

theonlinecitizen

A Community of Singaporeans

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New Media and Democracy

**Telling the untold stories about Singapore:
The Road Ahead**

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Who are we?

From our website

TOC began in December 2006 with a simple aim in mind: telling the stories about Singapore and Singaporeans that weren't being told in the mainstream press.

TOC is a blog site which endeavours to reflect the views and opinions of ordinary Singaporeans. It is a platform which welcomes contributions from anybody who is concerned about issues facing our country.

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Content

Commentary-Report Percentage
90-10

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The East-West divide, distilled

	Characteristics	Manifestation in the law of libel	Manifestation in journalistic coverage
Western conception of democracy	To be constantly accountable to the electorate before and after elections	Focus on protection of speech	Investigative press
Asian conception of democracy	Rule of the 'junzi, Confucian gentlemen Rule by trust in a rigorous system of selection	Focus on protection of reputation	A 'nation building press' Rejection of 'bo tua bo suay' discourse

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Attitudes to Political Participation

Would **not** engage in a petition

East Asia: 54%

West Europe: 71%

Would **not** engage in a protest:

East Asia: 30%

West Europe: 14%

Sample size: 2000 citizens

From:

Professor Jean Blondel

Democracy in East Asia and Western Europe:
the Citizen's Views (Survey conducted 2000)

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Cultural framework

Shared Values White Paper (1990)

Nation before community and society above self

Family as the basic unit of society

Community support and respect for the individual

Consensus, not conflict

Racial and religious harmony

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The lowest common denominator

Informed choice
Maximizing the flow and quality of information

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Regulating the Press

Newspaper and Printing Presses Act

Special features of newspaper company

10. —(1) Subject to subsection (15), in every newspaper company —

(b) there shall be 2 classes of shares, namely, **management shares** and ordinary shares

(11) The holder of management shares shall be entitled either on a poll or by a show of hands to **200 votes** for each management share held by him upon any resolution relating to the appointment or dismissal of a director or any member of the staff of a newspaper company but shall in all other respects have the same voting rights as the holder of ordinary shares.

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Government Influence in Singapore Press Holdings

Mangement Shareholding

NTUC Income: 16.34%

Singapore Telecommunications: 13.30%

Development Bank of Singapore: 8.05%

National University of Singapore: 5.36%

Head of Board of Directors: Dr Tony Tan, ex Cabinet Minister

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Regulating political content

Films Act Sections 33, 35

Section 33

- Bans the 'Making, distribution and exhibition of **party political films**'
- Cited by the MDA in the ban of Martyn See's film *Singapore Rebel*, about opposition leader Dr Chee Soon Juan

Section 35

- Allows the Minister to ban films "**contrary to the public interest**"
 - Cited in the ban of Martyn See's film *Zahari's 17 years*, a film about Said Zahari, a detainee under the ISA
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Regulating online content

Parliamentary Elections Act

Section 78A (1) (b)

- The PEA in general allows the Minister to regulate election advertising over the internet during an election period.
 - It applies to political parties, candidates, their agents, websites under a class license, and **websites required to register with the MDA.**
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Parliamentary Elections Act

Section 78A (1)(b)

Application of the PEA

- Websites which "**persistently promote political views**" will trigger a call for registration as a political site, followed by the application of the PEA prohibitions on elections advertising
- These prohibitions on advertising allow the Minister to prescribe 'the features that must or must not appear to be used in any such election advertising'

Criticism

- Vague guidance as to what it means to 'persistently promote political views'
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Regulating online content

Broadcasting (Class License)
Notification

Section 5b

Requires websites set up "for the propagation, promotion or discussion of **political** or religious issues relating to Singapore" **register** with the Media Development Authority.

The mandatory registration process requires **disclosure** of an individual's name, **employer**, and **salary**

Criticism

- Vaguely worded
 - Unenforced deterrent
 - Invasive registration process
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State of the blogosphere

- Part-time political commentators with no journalistic training
- Largely parasitical on commenting on the content generated by the MSM
- Some popular blogsites:

Mr Wang Says So (mrwangsaysso.blogspot.com/index.html)

Mr Brown (www.mrbrown.com)

Yawningbread (www.yawningbread.org)

theonlinecitizen (www.theonlinecitizen.com)

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A changing dynamic

- 1) Bloggers are increasingly being cited in the mainstream press
 - 2) Bloggers are starting to set the tone of public debate
 - 3) Bloggers are starting to play a part in agenda setting
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New media and the way forward

- 1) Free of barriers to entry
 - 2) Platform to have your voice heard on a national level
 - 3) Access to alternative points of view
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A strategy of resilience

Build a Community

“You can take a person down, but not a movement”

- 1) Get citizens invested in the blogosphere**
- 2) Principles are more important than results**

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Bloggers at the frontlines

13 prominent bloggers submitted a 20 page proposal for comprehensive internet deregulation to MICA in April.

Efforts to explain the proposal to the public and garner support for deregulation will continue in the coming months

Bloggers group includes activists, students and academics:

- .Martyn See
- .Alex Au
- .Cherian George

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CONCLUSION

Inspiration from The Matrix

Trinity: Not everyone believes what you believe.

Morpheus: My beliefs do not require them to.
