

## **The Singapore Blogosphere and Political Participation: An Ethnographic Approach**

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### **Abstract**

This paper questions whether or not blogs can help create participatory forms of democracy in non-democratic societies which have suppressed political participation among their citizens. Drawing on an event in July 2006 within a group of websites related to Singapore, this paper asks to what extent do bloggers in Singapore use their blogs for purposes related to politics, and investigates whether the blogosphere facilitates political participation among Singaporean bloggers. The internet has been heralded as a force for democratisation in the world (Pitrodi 1993) and also simply another means of disseminating propaganda, fear and intimidation in Singapore (Rodan 1997). Such predictions of how technology will affect upon futures is not new. This paper accepts Hine's (2000) position that there is a need for an ethnographic approach to question the assumptions inherent in these predictions of an increased public sphere and at the same time a loss of privacy associated with the technology. Singapore while being regarded by the Chinese Communist State and possibly the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) "as a laboratory for one possible future for the twenty-first century", (Castells 1998) is regarded as a semi-democratic regime (Brooker 2000). A regime which allows elections but has limits on political and civil liberties and restricts competition between political parties (Brooker 2000). An ethnography of the Singapore blogosphere might help in analysing how the internet is constructed and shaped by social actors in order to overcome the technological focus and the domination of research that focuses on the United States of America. This paper argues that a sustained participant observation within the Singapore blogosphere could illustrate the position that the internet both creates public space to facilitate political participation and also helps to legitimise the semi-democratic nature of the Singapore regime.

### **Introduction**

If an aspect of the internet is to be viewed as a public sphere (Habermas 1989) in a non-democratic regime certain questions need to be addressed. The first group of questions relate to the nature of 'blogs' and the 'blogosphere'. Can the 'Singapore blogosphere' be classified as a virtual online community, can this online community be delineated from the wider global 'blogosphere'? This is also of significance when attempting to define a field in which to conduct an ethnographic study. Can such a virtual community contribute to local geographic communities or special interest groups in order for them to conduct their rights as citizens? Does this virtual community strengthen citizen participation and introduce new forms of public debate and

discussion in political and administrative processes? The section of this paper called 'Blogs and the Singapore Blogosphere' attempts to address these questions by firstly arguing that the virtual community in question is distinct from the wider global 'blogosphere'. As well as outlining previous technologically focused studies that have been conducted on the blogosphere it categorises the basic attributes of a 'blog' and the effect that 'blogging' has on an individual.

The section 'Non-Democratic Theory' shifts attention to the de-politicising nature of 'authoritarian regimes'. Three theories of non-democracy are looked at and it is argued that each of them contend that authoritarian regimes have the same aim which is to de-politicise the population in order to facilitate the mass mobilisation of the same population to overcome perceived hardship and economic disadvantage. Habermas' concept of the public sphere is a normative ideal to be strived for and within non-democratic regimes the growth of such a public sphere will have been undermined. There are also explicit assumptions and conditions under which the public sphere can fulfil its function for democracy.

The paper then moves to argue that a public sphere does exist in the Singapore context and refers to the work of Crampton (2003). Crampton argues that there are basically two types of 'blogs', one type that deals with the private sphere of the writer and another that positions itself within the discourse of public life or the public sphere. With reference to the work of Schalken (2000), the second type is a way of creating or sustaining a space of resistance for cyberspace. It is an attempt to form a space which has the potential to sustain rational and public debate, free from the intrusion of commercial and government power, where citizens can speak with ultimate power.

The final section, 'S'poreans are fed, up with progress!', draws on an event in July 2006 that occurred in the 'Singapore blogosphere' and the mainstream media. In doing so it is hoped that the position put forward in this paper, that the 'Singapore blogosphere' is creating a public sphere while at the same time helping to legitimise the authoritarian regime in Singapore will be better illustrated. The event was the publication of an article in the main stream media and on a blog. The reaction to, and delineation of the event perceived by the Singapore government, as at one and the same time a 'serious matter' and mere 'internet chatter' because of the two different mediums illustrates the 'public sphere' aspects of the internet in Singapore.

The paper begins with a definition of terms and tries to show that Singapore has a distinct community of internet users who identify with the geographic space that is Singapore.

## **Blogs and the Singapore Blogosphere**

A blog or weblog is a type of content management system or more importantly a website that has some of the functions of a traditional website. The main difference is that blogs organise their content into 'posts' or 'articles' which are shown on the page in reverse chronological order. They contain personal opinion or facts. Blogs are continually updated and adding a new post or article is as simple as sending an email. Blogs tend to be informal and readers are able to view posts when they want to by visiting the site or having it delivered to their email inbox or a designated site by feedreader. Blogs tend to be authored by one person or a small group of individuals and readers can leave feedback or comments positioned within the post if the blog owner has activated the comment function. Blogs tend to inherit the authors identity and personality and are ideal for providing a flow of time-sensitive information, such as commentary and analysis of a particular event (Demopolus and Holtz 2006).

The term 'blogosphere' refers to a group of blogs or all blogs and their interconnections. They are able to connect to each other through Hyperlinks, comments and trackbacks. As bloggers tend to inter-link heavily and read each others blogs they may have an influence on each other. So the blogosphere is a collective term that encompasses all blogs as a community or social network (Demopolus and Holtz 2006). As a result of the high level of interconnections blogs may have developed their own culture.

Pole (2000) argues that the studies conducted on the blogosphere can be grouped into three categories; descriptive accounts, analysis of the meeting of blogs and politics; explorations of bloggers and political participation. Chang et al (2005) and Nardi et al (2005) provided descriptive accounts of bloggers who are engaged in the activity in order to document their personal lives, provide commentary, articulate ideas and maintain community forms. Hewitt (2005) and Posner (2005) who study the intersection of blogs and politics, argue that bloggers have a confrontational and competitive relationship with the mainstream media and that bloggers act as a check on the established media. Wallsten (2005) argues that bloggers amplify the opinions of mainstream media and other elites. Drezner and Farrell (2004) also assess the links between the mainstream media and bloggers and conclude that bloggers are motivated by material incentive, personal networks, expertise and speed. While the research outlined above is of significance to this paper, I feel that the research conducted by McKenna and Pole (2004), which I now turn to, is of greater relevance.

McKenna and Pole (2004) showed that bloggers in the United States used their blogs to predominantly engage in political participation. They suggest that blogging turns individuals who were moderately politically active into more active political participants. According to McKenna and Pole (2004), the functions that are specific to the blogging technology, such as commenting, trackbacks, linking and the

blogrolls facilitate political discourse and participation. McKenna and Pole (2004) by focusing on the nature of the technology seem to argue that the facilities of commenting and trackbacks have an affect on the social actors who in engage in the social practice of blogging.

I am interested in the Singapore blogosphere as it appears to be an isolated and distinct community. Defining a core group of users who continually return to a particular site of online interaction is needed and various attempts at defining, visualising and extracting these communities have been attempted. Examples include Yu-Ru Lin et al (2006), who used blog ranking and their social connections to devise a visual representation of blog communities. Yu-Ru Lin et al (2006) established communities by assessing the level of mutual awareness through the various actions of bloggers, such as commenting on each others sites or using trackbacks to inform the writer of an article that they have linked to it. Yu-Ru Lin et al have defined the Singapore blogosphere as a 'community with no obvious central topic', and stated that it was a rather closed community, or rather closed off from the wider global community of bloggers. Hurst (2006) using the same data as Yu-Ru Lin et al, created for the WWW 2006 Workshop, highlighted the same group of blogs as Yu-Ru Lin et al (2006). Again the Singapore blogosphere is isolated from the more global blogosphere<sup>1</sup>. As a member of the Singapore blogosphere since 2003 I feel that because of Yu-Ru Lin et al's (2006) and Hurst's (2006) data mining approach to defining and analysing the communities that this area would be better served by using participant observation methods, especially when trying to understand the nature of the culture and topics of discussion involved.

### **Non-Democratic Theory**

The second aspect of the question that this paper addresses is whether or not the blogosphere is capable of generating political participation in a population that has been politically de-activated. In order to assess the nature of how and why such a policy of depoliticisation has occurred it is necessary to assess the applicability of various non-democratic theory to the Singapore context. It is also hoped that by doing so that the discourse involved in legitimising a non-democratic position will be seen as generic rather than relating to a particular regime. The boundary between democratic and non-democratic is difficult to delineate and is rightly a contested region of theory. I now turn to three attempts to traverse this contested terrain.

Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1989, cited Brooker 2000) have attempted to identify a 'graduated range' or continuum of the 'less-than-democratic systems'. From non-democratic to near-democratic with the position of hegemonic one party system placed at the centre. Non-democratic or 'pseudo democracy' refers to a system that has formally democratic institutions such as an electoral competition in order to mask what is in

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<sup>1</sup>See Figure 1. In Appendix [the Singapore blogosphere](#) is the small cluster in the bottom right hand corner which consists of a core group of users during 2005.

reality authoritarian domination (*ibid*:xvii). At the other end of the scale is near-democratic or a semi democratic system in which electoral competition deviates from popular preference. The semi democratic system limits citizens preferences during elections, restricts competition between political parties, has a lack of fairness during the conduct of elections, and limits political and civil liberties in terms of political party capabilities to organise and express themselves. At the centre of these two positions is the hegemonic party system which they argue can overlap with the pseudo democratic system. The distinctive feature of a hegemonic party system, is that as a result of 'pervasive electoral malpractice' the opposition parties have no real chance to compete for power. A hegemonic party system tends however to be more institutionalised, less personalised and coercive.

Linz (1964, cited Brooker 2000) focused on authoritarianism which is defined as a system in which freedom is restricted in favour of obedience to authority. With four distinctive elements to the regime and one distinctive aim, the de-politicisation of the population, authoritarian regimes have firstly a limited political pluralism and limits maybe severe or moderate; legal or *de facto* and applied only to political parties and political groups (Linz 1964, cited Brooker 2000). Secondly, there tends to be an absence of a guiding ideology, which is replaced with a guiding 'distinctive mentality' which is more emotional than rational. This however does not mean that those in charge of the regime do not claim to have an ideology. Thirdly, the regime, after an early phase of political mobilisation, appears devoid of political mobilisation. The fourth and final distinctive element is that a single leader or small group exercise power within poorly defined limits which are easily predicted. The aim of such a regime is the continued creation and re-creation of an easy to manipulate population. Formed after severe political strife or as a result of the end of colonisation, populations that reside within such regimes have never experienced an organised movement before. The people are encouraged to shift their attention to private affairs as opposed to public issues. Such a position facilitates the implementation of socially progressive or conservative policies that require mass mobilisation.

The final theory of non-democracy I intend to outline is O'Donnell's (1973) typology. O'Donnell highlights three types of authoritarianism, the traditional, the populist and the bureaucratic. In contrast to Linz (1964) focus on mobilisation, O'Donnell (1973) centres on modernisation. The traditional type of authoritarianism is associated with low levels of modernisation but does not encompass monarchy. The populist type is found amongst medium levels of modernisation. Of interest to this paper is the bureaucratic type which is similar to Linz's (1964) interpretation in that it focuses on the goal of depoliticisation. O'Donnell's (1973) bureaucratic type of authoritarianism attempts to politically exclude and deactivate the popular sector. This type is supported by an administrative military complex of civil service aligned with the military and some members of the middle class. Bureaucratic authoritarian regimes can also occur under a party dictatorship (O'Donnell 1979). The technocrats and the organised strength of social sectors are encapsulated in government

dependent interest groups or political parties. The goal according to O'Donnell is political deactivation and exclusion, by eliminating the organisational bases, eliminating the electoral arena and suppressing electoral activity. The ultimate goal of the bureaucratic authoritarian system is to solve major economic and political-social problems which had played a central role in the formation of the regime. Overcoming these problems it is argued will create severe hardship by the people of the country and in order to ensure the success of these policies it is necessary to deactivate the popular sector, in particular the urban lower class (O'Donnell 1979 : 73).

Just how well do the aims and goals of authoritarian regimes explicated by the writers above apply to the Singaporean context? The state's intervention in Singaporean society is well documented – from material relations, to housing and the economy. The Peoples Action Party (PAP) has maintained power since independence from Britain in 1959, by neutralising such unease of a one party state, by forging an ideology of 'survivalism', the notion that the nation as a whole had to abandon politics to ensure their economic and social survival (Baber, 2000). Increasingly trying to de-politicise politics, the ideology has shifted to the discourse of 'pragmatism' and 'communitarianism'(Baber 2000).

Singapore adopted the Winsemius Report (United Nations Industrial Survey Mission, 1960, cited Rodan 1989) based on the idea that "owing to the dearth of local know-how and the structural immobility of domestically based capital, foreign capital would have to be seduced" (Rodan, 1989;64). In order to seduce foreign capital from the multinationals the Trade Union (Amendment) Bill that made strikes and other industrial action illegal, unless approved by a majority of the union members, and banned strikes in essential services was introduced in 1966 (Rodan, 1989). Social discipline was further enhanced by the Employment Act and the Industrial (Amendment) Act. Other initiatives included the management committees of all community centres being dismantled and brought under the control of the People's Association, who report directly to the Prime Minister's Office. Since then, further amendments to legislation has resulted in the ruling party influencing dating, sexuality, higher education, religion, ethnicity, the mass media and cultural production, formal and informal (Baber 2002). All of these were legitimised by appeals to 'survivalism', 'pragmatism and 'communitarianism'(Baber 2002 and Chua 1995).

It is argued here that political participation in Singapore has been undermined. Kollmeyer (2003) has provided a more concrete measurement in relation to analysing a specific regime. The conceptualisation and operationalisation of the contested term, 'democracy' and the framework for measuring 'democratisation' is correlated with class compromise by Kollmeyer (2003). Kollmeyer asserts that, "if we equate democracy with a governing system that equitably mediates class conflict [...]" we can measure changes in outcomes theoretically linked to effective democratic governance by using four macro-level social and political

indicators; income inequality, voter participation rates, incarceration rates and union membership.

According to Kollmeyer (2003), Muller (1998 cited Kollmeyer 2003) finds a positive correlation between rising levels of income inequality and the probability of an authoritarian takeover of a previously democratic regime. In Singapore, voting is compulsory, thereby complicating the use of this indicator when trying to gauge the level of political participation. With reference to union density, Singapore ratified Convention No.98 but not convention No.87 of the International Labour Standards Commission. Convention 87 refers to freedom of association and protection of the Right to Organisation Conventions. No. 98 refers to the Right to organise for the purpose of collective bargaining. The level of union density in 1999 (Campbell, 1999 cited Serrano, 2005) was 20.0%. However, the biggest union in Singapore is the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) which "is a family of 63 trade unions with more than 470,000 members in support of the labour movement" (NTUC 2006). The NTUC chief has always been a PAP member and a member of cabinet. 'Voter participation' and 'union density', both engaged in measuring political involvement of the population, have been encapsulated under the control of the dominant political party and the government. Like other authoritarian regimes the popular sector of Singapore has been deactivated by the PAP in an attempt to subdue the population to ensure the success of political and economic policies that are geared to making Singapore more competitive in the global economy. The PAP's continued commitment to a perceived multiparty system means that co-option is aimed at other parties' potential leaders and activists. Influential or potential local leaders are appointed to the Citizens Consultative Committees and those thinking of standing for election or openly supporting another party are deterred by fear of retribution (Chan, 1976; Milne and Mauzy 1990 cited Brooker 2000).

### **The Singapore Blogosphere as a Public Sphere**

According to Baber (2002) Habermas' (1989) public sphere has managed to survive in a very limited sense, in *kopi tiams*, or coffee shops on the streets of Singapore. Baber (2002) argues that, civil society, (voluntary associations independent of the state and private interests) are practically non-existent and any attempt to influence public policy is viewed as political and therefore contrary to the ideology of 'survivalism', 'pragmatism' and 'communitarianism'.

With Kollmeyer's (2003) 'voter participation' and 'union density' indicators inapplicable in the context of Singapore due to the enforcement of mandatory voting and the encapsulation of the trade union movement into the PAP dominated cabinet, this paper offers an alternative measurement of 'political participation' by applying Crampton's (2003) concept of *parrhesia*<sup>2</sup>. Crampton (2003) refers to Foucault's lectures

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<sup>2</sup> *Parrhesia* is a Greek term that very loosely translates as freedom of speech.

conducted in 1983. Crampton (2003) invokes the Heideggerian idea of 'being-in-the-world' in order to highlight the essentially ongoing reflexive non-static nature of being online. Communities in cyberspace, composed of individuals and networks, are engaged in either confessional or parrhesia activity (Crampton (2003). Briefly defined, the confessional approach is to do with attempts of an author or group of authors to construct an authentic sense of self in an on-going recursive fashion, similar to the writing of a physical diary and those studies by Chang et al (2005) and Nardi et al (2005). They are primarily focused on themselves, their lived experiences, friends and family. This paper intends to outline the second approach to blogging, that of parrhesia as a way of describing the relationship between one Singaporean blogger, his relationship with the government and the the governments relationship to the mainstream media.

According to Foucault (1983), "Parrhesiastes says what is true because he knows that it is true; and he knows that it is true because it is really true". Parrhesiastic claims of truth do not depend on evidence or a Cartesian Mental state; it is not belief linked to truth (mental experience) but is a verbal activity, which no longer fits into our modern epistemic framework. Certain 'moral qualities' are the proof that he/she has access to the truth and vice versa. The moral quality is his/her courage. In parrhesia, the danger always comes from the fact that the truth is capable of hurting your interlocutor. A speaker in order to be engaged in parrhesia is always in a position of inferiority, and is aware of this status. Crampton (2003) argues that one mode of parrhesia is the use of humour to soften the blow of the message being delivered. Finally, in parrhesia the speaker is able to speak and is duty bound to speak the truth but not under duress. Parrhesia is therefore related to freedom and duty.

For Crampton (2003) the implications of a parrhesiastic contract for the internet are both desirable and less desirable. The "Powers" of the internet are wise and cooperative, they allow people to speak and publish freely. It also reinforces the authorities, encourages stability of power, and legitimises the ruler-ruled relationship. It results in a relationship between those that control and are controlled.

Parrhesia it is hoped is a way of coding the various blogs within the Singapore blogosphere. Such a concept should enable an ethnographer to assess the level and nature of political participation, for or against the authoritarian regime, within a de-politicised environment. That way the ethnographer should be able to draw out the social practices and social actors who are creating and/or sustaining a space of resistance on the internet. Groups such as the Electronic Freedom Frontier tend to be reactive as opposed to being pro-active but according to Ho, Baber and Khondar (2002), after conducting a content analysis, Singaporeans are creating a public space, defending freedom of speech. This paper now turns to an analysis of an event that I hope will illustrate the relationship between, bloggers, the mainstream media and the Singapore government.

## **S'poreans are fed, up with progress!**

Drawing on an event in July 2006 within a group of websites related to Singapore, this paper asks, 'can bloggers in Singapore use their blogs for purposes related to politics?' and investigates whether or not the blogosphere facilitates political participation among Singaporean blogger.

The Singaporean A-List blogger MrBrown published an article in the mainstream media, Today Newspaper<sup>3</sup>, and shortly thereafter on his blog<sup>4</sup>. The blog article received a total of 131 comments and 11 trackbacks. MrBrown is generally regarded by the mainstream press as a satirist and is castigated by Dr Vivian Balakrishnan as using "humour, [to]distort or aggravate on an emotional level". The event illustrates the break down of a parrhesiastic relationship in terms of the mainstream media and the assertion that elements of the Singapore blogosphere and other aspects of the internet are in a parrhesiastic relationship with the government. A clear distinction is drawn between the type and style of discourse 'allowed' in the mainstream media and the internet with Dr Vivian Balakrishnan stating they, the Singaporean government, want their "newspapers to [...] be aware that the mainstream media in particular – you are not an internet chat room".

"THINGS are certainly looking up for Singapore again. Up, up, and away (MrBrown 2006b). This opening statement positioned next to a cartoon image of arrows with various daily prices rocketing towards the sky, refers to the upbeat tone of the mainstream media in Singapore even when disseminating economically harsh news. The satirical nature of the statements may not be readily available to a researcher who has simply data mined the events leading up to the publication. The article was published after yet another land slide victory for the PAP in the general elections, where 66% of the vote translated into 82 seats out of a possible 84, with opposition parties garnering a total of 33% of the votes and 2 seats in parliament. The use of headline-like phrases by MrBrown such as "Household incomes are up" (MrBrown 2006b) while further reading provides a more accurate account of the situation again seems to support Hewitt's (2005) and Posner's (2005) position that bloggers have a confrontational and competitive relationship with the mainstream media. However MrBrown was, at the time hired by the Today Newspaper. The confrontational tone of the article is tempered with a humorous acknowledgment to the reader that they are powerless to affect such changes in their personal income, "So Singaporeans need to try to "up" their incomes, I am sure, in the light of our rising costs"(MrBrown 2006b). Whether intentional or not the next phrase, "Have you upped yours?" (MrBrown 2006b) seems to refer to a rather profanity free curse usually expressed while gesturing with two fingers. The recurrent theme of all news in the mainstream media receiving a positive slant returns with the sentences "We are very thankful for the timing of all this good news, of course. Just after the elections, for instance. By that I mean that getting the important event out of the way means we can now concentrate on trying to pay

<sup>3</sup> MrBrown (2006a) S'poreans are fed, up with progress! Today Online. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.todayonline.com/articles/127762.asp> (accessed April 17<sup>th</sup> 2007)

<sup>4</sup> MrBrown (2006b) S'poreans are fed, up with progress! MrBrown. Online. Available HTTP: [http://www.mrbrown.com/blog/2006/07/today\\_sporeans\\_.html#c22756803](http://www.mrbrown.com/blog/2006/07/today_sporeans_.html#c22756803) (accessed April 17<sup>th</sup> 2007)

our bills”(MrBrown 2006b). The article itself is significant in its tone and the satire involved requires an awareness of the culture. However, the reaction to the article says more about the current issues of identity building and the perceived relationship that the government has with the online Singapore blogosphere. The excerpts below has been transcribed from news broadcasts that originally aired in the Singapore mainstream media and are currently available online<sup>5</sup>.

Both news items begin with lengthy introductions by the news presenter, almost 50% in each case, and were originally broadcast in July of 2006 in Singapore. The comments by Dr Lee Boon Yang are framed within the theme of identity and “what makes you, you?” This is apparently aimed at getting Singaporeans to decide for themselves, “what the Singapore identity really is”. It then quickly asserts Dr Lee's position that the article by MrBrown was “unfounded”. Dr Lee states that “MrBrown's comment was not posted on his blog”, and that because of this it could not be treated, “as part of the internet chatter”. Such disregard for the social interaction that takes place online is not unfounded but dismissing all internet deliberation as 'chatter' is an attempt to undermine the entire medium. The online medium is then positioned by Dr Lee in stark contrast with the mainstream newspapers in particular that they, the newspapers “have to be objective, you have to be accurate, you have to be responsible”. The piece is clearly framed within the notion of national identity building and the finishing remarks are that even though Singaporeans must decide for themselves who they are, they must speak with one voice and not “mislead people” or “confuse people” as it is likely to “undermine our national strategy”.

The second news piece that involves Dr Vivian Balakrishnan follows the same format, the introduction by the news reader followed by a piece to camera by the minister concerned. The government is credited with saying that “Singapore's mainstream media has a crucial role in ensuring the quality and standard of discourse and national debate and as long as everyone understands their respective roles Singaporeans can have a useful dialogue – going forward”. Dr Vivian Balakrishnan then states that “We are all entitled to express our opinions” but 'we' must be prepared to be “rebutted”. In this instance 'rebutted' for MrBrown means having his column discontinued. Dr Vivian goes on to say that “If you feel that there is a problem with cost of living, say so, lets collectively explore solutions[...] but also to be aware that the mainstream media in particular – you are not an internet chat room”.

The truth in MrBrown's article is a verbal activity, and the proof that he has access to the truth is the moral quality of his courage. MrBrown as many in Singapore are aware would have known that his comments might result in such action. However he dared to speak. In parrhesia, the danger always comes from the fact that the truth is capable of hurting your interlocutor. In this instance undermining the ongoing national

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2PXNevLR1A> Dr Lee Boon Yang and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDoxh4isuWk> Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, lasted viewed 17<sup>th</sup> April 2007.

identity building strategies of the PAP. A speaker in order to be engaged in parrhesia is always in a position of inferiority, and is aware of this status. MrBrown using humour spoke the truth but not under duress. MrBrown's article and the subsequent response from the mainstream media and the government illustrates the potential for the Singapore blogosphere to be perceived by the bloggers and the government of Singapore to be in a relationship of parrhesia, questioning and yet at the same time adding legitimacy to the authoritarian regime.

## **Conclusion**

The Singapore blogosphere has created a civil community that might be able to shift from resistance identity to project identity. One community that populates the internet can be referred to as potentially a unitary public sphere. Yu-Ru Lin et al defined the Singapore blogosphere as a 'community with no obvious central topic', they are unable to comprehend the communities topic because they are trying understand 'culture' and 'community' by counting the remnants of social action, comments and trackbacks. By engaging with the Singapore blogosphere and analysing the content and issues that the Singapore bloggers are writing about it 'a central topic' should emerge. I would tentatively posit the argument that they are engaged collectively in a form of public sphere creation. To paraphrase Schalken (2000) the Singapore blogosphere is able to combine their virtuality and their locality as a city-state and therefore possess the potential to create a form of democracy – cyberdemocracy. A cyberdemocracy in an otherwise authoritarian state does further legitimise the continuation of the one party dominated state.

Commenting and placing trackbacks on blogs that are perceived as being politically partisan in an authoritarian regime takes on wider ramifications for the bloggers and blog readers involved. Anonymity of bloggers under such conditions gains importance. When events like MrBrown's removal from the Today Newspaper happen it helps to remind those involved in the rule of law, the Sedition Act and defamation cases that take place in an authoritarian regime.

Questions however remain, will resistance identities emerging from these spaces become identity projects that led Singapore towards democratisation? What is the culture of the Singapore blogosphere and what are the social practices that they are engaged in? Such issues can only be addressed by conducting a sustained period of participant observation within the community. An ethnographic approach to studying the Singapore blogosphere should facilitate an understanding of the processes involved from the perspective of the social actors, rather than imposing a technology centric schema of the events.

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## APPENDIX 1

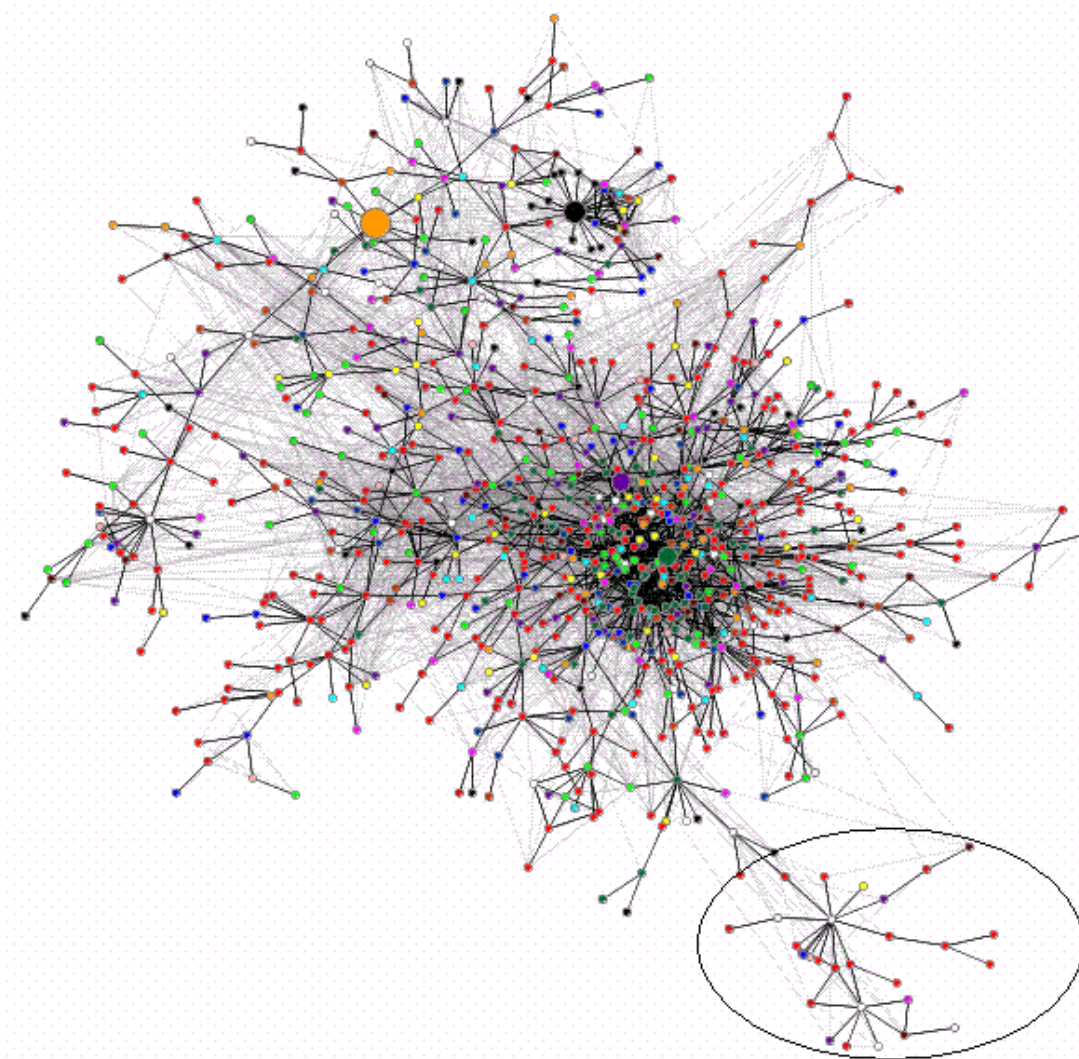


Figure 1: Matthew W. Hurst (Data Mining). Interactive version available at..

[http://datamining.typepad.com/data\\_mining/2006/07/interactive\\_map.html](http://datamining.typepad.com/data_mining/2006/07/interactive_map.html)