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MEDIA AND INTERNET USE DURING GENERAL ELECTION 2015

edited by
CAROL SOON
TAN TARN HOW
NADZIRAH SAMSUDIN

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Chapter 1

Introduction



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Carol Soon and Tan Tarn How

BACKGROUND

As with other countries, the Internet holds a strong allure for political parties and candidates in Singapore during election time because of its instant connectivity and wide reach. During Singapore's General Election (GE) in 2006, the author of the blog Yawning Bread, Alex Au, threw new media into the spotlight when his photograph of the huge crowd at a Workers' Party (WP) rally in Hougang went viral. In an instant, the power of new media became apparent, showing how ordinary citizens could create and share information not found in mainstream media sources, such as newspapers, television (TV) and radio.

By GE2011, some observers were predicting an "Internet election". However, a survey of 2,000 voters conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) after the election on people's use of media for election information found that the Internet played a much smaller role than expected (Tan & Mahizhnan, 2016). Not only did people consume more election news from mainstream media than from alternative online news sources (blogs, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter), mainstream media sources were also perceived by users to be more important and trustworthy than alternative online news sources.

Several developments that took place since GE2011 led to the question of what social media's impact on the election in 2015 would be. First, the proliferation of smartphones and Instant Messaging (IM) platforms such as WhatsApp meant that people were consuming information and accessing social networking sites (SNS) on the go, and in real time. Second, the media space has evolved and may influence people's consumption and trust of both mainstream and online media during GE2015.

The following section traces some of the key changes in the online media landscape. Following which, we discuss key policy changes and how politicians and political parties have become more social media-savvy during the time leading up to the election. Developments

on these various fronts set the stage for our study on the role of media during GE2015.

“NORMALISATION” OF THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

One key question for GE2015 is how the “political Internet” in Singapore has evolved since GE2011. In four years, the biggest change has been the “normalisation” of political cyberspace. By this, we mean that the online world has become more like the “normal” offline world, where there is a wide range of views, with most opinions clustering around the centre. Several developments have led to the normalisation.

First, the political Internet in Singapore is now home to a much wider spectrum of political views and players, and even more so since GE2011. This is contrasted with the previous period where the Internet was used almost exclusively to express anti-government and anti-ruling party sentiments. Although alternative sites such as The Online Citizen (TOC), TR Emeritus and Yawning Bread are still around, they have been joined by new players such as Mothership.sg, The Middle Ground, Inconvenient Questions and Six-Six.¹ The content on these new sites can be considered as “mainstream” as they offer news very similar to the Singapore Press Holdings and MediaCorp, though the former are slightly more critical of the government.

The mainstream websites pose strong competition to the anti-establishment ones. For example, Mothership.sg trumps TOC in readership, according to the figures provided by both sites. The Middle Ground, which was set up in June 2015 as a reincarnation of the defunct Breakfast Network, reached an impressive 300,000 views a month (as of September 2015). At the opposite end to TOC, new strongly pro-government, and pro-PAP sites, such as Fabrications About the PAP, Fabrications Led by Opposition Parties, and SG General Elections 2016 have emerged.

With increasing financial backing, websites, especially the mainstream ones, underwent professionalisation. During the time

¹ Inconvenient Questions and Six-Six have ceased operation as of May 2016 due to lack of funds.



leading up to GE2015, The Middle Ground had four full-time journalists and two staff in the business end. Inconvenient Questions had seven staff and outsourced its video production. Mothership.sg was and is still able to pay a handful of full-time staff and has a budget to advertise. The Middle Ground is led by a former professional mainstream media journalist, and so was Inconvenient Questions. On the other hand, TOC has been struggling to raise funds, paying its staff rates that range from “semi-formal to exploitative”, according to one of its then editors Mr Howard Lee. Inconvenient Questions, The Middle Ground, Six-Six and Must Share News had also formed a GE Online Alliance to pool resources.

Normalisation was also observed in the continued domination of online websites of mainstream media, e.g., *The Straits Times* and Channel NewsAsia as online sources of political news. These sites saw more readers than the alternative news sites, and were also more trusted than alternative news sites for election news, as Tan & Mahizhnan (2016) found in an IPS study in 2011.

Another development is the pervasive use of SNS by Singaporeans. Furthermore, Facebook has become a conduit for many articles — from both independent and established mainstream media, cementing Facebook’s reach. Here, the popularity of politicians online reflects their popularity offline. Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong’s Facebook page, which has over 800,000 likes, dwarfed those of WP’s Mr Low Thia Khiang’s (over 22,000) and Singapore Democratic Party’s Dr Chee Soon Juan’s (over 6,000). Almost all Members of Parliament (MPs) have Facebook pages.

We also observed rationality in cyberspace. A number of sites offered articles that were completely one-sided (that is, totally ignoring the other or different perspectives in an issue) or loaded with emotive language. The more serious sites, however, were more balanced and level-headed, irrespective of where they stood in the political spectrum, as found in our study on the rationality of the political online space conducted in 2014 (Soon & Tan, 2015). Partisanship has not stopped them from being “rational”.

In addition, since 2011, Singaporeans have become more willing to speak up against the government. This is a reflection of a similar trend offline. But it should also be noted that people are now more willing to speak up online for the government. In the past, supporters of the government would be shouted into silence. This willingness of speaking up — either for or against the government — is part of the normalisation process where the online world becomes more and more like the offline one.

POLITICAL PARTIES MORE SOCIAL MEDIA SAVVY

When the Internet first became popular in the 1990s, there was much hype about how it would expand the communication repertoire of governments and politicians. That has now become an understatement. Globally, social media has transformed government-citizen and politician-voter interaction. In a Pew Research Center survey conducted in October 2014, voters for both United States (US) Democrat and Republican parties said that social media helped them form deeper connections with the candidates they support (Mitchell, Gottfried, Kiley & Matsa, 2014).

In an interview with ASEAN journalists in June 2015, PM Lee said that people were spending more time on social media platforms and he wanted to have an online presence there too. This is because there would be people on Facebook “who will not be reading speeches and this is one way to reach them,” he added (“PM Lee talks about social media”, 2015). Besides PM Lee, other government ministers and MPs have been using Facebook to reach out to Singaporeans. They often comment on economic and social issues, and post photos of themselves interacting with residents at constituency visits.

In the months leading up to GE2015, all parties leveraged the myriad social media platforms to better connect voters to their candidates. Of the nine political parties, the PAP was most active on social media. The party took to announcing government policies in attractive and digestible infographics on Facebook, and introduced candidates through videos. It also launched a mobile application that featured the latest news and allowed users to find out about their party representatives. Similarly, the WP, departing from its usual minimalist online strategy, also extended its social media reach through a mobile



application. After the Writ of Election was issued, the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) unveiled their candidates through live video streaming.

However, the question is whether such endeavours necessarily translated to bigger vote shares? The answer is not a definite “yes” as people tend to seek out like-minded others. This has been observed in several studies including one from 1997 where political scientists Kevin Hill and John Hughes analysed 22 online political forums. They found that discussions were dominated by participants who shared similar political beliefs (Hill & Hughes, 1998). People visit sites that speak to their existing beliefs, to avoid dissonance that arises when they are exposed to contrarian views that challenge their long-held values.

Fast-forward 18 years, and the flocking of like-minded people to similar sites can be observed as well. The earlier mentioned Pew study found that there was little overlap in the news sources used by liberals and conservatives in the US (Mitchell, Gottfried, Kiley & Matsa, 2014).

One observation of political parties’ Facebook pages in Singapore is that while there were many supportive comments and accolades, there was a stark absence of dissenting views or debates on hot-button issues. The implication is that political parties and candidates were likely to be connecting with existing supporters. Thus, the success of any social media strategy during the hustings depends on how political parties use technology to reach out to fringe voters whose support is tipping towards them, and those in the middle ground who are undecided on whom to vote.

POLITICS LEADING TO GE2015

GE2011 was referred to by many as a “watershed election” with the PAP losing its first Group Representative Constituency (GRC), Aljunied, to the WP. The PAP-led government then spoke of a more consultative approach and it embarked on a nationwide initiative called Our Singapore Conversation (OSC), helmed by then Minister for Education Heng Swee Keat. The objective of the OSC was to facilitate conversations among Singaporeans, and between

Singaporeans and policymakers, on how to create “a home with hope and heart”. An estimated 30 dialogue sessions with Singaporeans from all walks of life commenced in October 2012. The initiative was supported by different offline and online platforms such as a website and a Facebook page.

Between 2012 and 2015, the government implemented a series of what some described as “left-of-centre” policies (Low, 2013). The key thrusts of these policies were to strengthen social safety nets, ensure that seniors’ medical needs are better taken care of, and promote life-long learning to increase people’s employability. One important measure is the MediShield Life, a health insurance scheme that is more comprehensive than the MediShield system. Among various changes, the previous age cap of 92 years was removed, people would be covered from birth, the yearly claims limit was raised (from \$30,000 to \$100,000) and coverage was extended to people with pre-existing conditions under MediShield Life.

The government’s response to citizens’ concerns was reflected in the measures it took in addressing concerns over the Central Provident Fund (CPF) scheme. The year 2014, especially with the high-profile case of blogger Roy Ngerng being sued by PM Lee for defamation, saw members of the public raising their concerns about the CPF. In early 2015, policymakers accepted recommendations made by the CPF Advisory Panel to make the scheme more flexible and comprehensible to the public.

The year 2015 also saw the government launch the Pioneer Generation Package (PGP) aimed at recognising the contributions of Singapore’s seniors aged 65 years and above (as of 2014). The PGP aims to help reduce pioneers’ healthcare costs and the slew of measures includes special premium subsidies and Medisave top-ups, additional subsidies for outpatient care, and disability assistance for seniors with moderate to severe functional disabilities. In addition to the PGP, the government also introduced the Silver Support Scheme aimed at the poorest 20% to 30% of elderly Singaporeans.

On another front, the government launched the SkillsFuture scheme to support life-long learning for Singaporeans. Grants and subsidies



are provided to encourage Singaporeans to take up courses to upgrade their skills.

Besides people-centric policies that tackle people's bread-and-butter concerns, two developments potentially shaped general public sentiments. One was the Aljunied-Hougang-Punggol East Town Council (AHPETC) saga which saw WP having to defend itself against charges of management lapses² and to meet deadlines in submitting its 2013 and 2014 accounts. This issue was a hot topic running up to and during the election hustings where PAP candidates questioned WP's competency in governance. The dispute also spilled over to Punggol East during the election.

A final key event was the passing of Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's first PM, in March 2015, which saw nation-wide mourning. Mr Lee's contributions to Singapore's nation-building was remembered and honoured by the mainstream media and government officials. It was a period of high emotional intensity with the public remembering Mr Lee and the progress Singapore has made since independence.

SCOPE OF THE BOOK

Set against the above-mentioned developments, IPS conducted a nation-wide survey to examine Singaporeans' media and Internet use during GE2015. The methodology for the study is presented in Chapter 2 and the subsequent chapters focus on different aspects of the study. Chapter 3 presents top-line findings relating to Singaporeans' use and trust of media and the Internet (specifically social media), their political participation and voting behaviour. Chapter 4 focuses on voters' political traits. In Chapter 5, we take a close look at the youth in Singapore, some of whom were first-time voters. Chapter 6 presents a separate analysis on political parties' social media use leading up to the GE.

² In early 2015, a report by the Auditor-General's Office stated that the management of AHPETC had several lapses, including the integrity of party transactions that involved ownership interests of the town council's managing agent FM Solutions and Services (FMSS), the town council's failure to transfer monies into the sinking fund bank accounts, and unnecessary expenditure for certain goods and services.

IPS collaborators from the Department of Communications and New Media (National University of Singapore), the Living Analytics Research Centre (Singapore Management University), and the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information (Nanyang Technological University) analysed a wide range of issues relating to media and Internet use during election time. Summaries of their studies are presented in Chapter 7. We conclude with our key observations and recommendations for future work in Chapter 8.



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Chapter 2

Methodology



CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Carol Soon

In this chapter, we discuss the methodology and questionnaire design, present key demographics of the respondents, and explain the classification of media.

As presented in the previous chapter, the objective of this study is to determine Singaporeans' media and Internet usage during GE2015, their trust of media, what they did online and offline relating to the election, their political participation (offline and online), their political traits and voting behaviour. An online survey with 2,000 eligible voters — Singaporeans aged 21 years and above — was carried out by YouGov Asia Pacific after Polling Day, from 14–25 September 2015. The average length of each interview was 15 minutes.

SAMPLING AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF RESPONDENTS

We used quota sampling of YouGov's proprietary panel to achieve a sample representative of Singapore's population. Hard quotas were set for age, gender and race, while soft quotas were used for education and housing type. The quotas were set based on Population Trends 2014 (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2014)

Table 2.1 shows the weights applied. What the table shows is that larger weights had to be applied to ethnic minorities (e.g., Malays and Others) and those in older age groups. This is due to the under-representation of these segments in the sample.

TABLE 2.1: WEIGHTING FACTORS (INTERLOCKING GENDER, AGE AND RACE)

Category	Chinese	Malay	Indian	Others
Male 21–24	0.69	1.57	–	1.28
Male 25–29	0.76	1.74	0.84	–
Male 30–34	0.80	1.83	0.89	1.49
Male 35–39	0.74	1.69	0.82	1.38
Male 40–44	0.85	1.94	0.94	1.58
Male 45–49	0.74	1.70	0.83	1.39
Male 50–54	0.81	1.86	0.90	1.52
Male 55–59	0.78	1.79	0.87	1.45
Male 60–64	1.10	2.52	1.22	2.05
Male 65+	3.62	8.31	4.03	–
Female 21–24	0.37	0.86	0.41	0.70
Female 25–29	0.65	1.49	0.72	1.21
Female 30–34	0.81	1.86	0.90	1.52
Female 35–39	0.84	1.94	0.94	–
Female 40–44	0.97	2.23	1.08	1.82
Female 45–49	0.69	1.58	0.77	1.28
Female 50–54	0.78	1.79	0.87	1.45
Female 55–59	0.84	1.92	0.93	1.56
Female 60–64	2.81	–	–	–
Female 65+	11.19	–	12.44	–

Of the 2,000 respondents, close to 62% completed the questionnaire via personal computers, while about 34% did so through their smartphones. The remaining sample completed the questionnaire using their tablets.

In terms of respondents' demographics, slightly more females than males participated in the study (see Figure 2.1). With the survey including only eligible voters — those aged 21 and above — the largest age group was those between 35 and 59 years of age, at 51.6% (see Figure 2.2).



FIGURE 2.1: GENDER

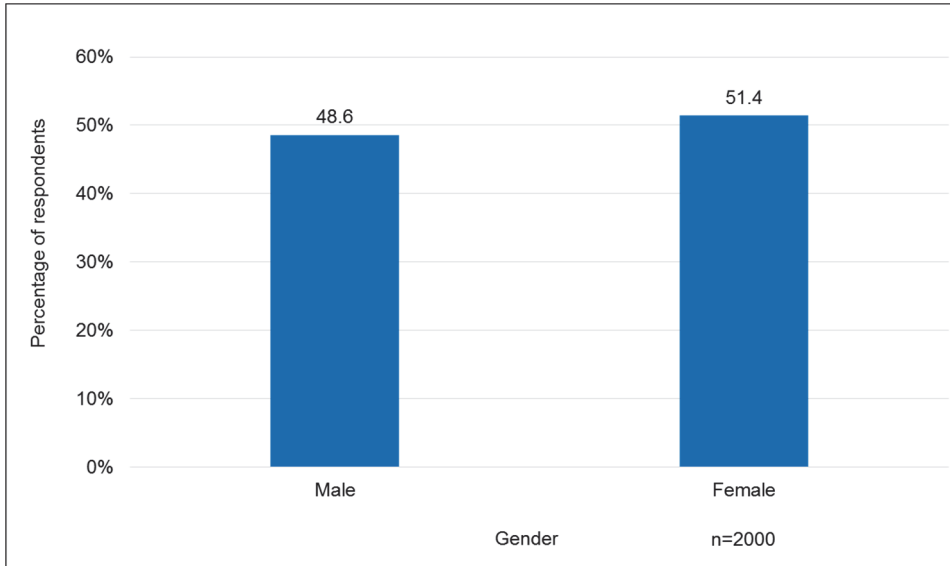


FIGURE 2.2: AGE

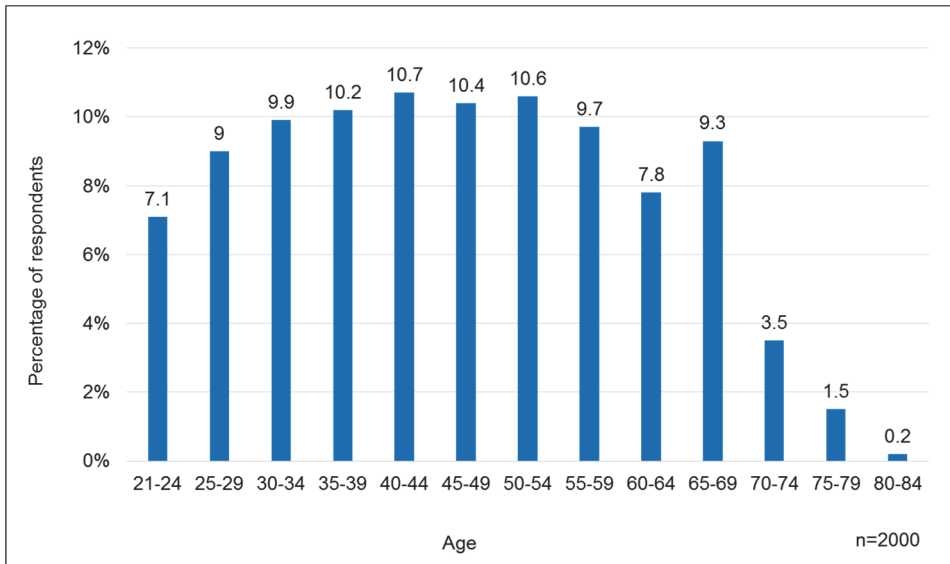
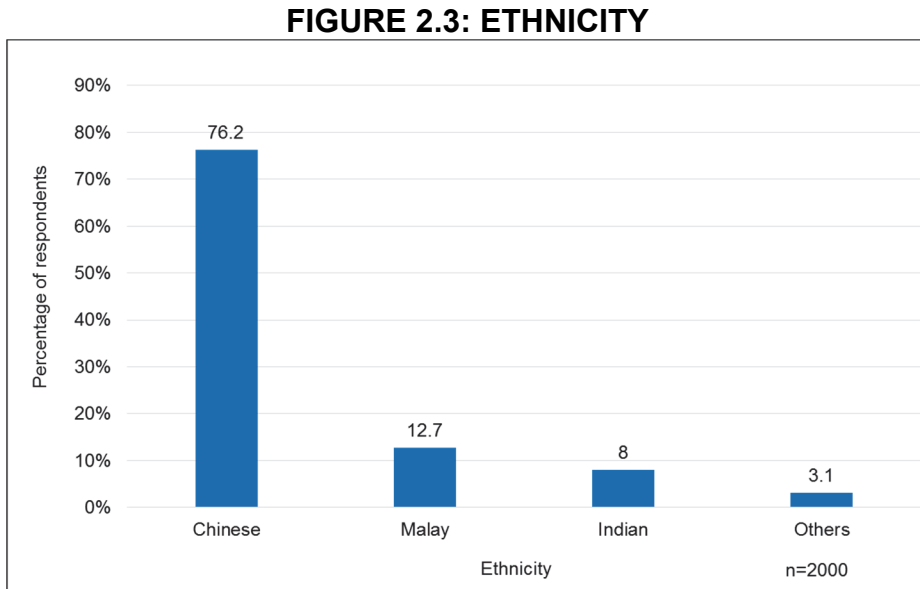


Figure 2.3 shows the ethnic breakdown of the respondents.



As shown in Figure 2.4, 97% of the respondents had secondary level education and above, and 38.1% had a university degree or postgraduate diploma/degree. Close to 28% had a polytechnic diploma or a professional qualification/other diploma.

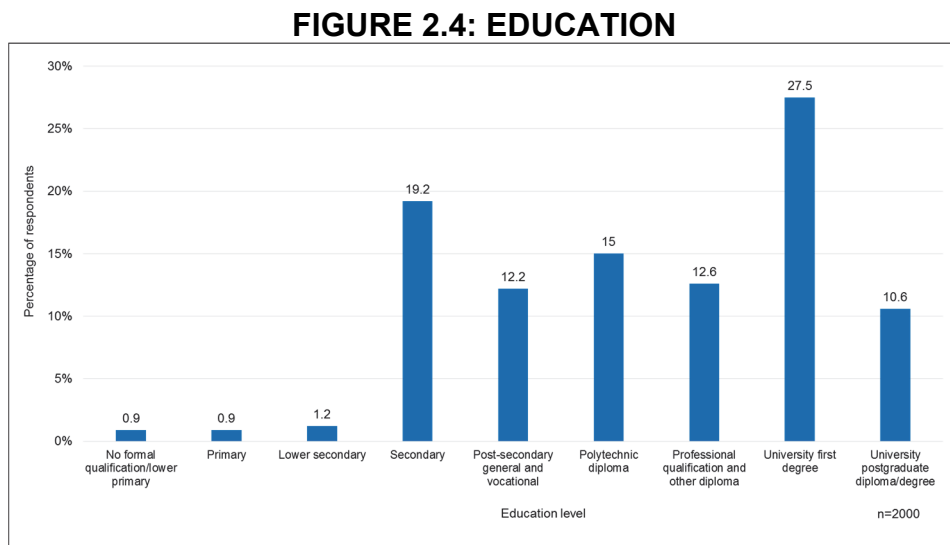




FIGURE 2.5: HOUSING TYPE

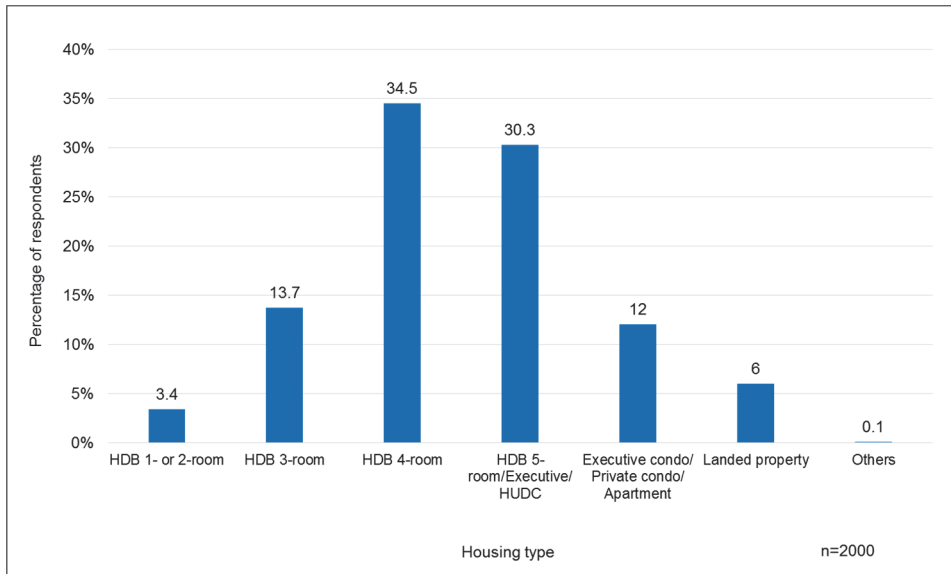
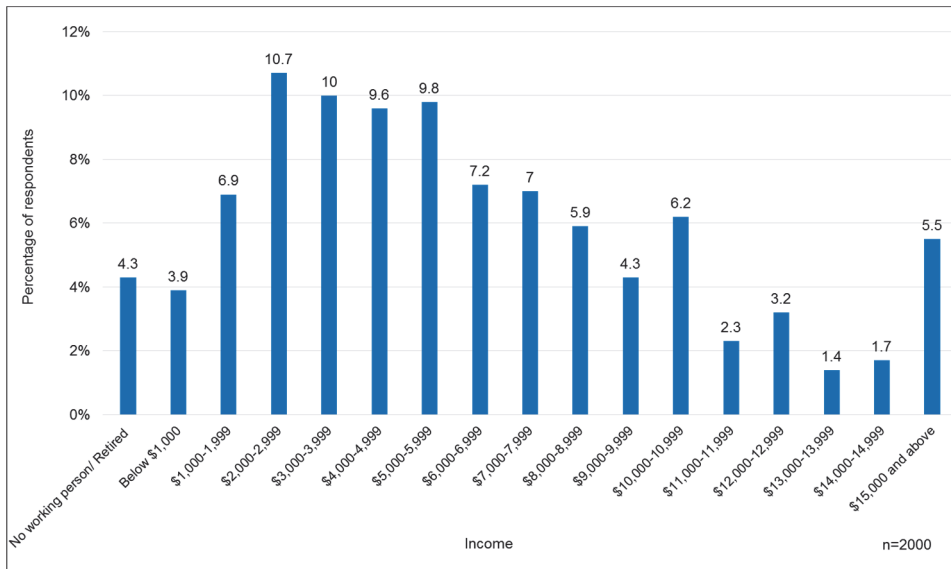


FIGURE 2.6: GROSS MONTHLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME



The housing type and gross monthly household income of respondents are presented in Figures 2.5 and 2.6. Majority of the respondents (64.8%) lived in HDB 4-room, HDB 5-room, Executive or HUDC, and 18% lived in Executive/Private Condominiums or landed property.

As for respondents' gross monthly household income, more than half (54.5%) had a household income of \$5,000 and above. Among our respondents, about 4% did not earn any income as they have either retired or did not have a working person in the household.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

In addition to questions on demographics (age, gender, ethnicity, education level, housing type, gross monthly household income), respondents had to answer questions on the following³:

1. Ownership of a mobile phone.
2. Political interest — Their interest in election issues.
3. Political efficacy (Personal) — Their understanding of political issues in Singapore and whether they thought they could influence the government.
4. Political efficacy (Collective) — Whether they thought the government was interested in knowing what the people thought, and if the government would respond to citizens' needs if people demand change together.
5. Political knowledge — Which parties four election candidates were from; the election outcome for GE2011; the meaning of "your vote is secret"; and identifying the campaign slogan of a party.
6. Political orientation — What they thought of people's right to criticise the government freely and which party they supported.
7. Political talk — How often they engaged in political discussions with others.
8. Use and trust of social media (see following section).

³ Please refer to the respective chapters for the specific questions and response scales.



9. Use and trust of mainstream media (see following section).
10. Online participation — What they did on different social media platforms.
11. Offline participation — Their involvement in four offline activities.
12. Personal opinion and perceived public opinion on three policy issues (population, transport and housing).
13. Voting behaviour — When they made up their mind on whom to vote for, whom they voted for, and what factors influenced their voting decision.

ELECTION MEDIA MIX

Tan and Mahizhnan (2016) explained that mainstream media and alternative media differed primarily in their content. While “mainstream media refers to media that purveys mainstream views, that is, those that are generally accepted by a large part of the population at a particular time and place”, “alternative media refers to media holding views which are similar to those of a small minority of the population” (Tan & Mahizhnan, 2016, pp. 6-7). They noted that mainstream media now exists in old or traditional media channels (e.g., print and television broadcast) as well as in digital formats.

According to Chomsky (1997), what makes mainstream media “mainstream” is its institutionalised structure, how it is connected to “power centres” such as governments and corporations, and in some cases, their actual involvement in the political system and process. As a result of their structure and connections, mainstream media typically propagates a certain view that Chomsky argues is hegemonic and reinforces the status quo.

The emergence of new technologies since the early 2000s such as Facebook and Twitter have provided additional platforms for individuals and groups to disseminate information, organise activities and mobilise supporters. A shift within digital media from “web 1.0” to

“web 2.0” was evident in the degree of control the latter accorded to individuals.

Flew (2005) described the shift as one from content creation which required up-front investment (Web 1.0 technologies such as organisational and personal websites), to content creation as an ongoing and interactive process between content producers and content consumers (Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs). What sets social media such as Facebook and YouTube apart from mainstream media is connectivity — users are able to connect and share content that is produced by themselves or others (van Dijck and Poell, 2013).

Building on the above definitions, we classified media into two types: Mainstream media and social media (see Table 2.2). In our study, mainstream media comprises traditional or official sources of news and information. They included print newspapers (e.g., *The Straits Times*, *Today*, *Lianhe Zaobao*, and *Berita Harian*), TV, radio, online websites of mainstream media (e.g., www.straitstimes.com, www.todayonline.com and www.zaobao.com), and printed party brochures and newsletters. With increasing usage of online media by political parties to disseminate information on their election campaigns, such as campaign slogans, manifestos and events (Soon & Soh, 2014), we added parties’ and candidates’ SNS to the mix.

On the other hand, social media consists of informal and networked-based sources such as blogs and YouTube sites of individuals and groups (e.g., TOC and Mothership.sg); online discussion forums and portals (e.g., Hardwarezone and Sammyboy); SNS (e.g., Facebook, Twitter and Instagram); and IM platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Viber and Facebook Messenger). The categorisation of media is presented in Table 2.2.

The survey also required respondents to indicate their use of each of the above medium for election-related information and news on a five-point frequency scale (with 1 being “Never” to 5 being “A few times a day”).



TABLE 2.2: MEDIA CLASSIFICATION

No.	Media Type	Media Platforms	Usage Frequency
1	Mainstream Media	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Print newspapers2. TV3. Radio4. Online websites of mainstream media5. Party and candidate websites/social networking sites6. Printed party brochures and newsletters	Never Once a week or less A few times a week About once a day Several times a day
2	Social Media	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Blogs or YouTube sites of individuals and groups2. Online discussion forums/portals3. Social networking sites4. Instant messaging	

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Chapter 3

Media Use and Political Participation

CHAPTER 3: MEDIA USE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Carol Soon and Nadzirah Samsudin

INTRODUCTION

According to the latest survey conducted by then Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (2014), close to 80% of residents were Internet users (defined as those who used the Internet in the last three months). The highest increase in usage was observed among senior citizens aged 50 years and above. Blogs, SNS and micro-blogging sites serve as alternative sources of election information, and facilitate information-sharing and online discussion. Leading up to GE2015, political parties used myriad social media platforms to better connect their candidates to voters. A detailed analysis of their social media usage is presented in Chapter 6.

In 2014, using SNS, IM, and email were the top three online activities conducted via mobile equipment (Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, 2014). According to 2015 statistics from global social media agency We Are Social, around 66% of the population in Singapore use social media and 46% are active users of WhatsApp.

Nearing GE2015, much of the buzz generated online favoured opposition parties and personalities such as the WP and Dr Chee from the SDP. Photographs and videos of huge crowds attending opposition party rallies were also circulated widely on social media. The buzz encouraged the perception that the opposition would garner more votes than in GE2011. Instead, incumbent party PAP improved its performance by almost 10 percentage points with a vote share of 69.9%.

This chapter examines the role media — both mainstream media and social media — played during GE2015. Specifically, it looks at people's use of different types of media as sources of election-related news and information, and people's trust in them. This chapter also presents findings on people's political participation (offline and online), their perceived public opinion climates on different types of social media platforms for three policy issues, and their voting behaviour.



MEDIA USE AND TRUST

Existing research on social media use addresses the use of social media as a source of information, particularly its displacement of mainstream information sources. A study by Holcomb, Gottfried and Mitchell (2013) found that mainstream media sources still play an important role with almost half of Facebook and Twitter users seeking news from the sites of mainstream media. In addition, more than 40% of both Facebook and Twitter users accessed news from their local TV stations, and 21% and 23% from print newspapers, respectively.

A study on people's media habits and what they did online leading up to the 2012 US presidential election established that the most important news sources for American voters were TV (54%) and the Internet (34%). Newspapers, radio and magazines were not as important news sources with usage levels at 6%, 4% and 1%, respectively (Willnat, 2013). The study also found that only one in 10 respondents used the two presidential candidates' websites (Mr Barack Obama's and Mr Mitt Romney's).

Skoric and Zhu (2015) grouped social media into two types — egocentric social media and interest-oriented social media. Egocentric social media comprises SNS such as Facebook and Twitter, which revolve around the user and their social connections, while interest-oriented social media refers to interest- or topic-based platforms such as online forums. User participation within these categories is diverse, ranging from passive consumption to the active production of content (Skoric & Zhu, 2015; Tomek, Hasprova, Zamazalova & Karlicek, 2012).

Communication via mobile phones has changed the communication landscape. Said to be social levellers, mobile phones enhance users' social capital by providing them with greater opportunities in knowledge acquisition and building networks. During the 2012 US presidential election, smartphones were popular tools to access political information (Willnat, 2013). As many as 44% of respondents said they kept up with election-related news on their smartphones, while 27% sent text messages relating to the election campaigns to friends, family members or others, and 22% shared photos or videos about the campaigns.

A twelve-country study found that two in three people use their smartphones to access news (Newman, Levy and Nielsen, 2015). The same study also found that news accessed from smartphones saw significant increases over the last year, particularly in the United Kingdom (UK), US and Japan; average weekly usage went up to 46% (from 37%) across all 12 countries. In addition, people in most countries were likely to access news via a mobile browser — indicating that news was often found through links from social media or email.

A more recent study released by the Pew Research Center in 2015 showed that more people were accessing digital news sites through their mobile devices than from desktops. Based on comScore data, 39 out of the top 50 digital news sites — these include legacy news outlets, digital-only organisations and some international news brands — get more traffic to their sites from mobile devices than from desktop.

However, existing research suggests that usage does not necessarily engender trust in the medium. Pentina and Tarafdar (2014) found that Facebook users avoided clicking on links on their Facebook wall due to low trust. Similarly, Johnson and Kaye's (1998) study of politically interested Internet users showed that only 4.5% of their respondents "relied on or heavily relied on" SNS for political news and information and rated SNS as "barely credible sources of political information" (p. 964). Another study by Johnson and Kaye (2014) suggested that more experienced users would be better adept at "filtering trustworthy information" from those that are less credible (p. 967).

MEDIA USE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

With social media's proliferation, its impact on political participation has also received much scholarly scrutiny as users now have the means to connect with other like-minded individuals easily (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Schlozman, Verba & Brady, 2010). However, some studies have found that social media leads to limited political engagement due to the highly selective nature of the web and reinforcement effects (Graber, 1996; Norris, 2001). The limited influence of social media on political engagement was supported by a study conducted by Willnat (2013). Through an online survey, Willnat found that only 3% of respondents who "sometimes" or "regularly"



participated in political activities on Facebook started a political group relating to the 2012 US presidential election.

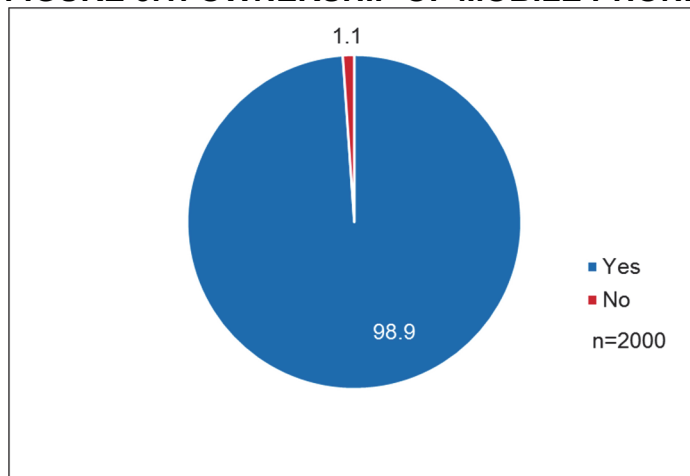
Another area of study focuses on the use of the Internet for organisation and mobilisation. While Zhang and Gearhart (2015) observed that technology use had limited impact on offline political participation, others have found a connection between the two (Boulianne, 2009; Weber, Loumakis & Bergman, 2003). In a study based on a post-election survey conducted after GE2011, Skoric and Zhu (2015) found that social media users were more likely to participate in offline activities, such as attending resident dialogues and volunteering to help in a political party. Several studies have pointed to factors that may account for the divergent findings, such as demographics and one's predisposition to politics. For instance, while Baumgartner and Morris (2010) found that the potential for SNS in increasing youth political engagement has not been realised, Johnson and Kaye (2003) argued that the Internet deepens the interest of those who are already politically interested.

FINDINGS

Mobile Phone Usage

As shown in Figure 3.1, only 1.1% of the respondents who took part in our study did not own a mobile phone.

FIGURE 3.1: OWNERSHIP OF MOBILE PHONE



Mainstream Media and Social Media Use

To recap, mainstream media in this study comprised official or formal sources of news and information, such as print newspapers, TV, radio, online websites of mainstream media, political party and candidate websites and SNS, and printed party brochures and newsletters. Social media encompassed informal and networked-based sources such as blogs and YouTube sites of individuals and groups, online discussion forums and portals, SNS and IM platforms.

Respondents were asked to indicate their use of each of these media for election-related information and news on a five-point frequency scale (with 1 being “never” to 5 being “several times a day”). The questions posed to the respondents were:

1. How often did you use the following social media platforms for election-related information or news during the recent election?
 - a. Blogs or YouTube sites of individuals or groups (e.g., TOC, Yawning Bread, TR Emeritus, Mothership.sg)
 - b. Online discussion forums and portals (e.g., Hardwarezone, Sammyboy, SGforums and REACH)
 - c. SNS (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
 - d. IM platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook Messenger)

2. How often did you access the following sources for election-related information or news during the recent election?
 - a. Print newspapers (e.g., *The Straits Times*, *Lianhe Zaobao*, *Today*, *Berita Harian*)
 - b. TV
 - c. Radio
 - d. Online websites of Singapore mass media (e.g., *The Straits Times*, *Today*, *The New Paper*, *Lianhe Zaobao*, Channel NewsAsia)
 - e. Political parties' and candidates' websites and/or their SNS (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
 - f. Printed party brochures and newsletters



For trust, we asked respondents to indicate their trust of each medium as a source of election-related information and news on a five-point scale (with 1 being “untrustworthy” to 5 being “very trustworthy”). We combined the traditional formats of mainstream media with their online counterparts. Thus, the question that measured trust for mainstream media was:

1. How trustworthy or untrustworthy was each of the following for you as a source of information about the recent election?
 - a. Singapore newspapers and their websites (including Facebook/Twitter pages)
 - b. Singapore TV stations and their websites (including Facebook/Twitter pages)
 - c. Radio stations and their websites (including Facebook/Twitter pages)
 - d. Political party and candidate websites (including Facebook/Twitter pages)
 - e. Political party brochures, newsletters and other publications

The following figures (Figures 3.2 and 3.3) show people’s use and trust of mainstream media for election-related information and news during election time.

FIGURE 3.2: USE OF MAINSTREAM MEDIA FOR ELECTION-RELATED INFORMATION OR NEWS

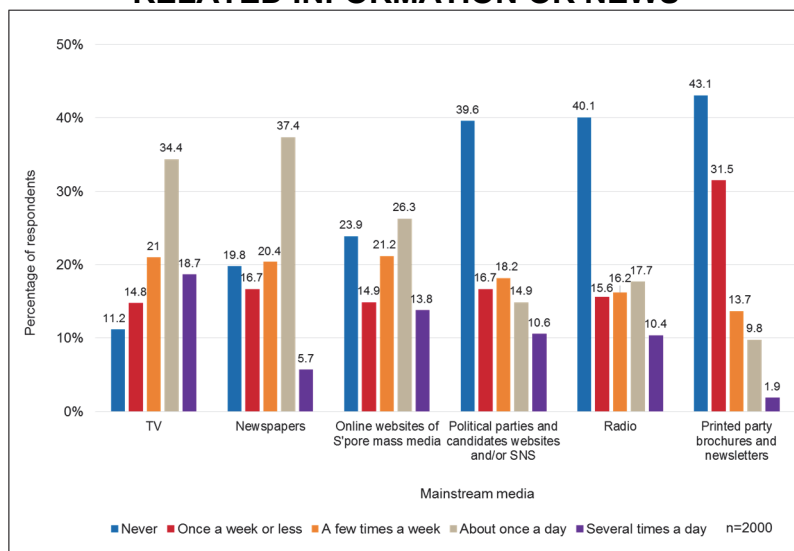
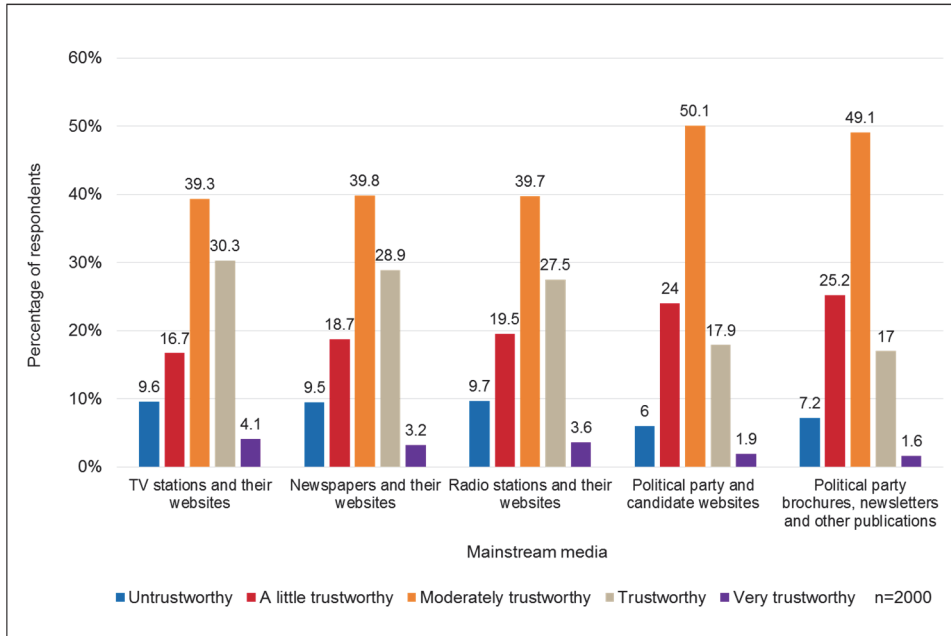


FIGURE 3.3: TRUST OF MAINSTREAM MEDIA AS SOURCES OF ELECTION-RELATED INFORMATION OR NEWS



When it came to mainstream media, TV was the most popular medium for election news and information, with 88.8% of the respondents having used it at least once a week or less and 18.7% several times a day. TV was followed by newspapers (80.2% used it at least once a week or less and 5.7% several times a day); online websites of Singapore mainstream media (76.1% accessed them at least once a week or less and 13.8% several times a day); political party and candidate websites and/or SNS (60.4% accessed at least once a week or less and 10.6% several times a day); radio (59.9% used it at least once a week or less and 10.4% several times a day); and printed party brochures and newsletters (56.9% used it at least once a week or less and 1.9% several times a day).

It should be noted that when it came to the usage frequency of “several times a day”, online websites of mainstream media were ranked second to TV. When it came to mainstream media that were used “about once a day” for election-related information and news, newspapers and TV were ranked first and second with 37.4% and 34.4% of respondents having used the media, respectively.

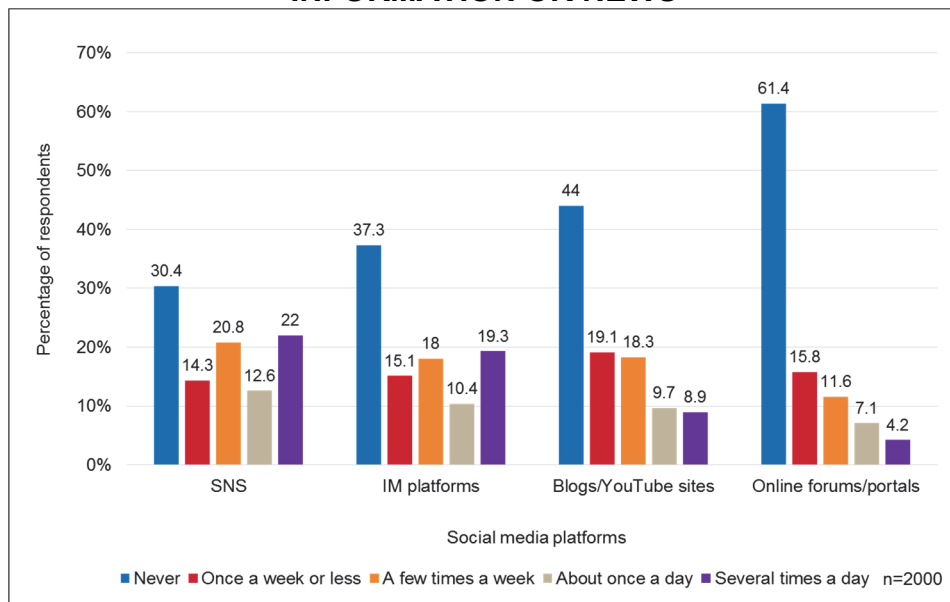


In terms of trustworthiness as sources of election-related information and news, the three mainstream media (newspapers, TV and radio) and their websites were considered more trustworthy than political party and candidate websites and/or SNS, and political party brochures and newsletters.

An almost equal number of respondents indicated that TV, newspapers, radio and their websites (73.7%, 71.8% and 70.8% respectively) were moderately trustworthy to very trustworthy. This is compared to the 70% and 67.6% who felt that political party and candidate websites and/or SNS, and political party brochures and newsletters were moderately trustworthy to very trustworthy, respectively.

Figure 3.4 shows people's use of social media for election-related information and news during election time.

FIGURE 3.4: USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ELECTION-RELATED INFORMATION OR NEWS



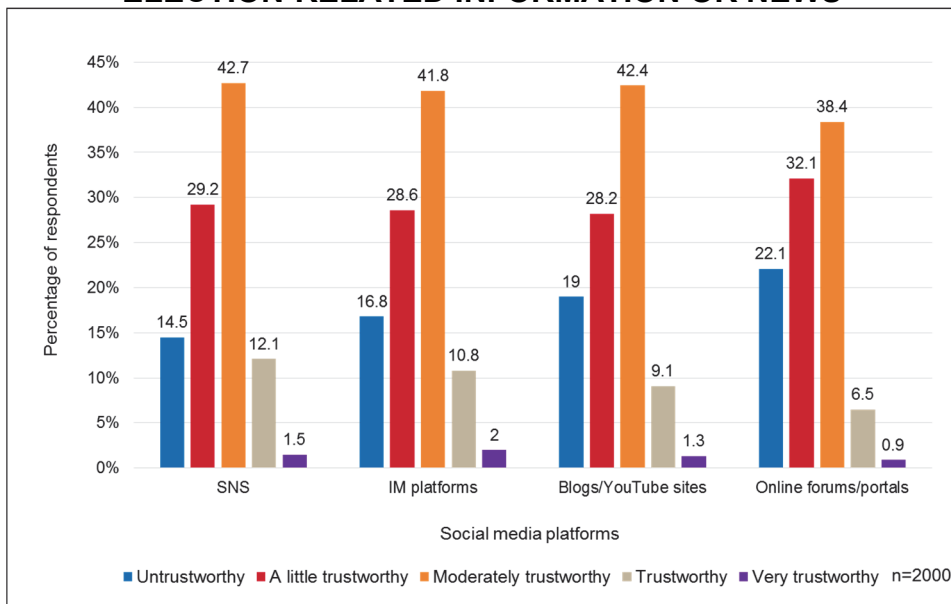
The most popular social media for information and news on the election was SNS with almost 70% of respondents having used it at least once a week or less and 22% several times a day. SNS were followed by IM platforms (62.7% used them at least once a week or

less, 19.3% several times a day), and blogs and YouTube sites of individuals or groups such as TOC, Yawning Bread and Mothership.sg (56% accessed them at least once a week or less, 8.9% several times a day).

The least popular source were online discussion forums and portals with less than 40% using it at least once a week or less, and only 4.2% accessed them several times a day.

When it came to trustworthiness as sources of election-related information and news, SNS, IM platforms, and blogs and YouTube sites of individuals and groups were perceived to be moderately trustworthy to very trustworthy by 56.3%, 54.6% and 52.8% of the respondents, respectively. Online discussion forums and portals were the least trustworthy sources, with 45.8% perceiving them to be moderately trustworthy to very trustworthy. See Figure 3.5 for the breakdown.

FIGURE 3.5: TRUST OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS SOURCES OF ELECTION-RELATED INFORMATION OR NEWS





To compare usage and trust across the two categories of media, we ranked all mainstream media and social media together. Figures 3.6 and 3.7 present the percentages of respondents who used each medium for election-related information and news and the mean scores for trust of media respectively.

Our study shows that mainstream media were primary sources for news and information (with the exception of radio). As shown in Figure 3.6, TV was the most used medium, with 88.8% of the respondents saying that they used it for election-related information and news. This was followed by print newspapers and online websites of Singapore mainstream media. About 53% of the respondents accessed TV about once a day or more, followed by 43.1% and 40.1% for newspapers and websites of mainstream media, respectively.

When it came to social media, online discussion forums and portals were used the least by people when seeking information and news on the election. SNS and IM platforms were more frequently used for election information. The results show that 34.6% and 29.7% of the respondents used SNS and IM platforms at least once a day or more for election-related news and information. These two social media platforms were used more than radio, and party websites and publications.

When it came to trust, mainstream media and their online counterparts were trusted the most, followed by party sites and publications (see Figure 3.7). TV, newspapers and radio saw the highest trust among users when it came to election-related information and news. They were followed by political party and candidate websites and SNS, and printed party collaterals.



FIGURE 3.6: USE OF EACH MEDIA AS A SOURCE OF ELECTION-RELATED INFORMATION OR NEWS

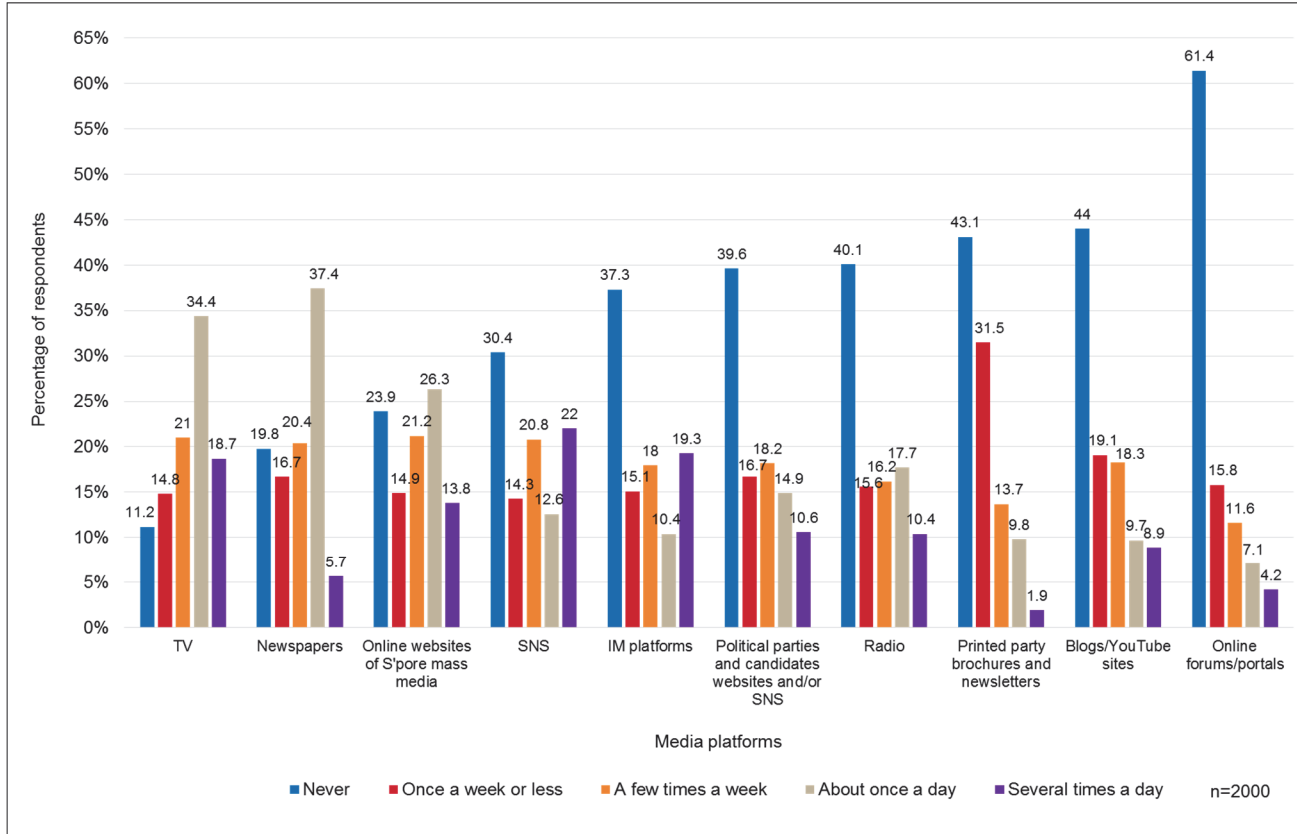
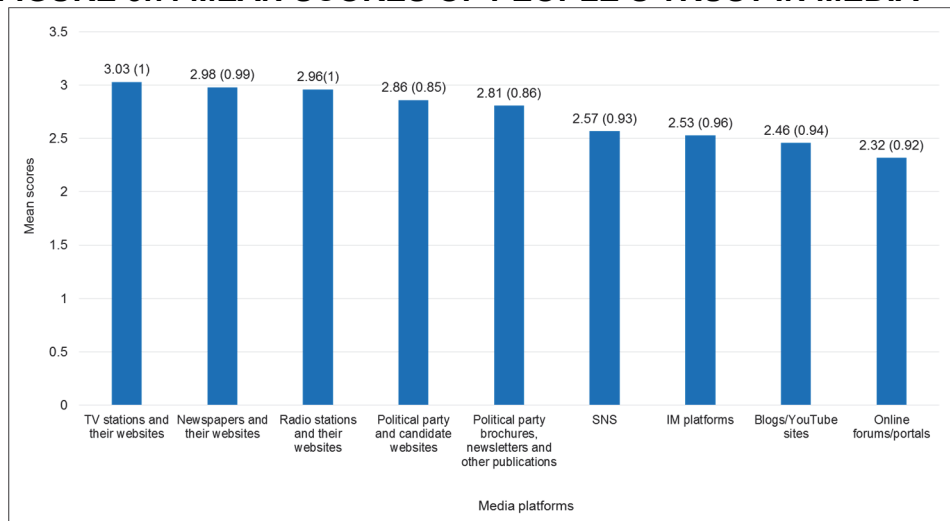




FIGURE 3.7: MEAN SCORES OF PEOPLE’S TRUST IN MEDIA



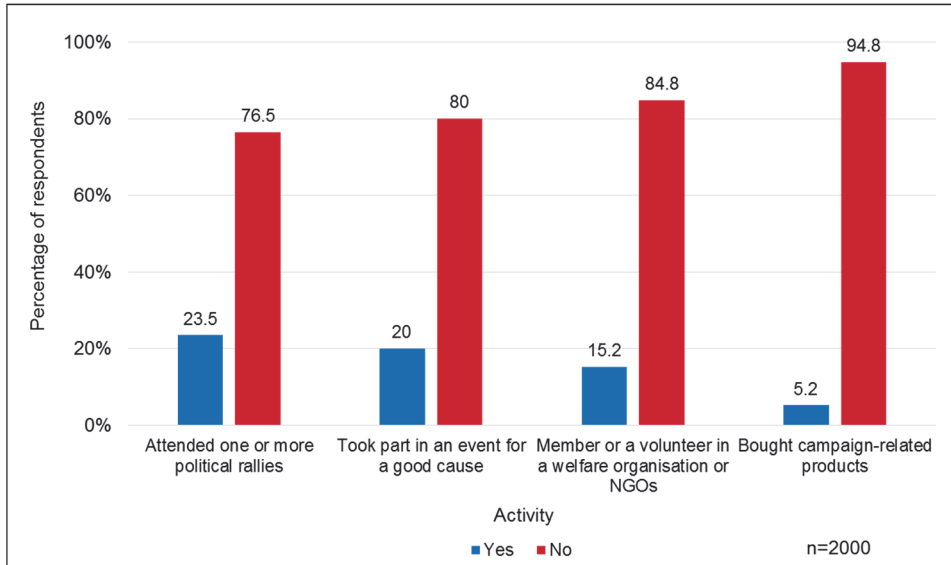
Political Participation

To measure offline participation, respondents were asked to indicate either “yes” or “no” to whether they had participated in these four activities:

1. Bought campaign-related products such as T-shirts, badges, arm bands or books
2. Took part in an event for a good cause such as flag day or walkathon
3. Was a member or volunteer in a welfare organisation or non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
4. Attended one or more political rallies during the recent election

Figure 3.8 shows respondents’ offline participation.

FIGURE 3.8: PARTICIPATION IN OFFLINE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

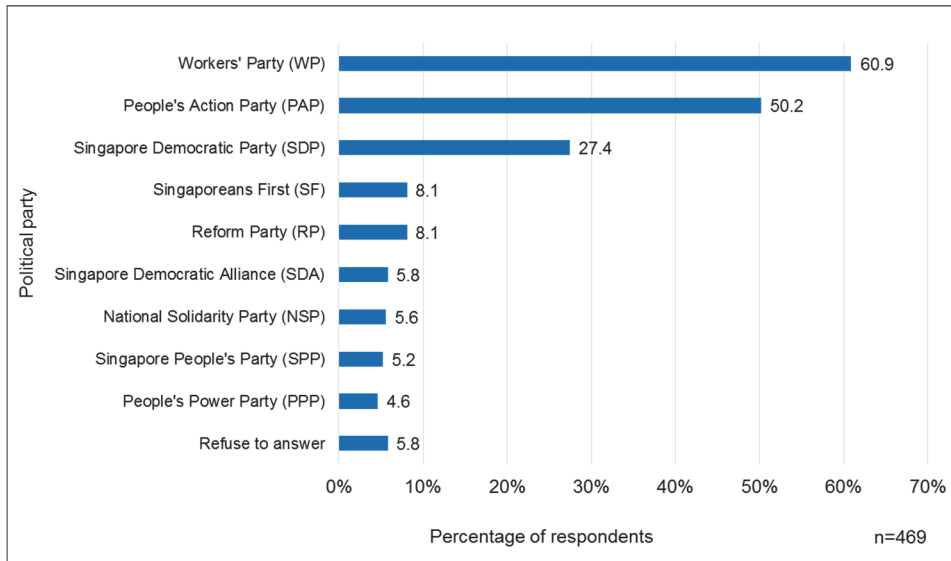


Participation in offline activities was low. The activity that saw the highest participation was “attended one or more political rallies during the recent election” (23.5%). The activity that saw the lowest participation was “bought campaign-related products during the last election” (5.2%). This was despite the increase in political parties’ marketing expenses (which included the production of party paraphernalia) incurred during the election. People’s participation in activities during non-election time such as taking part in an event for a good cause and being a member/volunteer of a voluntary welfare organisation or NGO was also low, with only 20% and 15.2% of the respondents doing so, respectively.

For respondents who attended one or more political rallies during the election, the survey also asked which rallies they attended (see Figure 3.9). The three most popular political rallies were those by WP, PAP and SDP.



FIGURE 3.9: PARTY RALLIES RESPONDENTS ATTENDED



For online participation, respondents were asked to indicate how often they participated in different online activities on the social media platforms they used, on a five-point scale (with 1 being “never” to 5 being “several times a day”):

1. For those who used blogs or YouTube sites
 - a. Wrote a post or made a video expressing my opinions on a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
 - b. Commented on a post or video on a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
 - c. Followed a blogger or YouTuber’s postings on a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
 - d. Shared relevant information and/or political commentary related to the post/video
2. For those who used online discussion forums and portals
 - a. Started a thread discussing a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
 - b. Followed a thread discussing a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
 - c. Shared relevant information and/or political commentary in a discussion thread

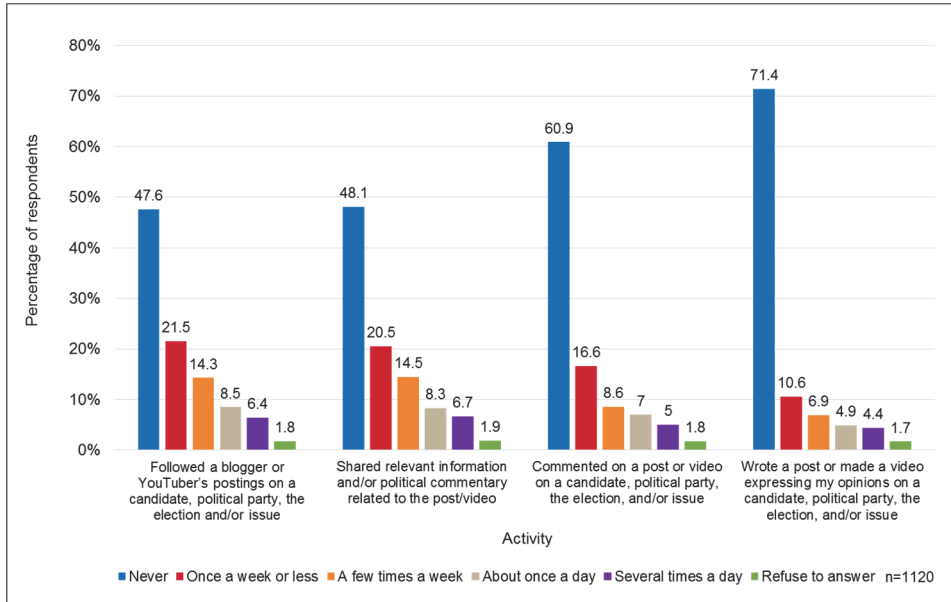
3. For those who used SNS
 - a. Liked a page or a post about a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
 - b. Commented on a page or a post about a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
 - c. Wrote a post expressing my opinions on a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
 - d. Followed someone in your social network's postings about a candidate, political party, the election and/or issue
 - e. Shared information and/or political commentary with people on your SNS
 - f. Used SNS to learn more about my family members' views on the election
 - g. Used SNS to learn more about my friends' views on the election
 - h. Used SNS to learn more about my colleagues' views on the election
 - i. Used SNS to learn more about fellow Singaporeans' views on the election
 - j. Used SNS to connect to people I already know
 - k. Used SNS to connect to new people related to my interests in the election

4. For those who used IM platforms
 - a. Started a discussion about a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
 - b. Participated in a discussion about a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
 - c. Sought/asked for information about a candidate, political party, election news and/or issue
 - d. Shared information and/or political commentary with people

Figure 3.10 shows the frequency of people's participation in different activities on blogs or YouTube sites.



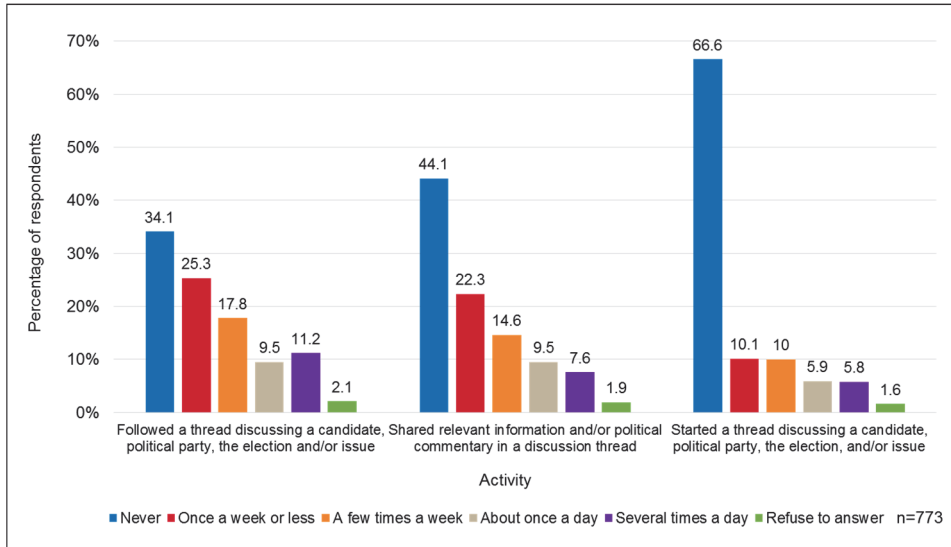
FIGURE 3.10: PARTICIPATION ON BLOGS OR YOUTUBE SITES



Out of 2,000 respondents, 1,120 (56%) used blogs or YouTube sites for election-related purposes (see Figure 3.4) but the level of activity was low. Excluding those who refused to answer, 50.6% of the respondents followed a blogger or YouTuber's postings on a candidate, political party, the election and/or issue; 50% shared relevant information and/or political commentary related to a post or video related to the election; 37.3% commented on a post or video on a candidate, political party, the election and/or issue; and 26.9% wrote a post or made a video expressing their opinions on a candidate, political party, the election and/or issue. Among those who engaged in the four activities, the majority did so at a low intensity of once a week or less to a few times a week.

Online discussion forums and portals were used the least (38.6%) by respondents for election-related purposes (see Figure 3.4). Among those who accessed forums and portals, about 64% followed a thread discussing a candidate, political party, the election and/or issue, 54% shared relevant information and/or political commentary in a discussion thread, and 31.8% started a thread discussing a candidate, political party and/or issue. See Figure 3.11.

FIGURE 3.11: PARTICIPATION ON ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUMS/PORTALS



Almost 70% of the respondents used SNS for election-related purposes (see Figure 3.4). Excluding those who refused to answer, the most popular activity was using SNS to learn more about fellow Singaporeans’ views on the election, with 82% having done so at least once a week or less (see Figure 3.12).

This was followed by the activities, “to connect to people I already know” (75.5%); “learnt more about my friends’ views on the election” (71.4%); “liked a page or a post about a candidate, political party, the election and/or issue” (60.1%); “learnt more about my colleagues’ views on the election” (59.5%); “followed someone in my social network’s postings about a candidate, political party; the election and/or issue” (50.7%); and “learnt more about my family members’ views on the election” (50.7%). The activity “wrote a post expressing my opinions on a candidate, political party, the election and/or issue” was least popular, with only 29% of those who used SNS during the election having done so.

FIGURE 3.12: PARTICIPATION ON SNS

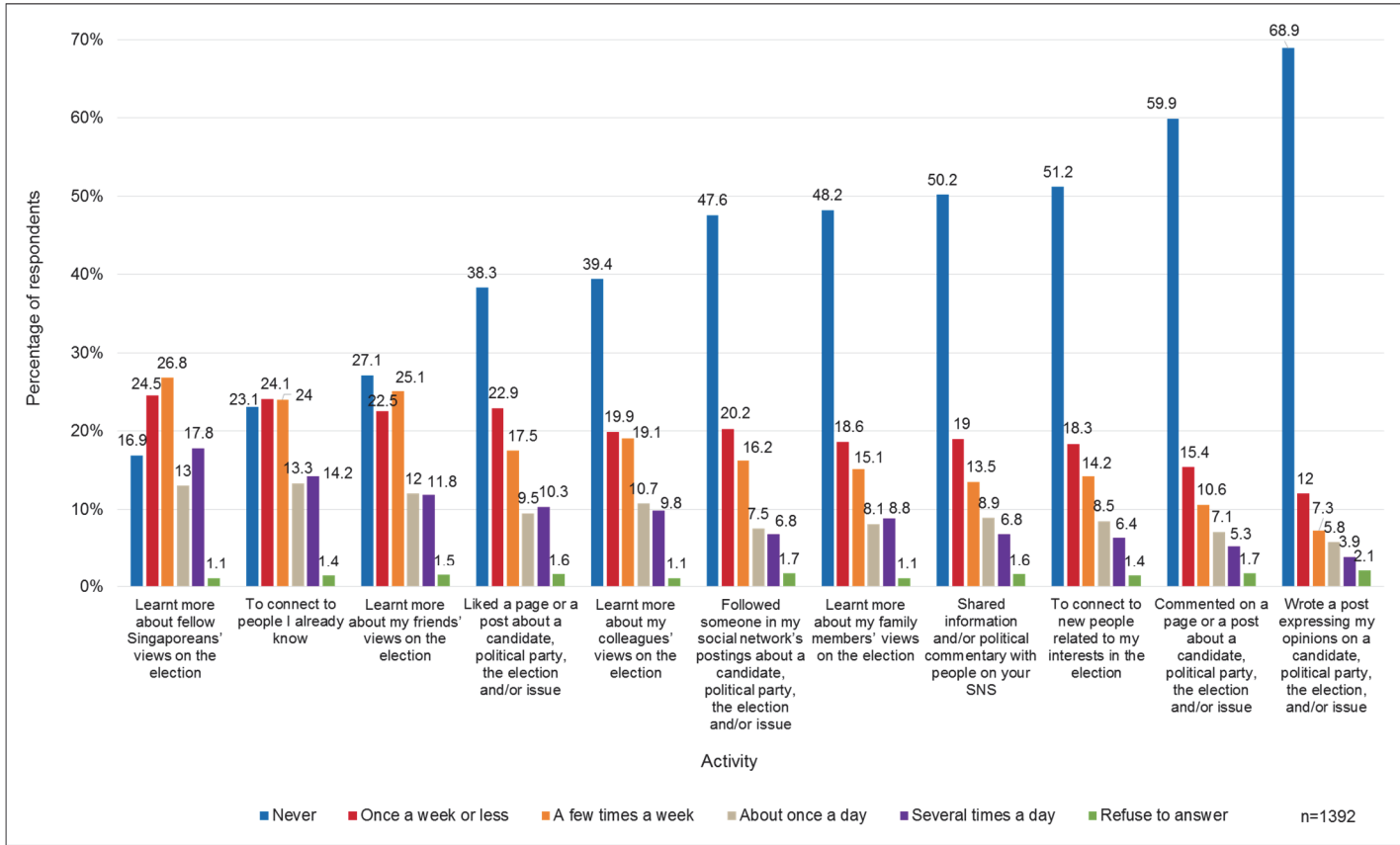
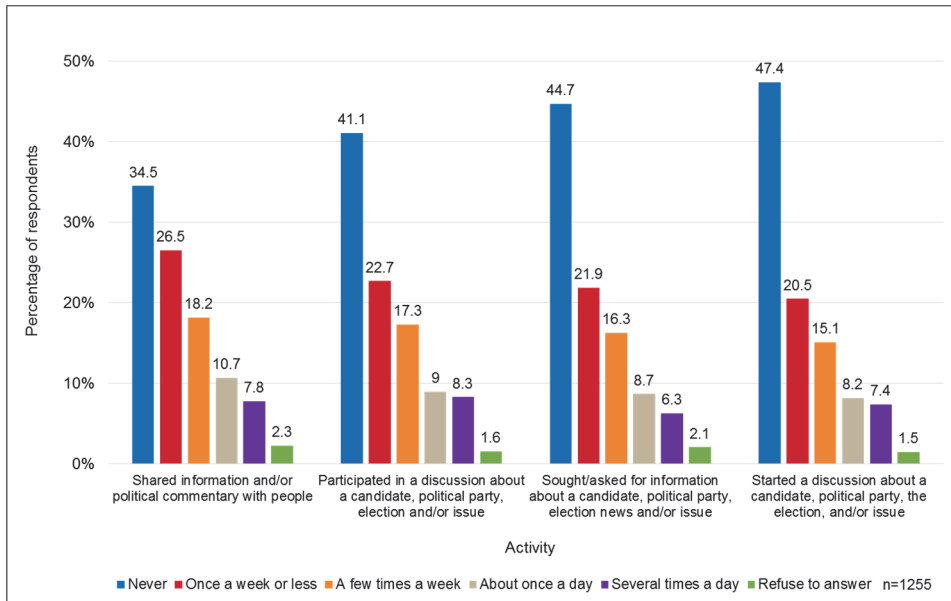


FIGURE 3.13: PARTICIPATION ON IM PLATFORMS



About 63% of the 2,000 respondents used IM platforms for election-related purposes (see Figure 3.4). As shown in Figure 3.13, excluding those who refused to answer, the most popular activity was “shared information and/or political commentary with people”, with 63.2% among those who used IM platforms having done so. This was followed by “participated in a discussion about a candidate, political party, election and/or issue” (57.3%), and “sought/asked for information about a candidate, political party, election news and/or issue (53.2%)”. Similar to online participation on blogs, YouTube sites and SNS, the activity that required more effort such as creating content was least popular on IM platforms, with 51.1% having “started a discussion about a candidate, political party, the election and/or issue”.

The above findings indicate that activities that required more effort, time and engagement with issues saw even lower participation. These include writing a post or making a video on a blog or YouTube site, starting a discussion thread in an online forum, writing a post to express one’s opinion on a candidate, political party or an election issue on SNS, and starting a discussion on IM platforms.



Personal Opinion and Perceptions of Public Opinion

Besides asking respondents what they did offline and online during election time, the survey also asked them for their personal opinion on three policy issues — population, transport and housing — and perceptions of how people on their SNS and IM platforms felt about the same issues.

When it came to respondents' personal opinion on the three policy issues, housing policies saw the highest level of satisfaction, with 31% feeling somewhat satisfied or very satisfied, followed by transport and population policies with 29% and 21.6% indicating the same, respectively (see Figure 3.14).

FIGURE 3.14: PERSONAL OPINION ON POLICY ISSUES

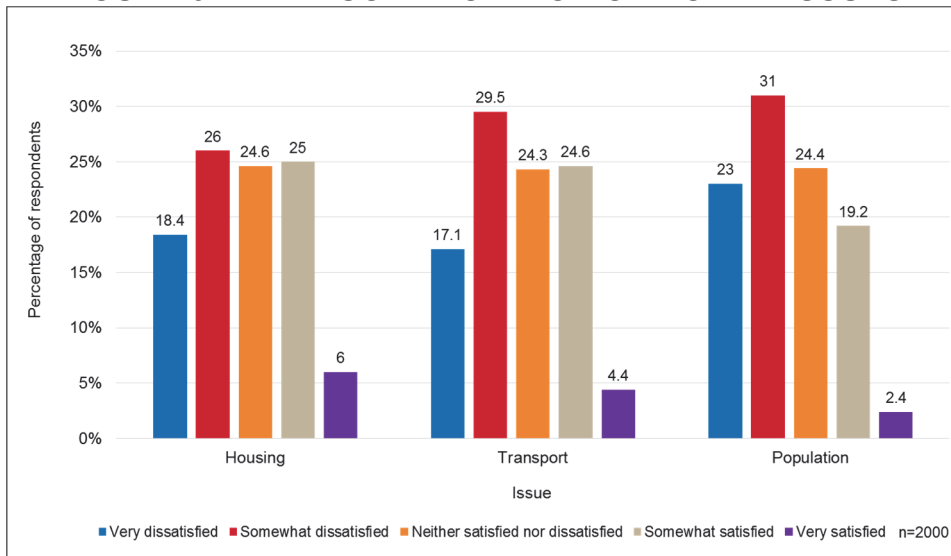
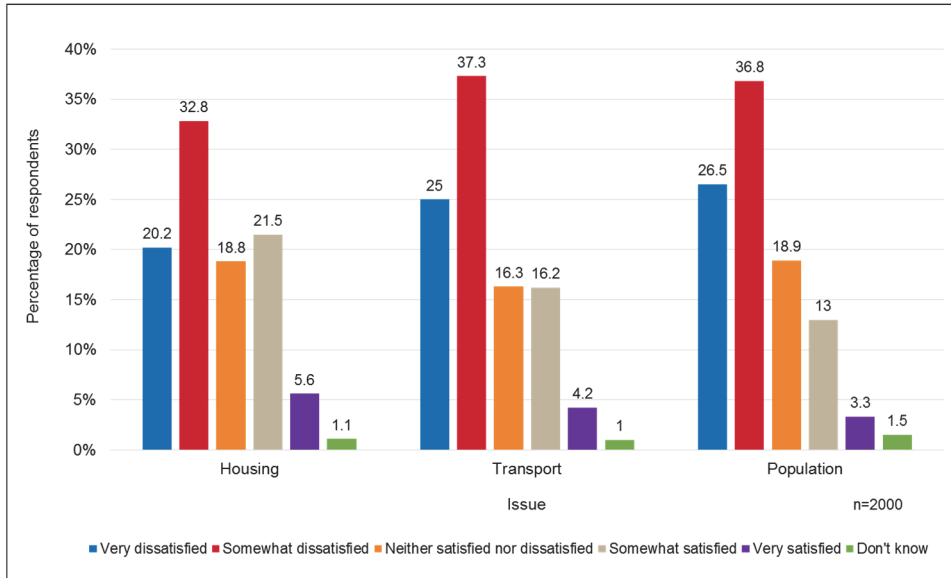


Figure 3.15 shows that respondents perceived that majority of Singaporeans were more dissatisfied with the issues than themselves. About 27% of the respondents felt that Singaporeans were somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with policies relating to housing, followed by 20.4% and 16.3% for policies relating to transport and population, respectively. Hence, for all three policy issues, respondents felt that other Singaporeans were less satisfied than themselves.

FIGURE 3.15: PERCEPTION OF HOW MAJORITY OF SINGAPOREANS FELT ABOUT POLICY ISSUES



Respondents also perceived that people in their SNS networks were more dissatisfied than people in their IM platforms on these three policy issues.

As seen in Figure 3.16, 60.8%, 69.7% and 70.7% of respondents felt that people on their SNS were somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied on issues relating to housing, transport and population respectively. On the other hand, 49.7%, 55.9% and 57.3% of respondents felt that people on their IM platforms were somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied on the same three issues respectively (see Figure 3.17).



FIGURE 3.16: PERCEPTION OF HOW PEOPLE ON SNS FELT ABOUT POLICY ISSUES

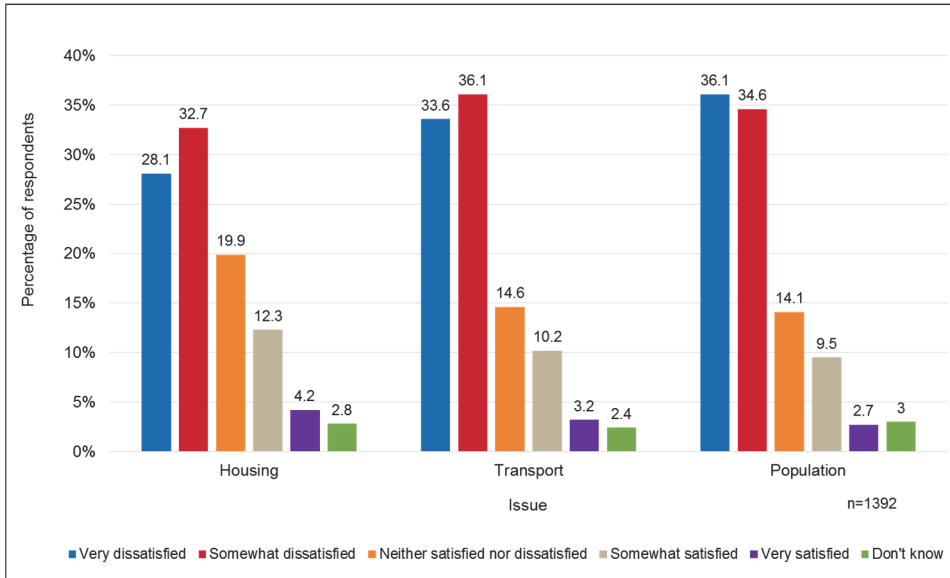
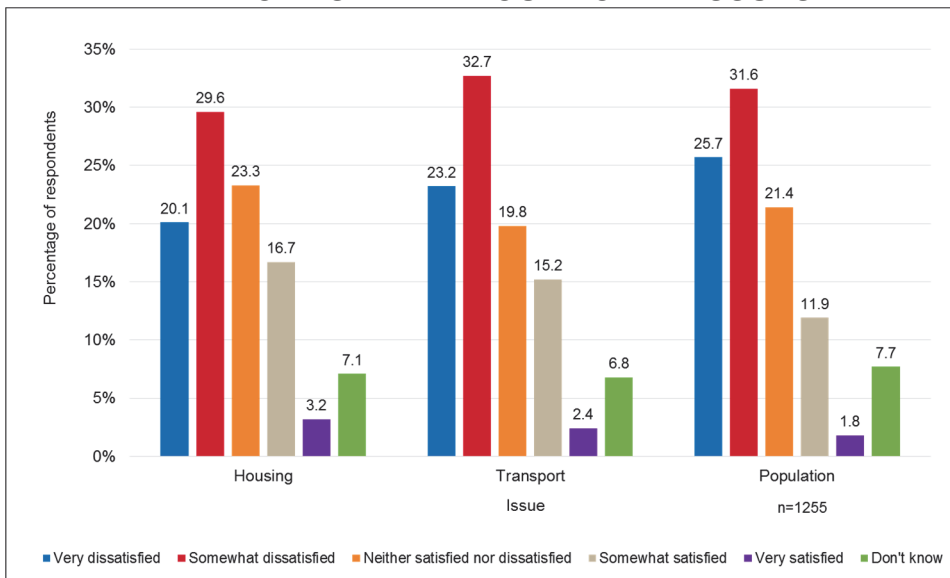


FIGURE 3.17: PERCEPTION OF HOW PEOPLE ON IM PLATFORMS FELT ABOUT POLICY ISSUES



Voting Behaviour

Our survey asked respondents when they made up their minds on whom to vote for, and which party they voted for. Figure 3.18 shows that the majority (47.3%) had decided on whom to vote before Nomination Day – 36% had decided even before the election was announced, and 11.3% decided during the time between the election announcement and Nomination Day.

FIGURE 3.18: WHEN VOTING DECISIONS WERE MADE

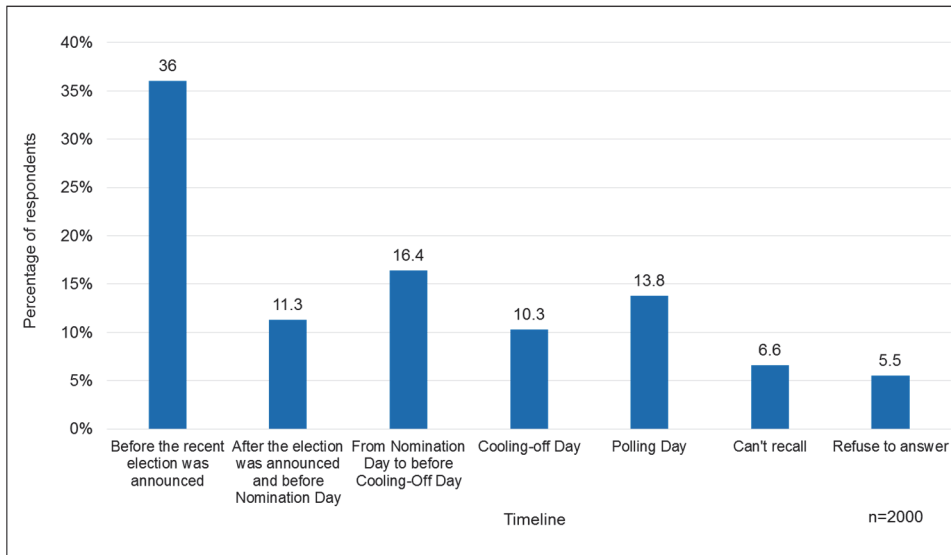


Figure 3.19 shows that almost 40% of the respondents refused to state whom they voted for during GE2015, while 41.2% said they voted for the PAP and 14.7% said they voted for the opposition.

The survey also asked respondents which factors influenced how they voted. They were allowed to select as many factors that applied to them. As shown in Figure 3.20, the top three factors were “quality of parties and/or candidates in my constituency”, “Singapore’s vulnerability as a country”, and “policy changes related to transport, housing cost and/or foreign workers”.



FIGURE 3.19: PARTIES THAT PEOPLE VOTED FOR

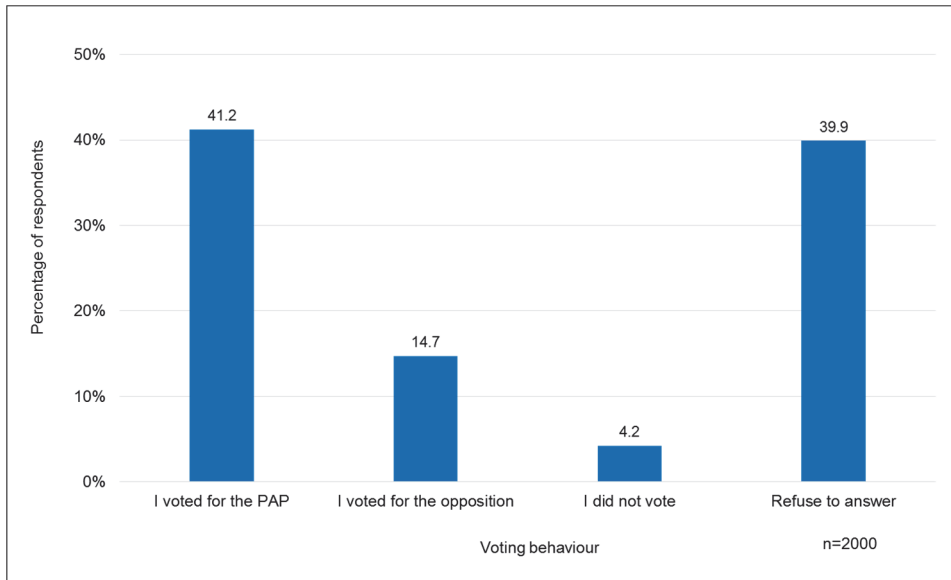
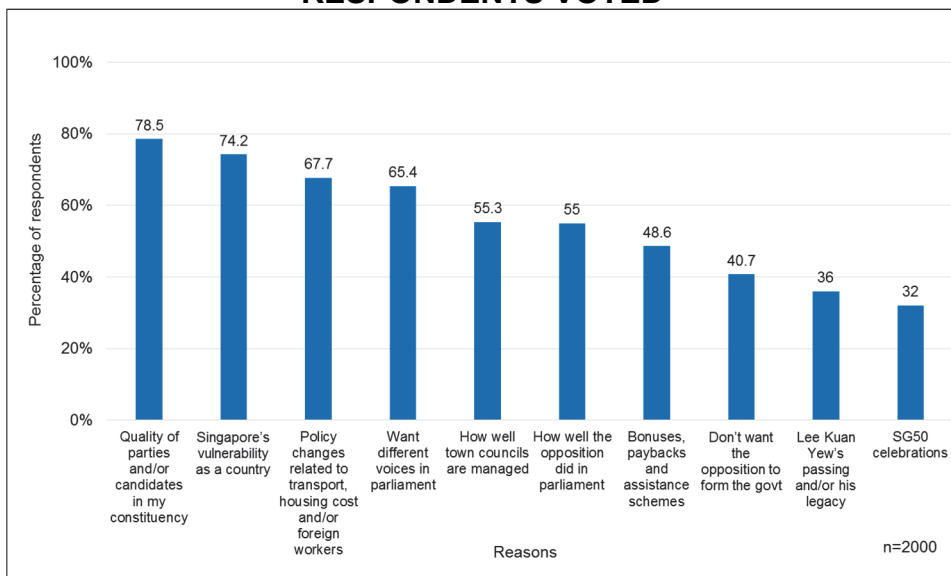


FIGURE 3.20: REASONS THAT INFLUENCED HOW RESPONDENTS VOTED



DISCUSSION

The findings in this chapter indicate that several patterns have remained the same since GE2011. As mentioned in the first chapter, the earlier study conducted by Tan and Mahizhnan (2016) found that the mainstream media played a more important role compared to non-mainstream media. Our survey showed that TV, print and their online versions were used most frequently by people seeking election information and news during GE2015. In addition, mainstream media were also trusted more by the respondents.

This suggests that during election time, official sources of information were seen as more credible than social media. One visible difference in terms of mainstream media coverage during GE2015, compared with GE2011, was the greater amount of space and air time allocated to reporting on various opposition political parties, their candidates and rallies. During past elections, the incumbent party PAP dominated mainstream media coverage. The levelling of election coverage for the political parties was particularly evident for daily news broadcasts on free-to-air television channels and reports in the broadsheets.

Blogs, YouTube sites and online discussion forums and portals were seen as the least credible information sources. The low trust could be attributed to the fact that people typically communicate with others who are oftentimes strangers on these interest- or topic-based platforms. An interesting finding was that although SNS and IM platforms were used more as sources of information compared to radio and parties' online platforms, they were less trustworthy, thus indicating that usage did not necessarily led to trust. This suggests that media users practised a certain level of healthy scepticism and were cognisant of the trustworthiness of differences sources. Offline political participation was low and despite the growing trend of online advocacy in recent years (Soon & Cheong, 2014), online participation during election time was also low.

Almost half the respondents made up their minds on whom to vote for before Nomination Day, while 40.5% made their decisions from Nomination Day till Polling Day itself. Thus, the impact of hustings and media coverage during election time is inconclusive. Social media is part of the media landscape and during the recent election, the



mainstream media were strong and credible competitors. What our study also found was that when it came to deciding whom to vote for, people were influenced by the quality of the political party and candidates in their constituencies and the recent policy tweaks relating to transportation, housing costs and presence of immigrant workers – areas that the ruling party have made significant progress in between the 2011 and 2015 elections. In order for social media to exert mobilising effects, the electorate has to be driven by grievances to use technology to call for action and galvanise others. Perhaps the developments in policies and governance in recent years gave people fewer reasons to do so.

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Chapter 4

The Politics in Media and Internet Use

CHAPTER 4: THE POLITICS IN MEDIA AND INTERNET USE

Tan Tarn How and Nadzirah Samsudin

INTRODUCTION

GE2015 was the first election since Singapore's independence which saw all seats contested. And despite expectations online that the election would be favourable towards the opposition (Soon, 2015), the PAP won by a 10% swing. For playwright Eleanor Wong (2015), PAP's win was a confirmation that Singaporeans want a "monolithic government". For others, the outcome signalled an approval of the incumbent's efforts to address citizens' concerns since the last GE (Chan, 2015; Chua, 2015).

In Chapter 3, we learn that the top reason that influenced voters' vote was the quality of parties and candidates in their constituency. Indeed, one of the reasons given to explain the swing was the fear that the country would be governed by an "immature opposition" (Chua, 2015). And as noted by Cherian George (2015), Singaporeans are not "experimental risk-takers"; it took the public 16 years since the first GE to vote in an opposition in 1981, and ever since then, the most numbers of seats an opposition party has won was six out of 89 seats.

In this chapter, we flesh out voters' political traits. Are they interested in politics? How frequent do they engage in political talk? What is their level of political knowledge? And what are their levels of political efficacy and orientation?

DETERMINING POLITICAL TRAITS

Studies have shown that politically interested people are more politically active — for example, they are more knowledgeable about politics, are more likely to vote and are more likely to be mobilised (Denny & Doyle, 2008; Prior, 2010; Reichert, 2015). Prior found that people's interest in politics was sustained overtime (Prior, 2010). However, political interest varies from person to person, depending on how interest is developed during a person's early years, his



personality traits or even his demographics, social capital, political values and attitudes (Prior, 2010; Reichert, 2015).

As for discussing politics, people avoid political talk in everyday conversations as politics is a “delicate, risky and unsafe topic” (Ekstrom, 2016, p. 2). Instead, they prefer to talk about politics in private, and are more likely to express political disagreement with those who are close to them, rather than with acquaintances. Nonetheless, discussions with people who hold views different from our own are “valuable experiences”, as it is an opportunity to facilitate the formation of more informed and thoughtful opinions (Choi & Lee, 2015, p. 258).

Studies have shown that a strong relationship exists between interpersonal communication and political knowledge (Eveland Jr, 2004), and having an informed citizenry is essential in a democratic society. Yet, to some researchers, the need for an informed citizenry is “overstated” (Delli Carpini, 2009, p. 133). What is needed instead is a rethinking of democracy, where real democracy functions through “some combination of government by experts, the availability of attentive publics, the resourceful use of heuristics and information shortcuts by citizens, and/or the beneficent effects of collective rationality, wherein the whole of citizen awareness is greater than the sum of its parts” (*ibid*).

Besides just having an interest in politics, talking about politics and being informed about politics, citizens should also feel that they can play a part (either individually or collectively) in affecting political and social change. This is known as political efficacy. Internal efficacy is the belief in one’s own ability to influence the government while external efficacy is the belief that the government will respond to the needs of citizens (Anderson, 2010).

Citizens with low political efficacy have little to no faith in the government and “believe that their actions do not make much of an impact on political leaders”, while citizens with high political efficacy are likely to believe that “their government is doing what is best for them and that their actions can make a difference in politics” (Hu, Sun & Wu, 2015, p. 1014). Closely linked with political efficacy is political trust. Governments that enjoy higher public trust have greater room to

manoeuvre when carrying out urgent political tasks, while those that do not will find it difficult to succeed (Hu et al., 2015).

As for political orientation, McAllister (2007) found that in Japan, Korea and Taiwan, demographic variables such as age, gender and education influenced how citizens identified themselves on the left-right spectrum or liberal/conservative divide. On the other hand, socio-economic factors such as trade union membership “significantly differentiate” partisan support in Australia and New Zealand.

FINDINGS

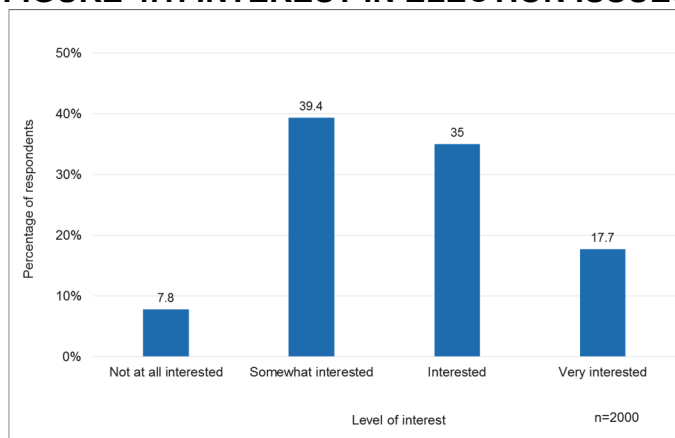
This section presents the findings on respondents’ political traits, specifically their interest in election issues, frequency of political talk, level of political knowledge, political efficacy and their political orientation.

Political Interest

Respondents were asked to rank their level of interest in election issues on a four-point scale with 1 being “not at all interested”, 2 “somewhat interested”, 3 “interested” and 4 “very interested”.

Figure 4.1 shows that 92.2% of the respondents were somewhat interested to very interested in election issues, while 7.8% were not interested at all. Zooming in on the level of interest, 39.4% were somewhat interested, 35% were interested and 17.7% very interested

FIGURE 4.1: INTEREST IN ELECTION ISSUES



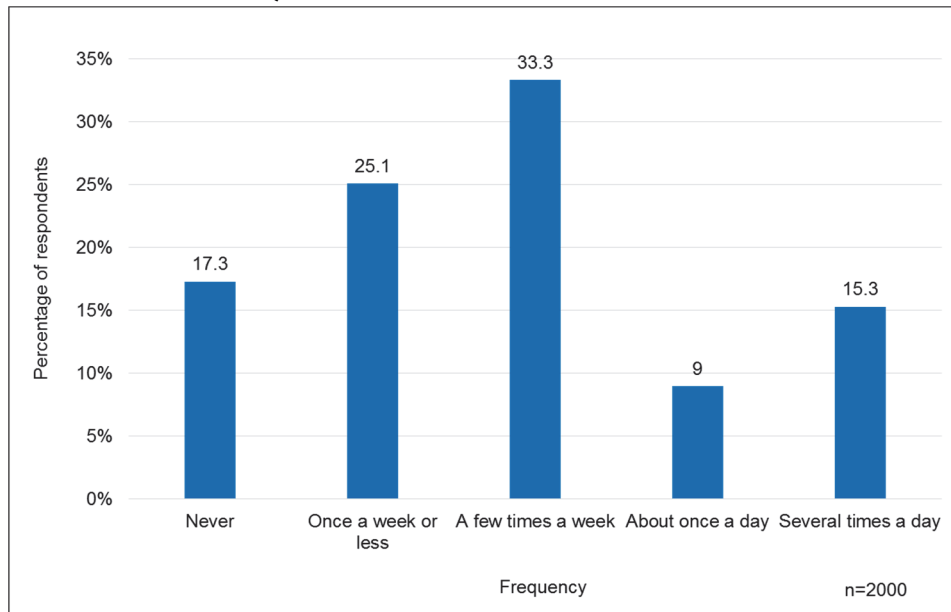


Political Talk

Respondents were asked how often they discussed the election with others, with 1 being “never”, 2 “once a week or less”, 3 “a few times a week”, 4 “about once a day” and 5 “several times a day”.

We observed that 82.7% of the respondents engaged in political talk during election time, while 17.3% did not (see Figure 4.2). As for how often they talked, 33.3% discussed GE2015 with other people a few times a week, 25.1% did so once a week or less, 15.3% several times a day and 9% about once a day.

FIGURE 4.2: FREQUENCY OF ELECTION TALK DURING GE2015



Political Knowledge

To measure respondents’ political knowledge, we asked them the following questions:

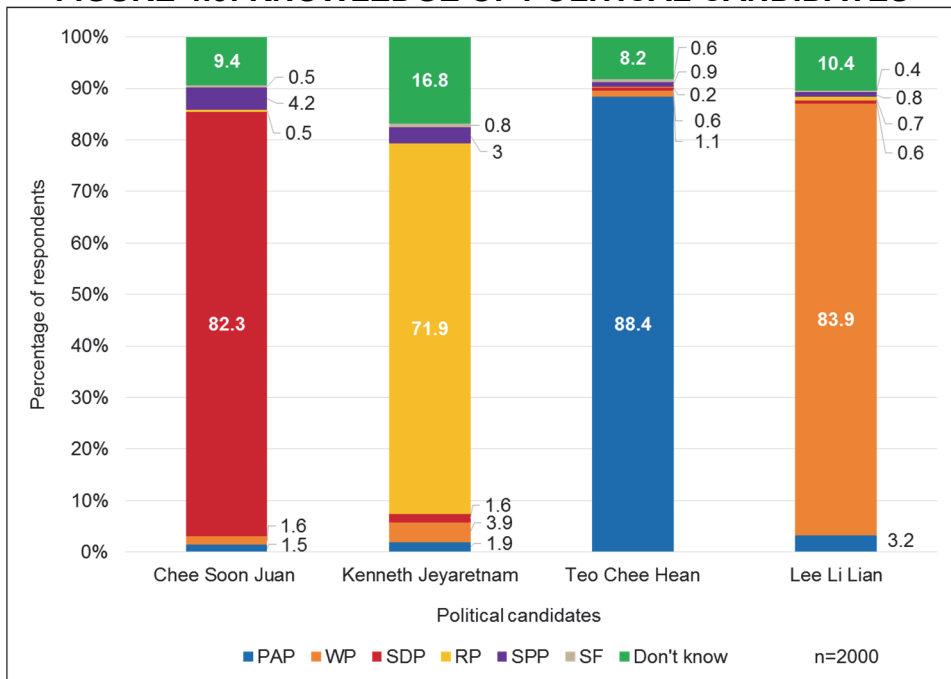
1. Which parties did candidates Chee Soon Juan, Kenneth Jeyaretnam, Teo Chee Hean and Lee Li Lian belong to?
2. What percentage of votes did the PAP win in GE2011?

3. Which party used the campaign slogan “Your voice in Parliament”?
4. What does “Your vote is secret” mean?

Respondents were given the option to select “don’t know” if they did not know the answers to these questions.

The majority of respondents (see Figure 4.3) correctly matched the politicians to their respective parties — 82.3% of the respondents correctly identified that Chee Soon Juan was from SDP, 71.9% correctly identified that Kenneth Jeyaretnam was from the Reform Party (RP), 88.4% correctly identified that Teo Chee Hean was from PAP and 83.9% correctly identified that Lee Li Lian was from the WP.

FIGURE 4.3: KNOWLEDGE OF POLITICAL CANDIDATES



However, only half of the respondents (50.7%) knew that PAP won 60.1% of the votes in GE2011 (see Figure 4.4). Even fewer (29.8%) knew that SDP was the political party which used the campaign slogan “Your voice in Parliament” (see Figure 4.5).



FIGURE 4.4: PERCENTAGE OF VOTES PAP WON IN GE2011

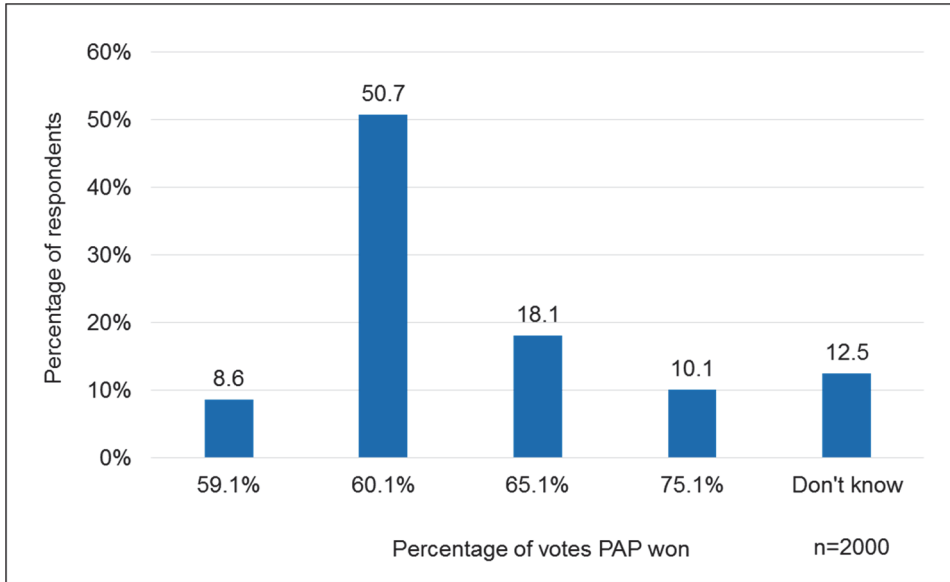
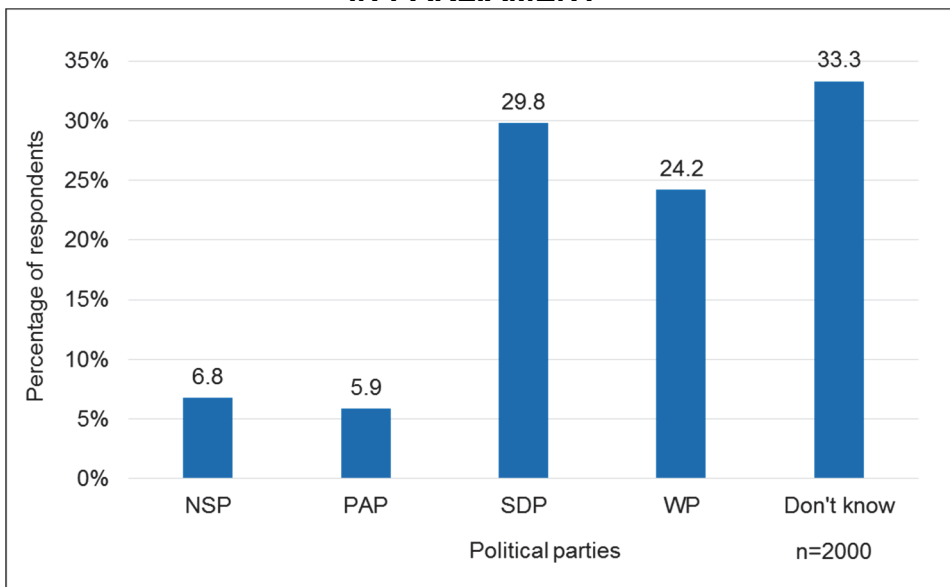
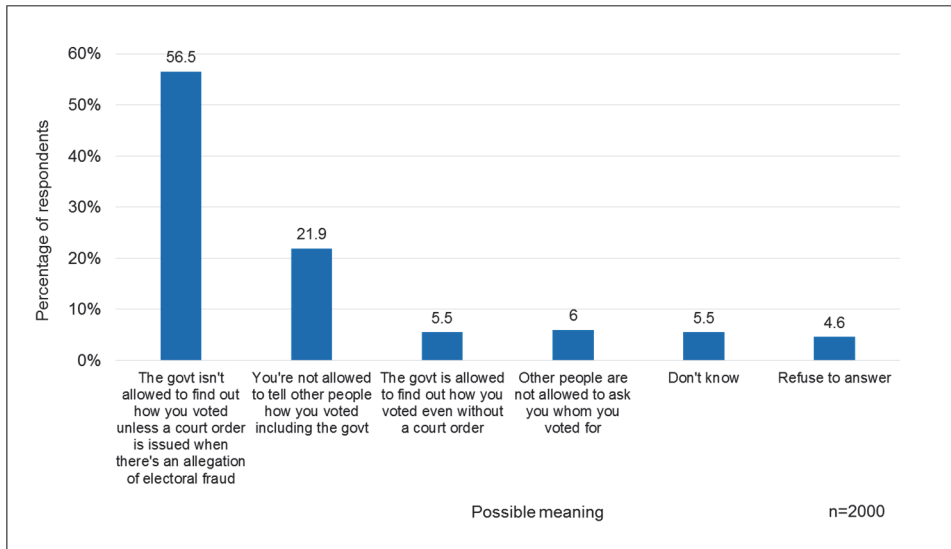


FIGURE 4.5: WHICH PARTY USED THE SLOGAN “YOUR VOICE IN PARLIAMENT”



As for knowing what “Your vote is secret” means, 56.5% knew that it meant “the government is not allowed to find out how you voted unless a court order is issued when there is an allegation of electoral fraud” (see Figure 4.6).

FIGURE 4.6: WHAT DOES “YOUR VOTE IS SECRET” MEAN



Political Efficacy

We also asked respondents about their sense of internal and external efficacy. Respondents had to indicate their level of agreement (with 1 being “strongly disagree”, 2 “disagree”, 3 “neither agree nor disagree”, 4 “agree” and 5 “strongly agree”) with these four statements:

1. I have a pretty good understanding of political issues in Singapore.
2. I feel people like me can influence the government.
3. If the government is not interested in hearing what the people think, there is really no way to make them listen.
4. The government will respond to the needs of citizens if people band together and demand change

The first two statements measured their internal efficacy, while the last two measured their external efficacy.



While 63.2% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had a good understanding of political issues in Singapore (see Figure 4.7), a large group (41.8%) was ambivalent about their ability to influence the government, and 23.6% strongly disagreed or disagreed that they could (see Figure 4.8).

FIGURE 4.7: I HAVE A PRETTY GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF POLITICAL ISSUES IN SINGAPORE

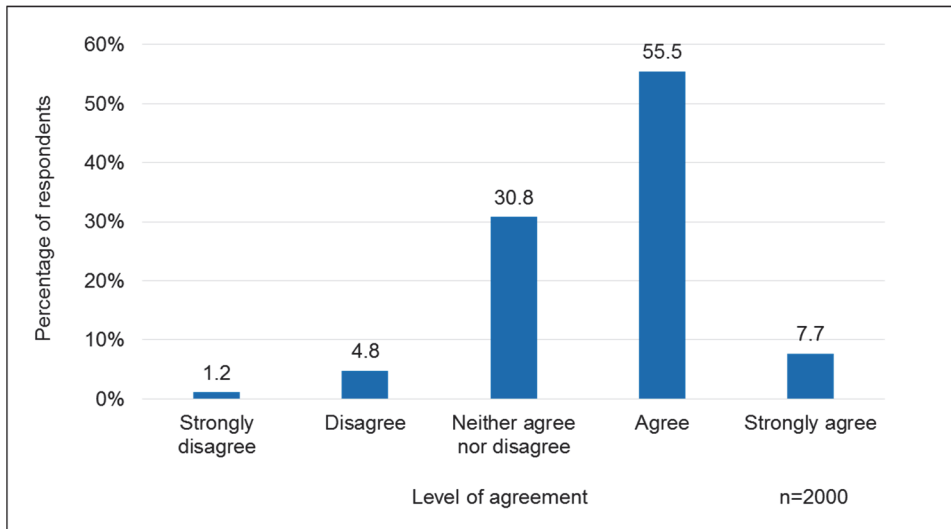
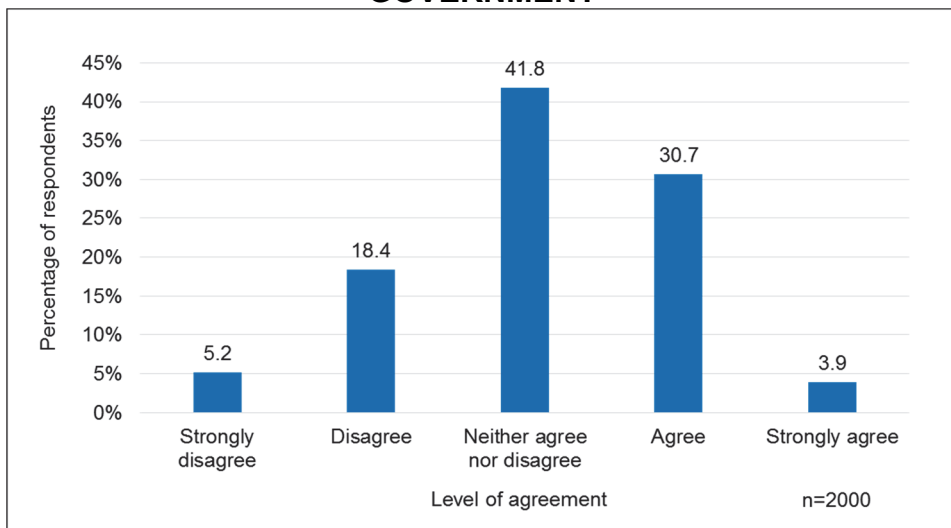


FIGURE 4.8: I FEEL PEOPLE LIKE ME CAN INFLUENCE THE GOVERNMENT



Slightly more than half of the respondents (54.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that there is no way to make the government listen if they are not interested in hearing what the people think. However, more respondents (62%) agreed or strongly agreed that if people band together and demand change, the government will respond to their needs (see Figure 4.10).

FIGURE 4.9: IF THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT INTERESTED IN HEARING WHAT THE PEOPLE THINK, THERE IS REALLY NO WAY TO MAKE THEM LISTEN

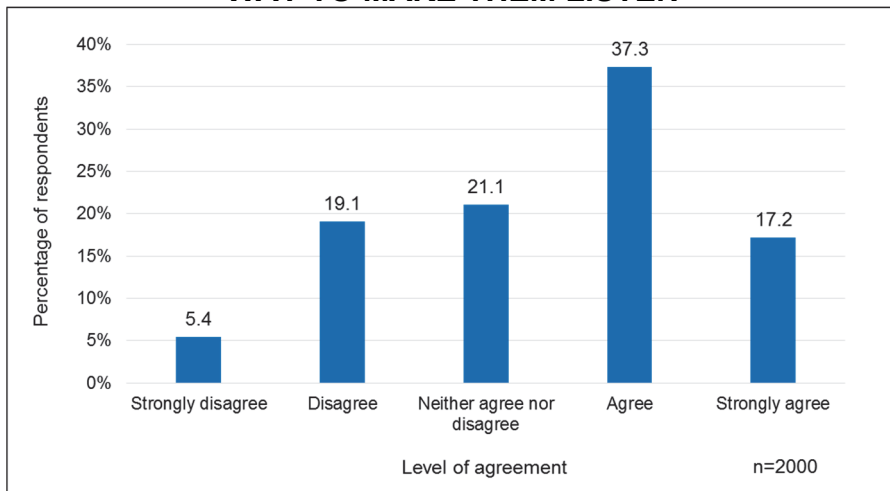
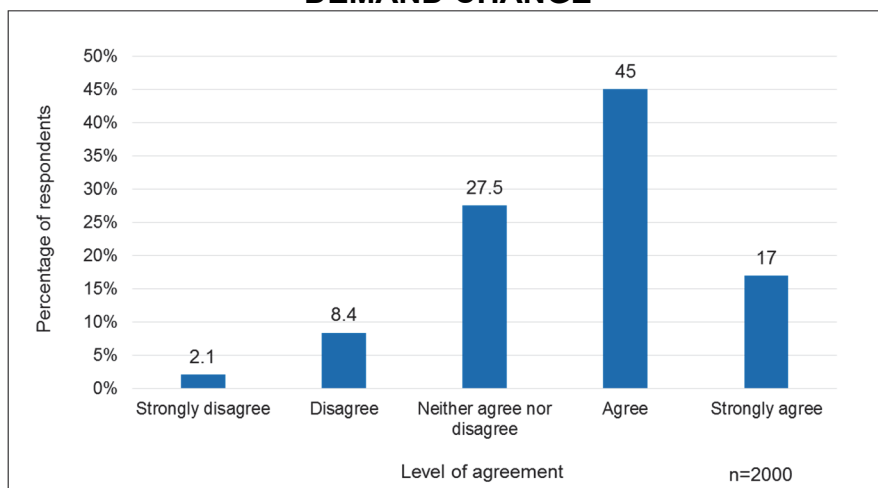


FIGURE 4.10: THE GOVERNMENT WILL RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF CITIZENS IF PEOPLE BAND TOGETHER AND DEMAND CHANGE





Political Orientation

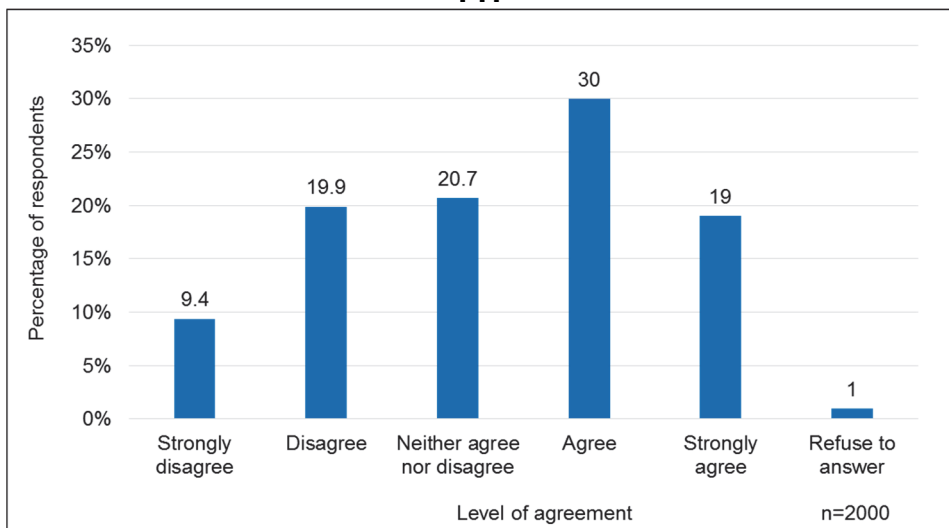
The survey also asked respondents about their political orientation. They had to rank their level of agreement (with 1 being “strongly disagree”, 2 “disagree”, 3 “neither agree nor disagree”, 4 “agree” and 5 “strongly agree”) with these two statements:

1. Singapore should have a powerful leader who can run the government as he thinks fit.
2. Everyone should be given the freedom to criticise the government publicly.

Additionally, respondents were also asked on their partisanship, if they supported the PAP or the opposition.

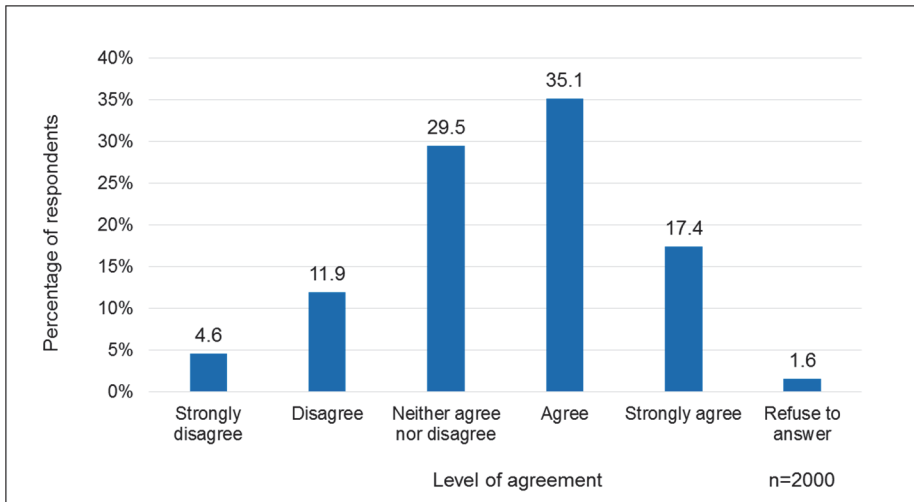
Respondents were divided as to whether or not Singapore should have a powerful leader. As seen in Figure 4.11, only 49% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed, while 29.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 20.7% neither agreed nor disagreed.

FIGURE 4.11: SINGAPORE SHOULD HAVE A POWERFUL LEADER WHO CAN RUN THE GOVERNMENT AS HE THINKS FIT



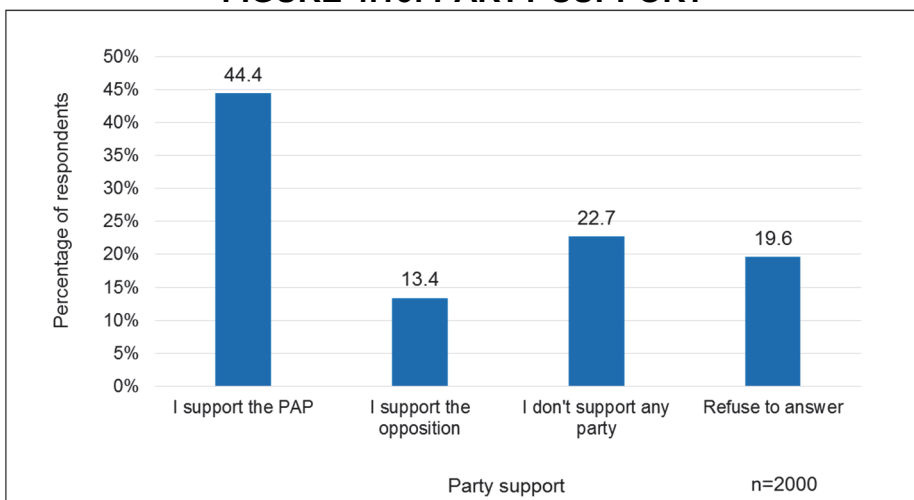
Slightly more respondents agreed that everyone should have the freedom to criticise the government publicly, as 52.5% of the respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (see Figure 4.12).

FIGURE 4.12: EVERYONE SHOULD BE GIVEN THE FREEDOM TO CRITICISE THE GOVERNMENT PUBLICLY



As for which party they supported, 44.4% of the respondents supported the PAP, 13.4% supported the opposition and 22.7% did not support any party (see Figure 4.13).

FIGURE 4.13: PARTY SUPPORT





DISCUSSION

The findings in this chapter shed light on the political attitudes and behaviours of Singaporean voters. It reveals several positives: Respondents were interested in election issues, felt that they understood political issues, and engaged in political discussions about the election.

Yet, they did not score well in the political knowledge questions. While the majority of them could match political candidates to their respective parties — perhaps due to the visibility the candidates enjoyed from mainstream media coverage and party rallies during the hustings — they were less familiar with the outcome of GE2011, and had limited knowledge about the slogans of opposition parties. Close to half of the respondents were also unsure what “Your vote is secret” means.

Respondents also did not feel empowered as individuals to affect change. They felt that if the government was not interested in hearing what the people think, there was no way to make them listen. Perhaps these sentiments are not surprising, given the government’s position on certain issues (such as the rights of the lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender community) despite strong calls for action from the civil society and some members of the public. However, the majority of the respondents also felt that the government will respond to the needs of citizens if people band together and demand change.

As for political orientation, the findings show that the majority of the respondents supported the PAP. In a 2015 rally speech, PM Lee, acknowledged that the success of Singapore was because “we keep faith with one another, the government works with the people, the people support the government” (Mohamad Salleh, 2015).

Lastly, respondents were divided on whether or not Singapore should be led by a powerful leader who can run the government as he thinks fit, while slightly more than half were politically liberal, that is they agreed that everyone should have the freedom to criticise the government.

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Chapter 5

Youth and Social Media Use



CHAPTER 5: YOUTH AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Nadzirah Samsudin and Carol Soon

INTRODUCTION

During GE2015, voters aged 21–30 years old made up 19% of the 2.46 million eligible voters. At the post-election press conference, PM Lee attributed part of PAP's success at the polls to the support the party received from these young voters (Loh, 2015).

The youth vote can make or break an election. Take for example the 2008 US presidential election where Mr Obama's campaign resonated strongly with the youth. He went on to secure more than 60% of the youth vote. In Taiwan, presidential candidate Ms Tsai Ing-wen rode to victory on the political and economic frustrations of the under 40-year-olds who made up 40% of the voters.

Engaging this key demographic is thus a priority for politicians, and one way for them to do so is through the Internet and social media. The proliferation of social media also created expectations and hype pertaining to their impact on political participation among the youth.

While the analyses presented in Chapter 3 are on media use among all voters, this chapter focuses on Singapore youth's mainstream media and social media use during the election. For this study, youth refers to those aged 21 (the voting age) to 35 years old. In this chapter, we also compare their trust of media, and their offline and online political participation with that of older voters (i.e., non-youth).

SOCIAL MEDIA THE GO-TO SOURCE FOR YOUTH

Youth are more likely to rely on social media as a source for information than non-youth. A 2016 US study conducted by the Pew Research Center found that 61% of respondents aged 18–29 years old learnt about the 2016 presidential election from social media, compared with 51% of those who were older. Most of those aged 50 years and above learnt about the election from local TV, cable TV or network news (Gottfried, Barthel, Shearer & Mitchell, 2016).

This trend is also observed in other countries. In Taiwan, a study showed that 70% of college students got their news from the Internet and only 20% relied on TV (Jen, 2016). Similarly, a growing number of youth in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are also using the Internet and social media to keep up-to-date with news and current affairs (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2016). During the 2002 South Korean presidential election, young voters were distrustful of the conservative mainstream media, and took to the Internet to share diverse views and to “create a counter agenda forum against the newspapers” (Rhee, 2003, p. 96).

ONLINE AND OFFLINE PARTICIPATION

Studies have suggested that there is no difference between youth's and non-youth's political participation. Some scholars argued that perceptions of a generational divide in political activity may be due to a dated or narrow understanding of what constitutes political activity. Youth are participating in politics, but their participation may not be seen as being “political” according to conventional political science and even by youth themselves (Henn, Weinstein & Wring, 2002).

Given the reliance on the Internet and social media, the concept of “political participation” should be updated. Towner (2013) suggested that political participation is the “ability to express political opinions and exert political influence in both offline and online worlds” (p. 529).

Another survey by Pew found that younger adults were just as likely as older adults to be engaged in political activities, but youth were much more likely to be politically active on SNS (Smith, 2013). In 2012, 44% of respondents aged 18–29 years used SNS or Twitter to “like” or promote political material as compared to 32% of those aged 50–64 years (Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady & Verba, 2012). In contrast, adults aged 35 years and above were more likely to engage in offline political activities such as signing a petition, contacting a government official, calling a radio/TV show, or sending a letter to the editor offline (Smith, 2013).

Whether or not the Internet has an impact on political participation is inconclusive. However, researchers acknowledged that Internet use is not a “uni-dimensional concept”, meaning it will affect different



groups in society differently, and its impact depends on a combination of “personal and social characteristics, usage patterns, and the content and context of the medium” (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011, p. 452).

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings on youth’s and non-youth’s use of mainstream media and social media, their level of trust in the media, and their offline and online political participation. The 2,000 respondents comprised 551 youth and 1,449 non-youth.

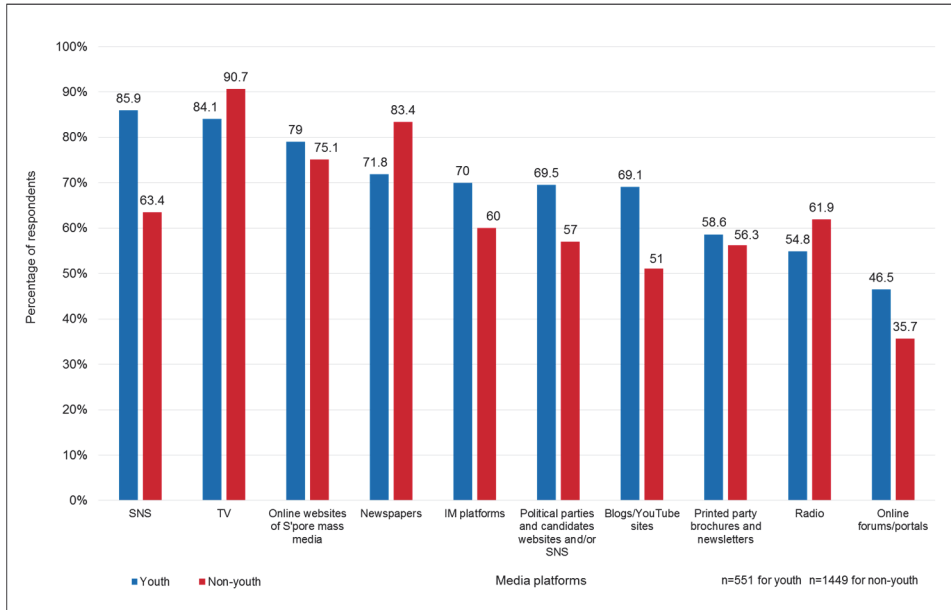
Media Use and Trust

As mentioned in Chapter 3, respondents were asked to rank their usage of four types of social media (blogs or YouTube sites of individuals or groups, online discussion forums and portals, SNS and IM platforms) and six types of mainstream media (print newspapers, TV, radio, online websites of Singapore mass media, political parties’ and candidates’ websites and their SNS and printed party brochures and newsletters) on a five-point frequency scale. Respondents were also asked to rank how trustworthy or untrustworthy each media platform was (see Chapter 3 for the trust scale)

To determine the number of respondents who used each medium for election-related information, we totalled responses for “once a week or less”, “a few times a week”, “about once a day” and “a few times a day”. See Figure 5.1.

The top three platforms used by youth during election time were SNS (85.9%), TV (84.1%) and online websites of Singapore mass media (79%). On the other hand, the top three platforms used by non-youth were TV (90.7%), print newspapers (83.4%) and online sites of mainstream media (75.1%).

FIGURE 5.1: USE OF MEDIA FOR ELECTION-RELATED INFORMATION



More youth than non-youth used social media and online websites of mainstream media. For instance, 85.9% of youth used SNS compared with 63.4% of non-youth. However, more non-youth than youth used mainstream media such as print newspapers, TV and radio. For example, 90.7% of non-youth used TV, compared with 84.1% of youth. Both youth (46.5%) and non-youth (35.7%) used online discussion forums and portals the least as a source of information and news on GE2015

When it came to trust for the media, both youth and non-youth trusted mainstream media sources more than social media (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3). Both groups trusted TV the most – 70.7% of youth and 74.8% of non-youth found TV to be moderately trustworthy to very trustworthy. The least trusted media was online discussion forums and portals; 45.7% of youth and 45.9% of non-youth felt that they were moderately trustworthy to very trustworthy.

A greater proportion of youth than non-youth found all media platforms very trustworthy.

FIGURE 5.2: YOUTH'S TRUST OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND MAINSTREAM MEDIA

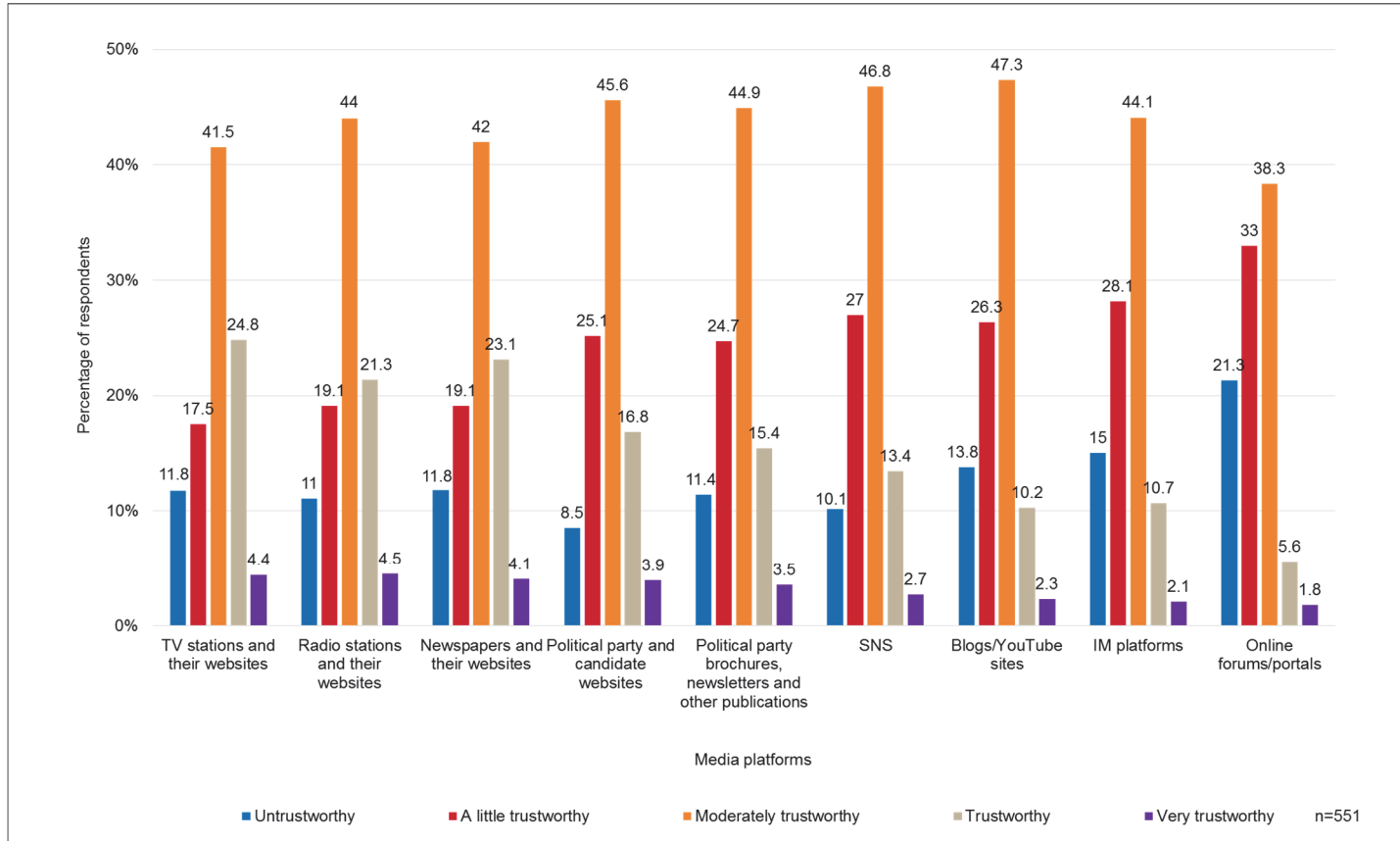
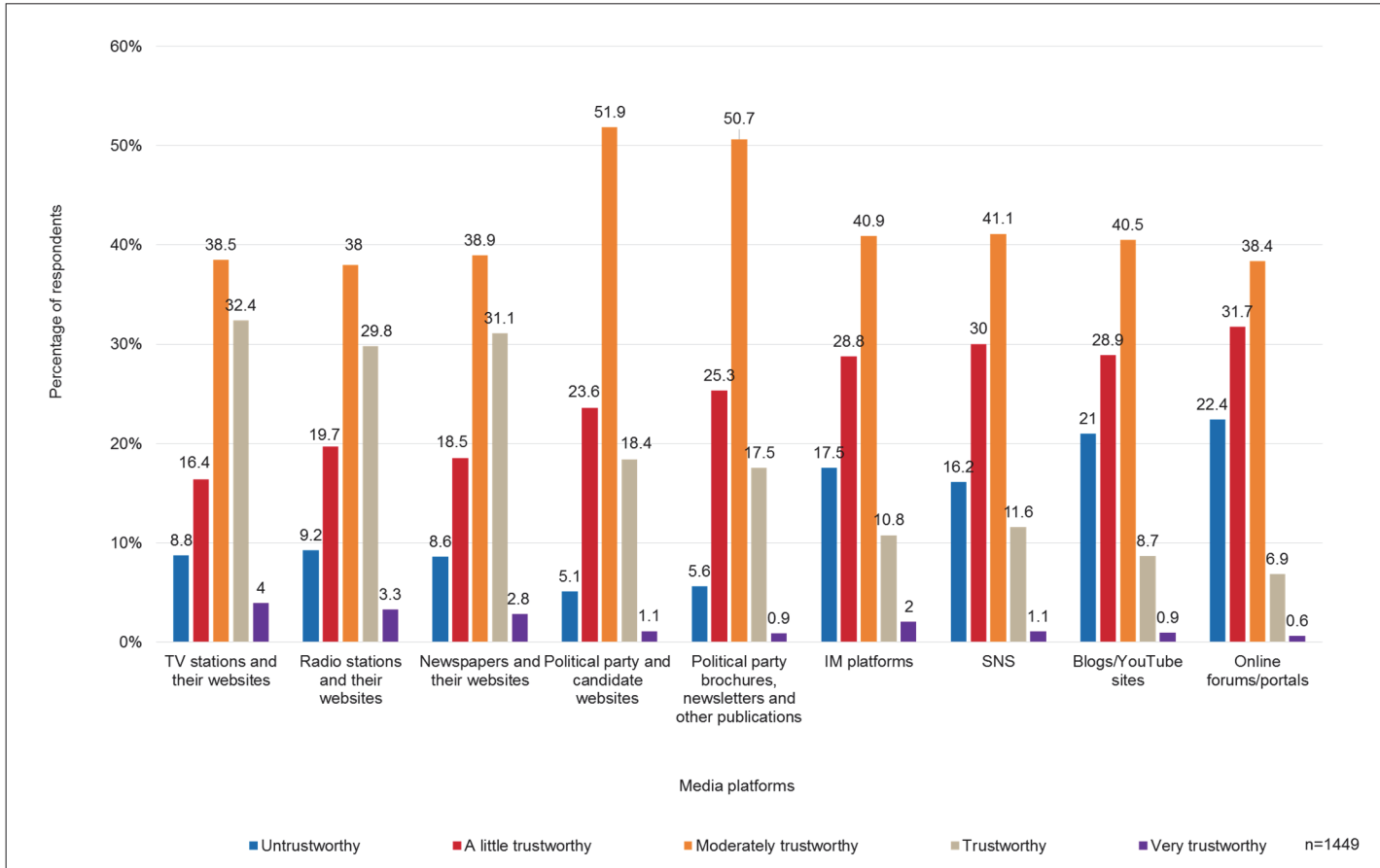


FIGURE 5.3: NON-YOUTH'S TRUST OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND MAINSTREAM MEDIA





Online Political Participation

Respondents who indicated that they used social media as a source of information and news on the election were also asked about their online political participation during GE2015 (refer to Chapter 3 for the list of activities and frequency scale).

We found that both youth and non-youth displayed low levels of online political participation across all four social media platforms. They also participated more in activities which required the least amount of time and effort. The frequency of use was also low, with most respondents participating in activities once a week or less.

Looking at youth's use of blogs or YouTube sites, and excluding those who refused to answer, the most popular activity was "shared relevant information or political commentary", where 50.3% did so once a week or less (see Figure 5.4).

As for non-youth (excluding those who refused to answer), the most popular activity was "followed a blogger or YouTuber's postings on a candidate, political party the election and issue" where 51% did so once a week or less (see Figure 5.5).

FIGURE 5.4: YOUTH'S PARTICIPATION ON BLOGS OR YOUTUBE SITES

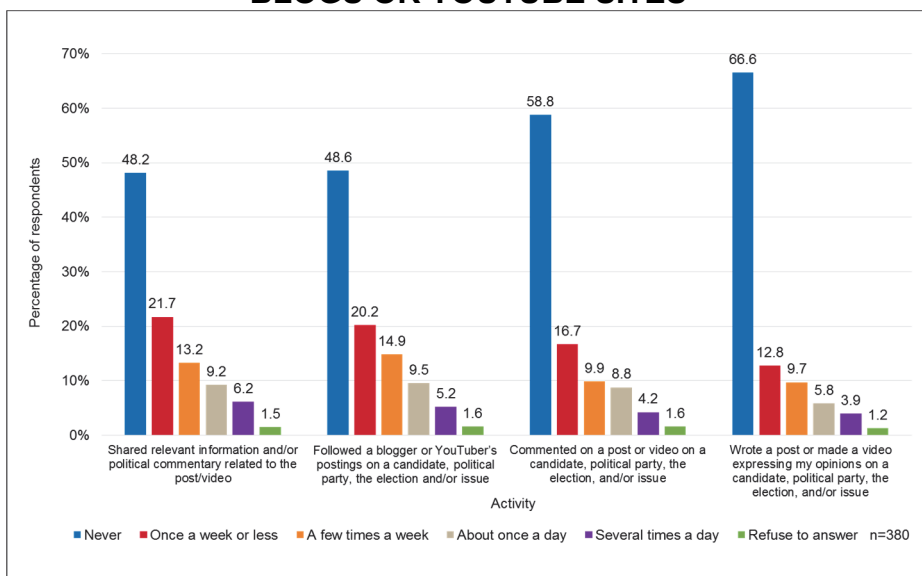
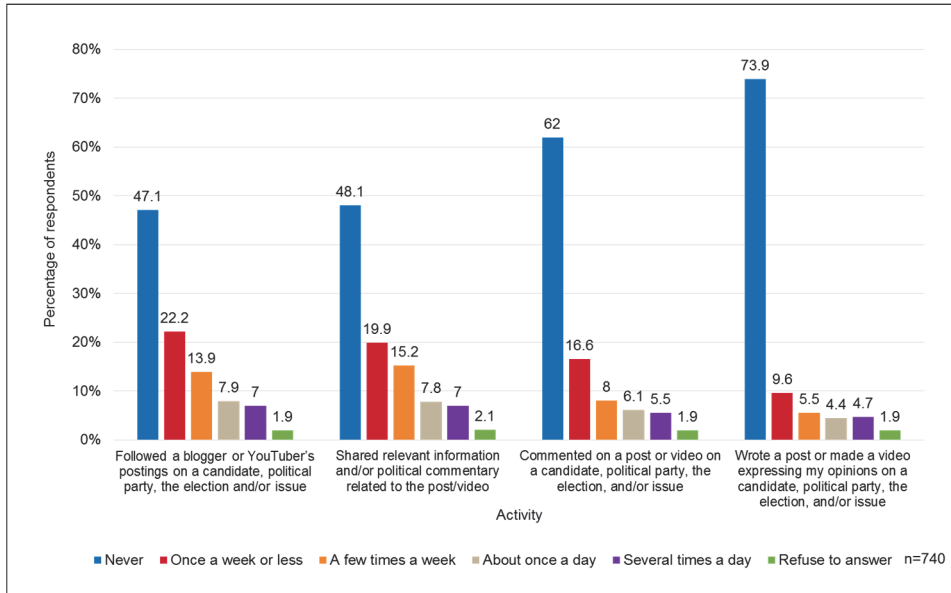


FIGURE 5.5: NON-YOUTH'S PARTICIPATION ON BLOGS OR YOUTUBE SITES



When it came to online discussion forums and portals, the most popular activity for both youth and non-youth was “followed a thread discussing a candidate, political party, the election and/or issue”, with 61.6% and 64.9% doing so at least once a week or less, respectively (see Figures 5.6 and 5.7).

FIGURE 5.6: YOUTH'S PARTICIPATION ON ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUMS/PORTALS

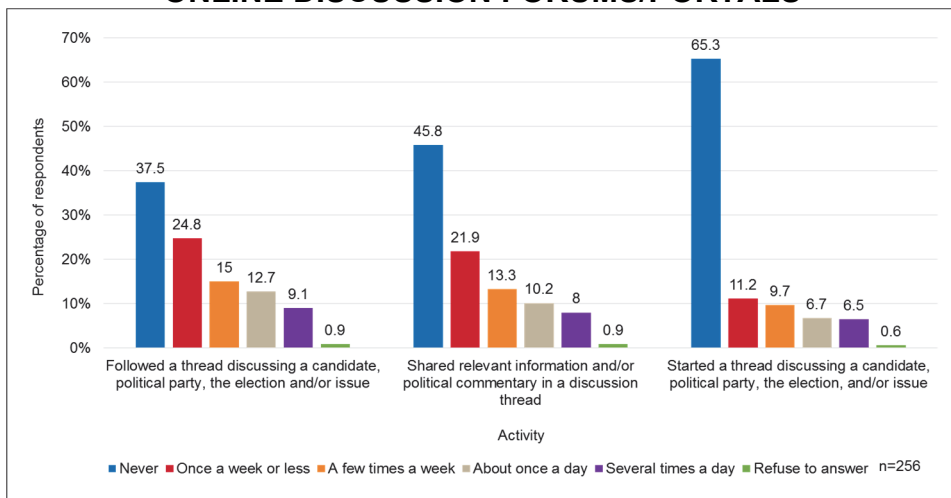
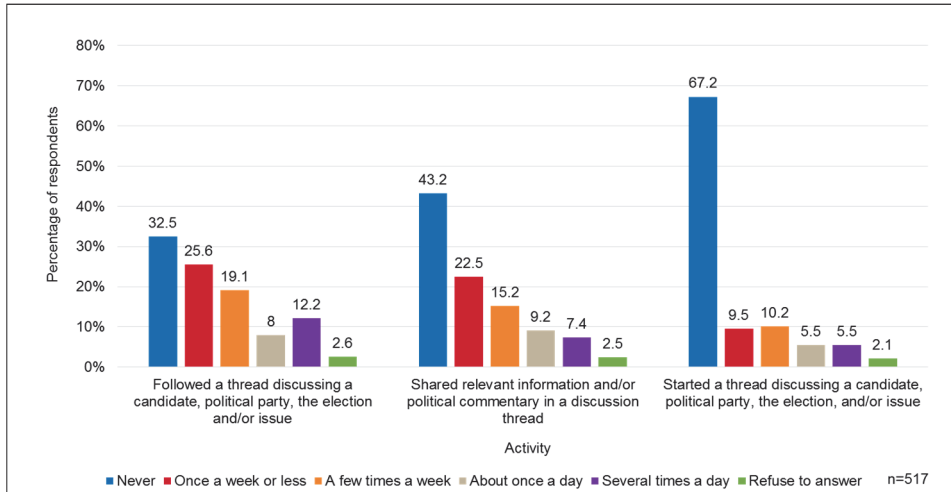




FIGURE 5.7: NON-YOUTH'S PARTICIPATION ON ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUMS/PORTALS



To recap, SNS was the most used social media platform for both youth (85.9%) and non-youth (63.4%) to learn more about GE2015 (see Figure 5.1).

As seen in Figures 5.8 and 5.9, the most popular activity for both youth and non-youth on SNS was “learnt more about fellow Singaporean’s views on the election” – 84.5% of youth and 80.8% of non-youth did so once a week or less.

FIGURE 5.8: YOUTH'S PARTICIPATION ON SNS

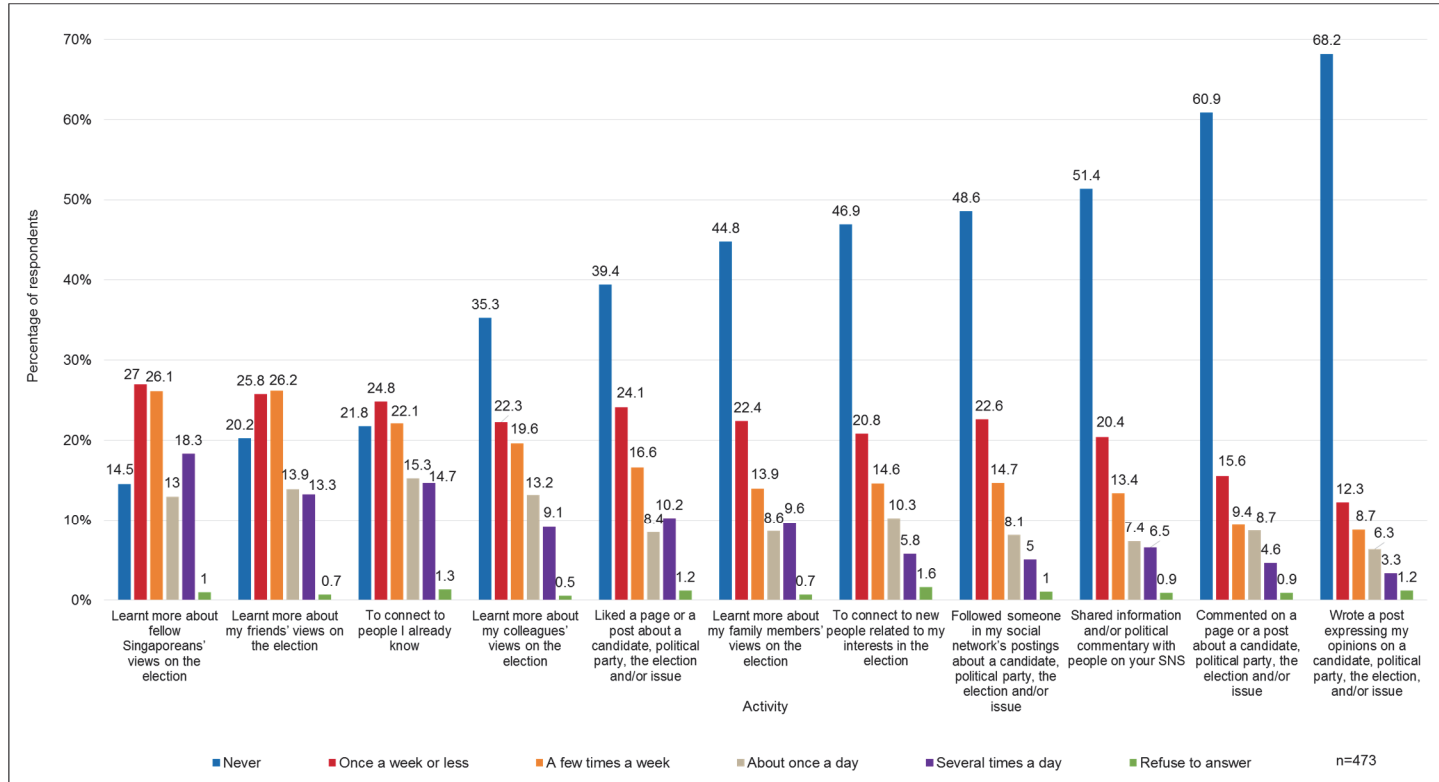
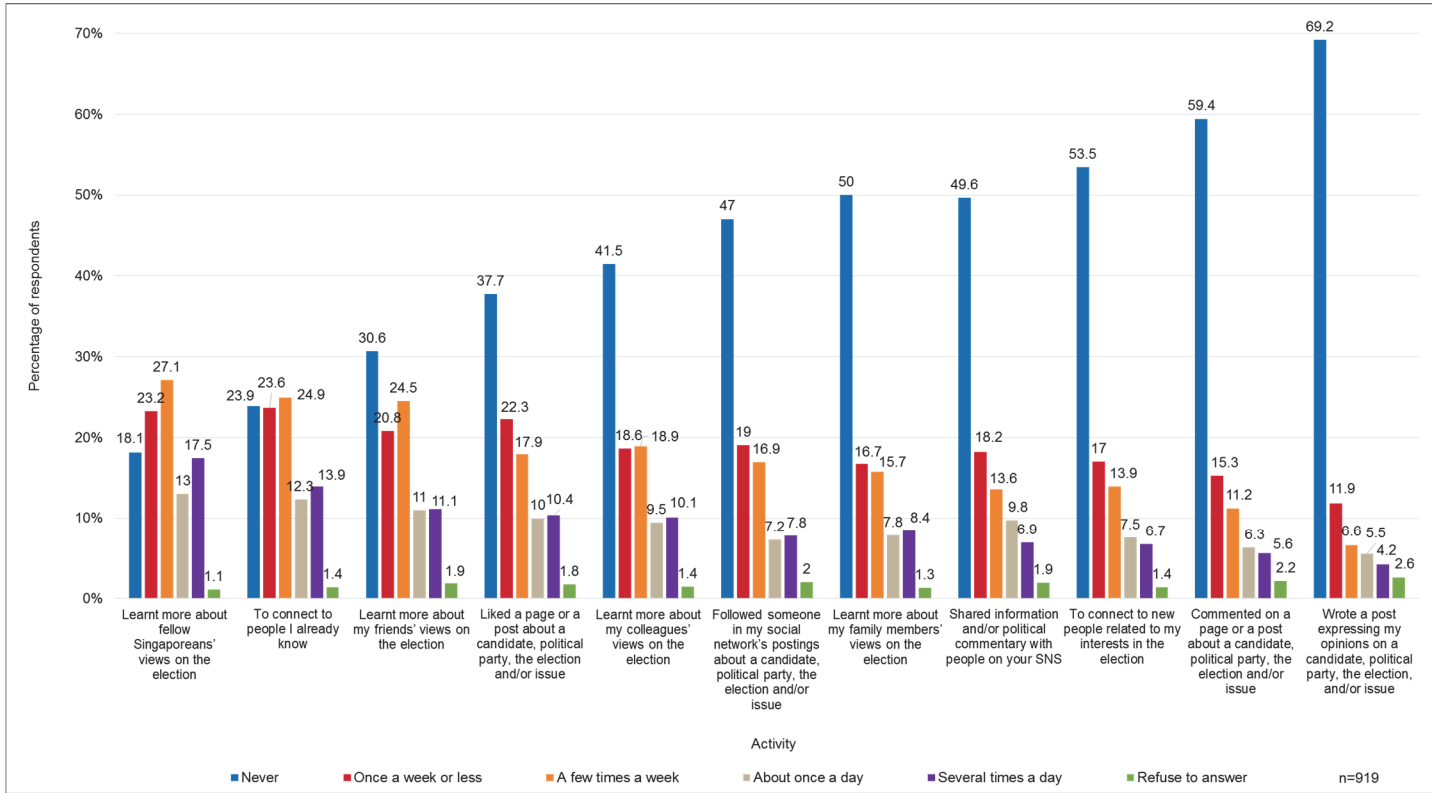


FIGURE 5.9: NON-YOUTH'S PARTICIPATION ON SNS



The use of IM platforms such as WhatsApp, Viber and Facebook Messenger also proved to be quite popular for both youth and non-youth as a source for election news and information. The most popular activity on these platforms for both youth and non-youth was “shared information and/or political commentary with people”, with 67.5% and 61.3% doing so at least once a week or less, respectively (see Figure 5.10 and 5.11).

FIGURE 5.10: YOUTH’S PARTICIPATION ON IM PLATFORMS

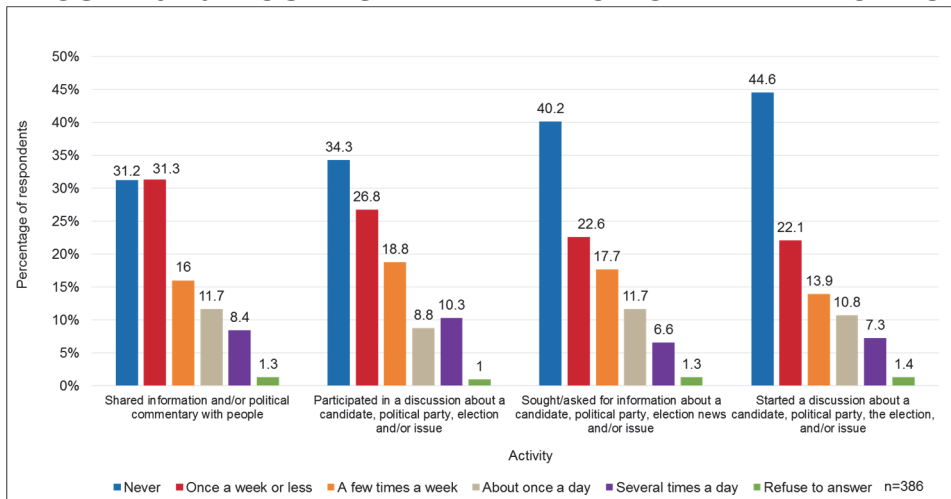
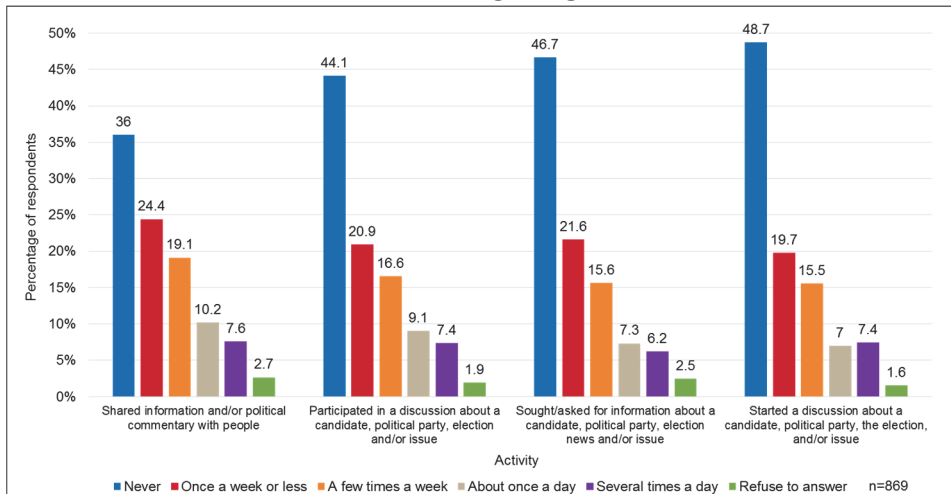


FIGURE 5.11: NON-YOUTH’S PARTICIPATION ON IM PLATFORMS





Offline Political Participation

Respondents were also asked about their offline political activity, and had to indicate “yes” or “no” to four activities (refer to Chapter 3 for the list of activities).

Similar to their levels of online political participation, youth and non-youth displayed low levels of offline political participation. The most popular activity for youth was “took part in an event for a good cause” (24.4%). For non-youth, it was “attended one or more political rallies” (23.7%). See Figures 5.12 and 5.13 respectively.

FIGURE 5.12: YOUTH’S PARTICIPATION IN OFFLINE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

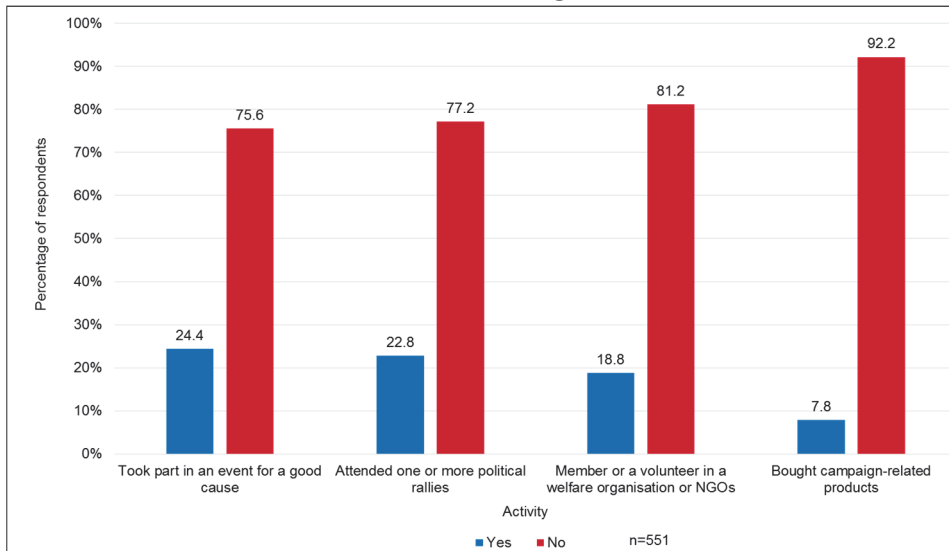
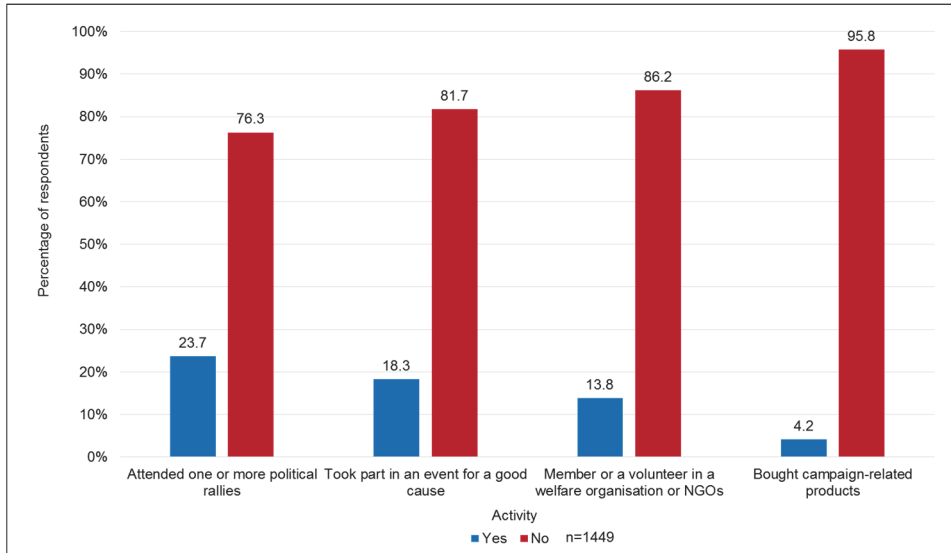


FIGURE 5.13: NON-YOUTH’S PARTICIPATION IN OFFLINE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES



DISCUSSION

The findings in this chapter show that just like trends seen in other countries, Singaporean youth used social media more than Singaporean non-youth as a source of news and information related to GE2015. However, when we compared youth’s use of different media, we found that youth used mainstream media and their online counterparts more than social media (with the exception of SNS). They also trusted mainstream media more than social media. Singaporean non-youth meanwhile relied more on mainstream media and trusted mainstream media more than social media to learn more about the election.

Politicians would have to be savvy in navigating both social media and mainstream media to bring across their messages and to engage with the electorate. (The next chapter examines how political parties in Singapore used social media during the election). For example, Ms Tsai deftly used online media to connect with voters. During her campaign, she released videos of herself as a “cutely bespectacled anime girl” on Facebook. These videos amassed more than 20,000 “likes” on Facebook, and was a way for her to express policies in a way that was easy for voters to understand.



When it comes to offline and online political activities, both youth and non-youth displayed similar participation patterns. For example, passive online activities on the different social media platforms — such as blogs, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, online discussion forums and portals, WhatsApp, Viber and Facebook Messenger — saw the highest participation rates. However, even then, people often only engaged in such activities once a week or less.

Offline political participation was also low for both groups. A slight difference was observed for online participation on blogs and YouTube sites. The most popular activity for youth was sharing relevant information and/or political commentary related to a post/video. For non-youth, it was following a blogger or YouTuber's postings on a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue. This suggests that non-youth were perhaps more passive than youth when online.

In Singapore, there is no discernible difference in youth and non-youth engagement with politics both offline and online. On the whole, the findings in this chapter echo the findings in Chapter 3, which presents the top-line results of the survey.

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Chapter 6

Use of Social Media by Political Parties



CHAPTER 6: USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY POLITICAL PARTIES

Tan Tarn How, Tng Ying Hui and Andrew Yeo

INTRODUCTION

A few days before GE2015 was called, there was talk of social media “shaping up to be a key front” (Ng, 2015). Indeed, during the campaigning period, all nine political parties adopted social media as part of their overall media strategies to varying standards and effectiveness. The noise surrounding social media led many to think that the opposition parties could use social media to their advantage and send more candidates into parliament during GE2015.

The Internet is an especially useful tool for the opposition parties in Singapore due to several reasons. First, the lower cost of the Internet gives more value for the money spent to resourced-strapped parties. Most online materials — from website updates to Facebook pictures — cost a fraction of printed banners and brochures.

Second, the Internet allows parties to reach voters directly without their messages going through and perhaps censored by media.

Third, the high penetration of the Internet, high smartphone ownership and on-the-go connectivity of voters means that political messages can reach voters wherever they are and at all times of the day. As of November 2015, 70% of Singapore’s 5.5 million population owns a Facebook account, making it the top ranking social media site. Twitter, on the other hand, was ranked 13th, with only 21% penetration rate (Hashmeta, 2015).

Fourth, the immediacy of the Internet means opposition parties can rebut or refute assertions or opinions about them instantly instead of waiting for the slower news cycles of print and broadcast.

Fifth, the Internet reduces the cost and increases the opportunity for voters to access party messages. For instance, when parties upload full videos of rally speeches, voters can watch them immediately.

However, as the election results trickled in on the night of 11 September 2015, it became clear to all that the incumbent party was going to garner a clear mandate from its voters. The PAP's vote share increased by almost 10 percentage points, from 60.1% in 2011 to 69.9%, where it secured 83 of the 89 seats in parliament. It was politics as usual. This prompted us to ask if there was equalisation in the use of the Internet by the parties in GE2015 — that is, did social media level the playing field for weaker parties? Conversely, did the parties' use of the Internet as a campaign tool mirror the balance of power offline where the dominant PAP has the most reach and impact?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media operates on a different logic from mainstream media. While the latter pushes information to the mass audience, social media users have to create their own content to pull audiences (Klinger, 2013, p. 722). We apply Bechmann and Lomborg's (2012) definition of social media as forms of online communication that are de-institutionalised, interactive and networked, and where users are also the producers of content, which includes SNS (p. 767). This unmediated and direct form of online communication seems to hold promise for small parties with limited resources when competing with dominant parties. However, will this assumption be true or will the dominant parties overshadow the rest online?

Proponents of the first assumption, the equalisation theory, point to the democratising potential of self-directed communication. According to Shirky (2011), social media has become coordinating tools for nearly all of the world's political movements. This is possible because even if users of social media start from a subordinate position in institutions or financial resources, they will be able to spread information over vast geographical barriers (Granovetter, 1983, p. 202; Castells, 2009, p. 302). Seen in this light, network media has the power to re-configure power relations and challenge the control of media in an authoritarian state (Loader & Mercea, 2011, p. 759).

By the end of the 1990s, others had raised doubts about these claims, based largely on evidence from the role of the Internet in American elections (Norris, 2003, p. 10). In the US, multiple parties and



candidates had established an online presence, with many websites emerging in the 1996, 1998 and 2000 presidential races. The websites were full of “multimedia gizmos and gadgets like streaming videos”, which aimed to disseminate information, a function similar to traditional forms of communications; and few websites offered unmediated public debates or discussions among the parties, supporters and critics (*ibid*). However, websites functioned more like one-way bulletin boards than user-generated communication platforms.

Explaining why the Internet failed to live up to its potential, Margolis and Resnick (2000) said “virtual reality has grown to resemble the real world” (p. 2). The online world, they concluded, operated in the same way as the offline world — they called this the normalisation theory. In their book *Politics as Usual: The Cyberspace “Revolution”*, the authors showed how the Internet was an elitist medium even in its early stages — only those who were financially well-off could access it (p. 206). Echoing that sentiment were Lilleker and colleagues (2011), who in their analysis of party websites in France, Germany, UK and Poland found that larger parties with greater resources had more innovative websites and used interactive elements of Web 2.0 applications (p. 197). Online communication thus replicated real-world power structures and resource allocation. Vaccari’s (2011) study of candidates in the 2008 US presidential primaries showed that incumbency is a relevant factor, as mounting an Internet campaign requires a degree of professionalism, experience and organisation that only those who are in office are able to harness; it is “no place for outsiders” (p. 33).

While the evidence supporting both theories is mixed, political campaigning on social media is here to stay. As people are increasingly turning to social media for information, political parties that fail to go online miss out on increasing their visibility. This is one of the reasons why politicians go online, according to a study by Enli and Skogerbø’s (2015) of Norwegian politicians. Politicians recognise the inevitability of electoral campaigning on social media. As with marketing, companies use advertising to keep the brands alive in the consumer’s mind so that they are remembered when the customer wishes to purchase a product (Sharp, 2010). For political parties, the

hope is that they have left an impression on the electorate such that on polling day, they will be picked.

At this point, there are a few case studies on how political parties in Asian countries use social media for electoral campaigns, such as those in Malaysia and Taiwan (Azizuddin, 2014; Lin, 2015). Our research differs from Lin's as he focuses specifically on the relationships between the candidates and netizens while our study gives a broader understanding of the way parties use social media. Our research also differs from Azizuddin's as we go beyond reporting top-line statistics for Facebook and websites.

METHODOLOGY

We focused on the social media campaigns of five political parties that fielded the largest slate of candidates. The PAP had the largest, with 89 candidates, followed by WP with 28. The National Solidarity Party (NSP) fielded 12 candidates, and the SDP and RP fielded 11 candidates each. Unless specified, all the data collected was from the day after the Writ of Election was issued on 25 August 2015 to Polling Day on 11 September 2015. We assessed parties' official websites, and their social media sites, which included their Facebook pages, Twitter and YouTube accounts.

We analysed party websites in two ways:

First, we adapted a rubric used by Goh and Pang (2015) to measure informational, interactive and communication features. We selected their rubric as it lists 53 website functions, and their study is the most recent one on Singapore's political parties. The rubric is split into six categories: Party Information, Election Information, Mobilisation, Community, Social Media Integration, and Interaction. The descriptions of each category are as follow:

- a. *Party Information* includes news and information of the party and candidates one can glean from the party's sites. We included two new features — "E-newsletter" and "Languages" — to account for parties which have an online newsletter, as well as to assess whether or not party websites were multilingual.



- b. *Election Information* refers to the availability of news specific to GE2015 that was found on a party's website. We included a new feature, "Geographical locality", to this section, referring to the feature that captures users' postal codes and connects them to the candidates.
- c. *Mobilisation* refers to features that allowed for the mobilising of resources, including volunteer and financial services, such as web stores and donations.
- d. *Community* refers to avenues for dialogue, opportunities to join focus group sessions, as well as interest groups within the party.
- e. *Social Media Integration* is a new section that we incorporated, keeping in mind the convergence of technological platforms. Three new features were included: "Follow us", "Widgets" and "Integration". Respectively, the first refers to the number of social media platforms one can subscribe to while using the party website. The second refers to the presence of widgets from other platforms. The last refers to content from other social media platforms that were embedded within the website itself.
- f. *Interaction* refers to the availability of channels to contact the political party, party officials and website administrators through email or phone.

Second, we conducted a qualitative analysis on the look and feel of party websites. We defined the "look and feel" of the site based on two attributes, adapted from Small's (2008) study of Canadian parties' webpages — presentation and freshness. Presentation refers to the use of and integration of multimedia, while freshness is measured by the frequency of updates.

We used four variables to assess which party dominated Facebook. First, we assessed the parties' frequency of posts by using R programming to crawl parties' official Facebook pages, to collect data about how many posts they put up each day from 1 January 2011 to 11 September 2015. By crawling for data from 1 January 2011 before

the 2011 election on 7 May, we were able to see if parties started campaigning on social media before the Writ of Election. We continued to gather data even after the election as we wanted to find out if any of the parties had any shifts in strategy, especially the PAP which lost a GRC.

Second, we wanted to find out if the information that parties posted had any resonance with voters. Our hypothesis is that posting more updates leads to more followers. Using R programming, we were also able to retrieve the number of followers for each party. Next, we did a Pearson correlation to test the hypothesis.

Third, to attract voters, Facebook posts should go beyond flooding voters' walls. They should be eye-grabbing so that voters would click on them. To assess the quality of content, we examined the originality of the posts. Being original means that while sharing a post, the party also wrote a caption as an addendum.

Fourth, we created a rubric with four categories to assess if parties used certain mobilising key words and Facebook's in-built features to communicate and interact with voters. We created the rubric based on the basic Facebook features available on a page.

The descriptions of each feature are as follow:

- a. *Page Information* refers to basic information about the party that they can list on Facebook. Without these fundamentals, voters would find it difficult to understand the party well enough to interact with it.
- b. For *Interaction*, we assessed if voters could use Facebook to send messages to parties, comment on parties' posts, like their page, sign up to receive alerts and share their page with their friends.
- c. For *Mobilisation*, we measured if parties asked voters to attend their rallies, to vote for and donate to them, and include hashtags in their messages.



- d. For *Types of Information*, we used R programming to crawl parties' official Facebook pages to collect data about what the party has posted since 2011. We assessed if the parties posted links, photos, videos, status and events.

We also appraised if the posts on Facebook were original. "Primary" posts are defined as those that were original or re-purposed to fit the platform. These status comments indicate the party's point of view, and an effort to connect with voters. "Secondary" posts are content taken from other sources.

We also looked at the number of videos parties posted on YouTube and the type of content. We included YouTube as it was the first time the platform was used by political parties during an election.

For Twitter, we examined the three ways through which Twitter users can interact with a party: sending a direct message to the party, @mentions where the user talks about another user in the body of the tweet, and @replies which happens when users address another user at the beginning of the tweet.

In our research, we also reached out to all five parties — the PAP, WP, SDP, RP and NSP — for interviews about their social media strategy. WP declined to be interviewed while PAP did not respond. We emailed our questions to SDP's secretary-general Dr Chee, to which he replied on 20 October 2015. The social media manager for RP, Ms Biddy Low, responded and agreed to a face-to-face interview on 6 October 2015.

We asked them questions such as: Who decided on the party's social media strategy for the election? What was the party's social media strategy and what were the major differences between 2011 and the earlier elections in terms of social media use? Were there strategies for each platform such as Facebook, party website and YouTube? How important was social media to the party? What was the impact of the party's social media outreach?

FINDINGS

Website Rubric

In the Party Information section of the rubric (see Table 6.1), the PAP scored 19 out of 21 possible points. Notably, they were the only political party that had an e-newsletter, and had also made the most number of election period updates. WP only managed a score of nine because they had precluded information such as the history of their party as well as information on their Youth and Women's section in their new website.

RP led the section on Election Information with a score of five. SDP, WP and PAP all scored four points each. RP was the only party with a separate election site. The SDP was the only party that included a schedule of events section on their website. A feature unique to the PAP website was the “geographical locality” function, which invited voters to key in their postal codes to match them with their respective candidates. The NSP fared poorly in this section with a score of two points — their candidates' page was under construction and provided no information to voters.

Both RP and SDP scored four points in the Mobilisation section. The SDP was the only party that allowed comments on its website. The WP website did not have a “Join Party” feature. The PAP scored the lowest on this section with only two points, and was the only party without a “Donate to party” feature.

Most parties' websites did not include Community features. Only two parties scored one point (out of eight) — the PAP had an advisory team for the different interest groups within the party, while SDP had a forum section. For the PAP, having an advisory team ensures that there are leaders to help facilitate discussions among the party and voters.

In terms of Social Media Integration, the PAP and RP fulfilled all categories, scoring three out of three. The PAP, however, was noteworthy because one could follow the party on six other channels through their website, namely, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram and email. In the social media age where social media



platforms are aplenty, parties are battling for eyeballs. Parties that deliver meaningful content across all channels over a sustained period of time are able to book a spot in voters' minds. Further, by using their website as a one-stop shop to display their use of these channels, PAP showed that they were up-to-date with social media and willing to connect with younger voters. Their website also featured a social wall that integrated posts on their website, Facebook and Twitter pages into a coherent wall of updates. The PAP scored five out of six to lead the Interaction section. The email addresses of the party and its candidates were readily available. The WP was the only party that had an email address for their webmaster.

Overall, out of a total of 53 points, the PAP achieved 34 points, RP achieved 32 points, SDP achieved 30 points, WP achieved 22 points, and NSP achieved 21 points.

TABLE 6.1: WEBSITE RUBRIC

		PAP	RP	SDP	WP	NSP
Information	Party Information					
	History	x	x	x		x
	Organisation/ leadership structure	x	x	x		x
	Manifesto/principles	x	x	x	x	x
	Party constitution and rules	x	x	x		
	E-newsletter (New)	x				
	Website in English	x	x	x	x	x
	Party member interviews (25 Aug–9 Sep)	x	x			
	Press releases or media section	x	x	x	x	x
	Updated news	x	x	x	x	x
	Archived news	x		x		x
	Links to external websites		x	x		
	Other affiliated organisation	x				
	Youth section	x	x			
	Women's section	x	x			
	Multimedia video or audio	x	x	x	x	x
	Links to social media	x	x	x	x	x
Non-party content		x	x			



	PAP	RP	SDP	WP	NSP
Election period updates	x	x	x	x	x
#Updates (25 Aug–9 Sep)	x 28 posts	x 7 posts	x 11 posts	x 9 posts	x 2 posts
Search capability	x		x		
#Languages (New)	x(4)*	x(1)	x(2)	x(4)	x(1)
Total	19	17	16	9	12
Election Information					
Separate election site		x			
Parliamentary candidate information	x	x	x	x	
Rally announcements		x	x	x	x
Rally highlights	x	x	x	x	x
Schedule of events			x		
Constituency information	x	x		x	
Geographical locality (New)	x				
Total	4	5	4	4	2
Mobilisation					
Join party	x	x	x		x
Submit message form	x	x	x	x	
Join discussion/listserv					
Comment			x		
Volunteer services		x		x	x
Sign up for e-newsletter					
Donate to party		x	x	x	x
Purchase party goods/products					
Total	2	4	4	3	3
Community					
Forums and dialogue session			x		
Ad for candidate					
Polls					
Advisory team	x				
Focus group					
Interest groups					
E-communities					
Internet chat and e-forum					
Total	1	0	1	0	0

Interaction



	PAP	RP	SDP	WP	NSP
Social Media Integration					
#Follow Us (New)	x(6)**	x(2)	x(4)	x(4)	x(1)
Widgets (New)	x	x	x	x	
Integration (New)	x	x			
Total	3	3	2	2	1
Interaction					
Ability to e-mail	x	x	x	x	x
Central e-mail	x	x	x	x	x
Party officials	x				
Candidates	x				
Webmaster				x	
Party mailing address	x	x	x	x	x
Total	5	3	3	4	3
OVERALL TOTAL	34	32	30	22	21

Note: "x" refers to the presence of a feature and "(New)" refers to a feature added to Pang and Goh's (2015) rubric.

*The number of languages used on the website.

**The number of platforms one can follow the party on.

Website Look and Feel

The PAP had the freshest website, as defined by Small (2008) to mean most frequently updated page. During the election period, the PAP posted 28 articles. The party with the second highest score was the SDP with 11 posts. The PAP was one of only two parties to post party member interviews on their website. In addition, each PAP candidate had a get-to-know-me-better quote under his or her profile. For instance, Mr Chee Hong Tat who represented the Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC had a quote that said, "I will work very hard and do my best to serve my residents. Together, we can build a stronger Singapore and a better future for all of us and our children." The other party that did so and in greater detail was RP, which published detailed profiles of the six members contesting in Ang Mo Kio GRC.

According to Robins and Holmes (2008), there is a positive correlation in the relationship between aesthetics and credibility of information on websites. They categorised websites into “low aesthetic treatment” (LAT) and “high aesthetic treatment” (HAT). LAT is one where the content is “simply placed on a website without professional graphic design” and HAT is one that “presents a professional look and feel appropriate to the organisation it presents” (p. 387). Sites that employ HAT principles of layout should “invoke confidence, enjoyment or some other positive emotion within users that makes them want to stay on the site” (p. 387). Websites are the “online face” of the party and hence to convey a sense of credibility to voters, parties should take into consideration the aesthetics. The NSP did not fare well in this department. The photographs in their slide banner appeared pixelated, as did their party logo and slogan heading their page.

When it comes to presentation, the PAP and SDP websites stood out. The PAP featured a Social Wall on their website, integrating the latest information from the party’s Facebook and Twitter accounts onto their website. The result was a visually stimulating interface that provided new ways for voters to communicate with the party, and made the site more engaging. They were also the only party to utilise a postal code matching function in their website, which allowed users to access the contact information of their respective PAP candidates easily. The SDP website featured a pop-up video that greeted users who visited their website. When the Chinese option was selected, a video of Dr Chee speaking in Hokkien popped up instead of the one in English. This indicated that the SDP made the effort to tailor their content according to use of language. The videos on other parties’ websites did not change according to users’ preferences.

Although the PAP had the best website, its number of total visits of over 100,000 was behind WP’s (250,000 visitors) and SDP’s (nearly 200,000). In this sense, SDP’s website was more visible during the campaigning period and reached out to more voters. SDP had publicised their website during their rallies, and on one occasion, their site faced overwhelming traffic and was down momentarily. Other than WP, SDP was considered as the other potential opposition party that would be voted into parliament; the return of its party chief Dr Chee (who was barred from taking part in elections in the past 15 years) was surrounded by much hype. It is thus unsurprising that many



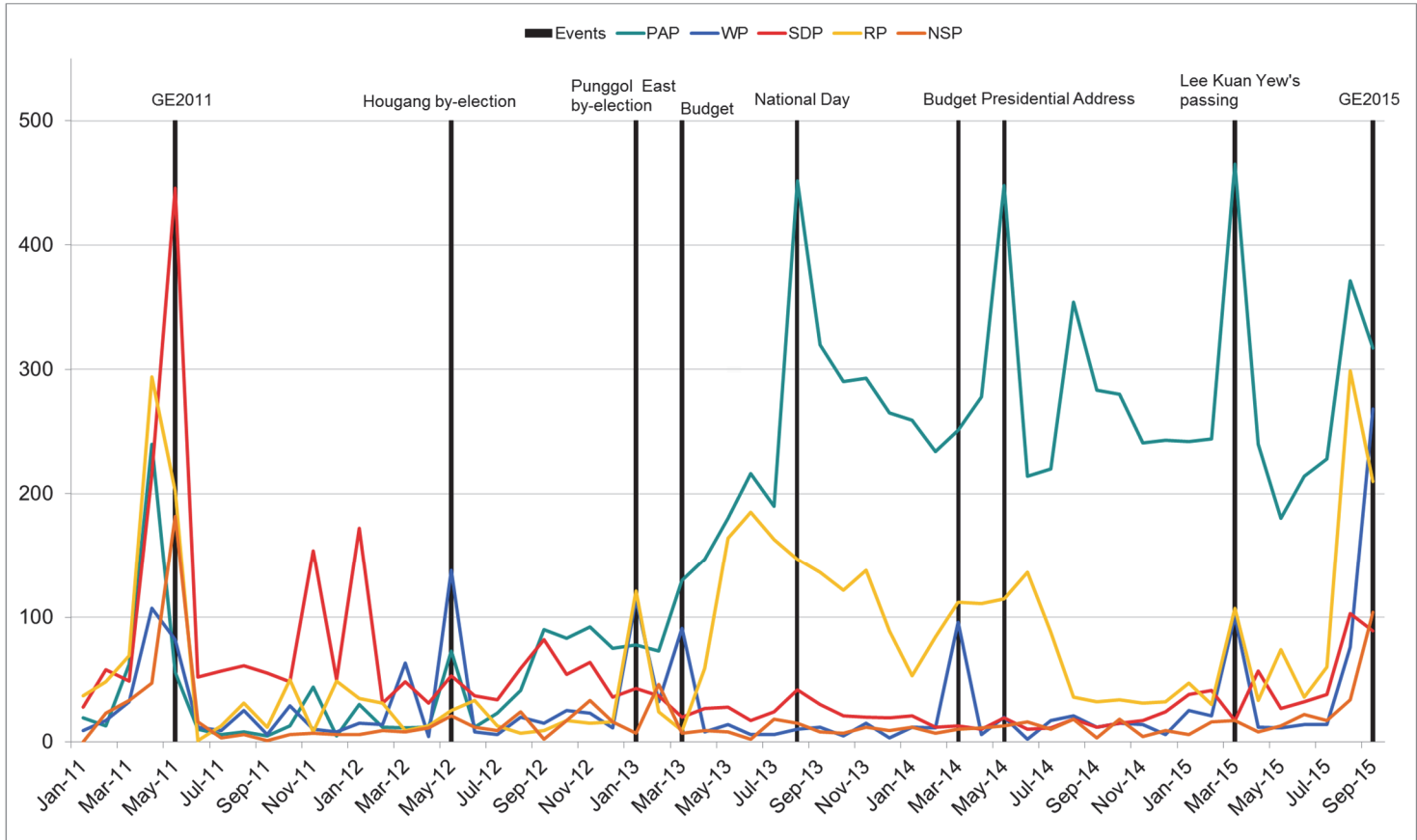
voters were keen to find out more about them. RP was the least visible site with only more than 15,000 visits.

Facebook Frequency

We collected Facebook posts from parties' pages from January 2011 to September 2015. The PAP had fewer posts compared to RP during the 2011 elections, but the number of posts increased after it lost the 2013 Punggol East by-election to WP (see Figure 6.1). PAP has since become far more active on Facebook than the other parties. The WP was consistently event driven, updating Facebook during parliamentary budget debates, the two by-elections (of which they were part) and the death of Mr Lee Kuan Yew. Their updates peaked only during the 2015 election campaigning period.

NSP trailed behind the other parties throughout the five years. Although the SDP used Facebook to deliver its messages in GE2011, the number of posts fell sharply since. The number of Facebook posts put up by RP was not far behind PAP's; RP had put up 330 posts while the PAP wrote 403 posts. Hence, the PAP used Facebook most intensely during GE2015, followed closely by RP and WP, and with SDP and NSP trailing behind.

FIGURE 6.1: FREQUENCY OF FACEBOOK POSTS BY EACH PARTY



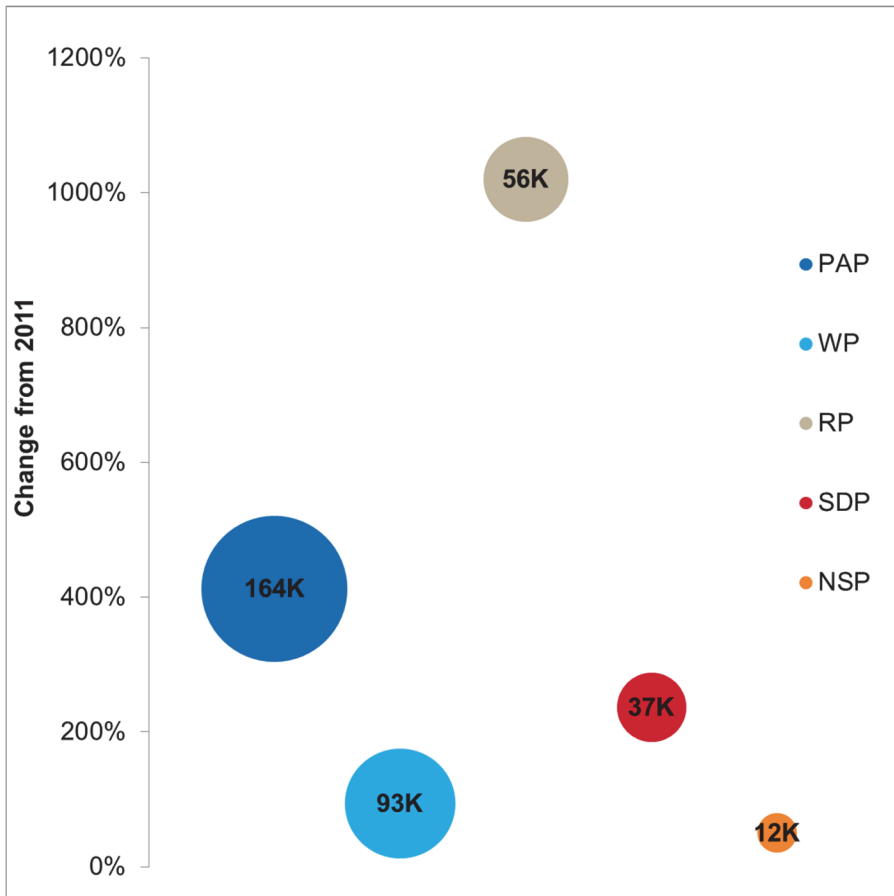


Facebook Resonance

Our findings showed that the PAP had the most number of likes on their party pages during the 2015 election period (164,000), followed by the WP (93,000), RP (56,000), SDP (37,000) and NSP (12,000) (See Figure 6.2).

The PAP saw an increase of four times in the number of followers from GE2011. They also had the highest number of updates during GE2015. Similarly, WP posted more updates during GE2015 compared to GE2011, and their number of followers increased by 0.9 times. However, the opposite happened for the RP — they posted slightly less on Facebook this election compared to 2011, but had a 10-time jump in the number of followers.

FIGURE 6.2: NUMBER OF FOLLOWERS FOR EACH PARTY



However, there is no connection between frequency of updates and the number of followers (see Table 6.2). The correlation between total number posts and total followers in this election is not statistically significant, at the 0.05 level ($r=0.876$, $p=0.052$).

TABLE 6.2: CORRELATION BETWEEN FOLLOWERS AND FREQUENCY

		Followers	Frequency
Followers	Pearson Correlation	1	.876
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.052
	N	5	5
Frequency	Pearson Correlation	.876	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.052	
	N	5	5

Klinger (2013) did the same test on political parties in Switzerland and found that there was no correlation between Facebook updates and the number of followers a party gets. Thus for social media to become an important communication channel, parties' Facebook strategy must go beyond quantity of posts and focus on the quality of posts.

Facebook Originality

We assessed the posts' quality by looking at whether they were original. PAP's posts contained all primary content. All their posts had a personalised commentary. Some of their top used words were "breaking", "exclusive", "updates" and "live". For example, the party posted sound bites from speeches delivered at the Jalan Besar GRC's rally, and made live announcements on Facebook, accompanied with their distinct hashtag #PAPG4SG. They also actively asked readers to sign up for their mailing list by promoting it in almost every post during the election period. They wrote status updates that read like brief letters targeted at their followers informing them of where their rallies would be held, who would be speaking and why voters should attend. By drawing voters' attention to what they have posted, PAP took the first step in connecting with them. The last stronghold of social media's interactivity is viral content, but first, the post must provoke readers into clicking and reading what was shared.



WP almost always wrote a caption to accompany the pictures and the posts they shared. For instance, they posted a picture of Mr Png Eng Huat speaking at a rally on 9 September 2015 along with the caption: “Peng Eng Huat, candidate for Hougang SMC. This election is about the future. It is about values that matter. Values like justice, equality, and fairness. Those values should be non-negotiable. #GE2015 #EmpowerYourfuture.” Out of 321 updates posted by WP, 306 (95%) were original. SDP had about 85% original content in their posts, RP had 51%, and NSP 70%.

Facebook Interactivity and Mobilisation

We composed a rubric (see Table 6.3) consisting of four categories: Page Information, Types of Information, Interaction and Mobilisation. The PAP, RP and SDP had basic information about the party (Name, Address, Description, Founded, Phone, Email and Website) on their page. NSP fared most poorly in this regard. Their Facebook page lacked information on who they were. For example, there was no information on the party, the year in which they were founded and contact details.

The next category — Types of Information — refers to whether the parties posted links, photos, videos, a status or events. In this section, RP posted all five categories of information. Photos were their most popular posts, as with other parties. According to social media analytics firm Socialbakers, who surveyed 30,000 brands in 2014, photos are the most interactive and far outweigh other content types (Socialbakers, 2015). The WP posted the highest number of photos, followed by the PAP.

Other than photos, the PAP also posted links and videos but did not create events to invite voters to attend its functions, such as rallies or house visits. Events are important because, unlike a status update, they go beyond simply providing information — they identify supporters, referring to those who have clicked “yes” to attending an event, and give parties the opportunity to tap on a network of like-minded people. These supporters can also be mobilised as volunteers. The PAP, as the dominant party, may not have felt the need to create events to mobilise its supporters as it already has a huge base of supporters. The two smaller parties, the SDP and RP,

have used the events page to request for help and donations, albeit not very frequent and only occasionally. The WP, created a pictorial advertisement for their rallies instead of using the events function. This suggests that it does not perceive the events page as a micro-platform for mobilisation.

We assessed if parties used interactive functions offered by Facebook. The PAP scored the highest in this, using the “send message”, “comments”, “like page”, and “sign up” buttons. It was the only party that used the “sign up” button for what it is — inviting the audience to enlist in its mailing list to receive updates. However, the RP and NSP linked the “sign up” button to their website. While there is an integration of platforms, it is an intuitively incorrect way of using the function. Users who clicked the button would expect a site where they can register to receive the party’s latest updates, but this is not the case for RP and NSP. The PAP used this feature effectively. When users clicked the “sign up” button on the PAP’s Facebook page, it directed them to the party’s newsletter subscription portal where they could get “breaking news, live updates, and exclusive content, on the go.”

We also examined if parties asked people to vote for them, participate in their campaign activities, use hashtags as signposts for mobilisation and asked for donations. The first three political activities were selected because they are basic activities for which parties around the world mobilise voters. Asking for donations was included because since ex-President Nominee Howard Dean used the web to generate fundraising in the 2004 US presidential election, the Internet has been seen as a tool to increase volunteers and money. These activities are thus a litmus test of small parties’ understanding of social media’s mobilising logic. As the incumbent and the most well-resourced party, the PAP does not need to request for more monetary assistance. However, NSP, which was a relatively new and the smallest party of all opposition, was expected to encourage its supporters to donate. All parties except for the PAP and NSP rallied voters to donate to them.

Based on the rubric, we found that RP scored the highest, SDP ranked second, the PAP and WP were ranked third, and NSP fared most poorly. The difference in scores for the top four parties was very close



(they differed from each other by only one point), but NSP clearly trailed behind the rest.

TABLE 6.3: FACEBOOK RUBRIC

	PAP	WP	SDP	RP	NSP
Page Information					
Name	X	X	X	X	X
Address	X	X	X	X	X
Description	X	X	X	X	
Founded	X	X	X	X	
Phone	X		X	X	
Email	X	X	X	X	
Website	X	X	X	X	X
Total	7	6	7	7	3
Types of Information					
#Links	X	X	X	X	X
#Photos	X	X	X	X	X
#Videos	X	X	X	X	X
#Status		X		X	X
#Events			X	X	
Total	3	4	4	5	4
Interaction					
Send message	X		X	X	
Comment post	X	X	X	X	X
Like page	X	X	X	X	X
Sign up	X				
Share		X			X
Total	4	3	3	3	3
Mobilisation					
Hashtags	X	X	X	X	X
Rally participation	X	X	X	X	X
Vote-for-me	X	X	X	X	X
Donate		X	X	X	
Total	3	4	4	4	3
OVERALL TOTAL	17	17	18	19	13

YouTube

Of the five parties profiled, only three parties used YouTube during GE2015. They were the PAP, SDP and WP. In total, WP uploaded 118 videos on their YouTube channel during the campaign period, PAP 102 videos and SDP 81 videos.

In terms of content, the SDP made the most creative use of their channel by uploading videos that covered a variety of themes including comedy (“Pappy washing powder”), social security (“Your CPF is your money”), and celebrity endorsements (“Endorsement for the SDP”). They were also the only party to feature a campaign song for GE2015 (“I will be the one”), and the only one that made use of YouTube to appeal for donations for the campaign. The PAP uploaded a cartoon tracing the development of Singapore from the perspective of an elderly lady (“You and your family”) and this was the only cartoon uploaded by any political party during the campaign. Additionally, the PAP YouTube channel also heavily featured in-depth interviews with candidates outlining their experiences and motivations behind their candidacy. The WP produced a highlights video just before Cooling-Off Day (“Empower your future, vote Workers’ Party!”), which featured a photo montage against the backdrop of audio highlights of candidates’ rally speeches during the campaign trail. They also produced a 15-minute clip (“The Workers’ Party — Empower your future”), where viewers could hear from newer WP candidates about their motivations for contesting. All three parties regularly peppered their YouTube channel with videos of their candidates’ rally speeches.

The most viewed video for WP, titled “General Elections 2015 – 02.09.2015 – Low Thia Kiang”, had 81,920 views. The PAP’s most popular video was “Speech by Tharman Shanmugaratnam (Jurong GRC)”, which had 64,710 views. The SDP’s most popular video during the campaign was “Pappy washing powder”, which had about 62,000 views. Although the NSP did not update their video channels during the election period, they relied on videos from *The Straits Times* and Channel NewsAsia to populate their Facebook feed. RP, on the other hand, uploaded videos on Facebook and also relied on Mr Roy Ngerng, their candidate for Ang Mo Kio GRC, to upload videos onto his personal YouTube page.



Twitter

Preceded only by Facebook, Twitter is often thought to be the world's most important social media platform and has been heralded as a new channel for communication between citizens and political actors to increase interactivity (Vergeer, Hermans & Sams, 2011). But as mentioned earlier, there are not many Twitter users in Singapore. Parties, however, still took to Twitter, although less aggressively as compared to Facebook. Over the span of 17 days, WP (@wp_sg) had 986 tweets; RP (@thereformparty) 824 tweets; PAP (@PAPSingapore) 523 tweets; SDP (@yoursdp) 313 tweets; and NSP (@nps_sg) with only 117 tweets.

Just as WP had the highest volume of tweets, they also had the highest number of mentions at 9,140. PAP ranked second with 6,604 mentions, and SDP, NSP and RP trailed behind with 1,430, 1,182 and 483 mentions, respectively. There was little interaction between the parties and their followers — RP replied to its followers the most number of times, but even then, they only used the @replies function 35 times. The PAP replied to its followers nine times, and NSP and SDP responded twice. WP, despite being the most mentioned party, did not reply to any of the comments it received.

DISCUSSION

Based on our analysis of parties' Facebook pages, websites, Twitter and YouTube, political parties use of the Internet fits into the normalisation rather than the equalisation theory. PAP emerged the overall online victor that was most adept at using Facebook and the website to its advantage. On YouTube and Twitter, the PAP was second to WP, in terms of video views, number of videos posted, volume of Twitter posts and mentions. Despite getting numerous mentions, PAP only replied its followers nine times and WP did not reply to any comments. Other parties did not fare well in this aspect too. Marcinkowski and Metag (2014) explained that the non-hierarchical and scattered communication aspects of interactive technologies are likely to make politicians nervous (p. 152). Moreover, interacting with the public carries the risk of exposure and embarrassment (p. 153).

Costs contributed to the normalisation effect. Social media requires monetary investment, even more so than before — for instance, on graphics and video design, professional photography, website maintenance, and paying volunteers to manage content. Having labour and monetary resources as well as power in the real world gave PAP the upper hand online. Their strength can also be seen by the number of times they updated their website compared to the other parties. They updated their website 28 times during the election period while SDP only did so 11 times.

Although RP was ranked second in the rubric assessment for websites, their attempts to create a separate website also revealed a weakness. Their Ang Mo Kio GRC site and their main website differed in that the former was fresher and had a high aesthetic treatment. The disparity showed their lack of resources in keeping the standards of both sites consistent.

After the election, accounts of how external digital consultants had helped PAP candidates in their online reputation surfaced (Chin, 2015). These consultants extended their help beyond the election period to the entire year. Their work included mobilising PAP fans to back the party online by listening and participating in conversations, and writing posts about the party. As the incumbent, the PAP is able to tap on its supporters to manage their online presence, unlike the smaller parties who do not have a tight network on the ground to help.

According to the parties' expenditure records we had retrieved from the Elections Department in April 2016, PAP spent more than S\$1 million on advertising, including Facebook and Twitter advertisements. The structural disadvantages that weighed the opposition down, i.e., the lack of an organised institution to search and corral supporters, cannot be overcome just because they show up on social media. Dr Chee wrote in an email interview that the lack of media freedom was one of the disadvantages the opposition faced. SDP had used the Internet as their main communications strategy during their campaign because of the “restrictive nature of the print and broadcast media”. He added that the results of GE2015 showed that the “Internet is still an insufficient campaign tool”. This points to the irony of social media campaigning — small parties who do not have a large fan base at their disposal to help with the ground work



need the Internet more than ever to win over more supporters; yet, their social media campaigns are hamstrung by their lack of resources, without which they are unable to conquer the online space.

When speaking to RP, they told us that they had only under 100 volunteers and their social media strategy was to “populate the Internet” throughout all platforms. They also told us that although they wanted to set up a YouTube channel, they abandoned the idea as the election period was too short for them to gain subscribers.

Whether parties’ ability to manage social media well translated into votes, we can only infer that it mostly did not. According to the survey findings, even though more social media users had made up their minds on whom to vote for later than social media non-users, most of them had already cast a mental vote before Nomination Day (Soon, 2015). It is also hard to tell to what extent PAP’s victory had to do with their social media usage as their offline political machinery is pervasive and their social media expertise is a reflection of that.

Research has not found all the variables that make videos and messages go viral. Hence, what captures eyeballs is still unknown. Our findings show that some of the opposition members and parties have done well on social media and even managed to rebuild their image. To some opposition parties, social media remains the only space where they can have some voice, albeit, as our findings and the outcome of the election show — it might not matter for much.

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Chapter 7

Summaries of Other Findings

CHAPTER 7: SUMMARIES OF OTHER FINDINGS

This chapter summarises findings presented by IPS' collaborators from the Department of Communications and New Media (National University of Singapore), the Living Analytics Research Centre (Singapore Management University), and the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information (Nanyang Technological University).

The first four studies presented below were based on the same survey while the fifth analysed political blogs using human and computer text analysis. The findings were presented at the IPS Symposium on Media and Internet Use During General Election 2015 held on 27 January 2016.

EXPLICATING SOCIAL MEDIA USE: HOW EXPRESSIVE, INFORMATIONAL AND RELATIONAL USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA SHAPE PARTICIPATION

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According to Carr and Hayes, “social media are Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others” (2015, p. 50).

The key elements of social media are: Internet-based and persistent (in the sense that messages and activities are created, transmitted and consumed online regardless of whether users are online), interactive, user-generated, is a form of mass-personal communication where otherwise personal messages can be communicated to a large or public audience.

In this study, social media platforms are categorised into four types:

1. Narrowcasting platforms (e.g., blogs or YouTube sites)



2. Interest-based platforms (e.g., online discussion forums and portals)
3. Open SNS (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
4. Closed SNS (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Viber)

While there are five types of social media use, this study focuses on three, as these are the most relevant for the context of social media use during GE2015:

1. Expressive: To express one's own opinions, ideas and thoughts.
2. Informational: To seek, gather and share information such as news, community information and campaign information.
3. Relational: To initiate, maintain and strengthen relationships with others.

Expressive uses of social media were measured by eight items in the survey that asked about election content relating to candidates, political parties or election issues. These items were adapted from Rojas & Puig-i-Abril (2009) and developed to account for how expressive use manifests in each of the four types of social media platforms:

1. Wrote a post or made a video expressing my opinions on a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue on blogs or YouTube
2. Commented on a post or video on a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue on blogs or YouTube
3. Started a thread discussing a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue on online discussion forums and portals
4. Liked a page or a post about a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue on SNS

5. Commented on a page or a post about a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue on SNS
6. Wrote a post expressing my opinions on a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue on SNS
7. Started a discussion about a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue on IM platforms
8. Participated in a discussion about a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue on IM platforms

Informational uses of social media were measured by eight items (adapted from MacAfee & De Simone, 2012) in the post-election survey that asked about election content relating to candidates, political parties or election issues:

1. Followed a blogger or YouTuber's postings on a candidate, political party, the election, and/or issue
2. Shared relevant information and/or political commentary related to the post/video on blogs or YouTube
3. Followed a thread discussing a candidate, political party, the election and/or issue
4. Shared relevant information and/or political commentary in a discussion thread
5. Followed someone in your social network's postings about a candidate, political party, the election and/or issue
6. Shared information and/or political commentary with people on your SNS
7. Sought/asked for information about a candidate, political party, election news and/or issue on IM platforms
8. Shared information and/or political commentary with people on IM platforms



Relational uses of social media were measured by six items, adapted from Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) in the post-election survey that asked about election content relating to candidates, political parties or election issues:

1. Used SNS to learn more about family members' views on the election
2. Used SNS to learn more about friends' views on the election
3. Used SNS to learn more about colleagues' views on the election
4. Used SNS to learn more about fellow Singaporeans' views on the election
5. Used SNS to connect to people I already know
6. Used SNS to connect to new people related to my interests in the election

The research questions are thus: How did voters use social media according to the above types during GE2015, and how did the types of use influence participation in the election?

Across platforms, relational use was the highest ($M=2.13$, $SD=0.57$), followed by informational use ($M=1.89$, $SD=0.62$) and expressive use ($M=1.83$, $SD=0.62$). There were three levels for each type of use: Non-use, below-average use, and above-average use. In terms of relational use, non-users comprised 10%, 66% were below-average users, and 24% were above-average users. In terms of informational use, 61% were below average users, 14% were above average users, and 25% did not use social media for these purposes. In terms of expressive use, non-users comprised 29%, 59% were below average users, and 12% were above average users.

For informational use, the level of use differed by age, with those from 65 to 69 years old significantly more likely to do so. Expressive and relational uses did not differ by age. Males were significantly more likely than females to engage in expressive and informational use.

Those with lower-secondary education were significantly more likely to engage in expressive and informational uses compared with those that had post-secondary, polytechnic, professional or university education. Post-hoc (Tukey) tests found that those in the lower-secondary group were significantly more likely to engage in expressive use compared to those in the secondary, post-secondary, polytechnic, professional, and university-first-degree groups.

There is an interaction between age and education levels on expressive use: Older adults (50 years and above) and those with below-tertiary education were the most expressive, whereas younger adults with the same qualifications (below-tertiary education) were the least expressive.

Among those with higher education qualifications (tertiary and above), there was little difference in terms of informational use between those aged below 50 years and those aged 50 years and above. However, among those with below-tertiary education, informational use was significantly higher for older adults (50 years and above) compared to younger adults (below 50 years).

Relational use was the highest for the younger and more educated (with tertiary qualifications and above). This suggests that online media contributes to social augmentation for this particular demographic. Within relational use during GE2015, checking out what other Singaporeans were saying about issues or candidates during the election was also the most dominant activity ($M=2.90$, $SD=1.33$). Additionally, the greater the expressive and informational use, the more likely respondents were to use social media to learn about the views of fellow Singaporeans.

Of the survey participants, 23.5% ($N=469$) indicated that they had attended a rally during the election. Both expressive and informational uses were positively associated with rally attendance, which means that the greater one's expressive or informational use, the more likely one would attend a rally. There was no significant effect from relational use, implying that relational use had no significant effect on rally attendance.



POSTED AND SHARED: PERSONALISED COMMUNICATION AND KNOWLEDGE GAP IN SINGAPORE'S GE2015

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Leading up to GE2015, there was intensified coverage of the hustings by mainstream and alternative media, and individuals such as bloggers and social media users. The proliferation of smartphones, social media and IM platforms also led to a greater diversity of content. Voters were accessing, sharing and posting election-related information on various social media platforms. According to Donahue, Tichenor and Olien (1973), the knowledge gap between the higher and lower social economic segments of the population will widen as mass media information increases. This is because the better educated are able to acquire information faster.

The Internet has been said to reduce access barriers to information. During GE2011, a study showed that Internet use narrowed the knowledge gap between groups with different socio-economic status (Goh, 2015). This is because alternative media filled information gaps and less educated voters gained more knowledge from increased alternative media use than those who were more highly educated.

This study examined whether there exists a similar effect of a reduction in knowledge gap when people use social media for “personalised communication”. Using Bennett and Segerberg’s (2012) definition, personalised communication refers to how people produce and share political content with individuals who share similar lifestyle values in their social networks.

Personalised communication was measured by asking respondents how often they: a) engaged in social media activities, such as writing a post or making a video expressing their opinions on the election, namely, the candidates, political party, the campaign, the issues raised; or b) liked a page or a post by others about the election.

Political knowledge was measured by the number of election-related questions that respondents answered correctly. Respondents were asked to identify the parties that four political candidates were from

(Chee Soon Juan, Kenneth Jeyaretnam, Teo Chee Hean, and Lee Li Lian); which party used the campaign slogan, “Your voice in parliament”; what percentage of votes were cast for the PAP in GE2011; and what “Your vote is secret” means according to the law.

The findings show that 69% of the respondents produced and consumed election content, 27% only consumed content (i.e., they consumed but did not generate content), while 4% (mainly older respondents aged 50 years and above) were “off the grid”, meaning they did not consume or produce any content. The respondents were classified into three types of personalised communication users by intensity: 31% were non-users; 37% were below-average users; and 32% were above-average users.

This study also shows that males were more likely to have higher intensity of use than females. Chinese respondents were fairly equally divided in their intensity of use of personal communication. Respondents from the “Others” racial category had the highest percentage of non-users (42%), while Malays and Indians had the largest group of below-average use (44% and 50%, respectively). University degree holders were equally distributed in the above- and below-average user groups. Diploma holders had an almost equal distribution of non-users (35%), above-average (38%) and below-average (39%) users. Those with secondary and below education had the largest group of non-users (42%). The low-income respondents (monthly household income of up to \$1,999) and lower middle-income respondents (\$2,000–\$5,999) had larger proportions of non-users (38% and 35%, respectively), compared with the upper middle-income respondents (\$6,000–\$11,999) and high-income respondents (\$12,000 and above) at 24% and 25%, respectively.

Generally, more intense use of personalised communication did not result in higher political knowledge scores. Older people, the least educated, those in low-income and higher-income groups, did not benefit from intense use of personalised communication. Indians with higher intensity of use saw a decline in their political knowledge, as compared with those who engaged moderately.

Those whose intense use of personalised communication did lead to an increase in their political knowledge scores were in the 40–49 age



group, male, university degree holders, and middle-income earners. Though the “Others” racial category had the highest percentage of non-users, those who did use personalised communication at a high intensity saw an increase in their political knowledge scores.

Predicting respondents’ political knowledge by other factors such as age, income, gender, education, political interest and media consumption revealed expected findings. For instance, seniors, those from the higher income group and university graduates were more likely to be more knowledgeable about election issues.

Whether or not personalised communication narrowed the knowledge gap during GE2015 thus depended on the profile of the user. The effects of personalised communication were not homogeneous as it enhanced political knowledge only for certain groups, and excessive use by some groups had negative effects on knowledge. Despite the amount of election content that was generated, users may not be engaging in those content.

MULTIPLE OPINION CLIMATE INDICATORS: SIGNIFICANCE OF OFFLINE-ONLINE OPINION CLIMATE PERCEPTIONS ON ENGAGEMENT AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR

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Every individual has a “quasi-statistical sense”, which is a “sensitively-tuned organ” that connects one’s own opinion with a proportion of the population. This “sense” helps them to seek majority opinion on issues.

To sense how others feel about an issue — otherwise known as sensing an opinion climate — a person can turn to mass media news sources, public opinion polls, their friends and families, general society, open-group social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and closed-group social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Viber and Facebook Messenger.

This study focuses on four levels of opinion climates and how influential they were during GE2015. One opinion climate was respondents' own personal opinion. The other three were those of the society at large, on open-group social media platforms and on closed-group social media platforms. Respondents were asked to rank the level of satisfaction they personally felt (1 being "very dissatisfied" and 5 "very satisfied"), and how they perceived people within the different opinion climates felt towards the government's handling of issues related to population, transport and housing.

The findings reveal that personal opinion and the opinion climates perceived from the three sources were least critical (i.e. least negative) of how the government handled issues related to housing, followed by transportation, and most critical (i.e. most negative) on population issues. However, respondents' own opinion of the issues were less critical than the perceived public opinion of society and those on their social media platforms. Respondents also perceived people on their open-group social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, as the most critical.

The findings also indicate a significant relationship between personal opinion, that of the society at large, and closed-group opinion climate with respondents' voting behaviour, but not for the perceived opinion climate coming from open-group social media platforms. The opinion that mattered the most was the respondent's own opinion. This means that the more satisfied voters were of how the government handled the three policy issues, the more likely they would vote for them. Opinions from respondents' closed-group social media platforms — unlike the opinions perceived from their open-group social media platforms — had an influence on their voting behaviour. This could be due to the former comprising closer-tied networks. The more the people in their closed-group social media platform felt that the government was handling the issues well, the more likely the respondent would vote for the incumbent.

However, the relationship with voting behaviour depended on the issue being discussed. For example, the findings show that only society's opinion on population issues (and not housing or transportation) influenced voting behaviour.



Additionally, those with a higher sense of political self-efficacy were more likely to vote for the opposition.

To recap, the opinions that influenced respondents' voting behaviour the most were those from their closed-group social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Viber, and Facebook Messenger, and their own personal opinion. Future studies could look at how different levels of involvement in the groups and discussions on closed-group social media platforms affect voting behaviour.

SWING VOTERS VS. NON-SWING VOTERS: COMPARING DEMOGRAPHICS, POLITICAL ATTRIBUTES, AND MEDIA USAGE PATTERNS

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The survey asked respondents how they voted in GE2011 and GE2015, specifically if they voted for the PAP or the opposition. Some 53% of the respondents revealed how they voted in 2011, while 33.8% refused to answer the question, and 13.3% indicated that they did not vote. Of those who revealed their votes, 31.7% said that they had voted for the opposition and 68.3% said that they had voted for the PAP.

The “swing voter” is defined as someone who switched their vote from the PAP in 2011 to the opposition in 2015, or the other way round. They were divided into three groups (see also Table 7.1):

1. Non-swing: Those who did not switch
2. Type 1: Those who swung from PAP to opposition
3. Type 2: Those who swung from opposition to PAP

TABLE 7.1: NUMBER OF NON-SWING AND SWING VOTERS

	Number of respondents	Percentages
Non-swing voters	821	87.1%
Type 1	44	4.7%
Type 2	78	8.2%

The average age of the Non-swing, Type 1 and Type 2 voters were 41 years, 38 years and 43 years, respectively, although the differences were not statistically significant. In the following when differences between groups are reported, it means that significant differences were found via statistical tests.

Non-swing voters were made up of 50.4 % males and 49.6% females; Type 1 voters were 29.5 % males and 70.5 % females; and Type 2 were 69.2 % males and 30.8 % females. Those who swung to the opposition were significantly more likely to be female and those who swung to the PAP were significantly more likely to be male.

Among Non-swing voters, 74% were Chinese, 11% Malays, 12% Indians, and 3% “Others”. Type 1 comprised 52% Chinese, 11% Malays, 32% Indians and 5% “Others”. Type 2 were 81% Chinese, 9% Malays, 5% Indians and 5% “Others”. There were significantly fewer Chinese and more Indians in percentage terms than the other races among the Type 1 voters, and more Chinese among the Type 2 voters.

Among Non-swing voters, 1% lived in 1- or 2-room HDB flats, 15% in 3-room HDB flats, 34% in 4-room HDB flats, and 28% in 5-room HDB flats. Among Type 1 voters, the figures were 33%, 11%, 29% and 16%, respectively. Among Type 2, they were 4%, 5%, 39% and 31%, respectively. Among those who swung to the opposition, there were significantly more who lived in 1- or 2-room flats. Among those who swung to the PAP, there was significantly more who lived in 4- or 5-room flats.

In education, there were no differences between Non-swing vs. Type 1 as well as Non-swing vs. Type 2 voters. But people who swung to the PAP were more educated than those who swung to the opposition.

The three groups were also analysed for differences in political attributes and participation. No differences were found between them in their interest in politics, how much they discussed the elections with others, and their knowledge of politics. They also did not differ in whether they bought campaign products sold by parties, and whether they were more likely to participate in a social cause. Compared to Non-swing voters, Type 1 voters were significantly lower in their online



political participation, such as expressing their views on YouTube, blogs, SNS or online discussion forums and portals.

On what campaign rallies they attended, 57% of voters that ever attended rallies said they attended PAP rallies and 62% attended opposition rallies. Among Type 1 voters, 84% and 21% attended PAP rallies and opposition rallies, respectively. However, among Type 2 voters, 37% and 79% attended PAP rallies and opposition rallies, respectively. That is, those who swung to the opposition were more like to attend PAP rallies than opposition rallies. Also, those who swung to the PAP were more likely to attend opposition rallies than PAP rallies.

On the kind of media they used, Type 1 voters watched more TV and used more party web sources, but listened to radio less compared to Non-swing voters. Type 1 voters also trusted blogs and SNS more but radio less, compared with Non-swing voters.

One of the survey questions listed 10 factors, and respondents were asked to indicate which factors influenced the way they voted. Compared with both Non-swing and Type 2 voters, Type 1 voters were less likely to pick these reasons: SG50 bonus, SG50 celebrations, policy changes made by the government, management of town councils, death of Mr Lee Kuan Yew, fear that the opposition will form the government, and Singapore's vulnerability. However, they were most likely to cite having different voices in parliament as a reason for their vote.

USING TEXT ANALYTICS IN ANALYSING ONLINE CONTENT ON GE2015

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This study analysed content in 200 blogs posted before, during and after GE2015 to see how political, partisan and emotional they were. The sample included blogs that discussed Singapore-related issues during the election.

The three periods were: Pre-GE2015 (18–24 August 2015), during GE2015 (25 August–11 September 2015), and post-GE2015 (12–18 September 2015).

During this period, about 100 posts from 50 active blogs were generated each day. Given the volume and speed of content generated, human coding would be less efficient than data analytics. The peak number of posts (275 posts) was reached on the day before Cooling-Off Day. There was a drop in the number of posts on Cooling-Off Day (where campaigning is disallowed and election advertising must not be published or displayed) and the number increased after Polling Day.

In a separate study conducted before GE2015, human coders from IPS classified posts into these categories: Political or non-political, emotional or non-emotional, and partisan or non-partisan towards the government. The classification was used to train computers to do the same classification. Posts that were partisan were ranked according to their being very anti-government/PAP, somewhat anti-government/PAP, neutral, somewhat pro-government/PAP or very pro-government/PAP. Posts that were emotional were ranked from very calm, somewhat calm, slightly ranting, very ranting to the use of expletives.

The machine classified posts using keywords. For example, if the post contained the words “PAP”, “Singaporean”, “votes” and “Amos” (Amos Yee, the teenage blogger who was charged for making offensive or wounding remarks against Christianity and for circulating obscene imagery), it would be coded as a political post. There were 20 words in total that were used as indicators of a political post. Partisan posts also used 20 words related to the government, which included “population”, “salary”, “PAP” and “unfair”.

Posts that used words like “heart”, “political” and “taxpayer” were classified as emotional. In addition, the use of punctuations, such as exclamation and question marks, and repeated characters, were also used as indicators of emotionality.



The machine had an accuracy rate of 86% for classifying political posts (as opposed to non-political posts), and 78% and 71% for partisan and emotional posts, respectively. These accuracy rates were comparable to the inter-coder reliability achieved by human coders.

Results from the machine classification showed that there was an increase in the number of political, partisan and emotional posts towards Cooling-Off Day, and the number dipped after that. There were roughly 3,700 posts, and the proportion of political posts pre- and post-GE2015 were about the same, at 48% and 49%, respectively. However, during the election period, the volume of political posts increased to 62%. There were 1,756 political posts during GE2015 and this number declined to 357 after the elections (see Table 7.2).

TABLE 7.2: BLOG POSTS BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER GE2015

Classified posts	Pre-GE2015 18–24 Aug (#Posts)	GE2015 25 Aug–11 Sep (#Posts)	Post-GE2015 12–18 Sep (#Posts)
Political posts	393	1,756	357
Political posts (% of all posts)	48%	62%	49%

Before the election, 80% of the political posts were partisan. During the election, the proportion increased slightly to 81%. This increased to 89% after the election.

There was also an increase in the number of emotional posts, from 33% before the election, to 38% during the election, and 54% after at the election. In sum, posts were most emotional and partisan after the election.

A word cloud showing the top words used in the blog posts was created from the posts generated during GE2015 and after. The word cloud indicated that the posts were more negative after Polling Day (e.g., “brainwashing” and “despair”).

In conclusion, text analytics is helpful, but they require human coders to train the data to improve accuracy for research. What was analysed

were blog posts generated by bloggers but these do not represent the entire population. For future work, survey data can be combined with data collected from various online sources.



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Chapter 8

Conclusion



CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Carol Soon

Unlike the previous study on media and Internet use during GE2011, this study collected data through an online survey. Like other survey methodologies, online surveys have their merits and limitations. One limitation is that it is harder to reach people from the older age groups and lower education groups. This is a reflection of the general demographic profile of people who go online — they tend to be younger, more educated and earn higher income. However, the attraction of online surveys lies in their lower cost and the relatively faster rate of data collection, the latter being an important consideration for time-sensitive studies that demand accurate recall on the part of respondents.

In addition, the social desirability bias normally associated with surveys (especially face-to-face surveys) may be smaller, and respondents may be less inhibited when they answer what they perceive as sensitive or controversial questions. In the telephone survey that was conducted in 2011, 49.6% of the 2,000 respondents surveyed then refused to answer the question, “Whom did you vote for during the election?” In 2015, the percentage of people who refused to answer the question went down to 39.9%. Future survey work requires a consideration of the challenges that come with different data collection methods. Increasingly, as evident in the work done by Pew Research Center in the US, hybrid methods where data is collected through different modes may be more common.

This study, a follow-up from the earlier one conducted in 2011, contributes to three areas: Social media’s role in the General Election and its relationship with voter demographics, political traits and political participation; how political parties used social media; and the heterogeneity of social media.

As highlighted in the introduction chapter, in the weeks leading up to Polling Day, political parties such as the PAP, WP and SDP harnessed party websites and SNS to communicate their campaign messages to the electorate. The increasing adoption of social media by the electorate and political candidates led to expectations of social

media changing the political landscape. In terms of the role of media as a source of information, not much has changed between the elections in 2011 and 2015. TV, print and their online versions were used the most and were seen as more trustworthy, compared to social media.

The impact of social media use on the election outcome is not conclusive as almost half the respondents made up their minds on whom to vote for before Nomination Day. As such, we cannot say with certainty if media use reinforced or changed people's minds on which party to vote for. Future studies should incorporate two additional measures, one on the types of elected-related information people consume – whether it conforms to what they believe in or challenges their beliefs – and another on the perceived influence of information on people's voting decisions. This will go some way to helping researchers and policymakers understand the impact of media content.

Perhaps, the factors that influenced people's decisions on whom to vote for could have a bearing on when people made up their minds on whom to cast their votes for. Our survey showed that the top three factors that impacted people's voting behaviour were the quality of the political party and candidates in their constituencies, Singapore's vulnerability as a country, and policy changes related to transportation, housing costs and/or foreign workers (see Chapter 3). Party performance in terms of how party members governed their wards and the impact of policy changes showed up over the years, not within the short campaigning period.

Furthermore, media effects are far from uniform and are mediated by different factors. The simplistic "hypodermic needle" or "magic bullet" approach, which views media as having a direct, powerful and immediate effect on its audiences, has long been debunked by communication scholars. One mediating factor lies with individuals, as demonstrated by IPS collaborator Dr Debbie Goh's analysis (see Chapter 7). Although the Internet has been advocated as a democratisation medium, as people are able to circumvent traditional barriers to information, personalised communication (i.e., people producing and sharing political content with similar others in their social networks) enhanced political knowledge only for certain groups



such as those “intense users” who were in the 40–49 age group, male, university degree holders, and were middle-income earners.

The effects of social media are further complicated by their different formats and the purposes they serve. Cognisant of the growing complexity within social media given their diverse features and affordances, we examined different types of social media platforms and their impact on voters. Our collaborator, Dr Elmie Nekmat, examined voters’ personal opinions on three hot-button policy issues (housing, population and transport) and their perceptions of public opinion on the same issues on different social media platforms (see Chapter 7). People’s personal opinions on all three policy issues were least negative. The perceived public opinion on open social media platforms such as SNS was most negative; more so than that on closed social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and Viber. Clearly, social media is not homogenous; and as presented in Chapter 7, different platforms have different effects on voting behaviour. Party and policy communication should take the differences in social media platforms into account when they reach out to supporters and the public.

In terms of political traits, Singaporeans were clearly not apathetic about the election. Political interest was high and Singaporeans engaged in discussions on the election, with close to 58% talking about it a few times a week to several times a day. Despite Singaporeans’ interest and political talk, their political participation — online and offline — is low. Our study shows that people tend to engage in low threshold activities (meaning activities that require less time and effort) on all four social media platforms. In her breakdown of different types of social media usage, our collaborator, Dr Natalie Pang, fills out the picture. Her analysis shows that relational use was the highest and expressive use, which requires more time and effort, was the lowest (see Chapter 7). Thus, social media use clearly does not necessarily translate into political engagement. Beyond looking at the number of people who use social media, it is imperative to critically examine what people do on social media. The nature of their participation suggests that social media, at least for now, may be used by Singaporeans more as a tool of surveillance (finding out what people say and feel about election issues) than as a mode of persuasion and mobilisation.

With social media touted to be a game changer, especially with young people, some of whom were first-time voters, we took a closer look at youth voters and how they might differ from non-youth voters. Following trends elsewhere, Singaporean youth used social media more than Singaporean non-youth as a source of news and information on the election. However, when we compared youth's use of different media, we found that youth used mainstream media and their online counterparts more than social media (with the exception of SNS) and they also trusted mainstream media more. Both youth and non-youth shared similarities in what they did online — passive or low threshold online activities saw the highest participation rates. Further challenging assumptions about youth's political engagement, being more engaged politically, their offline participation was also low.

With the “firsts” in political campaigning such as the development of mobile applications, we extended IPS' previous election study by examining political parties' social media usage, specifically that of party websites, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. We observed a normalisation rather than equalisation of power relations that exist in the real world, with the ruling party PAP being the overall winner online in terms of how it used social media and its engagement with the electorate. The implications for political parties are clear — investment in terms of manpower and monetary resources to sustain online engagement is needed and should be planned for. Parties' and candidates' online engagement is not just about “being there” or being seen in cyberspace, but what is key is to create and update information on a frequent basis, respond and interact with social media users, and curate content shared by followers (and perhaps detractors). For smaller parties that have lesser funds, more effort needs to be put into recruiting and building relationships with volunteers who can be mobilised into helping them sustain their online efforts.



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