore, commenting and sharing news articles concerning GE2011 made participants feel like they were involved in the whole election process, which contributed towards their sense of fulfillment as citizens who were genuinely concerned about their country’s political context.

Adopting majority sentiment and accepting overly emotional responses were, however, argued to have an effect on individual thoughts and personal resolve. Conforming to prevailing norms meant that individuals would be less identifiable, and thus, need not fear being punished or singled out by the omni-present gaze. Disregarding social norms of propriety when communicating online, views expressed online could then become disparaging or lead to social uprisings in extreme cases. Nevertheless, respondents rebutted the possibility of echo chambers occurring on Facebook, as the open discussion that Facebook’s platform encouraged ensured viewpoints expressed online did not become skewed or too extreme.

Based on the results obtained, it is clear that in Singapore, members of Gen Y regard Facebook as an appropriate platform for the expression of viewpoints. Contradicting the previously unapproachable and inaccessible platforms for the expression of views, Facebook has become a widely accepted channel of expression, amplifying voices that were previously suppressed or muffled. Gen Y’s consistent desire for freedom and voice, as well as the ongoing negotiation of older forms of structural constraint restraining Singaporeans, further underscores the resourcefulness displayed in the use of Facebook as a platform to emphasise, highlight and augment previously suppressed views.
The use of Facebook as a site of resistance in Singapore, enabling campaigning for causes also parallels the findings of research done on social media facilitating activism online. Offering greater control of content to netizens, the rise of participation in social media has shifted at least some power into the hands of everyday citizens. The effect of Facebook as an empowerment tool is, thus, indisputable.

8.4 Nation Building and the Dark Side of Social Capital

The rapid modernisation process the Singaporean city-state was put through has benefited its populace tremendously and has earned Singapore many accolades and much admiration. Emphasising the successes and accomplishments achieved since it was thrust into independence in 1965, Singapore is today dubbed an economic miracle. Still, concerns over nation building and Gen Y's engagement in socio-cultural matters remain.

Singapore's concern with establishing a viable national identity, one which embodied both governmental rhetoric and suitable values that root Singaporeans in the city-state, have been characterised as being shrouded by political ideologies, which are aimed primarily at safeguarding the government's legitimacy as the ruling elite. The emphasis placed on establishing a Singaporean soul, a notion that was introduced to counter the effects of the city-state's earlier more exclusive focus on economic success, and one which was introduced as a way for citizens to create their own unique characteristics so as to enjoy greater stakeholdership in society, has been argued to be yet another tactic of control employed by the PAP government. Dictating the kind of participation the PAP wanted from its populace, active engagement was only desired in civic issues.

The Singapore government's focus on constructing national belonging has also placed emphasis on the growth of social capital in the city-state. Fixated on establishing community links and ties, as well as emotional and ideological attachment, the Singapore government has worked more recently to develop
amongst its populace an attachment to home and, eventually, ensure Singapore's continued growth. Scholars such as Granovetter (1973), Putnam (1995, 2000) and Lin (2001) have contended that social capital requires social trust and enriched social relations in order for reciprocity and relationship maintenance to occur. Matei (2004) has also asserted that connections are needed before social resources from which individuals could benefit were able to exist.

From the results obtained, it is evident that participants are still trying to negotiate the development of bonds and relations, especially in the online sphere. Relying heavily on established FtF relationships and institutional credibility in interpreting the trustworthiness and authenticity of material obtained online, the discernment exercised when assessing information obtained on Facebook is encouraging. However, the skepticism participants placed on information offered by individuals outside their close social circles suggest weak bridging capital. Participants being unsure if people in their neighborhood shared the same values as they did also suggest detachment. As well, participants indicated rarely involving themselves in their community. Nevertheless, the majority of participants said they identified with their neighbourhoods, indicating the presence of at least some bonds and connections to their community.

These results suggest that, perhaps, traditional definitions of measuring social connectedness and engagement should be reassessed. Basing community attachment and involvement solely on physical participation in activities or engagement in citizenship duties such as volunteering and voting might not be the best way to gauge concern and awareness for civic matters, especially in the era of new media. Participants indicating that relationships can be deepened online, but not initiated via Facebook, further highlights the transitions and negotiations that are still ongoing in establishing appropriate processes when interacting via social media.

The use of the internet and social networking sites have made the ways individuals participate and engage in civic life easier. Despite participants' persistent assertion that physical action was necessary in determining real intention and commitment,
the successful use of Facebook as a form of activism, as indicated in the success of the annual Pink Dot events and the *Cook A Pot of Curry!* incident, suggests the significance of online participation in Singapore.

Yet, participants repeatedly asserted the view that 'likes' on Facebook were meaningless indications of support, as no concrete action was enforced via the clicking of Facebook's 'like' button. Actively involving oneself in activism required personal accountability, tangible outcomes, the proper assertion of views and the careful consideration of consequences to which their actions could lead, participants said. The personal stand that is taken by an individual turning up at Pink Dot events, for instance, suggests full commitment and appreciation of the message the event was trying to promote.

Not being physically present and, thus, not needing to be answerable to the act of supporting a cause, the motives behind the ease with which 'likes' could be indicated was, thus, questioned. The actualisation of support for causes in the physical realm is considered to hold more weight, as physical involvement cements the individual's position in advocating the cause put forth. Deciding to go against the norm in support of an alternative notion in the physical realm where individuals can be identified is, therefore, noteworthy, especially in Singapore, where the climate of fear has become a well-established way of life.

 Nonetheless, the effortlessness participants displayed in their willingness to support causes online does indicate a shift in the notion of fear and constraint that traditionally shrouds speaking-up in Singapore's context. Apart from participants characterising supporting causes online as a cowardly form of activism, where individuals are able to assume anonymity amidst a crowd of people and thus, shun the responsibility of having to align themselves with specific viewpoints, agreeing to have their Facebook profile publicly associated with causes online can be considered a bold move.

Considering the passiveness participants underscored when asked about their use of Facebook, preferring to absorb information rather than offer or add to content
online, as well as the assertion that participants only clicked ‘like’ if the cause was relevant to them, participants’ choosing to participate online, even if it was just a click of a button, needs to be reflected appropriately – as a valid, though limited statement of individual perspectives.

The use of Facebook as an empowerment tool, aiding individuals’ assertion of viewpoints, highlights the power of social media in inciting change. Still, what is considered active engagement in Singapore’s context needs to be re-examined. The increase in lateral surveillance that has been observed in Singapore’s online sphere can be considered a form of participation, with netizens choosing to respond, adopting a stand and actively doing something about the anti-normative comments they encountered on Facebook. Whilst ensuring the maintenance of social order in their communities, such calling out of unacceptable behaviour, so as to be able to protect the values and bonds that exist in Singapore, also indicates the internalisation and reproduction of the PAP’s top-down disciplinary rhetoric into a different, more multi-directional kind of restraint.

Instead of just top-down disciplinary mechanisms, multiple forms of lateral and bottom-up surveillance have occurred. The bottom-up surveillance demonstrated by the effect of movements online leading to the adjustment of ministerial salaries underscores changing power discourses in the Singaporean city-state. The pervasiveness of peer-to-peer surveillance also makes it seem as if the constraint engulfing the city-state is now more ubiquitous.

The Amy Cheong and Anton Casey incidents stemmed from netizens’ repeated sharing of the screen shots they had collected of the insensitive remarks Cheong and Casey posted online. Underscoring the parameters by which practices and expressions online were bounded, the seamless transition between online and offline discourses was emphasised. Maintaining social order and thus, the appropriate display of actions within a logic of practice, the freedom actors were allowed when expressing themselves online was now being scrutinised and limited by netizens who had taken it upon themselves to call out dissenting remarks that could potentially harm the social harmony in Singapore.
Netizens’ assertion of collective identity and their intense protection of a fundamental aspect of Singapore’s social milieu could be used to rally the development of more constructive relations within the city-state. Through the development of social capital and connections amongst Singaporeans, netizens’ interest in engaging online could also be enhanced; creating a community ethos that promotes an even more open democracy.

Social capital and civic engagement do not just increase democracy or indicate alterations towards the establishment of a more vibrant society. The dark side of social capital could lead to mutual surveillance that constricts social action, as has been exemplified in the Cheong and Casey Facebook case studies that were examined, as well as other findings observed in this study. Affecting society and the conceptions of democracy, the continued reproduction of disciplinary procedures has also resulted in the preservation and extension of the internalisation of constraint in Singapore.

Even though Facebook has helped enhance individual voice, created new ways of engaging with government figures, helped lift overbearing constraints, and changed the way the PAP dealt with its populace, respondents’ remarks still indicated a sense of fear and control that was being imposed upon the populace. A key difference, however, was that now it was the citizenry itself that was directly enforcing the rules and norms of propriety.

Still, netizens’ deference to the government to take action against Cheong and Casey suggests the lack of impact merely online activism had in mobilising tangible change toward a real democracy in Singapore. The outcome of online agency calling for action to be taken, especially in advancing causes such as those elicited by Cheong’s and Casey’s Facebook posts, was still being placed in the hands of the ruling elite.

The relationship between virtual and offline agency has, thus, not yet become a seamless process in the Singaporean city-state. At times, sentiments expressed online could be translated into offline action, such as in the case of the Pink Dot
events. However, in other instances, while certainly an expression of increased voice, online agency was a pretext for individuals not moving towards any offline agency.

While netizens’ primary concern for the continued stability of their community’s values and practices highlights their consideration for the social, the varying attitudes and methods of interaction observed on Facebook emphasise the ongoing adaptation and negotiation of practices online. The limits to freedom in the online sphere, or what is considered acceptable and what is socially unacceptable, also requires more figuring out.

8.5 Limitations and Future Research

Limitations of this study include the absence of follow-up questions and discussions with participants who participated only in the survey. This made it difficult sometimes to understand the exact reasons behind participants’ responses to the questions asked in the survey. As both the interviews and surveys were conducted concurrently, the topics addressed in the semi-structured interviews were also mostly based on literature reviews and background searches on social media use in Singapore, rather than the findings obtained from the completed surveys. Nevertheless, the intention of this study was to compare the findings from both the surveys and the interviews, so as to observe if there were similarities and/or differences in the way participants responded.

Additionally, the targeted sample group of respondents, all of whom had completed or were in the midst of completing their university degrees, might be considered as representing the elites of the Gen Y cohort in Singapore. Participants’ backgrounds could have skewed the results obtained. Nevertheless, the results obtained do illuminate the issues exemplified in the case studies discussed throughout this thesis.
Future investigations in this area of research need to focus on the effects of online agency and activism in emboldening offline agency in Singapore. Specifically, the motivations for the transference of practices from the online realm into that of the offline, the meanings ascribed to such actions and the alteration of socio-cultural discourse needs to be further explored. A deeper analysis of the influence new media technologies have in altering power discourses in Singapore can then be obtained. As the relationship between structure and agency in Singapore continues to develop, such studies will enable clearer understandings of the factors influencing the modifications to Singapore’s socio-political discourses and institutions of power.

As this study was focused specifically on a segment of Singapore’s population – its Gen Y population – the implications of this study’s findings cannot be extrapolated or taken to be representative of the entire Singapore populace. Future studies could look into assessing a larger sample, one that is more representative of the general Singaporean population, so as to be able to obtain results that are more representative of the views of Singaporeans as a whole.

8.6 Transitioning Towards a More Participatory Democracy

Scholars have cautioned that the ‘promises of openness do not amount to democratic developments’ in Singapore (Lee, T 2008, p. 170). The persistent shifts in the PAP’s strategies aimed at ensuring Singapore’s ‘survival’ could be viewed simply as techniques of adaptation, safeguarding Singapore’s relevance is maintained in an ever-changing global context. In view of larger aims such as the creation of a more connected community and the economic need to be regarded as a free and open economy, one that was not blanketed by restraint and restriction, Terrence Lee (2010) has asserted that the seeming openness toward which Singapore was moving was simply gestural politics in play. This was especially so when examining the ‘light touch’ approach the PAP indicated it would adopt in relation to the internet (see George 2005a).
The PAP’s declaration that self-regulation would be favoured over direct control of the internet was welcomed by users, as the move seemed to be in line with the ideology of freedom the internet was believed to epitomise. However, the argument that this apparent freedom online would result in greater auto-regulation has been legitimised with the increase in governmental presence online, as well as the continued occurrence of libel suits brought against individuals such as Ngerng who took to Facebook to challenge the legitimacy of the PAP. Coupled with the ongoing uncertainty enveloping the regulation of content production, netizens have been left to negotiate and test boundaries of appropriateness themselves. Participants even highlighted that it was still only the brave few (e.g., TOC) who dared to test limits.

Besides implying the existence of even more constraint, the alterations the PAP made in their approach to the internet could, alternatively, be viewed as flexibility on the part of the PAP. Hinting at possibilities for the banishment of ‘structured freedom’, a contradiction that has been normalised in the Singaporean context (Lee, T 2003), the promise of a more participatory democracy forming seemed plausible. Nevertheless, Rodan (2006, p. 4) has contended that political transitions or state transformations in authoritarian regimes such as Singapore do not exemplify theories of regime change that would typically identify transitional points in shifts towards the establishment of a democracy (see O’Donnell & Schmitter 1986; Case 2002; Diamond 2002). Rodan (2006, p. 4) further suggested that these shifts in policies and governance strategies should instead be regarded as ‘regime reproductions’ marked by ‘contemporary refinements to the political regime’ (see also Rodan 1993; Ortmann 2009).

Yet, it is clear that in Singapore there is more freedom of expression. New media have contributed to the opening up of Singapore’s previously restricted social sphere. Participants’ increased interest and awareness of social issues are already in stark contrast to the pre-internet situation, where news sources were heavily controlled and limited, and individuals were simply focused on pragmatically achieving career success. Now, participants indicate wanting to express opinions online, are mobilising protests, observing election campaigns, scrutinising and
engaging the government through various social media channels and are deepening their exercise of autonomy through their active participation in online civic society.

New media enabling such participation emphasises Jenkins’s (2004, 2006) notion of a convergence culture, where media consumers are able to engage, interact, and exercise more control over the kinds of information they encounter and respond to online. Facebook has thus given individuals a platform to express their viewpoints, has amplified voices, given netizens options, the ability to decide for themselves what they want to accept as credible pieces of information and the authority to enforce constraint on other individuals online. The shifting power of control is also evident in the responses and reactions the PAP government has shown. Changes to the way the government is reacting to online incidents and are being made to account for its actions highlight the increased weight netizens’ voices now carry.

Increasingly, the government has had to appease its populace by responding to queries and comments online, playing catch-up instead of being on top of situations, as was the case in traditional media platforms. The scrutiny that was once applied solely by government bodies upon its citizens is now not only being enforced (laterally) by netizens on their fellow netizens, but is also being applied (bottom-up) on the government.

The restructuring of ministerial salaries further stresses the impact netizens’ calls for transparency have in their assertion of power over the ruling elite. Needing to show responsiveness and consideration of citizens’ views, so as to continue proving its legitimacy and assuring acceptance from its people, the PAP has also been pressured into embracing new media and has been observed to have responded to Facebook incidents even when it was not necessary for it to do so. The Cheong and Casey incidences, where ministers were seen intervening and urging action to be taken, further underscore the changing dynamics occurring in Singapore.

The fact that the Cheong and Casey incidents would have had very different outcomes should they have not played out on Facebook further indicates the presence of different undercurrents being applied to practices online. And, just by
comparing the situation preceding GE2011 to the context following GE2015, it is clear that the government has changed its practices, having learnt the significance of social media engagement in connecting with its citizens.

Having increased communication links via Facebook as an avenue for direct access to ministers and government officials, the use of Facebook as part of the PAP’s outreach strategy has helped its citizens feel less neglected or disengaged from the concerns affecting their homeland. LKY and Goh Chok Tong announcing their stepping down from Cabinet and the subsequent sweeping reshuffle of ministers that took place after GE2011 further indicate the shift in approach the PAP has taken in the way it handles social issues in Singapore. Moreover, the increasing ease with which petitions and campaigns are being set up online, as in the case of the *Cook A Pot of Curry!* and Amy Cheong incidents, the Free My Internet rally, and the Pink Dot events that were mentioned earlier, suggest alterations to the kind of democracy that is being practised in Singapore.

Yet, while the PAP’s popularity rating received a much-needed boost of confidence in the GE2015 results, the improved results cannot be attributed entirely to the government’s response and adaptation to its citizens’ demands. Factors such as LKY’s passing and the year-long SG50 celebrations in 2015 need to be considered as well. Changes in the way PAP governs Singapore, actively utilising social media as a channel of communication do imply an adaptation to changing times and contexts. Still, the implementation of change requires active subjects that not only cooperate in the exercise of government, but are also engaged in the shaping and influencing of the social sphere (Morison 2000; Taylor, Howard & Lever 2010).

The reproduction of structural constraint via the cyclical reproduction of social structure and its set parameters on practices, as well as the constant negotiation and assertion of agency within the limits of freedom that participants have indicated, implies alterations to the practices and habitus of Singaporeans. However, as Ortner (1984, 2006) has argued, because practices can only be properly understood in their articulations with historical concepts, Singapore’s history of top-down structural constraint needs to be considered when examining
the extent of personal agency and choice in participants’ negotiation of structural constraints.

Acknowledging the significance of socio-cultural rules, norms and experiences in interpreting displays of actions and thoughts underscores practice theory’s assertion that contextual understanding is crucial when observing the extent of agency and choice individuals have. With contexts affecting individual action, what might be interpreted as restraint in one context could otherwise be construed as freedom in another. It is, thus, essential that the kind of freedom referred to, as well as the limits of such freedoms are properly determined, so as to facilitate the conduct of both valid and accurate investigations.

Additionally, while the changes observed in Singapore’s online sphere do specify increased openness and engagement in social issues, the impact of online agency has yet to be fully determined. The inconsistency observed in the transference of online agency into offline agency reveals the effort still required to alter social discourses in Singapore. Nevertheless, the reproduction and evolution of practices as observed in this study, can be viewed positively.

The impact new media has had on the reproduction of disciplinary procedures and the construction of national belonging in Singapore is obvious. The effect new media have had on the way Singaporean Gen Y navigate their social spheres also cannot be denied. Also, the increase in lateral surveillance online has brought to light a newly intensified social phenomenon that is occurring in the city-state. Combined with the increased freedom and openness the new model of democracy toward which Singapore is slowly transitioning – the establishment of a real democracy – may very well be achievable.

However, the extent of these changes observed online and the actual impact they will have in affecting Singapore’s progression towards becoming a more participatory democracy remain to be seen. The rate of change will be affected by subsequent modifications to practices in the city-state. Specifically, how the relationship between structure and agency continues to be negotiated in Singapore,
as well as the effect the meanings of such practices have on social milieus, will affect Singapore’s ability to progress towards a more open democracy.

It will be interesting to see how Singapore continues to negotiate this newfound freedom and expression of online agency. How netizens and the government balance the expansion of political, social and economic freedom will be critical in defining Singapore’s future.


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Survey Questionnaire

Singapore Gen Y's Viewpoints: Insights from the Use of New Media

Purpose of Study:

This PhD study is aimed at acquiring a deeper understanding of the viewpoints of Singapore's young adult generation through their use of new media. Identifying the impact the use of new media has had on social relations, communication methods and the construction of identity in Singapore, this study will examine Singapore's young adult generation's association to the nation and their formation of values signifying Singaporean-ness.

As a member of Gen Y, your participation will contribute towards understanding how young adults like yourself use new media and think about social processes related to very current topics. Assessing the impact of new social media methods in this study will also have significant benefits in evaluating the effect of such media internationally, thus enhancing potentials for civil society empowerment.

The questions are generally clustered around topics such as the uses and perceptions of Facebook; social relations and community engagement; voice and channel of expression; and national identity and attachment to home.

Questions:
(Please tick the appropriate response)

1. In a typical week, how often do you use Facebook?

☐ More than once a day, everyday
☐ Once each day of the week
☐ 5-6 times a week
☐ 4-5 times a week
☐ 3-4 times a week
☐ 2-3 times a week
☐ 1 or 2 times a week
2. Generally how long do you spend on Facebook each week?

- More than 6 hours
- 5-6 hours
- 4-5 hours
- 3-4 hours
- 2-3 hours
- 1-2 hours
- Less than an hour

3. Compared to your friends, how would you rate your Facebook usage?

- Extremely high
- High
- Average
- Low
- Minimal

4. Why do you use Facebook? (Please choose a maximum of 5 options that most closely match your usual motivations for using Facebook)

- To update yourself on what’s happening in the world
- To follow groups/pages and further specific interests
- To see what your friends are doing/saying/thinking
- To let your friends know what you are currently doing
- To spread newsworthy information/articles
- To keep in touch with friends and family
- To make new friends
- Because everyone is using it
- To pass the time

5. What do you do most when on Facebook? (Please choose a maximum of 5 options)

- Update your profile page
- Check your News Feed
- Comment on Wall postings or Status updates
- Post Status updates
- Upload pictures, videos or links to articles
- Facebook surf - look at your friends’ Facebook profiles/pages/pictures/links
- Read newsworthy articles posted by friends
- Watch videos posted by friends
- Follow or ‘like’ groups/pages
Create group events and send invites to friends
Play games
Use various Facebook Applications
Look for more friends to add to your friend list

6. How often do you post comments or update your status on Facebook?
_______________________________________  ________________________________  ______________

7. When using Facebook, individuals are more forthcoming and willing to engage in more delicate and reflective issues.

   □ Strongly Agree
   □ Agree
   □ Undecided
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly Disagree

8. Comments left on Facebook Walls are true reflections of individual thought.

   □ Strongly Agree
   □ Agree
   □ Undecided
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly Disagree

9. I feel compelled to comment or respond to comments posted on Facebook.

   □ Strongly Agree
   □ Agree
   □ Undecided
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly Disagree

10. Activity on Facebook can influence individual thought and perception on various issues or topics.

    □ Strongly Agree
    □ Agree
    □ Undecided
    □ Disagree
    □ Strongly Disagree
11. Facebook permits young adult Singaporeans to express their views accurately.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

12. Facebook enhances communication methods and strengthens social relationships between individuals.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

13. Online relations and communications via Facebook are equivalent to real life friendships.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

14. How important is information found on or exchanged via Facebook in your everyday life?

- Very Important
- Important
- Moderately Important
- Of Little Importance
- Unimportant

15. What kinds of groups or pages do you follow/‘like’ most often on Facebook? (Please choose a maximum of 5 options)

- Groups or pages supporting social issues
- Groups or pages supporting charitable organisations
- Groups or pages supporting environmental issues
- Groups or pages supporting political issues
- Education related groups or pages (includes Schools, Universities, clubs and societies, student associations, etc)
☐ Community groups or pages
☐ Sports teams or athlete groups or pages
☐ Celebrity pages
☐ Groups or pages supporting artists
   (musicians, bands, dance troops, musicals, etc)
☐ Pages supporting specific events
☐ Pages promoting businesses, brands, retail shops and products
   (luxury goods labels, online shops, eateries, etc)
☐ Industry related groups or pages
☐ Groups or pages created by yourself or your friends

16. Associating with groups and/or pages via Facebook helps distinguish my unique personality.

☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Undecided
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

17. Social media outlets like Facebook can aid in the development of bonds/relations between groups of people.

☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Undecided
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

18. How many years have you lived in your present neighbourhood?

_________________________________________________________________________________________

19. I identify strongly with the immediate neighbourhood I live in.

☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Undecided
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree
20. My neighbourhood is a place where people from different backgrounds get along well together.

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Undecided
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree

21. People in my neighbourhood share the same values as I do.

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Undecided
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree

22. People in my neighbourhood come together to improve the neighbourhood.

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Undecided
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree

23. How often do you involve yourself in your community?

- [ ] Very Frequently
- [ ] Frequently
- [ ] Occasionally
- [ ] Rarely
- [ ] Never

24. On a scale of 1 to 5, one being the least agreement and 5 being the most agreement, how much do you trust information obtained from:

- your family
- your friends
- your neighbours
- your elected government representatives

________________________
________________________
________________________
________________________
25. On a scale of 1 to 5, one being the least agreement and 5 being the most agreement, how would you rate the reliability of information obtained from:

- local newspapers __________________________________________
- local radio ________________________________________________
- local television ____________________________________________
- the internet (websites, search engines, etc) ____________________
- what you see on social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, blogs, etc) ________________________________
- what you hear in government announcements ____________________

26. Social media have given me an avenue for public expression that was unavailable in earlier forms of media like television, radio and newspapers.

☐ Strongly Agree  ☐ Agree  ☐ Undecided  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Strongly Disagree

27. Compared to other forms of public expression, I feel more comfortable expressing certain viewpoints on Facebook.

☐ Strongly Agree  ☐ Agree  ☐ Undecided  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Strongly Disagree

28. Facebook has raised my awareness of current issues/events in Singapore.

☐ Strongly Agree  ☐ Agree  ☐ Undecided  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Strongly Disagree
29. Social media are an appropriate avenue to use to express various viewpoints such as those raised by the *Cook A Pot of Curry* event held in August 2011.

- □ Strongly Agree
- □ Agree
- □ Undecided
- □ Disagree
- □ Strongly Disagree

30. The views and issues discussed via various social media in the lead up to the 2011 General Election were accurate representations of public sentiment in Singapore.

- □ Strongly Agree
- □ Agree
- □ Undecided
- □ Disagree
- □ Strongly Disagree

31. I feel public criticism directed at the Singapore government via social media has been excessive.

- □ Strongly Agree
- □ Agree
- □ Undecided
- □ Disagree
- □ Strongly Disagree

32. I am proud to be Singaporean.

- □ Strongly Agree
- □ Agree
- □ Undecided
- □ Disagree
- □ Strongly Disagree

33. Singapore has been associated with many of the following options. But what do you associate as being representative of Singaporean-ness? (*Please choose a maximum of 10 options*)

- □ The Merlion
- □ The national flag
- □ The pledge
- □ The national anthem
- □ The national flower
- National Day Parades
- National Day Songs
- National Service
- Singapore's Shared Values
- Singapore's education system
- Qualities like 'hard work brings success'
- Diversity of races and languages harmoniously living side by side
- Meritocracy and equality regardless of race, language or religion
- Economic success
- Living in a clean and green city
- Enjoying low crime rates
- Having chewing gum banned
- Living in a 'fine' city
- Locally produced movies/sitcoms/series/productions
  (Money No Enough, Phua Chua Kang, Little Nonya, etc)
- Local literature
  (books, poems, publications written by local authors such as Catherine Lim, Edwin Thumboo, Rex Shelley, etc)
- Local artists
  (Taufik Batisah, Kit Chan, Corrine May, Hady Mirza, Stefanie Sun, etc)
- Singapore's national sports teams
  (Teams sent for the Olympics, Sea Games, National Soccer Team sent to the AFF Suzuki Cup, National Netball Team sent to the World Netball Championships, etc)
- World class facilities
  (Changi Airport, infrastructure, transportation facilities, healthcare facilities, etc)
- Architectural Icons like the Esplanade, Marina Barrage, Singapore Riverfront, City Hall, etc
- Heritage and ethnic districts
  (China Town, Geylang Seri, Kampong Glam, Katong, etc)
- Coffee shops/hawker centres
- HDB flats
- MRT trains
- Traffic jams
- A large variety of local hawker foods
- Eating
- Being 'Kiasu'
- Speaking Singlish
- Shopping
- Complaining
34. I feel a strong sense of belonging in Singapore.

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Undecided
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree

35. I am lucky to be living in Singapore.

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Undecided
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree

36. Attachment to one’s homeland is measured solely in geographical terms; I must be physically present in Singapore to be able to call Singapore home.

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Undecided
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree

37. What does “home” mean to you?

___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

38. My heritage is an important part of who I am.

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Undecided
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree
39. How important is tradition and the continuation of customs handed down to you by your family or community?

☐ Very Important
☐ Important
☐ Moderately Important
☐ Of Little Importance
☐ Unimportant

40. I feel like my actions and choices are constrained in Singapore.

☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Undecided
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

41. In your opinion, what does Singapore’s Gen Y want?

________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________

42. The ‘Stayers vs Quitters’ debate has long been contested in Singapore, which group do you identify with the most?

☐ Definitely a Stayer
☐ Probably will be a Stayer
☐ Not bothered
☐ Will probably leave Singapore
☐ Definitely will leave Singapore

43. What do you think distinguishes Gen Y from other Generations of Singaporeans?

________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________

Thank You
APPENDIX B

List of Guiding Questions Used in Semi-structured Interviews

The Uses and Perceptions of Facebook

• Do you use Facebook?
• When and how did you start using Facebook?
• What do you use Facebook for?
• How would you describe your Facebook usage?
• How often do you log onto Facebook?
• How often do you post comments on Facebook?
• What do you usually post on Facebook and what makes you want to post such things on Facebook?
• Compared to when you first started using Facebook, are there any changes in the way you use Facebook now?
• Besides communicating with friends and family on a casual basis, what else can Facebook be used for?
• What other purpose does/can Facebook serve/be used for?

Structural Constraints and the Expression of Views/Agency

• Do you think Facebook is an appropriate platform for the expression of views?
• Do you think individuals are more forthcoming and willing to express themselves when interacting on Facebook?
• Has Facebook encouraged more individuals to speak up or is it just amplifying the voices that are already being articulated on the ground?
• Can Facebook be used to discuss ‘serious’ topics?
• What are your thoughts on the utilisation of Facebook in the lead up to GE2011?
• Did you voice your views or post/share anything related to GE2011? Did your friends post anything related to GE2011?
• What is your explanation for the influx of posts seen in the lead up to GE2011? Was it because:
  o it was exciting times and too good an opportunity to miss out on to show the government it wasn’t always right;
  o because Facebook was so accessible and easy to use making it convenient to join in;
  o because everyone was doing it and so it was the “in” thing to do; or
  o because individuals were really interested and concerned about the issues raised?
• Do you think comments/posts on Facebook are true reflections of individual thought?
• Can individuals be pressured or influenced on Facebook? How so?
• Has Facebook increased your voice and ability to express yourself online?
• What does freedom of expression mean to you?
Truth and Accountability Online

• What are your thoughts on the accuracy of posts/comments/views seen on Facebook?
• How do you decide on what is trustworthy information?
• How important is information obtained on Facebook to you?
• Can Facebook influence individual thought?
• What are your thoughts on being accountable for things posted online? Do you think individuals feel responsible for the things they say online?

‘Likes’ and Participation Online

• What are your thoughts about using Facebook as a platform to further causes/encourage activism?
• What does ‘liking’ something online mean?
• Can you equate ‘likes’ with taking a stand on something? Do ‘likes’ stand for anything in the offline realm?
• Is ‘liking’ Facebook events effective? Do Facebook events achieve anything?
• Did you ‘like’ the Cook A Pot of Curry event? Did you take part in cooking curry?
• Have you actually physically shown your support or participated in any Facebook event you have ‘liked’ and indicated support for on Facebook?

Being Singaporean, Attachment to Home and Community Engagement

• Do you participate in your community? How often do you do so?
• What kinds of volunteer work do you engage in?
• What do you think should be done to encourage engagement/giving back to your community?
• Do you feel attached to your community/the neighbourhood you currently live in?
• What does ‘home’ mean to you? Is ‘home’ defined purely by geographical terms/physical presence?
• How would you describe being Singaporean?
• What are some “so Singaporean” traits?
• Do you feel connected to Singapore? How and why do you say so?
• Given a choice, would you continue to stay in Singapore? Why?
• As a member of Gen Y do you think generalisations such as Gen Y is pampered, idealistic and detached from reality fair/accurate? Why?
• Do you think Gen Y is concerned about their community and the future of Singapore? If yes, what else can be done to encourage their involvement?
• In your opinion, what does Gen Y want?
## Coding and Brief Descriptions of Interview Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview No</th>
<th>Respondent Code(s)</th>
<th>Type of Interview</th>
<th>Brief Description of Interviewee(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>Sh</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Male, late 20s to early 30s, graduate, doing post-graduate studies, worked before commencing post-graduate studies, was previously directly involved with the use of Facebook in his work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>Ki</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Male, mid to late 20s, graduate, doing post-graduate studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>L, S, Am, C, Af</td>
<td>Group, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>All females, early 20s, about to finish undergraduate studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004</td>
<td>Jo, Se, Yt, H, N</td>
<td>Group, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>All females, early 20s, about to finish undergraduate studies, 3 have work experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005</td>
<td>Kh</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Male, mid to late 20s, graduate, doing post-graduate studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>Mu, J, Ma</td>
<td>Group, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>1 male, mid 20s, and 2 females, early 20s, all about to complete undergraduate studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>007</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Female, mid 20s, graduate, doing post-graduate studies, on government scholarship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>008</td>
<td>AT</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Male, mid to late 20s, graduate, doing post-graduate studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>009</td>
<td>Ge</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Male, early 30s, graduate, working, directly involved with the use of Facebook in his work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>010</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Male, mid 30s, completed post-graduate studies, working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>011</td>
<td>Jn, Ab, E</td>
<td>Group, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>All males, mid to late 20s, graduates, all working, all directly involved with the use of Facebook in their work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>012</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Male, late 20s, doing undergraduate studies, currently working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>013</td>
<td>JJ, Jf</td>
<td>Group, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Both males, mid 20s, doing undergraduate studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>014</td>
<td>Mk</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Male, early 20s, just started undergraduate studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>015</td>
<td>Mi</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Female, late 20s, graduate, working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>016</td>
<td>Sm</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Female, early 20s, about to finish undergraduate studies, has work experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>017</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>* Inaudible recording: Could not be transcribed Excluded from data set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>018</td>
<td>Im</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Male, mid to late 20s, graduate, working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>019</td>
<td>Vk</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Male, early 30s, completed post-graduate studies, working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>020</td>
<td>Za, Sa, G</td>
<td>Group, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>All females, about to complete undergraduate studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>021</td>
<td>Id</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Female, late 20s, graduate, working, directly involved with the use of Facebook in her work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>022</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Female, late 20s, graduate, working, directly involved with the use of Facebook in her work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>023</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Male, mid 30s, completed post-graduate studies, working, directly involved with the use of Facebook in his work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>024</td>
<td>F, Jm, Qr</td>
<td>Group, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>1 female and 2 males, all early 30s, all graduates, all working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>025</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Individual, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Female, mid 20s, graduate, about to finish post-graduate studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>026</td>
<td>An, Lk</td>
<td>Group, Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Both males, early 30s, graduates, working, 1 directly involved with the use of Facebook in his work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>027</td>
<td>Se</td>
<td>Online chat via Facebook Messenger</td>
<td>Female, early 20s, doing undergraduate studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All interviews were carried out between March and July 2012 at locations chosen by the respondents. A total of 27 interviews were conducted, and 45 people participated in these semi-structured interviews.

While participants’ responses dictated the general flow of each interview session, general guiding topics that parallel those covered in the survey component of this study were used. See Appendix B for the list of guiding questions utilised in these interviews.