

MAPPING DIGITAL MEDIA: SINGAPORE



Mapping Digital Media: Singapore

A REPORT BY THE OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

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Mapping Digital Media

The values that underpin good journalism, the need of citizens for reliable and abundant information, and the importance of such information for a healthy society and a robust democracy: these are perennial, and provide compass-bearings for anyone trying to make sense of current changes across the media landscape.

The standards in the profession are in the process of being set. Most of the effects on journalism imposed by new technology are shaped in the most developed societies, but these changes are equally influencing the media in less developed societies.

The **Mapping Digital Media** project, which examines the changes in-depth, aims to build bridges between researchers and policymakers, activists, academics and standard-setters across the world. It also builds policy capacity in countries where this is less developed, encouraging stakeholders to participate in and influence change. At the same time, this research creates a knowledge base, laying foundations for advocacy work, building capacity and enhancing debate.

The Media Program of the Open Society Foundations has seen how changes and continuity affect the media in different places, redefining the way they can operate sustainably while staying true to values of pluralism and diversity, transparency and accountability, editorial independence, freedom of expression and information, public service, and high professional standards.

The Mapping Digital Media project assesses, in the light of these values, the global opportunities and risks that are created for media by the following developments:

- the switch-over from analog broadcasting to digital broadcasting;
- growth of new media platforms as sources of news;
- convergence of traditional broadcasting with telecommunications.

Covering 60 countries, the project examines how these changes affect the core democratic service that any media system should provide—news about political, economic and social affairs.

The **Mapping Digital Media** reports are produced by local researchers and partner organizations in each country. Cumulatively, these reports will provide a much-needed resource on the democratic role of digital media.

In addition to the country reports, the Open Society Media Program has commissioned research papers on a range of topics related to digital media. These papers are published as the **MDM Reference Series**.

Mapping Digital Media: Singapore

Executive Summary

The city-state of Singapore, with its 5 million people, has fully embraced the technology and opportunities presented by digitization. While it was no surprise in 1996 when Singapore became one of the first countries to regulate the internet, a glance at today's online and mobile world might cause astonishment, considering that you can still be fined there for importing or selling gum.

One look at Stomp, a user-generated content portal loved by young Singaporeans, or the independent citizen journalism blog The Online Citizen, loved by the politically-minded, will reveal a different Singapore from the one depicted in the country's flagship newspaper, *The Straits Times*.

The paradox—or maybe the ingenuity—is that Stomp is the baby of the *Straits Times*, the government-friendly newspaper owned by Singapore Press Holdings, in effect the city-state's print monopoly. The newspaper started Stomp in 2006 and two years later won the IFRA 2008 award for Best in Online Media. Herein lies the secret of Singapore's digitization story: the state and its many close corporate partners have warmly embraced the digital world by funding innovation, launching new media platforms, and widening the public conversation.

Singapore—partly because it is a manageable size, but also because it is educated, wealthy and well run—is now an advanced digital society. Nearly nine out of ten households have broadband access. Mobile phone penetration is 150 percent (most are smartphones), and there are 340 TV and 46 local and foreign radio channels available for those who don't care much for the two national pastimes: eating and shopping.

However, for a country that is wiring every possible home, school and office building with all-fiber ultra-high-speed broadband access of up to 1Gbps, it is surprisingly behind in the analog-digital broadcasting conversion. Unlike similarly switched-on Asian countries such as Japan and Korea, Singapore has been slow to complete the transition, partly because it is following the 2015-2020 timeframe of the regional Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). But there's plenty of digital transmission around: the state-owned broadcast holding company MediaCorp has pioneered the rollout of its free-to-air TV channels in DVB-T

(Digital Video Broadcasting over Terrestrial) platforms. And the state Media Development Authority (MDA) has promised that Singapore's seven free-to-air (FTA) channels will go fully digital by the end of 2013 using the DVB-T2 broadcasting standard, and that analog will be switched off in 2020. As for Pay TV services, all channels are already digital. StarHub Cable Vision, the (stock market-listed) sole cable television operator, ceased analog transmission in 2009. At the same time, commercial HDTV services are available on FTA, cable and internet TV platforms.

Various government agencies are also collaborating in the development of a “media hub” for the incubation of start-ups, as well as testing innovative concepts in interactive digital media, film and broadcasting, which they hope will make Singapore a leader in Asia in media innovation.

The familiar paternalistic hand of the Singapore state is clearly at work in all of this. The MDA has likened media literacy to a “life skill” that is essential for work, learning and play in an age of connectedness. Indeed, it is a paternalism that is marked less by reluctant adaptation than by willing and energetic initiative.

That doesn't mean it heralds much in the way of a retreat of the state. The Government—and indeed the Singaporean people—are still highly sensitive to the belief that the stability of their multi-ethnic population (Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians) is fragile, stoked by the memory of two bloody race and religious clashes in the 1950s and 1960s. This has long shaped the role of the media as non-adversarial. For instance, mainstream media consciously and consistently choose to report on sensitive issues dispassionately and impartially, a role that they believe contributes to the understanding of national issues, ensuring racial and religious harmony and promoting shared values.

The Sedition Act, a legal relic of colonial times, has been a frequent reminder of that responsibility over the years and has been used recently against people for comments posted online. The Act goes beyond outlawing behavior that seeks to bring down the government of the day (the dictionary definition of sedition) to include racist comments or views that divide society, “producing or having a tendency to produce feelings of ill-will and enmity between different races or classes of the population of Singapore.”

A host of other laws, registration procedures, broadcast licensing codes, and threats of costly legal action for broadly defined acts of defamation further entrench ultra-cautious treatment by all media of these sensitive issues. A news story on an incident involving racial or religious sensitivity would, in the past, specifically avoid inclusion of details, lest even the reporting itself stokes or adds to feelings of hostility. In this internet age however, the local media report such incidents more freely since it would be pointless to suppress details which could easily be found online. A line is drawn at publishing extreme or potentially incendiary comments, however attention-grabbing they may be.

From a staunchly liberal—some might say “western”—perspective, curbing discussion on the very issues that are regarded as sensitive doesn't seem to be a good idea. Indeed, international civil society organizations concerned with freedom of expression have long been critical of Singapore's policies on such matters and the country is way down global tables of press freedom and other liberties. However, the Government, led

since 1965 by the People's Action Party (PAP), argues that a free press by Western standards does not always ensure clean and efficient government or contribute to economic freedom and prosperity. It says that the high numbers of foreign executives—media professionals included—who choose to live and work in the city-state are testimony that the limits on press freedom do not greatly deter their quality of life and employment.

So individuals, groups and media professionals operate within a state-sanctioned sphere and observe what are called “OB markers” (“out of bounds” lines used in sports to denote an area beyond which play is not allowed). These are the boundaries of acceptable and permissible political public discussion, which opposition politicians view as a form of self-censorship. The Government has recently acknowledged openly that those markers are shifting.

Digitization is partly responsible. Traditional media have found that their audiences have started to turn to more independent websites, broadcasters and publications for alternative sources of news, analysis and opinion, including widely available foreign and global media. This has been made possible by the fact that the Government has adopted a lighter touch approach to new media content, giving rise to what some have dubbed a “dual tolerance” system.

Indeed, the internet has become a lively space for information, discourse and engagement—for heated debates on national issues such as immigration, “foreign talent” (a widely-used phrase for skilled foreigners attracted to work in the city-state) and education. Even flood control has become a subject of sustained exchange, along with “evergreen” issues such as freedom of expression, the role of the opposition and leadership succession. The comments and views range from intelligent discourse to mindless “flogging” but have shown that new media have increased their reach and tapped the opinions of people from all quarters. The Online Citizen, for instance, positions itself as “advocacy citizen journalism” championing causes and values, such as civic participation, open government and free media.

This was most keenly felt in the general election of May 2011. Just days after an election date was announced, another independent website, Temasek Review, wrote on its Facebook page that it had “maxed its servers completely,” citing a five-fold increase in traffic in two weeks, hitting 50,000 unique readers daily. The fact that citizen journalists also cover opposition events such as rallies and blog freely about them has led the more conservative mainstream media to increase their coverage of the opposition or risk losing credibility.

As a result, traditional media have strived to ensure they are not outdone by the internet-empowered. They have fully utilized new media, with aggressive updates and content, expanding online news stories with comments and links to related information or differing points of view. As a result, the online editions of SPH's newspapers have enjoyed huge leaps in audiences and new entrants from the “old media” organizations have blossomed, along with Stomp and other user-generated content sites.

At the same time MediaCorp, the state-owned broadcaster, has widened its remit to something closer to a public service broadcaster, but without the strict financial and governance independence. Its remit is to “inform, educate and entertain,” and indeed an important guiding principle for its programming is racial

diversity, celebrating and reflecting what is special to each community. The presence of high quality global media has spurred MediaCorp to raise its standards of quality and creativity. Though the broadcast license fee system was discontinued in 2011, the Government has promised to continue to make plenty of money available for public service content. In July 2012, it announced it was setting aside S\$ 630 million (US\$ 515 million) for Public Service Broadcasting content, up 35 percent on the previous five-year period.

Both MediaCorp and SPH are sound and profitable commercial enterprises. In fact, the media business is thriving. Though newspaper circulations are flat, revenue—mainly from advertising—is robust. Both companies have diversified their revenue streams into other related (e.g. outdoor advertising) and non-related (e.g. exhibitions and contract publishing) businesses locally and regionally. And their new media offerings are surging ahead. In addition to those already highlighted, MediaCorp formed a strategic partnership with Microsoft to create the popular online portal xinmsn.com, featuring entertainment, sports and lifestyle content produced by MSN Singapore and MediaCorp's radio and television units, while Yahoo! hosts the popular "Fit to Post" blogs on topics ranging from health to technology and cars. SPH, meanwhile, launched the bilingual (English–Chinese) news and interactive web portal omy.sg in 2007.

While there are some isolated complaints about professionalism in the mainstream media, by and large ethical standards and quality remain largely intact, despite the more competitive and time-pressured environment. The same cannot be said for user-generated content and blogs, where quality and standards of accuracy and balance vary considerably, as they do in other countries.

On the telecommunications front, even though Singapore's system is more controlled and less competitive than in most countries, the Government ensures fair spectrum regulation by studying other countries' experiences and listening to voices from both local industry representatives and consumers. Public consultation and the auction system have kept the spectrum allocation process transparent and fair in a country long regarded as one of the least corrupt in the world.

Regulation of telecoms and media is very much a secondary consideration in a system where the law, licensing and registration wield unambiguous power. The MDA is an unusual creature with the twin—some would say conflicting—roles of industry promoter and regulator. As a statutory board set up in 2003 it has a certain degree of autonomy from the parent ministry, but is ultimately under that ministry's supervision. The broad range of industries under its purview includes television, radio, film, video games, digital media, music and publishing. In the area of print publications, the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPPA) has, since 1974, stipulated the terms and conditions of ownership, licensing and distribution of newspapers. The Ministry of Communications and Information oversees the enforcement of the NPPA and there has not been any attempt to establish a board or regulator for the press independent of government.

Despite the advances that have been made in recent years, there is a need for further steps to encourage diversity in content across all media. In addition, though Singapore has escaped the decline in professional standards that has accompanied media liberalization in many other countries, more needs to be done to

retain talent and to raise the standards and skills of the city-state's 70,000 media professionals, particularly as demand increases for new forms of content creation and distribution.

The advances so far have delivered considerable benefits on many fronts, including greater citizen participation in both public communication and political life. The 2011 general election heralded a new era of political contest: it was the most keenly-fought election—and resulted in the poorest showing by the PAP—since independence.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong moved swiftly to overhaul his cabinet within two weeks and introduce sweeping changes that have taken ordinary Singaporeans by surprise. He even reconfigured his Ministry of Communications and Information to improve public communications and engagement, which he admitted, “are more important in the age of social media and a more active citizenry.” No longer does this once-paternalistic government adopt a “Father knows best” attitude. Instead, it shows itself willing to tolerate various whims and whines from an increasingly diverse and vociferous public that knows it can go online at any time with any issue, and is no longer afraid of the heavy-handed tactics that earlier generations of leaders employed.

Context

On many world maps, Singapore is marked as a red dot. The term “Little Red Dot”¹ has often been used by Singaporeans to highlight the resolve of a small country² to overcome the odds of physical limitations and thrive as a developed world city.

As a multi-racial and multi-cultural society with a short national history, the country has achieved a significant degree of integration and “unity in diversity” among the main ethnic groups—Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians. With its history of immigration, Singapore is in the midst of a renewed push for new citizens to boost its population numbers.

Foreign investment and industrialization have created a modern economy and a leading financial center. It ranks as the second most open economy in the world in the 2012 Index of Economic Freedom.³ Global consultancy firm A.T. Kearney lists Singapore as the 11th most globalized country in its Global Cities Index 2012.⁴ According to the International Monetary Fund 2011 ranking of countries by GDP (nominal) per capita, Singapore occupies 12th place with US\$ 49,271.⁵

Singapore has consistently been rated as one of the least corrupt countries in the world by Transparency International.⁶ The Global Competitiveness Report 2012-2013 by the World Economic Forum (WEF) ranks

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1. Former Indonesian president B.J. Habibie coined this term in the *Wall Street Journal Asia* (4 August 1998), when he was quoted as having said “there are 211 million people [in Indonesia]. All the green [area] is Indonesia. And that red dot is Singapore.”
 2. Singapore has a total area of 697 km², slightly more than 3.5 times the size of Washington, D.C.
 3. Singapore’s economic freedom score is 87.5, making its economy the second freest in the 2012 Index of Economic Freedom, an annual guide published by the *Wall Street Journal* and the Heritage Foundation, Washington’s No. 1 think tank, at <http://www.heritage.org/index/ranking> (accessed 1 March 2013).
 4. A.T. Kearney Global Cities Index 2012 (which ranks metropolitan areas by 25 measures across five “dimensions”: business activity, human capital, information exchange, cultural experience and political engagement), at <http://www.atkearney.com/documents/10192/dfedfc4c-8a62-4162-90e5-2a3f14f0da3a> (accessed 1 March 2013).
 5. International Monetary Fund, at <http://www.imf.org/external/index.htm> (accessed 1 March 2013).
 6. Transparency International (Corruption Perceptions Index 2011) ranks Singapore 5th with a score of 9.2 out of 10; see <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2011/results> (accessed 1 March 2013).

Singapore second in its Global Competitiveness Index (GCI).⁷ In reserves of foreign exchange and gold, it ranks 11th in the world, with US\$ 254 billion as of October 2012.⁸

Despite the glowing economic indicators, the country faces the challenge of ensuring inclusive growth amid a widening income gap and wealth inequality. There is also unease over cost pressures and discomfort over competition for jobs, housing and common space from immigrants and foreign workers, largely from China and India.

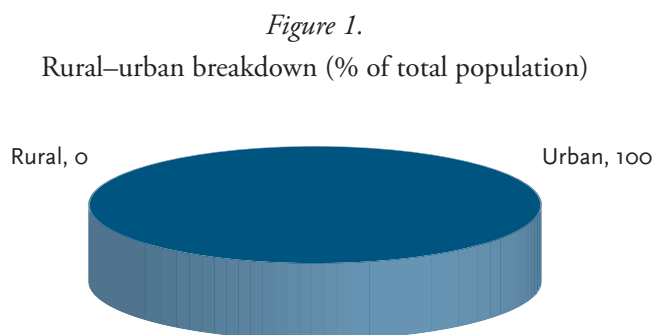
7. The ranking is based on Singapore's performance in the 12 pillars of competitiveness, namely institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic environment, health and primary education, higher education and training, goods market efficiency, labor market efficiency, financial market development, technological readiness, market size, business sophistication, and innovation. See http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalCompetitivenessReport_2012-13.pdf (accessed 1 March 2013), p. 13, Table 3 & p. 14, Table 4.

8. International Monetary Fund (IMF), "Singapore, International Reserves and Foreign Currency Liquidity," at <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sta/ir/IRProcessWeb/colist.aspx>, and <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sta/ir/IRProcessWeb/data/sgp/eng/cursgp.htm#I> (accessed 6 December 2012).

Social Indicators

Population (number of inhabitants): 5.31 million (June 2012)⁹

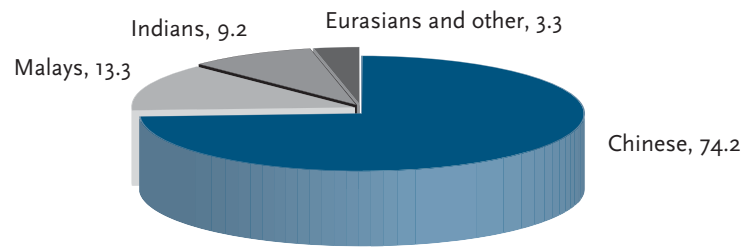
Number of households: 1.15 million (2011)



Source: Department of Statistics Singapore, Population Trends 2012, at <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/population2012b.pdf> (accessed 31 December 2012); Singapore Department of Statistics (12 January 2011). “Census of population 2010: Statistical Release 1 on Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion,” at <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/C2010sr1/cop2010sr1.pdf> (accessed 31 December 2012); Census 2010, Singapore Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade and Industry

9. Of those, 3.82 million are Singapore residents, comprising 3.29 million Singapore citizens and 0.53 million permanent residents; and 1.49 million are non-residents.

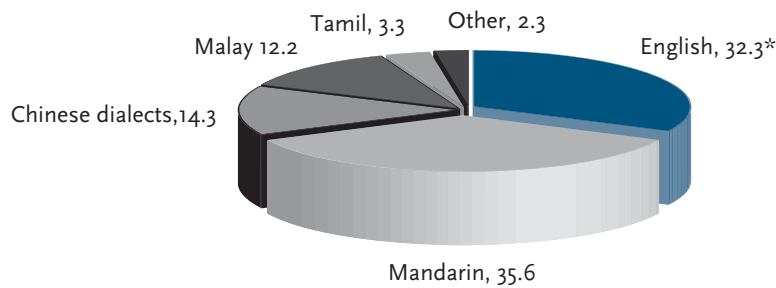
Figure 2.
Ethnic composition (% of total population),* 2012



Note: * Singapore citizens and permanent residents (collectively termed “residents”)

Sources: Department of Statistics Singapore, Population Trends 2012, at <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/population2012b.pdf> (accessed 31 December 2012); Singapore Department of Statistics (12 January 2011), “Census of population 2010: Statistical Release 1 on Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion,” at <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/C2010sr1/cop2010sr1.pdf> (accessed 31 December 2012); Census 2010, Singapore Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade and Industry

Figure 3.
Linguistic composition (% of total population)

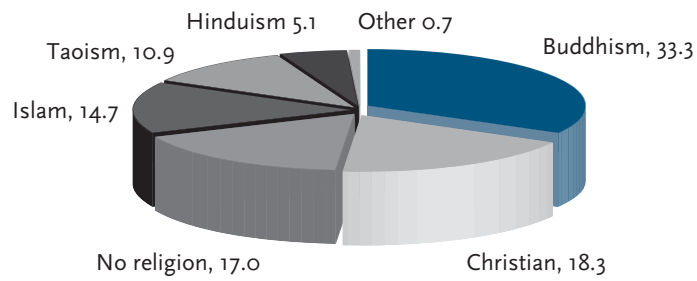


Note: These figures denote the language most frequently spoken at home by people aged five years and over. * 79.9 percent of the population (aged 15 years and above) is literate in English, and 70.5 percent of the population (aged 15 years and above) is literate in two or more languages.

Sources: Department of Statistics Singapore, Population Trends 2012, at <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/population2012b.pdf> (accessed 31 December 2012); Singapore Department of Statistics (12 January 2011), “Census of population 2010: Statistical Release 1 on Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion,” at <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/C2010sr1/cop2010sr1.pdf> (accessed 31 December 2012)

Figure 4.

Religious composition (% of total population)



Sources: Department of Statistics Singapore, Population Trends 2012, at <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/population2012b.pdf> (accessed 31 December 2012); Singapore Department of Statistics (12 January 2011); "Census of population 2010: Statistical Release 1 on Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion," at <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/C2010sr1/cop2010sr1.pdf> (accessed 31 December 2012); Census 2010, Singapore Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade and Industry

Economic Indicators

Table 1.
Economic indicators, 2005–2014

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012 ^o	2013 ^f	2014 ^f
GDP (current prices, US\$ billion)	125.4	145.0	176.7	193.3	182.2	217.3	233.1	267.9	277.8	289.0
GDP (current prices, US\$), per head	28,498	31,616	36,527	39,266	36,379	42,653	44,968	49,936	50,899	52,049
Gross National Income (GNI), (current US\$), per head	42,220	46,950	51,070	52,000	49,780	56,790	59,380	n/a	n/a	n/a
Unemployment (% of total labor force)	3.1	2.7	2.1	2.2	3.0	2.1	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.1
Inflation (average annual rate, % against previous year)	0.5	1.0	2.1	6.6	0.6	2.8	2.3	2.1	4.2	4.0

Notes: o-outlook; f-forecast; n/a-not available

Source: Singapore Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Singapore Workforce Development Agency, Ministry of Manpower, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (for GNI 2010–2011)

1. Media Consumption: The Digital Factor

The media industry in Singapore remains monopolistic, dominated by two sophisticated players, Singapore Press Holdings (SPH)¹⁰ and MediaCorp Pte Ltd.¹¹ Despite efforts to liberalize the market, they remain entrenched, due partly to a comprehensive set of rules governing mainstream media that raised the odds for new participants, and partly to strict regulatory frameworks that are safeguards against threats to the official policy of multi-racialism and religious harmony.

While the media companies strive to abide by free market commercial principles, they have not emerged fully from state control and balk at embracing the unfettered freedom associated with the Western media. Competition between the two media giants is carved out along platform-specific lines. SPH, a high-profitable listed blue-chip stock company, dominates the print media and publishing business. It positions its stable of newspapers and magazines to give a semblance of healthy competition while minimizing internal cannibalization. The local broadcast market is dominated by MediaCorp. As the national broadcaster, its free-to-air terrestrial television channels carry programming in all the four official languages: English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil.

Some semblance of genuine competition between the two media giants in their dedicated platforms was witnessed briefly between 2001 and 2004, when SPH set up MediaWorks, which launched two free-to-air terrestrial television channels. For its part, MediaCorp started a free tabloid-format daily, *Today*. Competition was most intense in the TV business, as a ratings war led to internal bleeding for both sides. In 2004, in a loss-stemming move, SPH MediaWorks and MediaCorp “merged,” with MediaCorp taking over much of the operations and SPH becoming a de facto passive investor. The *Today* newspaper continues to offer competition as the second most-read daily.

10. Singapore Press Holdings, at <http://www.sph.com.sg> (accessed 10 June 2013).

11. See MediaCorp website at <http://www.mediacorp.sg/en/home> (accessed 10 June 2013).

One reason why competition has been confined to these two players is the set of strict laws governing the operating environment. In the print domain, The Newspapers and Printing Presses Act of 1974¹² licenses local printing presses, and local as well as foreign newspapers and magazines. The law requires annual licensing of daily newspapers, which only public companies can own. All directors must be locals, and government approval is required for all appointments to key positions. Foreign media publications are subject to laws that involve restrictions in circulation if they “engage in domestic politics”: *Time*, the *Wall Street Journal Asia*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *Asiaweek*, and the *Economist* have all had their circulation curtailed. The Undesirable Publications Act prohibits the sale, importation or circulation of publications published or printed outside or within Singapore deemed “contrary to the public interest.”¹³ Besides such issues as copyright and defamation, other laws pertinent to the media include the Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Act¹⁴ and the 1964 Sediton Act.¹⁵

The laws for the broadcast media are modeled on those relating to the print media, under a comprehensive set of regulations outlined in the Singapore Broadcasting Act.¹⁶ The Media Development Authority (MDA) exercises censorship directly through a code of practice while the Ministry of Communications and Information does so indirectly. Under a penalty framework, breaches of the codes may result in a fine from S\$ 1,000 (US\$ 600) to S\$ 50,000 (US\$ 30,000), depending on their severity.

The local television industry has seen two major changes in recent years: the introduction of greater competition through cable television and the restructuring of the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) in 1994 through privatization and the creation of several competitive companies. The Government has not dropped the ban on satellite dishes for private households, even though it has set its sights on the regional and international arena. However, it has loosened the laws to allow selected buildings to install satellite dishes or subscribe to satellite TV operators, instead of restricting this to foreign embassies and financial institutions. Cable television was introduced to provide such services but also to stave off competition from satellite television broadcasters. Singapore CableVision (SCV) was formed in April 1992 to start and manage the new subscription television service. All major international news channels, including CNN, BBC and CNBC, are available to cable TV subscribers. However, the Government still maintains a mild form of control, as the MDA has to approve all SCV channels.

12. See Newspapers Newspaper Printing Presses Act (Chapter 206), at <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p?page=0;query=CompId%3A87a8472b-dd54-401a-b027-11e2bb71e5ca;rec=0> (accessed 1 March 2013).

13. Undesirable Publications Act (Chapter 338), at <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p?page=0;query=DocId%3A%22260443c8-a729-40e2-ac3a-a4fe673d71bb%22%20Status%3Apublished%20Depth%3A0;rec=0> (accessed 1 March).

14. Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Act (Chapter 67, Part 2): Making and possession of subversive documents, at <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p?page=0;query=DocId%3A%22a0f19883-86d3-46d3-8f92-17c578f590cd%22%20Status%3Apublished%20Depth%3A0;rec=0> (accessed 1 March 2013).

15. Sediton Act (Chapter 290), at <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p;query=Type%3Aauct,areved%20Content%3A%22sediton%22;rec=0;whole=yes> (accessed 1 March 2013).

16. Singapore Broadcasting Act, at <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/printView.w3p?page=0;query=Id%3A%2241fe030f-87b2-45db-b044-75674f790dd3%22%20Status%3Ainforce;rec=0>.

Over the years, a symbiotic relationship between the media and the state has evolved. However, this culture of self-censorship and pro-nation building and pro-establishment is facing increased pressure for a more open information system from a new generation of better-educated and highly informed Singaporeans, who are more critical of government policies and more demanding of the role of the media. Clearly, the inherent tensions have become more apparent—between tight regulation of the media and the effort to be a regional media hub with an intelligent and creative citizenry.

The Government has encouraged foreign multi-media companies to set up operations in Singapore and use it as a regional production or distribution center. It is often to the amazement of western-minded liberals and, perhaps, the envy of their conservative counterparts that despite advances and the availability of new communication technologies, the state monopoly of traditional media in Singapore has remained largely unchallenged.

This may have something to do with the extent of legitimacy that Singapore citizens accord their public institutions. One annual global study, the Edelman Trust Barometer, provides some evidence for this. Conducted by the public relations firm based in New York and Chicago but with 67 offices around the world, the study has over the past 12 years sought to measure people's trust in four institutions—government, business, NGOs, and media—in 25 countries with 25,000 respondents.

In the latest study, published at the beginning of 2013,¹⁷ the global figure for a composite index of trust in all four institutions was 57 (with, for instance, the UK at 53, the United States at 59, and Russia last at 36). Singapore had a score of 76, up 9 points from the year before, second only to China on 80 (six out of the nine in the “Trusters” bracket were Asian countries). While for China, the index for trust in government officials and regulators was 47 points lower than trust in government institutions themselves (the biggest gap of all), for Singapore it was just 20 points lower, at 56, and still well above the global figure of 43.

Singapore's trust in media rose from 65 in 2012 to 70 in January 2013. The global figure was, like the composite index, 57.¹⁸

1.1 Digital Take-up

1.1.1 Digital Equipment and Literacy

The population has embraced digital media, which have been strongly promoted in all walks of life by government initiatives.¹⁹ The sustained strength of high broadband penetration, heavy online engagement and the overall savvy of internet users have made Singapore an ideal market for the adoption of existing

17. See <http://cloud.presspage.com/files/354/edelmantrustbarometer2013-executivesummary.pdf> (accessed 25 June 2013).

18. See <http://www.edelman.com/insights/intellectual-property/trust-2013> (accessed 25 June 2013).

19. Media Development Authority of Singapore, *Annual Report (2005–2010)*, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Pages/Home.aspx> (accessed 30 June 2012).

and emerging digital technologies. The total online population was 3.7 million in 2010, or 78 percent of the population. More than 2.5 million people, aged 15 and above, accessed the internet in February 2009, consuming an average of 1,785 pages of content, with an average of 21 hours per person in that month. About 2 million were active Facebook users by August 2010.²⁰

Access to a computer at home grew from 74 percent in 2003 to 86 percent in 2011. Of these, the number with two or more computers at home grew from 23 percent in 2003 to 55 percent in 2011.²¹

Table 2.
Households owning equipment in Singapore, 2005–2011*

	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		2010		2011	
	No. of HH ('000) ²²	% of THH ²³	No. of HH ('000)	% of THH	No. of HH ('000)	% of THH	No. of HH ('000)	% of THH	No. of HH ('000)	% of THH	No. of HH ('000)	% of THH	No. of HH ('000)	% of THH
TV set	890	84.8	888	83.1	934	86.3	965	88.1	977	86.9	986	85.8	n/a	n/a
Radio set	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	679	62.0	709	63.0	727**	63.3	n/a	n/a
PC	776	74.0	833	78.0	854	79.0	876	80.0	936	83.0	965	84.0	1,007	86.0

Notes: * Radio/TV (RTV) ownership figures based on RTV licenses issued. Such licensing was discontinued in 2011. **November; n/a-not available

Sources: Figures and calculations by OSF editors based on available data from Singapore Department of Statistics, Yearbook of Statistics, Media Development Authority, IMF, ITU.

Traditional media, especially television and newspapers, continue to be the main platforms for accessing news. However, because Singapore is a very connected society both in terms of available technology and media consumer behavior, smartphones and tablets are often the chosen device for quick access to the news content of those traditional media, whether in the form of SMS news alerts, tablet apps or social media links.

1.1.2 Platforms

As broadband internet access becomes widely available, the Government has sought to raise the quality and value of access. This has involved a major effort with the telecommunication operators to provide new and emerging services such as the Next Generation National Infocomm Infrastructure (Next Gen NII) and the Next Generation National Broadband Network (NGNBN).

The print media are dominated by Singapore Press Holdings (SPH), a public listed company on the stock exchange with “management shares” through which state agencies are able to exercise influence. SPH issues

20. Internet World Stats, June 2010.

21. Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, Infocomm Usage—Households and Individuals, at <http://www.ida.gov.sg/Infocomm-Landscape/Facts-and-Figures/Infocomm-Usage-Households-and-Individuals.aspx#1> (accessed 1 March 2013).

22. Total number of households owning the equipment.

23. Percentage of total number of households in the country.

both management and ordinary shares but the Newspapers and Printing Presses Act specifies that all issues and transfers of management shares have to be approved by the Ministry of Communications and Information.²⁴ Over the years, there has been a pattern of political connections and close ties between the management of SPH and the Government. A longtime Cabinet minister from the ruling People's Action Party (PAP), Lim Kim San, led SPH as Executive Chairman for 14 years after he retired from politics. The former Director of the Security and Intelligence Division and later President of Singapore, S.R. Nathan, was SPH's Executive Chairman from 1982 to 1988. The immediate former chairman of SPH, Dr Tony Tan, was Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore from 1994 to 2005 and Singapore's current president after he won the presidential election in 2011. Dr Lee Boon Yang, a former PAP Cabinet Minister, is the current chairman of SPH.

SPH publishes the flagship newspaper the *Straits Times* and dailies in the four official languages, English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil.²⁵ Local radio and television stations are government-owned. All eight local television channels, including HD5 (the High Definition simulcast of Channel 5 and the only free-to-air HD channel in Singapore), are owned by MediaCorp Pte Ltd.²⁶ Private ownership of satellite dishes is banned, but most households have access to the sole cable television operator StarHub TV and the SingTel IPTV TV (mio TV) network which offers more than 30 channels. All radio stations are operated either by MediaCorp, the defense-linked Singapore Armed Forces Reservists Association or SPH UnionWorks.

Table 3.

Platform for the main TV reception and digital take-up in Singapore, 2006–2009

	2006		2007		2008		2009	
	No. of HH ('000)	% of TVHH	No. of HH ('000)	% of TVHH	No. of HH ('000)	% of TVHH	No. of HH ('000)	% of TVHH
Terrestrial reception	637	60	600	56	615	54	669	52
– of which digital	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cable reception	424	40	471	44	523	46	618	48
– of which digital	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Satellite reception	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
– of which digital	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
IPTV	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	1,061	100.0	1,071	100.0	1,138	100.0	1,287	100.0
– of which digital	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Notes: The figures on television coverage exceed 100 percent in some years because a number of households in Singapore have more than one main TV reception platform; n/a-not available

Source: Médiamétrie/Eurodata TV Worldwide, and calculations by OSF editors for the years 2006–2009

24. Newspaper and Printing Presses Act 1974, at <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p?page=0;query=CompId%3A87a8472b-dd54-401a-b027-11e2bb71e5ca;rec=0> (accessed 1 March 2013).

25. Singapore Press Holdings, *Quick Intro*, 2012, at <http://www.sph.com.sg/home.shtml> (accessed 30 June 2012).

26. MediaCorp, at <http://www.mediacorp.sg/en/home> (accessed 30 June 2012).

Household access to the internet reached 85 percent in 2011, compared with 65 percent in 2003. Household access to broadband rose significantly from 40 percent in 2003 to 85 percent in 2011. Mobile phone penetration rose from 69.2 percent in 2001 to 149.6 percent in 2011.²⁷ Residential wired broadband subscriptions touched 1.25 million by June 2012. The household wired broadband penetration rate was 105 percent in June 2012.²⁸ Phone subscription per 1,000 inhabitants was 1,496 as of 30 October 2012.²⁹

The Residential Wired Broadband Household Penetration Rate was 104.4 percent and the Wireless Broadband Population Penetration Rate 152.4 percent.³⁰ As of September 2012, Singapore had about 2 million fixed line subscriptions.³¹ Total mobile subscriptions (2G+3G) reached 7.9 million.³²

Table 4.

Internet penetration (total internet subscriptions as percentage of the total number of households) and mobile penetration (total active SIM cards as percentage of total population), 2005–2012

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Internet	54.0	65.0	71.0	75.0	80.0	n/a	85.0	86
– of which broadband	81.8	91.5	95.9	98.6	98.7	n/a	100.0	104
Mobile telephony	102.7	109.7	132.1	138.9	145.2	n/a	149.6	151.8
– of which 3G	n/a	n/a	n/a	38.7	46.0	63.3	n/a	n/a

Note: n/a: not available

Source: Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade and Industry and Infocomm Development Authority

There were about 3.7 million internet users as of June 2010, making up 77 percent of the population.³³ There were 2.6 million Facebook users as of 31 March 2012.³⁴ According to the Media Development Authority, which spearheads the drive for a media literate population, internet awareness and media literacy are fast approaching 100 percent of the population. The MDA defines these as basic awareness of new media technologies, competence in using media via different platforms and an ability to use media tools responsibly

27. Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, at <http://www.ida.gov.sg/Infocomm-Landscape/Facts-and-Figures/Telecommunications.aspx#1> (accessed 1 March 2013). Mobile phone subscription is computed using the total number of subscriptions divided by the total population.

28. Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, Infocomm Usage—Households and Individuals (Accessed 1 March 2013).

29. Yearbook of Statistics, at http://www.singstat.gov.sg/Publications/publications_and_papers/reference/yearbook_2012/yos2012.pdf (accessed 1 March 2013).

30. Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, Infocomm Usage—Households and Individuals, at <http://www.ida.gov.sg/Infocomm-Landscape/Facts-and-Figures/Infocomm-Usage-Households-and-Individuals.aspx#1> (accessed 1 March 2013).

31. Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, Statistics on Telecom Services for 2012 (July–December), at <http://www.ida.gov.sg/Infocomm-Landscape/Facts-and-Figures/Telecommunications/Statistics-on-Telecom-Services/Statistics-on-Telecom-Services-for-2012-Jul-Dec.aspx> (accessed 1 March 2013).

32. Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, Statistics on Telecom Services for 2012 (July–December), at <http://www.ida.gov.sg/Infocomm-Landscape/Facts-and-Figures/Telecommunications/Statistics-on-Telecom-Services/Statistics-on-Telecom-Services-for-2012-Jul-Dec.aspx> (accessed 1 March 2013).

33. Internet World Stats, *Singapore Internet Statistics and Telecommunications*, 24 June 2010, at <http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm> (accessed 1 March 2013).

34. See <http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm> (accessed 1 March 2013).

and safely. The MDA has likened media literacy to a “life skill” that is essential for work, learning and play in this age of connectedness.³⁵

Table 5.

Internet usage and population statistics, 2000–2012

Year	Users	Population	% of population
2000	1,200,000	3,263,209	36.8
2006	2,421,800	3,654,103	66.3
2009	3,370,000	4,657,542	72.4
2010	3,658,400	4,701,069	77.8
2011	3,658,400	4,740,737	77.2
2012	4,015,121	5,353,494	75.0

Source: Internet World Stats, June 2012, ITU

Consumption of digital media is at record levels. Some 85 percent of digital consumers in Singapore own an internet-capable mobile phone, 23 percent of Singaporean internet users have a tablet computer in their home, and 69 percent have connected with brands on social networking sites.³⁶ Mobile internet and mobile email usage is also on the rise, due to the rollout of more affordable data plan packages by the telecommunication providers. More than six in 10 youths are engaging in social networking (67 percent) and chatting (58 percent) weekly.³⁷ Most adults follow blogs, while activities such as blogging, tweeting and posting of photographs are more popular among young users, who also contribute and distribute content online.

A noteworthy trend is the marked increase in the number of residents using portable equipment such as laptops, notebooks and mobile phones. However, news and information are not the primary uses for digital tools. Sending and receiving SMS (79 percent) was the most common activity, followed by email (42 percent), social networks (25 percent), web browsing (23 percent) and playing or downloading computer or video games (20 percent). Reading online newspapers (13 percent) was more attractive to the younger set. Watching web television (2 percent) had a marginal share of the user base, along with forum discussion or posting of feedback and advice (2 percent) and listening to web radio (2 percent).³⁸

35. Media Development Authority of Singapore, *Media Literacy*, 2011, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/PUBLIC/PUBLICEDUCATION/Pages/MediaLiteracy.aspx#what%20is%20media%20literacy> (accessed 30 June 2012).

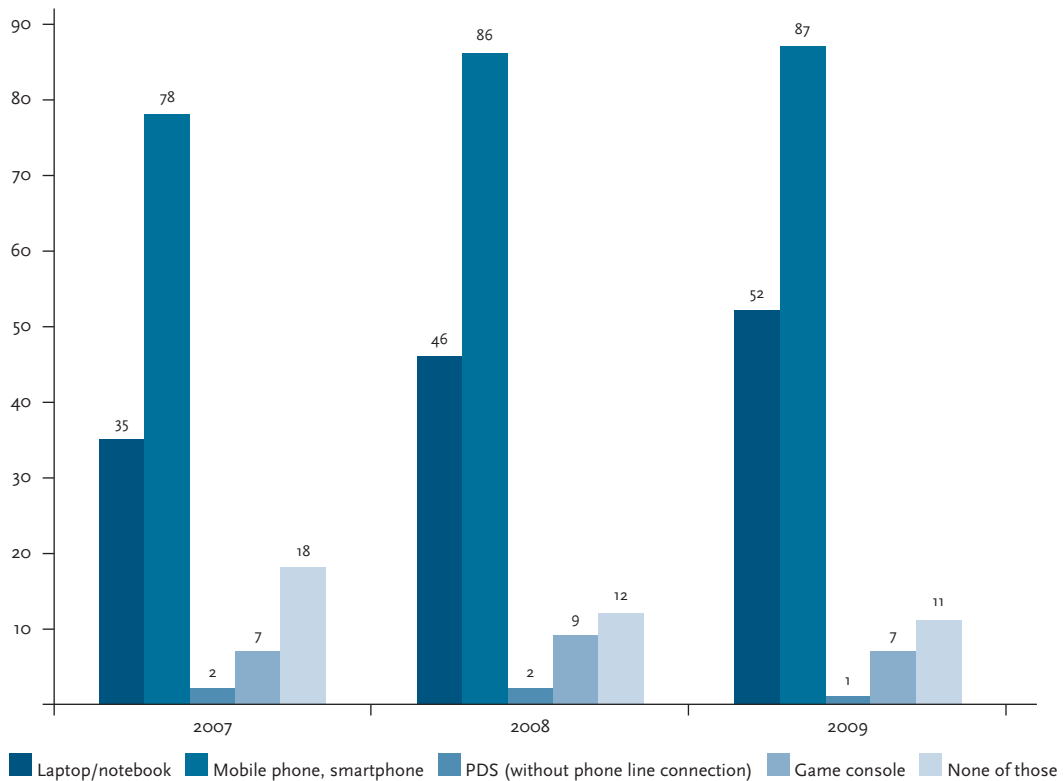
36. Nielsen Southeast Asia Digital Consumer Report, “Singaporeans can’t get enough of Digital Media: Nielsen,” 11 July 2011, at <http://www.sg.nielsen.com/site/NewsReleaseJuly112011.shtml> (accessed 30 June 2012).

37. Nielsen Media Study, July 2009 to June 2010. The research firm surveyed 4,862 adults aged 15 and above in Singapore from July 2009 to June 2010. Findings published in the *Singapore Business Review*, at <http://sbr.com.sg/media-marketing/news/nielsen-media-consumption-levels-in-singapore-remain-healthy> (accessed 30 June 2012).

38. Infocomm development Authority of Singapore, *Annual Survey on Infocomm Usage in Households and by Individuals (2009)*, 2010, at http://www.ida.gov.sg/doc/Publications/Publications_Level3/Survey2009/HH2009ES.pdf (accessed 30 June 2012).

Figure 5.

Usage of portable equipment (% of total users), 2007–2009



Sources: Infocomm Development Authority and ITU

1.2 Media Preferences

1.2.1 Main Shifts in News Consumption

The days when readers and viewers in Singapore relied solely on the legacy media as their primary information source—with the choice of only two television channels and a few newspapers—are long gone. News scarcity has been replaced by a news surplus. Besides the key local media players—the newspaper giant Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) and broadcaster MediaCorp Pte Ltd—Singapore has more than 500 foreign newspapers and publications in circulation. Nearly 200 correspondents from more than 70 foreign media organizations are based in Singapore, along with some 15 international cable and satellite broadcasters. Consumers have a choice of more than 340 television channels and 46 radio channels, a sharp increase from 57 for television and 28 for radio in 2002. Among other things, High Definition TV, IPTV and 3D movie viewing are available.³⁹

39. Media Development Authority, *Annual Reports, (2005–2010)*, 2011, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/ABOUTUS/Pages/Annualreports.aspx> (accessed 30 June 2012) (hereafter, *MDA Annual Reports*).

On the internet, there are countless sites to feed the growing appetite for niche and customized content. The internet has widened its reach among adults in Singapore. Three in five adults (60 percent) now go online daily — with the growth strongest among young readers.

The story of Singapore’s news consumption appears to be very much a case of “more is more.” There is clearly a steady rise in digital media consumption—more than four in ten people aged 15 and over watch videos, movies, or TV programs online—but what is important to note is that the number of people accessing news and current affairs via news websites or e-newspapers has also increased (more than 35 percent in 2012: up 4.3 percentage points on the previous year). At the same time, 90 percent continue to tune into terrestrial TV channels, more than a third of them to the 24-hour news platform Channel NewsAsia.⁴⁰

Meanwhile 93 percent of Singaporeans listen to the radio on a regular weekly basis, almost all of them via an FM receiver.⁴¹

There is a relatively high level of local consumer satisfaction, according to the first Media Consumer Experience Study for 2011.⁴² Respondents report high satisfaction levels for the quality of local content, such as newspapers, radio programs, local websites, as well as the content offerings of local pay-TV broadcasters. Traditional news sources continue to be a trusted source of information, with relatively high proportions of respondents across all ages of the view that news programs are credible, compared with documentaries or reality TV. However, those below the age of 30 tend to view traditional news sources with relative skepticism. Roughly 4 out of 10 respondents in the 15 to 19 age group say they believe that most, or all, of what they read on the internet is true, including information that is unverified.

A study in 2012 of English language news sources found that the *Straits Times* was read at least once a week by 70 percent of Singaporeans, and 43 percent of all Singaporeans named it as their most trusted source of news. By contrast, The Online Citizen was read by just 6 percent and only 1 percent ranked it as their most trusted source. Yahoo! Singapore News and Channel News Asia were the only other media to score double figures for trust of news content (both got 13 percent).⁴³

40. See <http://news.xin.msn.com/en/singapore/article.aspx?cp-documentid=251023175> (accessed 24 June 2013).

41. See <http://news.xin.msn.com/en/singapore/article.aspx?cp-documentid=251023175> (accessed 24 June 2013).

42. Media Consumer Experience Study 2011 was commissioned by the Media Development Authority and conducted by Singapore Internet Research Centre at Nanyang Technological University through interviews and focus group discussions from Sep 2011 to Jan 2012, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Reports/Pages/MediaConsumerExperienceStudy.aspx> (accessed 1 March 2013).

43. “You know anot? Issue Spotlight—The New News Environment.” See <http://www.blackbox.com.sg/yka-may2012/> (accessed 24 June 2013).

Table 6.
Internet viewership trends (Pop 15+), 2005–2010

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Any internet yesterday (% of total population)	43	46	51	56	59	60
Any internet yesterday ('000)	1,418	1,546	1,797	2,061	2,241	2,332

Source: Nielsen Media Index

Traditional media companies have taken advantage of the responsive regulatory framework that encourages competition and investment in digital media to offer more choice and convenience. They operate internet parallels which have collectively expanded the space for news, information and engagement. Newspaper readership has remained steady, while that for online versions increased by 45 percent.⁴⁴

Table 7.
SPH newspaper readership, 2005–2010

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Readership (% of total population)	83	82	81	79	79	77
Base (in '000)	2,726	2,761	2,851	2,898	2,988	2,973

Source: Nielsen Media Index

Terrestrial television viewership has declined significantly over time while cable viewership grew moderately. Free-to-air television retained the lion's share of viewers at close to 93 percent between 2008 and 2009. Close to eight in 10 (78 percent) of adults watch local television channels on an average daily basis. But viewing habits appear unchanged, especially during the recession years when belt-tightening made print, television, or radio inexpensive options.

The Chinese Channel 8 remains the station with the highest viewership at 49 percent. Together with the Chinese Channel U (32 percent) and English Channel 5 (28 percent), they remain the most-watched terrestrial channels. For Channel NewsAsia (stable at 22 percent), professionals and managers are still the core viewers, making up almost half of its audience (47 percent). Cable television viewership remained stable, with 37 percent, watching on an average daily basis, and close to half (49 percent) of all adults watching on an average weekly basis. Television remains the mass entertainment choice, with local channels as familiar favorites while cable television's variety of channels caters to different interest groups, from travel to lifestyle and entertainment.⁴⁵ Total radio listenership has been maintained over time.

44. Hitwise, the online traffic tracker, and the Nielsen Company, Singapore.

45. Nielsen Media Index, 2005–2010.

Table 8.
Viewership/listenership (aged 15+), 2005–2010

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total television (% of total population)	95	92	89	87	87	86
Any Singapore Television (% of total population)	92	87	83	78	78	78
Any Cable TV (% of total population)	35	35	37	37	38	37
Any total Viewership Yesterday (in '000)	3,100	3,094	3,130	3,211	3,305	3,325
Any Singapore TV Viewership Yesterday	2,989	2,927	2,922	2,880	2,969	2,992
Any Cable TV Viewership Yesterday	1,142	1,186	1,288	1,355	1,424	1,437
Any Radio Yesterday	1,951	1,977	2,025	2,057	2,186	2,202

Source: Nielsen Media Index

1.2.2 Availability of a Diverse Range of News Sources

An exponential increase in content, voices, and players has changed the power and balance of influence in the provision of news and information. Traditional media players are aware that their advantage depends on the loyalty of users who look to them for accurate, balanced, and credible content, and they are aware that even these loyalists are turning to independent and reputable websites, broadcasters and publications for alternative and supplementary sources of news, analysis and opinion. The Ministry for Communications, Information and the Arts lists 24 international publications, 12 wire agencies, nine international radio and television and seven satellite broadcasters, including the 24-hour BBC World Service, and a cable television network offering diverse programming.⁴⁶ The Japanese, Americans and Germans form the largest group of foreign correspondents. There is no shortage of foreign media products but the operations and reach of the foreign media players are regulated closely through a combination of ownership, legislation, defamation suits and self-censorship. Most international broadsheets and magazines, such as the *International Herald Tribune (IHT)*, *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*, *Financial Times*, *USA Today* and *Newsweek* are available in Singapore. However, their numbers remain low and are available only at selected newsstands and bookshops.

The more established and reputable newspapers and broadcasters are often associated with a freer press, a high degree of editorial independence and quality journalism. However, their reach is limited, after the rules on foreign publications that were previously exempted from the media code were tightened in August 2006. Their circulation may also be restricted further if, in the view of the authorities, they “interfere with domestic politics.” Publications that have had their circulation restricted include the *FEER*, *Asiaweek*, the *Economist*,

46. For a complete listing of the media organizations in Singapore, see http://www.news.gov.sg/public/sgpc/en/journalist_room/media_guide.html, and http://www.news.gov.sg/public/sgpc/en/journalist_room/media_guide/all.html (accessed 1 March 2013).

and the *Wall Street Journal Asia* (*WSJA*).⁴⁷ They have been taken to task in defamation suits or had their circulations “gazetted.”⁴⁸

In addition, foreign media players such as *Newsweek*, *Reuters*, the *Times* (London), *The Star* (Malaysia), *Time*, and *IHT* have had their editors and journalists arraigned for defamation or libel.⁴⁹ The foreign broadcast media are largely silent on domestic politics in Singapore. They face similar restrictions on the number of households that can receive their broadcasts through cable operated by Singapore Cable Vision or risk getting the channel “blacked-out,” which would hurt advertising and subscription revenue.

Circulation and readership of foreign publications remain small and niche-oriented. Circulation for the *WSJA* and the *Financial Times*, for example, ranges between about 8,000 and 10,000.

Table 9.
Top 5 foreign news websites in Singapore, 2013

Rank	Domain
74	BBC Online www.bbc.co.uk/news
104	The Guardian www.guardian.co.uk
118	CNN Interactive cnn.com
152	Bloomberg www.bloomberg.com
159	New York Times www.nytimes.com

Source: Alexa.com

In readership, the *WSJA* has 27,000 (0.7 percent) among the population aged 15 and above who read it yesterday while *IHT* has 15,000 (0.4 percent). Among those who read the publications in the past week, *WSJA* has 42,000 (1.1 percent) while *IHT* has 24,000 readers (0.6 percent). For broadcasters, BBC World ranks the highest in the survey of the population aged 15 and above who have watched it in the past week, with 262,000 viewers (6.8 percent), followed by CNN, with 250,000 viewers (6.5 percent), CNBC Asia with

47. The online Journal is subscription-based. At one point, during its brush with the Singapore courts, its website had a special note for Singapore readers: “Let us begin with an apology to our readers in Asia. Unless they are online, they will not see this editorial. For legal reasons, we are refraining from publishing it in the *Wall Street Journal Asia*, which circulates in Singapore.” See “Singapore Strikes Again,” *Wall Street Journal*, 29 November 2008, at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122791989311765753.html> (accessed 1 July 2012).

48. The *Far Eastern Economic Review* and its editor Hugo Restall were sued by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his father and former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew over an article, published in 2006, based on an interview with opposition politician Chee Soon Juan. The Court ruled that the magazine defamed the Lees by suggesting they were corrupt. In March 2009, a senior editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, another Dow Jones publication, was fined \$10,000 (US\$ 6,900 US) for contempt of court over three articles allegedly insulting Singapore’s judiciary. The High Court ordered Melanie Kirkpatrick, a deputy editor of publication’s editorial page, to pay \$10,000 in legal costs. In October 2007, the London-based *Financial Times* newspaper apologized to Mr Lee Kuan Yew and other members of his family and agreed to pay damages for allegations published in a column about sovereign wealth funds.

49. In an open letter to Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (25 March 2010), the media rights watchdog Reporters Without Borders urged top officials to “put a stop to the libel actions” against journalists. “Open Letter to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong,” Reporters Without Borders, 25 March 2011, at <http://en.rsfo.org/singapore-open-letter-to-prime-minister-lee-25-03-2010,36832.html> (accessed 1 July 2012). See also “Open Letter to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong,” Reporters Without Borders, 29 November 2005, at <http://en.rsfo.org/singapore-open-letter-to-prime-minister-lee-29-11-2005,15721.html> (accessed 1 July 2012).

115,000 viewers (3 percent) and Bloomberg with 71,000 viewers (1.8 percent).⁵⁰ The BBC World Service 88.9FM, which has been transmitting in Singapore since 1976, has a listenership of 100,000 every week but has expanded its reach on new platforms in the face of a dramatic drop in global shortwave listening trends to increase its reach to 300,000. Both *Asia Today* and *Asia Business Report* on BBC World News have dedicated teams based in Singapore and are broadcast from the region daily.⁵¹

The websites of foreign newspapers are available, mostly on a subscription model that does not enjoy wide acceptance among a population accustomed to free website content, thereby limiting the readership reach and audience base. Websites of American media networks such as CNN International, which are free, are popular as breaking news platforms for international news but do not rank among the top websites frequented in Singapore.

The internet has become a lively space for information, discourse and engagement—for heated debates on national issues such as immigration, “foreign talent” (Singapore’s widely-used phrase for highly-skilled foreigners attracted to work in the city-state), education, and flood control, as well as sustained exchanges on “evergreen” issues such as freedom of expression, the role of the opposition and leadership succession. The comments and views run the gamut from intelligent input to mindless flogging but have shown the ability of new media to increase the reach and organize people to amplify their opinions and make sense of voices from all quarters.

Robust debate and alternative views have also been brought directly to the domains and blogs of establishment figures and agencies. Most politicians, including Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, use Facebook, while a small number additionally use Twitter and Instagram to extend their reach, and share and gather feedback to sharpen their understanding of the issues. However, much of this communication came across as an extension of the official messaging often seen in mainstream media. While government leaders and agencies already receive sufficient local mainstream media coverage, they maintain a presence in cyberspace which is largely an exercise in public relations. Opposition figures also use platforms such as Facebook to articulate their views and causes. Together with socio-political websites such as Temasek Review and the Online Citizen, they have generated increased political discourse.

Increasingly, users are generating and governing the content—not just in volume, but in immediacy, variety and sometimes craft and entertainment value. MediaCorp’s CEO Shaun Seow recognizes that media giants now have to rely on people out there to generate content. “That’s content—when it’s valuable, it adds insight and relevance, and so we should stop seeing ourselves as just the only generator of content. And we’ve got to rely on the community out there as well.”⁵²

50. Nielsen Media Survey (2010).

51. BBC World Service Annual Review for 2009/10.

52. S. Seow, then Deputy Chief Executive Officer, MediaCorp (News, Radio, Print) an article on Channel NewsAsia website, “MediaCorp expands new media services for growing pool of internet users,” 8 August 2008 (hereafter, S. Seow, “MediaCorp expands new media services for growing pool of internet users”).

The boundaries between the different traditional formats such as print and video have become blurred. Traditional media companies that used to park content on their dedicated platforms are seeking to establish as big a presence as possible, while staying vigilant to the opportunities to monetize such content. Singapore Press Holdings, for example, is giving readers their news fixes on the go via an iPhone app with content from its flagship English daily, accompanied by features such as landscape viewing, a most-read section and news alerts based on user-nominated keywords.

MediaCorp has taken its newspaper and magazines online with services such as the “EasyReader” for users to download the news from any internet connection and read it on the go. Its flagship online product, channelnewsasia.com, has “my news playlist” for netizens to pick from a two-week archive of news and lifestyle videos and create their own news video. *News In Singapore* on YouTube has news clips from Channel NewsAsia’s nightly *Singapore Tonight* newscast. It started an English evening news program in January 2013, Singapore Connect@6, that rides on social media highlighting what’s trending online. MediaCorp is planning to extend traditional free-to-air television content to new platforms and offer additional services and features not possible in traditional broadcasting until very recently. They will be available on internet-enabled devices such as mobile phones and tablets—allowing subscribers to stay connected seamlessly. Television news programs will also have accompanying maps to aid viewers’ understanding of the story being presented. There will also be dedicated channels on specialist subjects such as investing. Shaun Seow, of MediaCorp, explains that “in the realm of the 2.0 space, the ‘everytime,’ the ‘anytime’ is primetime for the online users.”⁵³

1.3 News Providers

1.3.1 Leading Sources of News

Media consumers continue to latch on to the broad-based approach of the mainstream media that reaches as much of the population as possible, despite the widespread use of digital tools and the rise of the internet. The annual Nielsen Media Index surveys between 2005 and 2012 point to a marginal nibbling away of the mainstream media pie, with consumption of media content increasingly spanning multiple screens.⁵⁴

1.3.1.1 Print Media

Singapore newspapers, which are attractive and technically well-laid out, continue to be the preferred and trusted source of news and information. Amid the digital onslaught, print daily readership fell year-on-year by 2.3 percentage points, with 68.4 percent reading a hard copy daily newspaper on an average daily basis and 85.3 percent on an average weekly basis. When combined with online papers, daily readership reached nearly three quarters (75 percent) of the population.⁵⁵

53. S. Seow, “MediaCorp expands new media services for growing pool of internet users.”

54. Nielsen, “SG’s Digital Diet Eats Into Newspapers, TV Numbers,” 6 November 2012, at <http://www.asiamediajournal.com/pressrelease.php?id=4263> (accessed 3 July 2013).

55. Nielsen, “SG’s Digital Diet Eats Into Newspapers, TV Numbers,” 6 November 2012, at <http://www.asiamediajournal.com/pressrelease.php?id=4263> (accessed 3 July 2013).

Table 10.

Daily average local newspaper circulation, 2005–2012

Newspaper \ Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<i>The Straits Times</i>	386,200	388,500	387,700	389,000	374,500	365,800	367,200	389,700
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	392,410	402,600	384,500	382,200	371,900	372,100	373,000	355,700
TODAY*	n/a	n/a	250,000	300,000	300,000	300,000	300,000	300,000
<i>Weekend TODAY*</i>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	200,000	200,000	200,000	200,000
<i>Lianhe Zaobao</i>	183,500	184,100	178,000	176,000	174,500	172,100	173,000	168,000
<i>Shin Min Daily News</i>	123,800	121,300	116,200	139,600	136,500	141,400	138,000	132,600
<i>The New Paper/ New Paper Sunday</i>	117,900	115,800	114,600	109,300	104,900	101,600	98,100	90,800
<i>Lianhe Wanbao</i>	127,900	124,200	121,800	107,200	101,900	95,500	94,100	90,200
<i>Berita Harian</i>	56,800	63,800	62,500	62,000	60,900	58,900	59,200	53,900
<i>zbCOMMA/Friday Weekly</i>	72,800	70,100	59,300	60,000	74,000	68,400	80,590	59,700
<i>The Business Times</i>	31,500	30,400	34,500	35,700	38,300	37,500	38,400	36,400
<i>Thumbs Up</i>	33,600	38,400	40,500	39,200	38,300	34,700	31,300	30,800
<i>My Paper*</i>	n/a	120,000	180,000	280,000	n/a	n/a		
<i>Tamil Murasu/ Tamil Murasu Sunday</i>	9,700	11,200	12,600	14,400	14,100	14,800	17,200	16,900

Notes: * Free newspapers; n/a: not available

Source: Singapore Press Holdings, Annual Report, 2005–2012 (audited by ABC)

The *Straits Times* is the flagship English-language daily broadsheet newspaper that serves the mass market. The *Sunday Times* is its weekend edition, strong on features and lifestyle content. *Lianhe Zaobao* and *Lianhe Wanbao* are the Chinese equivalents. *Berita Harian* and *Berita Minggu*, and *Tamil Murasu* and *Tamil Murasu Sunday*, are niche half sheets for the Malay and Indian communities, respectively. The free half sheet *Today* caters for the mass market. The *Business Times* is branded as a paper for the business community, with a niche following. The *New Paper*, which has morning and noon editions, targets readers with more eye-catching tabloid journalism featuring sensationalist and exaggerated headlines. *Shin Min Daily* is a Chinese daily broadsheet but is a tabloid-style paper, known for sensationalist headlines. *My Paper* is a free bilingual half-sheet paper, featuring two front pages, one in English and the other in Chinese.

Paid papers have sustained their readership levels, while free sheets gained popularity as complementary sources of information. According to Nielsen's Media Index Report 2012, The *Straits Times* is the top English-language read daily with a combined average print and online readership of 34.3 percent. The print version slid 3.2 percentage points to 31 percent in average daily readership, while its digital edition rose 1.1 percentage points to 6.3 percent year-on-year.⁵⁶ In 2010, the then editor of the *Straits Times*, Mr Han Fook Kwang, was

56. Nielsen, "SG's Digital Diet Eats Into Newspapers, TV Numbers," 6 November 2012, at <http://www.asiamediajournal.com/pressrelease.php?id=4263> (accessed 3 July 2013). The Nielsen Media Index Report was conducted between July 2011 to June 2012 and surveyed 4,662 of the Singapore population aged 15 and above on their media consumption. Results are weighted by age, sex and race to be representative of the Singapore population.

confident that print readers would find compelling reasons to stay loyal. “What appeals to them and what they are prepared to pay for won’t change—news that’s relevant to their lives, that helps them understand the society they live in, and that’s told in an engaging way they can relate to.”⁵⁷ The sole newspaper of MediaCorp Press, *Today*, enjoyed robust readership growth of about 25 percent between 2005 and 2010. The free sheet remains the second most-read paper with a combined hard copy and digital readership of 18.1 percent; both editions registered modest gains in 2012.⁵⁸

Table 11.
Daily newspaper readership,* 2005–2010

Newspaper	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
The Straits Times/Sunday Times	1,470,000	1,540,000	1,540,000	1,660,000	1,650,000	1,620,000
Lianhe Zaobao/ZB Sunday	683,000	671,000	707,000	637,000	664,000	683,000
Today	537,000	571,000	590,000	621,000	698,000	677,000
The New Paper/New Paper Sunday	575,000	621,000	656,000	623,000	625,000	613,000
Shin Min Daily News/Shin Min Sunday	497,000	445,000	429,000	493,000	493,000	552,000
Lianhe Wanbao/Wanbao Sunday	610,000	563,000	551,000	540,000	504,000	515,000
My Paper	n/a	n/a	162,000	213,000	320,000	345,000
Berita Harian/Berita Minggu	273,000	277,000	289,000	274,000	287,000	274,000
Tamil Murasu/ Tamil Murasu Sunday	61,000	73,000	56,000	53,000	65,000	73,000

Notes: * SPH did not provide details of methodology for measuring readership; n/a: not available

Source: Singapore Press Holdings, 2005–2010; Published Reports, MediaCorp Press, 2005–2010

1.3.1.2 Broadcast

Free-to-air television channels are produced by MediaCorp, the country’s official broadcaster. For news, there is only one local English-language news and information channel in the country: Channel NewsAsia. Its news team also produces a nightly newscast for its mass market English-language sister Channel 5, which draws largely from the same pool of local stories. MediaCorp regularly tracks the strength of its audience base through market research agencies, but does not release the findings to the public.

MediaCorp’s radio offering consists of 13 FM stations in four languages. Only two—938LIVE and Capital 958FM—offer a staple of news and information, one in English and the other Chinese. The rest tend to be entertainment-focused or serve minority communities.

1.3.1.3 Online

More adults are turning to news online as a supplementary source of information and alternative views and opinions. Amid initial fears that the “mother ship” would be cannibalized by their online platforms, SPH and MediaCorp have exploited new business opportunities and pushed the online versions of their newspapers and news products.

57. F.K. Han, “Customized newspapers ‘one way to engage readers,’” *Straits Times*, 15 July 2010.

58. Nielsen, “SG’s Digital Diet Eats Into Newspapers, TV Numbers,” 6 November 2012, at <http://www.asiamediajournal.com/pressrelease.php?id=4263> (accessed 3 July 2013).

The online editions of SPH's newspapers have seen a jump of about 45 percent in readership—from 282,000 visitors daily in 2008 to 408,000 visitors daily in 2009. Four key websites—the news websites *straitstimes.com* and *AsiaOne*, the citizen journalism site *Stomp* (Straits Times Online Mobile Print) and the video news channel *RazorTV*—collectively had 5.2 million unique visitors in January 2010, and crossed the 80-million mark for the first time.⁵⁹

The online traffic tracker *Hitwise* found *ChannelNewsAsia*, *Zaobao*, *Straits Times*, *Stomp*, *Business Times*, and *MyPaper* among the top 10 news and media sites most visited by Singaporeans.⁶⁰ Online daily readership grew by 2 percentage points to reach 11 percent of adults. *Straits Times Online* increased its share by 1.3 percent to reach 4 percent of the population. Online versions of *Lianhe Zaobao* and *Today* both reach 2 percent readership. Between the print and online editions, a majority are exclusive hardcopy readers or reading both. Exclusive readership of the online edition remains small.⁶¹

The proportion of those who view content online has generally increased, especially among teens and young adults. This is the trend that portals such as *MediaCorp's xinmsn* are riding on. The portal with video services was launched in late March 2010, offering *Microsoft* and *MediaCorp's* services and media platforms. It enjoyed 70 million page views in October 2010—an increase of 94 percent from March and 192 percent from the same time in 2009, when the *MSN Singapore* and *xin.sg* operated independently.⁶² It had 1.9 million unique users six months after inception. The portal's news, lifestyle and sports channels received a combined 14 million page views across all three channels.

This early success was attributed to strong aggregated content in English and Chinese, as well as the addition of *Catch-Up TV* for free video-on-demand from *MediaCorp* channels and Hollywood studios such as *Fox* and *Disney*.

AsiaOne, *Straitstimesinteractive*, and *Channelnewsasia.com* are the breaking news sites and online editions of the mainstream media companies, *SPH* and *MediaCorp*. *Stomp* belongs to *SPH*, which describes it as "Asia's leading citizen-journalism website." *InSing* is an English news/lifestyle site belonging to the telecoms giant *SingTel*. *Hungrygowhere* is an English Singapore dining guide site, also from *SingTel*. *The Real Singapore* is a privately-owned user-generated opinions site. *Omy.sg* is an English/Chinese bilingual interactive site from *SPH*. *sgForums.com* is a privately moderated English forum site. *TREmeritus* is a private English news and views site.

59. *Straits Times Online*, at <http://www.straitstimes.com/> (accessed 1 July 2012); *asiaone*, at <http://www.asiaone.com/A1Home/A1Home.html> (accessed 1 July 2012); *Stomp*, at <http://www.stomp.com.sg/> (accessed 1 July 2012) (hereafter, *Stomp*); *Razor TV*, at <http://www.razor.tv/site/servlet/segment/main> (accessed 1 July 2012).

60. *Hitwise Media Survey, 2009*, reported in "SPH English websites draw record-high views," *asiaonenews*, 12 February 2010.

61. *Nielsen Media Index, July 2009–June 2010*.

62. Report in *Channel NewsAsia*, "Xinmsn emerges as Singapore's top online portal," 23 November 2010, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1095090/1/.html> (accessed 1 March 2013).

Table 12.
Most popular Singapore news & media sites, June 2013

Rank	Domain
1	AsiaOne
2	Straitstimesinteractive
3	Channelnewsasia.com
4	Stomp
5	InSing
6	Hungrygowhere
7	The Real Singapore
8	Omy.sg
9	sgForums.com
10	TREmeritus

Source: Alexa.com

1.3.2 Television News Programs

News programs are carried on MediaCorp’s free-to-air channels—the English-language Channel NewsAsia (24 hours) and Channel 5, and the four language channels (8, U, Vasantham, and Suria)—during primetime periods of the day. MediaCorp has highlighted the audience reach of specific channels that have performed strongly. For example, it described 2010 as a milestone for its free-to-air television services, after reporting its highest number of viewers in a decade, with an average of 2.7 million tuning in every day from 7 p.m. to midnight. Channel 8 led with 1.8 million viewers daily, the highest since 2001. Its sister channel, Channel U, followed with an average of 1.1 million viewers, the highest since 2004.

MediaCorp’s dedicated news outfit, Channel NewsAsia, has maintained steady viewership numbers. Channel NewsAsia saw average monthly gains of about 101,000 viewers among its target audience of white-collar professionals earning more than S\$ 5,000 (US\$ 4,000) monthly.⁶³ MediaCorp said the wider audience reach was due partly to efforts to deepen the connection and engage viewers on more platforms, such as catch-up TV.⁶⁴ In the absence of evidence, one can only infer that the ratings for the news programs mirror that of the overall channel performance.

63. Channel NewsAsia report, “MediaCorp sees highest number of viewers in a decade,” 28 January 2011. See <http://news.xin.msn.com/en/singapore/article.aspx?cp-documentid=4608677> (accessed 22 October 2012).

Table 13.

Top five news programs, 2005–2011

2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
News 8 At Ten (Channel 8) Half-hour primetime Chinese news programme at 10pm that appeals to the masses	Singapore Today (Channel 8)	Singapore Today (Channel 8)	News 8 At Ten (Channel 8)	News 8 At Ten (Channel 8)	News Tonight (Channel 8)
Singapore Today (Channel 8) Half-hour evening Chinese news program at 6.30pm for middle-income Singaporeans, retirees and students	News 8 At Ten (Channel 8)	News 8 At Ten (Channel 8)	Singapore Today (Channel 8)	Singapore Today (Channel 8)	Singapore Today (Channel 8)
News World @ 11 (Channel U) Half-hour Chinese news programs at 11pm that rides on content from its sister Channel 8	News World @ 11 (Channel U)	News World @ 11 (Channel U)	News World @ 11 (Channel U)	News World @ 11 (Channel U)	News Tonight Encore of CH8 (Channel U)
News 5 Tonight (Channel 5) Half-hour English news program at 9.30pm with local and foreign content	News 5 Tonight (Channel 5)	News 5 Tonight (Channel 5)	News 5 Tonight (Channel 5)	News 5 Tonight (Channel 5)	News 5 Tonight (Channel 5)
Berita (Suria) Malay language news program at 8pm with content dedicated to the Malay community	Berita (Suria)	Berita (Suria)	Berita (Suria)	Berita (Suria)	Berita (Suria)

Source: MediaCorp Pte Ltd

The Chinese news programs command an unchallenged lead in viewership, mainly because the Chinese-speaking and bilingual population is a majority. The most popular Chinese news program is Channel 8, a 24-hour news and entertainment channel that is also the most watched homegrown Chinese channel in Singapore, offering a mix of locally produced and acquired programs. Its sister Channel U, which is the entertainment channel for working professionals and the internet generation offering local productions and programs from the region, carries repeat broadcasts of the Chinese bulletins to complete the top three spots for news viewership.

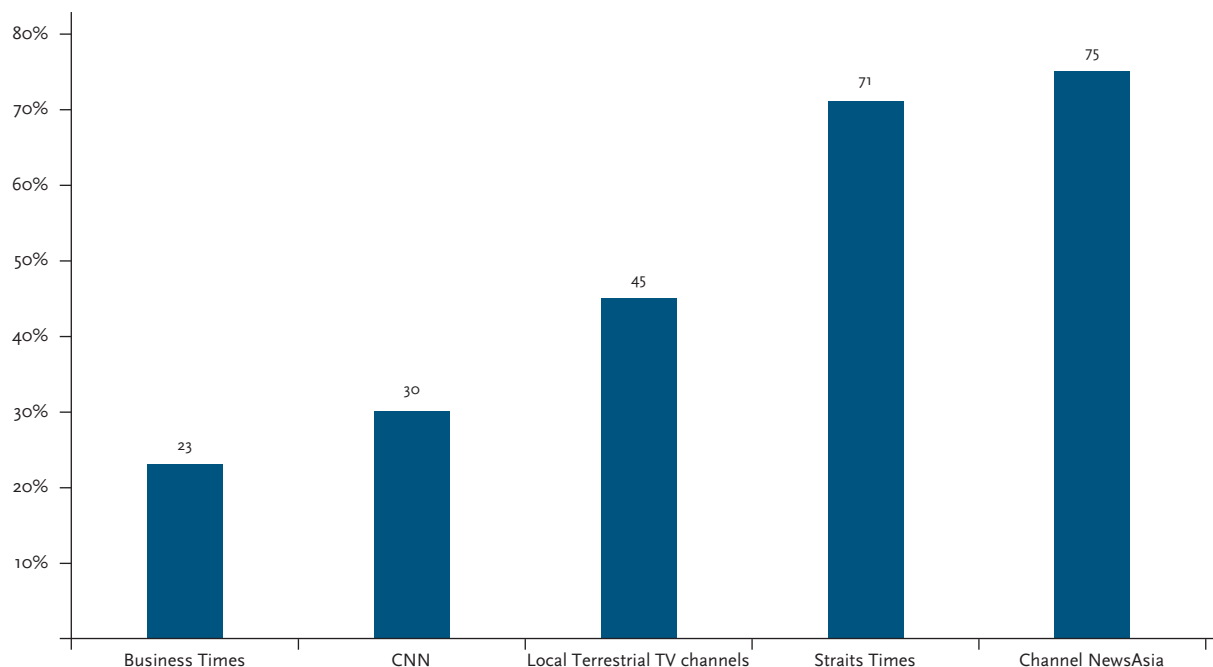
The highest rated English news program is *News 5 Tonight* on Channel 5, which is also the number one English mass entertainment and lifestyle channel known for local productions, acquired programs and blockbuster movies. The Malay news programs remains in 5th spot on Suria, which offers programs that reflect the unique views and lifestyles of modern Malay Singaporeans. The dedicated news channel, Channel NewsAsia, launched in March 1999, has a regional reach, providing the latest in news and information on global developments with an Asian perspectives, drawing on correspondents in major Asian and Western cities. Channel NewsAsia is now viewed in 24 territories across Asia for an audience of some 26 million viewers. The channel's second feed, Channel NewsAsia (International), was launched in September 2000. Its satellite footprint stretches from the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia to Australia.

64. Nielsen Media Index, report on Channel NewsAsia, "MediaCorp dominates local media ratings, says Nielsen survey," 22 October 2010.

The impact of digital migration is still not significantly felt as Singapore is still making the transition from analog to digital broadcasting, and plans to transit fully in line within the 2015–2020 timeframe of ASEAN’s switch-over. This switch will free up broadcast spectrum and enable industry players to develop novel digital content and services and promise consumers clearer and sharper wide-screen images, as well as more innovative and interactive content. The Government is reviewing how best to achieve a seamless transition from analog to digital broadcasting.

Figure 6.

Preferred source of news among all media, including TV, print, radio and online (% of total users), 2010



Source: MediaCorp, at <http://www.mediacorp.sg/en/home> (accessed 1 March 2013)

1.3.3 Impact of Digital Media on Good-quality News

Connection and engagement made possible by digital media have become the new powerful dimensions in the delivery of news. The velocity of the digital media impact has turned the internet into a lively sphere for discourse, giving users more choices and outlets for diverse and independent views. As traditional media strive to ensure they are not outdone by the internet-empowered, they have also fully utilized new media, with aggressive updates and content, expanding online news stories with comments and links to relevant information or offering differing points of view.

Channel NewsAsia flags its Facebook page on its nightly Singapore bulletins. It asks viewers for leads and comments as the stories unfold and develop, incorporates these views in its reports and reminds viewers: “Don’t forget to ‘Like’ us.” This new effort to reflect as wide a range of views as is permissible has led to an improvement in the quality of news. Digital tools have provided more avenues to access information.

Journalists trawl the internet to prevent content leakage and watch the competition in cyberspace. Websites such as SPH's Stomp thrive on citizen journalism and provide an additional information resource for the mainstream counterparts. It is populated by users who collectively help to drive traffic, content creation and interaction. News websites such as straitstimes.com provide the alternative platform for alternative, independent and intelligent views.

The editor of Straits Times Online, Mr Eugene Leow, says quality news does not always have to be handed down to the audience. "Traditional media gives you news they think you ought to know. Digital media listens and caters to the demands of the public and gives the masses the chance to participate in the identification, production and evolution of news events, and eventually a long-term impact in the shaping of society," he said. The internet-empowered now informs and influences thoughts in real-time. "Previously, there wasn't a total connection during, say, the Tiananmen protests in China. Now, as the Tunisia and Egypt examples of 2011 show, it can have a real-time galvanizing effect."⁶⁵

Quantity does not always mean quality, of course, for so-called citizen journalists often lack the editorial discipline, objectivity, and craft to produce a professional product. Websites such as Stomp appear to draw netizens who prefer to criticize public behavior such as indiscriminate parking and public displays of affection. The presence of new media has forced traditional media to place a higher premium on quality journalism to set their products apart from the shoddy journalism and sensational reporting often associated with online content.

At the same time, there are instances when digital media can directly challenge mainstream media or move away from being mostly reactionary to produce original content. Some have also adopted the technique of commenting on the news, questioning the extent of editorial independence and drawing attention to bias. The main targets have been the *Straits Times*, the flagship English daily of Singapore Press Holdings, and MediaCorp News, which they label as government mouthpieces, especially during general elections. A notable example was the coverage of the turnout at political rallies held during the 2006 general election. At the time scant mention was made of the overwhelming turnout for the opposition parties, so netizens took on the role of filming and uploading videos of packed rallies hosted by the opposition parties and the low attendance at the ruling party's rallies.

The tone was sharpened during the 2011 general election, when netizens were galvanized to question the reports that they read and watch on mainstream media, and even do a daily count of the number of stories on the incumbent candidate and the opposition (see section 4.4).⁶⁶ An increasing number of netizens also moved away from random posts to contribute articles that were not only well-written but also spelled out how they would vote.⁶⁷

65. Interview with Eugene Leow, Editor, Straits Times Online, 18 February 2011.

66. See <http://www.tremeritus.com/2011/03/31/a-handbag-and-a-pack-of-wolves> (accessed 1 March 2013).

67. T. Tan, "I am an Aljunied constituent... What is my role in this election? What are yours?" Facebook, 30 April 2011, at <https://www.facebook.com/notes/terence-tan/i-am-an-aljunied-constituent-what-is-my-role-in-this-election-what-are-yours/10150176467157884> (accessed 1 July 2012). Daphne, *My take on the Singapore General Elections*, Mother, Inc., 29 April 2011, at <http://www.motherinc.org/stuff-best-described-as-not-safe-for-parents/my-take-on-the-singapore-general-elections> (accessed 1 July 2012).

A recent daily practice has been to “post-mortem” news reports with netizens questioning the news angles, probing the issues and tracking factual errors and inaccuracies. The threads and posts start out on credible editorial positions for intelligent comments that add to the debate but sometimes sink into character mutilation, ridicule and “flogging.”

1.4 Assessments

At a time when the widespread use of digital technology and the rise of new media have opened the floodgates to a vast spectrum of news and views, users continue to place a premium on accurate, balanced and credible sources of news. For these reasons, traditional media giants continue to focus on their dedicated platforms and core competencies while making headway as new media players. This has taken on added importance, as traditional media platforms are seen as crucial in providing common sets of facts and sound analysis to help users sieve truth from fiction and make sense of the countless sources of information and voices on the internet.

On the other hand, users seek a more dynamic relationship with news providers. Easy-to-use tools have helped to generate user participation and content contribution. The online buzz is increasingly governed by users.

Both the mainstream and new media are seen as important avenues for news and information. Besides strengthening their core competencies, media organizations are re-inventing their relationships with their audiences and harnessing digital media to have as strong a presence on as many platforms as possible. The overall diversity of news and voices now makes it possible for audiences and users to choose content and platforms that match their interests.

Demand and supply of niche and customized content have grown. Exclusive users gravitate to platforms and sites that offer new dimensions that add value, relevance and fit. Their numbers remain small at 6 percent. Yet the Government views with concern this new behavior, termed “narrowcasting,” in which niche audiences gravitate to content tailored to their needs. Goh Chok Tong, then Senior Minister and now Emeritus Senior Minister, was of the view that if perpetuated on a wide scale, it could result in an “atomized” society, making it more challenging for policymakers to reach out to the citizens and build consensus on important issues.⁶⁸

Foreign media coverage and the availability of views on Singapore are far from complete and diverse. The fear of the use of libel laws against the foreign media, as well as the libel pressure and brushes with the authorities and the courts they have had over the years have a chilling effect on the flow of information and editorial content. These publications and broadcasters remain limited to a niche audience, especially when their unique and premium content is pay-walled from non-subscribers.

68. Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, in a speech to mark the 10th anniversary of the *Today* newspaper, MediaCorp Press, 10 November 2010.

More non-governmental, non-partisan or multi-partisan websites have been created and are expressing alternative views. All major political parties have an online presence, utilizing multiple media tools. Opposition parties have their own websites that break the news, articulate the party's position, challenge the published content from mainstream media, and seek feedback.⁶⁹ Besides using traditional media to disseminate news and public information, the Government also maintains an online presence to communicate and engage with the public, through social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, podcasts and Wikipedia. During the H1N1 flu virus outbreak in 2009, a dedicated H1N1 website and social media platforms kept the public in the loop.

Social media channels were used to reach out to promote major events such as the 2010 Youth Olympic Games, the online coverage of which had 1.3 billion readers across the world via newspaper websites, Facebook, Twitter and blogs;⁷⁰ the National Day Rally Speech by the Prime Minister was not only brought "live" to netizens but also encouraged online feedback and discussion. New media and digital tools have undoubtedly made the delivery of content more immediate, dynamic and varied.

A growing number of users turn to social media space for expression and opinion, either as valves to release pressures or as a way of articulating genuine concerns. Issues such as homelessness that were hitherto muted are now openly discussed in cyberspace. There are also avenues for pockets of users to connect with cause-based advocacy, such as websites and Facebook pages that bring together like-minded individuals behind various causes (see section 4.3).

69. The Workers' Party, at <http://www.wp.sg/>; Singapore Democrats, at <http://yoursdp.org/>; the Reform Party, at <http://www.thereformparty.net/>; Singapore People's Party, at <http://www.spp.org.sg/>; National Solidarity Party, at <http://www.nsp.sg/> (all accessed 1 July 2012).

70. "YOG online coverage totals 1.3bn readers, says IOC study," *Straits Times*, 8 April 2011. According to a study by the International Olympic Committee, coverage of the Youth Olympic Games in Singapore was read by the equivalent of one fifth of the world's population (1.3 billion) between January and September 2010. The research tracked online mentions in sources such as newspaper websites, Facebook, Twitter and blogs but excluded print news and television broadcasts.

2. Digital Media and Public or State-administered Broadcasters

2.1 Public Service and State Institutions

2.1.1 Overview of Public Service Media; News and Current Affairs Output

Public service broadcasting (PSB) in Singapore has long been associated with the Media Corporation of Singapore (MediaCorp), which has to fulfill such obligations according to its licensing requirements. It is not strictly a public service broadcaster (in the sense of being independent from state and commercial influences) but is widely regarded as a national broadcaster.⁷¹

As Singapore's only terrestrial free-to-air television broadcaster, its primary role is to provide the platforms and airtime for PSB content across its seven free-to-air television channels and 14 radio stations. The programs cover the four official languages—English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil—and range from news, information, current affairs and children's shows to sports, arts and minority-language news and ethnic programs, as well as dramas, documentaries and sitcoms. MediaCorp has to aim for quality PSB programming that, as defined by the Media Development Authority (MDA),⁷² serves to “inform, educate and entertain.”⁷³ An important guiding principle for PSB programming is racial diversity, celebrating and reflecting what is special to each community. At the same time, it has to build unique branding and product differentiation. “The process of shaping the editorial direction and tone of production will be a constant juggling of the dual needs to serve the public and remain commercially viable,” said Ms Zakiah Halim of MediaCorp.⁷⁴

71. MediaCorp, previously known as Radio Television Singapore, Singapore Broadcasting Corporation, and Television Corporation of Singapore, comprises commercial media companies in Singapore, with business interests in television and radio broadcasting, interactive media, and print publishing and film-making. It is wholly owned by Temasek Holdings, a government-owned investment fund. See MediaCorp, at <http://www.mediacorp.sg/en/home> (accessed 1 July 2012).

72. Media Development Authority of Singapore, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Pages/Home.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012).

73. *Public Service Broadcast*, Media Development Authority, 2011, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Licences/Pages/PSB.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012).

74. Interview with Zakiah Halim, Vice-President/Malay, Indian and Community Programming, MediaCorp, December 2010.

PSB programs on MediaCorp's stable of mass and niche television channels and radio stations were supported by radio and television license fees until the system was abolished in 2011 (see section 2.1.2). All households and non-resident premises with working television sets paid an annual fee of \$110 per household. All vehicle-owners with a working radio set paid a \$27 radio license. About 965,000 licenses were issued in 2008, compared with 812,500 in 2005. The fees collected amounted to S\$ 132.5 million (US\$ 108 million) in 2009. Of the fees collected, 67 percent were used for public service-type output.⁷⁵ For radio, funding is provided for Malay, Indian and arts programming on the Tamil station Oli 96.8FM and Malay stations Warna 94.2FM and Ria 89.7FM.

Dialect news is supported on the Chinese Capital Radio 95.8FM. For television, PSB funds are divided between the mass channels such as 5 and 8, which have the widest public reach; specialty networks such as Channel NewsAsia, which provides current affairs and information programs; and niche channels such as Central, Suria, and Vasantham, which provide children's programs, arts, Malay and Indian programming.⁷⁶ Despite concerns of duplication of resources, multi-language programming plays a role in ensuring that each community is aware of the key national political, social and economic issues.

About 3,000 hours of PSB content are produced yearly.⁷⁷ A key component is news and current affairs programming. News is broadcast on all the free-to-air television channels except Okto. The audience base varies, depending on the channel's target demographic. The mass channels have a base viewership of close to 5 million viewers (people aged 4 and above). The minority language channels have a viewership base of over 600,000 each.⁷⁸ MediaCorp has declined to share information on the reach and audience base of specific PSB programs.

The MDA also emphasizes working with industry to offer content that is informative, engaging and relevant. While the bulk of content is produced by MediaCorp, a growing share is crafted by independent production companies. The proportion outsourced has increased from about 26 percent in 2005 to nearly 40 percent in 2010.⁷⁹ Collectively, these independent units brought a fresh editorial eye and new approaches. This was possible, observed Viswa Sadasivan of the communications consultancy Strategic Moves, because they operate largely "outside the ambit and tyranny of broadcasters and channel managers...internal procedures set in stone, group-think and a cookie-cutter approach that's a typical malaise of monopolistic broadcasters."⁸⁰

75. The rest of the fees were channeled to expenses related to collection of the fees (11 percent), industry development (15 percent) and reserves for future PSB and content development funding (7 percent). In the 2007/08 financial year, about S\$81 million was used to fund PSB programs.

76. MDA *Annual Reports*, (2005–2010).

77. MDA *Annual Reports*, (2005–2010).

78. Email interview with Chia Su Jean, Broadcast & Music (Public Service Broadcast), Media Development Authority, March 2011.

79. Speech by Mr Sam Tan at the Committee of Supply 2011 on "Ensuring Quality PSB Programmes and Local Films, and Fostering Discerning Use of Media," Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts, 27 June 2012, at <http://app.mica.gov.sg/Default.aspx?tabid=36&ctl=Details&mid=539&ItemID=1264> (accessed 1 July 2012).

80. Email interview with Viswa Sadasivan, former Nominated Member of Parliament and Chief Executive Officer, Strategic Moves Pte Ltd., December 2010 (hereafter, Email interview with Viswa Sadasivan).

Quality and creativity benchmarks, along with the arrival of more international channels, raised the bar. Industry participation was tapped to develop concept-driven programs that explore pertinent issues, such as the untold stories of Singaporeans. The MDA also helped to kick-start new genres that the broadcaster is cautious to experiment with, such as teen drama and documentaries about Singapore's Malay community and Indian pioneers. "This is the beauty of competition. There was enough viewership and advertising pressure for MediaCorp to focus more on quality. If managed well, it will have an upward spiraling effect on quality."⁸¹

Programs that are viewed or perceived as non-propaganda tend to enjoy better ratings and greater interest. Many have won international awards or have been endorsed for channels such as the Discovery Channel and National Geographic Channel.⁸² Media-watchers see this ability to go places and pick up awards as a "fairly accurate measure of quality" but not always of public appreciation.⁸³

2.1.2 Digitization and Services

The seven free-to-air (FTA) television channels of MediaCorp that are the default channels for PSB content will go fully digital from December 2013. To ensure a smooth migration to digital TV, there will be a simulcast period, where both digital and analog free-to-air television signals will be broadcast to ensure all households have time to get accustomed to receiving their free-to-air TV signals digitally. Consumers will also be able to buy television sets with integrated digital receivers. Free-to-air channels will continue to transmit on analog at least until 2015, and poorer households can expect assistance during the switch-over.⁸⁴ Singapore will complete the switchover from analog to digital broadcasting by 2020, in line with ASEAN's agreed timeframe for making the switch.⁸⁵

The added impetus to move to digital is likely to increase choice, but is not likely to change the way content is being produced or crafted for consumers. Even though the collection of radio and television license fees to fund PSB content stopped in 2011,⁸⁶ the Government said that it was committed to keep funding MediaCorp to drive such content.⁸⁷ The Government will provide more money for this aim on top of the S\$ 630 million committed for five years announced in July 2012.⁸⁸

81. Email interview with Visawa Sadasivan.

82. Email interview with Visawa Sadasivan.

83. Email interview with Chia Su Jean.

84. Media Development Authority, Annual Report 2011/2012 Digital Switchover in Singapore, at http://trpc.biz/wp-content/uploads/3.-ling-pekling_mda.pdf (accessed 1 March 2013).

85. "TV Broadcast Going Digital," MDA, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/AboutUs/annualreport2012/Pages/chapter3-4.html> (accessed 1 March 2013).

86. "Radio and Television licence abolished," MDA, 18 February 2011, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2011/Pages/20110218.aspx> (accessed 12 April 2013).

87. Response by Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for Communications and Information, in parliamentary speech, 8 March 2013, at http://www.news.gov.sg/public/sgpc/en/media_releases/agencies/mcicrd/speech/S-20130308-12/AttachmentPar/0/file (accessed 12 April 2013).

88. Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for Communications and Information, in parliamentary speech, 8 March 2013, at https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:A2A5Wyhi7p0J:www.news.gov.sg/public/sgpc/en/media_releases/agencies/mcicrd/speech/S-20130308-10/AttachmentPar/0/file/+Minister+for+Communications+and+Information+Dr+Yaacob+Ibrahim+March+7/8+Committee+of+Supply+debate&hl=en&gl=sg&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESH2y3Aj6p1tZUhpO4nJ9vAh1Urle7tQNfFleIR8NQRhe5AJfz5XLcR8IS-YWrv1GtKB_TcNlu0-ldk8KtVEDkfzI9cMJ_yagVpymZO-S8ZnLklFytwCgoPh7aYyWIB21UL2QyBm&sig=AHIErbTd-FTB5NaV5TC7KpGEhTmFw2ldpA (accessed 12 April 2013).

Terrestrial channels will lose their default advantage and audiences will fragment as the choices increase. The program genre is still dictated by MediaCorp and the MDA. At this point, there is little dialogue on the pace of change and delivery of PSB for a post-switchover world. The core public purposes remain steadfast but the modes of delivery and institutional framework may have to change. As the sole PSB provider, the decline in the efficacy of the existing arrangements to ensure PSB provision makes the enforcement of these PSB obligations more uncertain after digital switchover.

The Government recognizes the need to use new media to extend the reach of PSB content so that more people, especially young net-savvy viewers, can benefit. It is exploring the technical possibilities for new content creation. Since 2010, the MDA has been supporting the creation of web-only content, which is an extension of PSB programs produced for television. The content is made available on the xinmsn online portal, which is a tie-up between MediaCorp and MSN. Its video site is currently the fourth most accessed multi-media site in Singapore. PSB programs first telecast on free-to-air television are also made available on xinmsn's catch-up TV.⁸⁹

The Government has also been looking at funding programs to support digital radio and television and encourage the development of original, innovative and high quality digital broadcasting content and services. These include value-added content in which data such as traffic and weather reports, as well as business and health information, is provided as a form of public service. As digital broadcasting will enable more channels to be made available, broadcasters have been encouraged to set up more niche radio stations. For digital television, the MDA is aiming for more high-definition broadcasts, with key events such as the National Day Parade televised on high definition and selected programs enhanced by features such as interactivity and links to informative websites.

2.1.3 Government Support

The media outlets concerned are already—to all intents and purposes—state media with a public service mandate. The entire digital switch-over project is more than just state supported: it is state-led. That leadership has neither more nor less of an effect on the media's independence, or indeed on their output, than the state's involvement in all other aspects of media policy.

2.1.4 Public Service Media and Digital Switch-over

Digital switchover does not begin until December 2013, but Singapore's small, 100-percent urban population, wealth, and advanced technology are such that the MDA and the media industry do not foresee any problems with regard to coverage, reach, and budgets to ensure full access by the time that analog signals are discontinued sometime between 2015 and 2020.

89. Xinmsn, at <http://xin.msn.com> (accessed 1 July 2012).

Meanwhile, a PSB Review Panel set up in October 2010 is looking into ways to enhance the quality, effectiveness and reach of PSB content. It is gathering views and feedback from the broadcast industry, academia, MDA and citizen-based advisory committees on the challenges and opportunities in delivering PSB content more effectively.⁹⁰ The MDA is also exploring options to increase access and availability of archived PSB content through a portal for non-commercial and educational purposes at reduced cost. For its part, the MDA has embarked on digitizing PSB content that can eventually be made available for public access online.

Amid calls to incentivize quality PSB content and for PSB program rights owned by MDA to be transferred to the producers, the MDA currently centrally manages and facilitates the use of PSB content for the public, schools and the industry. For a token fee of S\$20 (US\$16), schools can use PSB content. Producers can also tap the intellectual property of their productions at no more than S\$ 100 (US\$13) for licensing and merchandising activities, such as producing DVDs. The aim is to ensure that public access to PSB content is not hampered while addressing the industry's needs.

2.2 Public Service Provision

2.2.1 Perception of Public Service Media

To the general media consumer, PSB largely refers to highly regulated content colored with government messaging. As the media, especially television, still carry a “legacy baggage” since the early days of nation-building as a primary tool to ensure inclusivity in multi-racial Singapore, PSB programs are still perceived—and accepted—as a means to communicate government policies and perspectives.

To the Government, agencies and media organizations that produce and distribute PSB content, as well as to a growing pool of independent operators who believe in change, PSB is about premium programming that best serves the interests of the wider public—to entertain, inform and educate. The challenge is to enhance awareness of issues that are relevant and important, ranging from socio-political and economic issues to sports, health, education, culture and the arts. As the MDA, which administers PSB, explains, “it highlights issues of relevance to our society and plays a critical role in building social cohesion and instilling national pride.”⁹¹

One of the tenets of PSB programming is to meet the needs of a multi-racial society with four main languages, providing informational programs for general audiences as well as catering to niche and minority groups, such as the Malays and Indians. Another tenet is relevant local content. In a global city with television stations and networks that carry plenty of acquired programs and foreign productions, local content can help to cushion the impact and anchor Singaporeans with a sense of rootedness.

90. Sam Tam, *Parliamentary Speech*, at <http://app.mica.gov.sg/Default.aspx?tabid=36&ctl=Details&mid=539&ItemID=1264> (accessed 10 June 2013).

91. Media Development Authority of Singapore, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Pages/Home.aspx> (accessed 1 March 2013).

A program advisory committee noted an overall improvement in the quality, range and standard of most of the info-educational and current affairs programs on television.⁹² While the MDA has not tested the perception of public service media as state or pro-government content, it was able to ascertain the level of appreciation based on surveys conducted by the MDA.⁹³ PSB-supported programs have registered generally high levels of appreciation, according to a Public Program Appreciation Survey in early 2010. On average, eight in 10 of the “most appreciated” television shows in 2007 to 2008 were PSB-supported.⁹⁴ However, the auditor-general had pointed out that the survey did not assess the extent the programs have met the objectives identified by the MDA—a shortcoming that the MDA says has been rectified.⁹⁵

Producers have spoken of the satisfaction that their work is appreciated and pride themselves for making an impact, of “knowing that you are creating content that creates awareness and empathy, empowers and possibly even provides inspiration for thousands of people so that their appreciation for the environment they’re living in is enhanced.”⁹⁶ Producers of the Malay radio stations Warna and Ria cited satisfaction that the respective communities enjoy listening to their programs. The stations’ TSL (time spent listening) of about 18 hours a week are among the highest, compared to other radio stations. “These stations connected well because they have been keeping abreast with the community’s needs and aspirations,” said Ms Halim of MediaCorp.⁹⁷

Viewership numbers for minority language programs are high. A Malay drama *Pinggiran Ramadan* (Ramadan Blessings) was one of the highest-rated programs to date on the Malay-language Suria with a rating of 22 percent, compared with an average of 12 percent for other programs on Suria. The finals of the Tamil-language *Vasantham Star* variety program hit record high ratings of 26 percent, higher than the average of 15 percent for programs on Vasantham.

2.2.2 Public Service Provision in Commercial Media

All the free-to-air television stations and a majority of the mainstream and niche radio stations that carry PSB content come under the ambit of MediaCorp. The exceptions are radio stations run by the public-listed Singapore Press Holdings. SPH operates three radio stations with the labor movement’s NTUC Media under a joint venture, SPH UnionWorks. The MDA does not fund the mainstream radio stations but expects them to air news and info-education programs to help listeners stay abreast of key issues.

92. Program Advisory Committee for English Programs (PACE), *Annual Report 2009*, Media Development Authority, 2011, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Public/Consultation/Pages/AdvComEnglish.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012). *12th Report for the Program Advisory Committee for English Programs (2007/2009)*, Media Development Authority, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Public/Consultation/Documents/PACE%20Annual%20Report%202007-2009.pdf> (accessed 1 July 2012).

93. Email interview with Chia Su Jean.

94. Speech by the Parliamentary Secretary for Information, Communications and the Arts, Sam Tan, during the Budget Debate, 15 March 2010, Committee Of Supply Debate On Making Singapore An Endearing Home For All. See <https://www.ida.gov.sg/About-Us/Newsroom/Speeches/2010/20050712115504> (accessed 1 July 2012).

95. Auditor-General Report 2010, pp. 5–6, at <http://www.parliament.gov.sg/sites/default/files/Fourth%20Report%20of%20the%20Public%20Accounts%20Committee%20-%20Parl%201-2010.pdf> (accessed 1 July 2012).

96. Email interview with Viswa Sadasivan.

97. Email interview with Zakiah Halim, Vice-President/Malay, Indian and Community Programming, MediaCorp, December 2010.

Even though the broadcasting scene occupies a middle ground between commercial and public service models, they display a tacit acceptance of their role in providing information-related services that do not always contribute to the “bottom line.” These include announcements of regular civil and defense mobilization exercises to maintain vigilance, traffic updates and health advisories in times of disease outbreaks, as well as weather reports on the haze (caused by forest fires in neighboring Indonesia) and flooding. Such involvement is self-supporting, using internal resources.

2.3 Assessments

Even as Singapore harnesses new technologies and digital media to meet the changing needs of consumers, a widely held commitment to “inform, educate and entertain” ensures that PSB will continue to be insulated from ratings and the commercially driven media landscape. However, the availability of content on a large number of channels beyond the terrestrial channels with digital switch-over will lead to greater audience fragmentation. With more channel and network choices, more users will turn to cable television and the internet for information and entertainment. PSB provisions have not kept pace with the changes to take advantage of the opportunities presented by various content delivery platforms to expand their reach.

The MDA will have to assess which mass, niche and minority channels deserve a higher level of support. With an increasing number of the intelligentsia migrating to the internet for alternative sources of information, some “stakeholders” such as government agencies risk losing critical channels to communicate with the public, especially in times of crisis (e.g. the flu pandemic), if they continue to rely on traditional media.⁹⁸ This concern was highlighted by the former Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong (now Emeritus Senior Minister) as “narrowcasting.” Unlike broadcasting, which reaches out to the masses, the millions of internet sites with customized content catering to niche interests will give rise to an increasingly individualistic or atomized society. “In such a society, people have access to a vast spectrum of views and programs online or on the television. They share fewer common experiences and can live in a virtual world of their own. This trend will make it more challenging for policy makers to reach out to citizens and build consensus on important issues,” he said.⁹⁹

On the upside, the rise of new media has led to a redefinition of PSB, resulting in improvements, greater sophistication in content and efforts to ensure that the key messages are not lost in the cacophony of multiple channels. The MDA has stressed the importance of relevant PSB programming and of tapping the latest technologies to encourage interactivity and offer more value-added experiences with online users.

98. Interview with Dr Kalinga Seneviratne, Head of Research, Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC), Singapore, December 2010.

99. Speech by Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong at the 10th anniversary of *Today* newspaper on Wednesday, 10 November 2010 at St Regis Hotel, John Jacob Ballroom, Prime Minister’s Office Singapore, 23 December 2010, at http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesinterviews/seniorminister/2010/November/speech_by_seniorministergohchoktongatthe10thanniversaryoftodayne.html (accessed 1 July 2012).

In 2010, the MDA embarked on supporting the creation of web-only content that are extensions of PSB programs produced on television. The MDA is further reviewing the role of new media platforms for future PSB delivery strategies on new media platforms. When Singapore makes the full transition to digital broadcasting as part of a larger arrangement with the member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations between 2015 and 2020, consumers will have access to free-to-air television, which carries public service broadcasts, in digital format seamlessly on multiple platforms, giving PSB content the added significance it needs to be able to continue to be relevant.

3. Digital Media and Society

3.1 User-Generated Content (UGC)

3.1.1 UGC Overview

With Singapore being a highly westernized and globalized country, it is not surprising that users are drawn to well-known international UGC sites. Facebook tops Alexa's Singapore country list for SNS/UGC content. Among the top 10 UGC sites compiled from Alexa's top 500 sites in Singapore,¹⁰⁰ there are five content-sharing sites (YouTube, Wikipedia, Tumblr, Instagram and Pinterest), three blogging sites (WordPress, Twitter and Blogspot) and two social networking (Facebook and LinkedIn).

Table 14.
Top 10 most popular UGC sites in Singapore

	UGC Websites	UGC type
1.	Facebook.com	Social networking site
2.	YouTube.com	Video sharing
3.	Wikipedia	Content sharing
4.	LinkedIn	Career networking site
5.	WordPress.com	Blogging
6.	Twitter	Microblogging
7.	Blogspot.com	Blogging
8.	Tumblr.com	Content sharing
9.	Instagram.com	Photo sharing
10.	Pinterest	Content sharing

Source: Compiled from Alexa.com (April 2013)

In Alexa's study, the top sites in Singapore are in line with the global trend, with social networking and content sharing sites, such as Facebook, YouTube and Wikipedia, being most popular among the mostly English-speaking population. At the time of publication of this report, no homegrown site was among Singapore's top 10 UGC sites.

100. "Top Sites in Singapore" at <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/SG> (accessed 14 April 2013).

3.1.2 Social Networks

According to comScore's Media Metrix statistics as of April 2012,¹⁰¹ 94.7 percent of Singapore's online population aged 15 and over engaged in social networking, ranking second only after the Philippines at 96 percent. Another 2012 survey of more than 50,000 Singapore users by the Australian-based social marketing agency, Rock Publicity,¹⁰² believed to be the largest social media survey of its kind in the city state, found 68% of the total population using social media regularly, defined as at least once a week. The same survey also found that Facebook is the most popular social networking site, with 62 percent of the country's population as its users. When expressed as a percentage of the country's online population, this figure rises to 76.9 percent, with users clocking in an impressive 37.9 minutes in a single session on average.

Table 15.
Top 10 most popular social networking sites in Singapore

UGC Websites	
1.	Facebook.com
2.	YouTube.com
3.	LinkedIn
4.	WordPress.com
5.	Twitter
6.	Blogspot.com
7.	Tumblr.com
8.	Instagram.com
9.	Pinterest
10.	Blogger.com

Source: Compiled from Alexa.com (April 2013)

SNSs and blogging fall under both categories of social media and user-generated content (UGC), while social media content, such as Facebook, blogs and Wikipedia, is also considered UGC.

3.1.3 News in Social Media

UGC sites demonstrate the grassroots power for free exchange of information. Singapore's bloggers focus on Singapore's happenings and alternative perspectives related to a plethora of topics. Blogs such as Yahoo!'s Fit to Post from contributing bloggers, TOC, mrbrown and Yawning Bread, fall into this category. The well-known citizen journalism blog, TOC, also attracts plenty of local attention because of its controversial

101. G. Dale, *State of the Global and Local Internet*, comScore Presentation at AdTech Singapore 2012 at <http://www.slideshare.net/nguyenht/comscore-presentation-adtech-singapore-2012> (accessed 14 April 2013).

102. Rock Publicity, *The State of Social Media in Singapore* (2012) at <http://trainingedgeasia.com/download/2012-RP-SINGAPORE-SOCIAL-MEDIA-STUDY.pdf> (accessed 14 April 2013).

political news stories.¹⁰³ TOC positions itself as “advocacy citizen journalism” which champions causes and values such as civic participation, open government and free media. Its “blogivists” (blog activists) redefine mainstream news and merge opinions and reporting.

Despite many online options available, local UGC topics are still largely determined by news content found in traditional media. A large part of the discussions in socio-political blogs and citizen journalism sites are responses to current affairs, such as important political announcements related to housing, immigration or elections. Discussions on social networks are often driven by what is topical and being discussed by one’s friends and fans.

While international media organizations make efforts to harness the power of UGC to enrich content and engage users, such as CNN through its *iReport*, Singapore’s established media enterprises, such as SPH or MediaCorp, do not incorporate UGC into their news reports in newspapers or TV newscasts to such an extent. They tend to maintain separate forums or sites for the viewers to comment or contribute videos and photos. Some of these ultimately make their way into news coverage, e.g. photos of accidents, floods, trees uprooted by strong winds. Both rival news organizations are heavy users of social media (primarily Facebook and Twitter) to disseminate content to a great number of users within extensive social networks. For instance, the *Straits Times* has more than 81,000 Facebook fans and more than 206,000 Twitter followers, while Channel NewsAsia Singapore has more than 75,000 Facebook fans and more than 114,000 followers, as of April 2013.

3.2 Digital Activism

3.2.1 Digital Platforms and Civil Society Activism

As a rule, individuals and groups operate within a state-sanctioned sphere and observe what are called “OB markers” (out of bounds markers used in sports to denote an area beyond which play is not allowed). This describes the boundaries of acceptable and permissible political public discussion but is viewed by opposition politicians as a form of self-censorship.¹⁰⁴ The institutionalized approach via channels such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) aims to meet the aspirations of the better-educated citizens for greater sophistication in the expression of civil liberties.

Occasionally, heightened activism has nudged a feeble civil society from lethargy. The most high-profile case was the leadership tussle in a prominent women’s group, the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE).¹⁰⁵ In late March 2009, a group of conservative Christian women wrested control of the Executive Council (EXCO) from a group of liberals. The new group’s key accusations were that the “Old Guard” had

103. The Online Citizen (TOC), at <http://theonlinecitizen.com> (accessed 1 July 2012) (hereafter, The Online Citizen).

104. The full form of the word is rarely used. Unlike in golf, the OB markers of political discourse in Singapore are not visible. The term “OB markers” was first used in 1991 by the then Minister for Communications, Information and the Arts, George Yeo, to describe the boundaries of acceptable political discourse. See also “Minister Yeo on OB markers and Internet,” extracts from a report by the *Straits Times*, 26 May 1999, at <http://www.singapore-window.org/sw99/90526st.htm> (accessed 1 July 2012).

105. Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), at <http://www.aware.org.sg/> (accessed 1 July 2012).

strayed from women's issues and promoted what it perceived was a "pro-gay" agenda, particularly in sexuality education courses conducted in some schools.

On the other hand, the "Old Guard" alleged that the new EXCO members had brought the issue of religion into a secular organization. What started as a routine procedure morphed into a polarized debate between the Christian Right and homosexual and lesbian interest groups. For a few weeks, both sides traded barbs, while political leaders urged tolerance. It culminated in a showdown at a 3,000-strong Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) and a no-confidence motion engineered by the Old Guard on 2 May 2009. The new council lost the vote and resigned.

The internet proved to be instrumental in reinstating the Old Guard. While the new group remained coy and hushed about its agenda, the Old Guard took the battle to cyberspace. In a few short weeks, a core group of volunteers set up a website, two Facebook groups and produced two videos to mobilize supporters. Through virtual word-of-mouth, blogs and Twitter, the Old Guard quickly communicated its position. About 1,400 members turned up at the EGM to cast their vote of no-confidence. A majority had joined the organization only days before the EGM specifically to vote at the meeting. On the day of the EGM, tools such as Twitter created a huge cyber presence. Netizens mapped the events and gave real-time updates.

The New Guard restricted coverage to print and television heavyweights, allowing reporters from the newspapers and broadcaster into the closed-door meeting but barring the use of cameras for photographs and footage. That drove netizens to turn to "live" feeds from online commentary sites and Twitter. A Twitter account, *awaresg*, and a trending hashtag *#awaresg* created a snowballing effect. A defining video that made the rounds on YouTube and news websites as the event was unfolding was that of a New Guard member telling the audience to "shut up and sit down."¹⁰⁶ The Government, which tried to hold the ring impartially, observed that the emotional meeting with many heated exchanges was "not a model of calm deliberation and patient consensus building."¹⁰⁷ The *Economist* reported that "the tiny world of Singapore's usually timid NGOs has never seen anything like it."¹⁰⁸

There have been other expressions of the use of digital tools to try to demand greater civil liberties, though nowhere near the proportions witnessed in the AWARE saga. In January 2011, socio-political website The Online Citizen (TOC), found a sympathetic following among the online masses when it became the first website in Singapore to be gazetted as a "political association" under the Political Donations Act.¹⁰⁹ The main

106. The Online Citizen, "Sally Ang's 'shut up and sit down' incident," YouTube, 2 May 2009, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-VYBZgwGdg&feature=related> (accessed 1 July 2012).

107. "Comments by DPM (Deputy Prime Minister) and Minister for Home Affairs Wong Kan Seng in response to media queries related to AWARE," Ministry of Home Affairs, 15 May 2009, at http://www.mha.gov.sg/news_details.aspx?nid=MTQ0MA%3D%3D-H1alkdI4Ksw%3D (accessed 1 July 2012).

108. "Taken unawares: Liberals rally to take on Christian Right," *Economist*, 7 May 2009.

109. Chapter 236, Singapore Statutes (Revised Edition 2001). Under the Political Donations Act, political associations are required to ensure that they have not accepted donations from impermissible sources and anonymous donations of S\$5,000 or more in any financial year. The Act upholds a fundamental tenet of the political process in Singapore—that politics in Singapore should be for Singaporeans only. See "2nd Reading Speech by Minister for Home Affairs Mr Wong Kan Seng," Parliament Session on 22 May 2000, at http://www.mha.gov.sg/basic_content.aspx?pageid=66 (accessed 4 December 2012).

change relates to transparency in donations and funding. The Registry of Political Donations (RPD) deemed it necessary to safeguard the domestic political process and ensure that it is not funded or manipulated by foreign elements. It noted that TOC was no longer a passive website for social or political commentaries but provided coverage of political issues, organized campaigns to change legislation and government policies and served as a forum for politicians. These render it potentially capable of influencing opinions and shaping political outcomes.

As a political association, TOC cannot receive funding from foreign sources or more than S\$5,000 (US\$ 4,000) in anonymous donations a year and has to file annual reports on significant donations received. The website was given 14 days to designate the President, Treasurer and Secretary as the people who would be responsible for the accuracy of the donation reports. The website also had to reveal its owners, journalists and administrators. The RPD noted TOC's claims that it is largely staffed by volunteers and has never accepted foreign donations and believed it should have no difficulty complying. It also maintained that such a move would not hinder TOC's existing activities nor curtail freedom of expression.¹¹⁰

In a letter to the Prime Minister dated 14 January 2011, TOC had insisted that the move stemmed from political paranoia and asked how a group of bloggers can constitute a political association. Nevertheless, it took up the challenge to operate as a political association and furnished the names of four volunteers who would take responsibility for the preparation and accuracy of TOC's annual donation reports to the RPD. It continues to provide alternative voices, challenge mainstream media and generate broader discussions on issues ranging from "foreign talent" and labor relations to animal welfare and opposition figures.¹¹¹

Repeal 377A

Another notable example of digital activism is the call to repeal Section 377A, the main remaining piece of legislation in the Penal Code that criminalizes sex between mutually consenting adult men. A motion to repeal it was tabled in 2007 by Mr Siew Kum Hong, then a serving Nominated Member of Parliament (i.e. a member who is appointed by the President). He garnered expressions of public support through new media. After two days of debate, Parliament concluded with the view that legislation has to reflect the societal norms of a conservative society, as well as the views of the majority. It opted to keep section 377A as law on the premise that the majority embrace a heterosexual stable family as the norm but accept space for homosexuals to live their private lives. Repealing it might have sent a wrong signal that the Government is endorsing a homosexual lifestyle as part of the mainstream way of life.¹¹² While the law criminalizes gay sex, in practice it appears to

110. Letter from Registry of Political Donations to TOC, 14 January 2011.

111. "TOC's reply to PMO [Prime Minister's Office]," *The Online Citizen*, 24 January 2011, at <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/01/tocs-reply-to-pmo/> (accessed 1 July 2012).

112. "Second Reading Speech of The Penal Code (Amendment) Bill by Senior Minister of State A/P (Associate Professor) Ho Peng Kee on 22 October 2007," Ministry of Home Affairs, 22 October 2007, para. 69, at http://app-stg4.mha.gov.sg/news_details.aspx?nid=MTEzMQ%3D%3D-Fjrp1hVtn40%3D (accessed 1 July 2012) (hereafter, Ho Peng Kee, "Second Reading Speech of The Penal Code"). The Ministry of Home Affairs says the police have not been actively enforcing the provision and will continue to take this stance. There have been convictions over the years involving offences abuse by male adults on minors conducted in a public place such as a public toilet or back-lane.

apply to a narrower interpretation to prosecute “gross indecency” between men. The Law and Home Affairs Minister, K. Shanmugam, explained: “We, sometimes in these things, have to accept a bit of messiness. And the way the society is going, we don’t think it’s fair for us to prosecute people who say that they are homosexual.”¹¹³ Similarly, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong noted the contributions of homosexuals in society and assured that section 377A will not be actively enforced. “We do not harass gays. The Government does not act as moral policemen. And we do not proactively enforce section 377A on them,” he said.¹¹⁴

Despite the failure to repeal the section, Mr Siew spoke of the satisfaction in the role of new media entities in raising the profile of the civil society and the influence of the internet as the main platform on which the public expressed views and concerns.¹¹⁵ During the year-long review of the Penal Code that started in 2006, extensive feedback from the public was gathered via the press, forums and the internet. In various online forums, strong opinions were posted.

The Ministry of Home Affairs found the public feedback “emotional, divided and strongly expressed,” with a majority calling for Section 377A to be retained.¹¹⁶ The prospect of repeal captured the attention of the online masses, who took on a proactive role. The debate underlined the influence of the internet, which was the main platform on which members of the public expressed their views on the matter.

On 3 October 2007, an online appeal was launched via the website Repeal377A.com to gather signatories for an open letter to the prime minister. That spawned a counter-petition on the website Keep377A.com for citizens to voice support to retain the law. Within two days of its launch, on 20 October, Keep377A had overtaken Repeal377A by 7,068 to 7,058 signatories. Towards the end of October, at least one copycat site emerged—Support377A.com, featuring letters to forums against the repeal.¹¹⁷ The raucous campaign calling for the provision’s repeal included a website by liberal activists and even a YouTube video featuring prominent media personalities and celebrities.¹¹⁸

Perhaps the biggest collective show of unhappiness and intense debate engineered by social media was seen in a protest against a government “road map” on the country’s population, over the headline number of a projected population of 6.9 million by 2030, which the Government later maintained was a “planning perimeter.”¹¹⁹

113. K Shanmugam, the Minister for Law and Home Affairs, in “Singapore won’t repeal homosexuality law,” Channel NewsAsia, 5 July 2009.

114. Lee Hsien Loong, the Prime Minister, in Parliament on 22 October, 2007.

115. Siew Kum Hong, the former Nominated Member of Parliament, quoted in article on 5 February 2010 on discussion on New Media and Political Participation organized by Sociological Society, Nanyang Technological University on 28 January 2010.

116. Ho Peng Kee, “Second Reading Speech of The Penal Code.”

117. See archives of all parliamentary speeches made with regard to the Penal Code review on 22 October 2007 and 23 October 2007. For details, see P.L. Lim, Penal Code section 377A, Singapore Infopedia, National Library Board Singapore, 31 January 2010, at http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_1639_2010-01-31.html (accessed 1 July 2012). keep377a.com was launched on 20 October 2007 but is no longer available.

118. “Repeal 377A Singapore!” video, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTGzrte9ZjQ> (accessed 1 July 2012).

119. “Fury over 6.9 million target for Singapore,” Yahoo News, 30 January 2013, at <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/fury-over-6-9-million-population-target-for-singapore-103503070.html> (accessed 1 June 2013); “Singapore’s population could hit 69 million by 2030,” *Straits Times*, 29 January, 2013, at <http://www.straitstimes.com/breaking-news/singapore/story/singapores-population-projected-hit-69m-2030-singaporean-core-20130129> (accessed 1 June 2013).

The protest on 16 February 2013¹²⁰ was organized by a website group, Transitioning.org,¹²¹ at the designated Speakers' Corner of Singapore in Hong Lim Park. Twelve speakers, including several opposition figures, rejected the White Paper approved by Parliament¹²² a week earlier, while a petition calling for a referendum garnered 1,000 signatures. The White Paper had been criticized largely because of the 6.9 million headline population figure. The speeches took aim at the need to bring in more foreigners to sustain Singapore's economic growth, and maintained that Singaporeans should have been consulted more widely on the White Paper. No official figures on the number of people were available as police said they did not monitor the crowd size, though organizers claimed that close to 5,000 turned up. One academic described it as a debate—for both the Government and citizens—about what it means to be Singaporean. Simon Ty said:

The issues do not relate only to culture and the arts, but have broader implications for the political and economic paradigms in Singapore as well. The recent White Paper on Population was challenged by citizens on blogs, in the media and at a protest in Hong Lim Park not simply on questions of detail. At a deeper, more instinctual level, many registered their anger over the slew of changes in recent years and the prospect of still more to come.¹²³

Mr Gilbert Goh, who runs the website Transitioning.org, is pressing on in his effort to get the Government to provide more clarity and dialogue on the population target for Singapore with more events planned.

Singapore's online community has also used digital media to organize public protests against state measures aimed at curbing freedom of expression. After the Government announced at the end of May 2013 that news websites would have to apply for licenses (see section 7.1.2.1), The Online Citizen advertised a public protest meeting on its home page after joining more than 100 websites and blogs in a 24-hour blackout.¹²⁴ More than 100 bloggers, opposition politicians and netizens joined the online protest but the protest itself had little real impact.¹²⁵

3.2.2 The Importance of Digital Mobilizations

In a society where people are generally averse to any public expression of dissent, the heightened display of civil liberties during events such as the AWARE saga and the debate on Section 377A signaled the potential role for new media as the voice of conscience and of digital tools as the agents to galvanize segments of

120. "White Paper protest draws big crowd," *Straits Times*, 17 February 2013, at <http://forums.hardwarezone.com.sg/eat-drink-man-woman-16/%5Bstrait-times-news%5D-white-paper-protest-draws-big-crowd-4106587.html> (accessed 18 April 2013).

121. Transitioning.org is a support site for the unemployed and underemployed; see <http://www.transitioning.org> (accessed 18 April 2013).

122. A Sustainable Population for a Dynamic Singapore: Population White Paper, at <http://202.157.171.46/whitepaper/downloads/population-white-paper.pdf> (accessed 18 April 2013).

123. S. Tay, "What makes a Singaporean? A debate returns," 18 April 2013, at <http://www.todayonline.com/commentary/what-makes-sporean-debate-returns> (accessed 18 April 2013).

124. At <http://asiancorrespondent.com/108676/singapore-bloggers-internet-blackout-free-my-internet>, and http://techcentral.my/news/story.aspx?file=/2013/6/6/it_news/20130606143556&sec=it_news (accessed 18 April 2013).

125. "Singapore sites blackout to protest MDA rules," AsiaOne, 6 June 2013, at <http://www.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20130606-427919.html> (accessed 1 July 2013).

society. They highlighted the presence of a more educated and better informed public that is not afraid to speak up and stands ready to latch on to any form of space to express and anchor views and opinions. A small group of people was actively involved but it showed how passions and emotions run high when people's salient beliefs or interests are involved.

There were arguments both online and offline regarding issues such as religion and sexuality that resonated with society at large. The diversity and immediacy of content availability made it possible for users to draw their own conclusions. That the issues were resolved through debate is a sign of civil society activism at work. In the case of AWARE, it was the need to ensure that no single issue hijacks an organization's agenda and that single issues do not divide society. An AWARE EXCO stalwart, Ms Corinna Lim, credited the investigative work of the *Straits Times* and online forums such as The Online Citizen and Wayang Party for unearthing the truth.¹²⁶ The revelations, she said, brought to the fore issues that were critical to the peace and harmony of the country.

The media observer Cherian George listed three lessons for civil society activists and the public, namely the brand of secularism that works for Singapore, the type of representation that civil society organizations should offer and the level of transparency and accountability that the public deserve.¹²⁷ The activist and former Nominated Member of Parliament Mr Siew Kum Hong wrote in his blog:

While I do not see the [AWARE] EGM as a watershed or a pivotal moment signaling any sort of significant change in Singapore politics... it does stand as a milestone marking some sort of progress towards a more active and passionate civil society. The willingness of all these people to stand up and be counted, to invest all that time and effort for a cause that they believed in, gave me hope that Singaporeans are not as passive or apathetic as we are often said to be, and that it really takes the right cause to spark us into action.¹²⁸

The AWARE saga and the other episodes also generated a short-lived but extensive debate on the role of the press and new media.¹²⁹ While some applauded the *Straits Times* for uncovering the real motivation for the sudden overthrow of the long-standing AWARE EXCO, others accused the paper and its online platform of shutting out the new group while providing breathless coverage for the Old Guard. According to the then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs, Wong Kan Seng, in official comments released to the media,¹³⁰ the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts had analyzed the volume, tone and

126. Corinna Lim, EXCO leader, AWARE, in comment posted in response to thread "Sin Boon Ann: Aware and the Failure of the Media," 28 May 2009, at <http://www.we-are-aware.sg/2009/05/28/sin-boon-ann-aware-failure-of-the-media> (accessed 1 July 2013).

127. Cherian George, Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University, and a member of Maruah, the Singapore Working Committee for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism.

128. K.H. Siew, "What I took away from 2 May," Siew Kum Hong (blog), 6 May 2009, at <http://siewkumhong.blogspot.com/2009/05/what-i-took-away-from-2-may.html> (accessed 1 July 2012).

129. An online repository of stories and posts related to the AWARE saga can be found at <http://www.we-are-aware.sg/sections/saga/> (accessed 4 December 2012).

130. "Comments by DPM and Minister for Home Affairs Wong Kan Seng in response to media queries related to AWARE," 15 May 2009, at http://www.mha.gov.sg/news_details.aspx?nid=MTQ0MA%3d%3d-H1alkdI4Ksw%3d (accessed 1 July 2012).

objectivity of the coverage of the AWARE episode, and “found it wanting in some respects.” It felt that some of the coverage was excessive and not sufficiently balanced and reminded journalists not to get caught up in the stories they are reporting, however exciting the stories might have been.

After allegations of biased media coverage were raised in Parliament no less, *The Straits Times*’ editor, Han Fook Kwang, felt compelled to defend his paper’s coverage of the events.¹³¹ Even as many readers cheered the paper’s doggedness at getting to the bottom of the story, some months later, at a talk to the Singapore Press Club, the Acting Minister for Information and the Arts, Lui Tuck Yew, revealed that the only time he had to phone a newspaper editor to rein in coverage during his term of office was when he called Han’s boss—the editor-in-chief—during the AWARE saga.¹³² While the Government agreed that there were important issues at stake, such as the proper limits for religious activism, whatever happened in AWARE was not going to change Singapore, or the Government’s social policy.

The exposé of the AWARE takeover was the work of *The Straits Times*’ enterprise reporting team. The team’s editor, Susan Long, is best known as the writer responsible for the paper’s 2004 editorial, “NKF: Controversially ahead of its time?” which highlighted certain planned extravagances for the National Kidney Foundation chief executive officer’s bathroom, including a costly German toilet bowl and a US\$ 800 gold-plated tap.¹³³ The article sparked a series of events in quick succession: a failed defamation lawsuit revealing a massive scandal, followed by an investigation, which led to the downfall of the CEO and swift action by the Government to reform the way charities are regulated.

While that editorial stemmed conventionally from an interview with the contractor who had been engaged nine years earlier to install the bathroom fittings at the NKF’s new headquarters, the online vitriol that it triggered was unprecedented and could not go unnoticed by the Government or the media.

An online petition started by a 20-year-old soldier serving his compulsory national service, garnered 40,000 signatures in three days calling for the resignation of the NKF chief, TT Durai, in a rare demonstration of public outrage in normally placid Singapore.¹³⁴ A separate petition demanding an apology by 12 noon on 19 July 2005 was launched on 15 July against Tan Choo Leng, the wife of the former prime minister Goh Chok Tong’ and a patron of the NKF.¹³⁵ This was after she tried to defend Mr Durai’s US\$ 500,000 a year salary (including bonuses), saying the amount was “peanuts” for someone running a million-dollar charity organization.¹³⁶ The next day, Mr Goh told the media that his wife regretted making the remarks, adding that

131. F.K. Han, “How ST covered the story,” 30 May 2009, at <http://www.we-are-aware.sg/2009/06/01/how-st-covered-the-story/> (accessed 1 December 2012).

132. Response by Mr Lui Tuck Yew, the Acting Minister of Information and the Arts, during the question-and-answer session with members of the Singapore Press Club on 9 September 2009.

133. S. Long, “NKF: Controversially ahead of its time?,” *Straits Times*, 19 April 2004.

134. At <http://www.petitiononline.com/nkfs/petition.html> (accessed 1 December 2012).

135. At <http://www.PetitionOnline.com/mrsgohct/petition.html> (accessed 1 December 2012).

136. “Mrs Goh: I’ve full trust in NKF and its CEO,” *Straits Times*, 13 July 2005.

her resignation two days earlier as the foundation's patron was a separate matter—to enable the new board to start afresh with a new patron or go without one altogether.¹³⁷ By the 19 July deadline, the petition had amassed over 3,700 signatories—reflecting the speed at which the internet could be used to mobilize and reflect public opinion, even against the wife of a much-respected elder statesman.

3.3 Assessments

While the democratizing effects of digitization have provided an unprecedented level of access to open online platforms and raised the public's ability to share and distribute news and other information from a wide variety of sources, both local and foreign, this has not resulted in a significant increase in the number of professionally run news sites. Apart from a couple of professionally staffed newsrooms in foreign-owned technology companies (MSN and Yahoo!) with offices in Singapore and a modest operation set up in 2012 by the homegrown telecommunications giant SingTel, practically all sources of homegrown alternative media are volunteer-run, often relying on online advertising or crowd-funding.

In contrast, traditional media companies such as SPH and MediaCorp have widened their product ranges for news consumers. Faced with the prospect of losing audiences to other online sites, they have rolled out their own digital offerings to retain and expand their market dominance, in line with commercial common sense. These include online properties such as AsiaOne, Straits Times Online, omy.sg, channelnewsasia.com, todayonline and xinmsn.com.

Such moves are also in line with the Government's exhortation to "expand print, or the mainstream media into the new media," a move which the then Acting Information and the Arts Minister, Lui Tuck Yew, described as "multiplication by division" in his 2009 speech to the Singapore Press Club.¹³⁸ In it, he urged local mainstream media to avoid losing their ground as the dominant source of news and information and their credibility by multiplying their presence online, thus dividing the effect of various less-than-reliable newcomers, which often ran alternative or opposition views. He urged the mainstream media not to import what he dubbed new media "approaches," "practices" and "standards"—a move he regarded as "subtraction by addition," i.e. subtracting and detracting from the objectivity and professionalism built up over the years, by the adoption of more aggressive, strident coverage featuring a wide range of views and voices.

With the ubiquitous availability of the internet since the first commercial ISP service was launched in Singapore in 1994, Singaporeans have seen a range of alternative news platforms springing up, offering views more diverse than those found in mainstream media. Sites like TOC, mrbrown, Yawning Bread and TR Emeritus are now entrenched in the local online landscape and joined by relative newcomers like New Asia Republic, Temasek Times and New Nation which offer a liberal, and sometimes tongue-in-cheek, take on current affairs and government policies.

137. P. Jacob, "Peanuts' comment by Mrs Goh: She regrets it, says SM," *Straits Times*, 17 July 2005.

138. Speech by Lui Tuck Yew, the Acting Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts to the Singapore Press Club on 9 September 2009. Full text at <http://app.mica.gov.sg/Default.aspx?tabid=79&ctl=Details&mid=540&ItemID=1039> (accessed 16 February 2012).

Most of these volunteer-run socio-political sites today survive through a combination of donations, online fundraising methods and online advertising. As has been seen earlier in this paper, when such a site becomes a force to be reckoned with, it gets gazetted with the status of a political association for the purposes of the Political Donations Act.¹³⁹ The requirement that TOC register as a political association came just five months before the 2011 general election. Netizens decried the move as oppressive and feared it would have a chilling effect on free speech online.

Nevertheless, TOC has taken up the challenge, in the belief that just as they demand openness and transparency from the Government, they have remained completely above board in their operations and have nothing to hide nor fear.¹⁴⁰ “We believe that shutting down or going underground is precisely what those who misunderstand us want and will be fodder to discredit the blogosphere. We will not give them that satisfaction,” declared the Acting Chief Editor, Joshua Chiang. TOC’s position is in direct contrast to online socio-political pioneer. Sintercom (Singapore Online Community, 1994–2001).

Sintercom grew out of a group of netizens who were active on the soc.culture.singapore Usenet group in the early 1990s when the internet was still nascent in Singapore. When its editor, Tan Chong Kee, was asked to register the site under the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (Class License) Notification 1996 which is still in force today, he declined,¹⁴¹ saying the authorities had made it impossible to run Sintercom with integrity. He refused to continue running Sintercom under the pretense that everything was as it should be; nor would he censor himself. Instead, he chose to close the site down to show that it was no longer possible to claim that Singaporeans could speak openly about issues that concerned them.¹⁴²

Tan was one of the earliest civil society activists to use the internet. He later went on to co-found The Working Committee (TWC), an informal network of Singapore NGOs in the late 1990s that was set up to collaborate on civil society activities. The efforts of Tan and his fellow Sintercom editors such as Chang Li Lin, Wynthia Goh, and Harish Pillay, set the stage for others to follow.

In later years, Singapore would see periodic bursts of online activism to register outrage and displeasure. The petitions both for and against the repeal of Section 377A of the Penal Code was one of the most open, lively and democratic demonstrations of the use of the internet the country had ever seen.

139. Chapter 236, Singapore Statutes (Revised Edition 2001).

140. The Online Citizen, “TOC Statement: Keep Calm and Carry On,” 14 January 2011, at <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/01/toc-statement-keep-calm-and-carry-on/> (accessed 16 February 2012).

141. A. Siew, “Speaking your mind online without fear,” *Computer Times*, 22 August 2001. Reproduced at <http://www.singapore-window.org/sw01/010822ct.htm> (accessed 16 February 2012).

142. Account of Sintercom’s history in E. Tan, “Unpicking the Semes: Power, Resistance and the Internet,” 2002, at <http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/339/2/02Whole.pdf> (accessed 16 February 2012).

4. Digital Media and Journalism

4.1 Impact on Journalists and Newsrooms

4.1.1 Journalists

Digitization and convergence have been the driving forces of change in journalism in Singapore over the past five years. SPH's internet editions of its newspapers attract more than 225 million page views from 15 million unique visitors each month.¹⁴³ Its journalists routinely Tweet and post Facebook updates daily. They also live blog during special events such as general elections, providing the public with blow-by-blow accounts of polling result suspense, sometimes pre-empting official announcements by several minutes.

However, unlike the old days in the early 2000s when SPH prided itself on producing what it called “amphibious” journalists comfortable in creating content in both print and broadcast, it now sends separate personnel to work on the print and video stories, reducing the physical strain and quality trade-offs that come with such multi-tasking. This ensures stories are thoroughly reported and well-produced. On the foreign front, digitization has not resulted in any cutting back of original content either. The paper maintains one of the largest networks of foreign correspondents among Asian newspapers with over 20 staff correspondents and more than 50 contributors worldwide.

At Channel NewsAsia, a digital content and strategy team was created in 2011 to drive the channel's social media engagement with viewers and push content to them. It routinely posts latest news on all social media platforms and also reaches out to viewers by putting up humorous outtakes of its newscasters before they go on air.

In 2012, the separate E-News team behind channelnewsasia.com finally moved into the same newsroom as the channel's broadcast journalists, some 14 years after the website began. The idea and benefits of being in the same place, though seemingly obvious for a fast-paced news environment, had taken the back seat to other non-editorial considerations such as the lack of space and organizational realignments. Being finally

143. Singapore Press Holdings, *About Singapore Press Holdings Ltd*, 2012, at http://www.sph.com.sg/aboutsph_profile.shtml (accessed 1 July 2012) (hereafter, Singapore Press Holdings, *About Singapore Press Holdings Ltd*).

together will enable the channel to reap the benefits of better editorial coordination in an age where the need for speed and accuracy are often at odds with one another.

In terms of workflow, Channel NewsAsia undertook a multi-million dollar investment to digitize its tape handling and video editing processes fully. In 2007, it installed the Thomson Aurora digital asset management system to solve the problems of obsolete analog equipment and shorten the editing time.¹⁴⁴ After two years spent training more than 200 staff, MediaCorp launched an integrated content and production system gradually for different news teams and fully utilized it.¹⁴⁵

The system creates a common digital platform for sharing content and resources in a multi-language and multi-channel news production environment, creating new workflows and work roles. After shooting, reporters select footage to digitize for nonlinear editing, a process known as “ingestion.” Ingested footage can be viewed and edited by multiple users simultaneously, which saves the job of duplicating tapes so that news workers across language teams are able to share content effectively. Reporters can easily search and watch audiovisual content to write better quality scripts to match pictures, while news supervisors and producers are able to improve quality of editorial decisions in vetting stories and arranging rundowns. Later, news reporters and language producers edit and provide voice. The server-based broadcasting system has reduced errors, such as playing the wrong tapes, and diminished the chaos of sending tapes to studios. The implementation of an integrated newsroom has made redistribution and “repurposing” of digital news content across platforms much easier.

MediaCorp’s news workers have embraced multiskilling to adapt to the changes in workflow. Concerns that multiskilling would lead to overworked journalists compromising traditional journalistic practices and producing shallow stories were not borne out in MediaCorp’s case.¹⁴⁶ MediaCorp’s news managers and editors, who regarded nonlinear editing as a secondary skill for the reporters, expected them to do only rough cuts, record voice-overs and select interview sound bites.¹⁴⁷ However, multiskilling was found to have a negative effect on news picture quality. When the reporters covered news with increasing speed after digitization and handled non-linear editing under deadline stress, their unfamiliarity with visual grammar tended to compromise picture quality.¹⁴⁸

With digitization, media content can be easily repurposed and redistributed across platforms, from offline to online and mobile. The internet has become an important source for news stories, a crucial platform for distributing news, as well as receiving instant feedback from readers. Mobile has become an emerging platform for distributing news. For instance, MediaCorp’s CNA news and SPH news can be watched live

144. Lin, T.T.C., “Adoption Process and Implementation Strategies: Longitudinal Study of Integrated Newsroom Management’, in EMMA (London: 2010),” paper presented at the European Media Management Association Conference, London, UK, 2010 (hereafter, Lin, T.T.C., “Adoption Process and Implementation Strategies”).

145. Lin, T.T.C., “Adoption Process and Implementation Strategies.”

146. T. Lin, “Multi-skilling as a solution? Changing workflow and journalistic practise and the implications for international news,” in J. Clarke & M. Bromley (eds), *International News in the Digital Age: East-West Perceptions of a New World Order*, Routledge, New York, 2012, pp. 90–109.

147. Interview with Donald Low, Senior Producer, Channel NewsAsia, MediaCorp Singapore, 4 March 2009.

148. Interview with a MediaCorp craft video editor (who requested anonymity), MediaCorp, Singapore, 4 March 2009.

or on demand via online and mobile platform. News headlines are updated throughout the day on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Convenient social media buttons on every online or mobile news story enable readers to share stories they read with their networks. SPH's RazorTV and Stomp are among the top downloaded applications in Singapore's Apple iTunes store. Going online or mobile has allowed news to reach a greater audience anytime, anywhere with greater interactivity.

4.1.2 Ethics

As digital news media in Singapore have fewer content restrictions, they provide more diverse voices across platforms. However, there has arguably been an increase in sensationalized news that does not comply with the strict codes of conduct of traditional journalism. Digital news media must update content quickly. The price of speed and exclusivity can be paid in terms of compromising accuracy, the first value in journalism.

Stomp¹⁴⁹ and RazorTV¹⁵⁰ are SPH's attempts at digital news media; however their unconventional news content often generates sensationalism and gossip. In SPH's Stomp, for instance, users take pictures of anti-social commuting habits on public transportation and upload them to a page on the website called "Ugly commuters."¹⁵¹ However, critics question the news values involved and point out that randomly uploading pictures of commuters can be an invasion of privacy (though faces are always pixelated). Another inherent problem is the reliability of user-generated news content. The editor of Stomp admitted the difficulty in verifying some news sources.¹⁵²

Stomp's credibility took a massive dive in 2012 when a photo posted by one of its content producers of a door left open on a moving subway train was later found to be false. The producer, Samantha Francis, initially claimed she had snapped the photo herself, although subsequently she admitted lifting the image off someone's Twitter post. SPH sacked her and made several apologies to the subway operator for the fabrication.¹⁵³

4.2 Investigative Journalism

4.2.1 Opportunities

Singapore reporters often receive tip-offs via email or through their news organization's websites, and they also scan online forums to find evidence or gauge sentiments.¹⁵⁴ There is also plenty of unclassified official information available online. Since 2011, there has been a concerted thrust to make textual and spatial data available, such as economic, census, traffic, weather, disease outbreak and zoning information. More than

149. Stomp, "About Us," at <http://www.stomp.com.sg/about/about.html> (accessed 1 July 2012).

150. RazorTV, "About Us," at <http://www.razor.tv/site/servlet/segment/main/about/> (accessed 1 July 2012).

151. "Ugly Commuters," Singapore Seen, Stomp, at http://singaporeseen.stomp.com.sg/stomp/sgseen/ugly_commuters/ (accessed 1 July 2012).

152. V'Ming Chew, Editor, Stomp, Presentation at SPH Multimedia Centre, 26 November 2010.

153. "Stomp staff sacked over false 'MRT open door photo'," *AsiaOne*, 25 June 2012, at <http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest+News/Motoring/Story/A1Story20120625-355071.html> (accessed 29 June 2013).

154. Email interview with *Straits Times* correspondent, Singapore, 18 April 2011.

5,000 data sets from 50 ministries and agencies have been put online at data.gov.sg to spur IT application development and research. Population and economic data from the country's statistical authority is published at Singstat.gov.sg.

A web crawl conducted and cited by the Institute of Policy Studies¹⁵⁵ showed close to 200 online sites by government ministries, agencies and organs of state. These sites often include annual reports and user-friendly Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) sections. Some also offer online searches for business registration information, creditworthiness, court cases, property transactions, vehicle ownership, and even marital status, which can be carried out upon electronic payment of a modest transaction fee.

Besides the ability to search and obtain plentiful official data, Singapore journalists also track citizen blogs and social networking sites for story tip-offs or to discern emerging trends among netizens. As we have seen, Stomp depends heavily on user generated content, which *Straits Times* journalists then sometimes turn into print stories. The site has turned into a gallery of Singapore residents' worst and weirdest behavior and reprehensible social habits. Indiscriminate parking in lots meant for disabled drivers, couples engaging in prolonged public displays of affection, public housing residents who steal their neighbors' footwear from doorsteps and motorists who use fire hoses to wash their cars in public car parks are just some examples of the content contributed to the site.

4.2.2 Threats

While there is no equivalent of the U.S. Freedom of Information Act or automatic right to information, journalists in Singapore do have access to a great amount of publicly available unclassified information both online and offline. Where such information is not available, journalists routinely email the relevant organizations, which then evaluate each request. This, however, can put the organization on notice and lead it to suppress information related to the story being pursued. A case in point concerns a *Straits Times* Enterprise Desk story on sex education in local schools.¹⁵⁶ The reporter noticed that a certain module on facilitating sex education was no longer being offered at an educational institution, after comparing its website information on previous years' modules. Within hours of her phone query to the institution, the previous years' information vanished from the website. Fortunately, she had made printouts, but the institution did not provide answers to her queries.¹⁵⁷

Email has also made it easy for lawyers to threaten reporters with legal action for publishing a story.¹⁵⁸ The onus thus falls on reporters to ensure their stories are solid and backed up with the necessary evidence to avoid a legal tangle later.

155. C. Soon, "Talking to Each Other: Do We Have What it Takes?," 3 May 2013 at <http://ipscommons.sg/index.php/categories/featured/137-talking-to-each-other-do-we-have-what-it-takes> (accessed 9 May 2013).

156. H.Y. Tan & E. Teo, "Let's talk about SEX really," *Straits Times*, 21 August 2010.

157. Email interview with *Straits Times* correspondent, Singapore, 18 April 2011.

158. Email interview with *Straits Times* correspondent, Singapore, 18 April 2011.

These days, journalists routinely head to Facebook or Twitter to invite suggestions from online users on story ideas and people to interview or to find out what is going on at a remote location. They do, however, run the risk of tipping off their competition or even the subjects of their investigation if they fail to act discreetly.

4.2.3 New Platforms

Traditional media organizations cannot afford to ignore citizen-run socio-political blogs such as TOC and Wayang Party (which later became Temasekreview.com, and then TREmeritus.com). Both are well-known for their pull-no-punches stories, often critical of the Government. Founded in 2006 by a law student, Choo Zheng Xi, and by a restaurateur-turned-full-time-blogger Andrew Loh, TOC now boasts a readership of 500,000. It prides itself on being an open, independent platform for alternative voices in Singapore and maintains a policy where its writers put their names on their articles.

In contrast, Wayang Party, which took its name from the Malay word “Shadow Play,” remained under a cloak of anonymity for more than eight years after its founding in 2004. Claiming to be run by volunteers using a server hosted overseas, Wayang Party and its eventual successor TRE have been responsible for several major scoops that were subsequently carried by mainstream media.

4.2.4 Dissemination and Impact

Being able to bypass traditional media gatekeepers—the editors—has given individuals and citizen journalists their own public voice and has in turn made them sources of news that traditional media cannot ignore. At the same time this democratic effect of online platforms has also presented new challenges to the authorities—whether to deal with such issues as and when they arise, and how to do so. The Government itself has admitted¹⁵⁹ that it can do more in reaching out to the public across multiple platforms. So besides government ministers starting Facebook accounts, many agencies have started using a combination of social media, mobile applications and other search engine-optimized digital platforms to convey government information and policies.

In the case of Lianain Films, the documentary production house and independent producer of investigative journalism in Asia, its blog provides an alternative platform for its works, which would otherwise only be screened on festival circuits or on client broadcasters such as Al-Jazeera, a channel no longer carried on Singapore’s sole IPTV service, mioTV.

159. Response by Mr Lawrence Wong, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) at Committee of Supply Debate in Parliament on MCI’s Budget, 8 March 2013, at http://www.mci.gov.sg/content/mci_corp/web/mci_pressroom/categories/speeches/2013/strengthening_publiccommsengagement.html (accessed 26 April 2013).

4.3 Social and Cultural Diversity

4.3.1 Sensitive Issues

As a conservative, multi-racial and multi-religious society, Singapore generally adheres to the so-called out-of-bounds markers (OB markers), which demarcate the areas permissible for public discussion (see section 3.2.1). This is most apparent in four key sensitive areas—race, religion, sexual minorities and relations with Malaysia and Indonesia. In an attempt to find a balance between individual freedom and the interests of society, the gatekeeping perimeters have been carefully calibrated.¹⁶⁰ The model has evolved out of what the authorities and official institutions see as the country’s “special circumstances” from a society deeply divided along racial and religious lines during the early days of nationhood, and later, by threats such as regional distrust and terrorism.

Although the secular tone is set by the Government, there appears to be a tacit acknowledgement by society of the need to tread carefully. In recent years, while discussions have increased on the potential fault lines in society, namely over the widening income gap, “foreign talent,” and new immigrants, the dialogue on the fault line of race and religion remains muted.

The rights of minorities are, in law at least, protected to ensure full and non-discriminatory participation in political, economic and cultural life. The fear that society could not withstand the harm that would result if the cracks along racial and religious lines were exploited has shaped the role of the media as non-adversarial. Mainstream media consciously and consistently regard their role as reporting on sensitive issues dispassionately and impartially, contributing to the understanding of national issues, ensuring racial and religious harmony and promoting shared values.

The internet has given rise to loopholes in these gatekeeping methods. A government-appointed Censorship Review Committee (CRC), which helps to develop censorship policies and standards, warned that the changes taking place in new media are starting to outpace the ability to cope from a regulatory perspective. It noted that with media convergence happening rapidly, mainstream media content, which is more susceptible to regulatory pressure, is now much more diffuse as it is increasingly delivered on platforms such as internet and mobile downloads. The enormous volume distributed via the internet, which largely bypasses physical media, makes regulation a challenge. The regulatory fort is “blasted repeatedly by technological change” due to next-generation broadband services and the growing convergence of newsrooms and media platforms.¹⁶¹

160. Seditious Act, Chapter 290, Singapore Statutes (Revised Edition 1985). Newspaper and Printing Presses Act, Chapter 206, Singapore Statutes (Revised Edition 2002). Subscription Television Program Code, Media Development Authority, at http://www.mda.gov.sg/Documents/PDF/MDA_Subscription%20TV%20Programme%20Code%202010.pdf (accessed 1 July 2012).

161. The Censorship Review Committee first convened in 1992 and was to be formed once every decade to look at content issues extensively. The move to conduct a mid-term review after its last review in 2003 was to enable the Government and the Media Development Authority to respond in a timely manner to issues arising from the rapidly changing media environment. The committee of 17 members from various fields of expertise was appointed in September 2009 to look into content issues across the spectrum of broadcast, films, videos, publications, audio materials, the arts and new media. See <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Public/Consultation/Pages/CRC.aspx> and http://www.mda.gov.sg/Public/Consultation/Documents/CRC_2010_Report.pdf (accessed 26 December 2012).

Race and Religion

Singapore is a secular society, in which the main races (Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians) and religious groups (Christians, Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus) are encouraged to live in tolerance and accommodation. Keeping race and religion separate from politics is a key rule of engagement. The memory of race riots in the 1950s and 1960s,¹⁶² and the existence of tough sedition laws help to ensure adherence. The Sedition Act extends to actions that “promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or classes of the population of Singapore.”¹⁶³ The observance of religious and racial practices is critical in preserving the social fabric. The rights of minorities are protected by law. Their language, or mother tongue, is taught in schools, their cultures are celebrated by all races, and housing policies ensure racial enclaves do not emerge. Political rights are safeguarded in Parliament through Group Representation Constituencies in which one Member of Parliament from a team has to be from a minority race.

Economically, the Chinese fare better while the Malays, the so-called “sons of the soil,” lag behind. The media remain guarded against coverage that could fuel potentially divisive impressions of the Malay/Muslim community as a marginalized group. Although most people think of themselves as Singaporeans, race, culture and religion can become more pronounced when issues touch on the unique character of races and religions. The Government is alert to any activism that it thinks might threaten the social fabric. Even though netizens can hide behind the veil of anonymity when they post comments and articles on internet sites, a handful of individuals have been charged with sedition for making racist comments online.

Sexual Minorities

Singapore is a conservative society, with a majority subscribing to the heterosexual stable family as the norm but accepting homosexuals as part of society. Although there have been increased public debate and attempts by advocates to assert themselves, the Government repeatedly said it will not change its position as a result of such lobbying and will not decriminalize gay sex under Section 377A of the Penal Code, which deems sex between men a crime. It viewed the debates in the media as disquieting, unproductive and divisive.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the gay community is far from silent. Its activities have been given coverage in mainstream media, while its voices are audible online via portals, forums, support groups and social networking sites.

One example is the debate over the revision to the Penal Code (see section 3.2.1). On October 2007, the Singapore government repealed Article 377, which prohibited anal and oral sex between consenting adult

162. The Maria Hertogh Riots between Malays and the European and Eurasian communities happened over three days from 11 December 1950 and left at least 18 people dead and 173 people injured. It was sparked by a controversial custody battle between Maria's adoptive Malay family and her Eurasian parents. The riots highlighted the insensitive way the media handled religious and racial issues, especially in emotional reports of the custody battle and photographs of a Muslim girl in a Catholic convent. The 1964 Race Riots took place between Chinese and Malay groups. The first occurred on 21 July during a procession to mark the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. Thirty-six people were killed and 556 were injured. A second race riot occurred on 3 September, when a Malay trishaw-rider was found murdered. His attackers were believed to be a group of Chinese. Thirteen people were killed and 106 people injured.

163. Sedition Act, Chapter 290, Singapore Statutes (Revised Edition 1985).

164. Comments by DPM and Minister for Home Affairs Wong Kan Seng in response to media queries related to AWARE, Ministry of Home Affairs, 15 May 2009, at http://www.mha.gov.sg/news_details.aspx?nid=MTQ0MA%3D%3D-H1aIkdI4Ksw%3D (accessed 1 July 2012).

heterosexuals but retained Article 377A, criminalizing sex between men. Mr Siew Kum Hong, a Nominated Member of Parliament, spearheaded a public petition to Parliament with 2,341 signatures from a broad cross-section of Singaporeans who championed a repeal on the grounds that it was discriminatory. Parallel to this was a three-day online campaign initiated by a Singaporean gay activist, Mr Johnson Ong, garnering about 8,000 signatures from around the world. While the outcome was not unexpected, the very fact that same-sex relationships were discussed in a public forum was significant. The debate also demonstrated the level of confidence that the establishment, institutions and decision-makers have developed over the years to manage sensitive issues hitherto not discussed openly and publicly.¹⁶⁵ In April 2013, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of Section 377A.

Relations with Neighboring Countries

Relations with its close neighbors Malaysia and Indonesia are the most important and sensitive for Singapore. With Malaysia, the relationship has been complex and volatile, punctuated by many highs and lows. These stemmed from a host of longstanding issues, such as their overlapping territorial claims and the status of Malayan Railway land in Singapore. Singapore has been on the receiving end of periodic threats to sever water ties whenever its policies were seen to have impinged on Malaysian sensitivities or when negative media reports crept into relations. Singapore's racial structure of 75 percent Chinese, 15 percent Malay, 8 percent Indian—is the reverse image of Malaysia's, in which Malays are the majority. Malaysia, too, has to grapple with racial and religious tensions, but these do not prevent politicians and fringe groups from fishing in troubled waters or the media from feeding on the fodder around such issues.

With Indonesia, whose sheer size makes relations important and sensitive, ties have been generally good. The posture is one of respectful silence, despite the low-level conflict during the early post-independence years and occasional spats over issues such as bans on the export of sand and granite, the treatment of Indonesian domestic helpers in Singapore and the ruinous haze from forest fires in Indonesia. The Singapore media are mindful of the attendant risks and consequences on the state of relations when they cover stories such as court cases of abuse and crimes of domestic workers (“maids” and “nannies”) or employers. These reports are stripped of disturbing facts and strive to make the point that justice has been dispensed.

4.3.2 Coverage of Sensitive Issues

Matters pertaining to race and religion are handled in accordance with the stringent guidelines spelt out in the respective codes and acts governing broadcasters and the press. For example, the Subscription Television Code stipulates that content which is against the public interest or public order, or national harmony, or which offends good taste and decency, is not allowed. The Media Development Authority (MDA) is also empowered under the Broadcasting Act to impose sanctions or financial penalties on any broadcaster for programs that denigrate, or are likely to offend the sensitivities of, any racial or religious group.

165. Richard Tan, Director (Communications & International Relations Division), Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports in interview, December 2010.

Programs that are likely to hurt the sensitivities of any racial or religious group, or are laced with proselytizing, are not allowed. References to race and religion are presented with as much accuracy as possible, in a dignified and sensitive manner. They also observe respect for the customs and practices of the races and religions. Kissing in Malay programs, for example, is banned.

Singapore's Sedition Act goes beyond behavior that seeks to bring down the government of the day to include racist comments or views "producing or having a tendency to produce feelings of ill-will and enmity between different races or classes of the population of Singapore...to promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or classes [...]."¹⁶⁶

In the coverage of the detentions of the Malay-Muslim militants linked to the Southeast Asian terror network, Jemaah Islamiah (JI), for instance, care was taken to avoid racial profiling and stereotyping that could apportion blame. The editorial content took on positive spins that would foster understanding, tolerance and support. This was especially evident in the coverage of the hunt for the leader of the Singapore arm of JI, Mas Selamat Kastari—from his escape from detention on 27 February 2008 to his recapture in Malaysia and eventual return to Singapore. After it emerged that the fugitive terror chief was harbored by four family members when he escaped, the media reports mirrored the Government's reassurance to all communities that this was not a reflection of the wider Malay-Muslim community, which not only disapproved of his deeds but also took part in the manhunt.¹⁶⁷

In cases that involve race and religion, the media take care not to repeat offensive remarks or embellish stories with details, reactions and comments that may elicit ill-will. Rarely do the media have exclusive content or extended coverage that might provoke more reaction and comments. Most of the headlines, photographs and content appear similar—fact for fact, angle for angle.

In the case of the gay community, the style and treatment of reporting are consistent with the official standpoint, treating information on "lifestyles" such as homosexuality, lesbianism and incest with the utmost caution and taking care not to promote, justify or glamorize them. Explicit depictions are avoided at all costs, especially in crime and court cases that involve homosexuals.

In the case of relations with neighboring countries, the mainstream media tend to follow very closely the official policy of promoting friendship. But the on-line forums of these same media have assumed a defiant posture, in particular with regard to Malaysia, where the media occasionally enjoy opportunities for Singapore-bashing. As with so many other areas, the on-line world in Singapore allows considerably more room for the expression of stronger and more controversial views than are tolerated in the off-line world.

166. Sedition Act. (Chapter 290), at <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p;query=Type%3Auact,areved%20Content%3A%22s%20edition%22;rec=0;whole=yes> (accessed 1 March 2013).

167. Ministerial Statement by the Minister for Home Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs and Law, 22 November 2010, at http://www.mha.gov.sg/news_details.aspx?nid=MTkwMA%3d%3d-EOj6Ax%2fycQA%3d (accessed 1 July 2012).

4.3.3 Space for Public Expression

Thus digital media have enlarged and improved the space for public expression. For example, the gay community gets ample voices online, through dozens of websites and forums. There are support groups on websites and portals such as Yagga Yagga, which is for men who “came out” late in life; Adventurers Like Us, a sports and outdoor activities network for gays and lesbians that even sent Singapore’s first sports team to the Gay Olympics in Sydney; Women’s Nite, which is a forum for lesbians and bisexual women; MenAfterWork, which organizes social outings for gay men; SGRainbow, an online portal for youths who advocate room for self-acceptance; Pink Dot sg, a non-profit movement which organized Singapore’s first open-air LGBT-supportive event on 16 May 2009; and fridae.com, an LGBT portal that organized mega-parties until public gay parties were banned in Singapore in 2004.

Following the AWARE saga and the debate on Section 377A, the Government pledged to encourage the development of civil society and facilitate a gradual widening of the OB markers. But it wants this to be matched first by what they say should be an ability to manage disagreements in a responsible manner and the willingness to articulate views without denigrating others. There have been calls for the gradual opening up of the space for public expression and a revision of laws and policies that may constitute journalistic restrictions, especially with an improved political climate and remarkable progress in racial and ethnic integration.

These limits were highlighted by a United Nations official, Githu Muigai, during a fact-finding trip to Singapore in 2010. He acknowledged that most of the measures to prevent ill-will are widely appreciated but observed that they appear to limit public debate or discourse. “It is absolutely necessary in a free society that restrictions on public debate or discourse and the protection of racial harmony are not implemented at the detriment of fundamental human rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly,” he said. The time is ripe, he added, to review any legislative restrictions so that Singaporeans can share their views on matters of ethnicity, identify potential issues of discomfort and work to find solutions.¹⁶⁸

4.4 Political Diversity

4.4.1 Elections and Political Coverage

Political parties in Singapore have begun using websites in a big way since the 2001 general election. With the prevalence of internet usage and broadband penetration, blogs and citizen journalism sites sprang up around 2005 and became part of the online landscape.¹⁶⁹ Under the country’s professed “light touch” internet content regulation, they provide Singaporeans with alternative voices that complement the self-censored and

168. G. Muigai, Full text of the press statement delivered by the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, United Nations Press Release, 28 April 2010, at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/racism/rapporteur/docs/StatementVisitSingapore.pdf> (accessed 1 July 2012).

169. James Gomez, “‘Citizen Journalism’: Bridging the Discrepancy in Singapore’s General Elections News,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, October 2006, pp. 3–34.

self-regulated news content in mainstream media.¹⁷⁰ Since the 2006 election, there has been a proliferation of online political and election information.

Realizing the impact of the internet on society and politics, the Singapore government set up the Advisory Council on the Impact of New Media on Society (AIMS) in April 2007. This council succeeded the 10-year-old National Internet Advisory Committee, which had sub-committees to advise it on legal and industry matters and another high-level group to advise it on community impact. AIMS was given the task of studying the implications of rapidly evolving media technologies in Singapore's society, and it made recommendations relating to online political content, among other things.¹⁷¹ In 2009, the Government accepted AIMS's recommendation to liberalize internet election advertising, paving the way for election candidates, political parties and individuals to use new media tools such as blogs, podcasts and vodcasts for online political advertising during elections.¹⁷²

4.4.2 Digital Political Communications

In the 2006 election, there was a surge in internet election coverage when independent bloggers and citizen journalists enthusiastically contributed alternative perspectives and comments. These often contrasted with the largely filtered and conservative mainstream media reports.¹⁷³ According to the local analytics firm NexLabs, Singapore bloggers collectively contributed 200 entries daily during the 2006 election campaign.¹⁷⁴

Such extensive online coverage put pressure on the mainstream media to provide more balanced coverage of both ruling and opposition parties. For example, opposition rally photographs would first appear on independent websites such as SGally.blogspot.com, leaving mainstream media little choice but to give at least some coverage to the more notable opposition events, lest they be accused of underplaying news about the opposition. A 2009 survey study found that over 50 percent of Singapore's netizens use political websites or weblogs as an alternative to mainstream news, because of the perception that mass media producers tend to self-censor and omit certain important information.¹⁷⁵

170. T. Lin & S. Lim, *Content and Presentation of Political Blogs in Singapore* (May 2010). Paper for 8th Annual International Conference on Communication and Mass Media, Athens, Greece.

171. Ministry of Information, Communication & the Arts Response to AIMS recommendations, at http://www.mci.gov.sg/content/mci_corp/web/mci/pressroom/categories/speeches/2009/remarks_by_dr_lee_boon_yang_minister_for_information_communications_and_the_arts_at_the_media_conference_on_the_governments_response_to_the_recommendations_made_by_the_advisory_council_on_the_impact_of_new_media_on_society_aims.mnews.publiccomm.html (accessed 30 April 2013).

172. Section 78A and 78B, Parliamentary Elections Act (Cap 218, 2011 Rev Ed), Singapore Statutes.

173. James Gomez, "Citizen Journalism: Bridging the Discrepancy in Singapore's General Elections News," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, October 2006, pp. 3–34.

174. F.A. Rahim, "Blogging Activity Up During Singapore Election Campaign," 13 May 2006, channelnewsasia.com. No longer on server. See archived copy at <http://www.singapore-window.org/sw06/060513CN.HTM> (accessed 19 January 2012).

175. Hong Yah-Huei, Trisha T.C. Lin & Ang Peng Hwa, *Political Campaigning in Cyberspace: Innovation Resistance among Internet Users in Singapore*, paper presented at the 19th AMIC Annual Meeting, Singapore, June 2010.

Founded after the May 2006 general election, TOC became the first blog and fifth local organization,¹⁷⁶ if it can be called that, to be gazetted as a political association for the purposes of the Political Donations Act (see section 3.2). Since its registration in 2011, it continues with its political coverage and commentary, alongside its other offerings, suggesting that gazettement and registration may not have a great impact on citizen journalism sites.

While such sites have been flourishing since 2006 and provide a much-needed outlet to release pent-up frustrations over government policies or the system generally, no significant news sources have migrated from offline media to become completely online to take advantage of the freer environment that the Government professes to regulate with a light touch. On the contrary, researchers have noted the leap citizen journalism sites have made from the realm of online commentary into offline activism, which they described as breaching the “online-offline firewall.”¹⁷⁷

Since the 2006 general election, the number of election-related blogs and websites (excluding party websites) has grown substantially. Based on our observations, there were more than 40 devoted to Singapore’s political discussions. The flurry of digital activism is, however, hard to sustain. Several blogs set up to monitor the 2006 elections were left dormant when public and media interest dwindled after the event. These include SGally.blogspot.com, singaporeelection.blogspot.sg and PAPtalk.blogspot.com.

On the opposition front, political parties have found the internet indispensable in reaching out to their members and the public as they often lack the coverage in the mainstream media that their PAP counterparts enjoy. Initially, opposition parties encountered difficulties in moving online because they lacked funds and web developers who were willing to set up their party websites.¹⁷⁸ However, this is no longer the case today. Opposition parties such as the Singapore Democratic Party and Workers’ Party have fully Web 2.0-enabled party websites with many interactive features.

In terms of news coverage, Low Thia Kiang, the long-time opposition Member of Parliament for Hougang, credited new media for shaping the way mainstream media covered the 2011 general election. He said:

We have made good progress in terms of the behavior of the media. Print and TV media have provided more balanced coverage, compared with the past elections where the coverage was almost one-sided and pro-PAP (People’s Action Party),” he said. “For this, we have to thank new media, because if you don’t cover, the new media will cover and people will talk about it and mainstream media will be affected. Their credibility will be called into question and that

176. Other organizations gazetted previously are the Open Singapore Centre (defunct), the Think Centre, Singaporeans for Democracy (defunct), and the human rights NGO Maruah.

177. “Political Blogs More Sophisticated but Obstacles Remain,” *The Online Citizen*, March 2009. See <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2009/03/political-blogs-more-sophisticated-but-obstacles-remain/> (accessed 19 January 2012).

178. James Gomez, “Online Opposition in Singapore: Communication Outreach Without Electoral Gain,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, November 2008.

is why it has to be more open today and the Government will have to be careful if it wants to ‘influence’ the media to its advantage. I would expect we should be able to get across the message more effectively this time through the help of the media.”¹⁷⁹

As the campaigning closed on 5 May, Mr Low’s opponent from the PAP, the former ministerial heavyweight George Yeo, was introspective after having waded against a tide of deep unhappiness in the hot seat of Aljunied Group Representation Constituency. Mr Yeo, who had variously served as Information, Health, Trade and Foreign Affairs Minister over a political career spanning 23 years, promised to push for his party to take a “very hard look” at itself and the way it governs. He noted that the emotional undertow was tapped by the Workers’ Party, providing what he called “a loudspeaker for those who are frustrated, resentful and angry.” The internet, Mr Yeo acknowledged, was instrumental in fanning this sense of disenfranchisement, breaking down “old hierarchies” of human relationships, along with globalization, which exacerbates change.¹⁸⁰

Socio-political websites such as The Online Citizen and Temasek Review have a following among those who seek content challenging the establishment. In the 2011 elections, there was much online buzz surrounding the ruling PAP’s new candidates. The most intense scrutiny fell on a 27-year-old business consultant, Tin Pei Ling. Pictures of her posing with a Kate Spade designer bag and with her husband on holiday were lifted from her Facebook account and posted on various websites and blogs, questioning her lifestyle and age, as well as her maturity and suitability to handle the job of a parliamentarian. An online petition was created calling for her to contest a single seat ward, where she would have to fight on her own instead of contesting in a group representation constituency alongside more experienced PAP politicians.¹⁸¹

Another PAP candidate, the Malaysia-born Foo Mee Har, came under fire as she had only become a Singaporean in 2008. Partly emboldened by the Government’s light touch approach to regulating cyberspace, netizens appear to have little fear of the authorities or respect for decorum, despite the history of political figures, writers and media companies hauled to court for defamation and objectionable content. And while no new PAP candidate was left unscrutinized, online sentiment was generally more sympathetic and supportive of the opposition’s new faces.

For the 2011 general election, mainstream media coverage went full out online. The *Straits Times* launched a dedicated general election site, which chalked up an all-time high of 4 million page views on 27 April, Nomination Day, more than twice its daily average of 1.85 million. The number of unique visitors jumped to about 282,300, double the daily average. The centerpieces were a new live blogging feature, which gave

179. Low Thia Khiang, MP for Hougang, Channel NewsAsia, 3 April 2011. See the interview at <http://maruah.org/category/ge2011-election-watch/> (accessed 20 January 2012).

180. George Yeo, Minister for Foreign Affairs, in article, “George Yeo: We will push for reform of PAP,” *Straits Times*, 6 May 2011. Mr Yeo cited as an example the unease over the pace of change, which necessitated a trade-off between the influx of foreigners and economic growth. If the infrastructure is not ready, he said, the Government should get it ready first so that people do not feel the congestion or get the sense that they are being displaced.

181. “A handbag and a pack of wolves,” TR Emeritus, 31 March 2011, at <http://www.tremeritus.com/2011/03/31/a-handbag-and-a-pack-of-wolves/> (accessed 1 July 2012). “Online smearing of PAP candidate Tin Pei Ling is hypocritical and cowardly,” Sgpolitics.net, 30 March 2011, at <http://www.sgpolitics.net/?p=6488> (accessed 1 July 2012).

minute-by-minute reports from the hustings, as well as an interactive electoral map on the constituencies contested.¹⁸²

This was matched by citizen journalists who gravitated to websites such as The Online Citizen (TOC) and TRE to play a more conspicuous role. The websites moved into active newsgathering mode. TOC and TRE sent reporters to the media conferences (usually of the opposition parties) and party outreach activities, and trawled deep for content that would serve as useful background to put right what they believed to be a pattern of unbalanced coverage in mainstream media over the decades. On Nomination Day, anticipating that the coverage on mainstream media would focus on the incumbent People's Action Party (PAP), TOC's writers provided live streaming and put out newswashes, while its network of contributors fanned out across nomination centers and party headquarters to post short quick reports, photographs, videos and comments.

While they lacked the sophistication of the journalism and skills of mainstream media professionals, citizen journalists compensated by operating fearlessly as breaking news outfits. This was rewarded by a marked increase in visitors, which stretched the capacity of their servers to a point where traffic had to be directed to mirror sites owned by bloggers. During the campaign period, these contributors wrote reports, tweeted and produced video and audio content largely about the opposition and the challenges they posed to the PAP. Just days into the start of campaigning, TRE found it had more than 70,000 unique readers daily and declared that it was "in pole position to counter the propaganda of the mainstream media."¹⁸³

Citizen journalism websites also helped to raise the profile of opposition candidates, increase awareness and garner support for them. For example, the election's youngest candidate, 24-year-old Nicole Seah of the National Solidarity Party, has since chalked up an impressive 105,000 likes on her Facebook page.¹⁸⁴ This election novice campaigned against the PAP team led by the former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong. Despite losing to the elder statesman, she is active in serving residents in the constituency and uses her Facebook page to reach out to the public.

The use of social media has been warmly embraced by political parties on both ends of the spectrum. As of May 2013, the Workers' Party Facebook page had the most fans (68,000), surpassing the PAP's 39,000 and other opposition parties, the Singapore Democratic Party (13,000) and Reform Party (5,000). Even government ministers have their own accounts, the most notable of all being Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who joined Facebook relatively late in April 2012. Mr Lee's Facebook page attracted over 17,000 "Likes" within the first eight hours of its launch.¹⁸⁵ Staff help him to maintain the page, although he occasionally puts up his own posts, signing them off with his initials "LHL."

182. General Election 2011, Straits Times Online, at <http://www.straitstimes.com/GeneralElection/Home/Home.html> (accessed 1 July 2012).

183. Editorial, "Unfair and lop-sided coverage of opposition by mainstream media," TR Emeritus, 2 May 2011, at <http://www.tremeritus.com/2011/05/02/unfair-and-lop-sided-coverage-of-opposition-by-mainstream-media/> (accessed 1 July 2012). S.H. Leong, "S'poreans and PR job stats—making no sense," The Online Citizen, 21 May 2011, at <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/04/the-steve-tan-debacle-singaporeans-deserve-a-full-account/s> (accessed 1 July 2012).

184. Nicole Seah's Facebook page, at <http://www.facebook.com/nicoleseahnp> (accessed 1 July 2012).

185. "PM Lee starts Facebook page and it already has thousands of 'likes'," 21 April 2012. See <http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC120421-0000043/PM-Lee-starts-Facebook-page-and-it-already-has-thousands-of-likes> (accessed 25 June 2012).

Despite Singaporeans' love affair with Facebook (46.7 percent have an account) a demographically representative national survey of 2,000 respondents by the Institute of Policy Studies found that only 30 percent of the population used Facebook and/or political blogs for election information in the 2011 polls.¹⁸⁶ The rest either relied on mainstream media (about 60 percent) or did not use any media for their election information at all (7.8 percent). Not surprisingly, the 30 percent that did use Facebook tended to be younger, more educated and more affluent. Most were male. They were found to talk more with others, disagree more on politics and were more politically knowledgeable. Findings also showed that they were more politically active online (in online forums, for example) and offline (through dialogues, attending rallies and other events).

Researchers pointed out that over 95 percent of this politically active group of 30 percent were also mainstream media consumers. Taken together with the 60 percent who used only mainstream media for their election information, the figures demonstrate the high reliance placed by Singaporeans on their mainstream media. Furthermore, consumption of non-mainstream media content was found to be lower than consumption of mainstream media content. Consumption via online channels alone (even of mainstream content) was also lower than offline (e.g. print, radio and TV). However, researchers also noted the rising use of non-mainstream content over time. They found that for the 2011 election, 21.3 percent read blogs on election issues during the election. This was significantly higher than the 12.8 percent reading political blogs (e.g. TOC, TRE, Yawning Bread) in an earlier survey conducted in 2010 when there were no elections held.

4.5 Assessments

Digitization offers journalists speed, ease of access and new sources of stories. However, this puts additional pressure on the single reporter covering an event whose story will be repurposed where necessary and carried across a news organization's print, radio, TV, online and mobile platforms. While efficient, this model reduces the diversity of news angles for any one event—the consumer will receive a tweet or mobile news alert, read the online story, hear the radio news version and watch the video all written from the same reporter's perspective. There is also the danger that the same error will be carried across multiple platforms.

With almost every kind of organization now having an online presence, journalists have an easier time monitoring marginalized groups or entities they are investigating by checking up on their websites regularly, subscribing to their mailing lists or RSS feeds or following their social media updates. Special interest groups have come to realize this and also make it a point to keep their websites, blogs and social media pages updated and issue regular press releases to mainstream media. Notwithstanding copyright concerns, such groups sometimes also reproduce on their websites investigative pieces by the local media relevant to their interests. This gives added mileage to these stories, which would otherwise remain behind the news organization's paywall.¹⁸⁷

186. "Impact of New Media on General Election 2011," 4 October 2011. See http://www.spp.nus.edu.sg/ips/Conf_Impact_of_New_Media_on_GE_041011.aspx (accessed 9 December 2012).

187. Email interview with *Straits Times* correspondent, Singapore, 18 April 2011.

TR Emeritus' exposé early in 2012 of the opposition MP Yaw Shin Leong's extra-marital dalliances marked a quiet turning point in the importance of the role of citizen online media. The site, which had made its mark being stridently supportive of opposition politics, had to consider long and hard whether to break the story, and when it did, mainstream media were quick to publish the next day. The speed at which mainstream media came out with the story suggests that their reporters actually had the story but needed to find a way to break it, without being unfairly accused of being part of some larger conspiracy designed to make the opposition look bad.

The proliferation of political blogs has given ordinary citizens a choice of platforms to vent their grievances and frustrations. Political discussions online are often lively. Singaporeans like the sense of security in numbers when expressing their opinions and engaging in political debates in an online crowd amid relative anonymity. This kind of active engagement is seldom seen in the mass media because of the perceived double standard that holds views made on traditional, more "formal" media platforms to a higher level of accountability. This in turn leads to the tendency for citizens to keep silent and refrain from making political comments, at least on mass media platforms, over concerns that such action might be fruitless and considered controversial.¹⁸⁸ Indeed the Government's "light touch" approach towards much of the internet can be credited for the freewheeling nature of online content.

The fact that citizen journalists now cover opposition events such as rallies and blog openly about them has prompted the largely conservative mainstream media to increase their coverage of the opposition or risk losing credibility. No longer are a few mainstream media rivals competing with one another for speed and scoops; they also have hundreds of citizen journalists armed with HD camcorders and mobile phones to contend with. The AWARE EGM (see section 3.2) could be hailed as the first major event involving intense wall-to-wall social media coverage. There, citizen journalists outperformed mainstream news organizations in their use of social media platforms to provide the public with up-to-the-minute updates. Since then, mainstream outlets have improved and broadened their breaking news coverage, providing rolling updates on a variety of online and mobile platforms through the use of live blogs and social media such Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Still, if one asked whether the internet mattered in the 2011 polls, the researchers involved in the national survey concluded that it was not an "internet election."¹⁸⁹ While 30 percent of those surveyed said they used Facebook and/or political blogs for their election information, the study found that over 57 percent of those who said they voted had already made up their minds before the election was called. Researchers also found that non-mainstream media content had a lower influence on voting than mainstream. Interestingly, though, the survey showed a rise in political interest among the population. More respondents attended political rallies during election fortnight in 2011 (23.6 percent) than at the previous hustings in 2006 (16.9 percent). This might point to the soft aspects of the internet's impact—in enhancing citizens' engagement with the election process, providing them a sense of community and helping to nurture empowerment and action.

188. Hong Yah-Huei, Trisha T.C. Lin & Ang Peng Hwa, *Political Campaigning in Cyberspace: Innovation Resistance among Internet Users in Singapore*. Paper presented at the 19th AMIC Annual Meeting, Singapore, June 2010.

189. Y.N. Hoe, "GE not 'Internet election,' says survey," 4 October 2011. See <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1157136/1/.html> (accessed 25 June 2012).

5. Digital Media and Technology

5.1 Broadcasting Spectrum

5.1.1 Spectrum Allocation Policy

In Singapore's broadcast network operating system, the Infocomm Development Authority (IDA) is responsible for broadcasting spectrum, while the Media Development Authority (MDA) supervises and regulates broadcast technology standards, licensing, and content. There is only one terrestrial television company, MediaCorp,¹⁹⁰ while three companies, MediaCorp, SAFRA and SPH Unionworks serve the radio market.¹⁹¹ MediaCorp, which is owned by Temasek Holdings, a government-owned investment vehicle, runs seven television channels and 14 radio channels. SAFRA Radio, owned by the Singapore Armed Force Reservists Association, has two FM channels, while SPH UnionWorks, a joint venture of SPH Multimedia and NTUC Media, operates three radio channels.

As the chief information office of the Singapore Government, the IDA is responsible for overseeing the telecom industry and for planning aimed at developing Singapore into a dynamic global "info-comm hub." Appointed by the Minister of Communication and Information, its board of directors from both the private and public sectors is responsible for putting pro-consumer and pro-business policies and regulatory frameworks in place to ensure free and fair competition in the telecoms market so that consumers can gain access to a variety of products and services.

The MDA's board of directors, also appointed by the minister, is responsible for policies aimed at nurturing homegrown media enterprises and attracting foreign investment for economic growth, as well as issuing content codes and guidelines for media content providers.

190. Media Development Authority of Singapore, *Broadcast TV*, 2011, at <http://mda.gov.sg/Industry/TV/PoliciesLegislation/Pages/BroadcastTV.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012).

191. Media Development Authority of Singapore, *Free-to-Air Radio*, 2011, at <http://mda.gov.sg/Industry/Radio/PoliciesLegislation/Pages/FreetoAirRadio.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012).

Singapore employs “facilities-based competition,”¹⁹² in which operators are required to build their own facilities or transmission networks.¹⁹³ The owners of the transmission networks, such as the broadcasters and telcos, tend to have more spectrum resources for developing digital broadcasting services. However, the IDA reserves some frequencies for innovative services as it welcomes interest from new entrants.¹⁹⁴

The IDA has been Singapore’s regulator for spectrum allocation since it was founded in 1999.¹⁹⁵ In 2002 it released its “Spectrum Management Handbook” and a “National Numbering Plan” to provide more regulatory transparency and industry understanding on spectrum management and allocation. The handbook also served as the guideline for stakeholders and social actors to apply for frequency spectrum.¹⁹⁶

For radio spectrum management, the IDA draws up frequency allocation plans for various services (i.e. analog and digital broadcasting television and radio channels, mobile and wireless services, satellite services, etc.). It also co-coordinates frequency assignments at international (i.e. with ITU), regional (i.e. with Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union), and bilateral levels (i.e. with neighboring countries), monitors spectrum usage, and resolves radio interference.¹⁹⁷

Preparing for the advent of digital audio and video broadcast, the IDA has drawn up a *Radio Spectrum Master Plan*, which reallocates frequencies and bandwidth for analog and digital services. Table 16 shows the arrangement of spectrum usage as it was in November 2012. In addition to existing services, Singapore uses DVB-T (Digital Video Broadcasting over Terrestrial) for digital terrestrial television.

192. IDA Singapore, *Policies & Regulation Overview*, 28 December 2010, at <http://www.ida.gov.sg/Policies%20and%20Regulation/20060416174257.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012).

193. M. Bourreau & P. Dogan, “Service-based vs. Facility-based Competition in Local Access Networks,” *Information Economics and Policy*, 2004, 16(2), 287–306.

194. IDA Singapore, “Decision and Explanatory Memorandum Issued by Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore on the Allocation of an Additional 2 X 5 MHz of 1800 MHz Spectrum,” 31 January 2011 (hereafter, IDA Singapore, Decision and Explanatory Memorandum).

195. IDA Singapore, *History*, 12 August 2010, at <http://www.ida.gov.sg/About%20Us/20060413182921.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012).

196. IDA Singapore, *Handbooks Released for Greater Regulatory Transparency in the Nation’s Spectrum Management and Numbering Plan*, 15 May 2002, at <http://www.ida.gov.sg/News%20and%20Events/20061115151759.aspx?getPagetype=20> (accessed 1 July 2012).

197. IDA Singapore, *Radio Spectrum Master Plan*, April 2012.

Table 16.
Broadcasting Services Spectrum

Service	Band (MHz)	Bandwidth	Status
MW (Medium Wave)	0.5265–1.6065	10 kHz	Not assigned
SW (Short Wave)	5.95–21.85	10 kHz	Usage subject to coordination by ABU
FM (Frequency Modulation)	88–108	180 or 300 kHz	Mostly assigned
TV (Television)	174–230 494–790	7 MHz 8 MHz	Fully assigned Mostly assigned
DAB (Digital Audio Broadcasting)	174–230 1452–1492	1.536 MHz 1.536 MHz	Not assigned Not assigned
DVB (Digital Video Broadcasting)	494–790	8 MHz	Mostly assigned
DBS (Digital Broadcasting Satellite)	11,700–12,200	27 MHz	Not assigned

Source: IDA, 2012¹⁹⁸

Singapore's broadcasting service spectrum allocation is directed by the IDA with what it maintains is consideration of public interests and fair competition, rather than market competition and self-interested lobbying. Singapore's telecommunication industry, including its broadcasting market, is meticulously designed to give responsibility and control exclusively to state institutions and companies with direct and indirect state ownership structures, even in the case of companies listed on the stock exchange. In the Code of Practice for Competition 2010,¹⁹⁹ the IDA maintains that industry competition and self-regulation are effective in providing competitive telecom markets and innovative services. However, it will get involved when necessary to ensure what it maintains should be fairness, accessibility and diversity. Because of the structures of ownership and control, such diversity does not encompass content or views that challenge the fundamental ideological principles of the ruling PAP.

5.1.2 Transparency

According to its *Radio Spectrum Master Plan* of April 2012, the IDA has two schemes governing the spectrum allocation charges: a cost-based charging mechanism and market-based charging (via auction).²⁰⁰ If there is no or little competition, the cost-based charging mechanism is applied to cover administration costs in spectrum management, including frequency coordination, interference investigations, and frequency database management.

However, when there is competition for the limited radio spectrum, the IDA will employ a market-based charging mechanism to hold an open auction to settle frequency allocation. For instance, the IDA issued six Wireless Broadband Access (WBA) spectrum rights in May 2005 through auction because demand was greater than the available 25 lots (140 MHz) available for allocation.²⁰¹ In the most recent allocation exercise

198. IDA Singapore, *Radio Spectrum Master Plan*, April 2012.

199. IDA Singapore, *Code of Practice for Competition in The Provision of Telecommunication Services 2010*, 2010.

200. IDA Singapore, *Radio Spectrum Master Plan*, April 2012.

201. IDA Singapore, "IDA Issues Six Wireless Broadband Access Spectrum Rights," 24 May 2005, at <https://www.ida.gov.sg/About-Us/Newsroom/Media-Releases/2005/20050710112043> (accessed 1 July 2012).

for 4G spectrum in the 1800MHz and 2.5 GHz bands, no auction was held as the total spectrum demanded by bidders did not exceed the amount on offer. All three bidders—M1, Singtel, and StarHub—were awarded the spectrum applied for at the IDA reserve prices they had bid for.²⁰²

To be eligible to take part in an auction, bidders have to satisfy a number of criteria relating to financial capability, operating experience and technical expertise. In Singapore's 10.5 GHz spectrum auction in 2007, participation was restricted to holders of Facilities-Based Operator (FBO) Licenses and to the Singapore Armed Forces, the Singapore Police Force, and the Civil Defense Force.²⁰³ The criteria for obtaining an FBO License entailed evidence of the applicant's financial capability, technical competence, and the soundness of technical plans. Similarly, the bidders for the Public Cellular Mobile Telephone Services (PCMTS) auction in February 2008 had to either hold existing PCMTS licenses or an FBO license.²⁰⁴

Out of the 2005 auction, the 2.3 Ghz spectrum was assigned to QMAX while the 2.5 Ghz spectrum was assigned to SingTel, StarHub, M1, and PacketOne.²⁰⁵ Stemming from this and to cater for the influx of 4G enabled devices increasing the demand for 4G services, M1 was the first to introduce full nationwide 4G services in September 2012.²⁰⁶ Though Singtel and Starhub rolled out their 4G services in 2012, their services were largely limited to business areas of Singapore. Singtel announced full coverage in April 2013 while StarHub expects to do so by late 2013.²⁰⁷

In April 2012, the IDA released its proposed framework for the reallocation of spectrum for 4G telecommunications systems and services, as a prelude to another spectrum rights auction.²⁰⁸ This is part of its standard practice to invite industry and public feedback on its proposed regulatory frameworks or spectrum allocation plans. For example, before the IDA made a decision in 2010/11 on the allocation of spectrum in the 1800 MHz frequency band, it posted a public consultation paper for 26 days. After considering three public responses, the IDA announced the decision to allocate an additional one 2 x 5 MHz paired lot spectrum for the PCMTS.²⁰⁹

202. IDA Singapore, "4G Spectrum Allocated to Three Bidders," 28 June 2013, at <https://www.ida.gov.sg/About-Us/Newsroom/Media-Releases/2013/4G-Spectrum-Allocated-to-Three-Bidders> (accessed 29 June 2013).

203. ICT regulation toolkit, *Pre-Qualification Criteria*, 1 March 2011, at <http://www.ictregulationtoolkit.org/en/Section.597.html> (accessed 1 July 2012).

204. IDA Singapore, *PCMTS spectrum rights auction*, 25 February 2008, at <http://www.ida.gov.sg/Policies%20and%20Regulation/20080118172443.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012).

205. IDA, *Consultation Paper Issued by the Info-Communications Development Authority of Singapore: Proposed Framework for the Reallocation of Spectrum for Fourth Generation ("4G") Telecommunication Systems and Services*, April 2012, at http://www.ida.gov.sg/-/media/Files/PCDG/Consultations/20120410_4Gtelecomm/publicconsult_4Gspectrum.pdf (accessed 1 July 2012).

206. E. Yu, "Singapore's M1 to roll out nationwide LTE service," *Zdnet Asia*, September 2012, at <http://www.zdnet.com.sg/singapores-m1-to-roll-out-nationwide-lte-service-7000003815/> (accessed 14 November 2012).

207. I. Tham, "StarHub 4G network coverage to hit 95% by October," 14 June 2013, at <http://www.straitstimes.com/breaking-news/singapore/story/starhub-4g-network-coverage-hit-95-october-20130614> (accessed 29 June 2013).

208. Eight responses were received from industry players, see the IDA's decision at <http://www.ida.gov.sg/Policies-and-Regulations/Consultation-Papers-and-Decisions/Completed.aspx> (accessed 1 January 2013).

209. IDA Singapore, "Decision and explanatory memorandum issued by Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore on the allocation of an additional 2 X 5 Mhz Of 1800 Mhz spectrum," 31 January 2011, at http://www.ida.gov.sg/doc/Policies%20and%20Regulation/Policies_and_Regulation_Level2/20080522114233/ExpMemo1800MHzAuction2011.pdf (accessed 1 July 2012).

The approach generally adopted by the regulators has been to maintain a dialog with the public and industry players to ensure that the eventual decisions and laws will serve society's interests, as well as being commercially viable. In its *Radio Spectrum Master Plan*, the IDA states:

As technology evolves and new services are introduced, additional spectrum bands may be identified and existing ones re-farmed. In achieving an effective spectrum master plan, IDA welcomes industry's feedback on spectrum allocation and usage in Singapore and where necessary, will update its spectrum plan periodically to take into account the latest market trends and technology developments.²¹⁰

While it is in the interest of industry players to respect the various laws and master plans in telecommunication and media, which are mostly aligned with their business interests, the system is designed to let industry players and the public comment on online policy consultation papers, in order to avoid conflicts and abuse of gatekeeping powers.

5.1.3 Competition for Spectrum

The Singapore government, together with the other nine member countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), plans to switch fully to digital broadcasting between 2015 and 2020. By then, analog broadcasting will be phased out. Singapore's government must facilitate the industry's smooth transformation to digitization and prepare the public for the digital migration.²¹¹

The extra spectrum that will be released as a result of the migration will be made available to provide new business opportunities for wireless, mobile, or new audiovisual services. In its *Radio Spectrum Master Plan*, IDA has mentioned some potential uses of the digital dividend, including the International Mobile Telecommunication–Advanced (IMT-Advanced) (a global mobile platform which provides access to a wide range of telecommunication services and supports high quality multimedia applications),²¹² Public Protection Disaster Recovery (PPDR) and White Space Devices (WSD). To make the plans feasible, the IDA has started working with neighboring countries to re-plan the spectrum allocation in UHF and VHF bands to introduce digital terrestrial broadcasting and new wireless/mobile services.²¹³

210. IDA Singapore, "Decision and explanatory memorandum issued by Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore on the allocation of an additional 2 X 5 Mhz Of 1800 Mhz spectrum," 31 January 2011, at http://www.ida.gov.sg/doc/Policies%20and%20Regulation/Policies_and_Regulation_Level2/20080522114233/ExpMemo1800MHzAuction2011.pdf (accessed 1 July 2012).

211. Media Development Authority of Singapore, *Introduction to digital TV*, 2011, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Public/DigitalTV/Pages/Introduction-DigitalTV.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012).

212. International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "ITU global standard for international mobile telecommunications 'IMT-Advanced'" (n.d.), at <http://www.itu.int/ITU-R/information/promotion/e-flash/2/article4.html> (accessed 1 January 2013).

213. IDA Singapore, *Radio Spectrum Master Plan*, April 2012.

5.2 Digital Gatekeeping

5.2.1 Technical Standards

Both the IDA and MDA emphasize that their goal is to foster a pro-innovation and pro-consumer telecom industry which channels business interests to coincide with national goals and the public interest in ICT development. In 2006, Singapore announced the Intelligent Nation 2015 (iN2015) masterplan, a 10-year framework to transform the country into an “Intelligent Nation” powered by Infocomm.²¹⁴ With it, the Singapore government encouraged the industry players to conduct market trials to test technological standards, market responses, and experimental content. Then it announced public consultation papers regarding significant telecommunication or broadcasting policy decisions (e.g. spectrum allocation, digital television, and mobile broadcasting television) in order to get feedback.

In its policy overviews, the MDA highlights the mission to create a conducive environment for media businesses and introduce innovative services to foster industry growth and safeguard the public interest.²¹⁵ The MDA plays a crucial role in making policies, supervising new media service trials, such as digital television, HDTV, and mobile broadcasting television, as well as facilitating the adoption of commercially viable media technologies. There have been few debates in public or in the media about the adoption of technical standards for platforms that carry news or for media reception and consumption.

As early as 1998, Singapore started the process of deciding on its digital broadcasting standard by having trials to evaluate ATSC (Advanced Television Systems Committee), DVB-T, and the Japanese DiBEG (Digital Broadcasting Experts Group). In addition to superior reception on the move and flexibility for media content, DVB-T outperforms other standards in terms of coexistence with analog television. These factors favored the choice of DVB-T as the digital terrestrial television (DTT) standard with little controversy.²¹⁶ In June 2004, Singapore was the first country in Asia to demonstrate live DVB-H mobile television.²¹⁷

During 2007 and 2008, Singapore had two trials of DVB-H mobile broadcasting television: one launched by the three telecoms companies and MediaCorp and the other led by Singapore Digital, a new entrant which started the trial TV2GO mobile television service.²¹⁸ Holding a technology-neutral approach, the MDA believed the industry players would find the best matched technological standards. Industry players revealed that DVB-H used by the two trials was the most likely to be adopted.²¹⁹ However, in the consultation response

214. iN.SG. (2010 June 16). *iN2015 Part 1: On course for Intelligent Nation 2015*, at <http://www.ida.gov.sg/insg/post/iN2015-Part-1-On-course-for-Intelligent-Nation-2015.aspx> (accessed 14 November 2012).

215. Media Development Authority of Singapore, *Policies Overview*, 2011, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Policies/Pages/Overview.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012).

216. M. Jacklin and P. MacAvock, *Facts about DVB-T*, DVB Project Office, Geneva, December 1998.

217. *Live Demo of Mobile Phone TV over DVB-H*, 15 June 2004, at <http://www.3g.co.uk/PR/June2004/7898.htm> (accessed 1 July 2012).

218. “Mobile TV Trial Comes to an End in Singapore,” Cellular-news, November 2008, at <http://www.cellular-news.com/story/34852.php1> (accessed 4 November 2012).

219. T.T.C. Lin & Y. L. Liu, “The development of mobile broadcasting TV: A socio-technical comparison of Singapore and Taiwan,” *Asia Journal of Communication.*, 2011, 21(1), 4–24.

report issued in April 2011, the MDA indicated it would not mandate a standard for mobile television as there was no consensus on global standards at present. Besides, the MDA would continue to monitor global trends on mobile TV standards while enabling commercial entities to innovate and differentiate their services.²²⁰ In June 2010, the MDA initiated a year-long 3D television trial with MediaCorp, Starhub Cable Vision and Singtel. The trial aims to test transmission signals over different platforms and address possible technical challenges.²²¹ After a year, MICA Minister Dr Yaacob Ibrahim announced that the trial had been successful in transmitting 3D content to Singapore homes.²²²

The Government endorsed various television trials to evaluate technical standards and customer taste, as well as foster R&D in interactive digital media. There are few misalignments between the interests of the authorities and the monopolistic broadcaster and oligopolistic telcos that are part of the carefully-planned telecommunications system.

5.2.2 Gatekeepers

As the national broadcaster and sole free-to-air TV operator, MediaCorp holds most of the broadcasting spectrum allocated by the IDA. It is the default partner for the MDA to experiment and implement cutting-edge broadcasting technologies. In this sense, MediaCorp can be regarded as the digital gatekeeper of Singapore. As a terrestrial television provider, it must allow Singapore's audiences to have free access to all its content. This role gives MediaCorp power over deciding the audiovisual content on its platform. The four-language newscasts and Channel NewsAsia are all produced in-house. So there are no commercial or other separate interests between the digital gatekeeper, broadcaster, and content producers because they are all part of the state-monopoly structure set up to avoid conflict. However, while monopolies tend to make conflicts less likely, the price is limited diversity.

In 2003, the MDA introduced a "Code of Practice for Market Conduct in the Provision of Media Services" (the "Media Market Code") to promote what it described as fair market conduct and effective competition in the print and broadcast sectors while ensuring a range of quality media services and encouraging industry self-regulation. Following its first triennial review in 2010 and 15 months of industry consultation, the Code was amended to require pay TV operators to offer exclusive content to subscribers of other qualified pay TV retailers.²²³ This cross-carriage measure is limited to pay TV content delivered via hybrid fiber-coaxial, optical fiber or ADSL and such content delivered over internet and mobile platforms.

220. Media Development Authority, *Policy and Regulatory Framework for Mobile Broadcasting Services in Singapore: Consultation Response*, 11 April 2011, at http://www.mda.gov.sg/Reports/ConsultationReports/Documents/Mobile_TV_Consultation_Response.pdf (accessed 14 November 2012).

221. P. Wong, "Singapore kicks off year-long 3D TV trial," CNET Asia, 15 June 2010, at <http://asia.cnet.com/crave/2010/06/15/singapore-kicks-off-year-long-3d-tv-trial> (accessed 1 July 2012); Media Development Authority of Singapore, "Singapore gears up for the Future of Media," 15 June 2010, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2010/Pages/15062010.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012).

222. Speech by Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA), 21 June 2011, at <http://www.ida.gov.sg/News%20and%20Events/20110621143654.aspx?getPagetype=21> (accessed 5 June 2012).

5.2.3 Transmission Networks

The structure of Singapore's entire telecommunication system, from regulators to transmission network administrators, is designed to achieve the outcomes that the Government perceives to be in the city-state's public, commercial, and national interests, and also—by the same token—to avoid what it explicitly perceives to be malicious competition, sedition, and potential societal upheavals.

Since the Government exercises tight control over broadcast licensing, and state-owned companies and media have exclusive control over the infrastructure and the content, there are no alternative players. It follows that no *additional* intervention is needed to achieve the allocation of spectrum which the state considers right and necessary to achieve those goals.

5.3 Telecommunications

5.3.1 Telecoms and News

With its system of strict content and licensing regulation, Singapore has a controlled competitive telecommunication industry, which has a few industry players involved in audiovisual content production, aggregation, or distribution. In addition to the monopoly broadcaster MediaCorp, other players include SPH, SAFRA, Starhub Cable Vision (SCV), and telecommunications companies' IPTV services (Singtel's mio TV and M1's 1Box). MediaCorp, SPH, and SAFRA are the only companies that create original local content and news. The rest use their platforms to distribute aggregated foreign TV channels and interactive services.

Since 1995, SCV was the only paid television operator until Singtel's mio TV launched its subscription-based IPTV service in 2007. SCV serves more than 1.9 million mobile subscribers and nearly half a million pay-TV households, while mio TV has more than 400,000 subscribers and carries a total of 62 channels, including 19 on-demand channels, and HD content.²²⁴ The content lineup of SCV and mio TV include local news from free-to-air channels and international news channels. In May 2008, to expand mio TV's user base, SingTel started to offer mio TV on mobile.

The 2010 Youth Olympics was an important occasion for Singapore's television and telecom operators. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) selected MediaCorp, SingTel and SCV as the official broadcasters for the Youth Games within Singapore. While MediaCorp was granted the exclusive rights for the 2010 Youth Olympics on free-to-air television and radio within Singapore, SingTel won the exclusive broadcast

223. Media Development Authority of Singapore, *Code of Practice for Market Conduct in the Provision of Media Services 2010*, 12 March 2010, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Documents/PDF/Closing%20Note.pdf> (accessed 1 July 2012).

224. Casbaa, "Granada TV to launch on SingTel mio TV," 16 July 2009, at <http://www.casbaa.com/media-and-resources/news-center/members-news/1031-granada-tv-to-launch-on-singtel-mio-tv> (accessed 1 July 2012).

rights for Youth Olympic New Channel on the mobile platform within Singapore and in neighborhood countries, including India, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand via regional mobile associates.²²⁵

SingTel also worked with the Olympic Broadcasting Services (OBS) to develop an internet broadcasting solution. SCV, on the other hand, was granted the exclusive broadcast rights for the live feeds on pay cable television and mobile phone platforms in Singapore, as well as the exclusive broadcast rights for the Youth Olympic News Channel on its free Preview Channel (Channel 1).²²⁶ All three organizations acquired the non-exclusive right to broadcast the Youth Games online (live and on-demand) within Singapore.

In December 2010, mio TV added four sports channels to its line-up to attract sport fans.²²⁷ In contrast, with over 1.9 million mobile subscribers, SCV deployed SeaChange International's Intelligent Video Platform in support of its mobile television service in June 2010.²²⁸ SCV's TV on Mobile offers both pre-paid and post-paid mobile phone users 24 premium pay channels (e.g. CNN and BBC), live streaming and VOD services.

According to MICA's then acting minister Lui Tuck Yew,²²⁹ the competition between SCV and mio TV has resulted in widespread use of exclusive carriage agreements (ECAs) between channel providers and pay-TV operators. The MDA's study in 2009 revealed that the ECA-centric competition in Singapore has negatively affected industry and consumers due to the significantly increasing exclusive pay-TV content costs and a high degree of content fragmentation. SCV's content costs-to-revenue ratio had risen 30 percent and only seven out of 179 channels were common to both SCV and mio TV. MDA later regulated SCV and SingTel to cross-carry each other's content which was acquired exclusively on or after 12 March 2010. After this, consumers no longer required new STBs when they switch to a new pay-TV service provider.

According to the MDA's cable television and IPTV regulation, both SCV and mio TV must carry free-to-air (FTA) television programming, which includes MediaCorp's four language newscasts in four television channels and the 24/7 news channel CNA. Besides, on both internet and mobile platforms, SCV, and mio TV distribute local free-to-air news content and include some noted international news channels, such as CNN, BBC, CCTV, and TVBS. Moreover, after MDA awarded SPH a niche web television license in 2008, the print giant launched Razor TV, which produces free local and sensational audiovisual content to appeal to young internet users. As a niche web television service, Razor TV is not subject to must-carry rules that major broadcasters must comply with.

225. "Singtel awarded mobile and internet broadcast rights for Youth Olympics Games," SingTel, 13 November 2009, at <http://info.singtel.com/node/6598> (accessed 1 July 2012).

226. "StarHub To Offer Immersive Coverage Of Youth Olympic Games," Starhub, 18 June 2010, at http://www.starhub.com/corporate/newsroom/2010/06/starhub_to_offerimmersivecoverageofyoutholympicgames.html (accessed 1 July 2012).

227. R. Major, "MioTV expands sports broadcasts in Singapore," *RapidTVnews*, 8 December 2010, at <http://www.rapidtvnews.com/index.php/201012089247/miotv-expands-sports-broadcasts-in-singapore.html> (accessed 1 July 2012).

228. "StarHub Offers Mobile Television Service with SeaChange Multi-Screen Video Solution," *BusinessWire*, 16 June 2010, at <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20100614007171/en/StarHub-Offers-Mobile-Television-Service-SeaChange-Multi-Screen> (accessed 1 July 2012).

229. "Acting Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts Lui Tuck Yew Speaks at Committee of Supply Debate on Driving Innovation, Productivity and Competition for a Vibrant Economy," Singapore Government News, 12 March 2010.

In Singapore, pay-TV and telecom operators that obey must-carry rules for FTA channels neither favor nor disadvantage any news content in particular. Due to the must-carry requirement, MediaCorp's news programs can be watched not only on its own television channels and platforms, but also over cable television, web television, and mobile phones. In comparison, SPH's news content can only be read in its own newspapers, websites, or text messages, while its RazorTV service is carried only on its own site. In Singapore, the MDA is the ultimate arbiter for any content shown on mass media, pay-TV, IPTV, and mobile video services.

5.3.2 Pressure of Telecoms on News Providers

The ultimate owner and arbiter of both telecoms companies and news providers is really the state, and there is as such a common purpose (if not entirely shared commercial incentives) in what they do and how they are governed. It would therefore be deemed neither appropriate nor necessary for companies to restrict access or discriminate via fees or use any other form of pressure in order to achieve a particular commercial or possibly even political outcome.

5.4 Assessments

The IDA's publicized spectrum allocation plan has taken into account various types of services, namely mobile, which includes wireless broadband services, fixed services, satellite services, broadcasting services, and short range services.²³⁰ The IDA continues to hold open auctions to settle the competition of frequency allocation. The purpose of reallocating frequencies, the number of spectrum lots and qualifications for bidders were elaborated in details and publicized via various channels, including the internet. During the process, the Government has also sought public and industry feedback for making any decision in spectrum allocation.

Both the IDA and MDA have a standardized procedure for announcing the proposed regulatory framework or spectrum allocation plan for public consultation. The Government is also putting in place initiatives it believes will optimize the digital dividend usage. For example, to prepare for the impending 4G wireless spectrum, the IDA announced the plan in early January, 2011.²³¹ Meanwhile, between 2015 and 2020, Singapore is expected to switch to full digital broadcasting so that spare frequencies can be released and reallocated for other purposes. The regulators say they are committed to study the technical constraints of various technologies to decide the most beneficial technological arrangements (e.g. spectrum allocation).

Interestingly, while "public interest" is mentioned frequently in Singapore's telecom and media laws, and in policy documents, there is no specific definition of what the term means. Both the IDA's and MDA's websites clearly emphasize the importance of information and media for economic growth and social well-being. The MDA's Media Market Code is one of several which specify the media's "public interest" obligations. It

230. IDA Singapore, *Radio Spectrum Master Plan*, April 2008.

231. IDA Singapore, *Spectrum Framework for Fourth Generation (4g) Mobile Communication Systems in Singapore*, 24 January 2011, at http://www.ida.gov.sg/doc/Policies%20and%20Regulation/Policies_and_Regulation_Level2/20100329151251/4G_Interim_Position.pdf (accessed 5 June 2012).

mandates the cross carriage of exclusive content for FTA and radio licensees and paid TV service providers to avoid malicious exclusive programming competition and fragmented media content.

Singapore wants to be Asia's media hub. To this end, the IDA and MDA plan in the next five years to oversee delivery of digital broadcasting, HDTV, mobile television, and 3DTV. Even though Singapore's telecommunications industry is more controlled and less competitive than most countries, the Government maintains that it has ensured the implementation of appropriate spectrum regulation by studying other countries' experiences and listening to both local industry and the public and through an auction system that has kept the spectrum allocation process transparent and fair.

While these are considerable achievements, Singapore's media and telecoms industry remains a family affair. At the head of that family is the ruling PAP with its paternalistic idea of what Singapore is and what Singaporeans should be allowed to say and do (and what foreign sojourners are permitted to say about them). The rest of the family is made up of the monopoly broadcaster and three private sector telecoms companies with substantial state investment, which compete fiercely on a commercial terrain but follow the family's interests in all other respects. Regulation is therefore of, for, and by the state.

6. Digital Business

6.1 Ownership

6.1.1 Legal Developments in Media Ownership

In 2000, the Singapore government embarked on a hugely expensive attempt at media liberalization in which the country's media giants were given licenses to operate on each other's turf.²³² In the ensuing four-year experiment SPH, the stock exchange listed publishing company, lost more than S\$40 million a year (US\$23 million) in television operations, while MediaCorp's *Today* newspaper racked up estimated start-up costs of S\$22.2 million (US\$12.5 million) in its first 11 months,²³³ and bled S\$9.6 million (US\$5 million) in the fiscal year 2004 alone.²³⁴

The hemorrhaging led both sides to enter into a marriage of convenience with the blessing of regulators after four years of deregulation to stem losses and return them to the profitability each was accustomed to in the merry days of being monopolies. SPH's two television channels were merged with three MediaCorp channels to form a new company called MediaCorp TV Holdings, in which SPH received a 20 percent stake for S\$10 million (US\$8 million). Its freesheet, *Streets*, was folded into the *Today* newspaper's publisher, MediaCorp Press, in which SPH took a 40 percent stake for S\$19.6 million (US\$16 million).²³⁵

Since that bitter experience, there have been no similar seismic shifts in local news media ownership, with players largely confining themselves to new businesses within their respective organizations or through tie-ups with other partners. In 2010, MediaCorp formed a strategic partnership with Microsoft to create the popular online portal xinmsn.com, featuring entertainment, sports and lifestyle content produced by MSN Singapore and MediaCorp's radio and television units. SPH attempted to enter the search engine space with its own Rednano offering in a 2008 joint venture with the Norwegian media group Schibsted ASA. However,

232. C. Ong, "Broadcast licences for SPH, newspaper licence for MediaCorp," *Business Times (Singapore)*, 6 June 2000.

233. "Today drags down profits," *Straits Times*, 26 October 2001.

234. M.H. Chua, "Media rivals strike deal to curb losses; After four years of media liberalisation, SPH and MediaCorp come together to stem bleeding in TV, free newspaper ops," *Straits Times*, 18 September 2004.

235. MediaCorp & Singapore Press Holdings, "MediaCorp and Singapore Press Holdings to merge their free newspaper and TV operations," 17 September 2004. See <http://www.sph.com.sg/article.display.php?id=121> (accessed 24 April 2011).

Rednano ceased operations in 2011 following a group-wide review of SPH's online portfolio. The bulk of its Singapore directory listings were moved to SPH's online classified portal, ST701.

In 2007, the MDA introduced a technology-neutral licensing framework to enable the introduction of new media services such as internet protocol television (IPTV).²³⁶ The two-tier framework²³⁷ makes a distinction between service providers targeting specific niche market segments (e.g. RazorTV) and nationwide or mass market service providers (e.g. local telecommunications giant Singtel's mioTV service). The ownership restrictions that govern maximum shareholding and shareholder nationality under the Broadcasting Act²³⁸ apply to nationwide licensees, which, by definition, have over 100,000 subscribers, but not to niche licensees which do not exceed this threshold.

6.1.2 New Entrants in the News Market

Recent new additions to the local English-language news market are at polar opposites on the ownership spectrum. SPH launched the English-Chinese news and interactive web portal omy.sg in 2007, followed by RazorTV and the weekly Indian diaspora tabloid newspaper *Tabla!*, both in 2008. In 2010, MediaCorp inked a deal with Microsoft to launch xinmsn.com to tap the combined nearly 3 million visitors MSN Singapore and MediaCorp's online properties attract each month. Besides free video-on-demand, integrated access to Messenger and Hotmail and community discussion boards, the site also offers audio streaming of MediaCorp's news and lifestyle radio stations, celebrity gossip, entertainment and sports news.²³⁹

Following MediaCorp's tie-up with Yahoo!'s arch-rival, Microsoft, Yahoo! News Singapore moved to beef up its newsgathering resources in the city-state. A small but very pro-active team of young reporters fans out to cover major events and also initiate their own stories, which are sometimes picked up by local mainstream media.

In contrast to these latest efforts by local media giants, there has also been a mushrooming of socio-political blogs since the 2006 elections (see section 4.4). These are small-time outfits run by volunteers which have garnered such a following that their fans have come to regard them as alternative sources of news to mainstream media. The Online Citizen (TOC) now has "senior" status among local socio-political blogs.

Its co-founder, the self-employed businessman Andrew Loh, decided to start it in 2006 after he timed a local television news bulletin and found 28 minutes of it devoted to coverage of the ruling People's Action Party and only two minutes to the opposition.²⁴⁰ Loh's co-founder, Choo Zheng Xi, was then a law student. Choo

236. Media Development Authority, "Broadcast TV Licence," no date given. See <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Licences/Pages/IPTVLicences.aspx> (accessed 24 April 2011).

237. Media Development Authority, "Key Conditions for Niche and Nationwide TV Licences," no date given. See <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Licences/Pages/NicheandNationwideTVLicence.aspx> (accessed 24 April 2011).

238. Broadcasting Act (Cap 50, 2003 Rev Ed), Singapore Statutes.

239. MediaCorp & Microsoft, "Microsoft and MediaCorp enter strategic partnership to create new online portal," 23 February 2010. See <http://www.mediacorp.sg/en/media/EDC101020-0000272/microsoft%20and%20mediacorp%20enter%20strategic%20partnership%20to%20create%20new%20online%20portal> (accessed 24 April 2011).

240. J. Au Yong, "Won't play HIDE & SPEAK; There's no hiding behind cloaks of anonymity at Singapore's best-read socio-political blog," *Straits Times*, 3 October 2008.

was also a former legislative assistant to a PAP member of parliament and, at 15 years old, the youngest Singaporean to speak at the country's Speakers Corner in 2000. Helped by about 40 volunteers, the site started earning its first revenues only in 2008 when two checks for about S\$540 (US\$ 439) arrived from Google Ads—barely enough to cover TOC's web hosting costs.

Another notable player is TR Emeritus, which started out as Wayang Party in 2004. It was later renamed Temasek Review in 2009 but subsequently came under pressure²⁴¹ from the state investment company Temasek Holdings for bearing the same name as the holding company's annual report, which had been so named since 2004. The site then became Temasek Review Emeritus (TRE) in May 2011 shortly after the general election and then suddenly went offline three months later. The lack of funding appeared to be the main cause, coupled with a difficulty in attracting contributors, some of whom were afraid of being associated with TR's distinctively hard-hitting and pro-opposition stance.²⁴² In December 2011, the site re-emerged with a shortened name, TR Emeritus (www.tremeritus.com), with the tagline, "The Voice of Singaporeans for Singapore." It relies on advertising and the work of volunteers. After years of anonymity and claims that its editors are based overseas, only one editor, Richard Wan, has openly stepped forward to reveal his identity, to break away from the "old" Temasek Review website and instill "responsibility" into its operations.²⁴³

A recent entrant in the socio-political blogosphere is the Temasek Times, set up by freelance bloggers, some of whom are moderators and contributors of the popular Hardware Zone forum or former readers of the old Temasek Review. They say they are not linked to any political parties or blogs. The site, which began in February 2012, touts news and views from a "unique and interesting perspective," with a focus on "sexy" issues, rather than run-of-the-mill stuff. The group has revealed plans to build two entirely new sites in future, using its current Wordpress-powered blog as a prototype²⁴⁴ and plans to pay writers on a fee-for-assignment basis.

6.1.3 Ownership Consolidation

In 2009, MediaCorp embarked on an ambitious but short-lived attempt to reorganize its journalists across its various platforms and business units under a single division called the NewsHub to produce local news for television, radio, print, and online media, including CNA, *Today* newspaper, 938Live radio station and websites. This marked a significant shift in newsgathering and editorial operations. For more than two years,

241. R. Chang, "Temasek asks anti-Govt website to change name; Company sends letter to doctor linked to Temasek Review site," *Straits Times*, 16 October 2010.

242. M. Han, "A short statement on the Temasek Review's planned closure," Temasek Review, 7 April 2011. See <http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/04/07/a-short-statement-on-the-temasek-reviews-planned-closure/> (accessed 24 April 2011); J.Y. Ng, "Temasek Review to shut down, says website editor," *Today*, 8 April 2011. See <http://www.todayonline.com/SingaporeVotes/EDC110408-0000391/Temasek-Review-to-shut-down,-says-website-editor> (accessed 24 April 2011); A. Wong, "Temasek Review Emeritus to continue operations," Yahoo News Singapore, 2 August 2011, at <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/blogs/singaporescene/temasek-review-emeritus-continue-operations-052414441.html> (accessed 4 April 2012); L. Tan, "Temasek Review website down," *Straits Times*, 28 September 2011, at <http://www.tnp.sg/content/temasek-review-website-suspended> (accessed 24 April 2012).

243. A. Wong, "Now that I am out, I have to face the music," *Today*, 25 February 2011. See <http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC120225-0000060/Now-that-I-am-out,-I-have-to-face-the-music> (accessed 4 April 2012).

244. "Temasek Times' readership is now more than twice that of The Online Citizen," Temasek Times, 3 March 2012. See <http://temasektimes.wordpress.com/2012/03/03/temasek-times-readership-is-now-more-than-twice-that-of-the-online-citizen/> (accessed 4 April 2012).

editors were clustered together to coordinate news assignments and story coverage, while reporters were pooled to work across at least two media to learn new skills.²⁴⁵ Stories covered by any NewsHub reporter were pushed out as soon as possible for web and SMS and repurposed for multiple platforms. While this resulted in each story being made available on more platforms, it also meant that a story would only be covered from one angle, instead of possibly two or three, when each platform would previously have sent its own reporter.

The benefits from economies of scale and greater synergy across platforms were not enough to sustain the attempt at convergence. The individual platforms still preferred to have their own reporters under direct charge. Since 2012, most of the reporters have returned to their respective platforms' newsrooms. Not all has been lost, however. The upside of this experiment has been greater teamwork between platforms and sharing of content.

Going beyond local news, MediaCorp's partnership with Microsoft to form xinmsn (see above) is not a merger but a strategic tie-up that aims to take advantage of the growing market for online content and advertising. It has also created new production jobs especially in the areas of entertainment and lifestyle news, widening the range of content offerings by the broadcaster. Radio news has also benefited from the increased exposure afforded by being streamed on xinmsn.²⁴⁶ Xinmsn, which plays on the name "Sin" as in "Singapore" and the Chinese word "xin" which means "new," catapulted to being the country's top video site, surpassing RazorTV and Yahoo Singapore, within three months of its launch.²⁴⁷

The xinmsn deal, however, does not include Channelnewsasia.com and Todayonline.com, which continue to exist as separate online news properties within the MediaCorp stable, maintaining a level of diversity in its news offerings for users as well as advertisers. Over the years, MediaCorp's sales teams have become more responsive to their clients' needs and their enthusiasm sometimes spills over to the newsroom where they try to assist their clients in attracting editorial interest. They do so while still recognizing that the ultimate decision on whether to cover the client still rests with the editor. Such commercial pressures, however, do creep into the news line-up and sometimes result in the coverage of events which in themselves would ordinarily not be regarded as newsworthy.

6.1.4 Telecoms Business and the Media

Singapore's third mobile operator, StarHub, started service in 2000, and by 2002 had merged with the country's sole cable operator, Singapore Cable Vision (SCV). SCV, which launched its TV service in 1995, acquired the city-state's third ISP Cyberway in 1997. This makes StarHub an unusual creature—it is a telco, pay-TV operator and ISP all rolled into one.

245. C. Rajaram, Director of MediaCorp NewsHub, in a presentation at The Future of News Media & Journalism Conference, Singapore, 26 February 2010.

246. MediaCorp, "All MediaCorp radio stations back on the Internet and now also on Apple iPhones," 6 May 2010. See <http://www.mediacorp.sg/en/media/EDC101020-0000264/all%20mediacorp%20radio%20stations%20back%20on%20the%20Internet%20and%20now%20also%20on%20apple%20iphones> (accessed 25 April 2011).

247. MediaCorp, "Channel NewsAsia and MediaCorp radio websites are netizens' favourite," 26 August 2010. See <http://www.mediacorp.sg/en/media/EDC101020-0000296/channel%20newsasia%20and%20mediacorp%20radio%20websites%20are%20netizens%20favourite> (accessed 25 April 2011).

In 2004, StarHub became a publicly listed company on the mainboard of the Singapore Exchange. The company's then president, Mike Reynolds, told the *Straits Times* that StarHub was "primarily focused on delivering profitable growth and increasing shareholder value."²⁴⁸ A November 2007 Goldman Sachs report quoted in the same article said StarHub offers investors a "high quality earning stream, attractive cash return strategy and reasonable valuation," while another brokerage firm, CIMB-GK, said in an October 2007 report that the ICT giant "offers the best exposure to Singapore's telecom consumption growth story." However, the Government's attempt to encourage further pay-TV competition by offering a second cable TV license in 2003 attracted no bids. StarHub remains the sole cable TV provider. It offers over 130 channels in a variety of languages and genres, including local and foreign news channels such as BBC, CNN, Bloomberg, CNBC, SkyNews, Fox News, Russia Today and CCTV9.

Similarly, Singtel's IPTV service, mioTV, offers six foreign news channels, including Bloomberg, euronews, Russia Today, CCT, ETTV Asia News (from Taiwan) and NDTV 24x7 (India). Until March 2010, it also offered Al-Jazeera English before dropping it amid disputed accounts as to whether the move had been motivated by the channel's allegedly negative reporting about Singapore.

6.1.5 Transparency of Media Ownership

When it comes to corporate matters, Singapore ranks as the most transparent country in the world, among 58 surveyed by the Swiss business school, the International Institute for Management Development.²⁴⁹ The Companies Act²⁵⁰ lays down strict filing and compliance requirements for private limited and public listed companies. As all major media organizations are incorporated as companies, they are bound by the reporting requirements set out in the Act. This includes, among many other things, submitting its memorandum and articles of incorporation, and on the company's officers and shareholders and share capital. Such information is publicly available through in-person searches at the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority or online from its website at Acra.gov.sg. Failure to comply with filing requirements can result in stiff fines.

There are also other legal requirements concerning media ownership. The Newspapers and Printing Presses Act (NPPA)²⁵¹ lays down special criteria for local newspaper companies. For example, all directors must be Singapore citizens and every newspaper company must have ordinary shares and management shares (equal to one percent or more of its issued and paid up capital).²⁵² Management shareholders rank equally with ordinary shareholders when it comes to dividend payouts, bonus and rights issues.²⁵³ Management shareholders also have the same voting rights as holders of ordinary shares, except when it comes to resolutions relating to the

248. H.H. Chua, "Hub of innovations helps telco shine bright," *Straits Times*, 10 January 2008.

249. IMD World Competitiveness Report 2010, IMD, 19 May 2010. See <http://www.imd.org/research/publications/wcy/index.cfm> (accessed 28 April 2011).

250. Companies Act, (Cap 50, 2006 Rev Ed), Singapore Statutes.

251. Newspapers and Printing Presses Act (Cap 206, 2002 Rev Ed), Singapore Statutes (hereafter, NPPA).

252. NPPA, s10(1)(a) and (b).

253. NPPA, s10(10).

appointment or dismissal of a director or any staff member of the company. In such situations, management shareholders have 200 times the voting power of their ordinary counterparts.²⁵⁴ This means they can easily control the newspaper's board and other key appointments. The Act also states, "no management shares shall be issued or transferred except to citizens of Singapore or corporations who or which have been granted the written approval of the Minister."²⁵⁵

The Act also imposes a 5 percent cap²⁵⁶ on share ownership unless the minister's approval has been obtained. This approval was given in 2004 when SPH took a 20 percent share in MediaCorp Press. Penalties for non-compliance include heavy fines, and in some situations, jail. The minister also has the power to issue directions or restrictions in writing as he/she considers appropriate.²⁵⁷ All publications produced by a printing press are also required by law to display the name of the publisher and printer on the first or last page.²⁵⁸

For broadcasters, the Broadcasting Act²⁵⁹ requires top appointments, namely chief executive officer, director or board chairman, to be approved by the regulator, i.e. the Media Development Authority.²⁶⁰ It also states that the CEO and at least half the board must be Singapore citizens, unless the Authority otherwise approves.²⁶¹ While there is no provision creating a class of management shares (there is no need for one since MDA approves the key appointments), substantial shareholding limits are similar to those under the NPPA. There is a 5 percent cap²⁶² on share ownership, unless the minister's approval has been sought for more. In the case of MediaCorp, the state investment holding company Temasek Holdings is the sole shareholder. Penalties for non-compliance include fines in amounts similar to those set out in the NPPA, while the Act gives the minister the power to issue directions or restrictions in writing as he considers appropriate.²⁶³

Both media giants display the compositions of their respective boards of directors on their websites. SPH, being a listed company, also publishes detailed breakdowns of its ordinary and management shareholdings. MediaCorp's shareholding information as a private limited company is available through an ACRA search and it has also stated publicly that its sole shareholder is Temasek Holdings.²⁶⁴

254. NPPA, s10(11).

255. NPPA, s10(1)(c), although s10(15) states that the Minister may approve a non-citizen to buy, acquire, or hold management shares and appoint him as a newspaper company director.

256. NPPA, s11(3).

257. NPPA, s16.

258. NPPA, s5(1).

259. Broadcasting Act (Cap 28, 2003 Rev Ed), Singapore Statutes (hereafter, BA).

260. BA, s33(1).

261. BA, s33(2).

262. BA, s35.

263. BA, s40.

264. MediaCorp, "MediaCorp announces higher earnings for FY 2009/10 as economy recovers," 25 August 2010. See http://www.mediacorp.sg/en/media/EDC101020-0000295/mediacorp%20announces%20higher%20earnings%20for%20fy%202009_2010%20as%20economy%20recovers (accessed 1 May 2011).

6.2 Media Funding

6.2.1 Public and Private Funding

In Asia, the outlook for television advertising remains rosy, with revenues projected to grow by an average of 8.3 percent a year to US\$61 billion by 2015.²⁶⁵ This compares favorably with the expected US\$35 billion from internet advertising expenditure for the same period. In Singapore,²⁶⁶ broadcast advertising is expected to grow steadily, from US\$ 264 million in 2011 to US\$ 326 million in 2015, at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 5.2 percent. Internet and mobile revenues are projected to rise more spectacularly at a CAGR of 18.5 percent, from a much lower base of US\$4 million to US\$7 million in the same period.

Table 17.

Projected advertising spend by medium (US\$ million), 2011–2015

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2011–15 CAGR (%)
Mobile Internet advertising	3	4	7	9	11	40.06
Wired Internet advertising	78	92	106	121	135	16.10
Digital advertising	2	2	3	3	4	32.00
Print advertising	465	476	491	505	520	2.60
Broadcast advertising	264	278	293	311	326	5.20
TV online, mobile advertising	4	4	5	7	7	18.50

Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers Entertainment and Media Outlook 2011–2015 (Asia-Pacific)

MediaCorp, fully-owned by the state investment company Temasek Holdings, generates the bulk of its revenue through local advertising. For the financial year ended 31 March 2012, MediaCorp reported a 7.5 percent rise in operating profit to S\$44.4 million (US\$35.9 million).²⁶⁷ This was on the back of a 6.7 percent growth in total revenue to S\$ 629.4 million (US\$ 508.3 million). Growth for both figures slowed from the previous year as the company continues to be susceptible to shrinking advertising budgets with the global economy hit by the Eurozone crisis and weak U.S. numbers.

The company had been very badly hit by the global financial crisis in 2008, and had turned in a paltry operating profit of S\$16.4 million (US\$13 million) in the financial year ending 31 March 2009.²⁶⁸ As a result, the then CEO, Lucas Chow, remarked that the company would watch Asian economies closely and adjust its strategies accordingly. In the fiscal year 2009/10, the company's operating profit surged, thanks to

265. PricewaterhouseCoopers Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2011–2015.

266. PricewaterhouseCoopers Entertainment and Media Outlook 2011–2015 (Asia-Pacific).

267. MediaCorp, "MediaCorp announces operating profit of \$44.4 million for FY 2011/12," 26 September 2012. See [http://mediacorp.sg/en/media/EDC120927-0000079/MediaCorp%20announces%20operating%20profit%20of%20\\$44.4%20million%20for%20FY%20201112](http://mediacorp.sg/en/media/EDC120927-0000079/MediaCorp%20announces%20operating%20profit%20of%20$44.4%20million%20for%20FY%20201112) (accessed 10 April 2013).

268. MediaCorp, "MediaCorp announces operating profit of \$16.4 million for FY 08/09," 25 September 2009, at [http://mediacorp.sg/en/media/EDC101116-0000234/MediaCorp%20announces%20operating%20profit%20of%20\\$16.4%20million%20for%20FY%200809](http://mediacorp.sg/en/media/EDC101116-0000234/MediaCorp%20announces%20operating%20profit%20of%20$16.4%20million%20for%20FY%200809) (accessed 14 February 2012).

stringent belt tightening measures such as compulsory unpaid leave of two days a month. These measures were generally welcomed by staff as it meant some extra time off and more importantly, no jobs would be lost as a result. Looking ahead, the company plans to increase audiences across all its media platforms and also diversify its revenue sources, says its new CEO, Shaun Seow.²⁶⁹

Table 18.
MediaCorp results for fiscal year ending March, 2008–2012

Year	Revenues (S\$ million)	Operating profit (S\$ million)
2008	530.3**	n/a
2009	538.8	16.4
2010	531.7	31.2*
2011	589.9	41.2
2012	629.4	44.4

Note: n/a: not available; * Calculated from 2011 operating profit growth; ** Calculated from 2009 revenue growth

Source: MediaCorp, at <http://mediacorp.sg/en/media>

In February 2011, the 48-year-old scheme mandating that households and residential premises pay radio and television license fees was abolished (see section 2.1.1). The scheme had generated complaints that it unfairly penalized some users and forced them to subsidize the media habits of others. The announcement to remove the fees was greeted with cheers and applause in the House.²⁷⁰ From the government standpoint, the move was necessitated by the changes in consumer habits brought on by digital tools. The license fees had lost their relevance. With devices such as the internet and smartphones, it is now possible to watch television programs in ways that are not taxed. The government revenue that will be lost from the removal of the fees is around S\$ 120 million (US\$ 100 million) annually.

Despite the removal of a traditional source of funding, the Government gave the assurance that it would fund PSB programs, not just on traditional media platforms but making them available on new platforms and ensuring that they keep pace with changing media habits as well.²⁷¹ MediaCorp, whose total of PSB hours across its channels and stations each year exceeds the number of hours mandated by the MDA, also pledged its commitment. In July 2012 the Government announced it was making S\$ 630 million (US\$ 515 million) available for Public Service Broadcasting content, up 35 percent on the previous five-year period.²⁷²

269. MediaCorp, “MediaCorp announces strong earnings growth for FY 2010/11,” Media Release, 2 September 2011, at <http://mediacorp.sg/en/media/EDC110902-0000781/MediaCorp%20records%20all-time%20high%20revenue%20in%20FY%20201011> (accessed 12 March 2013).

270. Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Finance Minister, *Singapore Budget Statement 2011*, 18 February 2011, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/annex/budget2012speech.pdf> (accessed 14 February 2012).

271. Aubeck Kam, Chief Executive Officer, Media Development Authority, in “Radio and Television licence abolished—2011 RTV license fees collected will be refunded by April 2011,” Media Development Authority, 18 February 2011, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/Newsletters/2011/6/Pages/01.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012).

272. J. Ng, “More funding for Public Service Broadcast programmes,” 25 July 2012 at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1215569/1.html> (accessed 16 December 2012)—story no longer available. Copy of text and video available here: “S\$630 million for Public Service Broadcast programmes over the next 5 years,” 25 July 2012 at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZGTa_QpKY (accessed 13 April 2013).

Measures have also been put in place to make it easier for producers to apply for funding. In September 2011, the MDA announced it would simplify 46 industry funding schemes and replace them with just five.²⁷³ A total of S\$88 million (US\$72 million) has been set aside for these for new schemes to cover five key areas of growth—from idea creation, production and marketing to talent grooming and enterprise development. Industry players in broadcasting, animation, film, music, interactive media, games and publishing are eligible for the grants, ranging from scholarships to enterprise assistance of up to S\$1 million (US\$ 813,000) a year for up to five years.

In June 2012, the MDA announced another S\$20 million (US\$16 million) injection over the next five years for two of these schemes—Talent Assistance and Enterprise Assistance.²⁷⁴ These funds will help media workers defray local and overseas training costs, encourage employers to offer paid apprenticeships and improve their work processes. Media workers can stand to receive up to US\$ 3,000 (US\$ 2,440) a month while on overseas attachments and a one-off sum for airfare and insurance. The moves are welcomed in an industry where up to 40 percent of its 72,700 media workers are freelancers.

In contrast, the Singapore newspaper industry does not enjoy a taxpayer-funded equivalent to public service broadcasting assistance, nor does it need it. The publicly listed Singapore Press Holdings is one of the most profitable newspaper companies in the world, with an operating margin of more than 30 percent annually. For FY 2012, the group posted S\$ 410.24 million (US\$ 331 million) in full-year operating profit on revenue of S\$1.27 billion (US\$1 billion),²⁷⁵ surpassing the S\$1 billion mark for the eighth consecutive year. According to its annual report, its print advertisement revenue fell 0.7 percent to S\$ 769.4 million (US\$ 621 million) and circulation revenue dropped by 2.1 percent to \$202.9 million (US\$ 164 million). However, the average daily circulation of its flagship paper, the *Straits Times*, rose 4.9 percent to 373,900 copies, reflecting the competitive advertising climate in the media industry.²⁷⁶

Advertising therefore continues to be the main source of revenue for both media giants. With sufficient commercial advertising, MediaCorp, in particular, is less inclined to turn to public service broadcasting funding for certain genres of its content. This would enable it to produce content beyond the PSB mold. MediaCorp's practise of inviting clients to co-fund certain types of entertainment (e.g. reality TV) and factual content (e.g. promoting lifelong learning, better parenting, good nutrition, an appreciation of nature, etc.) is a double-edged sword. While this practice is not unique to Singapore, the broadcaster has to constantly ensure that its editorial independence is protected while meeting the brief and the expectations of the client, which could be a government agency, NGO or private sector company. The broadcaster must also ensure

273. Media Development Authority, "MDA Grant Schemes," at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Schemes/Pages/GrantSchemes.aspx> (accessed 14 February 2012).

274. B. Chan, "Media sector gets \$20m boost," *Straits Times*, 27 June 2012.

275. Singapore Press Holdings, "Annual Report 2012," at http://www.sph.com.sg/pdf/annualreport/2012/SPH_AR2012.pdf (accessed 10 April 2013).

276. Singapore Press Holdings, "Annual Report 2012," at http://www.sph.com.sg/pdf/annualreport/2012/SPH_AR2012.pdf (accessed 10 April 2013).

that a balance is struck between producing programs that clients want and content that may not be so commercially appealing but yet ought to be offered (e.g. historical documentaries and current affairs shows analyzing local or foreign developments, which generally have a short shelf life and limited redistribution potential).

6.2.2 Other Sources of Funding

Advertising made up 63 percent of SPH’s operating revenue in FY 2012. While advertising has recovered since the 2008 global financial crisis and forms the bulk of SPH’s operating revenue, the group also attributes its solid results to its rental income from two lucrative shopping malls and its healthy exhibitions and online businesses.²⁷⁷ Its two top revenue contributors, advertising and circulation, did not fare as well in 2012 compared to 2011, with rental income taking up the slack. Property has proven to be such a winner for SPH that the group is now looking for more malls to acquire or manage, says its chairman, Alan Chan.²⁷⁸ Mr Chan acknowledged, however, that print advertisement revenue would continue to move in tandem with the Singapore domestic economy.

Table 19.
SPH results for fiscal year ending August, 2008–2012

Year	Revenues (S\$ billion)	Operating profit (S\$ million)
2008	1.30	501.69
2009	1.30	496.96
2010	1.38	539.10
2011	1.25	409.04
2012	1.27	410.24

Source: SPH, at http://www.sph.com.sg/annual_report.shtml

Similarly, MediaCorp has sought to diversify its revenue streams beyond radio and television airtime sales and print and online advertising through a combination of conventional and digital platforms, e.g. outdoor advertising on buildings, bus shelters, indoor screens and vehicles and making forays into regional markets with other television stations (Vietnam and Indonesia) and conventional billboard advertising (China). It is also looking at content distribution and co-productions with overseas partners, particularly in China. Recent investments include buying into the fast-growing Asian luxury online retailer, Reebonz,²⁷⁹ and taking a majority stake in the Malaysian digital games publisher Cubinet Interactive.²⁸⁰

277. A. Low, “SPH posts \$389m in full-year profit,” *Straits Times*, 13 October 2011, at [http://www.printsingapore.net/Singlenews.aspx?DirID=98&rec_code=766825&title=SPH%20posts%20\\$389m%20in%20full-year%20profit](http://www.printsingapore.net/Singlenews.aspx?DirID=98&rec_code=766825&title=SPH%20posts%20$389m%20in%20full-year%20profit) (accessed 12 March 2013).

278. A. Low, “SPH posts \$389m in full-year profit.”

279. MediaCorp, “MediaCorp Invests in Singapore luxury online retailer, Reebonz,” 20 May 2013, at <http://mediacorp.sg/en/media/EDC130520-0000023/MediaCorp%20Invests%20in%20Singapore%20luxury%20online%20retailer,%20Reebonz> (accessed 29 June 2013).

280. MediaCorp, “MediaCorp invests in online gaming, Cubinet Interactive,” 29 May 2013, at <http://mediacorp.sg/en/media/EDC130529-0000011/MediaCorp%20Invests%20in%20online%20gaming,%20Cubinet%20Interactive> (accessed 29 June 2013).

6.3 Media Business Models

6.3.1 Changes in Media Business Models

As we have seen, both media giants in Singapore continue to rely on advertising as the main revenue generator, although they have significantly diversified their revenue streams into other related (e.g. outdoor advertising) and non-related (e.g. exhibitions and contract publishing) businesses locally and regionally.

Both companies have also suffered their share of failed initiatives. In December 2010, SPH's trumpeted Rednano.sg local-centric search engine, a joint venture with Norwegian media group Schibsted ASA, was quietly folded into its online classified service ST701. Looking further back, the massive failed attempt at media market liberalization in the early 2000s resulted in several casualties. SPH's maiden English-language mass-market TV Channel i was shut down. The group's first print-online hybrid product, an English-language newspaper-cum-website called Project Eyeball, could not survive the competition posed by SPH's own new English-language freesheet, *Streets* and MediaCorp's commuter tabloid, *Today*. Later, as part of the terms of the merger to stem the losses flowing from the liberalization, *Streets*, and Chinese-language mass-market Channel U merged with rival MediaCorp platforms (see section 6.1).

In recent years, MediaCorp has also shut down non-profitable or low-demand services such as Digital Audio Broadcasting of its existing radio stations (2011), Radio Singapore International (2008), shortwave transmissions of its radio stations (2008), several magazine titles (2008) and the in-bus television service TV Mobile, a world technological first when it was launched in 2000, which subsequently ceased operations in 2010. MediaCorp Online Broadband Television (MOBTV) —the country's first internet subscription-based video-on-demand (VOD) service—floundered for four years until it was subsequently rebranded in 2010 to become Catchup TV, xinmsn.com's hugely popular and free service. Catchup TV taps xinmsn's huge user base and traffic, appealing to its predominantly young users because it is free.

The biggest changes at MediaCorp, however, were not obvious to the public. In 2006, it embarked on a major realignment of its sales teams to meet the demand of clients seeking cross-media solutions.²⁸¹ Teams that used to serve only news, radio, print or publishing platforms were merged into an integrated sales force to sell multiple media. Teams are generally grouped to cover industry sectors or by named clients, although exceptions or combinations may exist to service niche groups or platforms such as ethnic media clients or outdoor advertising.

In 2008, MediaCorp launched a consolidated media sales hotline called MediaCorp Advertising Enquiries (MAE)²⁸² to extend its reach to small and medium enterprise clients and provide them with integrated solutions across multiple media. In January 2009, the company also consolidated its various online and

281. Email announcement from MediaCorp Deputy CEO to employees, 13 July 2006.

282. MediaCorp, "MediaCorp launches a One-Stop Advertising Enquiring Hotline," 29 October 2008, at <http://mediacorp.sg/en/media/EDC101118-0000144/MediaCorp%20Launches%20a%20One-Stop%20Advertising%20Enquiry%20Hotline> (accessed 14 February 2012).

mobile properties into a new Interactive Media Division (IMD)²⁸³ to develop new media businesses across the whole group, such as xinmsn and the Toggle service (Toggle.com.sg) that will ride on Singapore's new Next Generation Nationwide Broadband Network (NGNBN). Toggle will offer users access to both MediaCorp's vast archives and fresh local and foreign programming available on consumer devices such as TVs, computers, smartphones and tablets. MediaCorp's various organizational restructuring efforts over the past six years appear to have reaped benefits. The group's revenues have grown from S\$ 530 million (US\$ 431 million) in FY 2007/08 to S\$ 590 million (US\$ 480 million) in 2011, while weathering the 2008 global financial crisis. And with new initiatives such as Toggle, the company is seeking fresh revenue streams from paid content.

6.4 Assessments

The story of the media business in Singapore is one of growth and financial stability, and that includes the print media, which have enjoyed robust circulation and advertising revenue—a far cry from the experiences of so many other rich countries. At the same time, Singapore's tightly prescribed media ownership laws have not changed with the coming of digitization and both incumbents continue to enjoy their entrenched positions in their respective print and broadcast fields while dealing with the commercial and technological challenges brought about by new media.

MediaCorp is fully owned by the government investment company Temasek Holdings, whose board comprises well-known establishment figures, including corporate leaders and former politicians. Temasek, however, is not involved in the day-to-day running of MediaCorp, which has some 2,600 employees—that task is left to the chief executive and management team. Unlike MediaCorp, SPH is publicly-listed. Its management shares are held by 20 corporate entities and individuals, ranging from banks and insurance companies to members of its board.²⁸⁴

The composition of the management and boards of both these local media giants has meant that they are generally run or advised by individuals with a variety of professional backgrounds that often extend beyond the media. This breadth of expertise to some extent ensures that the companies are well-run and have an appetite for some risk. Board members do not get involved in daily editorial and production operations of these media companies while senior management personnel tend to be more focused on the bottom line, leaving daily operations in the hands of managing editors and their teams. Board members are largely establishment figures and they, in turn, have a say in the selection and appointment of top editors.

The editors, for their part, embrace a particular view of the role their organizations play in Singapore society, the expectations that are placed on them by the country's leadership and the fact that they are in some

283. MediaCorp, "MediaCorp forms Interactive Media Business," 2 January 2009, at <http://mediacorp.sg/en/media/EDC101116-0000270/MediaCorp%20forms%20Interactive%20Media%20Business> (accessed 14 February 2012).

284. Singapore Press Holdings, "Main Shareholders," 6 October 2011, at http://sph.listedcompany.com/main_shareholder.html (accessed 15 February 2012).

quarters regarded as carriers of official news and policy (by foreign governments, for instance). Such editors are always top career journalists and often educated at leading western universities. They have close ties with Singapore's leaders, which both sides argue involves building trust and understanding while allowing the editors to maintain editorial independence and credibility in an age where consumers have easy access many alternative sources of news. Government leaders also routinely hold informal talks with editors behind closed doors. These enable editors to share their views candidly with ministers and serve as an informal barometer of public feeling about the Government.

At the other end of the media spectrum are the many new entrants that have come with digitization. The big media companies have launched their own online and mobile platforms and they are not mere new media replicas of old media content. They are innovative and appeal more to the younger and more socially-connected generation, and embrace a much wider range of opinion and dissent. Alongside them are the self-funded and independent new entrants on the internet and on mobile, notably The Online Citizen (TOC) and TR Emeritus, which pursue a much more diverse political and social agenda, sometimes supported by volunteers, a reflection of their often precarious financial circumstances.

In the case of broadcasting and telecoms, the state has maintained its firm grip, particularly on the former. But it has ensured that there are three competitive and innovative players in mobile telecoms, so that Singapore remains one of the world's most connected societies.

7. Policies, Laws, and Regulators

7.1 Policies and Laws

7.1.1 Digital Switch-over of Terrestrial Transmission

7.1.1.1 Access and Affordability

Singapore plans to complete the transition to digital broadcasting in line with the goals of the 10-member-country Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) for a digital switch-over of terrestrial transmission between 2015 and 2020.²⁸⁵ In June 2012, the MDA announced that Singapore's seven FTA TV channels would go fully digital by the end of 2013, using the DVB-T2 broadcasting standard.²⁸⁶ Channels 5, 8, Suria, and Vasantham would also be transmitted in HD by the end of 2013, while Okto, Channel U, and Channel NewsAsia would follow suit within three years.

A simulcast period—broadcasting both analog and digital television channels—is needed for audiences to migrate smoothly to digital terrestrial television (DTT). After the simulcast period, ending by 2020, none of MediaCorp's FTA channels will be broadcast any longer in analog signals as part of the Digital Switchover Roadmap.²⁸⁷

As for Pay TV services, all channels are already in digital mode. Starhub Cable Vision (SCV) ceased analog transmission on its cable networks from 30 June 2009 and went fully digital.²⁸⁸ In addition, commercial HDTV services are available on free-to-air (FTA), cable and IPTV platforms.²⁸⁹

285. Media Development Authority of Singapore, *Introduction to Digital TV*, 2010, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Public/DigitalTV/Pages/IntroductionDigitalTV.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012).

286. "Media Development Authority, "Singapore's free-to-air TV channels to go fully digital by 2013," June 2012, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2012/Pages/19062012.aspx> (accessed 14 November 2012).

287. P.L. Ling, "Digital Switchover in Singapore," 17 July 2012, at http://trpc.biz/wp-content/uploads/3.-ling-pek-ling_mda.pdf (accessed 14 November 2012).

288. Casbaa, "StarHub TV to go into full digital mode," 17 February 2009, at <http://www.casbaa.com/media-and-resources/news-center/members-news/1133-starhub-tv-to-go-into-full-digital-mode> (accessed 1 July 2012).

289. "Singapore Media Fusion, About Singapore: Media city," 2010, at <http://www.smf.sg/SingaporeMediaCity/Pages/AboutSingapore.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012).

According to Informa Telecoms & Media, household penetration of digital TV in Singapore will rise from 69 percent in 2009 to 100 percent by 2015.²⁹⁰ As analog television channels are to be switched off between 2015 and 2020, the Media Development Authority (MDA) must ensure that the infrastructure can support a seamless delivery and reception of DTV signals and that nobody will be left behind during the digital transition. “This switch will free up the broadcast spectrum that will allow industry players to develop novel digital content and services. For consumers, switchover means that they can look forward to clearer and sharper wide-screen images and more innovative and interactive content,” Mr Lui Tuck Yew, the Acting Minister of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA), told Parliament.²⁹¹

With Singapore moving towards an all-digital environment by promoting IPTV and the adoption of HDTV nationwide, most television sets require the installation of a STB to receive DTT signals and HD channels. For content, Singaporeans can subscribe to SCV’s digital cable television services and Singtel mio TV’s IPTV services, with the latter gaining ground over the former since its audacious multi-million dollar bid in 2010 to clinch exclusive screening rights to English Premier League football. While there has been a strong take-up in both digital cable television and digital IPTV, mio TV has been fast catching up with SCV’s sliding base of 532,000 subscribers (down 13,000 year-on-year),²⁹² announcing that it crossed the 400,000 customer mark in early 2013.²⁹³

Given the far-reaching impact that digital switch-over will have, the Government has rolled out a series of measures and actions to facilitate the transition. In August 2012, the MDA and IDA called for a public consultation to gather feedback on the technical specifications for integrated DVB-T2 receiver decoders.²⁹⁴ Sixteen submissions were received and technical specifications were issued in November 2012 and March 2013.²⁹⁵ Aside from public consultations, the MDA conducts consumer and retailer education using brochures, hotlines and website FAQs regarding the importance and benefits of digital switchover.²⁹⁶

290. “Research pegs IPTV, digital TV to continue upward trend in Asia Pacific,” domain-b, 7 July 2010, at http://www.domain-b.com/brand_dossier/media/20100707_singapore.html (accessed 1 July 2012).

291. Speech by Mr Lui Tuck Yew at the Committee of Supply Debate on Driving Innovation, Productivity and Competition for a Vibrant Economy, 12 March 2010, at http://www.mci.gov.sg/content/mci_corp/web/mci/pressroom/categories/speeches/2010/speech_by_mr_lui_tuck_yew_at_the_committee_of_supply_debate_on_driving_innovation_productivity_and_competition_for_a_vibrant_economy.mnews.publiccomm.html (accessed 1 July 2012).

292. SCV, “StarHub Reports 2013 First Quarter Results,” 9 May 2013, at <http://www.starhub.com/content/corporate/newsroom/2013/05/starhub-reports-2013-first-quarter-results.html> (accessed 29 June 2013).

293. Singtel, “Stable performance in the third quarter,” 14 February 2013, at <http://info.singtel.com/node/12634> (accessed 29 June 2013).

294. MDA & IDA. (2012 August 1). Public Consultation on the Integrated Receiver Decoder for use with the Second Generation Digital Terrestrial Television Broadcasting System, at from [http://www.mda.gov.sg/Reports/ConsultationReports/Documents/PUBLIC_CONSULTATION_DOCUMENT_\[TECHNICAL_SPEC_FOR_T2_RECEIVER\]_1Aug_12.pdf](http://www.mda.gov.sg/Reports/ConsultationReports/Documents/PUBLIC_CONSULTATION_DOCUMENT_[TECHNICAL_SPEC_FOR_T2_RECEIVER]_1Aug_12.pdf) (accessed 14 November 2012).

295. MDA, “Consultation on the Technical Specification for DVB-T2 Receiver,” at http://www.mda.gov.sg/REPORTS/CONSULTATION_REPORTS/Pages/DVBT2Receiver.aspx (accessed 29 June 2013).

296. Ling, P.L., *Digital Switchover in Singapore*, 17 July 2012, at http://trpc.biz/wp-content/uploads/3.-ling-pek-ling_mda.pdf (accessed 14 November 2012).

7.1.1.2 Subsidies for Equipment

In this affluent society, there are no public provisions to improve affordability by setting price restrictions for digital television services. There are no subsidies to citizens who cannot afford STBs or digital television sets, nor any schemes to ensure that citizens obtain STBs before analog switch-off. Instead, the Government has focused on ensuring that supply will meet demand for those who can afford digital television equipment. The MDA has also been encouraging local companies to develop DTV middleware and value-added applications for STBs.²⁹⁷ Since 2006, HD-ready panel manufacturers have introduced integrated STBs into their products, and now almost all new television sets purchased in Singapore are HD-ready.

7.1.1.3 Legal Provisions on Public Interest

The introduction of DTV has provided an opportunity for the Infocomm Development Authority (IDA) to review the current use of broadcast spectrum. In April 2008, the IDA announced that it was coordinating with its regulatory counterparts in neighboring countries on spectrum in the VHF and UHF bands to introduce digital terrestrial broadcasting and new wireless/mobile services.²⁹⁸ The IDA studied the technological constraints for spectrum allocation, taking into account the potential uses and benefits to society. It focused on how to manage the digital dividend in order to satisfy the maximum demand when arbitrating among competing users.²⁹⁹ To achieve an effective spectrum master plan, the IDA sought industry feedback on how to achieve a seamless transition from analog to digital.

In 2009, the IDA and MDA launched Project NIMS (Next Generation Interactive Multimedia, Applications and Services) to develop a national strategy to establish the infrastructure and the industry ecosystem for interactive multimedia. Television viewing was to be transformed into a two-way IPTV experience riding on the Next Generation Broadband Network (NGBN).³⁰⁰ In November 2010, the NIMS Connect Requirement document proposed all interactive multimedia content to be offered on one universal STB: the NIMS Common Feature Set-Top-Box (NIMS CF STB). “The desired policy outcome is for end-users to be able to receive the widest possible spectrum of content and service offerings available in the market, thus maximizing the value and potential benefits of the NIMS CF STBs being deployed to consumers.”³⁰¹

The Government will finance a selected NIMS operator to facilitate the rollout of the universal STB. Consumers no longer need to acquire separate STBs for switching services. Moreover, NIMS content will be managed by the MDA to ensure a wide variety of entertainment options for adults while keeping unsuitable

297. Don Groves Television Asia (2007), “Outlook for HD in Asia: currently cloudy with sunshine expected,” *On Screen Asia*, 1 June 2007, at <http://www.onscreenasia.com/article/outlook-for-hd-in-asia-currently-cloudy-with-sunshine-expected/1281> (accessed 1 July 2013).

298. IDA Singapore, *Radio Spectrum Master Plan*, April 2008, at http://www.ida.gov.sg/doc/Policies%20and%20Regulation/Policies_and_Regulation_Level2/20060421164253/RSMF.pdf (accessed 1 July 2012).

299. Media Development Authority of Singapore, *Joint IDA–MDA project NIMS industry dialogue*, 2010, at <http://www.ida.gov.sg/Infrastructure/20090807131841.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012) (hereafter, Media Development Authority of Singapore, *Joint IDA–MDA project NIMS industry dialogue*).

300. Media Development Authority of Singapore, *Joint IDA–MDA project NIMS industry dialogue*.

301. IDA Singapore, Media Development Authority of Singapore, *Industry Dialogue on NIMS—Connect Requirement*, *Project NIMS*, 2010.

content away from young people.³⁰² These guidelines for NIMS content were drafted in consultation with the industry as well as public advisory committees, to conform to community standards.³⁰³ To engage the public and protect their interests, the MDA held regular dialogue sessions with citizens' consultative bodies to invite feedback to identify a good mix of content, including education and entertainment.³⁰⁴

The standard procedure adopted by the MDA and IDA in formulating new media and telecommunication policies is to issue a consultation paper and request that the public and stakeholders give feedback and suggestions by a fixed deadline. Although the MDA and IDA do not provide immediate feedback on comments and suggestions, they respond to the issues in comprehensive reports which are released subsequently. All documents relating to the consultation process and submissions from the public are made available on the official websites in a clear and transparent manner.³⁰⁵

7.1.1.4 Public Consultation

With respect to digital switch-over and the NIMS Project, the IDA and MDA held a series of dialogues with industry representatives,³⁰⁶ and public consultations regarding the policies and provisions involved in spectrum allocation, the digitization schedule, STB, content, and licensing.³⁰⁷ Participants included content rights holders, interactive application developers, channel providers, pay TV retailers, infrastructure providers, and equipment vendors. Through this lengthy process, which began in 2009, support from various industry players has been instrumental in developing new market opportunities and business models for delivery of interactive multimedia, applications, and services.

7.1.2 The Internet

Singapore was one of the first countries to regulate internet content—in 1996. A Class Licensing Scheme automatically deems all ICPs³⁰⁸ to be licensed under the Broadcasting Act (without them having actively to do anything) and subjects them to various conditions and an Internet Code of Practice. These regulations deal with the broadcast of undesirable and illegal content such as pornography, extreme violence, and the propagation of religious and political issues. One cannot refuse the Class License, for without it, one would technically be providing a “licensable broadcasting service” without a broadcasting license, which is an offense under the Broadcasting Act.

302. Media Development Authority of Singapore, *Co-regulation with Industry*, 2010, at <http://mda.gov.sg/Policies/Pages/CoRegulationwithIndustry.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012) (hereafter MDA, *Co-regulation with Industry*).

303. MDA, *Co-regulation with Industry*.

304. MDA, *Co-regulation with Industry*.

305. MDA reports are at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Reports/ConsultationReports/Pages/ConsultationReports.aspx> while IDA's reports can be found at <http://www.ida.gov.sg/Policies-and-Regulations/Consultation-Papers-and-Decisions.aspx>.

306. For documents: Joint IDA-MDA Project NIMS Industry Dialogue, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/REPORTS/CONSULTATIONREPORTS/Pages/NIMSIndustryDialogue.aspx> (accessed 29 June 2013).

307. Media Development Authority of Singapore, *Consultation papers*, 2010, at <http://mda.gov.sg/Policies/PoliciesandContentGuidelines/ConsultationPapers/Pages/default.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2012).

308. Clause 2, Broadcasting (Class License) Notification (15 July 1996) defines ICPs as: “a. any individual in Singapore who provides any program, for business, political or religious purposes, on the World Wide Web through the Internet; or b. any corporation or group of individuals... who provides any program on the World Wide Web through the Internet, and includes any web publisher and any web server administrator.”

While most ICPs do not have any administrative responsibilities under the Class License Scheme, several types of entities are required to submit a registration form, should the MDA determine that they are one of the following:³⁰⁹

- a) a political party providing any program on the World Wide Web through the internet
- b) in the business of providing through the internet an online newspaper for a subscription fee or other consideration
- c) a person or a body of persons engaged in the propagation, promotion, or discussion of political or religious issues relating to Singapore on the World Wide Web through the internet.

Apart from filling out and submitting the form, the requirement for registration does not confer additional obligations on such ICPs, but instead can be seen as an administrative device to have on file the details of the sites and those behind it. In its 229-page report, the Advisory Council on the Impact of New Media on Society (AIMS) noted that “MDA has always maintained that the requirement to register does not mean discussion of political issues is disallowed. Registration instead serves to emphasize the need for responsibility on the part of those who run websites that actively engage in the discussion of domestic politics.”³¹⁰

Besides ICPs, Internet Service Providers and Internet Service Resellers are also subject to the terms and conditions under the Class License Scheme and the Internet Code of Practice. The Code was substantially revised a year after its introduction to spell out more clearly the responsibilities of ISPs and ICPs and reduce the categories of prohibited material to mainly sexual content and material that could promote or incite ethnic, racial, and religious hatred. References to political out-of-bounds markers were removed.³¹¹

A subcommittee of the National Internet Advisory Committee (NIAC), which mixes public and private sector members, recommended greater clarity about the duties of ISPs. For example, instead of a general obligation on ISPs and Internet Content Providers to use their *best efforts* to exclude material which is “against public interest, public order, national harmony or which offends against good taste or decency,” the 1997 amendments stipulate that an ISP would discharge its obligations when it *denies access to sites that are notified to it* as containing prohibited material. In other words, there is no general obligation to monitor and proactively block content imposed on ISPs. Instead, they only need to block access when specifically informed of prohibited material. In practice, this includes blocking access to about 100 sites promoting pornography, hatred and violence (the “100-list”). Over the years, it has repeatedly denied calls to reveal the sites on this list, but random checks using names such as Playboy.com show that the list is confined to well-known pornographic or offensive sites while allowing access to all other types of content. No political site has complained of being blocked.

309. Paragraphs 3–5, Conditions of Class License.

310. Paragraph 4.7, Report of the Advisory Council on the Impact of New Media on Society, “Engaging New Media/Challenging Old Assumptions,” (2008), at [http://app.mica.gov.sg/Data/0/AIMS%20Report%20\(Dec%2008\)%20-%20Engaging%20New%20Media,%20Challenging%20Old%20Assumptions.pdf](http://app.mica.gov.sg/Data/0/AIMS%20Report%20(Dec%2008)%20-%20Engaging%20New%20Media,%20Challenging%20Old%20Assumptions.pdf) (accessed 15 February 2012).

311. C. George, “Looking for patterns in 10 years of ‘light touch’ regulation,” 23 August 2007, at <http://journalism.sg/2007/08/23/looking-for-patterns-in-10-years-of-light-touch-regulation> (accessed 15 February 2012) (hereafter, C. George, “Looking for Patterns”).

In subsequent reports, the NIAC, which was a predecessor to AIMS, recommended further adjustments and relaxation of the internet regulatory framework.³¹² This included a call on the MDA to review its policy of requiring ISPs to impose mandatory filtering in accordance with the 100-list and whether it should be applied uniformly to all forms of internet access, including mobile access.³¹³ Despite views from many quarters that filtering using the 100-list would be quite pointless today amid the proliferation of so many other accessible potentially offensive sites, the authorities have held fast to its existence, saying that it is a symbolic statement of community values against such content.

Regulatory enforcement examples exist in respect of the more “traditional” linear content providers. Such enforcement is publicized and typically involves fines for broadcasting footage related to lesbianism, product placement, and illegal gambling. Publicly available records do not reveal instances of regulatory enforcement regarding political, religious, or ethnic issues.³¹⁴

More recently in 2011, SingNet became the first ISP to be fined for contravening the Class License and Code. It was fined S\$40,000 (US\$ 33,300) after a member of the public complained that the ISP was carrying sex-themed games on its corporate parent SingTel’s IDEAS website.³¹⁵ These games were found by the regulator to contain images of scantily clad or nude women, while two of them featured themes of rape and bestiality, thus infringing the Internet Code of Practice.

Other recent cases have involved not content providers but individuals posting potentially offensive remarks on Facebook concerning race and/or religion. In early 2010, two teenagers were arrested for making malicious remarks against Indians. They were later let off with a police caution and no further action taken.³¹⁶ In

312. Report of the National Internet Advisory Committee (2005). See <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Documents/mobj.904.2005%20NIAC%20Report.pdf> (accessed 15 February 2012). The amendments to the Code are analyzed and discussed in Anil, S., “Re-Visiting the Singapore Internet Code of Practice,” *The Journal of Information, Law and Technology (JILT)*, University of Warwick & University of Strathclyde, 2001 (2), at http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/elj/jilt/2001_2/anil (accessed 1 July 2013).

313. Paragraph 2.19, Report of the National Internet Advisory Committee (2005).

314. For example, in 2008, the Cable TV operator, Starhub Cable Vision, was fined for showing a commercial of a song that depicted lesbian kissing scenes on 26 and 28 November 2007. Media Development Authority, “Starhub Cable Vision fined for breaching the TV Advertising Code,” 9 April 2008, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2008/Pages/9042008.aspx> (accessed 15 February 2012). In 2007, MediaCorp Radio was fined for airing a discussion on a sex-related topic during a morning program. Media Development Authority, “MediaCorp Radio settles fine for breaching the Radio Programme Code,” 6 December 2007, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2007/Pages/06122007.aspx> (accessed 14 November 2012). See also Media Development Authority, “MediaCorp Radio to be fined for breaching the Radio Programme Code,” (4 June 2007) at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2007/Pages/04062007.aspx> (accessed 15 February 2012); “MediaCorp TV5 fined for breaching Programme Code on episode of Without a Trace,” (9 May 2007) at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2007/Pages/09052007.aspx> (accessed 15 February 2012); “MediaCorp TV fined for breaching TV Programme Sponsorship and TV Advertising Guidelines,” (12 March 2007) at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease2007/Pages/12032007.aspx> (accessed 15 February 2012); “SCV fined for breaching Programme Code on its Reality Zone Channel,” (23 October 2006) at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2006/Pages/23102006.aspx> (accessed 15 February 2012); “MediaWorks fined for breach of programme code,” (22 November 2006) at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2003/Pages/22112003.aspx> (accessed 15 February 2012); “MediaWorks fined for breach of programme code,” (21 June 2003) at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2003/Pages/21062003.aspx> (accessed 15 February 2012); “MediaCorp TV fined for Chu Mei-Feng sex scandal footage on Channel 8 news,” 22 February 2002, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/Archives/Pages/22022002.aspx> (accessed 15 February 2012).

315. MDA, “MDA imposes \$40,000 fine on SingNet Pte Ltd for breach of Class License and Internet Code of Practice,” 23 July 2011, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2011/Pages/20110723.aspx> (accessed 16 February 2012).

316. R. Chang, “PAP Youth member quits over ‘racist’ online posting; Youth wing acts swiftly, condemns posting; police probing reports,” *Straits Times*, 18 November 2011.

November 2011,³¹⁷ three men were investigated for separate, unrelated incidents that took place in quick succession. Three police reports were lodged against a member of the ruling PAP's youth wing for posting a photo of Muslim schoolchildren wearing Islamic headgear accompanied by a caption which read, "Bus filled with young terrorist trainees." Thirty-year-old Jason Neo later apologized in writing to the school and to parents of its students and quit the political party, which he had joined four months after putting up the picture on Facebook. In an unrelated incident, days later, military serviceman Christian Eliab Ratnam apologized and took down a picture he had posted of words criticizing Islam.

At around the same time, the 28-year-old editor of a Singapore-based current affairs commentary website—New Asia Republic—was accused of making racist remarks by reposting a picture of a pig superimposed on the Kaabah, the building in the Saudi city of Mecca which is considered sacred to Muslims. Donaldson Tan said he had reposted it as a warning to other Facebook users not to be taken in by the flamebait—something calculated to provoke a response. Following queries from the media, the Ministry of Home Affairs said that the right to free speech does not extend to making remarks that incite racial and religious friction and conflict. It added that the authorities take a very serious view of all instances of racial and religious incitement.³¹⁸ At this time of writing, no further police action appears to have been taken against the three, Jason Neo, Christian Eliab Ratnam, and Donaldson Tan. It is worth noting that given their gravity, these incidents were apparently investigated by the Ministry of Home Affairs for possible offences under racial and religious incitement laws, rather than as violations of internet content regulations, which come under the purview of the MDA.

7.1.2.1 Regulation of News Content on the Internet

The most significant requirement regarding content distribution on the internet is the Broadcasting (Class License) Notification, under section 9 of the Broadcasting Act.³¹⁹ Under this provision, an "Internet Content Provider" (ICP) which is "in the business of providing, through the internet, an online newspaper for a subscription fee or other consideration" is required to register with the Media Development Authority (MDA) within a stipulated time frame.³²⁰ Several newspapers clearly operate active internet websites, e.g. the *Straits Times* (Straitstimes.com), the *Business Times* (Businessstimes.com.sg), and *Today* (Todayonline.com). The *Straits Times* and the *Business Times* are published by Singapore Press Holdings and operate on a subscription model, and *Today* is published by MediaCorp and available at no charge. While these papers all hold annual renewable permits as required under the Newspapers and Printing Presses Act,³²¹ they would, by law, be required to register separately with the MDA. As of May 2013, no news sites had been required to do this.³²²

317. S. Sudderuddin, "Another blogger probed for offensive post; It is the third such case in recent weeks," *Straits Times*, 23 November 2011.

318. "MHA urges public not to inflame situation," *Today*, 23 November 2011, at <http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC111123-0000076/MHA-urges-public-not-to-inflame-situation> (accessed 16 February 2012).

319. Chapter 28, Singapore Statutes (2003 Revised Edition).

320. Clause 5, Conditions of Class Licence in Schedule to Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification.

321. Chapter 206, Singapore Statutes (2002 Revised Edition).

322. Aubeck Kam, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Communications and Information in a question-and-answer session at a panel discussion "How MDA's new Licensing Regime will affect YOU," 4 July 2013 by Singapore Computer Society and Internet Society Singapore.

The growth of alternative news websites, via blogs or social media platforms (e.g. Twitter and Facebook), has not resulted in separate targeted regulatory measures governing online speech and conduct.³²³ Instead, in January 2011, TOC was notified to register under the Broadcasting (Class License) Notification.³²⁴ TOC announced that “if registering is what it’ll take to continue our contribution to Singapore, we will do it and send a clear message that we will not be intimidated into exiting the arena of public discourse.”³²⁵ Supportive members of the blogging community rallied round TOC, expressing confidence that it would not be deterred by this regulatory blip.³²⁶

However, registration is not a prerequisite for the applicability of the Class License, including the take-down requirements in clause 16 of the Class License Notification. The Class License applies automatically in respect of *all* covered content providers, with no need to take any active steps to “register.” Registration does, however, require that the individuals responsible for the site should be identified and notified formally to the MDA. The stated reason for this is to ensure accountability.

At the end of May 2013, 17 years after the introduction of the Class Licensing Scheme, the MDA suddenly announced³²⁷ what it described as a “refinement”³²⁸ to the scheme as part of a routine policy review. From 1 June, notified news websites meeting the MDA’s published criteria would have to apply for licenses and put up a “performance bond” equivalent to US\$ 40,000. The Government says this will bring them into line with traditional news platforms, which are already individually licensed. Existing content standards would apply. However, these named websites³²⁹ would be subject to a 24-hour deadline for removing prohibited content after notification by the authorities.

Responding to a blogger’s query, the MDA later disclosed that since 1996, there had only been one take-down notice issued for religiously offensive content (against Google, to block the video “Innocence of Muslims”) and 23 others mainly for pornographic content and advertisements soliciting sex or sex chats, which the regulator was alerted to via complaints from the public.³³⁰ Clarifying the scope of the latest regulatory

323. There are, however, laws on online election advertising and “sexual grooming” over the internet. See I. Saad, “Singapore eases rulings on Internet election advertising,” *channelnewsasia.com*, 14 March 2011, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1116396/1.html%20> (accessed 9 December 2012) and M. Gopalan, “Anti-Grooming Law: The First Step,” *Singapore Law Review*, 9 December 2007, at <http://www.singaporelawreview.org/2007/12/anti-grooming-law-the-first-step> (accessed 9 December 2012).

324. “Breaking news: MDA demands registration of TOC,” *Theonlinecitizen*, 11 January 2011, at <http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2011/01/breaking-news-mda-demands-registration-of-toc/> (accessed 15 February 2012).

325. “TOC Statement: Keep Calm and Carry On,” *Theonlinecitizen.com*, 14 January 2011, at <http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2011/01/toc-statement-keep-calm-and-carry-on> (accessed 15 February 2012).

326. T. Lee, “The Online Citizen will carry on,” 14 January 2011, at <http://newnation.sg/2011/01/the-online-citizen-will-carry-on/> (accessed 15 February 2012); Benjamin Cheah, “Why I’m not concerned about The Online Citizen,” 12 January 2011, at <http://benjamincheah.wordpress.com/2011/01/12/why-im-not-concerned-about-the-online-citizen/> (accessed 15 February 2012).

327. MDA, “Fact Sheet—Online news sites to be placed on a more consistent licensing framework as traditional news platforms,” 28 May 2013, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2013/Pages/28052013.aspx> (accessed 30 June 2013).

328. MDA’s response to blogger Roy Ngerng, reproduced on 12 June 2013 at <http://thehearttruths.com/2013/06/12/letter-to-mds-feedback-on-new-licensing-framework-for-online-news-sites-part-4-mdas-response/> (accessed 1 July 2013).

329. MDA, “List of Online News Sites which Require Individual Licence,” at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2013/Documents/Annex.pdf> (accessed 1 July 2013).

330. MDA’s response to blogger Roy Ngerng, reproduced on 8 June 2013, at <http://thehearttruths.com/2013/06/08/letter-to-mds-feedback-on-new-licensing-framework-for-online-news-sites-part-3-mdas-response/> (accessed 1 July 2013).

measure, the regulator said: “An individual publishing views on current affairs and trends on his/her personal website or blog does not amount to news reporting,” so would not be included.³³¹ The top civil servant at the Ministry of Communications and Information told a public forum that since 1996, no takedown notice had been issued for content against the government, its policies, or alternative political viewpoints—areas not covered by the Code.³³²

7.1.2.2 Legal Liability for Internet Content

The approach in Singapore is to consider internet content and content providers as being subjected to the same amount of legal liability and responsibility as would pertain in the “real world” or the off-line realm. When TRE and TOC published an article by the opposition Singapore Democratic Party treasurer Eugene Wijeyesingha which alleged, in passing, that his colleague Dr Chee Soon Juan had been deprived of a living by evidence “fabricated” by Chee’s former boss (a retired ruling party MP, Dr S. Vasoo), the two socio-political websites received a letter from Dr Vasoo’s lawyer demanding that the words be removed and an apology published within four days.³³³ Both sites complied.³³⁴

In another episode, lawyers acting for a cabinet minister wrote to the blogger Alex Au, who publishes Yawning Bread. The letter pointed out that a reader’s comment on a post by Mr Au was “false and scurrilous,” and asked Mr Au to remove it. Mr Au complied.³³⁵ This approach is akin to what print newspapers might do if faced with a similar legal demand, except that the online sites might also reproduce the letters from the lawyers and/or include links to the original allegedly offending article, with the disputed words or phrases removed.

Rather than treat online content as a different creature in need of a distinct legal regime, the approach has broadly applied the same legal standards and procedures that apply to written or spoken speech and content, regardless of the operational structure and ownership of websites—whether they are staffed by professional journalists or by a group of volunteers. Judging from the tenor of the coverage on these volunteer-run sites, they remain fiercely independent and pride themselves on providing alternative perspectives on issues of the day that are far more hard-hitting and critical of the Government than that found in the mainstream media.

Conversely, there is tacit acknowledgement within the internet community that online commentators must regulate themselves, or risk the (potentially) heavier hand of governmental regulation. When the former

331. L. Lim, “MDA: Views on blogs do not amount to news reporting,” *Singapolitics*, 31 May 2013, at <http://www.asiaone.com/print/News/Latest%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20130531-426503.html> (accessed 1 June 2013).

332. Aubeck Kam, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Communications and Information, at a panel discussion on “How MDA’s new Licensing Regime with affect YOU,” 4 July 2013, Singapore Computer Society and Internet Society Singapore.

333. “2 websites apologise to ex-MP Vasoo for offending article,” *Straits Times*, 9 December 2012, pB2.

334. TR Emeritus Team, “TRE receives Letter of Demand from Dr Vasoo’s lawyer,” 7 December 2012, at <http://www.tremeritus.com/2012/12/07/tre-receives-letter-of-demand-from-dr-vasoos-lawyer> (accessed 8 December 2012) and TOC Team, “TOC Letter of Apology to Dr S Vasoo,” 8 December 2012, at <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2012/12/toc-letter-of-apology-to-dr-s-vasoo> (accessed 8 December 2012).

335. A. Au, “Comment about K Shanmugam withdrawn,” yawningbread.com, 14 February 2012, at <http://yawningbread.wordpress.com/2012/02/14/comment-about-k-shanmugam-withdrawn/> (accessed 28 June 2012).

opposition politician and self-proclaimed Singapore dissident Gopalan Nair published a post asserting that the former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew had suffered a heart attack in early 2010, the blogosphere lit up with outrage and protest when it was acknowledged that there was no truth in the report. TOC, known to include fierce critics of the establishment, carried prominent posts denouncing Nair's actions, and pointing out that such actions would tend to provide an "excuse" for the Government to impose greater regulation on the internet.³³⁶ TOC's fears have proved to be founded as the latest licensing requirement for popular local news sites can be seen as a step in that direction.

7.2 Regulators

7.2.1 Changes in Content Regulation

Singapore's media content regulators have evolved over time. In the years following independence, the Ministry of Culture was the watchdog, succeeded by the Ministry of Communications and Information (1985) and later by the Ministry of Communications, Information and the Arts (1990). To regulate and promote the broadcast industry, the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) was established in 1994. This statutory board was later merged with the Films and Publications Department and the Singapore Films Commission to form the Media Development Authority (MDA) in 2003.

As a statutory board, the MDA has a certain degree of autonomy from the parent ministry, but is ultimately under ministerial supervision and oversight. It is an unusual creature with the double and—some would say—conflicting roles of being both industry promoter and regulator. The broad range of industries under its purview includes television, radio, film, video games, digital media, music, and publishing.

In the area of print publications, the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPPA) has regulated the ownership, licensing and distribution of newspapers since 1974. The NPPA is directly within the regulatory supervision of the MDA's parent ministry, which is currently the Ministry of Communications and Information. There has been no attempt to establish a board or regulator independent of the government to administer the NPPA.

The MDA is funded by the Government, with budget allocations published in the annual budget estimates debated in Parliament. There have been no major changes in the budgetary or organizational arrangements from the pre-internet era.

7.2.2 Regulatory Independence

The regulators are part of the government machinery and therefore comply and implement standards established by the Government. There are no mechanisms to ensure the regulators' independence from the Government (and, hence, from the ruling political party).

336. "Hoax on Singapore leader Lee Kuan Yew stirs netizen protests," *earthtimes.org*, 9 March 2010, at http://yoursdp.org/news/hoax_on_singapore_leader_lee_kuan_yew_stirs_netizen_protests/2010-03-09-1654 (accessed 9 December 2012).

It is not possible to judge whether or not the regulators have delivered independent decisions in practice. What can be documented is that websites which have taken or propagated anti-establishment views have been asked to register as political websites. As explained above, this does not prevent a site from operating, but requires it to make known to the regulators who runs it. No similar action appears to have been taken for independent, pro-establishment, or pro-government websites.

7.2.3 Digital Licensing

In the analog or pre-internet regime, the entry-barrier to the broadcasting or media markets was significantly higher—the capital expenditure required for a traditional broadcasting station, and the limited market size served as significant deterrents to non-establishment aspirants. The reality in the pre-internet context was that government investment and involvement were, for all practical purposes, prerequisites for seeking a license to operate a print or broadcast business.

This is no longer clearly the case today. Much less capital investment is required, and there are clear examples of how independent entrepreneurs have managed to secure licenses to operate services that leverage off internet technologies. One example is IPTV, or Internet Protocol Television, which does not consume electromagnetic spectrum or radio frequencies, and allows for on-demand provision of programming with a wide reach, unconstrained by transmitting power or cabling infrastructure. The MDA introduced the Niche Subscription TV License (see section 6.1) and awarded the first such license to VeeV Interactive Pte Ltd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of a privately held company, Sky Media Pte Ltd.³³⁷

Another Niche TV License has also been granted to Singapore Press Holdings,³³⁸ which is in effect controlled by the state. Nevertheless, the granting of the Niche Subscription TV License to VeeV seemed to demonstrate that licensing is not used as a tool to exclude non-government linked entities.

7.2.4 Role of Self-regulatory Mechanisms

One of SPH's two in-house unions, the Singapore National Union of Journalists, has a code of conduct,³³⁹ but this is not widely promoted among journalists or in local journalism schools. The union, which has been around for more than 40 years, maintains a low profile and is a member of the Confederation of Asean Journalists. SPH and MediaCorp do not have ombudsmen, nor is there one at the national level.

The idea of setting up an Internet Content Consultative Committee (IC3) was put forward in 2008 by a group of bloggers calling themselves “Bloggers 13.” In their push for greater internet freedom, free speech, and community self-regulation, the group drew up a 20-page paper called “Proposals for Internet Freedom

337. MDA, “MDA awards first niche TV license to VeeV Interactive,” at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2008/Pages/06032008.aspx> (accessed 22 June 2012).

338. MDA, “MDA awards Niche TV License to SPH to introduce its Razor TV service,” at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2008/Pages/30072008b.aspx> (accessed 22 June 2012).

339. Singapore National Union of Journalists, “Code of Conduct,” at <http://www.eyeonethics.org/journalist-code-of-ethics-in-asia/singapore-national-union-of-journalists-code-of-professional-conduct/> (accessed 15 February 2012).

in Singapore” and submitted it to the Information and the Arts Minister, Dr Lee Boon Yang.³⁴⁰ The paper called for an urgent review of Singapore’s media and internet laws and proposed ways of addressing defects in current laws and regulations relating to political expression, hate speech, sex, and violence.

They held a public seminar on the topic in June 2008, which was attended by the chairman of the Advisory Council on the Impact of New Media on Society (AIMS)—the government-appointed body reviewing legal and regulatory issues concerning the internet and new media for the Government. Bloggers 13 subsequently responded to AIMS proposals³⁴¹ when those were released in late 2008, saying they were overly cautious and did not go far enough. The Government accepted 17 out of the 26 recommendations made by AIMS, such as agreeing to liberalize the Films Act in phases, but it rejected proposals such as removing the registration requirement under the Class License Scheme and the setting up of a consultative body comprising young “digital natives.”³⁴²

No self-regulatory mechanism exists for on-line media. In May 2012, the minister in charge of internet-related matters called on the internet community to create a code of conduct for responsible online behavior. The response has been mixed. Some commentators have argued that self-regulation is sufficient, whereas others have supported the use of legislation to tighten up some aspects of online activity, specifically where cyber-bullying or identity theft is concerned.³⁴³

7.3 Government Interference

In a country where the media are owned, shaped, and regulated by the state—sometimes at one remove, but always as the final authority—there is no reason for the state to interfere in the media market or exceed its legal or regulatory powers. Singapore prides itself on the fact that international institutions rank it as one of the least corrupt countries in the world, and it therefore exercises its strict management of the media under and by the law. In this sense, when an elected government runs government agencies with the intention of having voter-endorsed government policy adhered to, it cannot be described as interference.

340. Sgpolitics.net, “Proposals for Internet Freedom: Bloggers for Internet Deregulation,” 18 April 2008, at <http://www.sgpolitics.net/?p=1166> (accessed 15 February 2012).

341. Report by Advisory Council on the Impact of New Media on Society, “Engaging New Media—Challenging Old Assumptions,” 2008.

342. MICA, “Government’s Response to the Recommendations Made by the Advisory Council on the Impact of New Media on Society (AIMS) in the Report “Engaging New Media—Challenging Old Assumptions,” at http://app.mica.gov.sg/Data/0/AIMS%20-%20Govt%20response%20_full_9Jan09_FINAL.pdf (accessed 15 February 2012).

343. L. Tan, “No, self-regulation online is sufficient, others argue,” *The New Paper*, 2 May 2012, at <http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Science%2Band%2BTech/Story/A1Story20120430-343069.html> (accessed 22 June 2012); T. Wong, “Online code of conduct? ‘No thanks,’” *Straits Times*, 28 April 2012, p. A30.

7.3.1 The Market

When it comes to media regulation, the ruling PAP government has been described as being committed to “the principle of strategic self-restraint.”³⁴⁴ It has, over the years, developed and continues to update what the academic Cherian George has described as an “arsenal of coercive powers,” while “calibrating its coercion to get the job done with as little force as necessary.”

This spectrum of powers has been astutely analyzed and found to range from the blanket closure of entire newspapers (a tactic last employed more than 40 years ago) to more sophisticated legal requirements for media companies, such as ownership structures that include the enhanced vote-carrying management shares (dubbed by George as part of “unique legislative innovations the genius of which remains under-recognized and under-estimated”), to being among the first in the world to introduce internet content regulations back in 1996. Such new media controls include technical requirements regarding proxy servers and licensing devices such as the Class Licensing Scheme.

7.3.2 The Regulator

From the outset, the MDA promised to adopt a “light-touch approach” in regulating internet content. A study by George of all known cases of state action in the first ten years of the Class License Scheme and Internet Code of Practice involving more than 20 reported instances generally found this to be the case.³⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that these verifiable cases of enforcement action all relate to situations which involve or potentially involve racial and religious sensitivities. When juxtaposed with other instances of enforcement action against sexually explicit or deviant sexual conduct online, it appears that there are no known cases of enforcement action on account of political views.

7.3.3 Other Forms of Interference

In the Singapore context,³⁴⁶ overt threats and shutdowns are considered old-school tactics, last employed more than 40 years ago when the Government, under Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, accused three newspapers of being involved in “black operations” against Singapore’s security. In his review of developments, George highlighted a 1981 article³⁴⁷ by the former *Straits Times*’ Editor-in-Chief Cheong Yip Seng, who wrote that local newspapers have become “a little more confident, assertive, and critical” and that despite a history of poor press relations, the Government “does not want a docile press” but “a livelier, more credible press with high professional standards.” He added that instances of government interference through “telephone calls to influence treatment of news or to reprimand ... are much fewer nowadays.”

344. C. George, “Calibrated coercion and the maintenance of hegemony in Singapore,” ARI Working Paper, No. 48, September 2005, at <http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/showfile.asp?pubid=514&ctype=2> (accessed 15 February 2012) (hereafter, C. George, “Calibrated Coercion”).

345. C. George, “Looking for Patterns.”

346. C. George, “Calibrated Coercion.”

347. Y.S. Cheong, “The Singapore Press: How free, how credible?” in *Asean Journalist*, 1981, 1(1), pp. 28–29.

Twenty-eight years later, at the Singapore Press Club luncheon talk³⁴⁸ (see section 3.2.2), the Acting Information and the Arts Minister Lui Tuck Yew disclosed that the only time he had contacted editors about coverage was during the leadership tussle at the women's group AWARE. This was because sustained coverage by the local media threatened to turn a story about the takeover of the women's rights group executive committee by a hitherto unknown group into a fiery and potentially divisive battle between "secular" versus "Christian" values in sex education taught in schools.

"The other times when we do talk, it is not about news reporting. It is certainly not a situation where I call [the editors] and say why is your journalist taking this slant?" Lui said. "At the end of the day, if we do things that way here, it is going to be very damaging, not just to the Government, but also to the newspapers."³⁴⁹

In the internet arena, the Government realizes that phone calls, however occasional, will not work with fiercely independent-minded and unsympathetic bloggers and writers. While no known local political website has been put on the MDA's list of 100 banned sites,³⁵⁰ two non-political party sites were, in the early days of internet regulation, asked to register with the MDA. One of them, Think Centre, complied, while the other, the pioneer socio-political site Sintercom, eventually chose to close down.

The registration requirement was again invoked by the MDA in January 2011 after the Prime Minister's Office gazetted The Online Citizen as a political association³⁵¹ (see sections 1.2.2 and 3.2.2). The impact of these actions prior to expected local parliamentary and presidential elections was swiftly and extensively analyzed by local bloggers.³⁵² TOC steadfastly vowed to carry on,³⁵³ even as its appeal to the Prime Minister's Office was rejected. A group of key volunteers registered and the site continues with its relentless coverage of socio-political affairs.

348. Speech by Lui Tuck Yew, Acting Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts, 9 September 2009, at <http://app.mica.gov.sg/Default.aspx?tabid=79&ctl=Details&mid=540&ItemID=1039> (accessed 16 February 2012).

349. C. Oon, "Advice to main media: Stay balanced; this can help in battling the influence of online media that are biased, says minister," *Straits Times*, 10 September 2009 (accessed 16 February 2012).

350. C. George, "Looking for Patterns."

351. Theonlinecitizen, "Breaking News: PM wants TOC gazette as Political Association," 11 January 2011, at <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/01/breaking-news-pm-wants-toc-gazetted-as-political-association> (accessed 16 February 2012).

352. B. Cheah, "Why I'm not concerned about The Online Citizen," 12 January 2011, at <http://benjamincheah.wordpress.com/2011/01/12/why-im-not-concerned-about-the-online-citizen>; B. Jaipragas, "Regulating The Online Citizen: What will it mean for Singapore's top alternative site?" 12 January 2012, at <http://journalism.sg/2011/01/12/regulating-the-online-citizen-what-will-it-mean-for-singapores-top-alternative-site>; T. Lee, "The Online Citizen will carry on," 14 January 2011, at <http://newnation.sg/2011/01/the-online-citizen-will-carry-on>; H. Lee, "TOC Gazetted: It's not about politics, but media," 16 January 2011, at <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/01/toc-gazetted-its-not-about-politics-but-media> (all accessed 16 February 2012).

353. Theonlinecitizen, "TOC Statement: Keep Calm and Carry On," 14 January 2011, at <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/01/toc-statement-keep-calm-and-carry-on> (accessed 16 February 2012).

7.4 Assessments

Technology has significantly reduced the cost of media ownership. Almost anyone with a computer in their home can be a “broadcaster,” not subject to strict TV or radio program codes that traditional broadcasters must uphold.

Singapore, in 1996, was one of the earliest countries to regulate internet content. The Class Licensing Scheme automatically deems ICPs to be licensed and subjects them to various conditions and an Internet Code of Practice. The Code was subsequently revised to spell out the responsibilities of ISPs and ICPs and reduce the categories of prohibited material to mainly sexual content and material that could promote or incite ethnic, racial and religious hatred. References to political out-of-bounds markers were removed.³⁵⁴ Yet symbolic but archaic vestiges of the early days of the internet remain. All fixed line traffic is filtered against a list of 100 sites prohibited for their sexual, violent or hate content—a task that is admittedly futile in a cyberspace filled with thousands of far worse sites—but is still carried out amid concerns over the impact on access speeds and compliance costs.

In the area of election advertising, however, as seen in section 4.4, laws were relaxed significantly before the 2011 polls to allow online promotion via podcasts, video streams, blogs, microblogs, social networking sites, mobile multimedia messaging, and other electronic applications. Prohibitions against chain email appeals urging citizens to forward such election-related content were also lifted. Election campaign footage could also be uploaded for viewing, without prior submission to the Board of Film Censors.³⁵⁵ This resulted in an explosion of online activity during the campaign period and increased *savoir-faire* among opposition parties, harnessing the internet to reach citizens.

In calibrating its approach to internet regulation over the past five to ten years, the Government appears to have maintained a “dual tolerance” system for material online and in mainstream media.³⁵⁶ It continues to be sensitive to criticism in mainstream newspapers, which are seen to set the agenda and tone of public debate, and is able to manage those relations through regular dialogue and interaction with senior editors. However, it usually closes one eye to the plethora of criticisms and complaints directed at it online, stepping up to act in the event of complaints from the public or when the content or behavior is patently objectionable on racial, religious, sexual, or violence grounds.

In the recent Facebook incidents (see section 7.1.2), police investigations were launched but the culprits faced no legal action, signaling an awareness that pursuing each and every such instance in court would be counter-productive and might in fact spur many more digital copycats, and that weighing in with too heavy a hand may do more harm than good to delicately managed community relations in the long run.

354. C. George, “Looking for Patterns.”

355. I.Saad, “Singapore eases rulings on Internet election advertising,” Channel NewsAsia, 14 March 2011, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1116396/1.html>. (accessed 1 July 2012).

356. C. George, “Looking for Patterns.”

To help it distinguish what is from what is not acceptable, the Government has stepped up public consultation on a variety of new media developments, ranging from content regulation, data protection, refinements to the Media Market Conduct Code³⁵⁷ (see section 5.2.2), and even technical solutions. This process enables the Government to tap relevant expertise in the public and private sectors while ensuring that the changes gain wide acceptance. Reports on the feedback received and the final approved versions are available on the relevant agency's website.

Efforts by a government-appointed council and a group of bloggers representing the blogging community to streamline and further liberalize internet content regulations and related laws have had a mixed outcome. The Government agreed with AIMS's recommendation to adopt a phased approach in liberalizing the Films Act. For instance, it agreed to allow for certain types of party political films and their use in internet election advertising and widened the positive list of items that could be used online during elections, such as podcasts, vodcasts, and blogs.

The Government declined, however, to accept the council's and bloggers' recommendation to remove the MDA registration requirement for individuals and political/religious organizations under the Class License Scheme. It also agreed with the council to retain the Class License Scheme—something the bloggers group is vehemently opposed to. With the continuing existence of the Scheme and Code, the MDA has maintained its light-touch approach to enforcement.

Coupled with the MDA's continued light-touch approach to online content, consumers have enjoyed access to a wide variety of alternative sites within the scope of what society generally deems to be acceptable. As George has pointed out, the Government appears rightly confident that such individual self-expression does not pose a serious challenge to its rule and may even provide a release valve for pressures that can build up.³⁵⁸

357. Media Development Authority of Singapore, *Code of Practice for Market Conduct in the Provision of Media Services 2010*, 12 March 2010, at <http://www.mda.gov.sg/Documents/PDF/Closing%20Note.pdf> (accessed 1 July 2012).

358. C. George, "Looking for Patterns."

8. Conclusions

8.1 Media Today

When Pacific Internet launched Singapore's first commercial internet service in 1995, few could have dreamed of the considerable proliferation and range of digital devices and applications that exist in today's market. Mainstream media companies were initially cautious and somewhat hesitant about embracing digital media for fear it would cannibalize existing traditional media businesses. The national broadcaster MediaCorp still provides pretty much all of its mass market news for free while SPH has become bolder in putting more of its premium content behind paywalls. Competition from independent sites, often run by socially conscious and committed volunteers, means there are no longer only two major media rivals in the country.

Mainstream media have had to jump on to the social media bandwagon to interact with and engage audiences, while discovering that content curation is just as important as content creation. The challenge to retain audiences has never been more difficult in a fragmented market.

For its part, the Government has taken steps to ensure that the process of digitization is managed well, and it has put in place a consultative mechanism to gather industry feedback on technical matters such as spectrum allocation and broadcast engineering standards. From a public communication standpoint, it has found the raucous online marketplace a challenge to manage but regards it as par for the course. Several ministers, including the Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, have turned to blogging and being active on Facebook in an effort to engage citizens and hear them out.

Despite earning itself the reputation of being one of the first attempts in the world to regulate internet content of an obscene, racial, religious or political nature, the framework, with a few refinements over the years, still stands firm, and is unlikely to be dismantled in the near future. In spite of this, the past decade or so has seen the flourishing of independent voices online. These have been mostly volunteer-run, largely self-funded operations that have yet to develop a sustainable operating model for the long term. Their future currently lies in the hands of small core groups of committed individuals, making them vulnerable to personnel changes and even the vicissitudes of daily domestic life.

The quality of writing and editorial values can be uneven as many are not trained writers and struggle to maintain journalistic values and practices among their stable of contributors. As seen from the case of The Online Citizen, those who write credibly and convincingly enough to garner a wide following can be held to account by registration and gazetting mechanisms that require key editors or writers to submit their personal details to the authorities and can effectively prevent them from receiving foreign funding.

On the other end of the spectrum, the mainstream media continue to pursue a profit-oriented agenda, carrying out basic and necessary functions to inform and educate the masses but generally shying away from rocking the political boat and unsettling a PAP-dominated government that in the 2011 general election saw its worst performance since independence in 1965. It garnered 60.1 percent of the vote, a respectable result, going by polls in other developed countries, but a far cry from the resounding 75.3 percent just two elections earlier in 2001.

Entrenched media ownership laws and a relatively small and linguistically diverse population of more than 5 million deter independent ownership of traditional media, making it an expensive and resource-intensive proposition. However, existing mainstream media giants still feel some pressure not to be out-scooped by their much-smaller online upstart counterparts or have their credibility called into question, and this has occasionally spurred the publication of politically sensitive or potentially embarrassing stories about the establishment which would otherwise have buried or downplayed in the past.

The emergence of easy-to-use blogs and social networking sites have provided truly democratic platforms for citizens to be heard. Singaporeans have flocked to such sites in their thousands to share views, find like-minded individuals, vent frustrations and provide feedback on various causes of unhappiness. At such online rallying points, they call for greater political accountability, transparency and efficiency and even put forward proposals for change. President Tony Tan described Singapore politics as entering “a new normal” during his own closely fought campaign to become head of state, which took place three months after the general election.³⁵⁹

The 2011 general election (“GE2011”) was hailed as a watershed on many fronts. Singapore’s usually fragmented and weak opposition collectively contested 82 out of 87 seats in the most competitive election since independence in 1965—winning six seats in the process. In contrast, 47 out of 84 seats were contested in GE2006, with only two opposition members taking their seats in parliament. But more than just for quantity, GE2011 stood out for the quality of the candidates fielded by the opposition, giving Singaporeans a foretaste of what could be the makings of an alternative leadership. The opposition MP Yee Jenn Jong noted that more professionals were losing their fear of political participation and coming forward to join the opposition, while more Singaporeans were making their voices heard through whatever channels available.³⁶⁰

359. A. Low, “Post-GE politics is the new normal: Tony Tan,” *Straits Times*, 16 July 2011, at http://www.straitstimes.com/The-Big-Story/The-Big-Story-1/Story/STIStory_697558.html (accessed 4 July 2012.)

360. L. Lim, “Whither the new normal in politics?” *Straits Times*, 5 May 2012, page D2 (hereafter, L.Lim, “Whither the new normal in politics?”).

Singapore's ambassador to the US for more than 15 years, Professor Chan Heng Chee, noted that there was now a more active citizenry that was demanding more from its elected government and its MPs.³⁶¹ Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong attributed the shifts in the ground to unease and disquiet in some quarters over the heavy influx of new immigrants, exacerbated by social media and what he called the "global mood of dissatisfaction with the status quo." He promised greater openness in sharing information with citizens and providing more room for civic society to grow³⁶² but also cautioned that more political openness is not enough and that Singaporeans would also have to play their part.³⁶³

This openness was translated into swift action. Within a year, three ministers linked to major missteps in housing, transport and home affairs stepped down immediately after the polls, rules on foreign immigration were tightened up and more Singaporeans-first policies were introduced, generous ministerial salaries were slashed by one third and greater efforts were made to consult environmental and heritage groups over urban redevelopment plans. In announcing his retirement after 52 years in cabinet a week after the 2011 elections, the former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew said, "It cannot be government as usual."³⁶⁴

On the mainstream media front, however, little has changed. While the Government has eased up on its past practice of launching defamation suits to silence dissenting views and has relaxed rules on internet election campaigning, it holds on to the existing regulatory safeguards while it tries to reconcile existing laws with emerging practices.

8.2 Media Tomorrow

Rapid technological advancements have greatly influenced news consumption habits and changed the way content producers create and distribute their work. Singapore already has more than 70,000 media workers and the number is likely to grow as media companies seek out talent to produce more digital content, especially online and on mobile platforms, to meet growing local and regional demand. Singapore could achieve major successes in the fields of digital animation and online gaming, where there is a big push by the MDA and plenty of grant funding available. Besides increased hiring, employers will also be upgrading and developing the skills of new and existing staff and finding new ways to manage content in the new media age. Greater advertising revenue growth is expected as advertisers start to recognize the return on investment and reach of digital media over traditional media and the latter's shrinking audience.

361. L.Lim, "Whither the new normal in politics?"

362. E. Toh, "PM Lee pledges Government will be more open," *Straits Times*, 21 October 2011, at http://www.straitstimes.com/Parliament/Story/STIStory_725729.html (accessed 4 July 2012).

363. L.H. Chua, "S'pore must find its own way: PM Lee," *Straits Times*, 28 January 2012, at http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/Singapore/Story/STIStory_760300.html, and http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/inthenews/primeminister/2012/January/spore_must_find_itsownwaypmllee.html (both accessed 4 July 2012).

364. "It cannot be government as usual: MM," *AsiaOne*, 16 May 2011, at <http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20110516-279106.html> (accessed 4 July 2012).

Being a compact, highly digitized country, with plenty of public information already available online, Singapore is likely to develop expertise in big data which could also pave the way for interesting developments in the field of data journalism. The republic is also the home of Newsplex Asia, a convergent training newsroom and media lab set up by the Nanyang Technological University in partnership with the World Association of Newspapers and Publishers (WAN-IFRA), from which new forms of digital storytelling are being tested and could emerge.

With greater civic activism and engagement online, this could spur the development of a sustainable model of volunteer journalism, one that is likely to combine some advertising with crowd-funding and other innovative ways of fundraising, including through offline events such as talks, fairs, and concerts.

Mainstream media will continue to dominate the content space through their sheer number of titles and outlets across multiple media platforms and reach. However, they risk losing their credibility and trust of their highly educated and discerning users if they blindly adopt a pro-government stance. Besides losing audience numbers, media organizations will also find it increasingly hard to hire talent that will seek to work elsewhere in freer, less-regulated jurisdictions. It is time that Singapore, as a regional business and financial hub and attractive world city, deserved an equally world class and open media environment for content creators to work and flourish.

List of Abbreviations, Figures, Tables, and Companies

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AIMS	Advisory Council on the Impact of New Media on Society
AMIC	Asian Media Information and Communication Centre
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ATSC	Advanced Television Systems Committee
AWARE	Association of Women for Action and Research
CRC	Censorship Review Committee
DiBEG	Digital Broadcasting Experts Group
DTT	Digital terrestrial television
DVB-T	Digital Video Broadcasting over Terrestrial)
ECA _s	Exclusive carriage agreements
EXCO	Executive Council of AWARE
FBO	Facilities-Based Operator
FTA	Free-To-Air
IC3	Internet Content Consultative Committee
ICP	Internet Content Provider
IDA	Infocomm Development Authority
IPTV	Internet protocol television
ISPs	Internet Service Providers
ISRs	Internet Service Resellers
IMT-Advanced	International Mobile Telecommunication–Advanced
LTE	Long-Term Evolution
MCI	Ministry of Communications and Information
MDA	Media Development Authority
MICA	Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts
NIAC	National Internet Advisory Committee
NPPA	Newspaper and Printing Presses Act
NIMS	Next Generation Interactive Multimedia, Applications and Services

NGNII	Next Generation National Infocomm Infrastructure
NGNBN	Next Generation Nationwide Broadband Network
PACE	Program Advisory Committee for English Programs
PAP	People's Action Party
PCMTS	Public Cellular Mobile Telephone Services
PSB	Public Service Broadcast
PPDR	Public Protection Disaster Recovery
RPD	Registry of Political Donations
SBA	Singapore Broadcasting Authority
SNS	Social Nnetworking Site
STB	Set-Top Box
VOD	Video On Demand
UGC	User-Generated Content
WAN-IFRA	World Association of Newspapers and Publishers
WBA	Wireless Broadband Access
WSD	White Space Devices

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Companies

Apple	NexLabs
A.T. Kearney	Nielsen Company
BBC	NTUC Media
Bloomberg	PacketOne
Blogspot	Pinterest
comScore	PricewaterhouseCoopers
CIMB-GK	Reebonz
CNN	Rock Publicity
CNBC	Routledge
Cubinet Interactive	SAFRA
Disney	SeaChange International
Facebook	Schibsted ASA
Flickr	Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC)
FOX	Singapore Cable Vision (SCV)
Goldman Sachs	Singapore Press Holdings (SPH)
Hitwise	SingNet
Informa Telecoms & Media	SingTel
Instagram	SPH UnionWorks
Lianain Films	StarHub Cable Vision
LinkedIn	StarHub TV
MediaCorp	Strategic Moves
M1	Temasek Holdings
Media Corporation of Singapore	Twitter
MediaWorks	VeeV Interactive
MSN Singapore	Yahoo!
	YouTube

Mapping Digital Media: Country Reports (published in English)

1. Romania
2. Thailand
3. Mexico
4. Morocco
5. United Kingdom
6. Sweden
7. Russia
8. Lithuania
9. Italy
10. Germany
11. United States
12. Latvia
13. Serbia
14. Netherlands
15. Albania
16. Hungary
17. Moldova
18. Japan
19. Argentina
20. South Africa
21. Turkey
22. Lebanon
23. Macedonia
24. Bosnia and Herzegovina
25. Poland
26. Montenegro
27. Georgia
28. Nigeria
29. Colombia
30. Croatia
31. Slovenia
32. China
33. Peru
34. Chile
35. Spain
36. Kenya
37. Bulgaria
38. India
39. France
40. Estonia
41. Kazakhstan
42. Malaysia
43. Pakistan
44. Slovakia
45. Czech Republic
46. Egypt

Mapping Digital Media is a project of the **Open Society Media Program** and the **Open Society Information Program**.

Open Society Media Program

The Media Program works globally to support independent and professional media as crucial players for informing citizens and allowing for their democratic participation in debate. The program provides operational and developmental support to independent media outlets and networks around the world, proposes engaging media policies, and engages in efforts towards improving media laws and creating an enabling legal environment for good, brave and enterprising journalism to flourish. In order to promote transparency and accountability, and tackle issues of organized crime and corruption the Program also fosters quality investigative journalism.

Open Society Information Program

The Open Society Information Program works to increase public access to knowledge, facilitate civil society communication, and protect civil liberties and the freedom to communicate in the digital environment. The Program pays particular attention to the information needs of disadvantaged groups and people in less developed parts of the world. The Program also uses new tools and techniques to empower civil society groups in their various international, national, and local efforts to promote open society.

Open Society Foundations

The Open Society Foundations work to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. Working with local communities in more than 70 countries, the Open Society Foundations support justice and human rights, freedom of expression, and access to public health and education.

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