

**SOCIAL NEWS USE & CITIZEN PARTICIPATION**

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## ABSTRACT

News use has been consistently and closely linked to an active citizenry. In the last decade, social media has rapidly emerged as a means for one to not just consume but reproduce and disseminate news-related content. This trend is particularly more prevalent among young adults. Accordingly, it is important to better understand what factors may influence different news-related activities on social media – or what this research refers to as social news use – and how this in turns affects citizen participation.

The three research objectives of the present research are as follows: 1) to explore how media and individual factors affect millennials' engagement in social news use, 2) to understand how civically or politically engaged millennials engage with social media as sources of news and information, and 3) to examine how social new use facilitates or inhibits citizen participation. To achieve the research objectives, a conceptual model was proposed on the basis of uses & gratifications theory, social presence theory, processes in self-presentation and information control, and the O-S-R-O-R model. In particular, the entire research is divided into two interrelated studies.

In the first study, one-on-one survey data was collected in Singapore from eligible voters under the age of 36 years old and have had some prior experience with social news use. Hierarchical regression showed how each dimension of social news use was predicted by a varied pattern of motivations, information controls and social presence. Further, mediation analyses revealed that certain communicative and cognition factors (i.e. interpersonal discussion, efficacy, and news production) channel the effects of social news use on citizen participation. To complement the data collected in the first study, Study 2 relied on qualitative data derived from

in-depth interviews with Singaporean millennial activists. The findings in this phase clarified some of the findings/relationships found in the earlier study (e.g. entertainment motivation and news participation) and elucidated current social news use practices beyond consumption. Moreover, the interview material also revealed some of the shortcomings of social news use, particularly with regards to citizen participation.

Collectively, this research not only showed that social news use is a multi-dimensional activity driven by both individual and media factors, but also not all forms of news engagement are necessarily in equal in terms of deliberation and mobilizing effects. For researchers, the present research provides a theoretical framework advancing the understanding of the antecedents, characteristics, and outcomes of social news use. In addition, the project as a whole contributed to the current discourse on the effects of social news use by producing research out of a Western liberal-democratic context. For social media providers, practitioners in the media industry, and policy makers, the findings shed light on how to increase engagement on these platforms to suit their respective goals.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media as a popular communication medium is having a significant impact on online news distribution and consumption. As reported by Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, social media have become an important pathway for news and current affairs, with at least one third of users worldwide now using the platform regularly to obtain such information (Newman et al., 2019). While the one-size-fits-all social networking site Facebook remains the most popular social media platform currently for both generic and news use (64% and 36%), instant-messaging and microblogging application WhatsApp and Twitter are its closest competitors worldwide. Overall, less than a quarter (16%) of its sample consume, share or discuss news through WhatsApp and 10% of them use Twitter in a similar fashion. Conversely, news consumption via printed newspapers, television and other online platforms have either plateaued or declined. Taken together, the current trend suggests that an increasing number of social media users are becoming dependent on the platform as a primary source of news and not just a means of access. At the same time, industry pundits and academics have also pointed out that unlike traditional media, the interactive features of the medium have lowered the threshold for news audiences to be part of the production and diffusion process as well (Glynn et al., 2012; Kristen Purcell et al., 2010). Research has provided evidence to support this position, finding that while passive news exposure still forms the bulk of online news consumer activities, a significant portion of social media users are beginning to participate reactively – particularly through means of sharing or commenting on news content (Newman et al., 2016; Pothong & Nielsen, 2016).

However, despite the use of social media for news-related activities – or social news use – becoming increasingly prevalent in recent years, extant academic literature documenting the

determinants and outcomes of this phenomenon calls for further development. While recent research has begun to acknowledge some of the ways in which social news users participate in these platforms actively, these studies have often focused on one aspect of news participation (such as ‘sharing’), and do not venture far from investigating the effects of human factors such as age, gender, media ownership, social or psychological needs (Choi et al., 2013; Choi, 2016; Glynn et al., 2012; C. S. Lee & Ma, 2011). Further understanding and determining how the affordances of the medium can facilitate social news use would lead to a better explanation of the implications of this rising trend. Accordingly, the present project intends to shed light on what social news use means for civic or political participation (citizen participation) by examining what factors lead to news use on these platforms in the first place. During the last decade, scholarly attention revolving around the impact of new media, particularly social media platforms such as Facebook, on both online and offline citizen participation, has flourished. The findings, however, have been inconclusive; a meta-analysis of 36 studies examining social media’s effects on participation demonstrated a positive relationship, but only half of the coefficients were statistically significant (Boulianne, 2015). Hence, to properly address the role of social media in the process of citizen participation, several scholars have stressed the importance of identifying the context of use as well as the specific usage of these technologies (Garrett et al., 2012; Gil de Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011).

The present research contributes to the existing body of research on social media and citizen participation by examining how both technical (social presence and information control) and social-psychological (motivations) factors predict social news use and how these relationships in turn affect online and offline participatory behaviours. Social presence, defined as the extent to which a medium facilitates the experience of direct or indirect human contact

(Gefen & Straub, 2004), has often been identified as a key predictor in a range of virtual environments (Chung et al., 2015; Kear et al., 2014) and is therefore a likely factor affecting social news use. Similarly, empirical studies in computer-mediated communication (CMC) have demonstrated how the affordances offered by social media – particularly controls which enable users to limit or regulate information about oneself – can have a positive impact on its usage (Kuo et al., 2013). Given the commonly accepted understanding that individuals undertake a daily “information game” whereby their expertise in communicating facets of their real core selves influences the impressions others form of them (Ellison et al., 2006; Goffman, 1973), the affordance of information control would be more relevant to those who engage regularly with materials that are potentially contentious.

Additionally, while preceding published research on social news use have frequently invoked the uses and gratifications (U&G) perspective of mass communication, none to the best of the author’s knowledge has simultaneously considered the influence of individuals’ motivations (i.e., information-seeking, socialising, status-seeking and entertainment) and the nature of the social interactions offered by these technologies. By modelling the implications of social news use through both social-psychological and technical dimensions this study hopes to present and study a more detailed set of hypotheses and research questions, which in turn may shed light on some of the contradictory results found in past research.

### **Conceptualising Social News Use**

While the use of social media has become a widespread phenomenon, there remains no unanimous interpretation of the medium. A popular definition advanced by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) is “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological

foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (p. 61). For Velasquez et al. (2014), social media are information and communication technologies that create and support online communities through content generation, expression, and social interaction. Similarly, Bechmann and Lomborg (2013) describe social media as forms of online communication that are unmediated, interactive and networked, and where consumers of content are also producers. Although researchers have varying understandings of social media, their definitions all reveal a common thread: Social media are web-mediated tools in which users form online communities to (re)create and share information with one another.

Seven types of social media platforms are often identified when theorising social media: social networking sites, blogs (including microblogs), chat platforms, online collaborate projects, content communities, virtual social worlds, and virtual game worlds (Bryer & Zavattaro, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The applications of particular interest in this study are Facebook (a social networking site (SNS)), Twitter (a microblog), YouTube (a content community), and WhatsApp (an instant messaging application). These applications have been chosen because they are the most popular social media platforms for news use (Newman et al., 2016) and/or have received considerable attention in scholarly literature (Kümpel et al., 2015; Theocharis & Lowe, 2015). Even though all social media are characterised as “interactive”, the differences in underlying structures and affordances between them encourage different type of user interactions, thus promoting the emergence of distinct social news use practices which have important implications for citizen participation.

Boyd and Ellison (2007) dedicated considerable attention to discussing what constitutes a SNS and have established that construction of a profile and the articulation of a list of connections are its more salient features. Facebook is oriented towards social exchanges among

pre-existing relationships – interaction is predicated upon mutual confirmation of “Friendship” – and allows it users to communicate with their list of connections privately or publicly in a multimodal way. Twitter on the other hand, typically encourages users to create site-specific online identities and only allow it users to publish smaller elements of content (e.g. short sentences of 280 characters, individual images, links) to its list of connections or *followers* (Philip. R. Johnson & Yang, 2009). The basic architecture of Twitter is designed to facilitate a public asynchronous conversation on shared interests through social tags (e.g. quote-tweets, replies using @mention). YouTube is a niche social media platform that lets it users upload and share video clips only to their connections. Similar to Twitter, YouTube does not require its users to create an extensive profile page and connections on YouTube may be one-directional – a user can subscribe to another user’s channel, but the user being subscribed to need not follow back (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Lastly, in contrast to the three aforementioned applications, transmission of messages between users on WhatsApp takes place in an entirely closed network structure. Although communication can take various forms, it is primarily dyadic or limited to a chat group size of 256 recipients.

Scholarship suggests a growing trend in not only understanding individuals’ motives for engaging in social media (e.g. Oliveira et al., 2016; Storsul, 2014), but also its role in online news consumption and distribution (e.g. A. Mitchell & Page, 2013; Pentina & Tarafdar, 2014), political participation (e.g. Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2010; Saldaña et al., 2015), and civic participation (Bachmann & Gil de Zúñiga, 2013; Bennett, 2008; Skoric, 2015). However, despite the popularity of social media and the developing interest in explaining the use of social media for political or news-related activities, only a handful of research has begun to recognise the varied ways in which an individual may participate in this platform (Choi, 2016; Hyun & Kim,



2015; C. S. Park & Kaye, 2018, 2019; Skoric & Zhu, 2016). Depending on generic measurement items such as frequency or time spent is inadequate in revealing how different communicative actions on social media might foster or undermine an active citizenry. A more detailed distinction and operationalization of social media use is required to address and expand upon previous limited research on young adults.

To study the different antecedents and effects of news-related activities on social media – or social news use – this research first identifies news as information relating to local politics or public affairs. I focus on this particular type of content as earlier studies have consistently found a connection between consumption of such materials and political participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2010; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Shah et al., 2001; Skoric et al., 2012). More details on this relationship and how exposure to different topics of news content is influenced by individual factors are discussed in the following chapter. Secondly, I readapt the classification of social news use as proposed by Choi (2016), Hyun and Kim (2015), and Park and Kaye (2018). These scholars have stressed that today’s social media ecology offers a myriad of ways to engage with news and that simply categorizing social news use as an activity that is either consumptive or expressive is insufficient. Accordingly, the three primary types of social news use activities that will be explored in this research are: news consumption, news participation, and news production. Consumption, otherwise known as “news reading” (Choi, 2016) or “news reception” (Hyun & Kim, 2015), refers to monitoring of all news content that is either directed at a given user or publicly available within the social media platform. Activities in this category are primarily isolated, with no apparent contribution of content and include reading news headlines or watching a news-related video. News participation consists of user-to-user interaction and/or user-to-content interaction in response to an existing news-related material. Activities in this

category include: (i) sharing news links on social media from other online news sources, ii) endorsing a news story by using the “like” or a similar reaction feature, and iii) responding with a reaction feature to other users’ comments on news stories. News production encompasses news-related user generated content (UGC) created by the user and disseminated to a mass audience. This includes: (i) publishing an original opinion piece, article or video, ii) posting an original summary of news, and iii) reposting a news piece together with additional comments. This is undoubtedly a more proactive form of news engagement than the preceding two and is closely related to Park and Kaye (2018)’s concept of news curation, which is the sharing of reconstructed or reformulated news material through social media. Shao (2009) posits that while these classes of activities are progressively more demanding – with consuming and producing being the lowest and highest tier respectively – not all users who consume will eventually become producers. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to investigate further what makes social news users engage with news differently on social media.

### **Research Gaps and Justification for Research**

The news-related activities engaged in by users of social media and the issues pertaining to citizen participation that these practices raise is a developing phenomenon. That being the case, questions still remain about the effects of social media on citizens’ civic and political engagement. Some empirical studies have found statistical significance in this relationship (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Valenzuela et al., 2009a), while others have failed to yield similar results (Groshek & Dimitrova, 2011; Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009). The inconsistencies in results suggest several methodological issues of which the current study will attempt to address. The

findings of this study, proposed to be gathered from both a quantitative and qualitative approach, aim to provide important insights to both academics and practitioners.

First, in contrast to a socially or technologically deterministic approach that overemphasizes the characteristics of the platforms or the individual users themselves, this project investigates the effects of both media capabilities (social presence and information control) and individual characteristics (motivations) on social news use, and the subsequent impacts on citizen participation. Communication scholars have hitherto relied heavily on the U&G framework in investigating how an individual's social and psychological needs impacts online news use behaviour. Much of their work suggest that individuals' specific social news activities can be differentiated depending on the following motivations: surveillance, social, status-seeking, and entertainment needs (Choi, 2016; Go et al., 2016; Hanson & Haridakis, 2008; C. S. Lee & Ma, 2011; Ma et al., 2011). While these studies have provided some preliminary insights into the influences of social news use, they are also somewhat limited, particularly in exploring their effects on social news use with other environmental factors that might also be predictive.

Indeed, several theorists have also pointed out that media affordances, or features of a communication channel that are perceived to be in tandem with or relevant for social interaction, can influence usage (Feaster, 2010; Majchrzak et al., 2013). Extant research has corroborated with this claim; Staddon et al. (2012a) found that greater reported control and comprehension over information sharing on Facebook was strongly associated with engagement on the platform across several metrics – including frequency of visits, posting, commenting, and “liking” content. Conversely, these engagement metrics decreased as privacy concerns increased. Another affordance studied extensively in both information systems (IS) and communication discipline is the capability of a medium to convey social presence. In the context of social media

specifically, perceived social presence has been reported to have both direct and indirect influences on users' adoption and continuance intention of SNSs (Cheikh-Ammar & Barki, 2016; C. Xu et al., 2012). This project takes into consideration the research cited above and explores how motivations predict social news use activities, while accounting for the perceived affordances of information control and social presence. By addressing both social-psychological and technical aspects simultaneously, the current project aims to contribute to the theory of social news use by introducing a novel theoretical framework. The framework is inspired by U&G theory, social presence theory, self-presentation theory, and the communication mediation model. The novelty of this approach lies in its combination of work from IS, communication, and sociology. The use of this interdisciplinary approach would assist in developing a coherent theoretical model, thereby elucidating the broader societal implications of social news use.

Second, compared to the sizeable body of qualitative research examining how politically engaged young people use social media for activism (e.g. Abidin, 2019; Beta, 2019; David, 2013; Gordon & Taft, 2010; Storsul, 2014; Yue et al., 2019; Zhang, 2013), fewer attention has been dedicated to discussing the implications of social news use on this phenomenon. Instead, (social) news use is often observed as a subset of civic or political participation, rather than a factor that influences it. Recognising social news use as a related but distinct construct from citizen participation is crucial as multiple studies have consistently corroborated the indirect effects of news use – online or otherwise – on political and civic life (e.g. Chan et al., 2017; Jung et al., 2011; McLeod et al., 1999; Shah et al., 2007). A more thorough discussion explicating these mediating effects is presented in Chapter 2, where I raise the suitability of the O-S-R-O-R model in this project. With that distinction in mind, it is apt to point out that an overview of 105 empirical studies by Kümpel et al. (2015) revealed two major trends in social news research: (a)

a strong focus on quantitative approaches and (b) a US-centric bias. At least a quarter of the articles examined deployed content analysis (57%) and self-reporting questionnaires (25%), and these were largely conducted on samples from the U.S (79%). While these studies provide some knowledge about who engages in social news use and why, they are unfortunately, weak in providing detailed contextual knowledge and in unravelling relevant aspects beyond predefined categories. In response to these weaknesses, the findings of this project reported herein includes in-depth interviews to gain more qualitative insight into how social news users actually understand and experience different social media platforms as new sources. This study also seeks to culturally balance understandings of social news use by considering the issue from an Asian perspective. Singapore – where the present study is located – with its unique blend of high ICT and social development, and a populace that is generally resistant to political change, represents an interesting research site for exploring the relationship between news engagement on new media and citizen participation.

The practical importance of this research is timely given the increasing popularity of news consumption and sharing on social media, particularly among young adults (Blackbox Research, 2015; A. Mitchell & Page, 2013). The findings of this study will be able to guide social media service providers when developing or enhancing interface designs and related elements to be mindful of user online information behaviours and the potential implications on their users. Ultimately, the success of any social media platform is dependent on the amount of activity and content that its users (co)produce, and as such, it is imperative to empower users to have more control to interact on these platforms as desired.

The findings of this study will also be able to guide the media industry, particularly organisations involved in news and current affairs, in understanding what drives participation on

different social media platforms, and thereby guiding them in channelling appropriate resources to encourage these activities. In an attempt to recuperate revenue that has been lost with the declining rate of paid subscriptions, many legacy media organisations in the last decade have turned to multiple social media channels to extend the reach of their publications or broadcasts (Arango, 2009; Bunz, 2010; Stepanek, 2011). A better understanding of the social-psychological factors leading to a richer audience engagement on these platforms can inform the content marketing efforts of news organisations wrestling with how to fill the deficit in coverage and traffic to news content, and therefore, revenue.

Finally, as scholars have consistently regarded citizen participation as the cornerstone of a healthy and well-functioning democracy (Crouch, 2004; R. Davis, 1999; Mutz, 2006), and pointed out the role of an active citizenship in attenuating the effects of fears in the age of terrorism (Barber, 2004), a better understanding of what facilities an active citizenry should be of interest to politicians and policymakers. There has been a growing body of literature in Singapore examining the use of social media for citizen engagement in the last few years (D. Goh & Pang, 2016; T. Lee & Tan, 2011; Trisha T. C. Lin, 2015; Skoric et al., 2012; Skoric & Poor, 2013; Skoric & Zhu, 2016; Soon & Samsudin, 2016a; T. H. Tan & Mahizhnan, 2015). However, most of these studies were conducted under the backdrop of a major local news event such as the nation's general election or a protest, and/or have explicitly limited news exposure to information about the general election. Political content during elections tend to be quite high on social media; and as a result, levels of interest and involvement in political or civic affairs may also be artificially inflated. The present research, conducted outside of a specific, "episodic" period, contributes to the growing discourse by focusing on how everyday use of social media is linked to citizen's engagement with civic or political institutions.

## **Context and Significance of Locating Study in Singapore**

Despite being the 19<sup>th</sup> smallest nation in the world with a total surface area of 719.9km<sup>2</sup>, Singaporeans enjoy one of the highest standards of living with a per capital purchasing power parity (GDP) of US\$ 52,963 and a nominal GNP per capita of US\$ 51,880 – thus making it the third richest country in the world (The World Bank, 2018). The biggest contributor of the economy is manufacturing, particularly in electronics and petrochemicals, commanding almost 20% of the economic pie in 2016. Trade and business services held a 14 and 16 percent share respectively (Department of Statistics (DoS), 2017). Aside from the aftermath of the global economic recession in 2009, unemployment rate has remained mostly stable for the last decade, averaging a low of 2% of the estimated labour force (Ministry of Manpower, 2018). One of the greatest advantages the nation enjoys is a skilled workforce – literacy rate is 97% for residents aged 15 years and above, and more than half of its residents aged 25 years and above have received post-secondary school qualification (DoS, 2017). This is especially significant when one considers that on average, over 20% of the 0–14 age group in east Asia and the Pacific are not enrolled in secondary education (World Economic Forum, 2016). Such levels of education and socioeconomic progress is a marked achievement for a nation that only gained its sovereignty in 1965 and faces the perennial challenge of scarcity of natural resources.

On top of being an economically advanced city-state, Singapore has experienced a high information and communication technology (ICT) penetration since the nineties after the government aggressively executed a master plan to transform the republic into an “intelligent island” (Jussawalla et al., 1992). In the last survey conducted by Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) (2017c), it was revealed that more than 87% of resident households have

access to at least one computer at home and a broadband internet connection. The country also has one of the fastest fixed internet connection speeds in the world, close to four times the global average of 40.7mbps (Kemp, 2018). Mobile broadband penetration in 2017 has reached 150%, indicating that many Singaporeans are using more than one portable info-communication device to connect to the internet wirelessly. Youths in particular (defined as residents aged between 15-34 years of age) form the biggest proportion of internet and smartphone users (IMDA, 2017a). Unsurprisingly, the use of social media is becoming vastly popular, with seven in 10 internet users assessing Facebook regularly in 2018, up 27% from two years earlier (Kemp, 2016, 2018). For other social media platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram, the corresponding figures were 73%, 71%, and 44%. These statistics not only exceed the regional average, but also put the republic among one of the most digitally engaged countries in the world.

However, despite being emblematic of a globally-savvy and well plugged-in society, the influence of new media on civic and political engagement has been less than meaningful on the general population. Findings from Singapore's Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), a government-funded public policy think-tank, has consistently showed that people still continued to consume more news about domestic politics from mainstream news channels (i.e. television and newspaper, including their respective online websites) than alternative online sources (i.e. social media) (Soon & Samsudin, 2016b; T. H. Tan & Mahizhnan, 2015). Further, the former was also regarded as more influential in shaping voting behaviour during elections. The same studies also showed that the electorate was largely uninvolved in traditional and online civic or political activities. In 2015, at least 7 in 10 respondents did not take part in an event for a good cause or volunteered in a welfare organisation or non-governmental organisation (NGO) during non-election time. Similarly, during election time, more than half did not (re)produce content on SNS



that was related to local politics through means of sharing, commenting, or creating an original post.

There are several socio-political factors attributing to this. Conventional wisdom suggests that as a country becomes more affluent, with a growing middle class and a better-educated population, it faces a problem of higher-skilled workers having lesser time to participate in political or civic activities. This conclusion, however, is limited as the city-state is also known for its authoritarian democratic system forged by its founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (LKY) (Ortmann, 2010). Since its independence in 1965, Singapore has held parliamentary elections regularly, free of irregularities and fraud, but has not experienced any real challenge towards the hegemonic domination of the ruling party – the People’s Action Party (PAP). As of 2018, Singapore has had 13 general elections, with the PAP securing at least 90% of elected seats each time. The absence of a turnover in government and dearth in competitive party politics have been attributed to a slate of electioneering and legislative devices. For instance, it has been pointed out by several scholars and political pundits that the non-independent elections department – currently a branch under the prime minister’s office – and the supermajority in parliament does not prevent the ruling PAP from gerrymandering the boundaries of electoral districts and manipulating electoral rules to its own advantage (Rajah, 2012; N. Tan, 2013; N. Tan & Grofman, 2014).

Between elections, the government of Singapore is often characterised as paternalistic, rejecting a laissez-faire approach to freedom of expression, assembly, and association (H. K. Leong, 2000; K. Tan, 2001). This description is not unfounded. The country maintains a comprehensive and expansive toolkit of sanctions, not excluding the Internal Security Act (ISA), which allows the state to incarcerate anyone deemed a national security threat for a renewable

period of two years, without charge or trial. High profile defamation lawsuits and sedition charges have been brought against bloggers and individuals engaged in political expression. Singapore's first reported case involved Robert Ho, a 51-year-old blogger who allegedly posted inflammatory articles on the now defunct Singaporeans for Democracy website (The Straits Times, 2001). More recently, a teenager, Amos Yee, was arrested for uploading a YouTube video crudely criticising former Prime Minister LKY (Chong, 2015). Both individuals were prosecuted under the Singapore Penal Code. As a result, political boundaries in Singapore – colloquially referred to as out-of-bounds markers or “OB markers” – remain etched in the minds of many Singaporeans. A number of observers have noted that the general populace is, however, quite content with the status quo, having grown to “rationally” agree to suppress their individual freedoms and gratifications, collectively yielding these to a state powerful enough to ensure widespread security, prosperity, and protection of property (J. Chin, 2016; B.-H. Chua, 1995; George, 2005). This pervasive ideology of “instrumental acquiescence” (Held, 1989), which places primacy on the wider interests of the public above individuals' rights, is arguably a leading contributor to the prevailing climate of apathy and fear among the majority.

As a crucial part of political control, the traditional mass media in Singapore operates in an environment closely structured and controlled by the state, in terms of ownership, regulation, and degree of liberalisation. There is currently only one national broadcaster, MediaCorp, and one newspaper company, Singapore Press Holdings (SPH). The former is a subsidiary of Temasek Holdings, a government-owned investment arm while SPH is a publicly-listed company. The Broadcasting Act (2002) vests the minister of communication and information, and thus, the Media Development Authority – the regulatory agency under his ministry – the discretion in approving a broadcasting company's chief executive officer, directors and chairman

of the board. The Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPPA) (1974a) require newspaper corporations to create management shares – reserved for banks and other establishment figures – which have 200 times the voting rights as ordinary shares. Similarly, allocation of management shares requires the approval from the minister. The NPPA (1974b) also mandates all publishers to apply for annual permits, which can be revoked at any time. The combination of government licensing and ownership controls effectively allows for indirect supervision of the mass media, in which authorised gatekeepers ensure that content stays within the unwritten perimeters of racial, religious and political acceptability. It is also worthy to note at this stage that foreign media are not exempt from being regulated either. The state and its leaders have successfully sued or limited the circulation of foreign periodicals that were deemed to have interfered with domestic politics (See Ministry of Communications and Information, 1987; Timms, 2004).

However, unlike traditional media, regulations concerning the internet per se were dispensed with a “lighter touch” (George & Raman, 2008). The state only maintains a symbolic ban of 100 websites, mostly pornographic in nature, to signpost Singapore’s societal values (Y. L. Goh et al., 2010). Under the internet class licensing system, all local internet content providers are automatically licensed (IMDA, 2018). The exception to this are those that deal with what are deemed to be more sensitive issues: 1) sites with religious or political affiliations and, 2) professional news websites. Such sites require separate registration with the authorities, with which includes a declaration accepting responsibility for all content produced or a performance bond. Social media pages without a significant reach of 50,000 unique visitors a month do not fall under the purview of this regulation. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that a number of alternative news outlets and socio-political social media pages have emerged and gain popularity in the last decade (T. H. Tan, 2015). These include pages that are clearly anti-

establishment (i.e. *The Independent Singapore*, *National Times Singapore*, *TR Emeritus*) and those that are more partisan towards the government (i.e. *Singapore Matters*, *Onward Singapore*, and *Fabrications About the PAP*). At the same time, there is also a small body of pages that take a more moderate stance, such as *New Naratif*, *Mothership*, and *Rice Media*. Hence, it can be posited that new media, or social media specifically, represents a “balancing force” (Y.-R. Lin et al., 2011) to the otherwise closed media system in Singapore. It should be noted however that while the government tolerates a lesser degree of control over online news media, there have been occasions of reprisals from the government for crossing the trip wires of sedition and contempt of court. A prominent case in point is *The Real Singapore (TRS)*. After almost half a decade of operations, TRS was forced to shut down in 2015 on the grounds of producing materials that were contradictory to public interest and national harmony (V. Koh, 2015). Both of the site’s administrators were subsequently prosecuted under the Sedition Act and sentenced to several months’ incarceration (BBC, 2016).

### **Singaporean Millennials, New Media, and Civic Life**

Given all that, it is worth focusing on the relationship between social media use and citizen participation for the younger section of the population in Singapore. There were 830,719 Singaporean citizens and residents who fell into the category of young adults (20-34 years old) in 2019, which comprises less than 15% of the total population (Strategy Group, Prime Minister’s Office et al., 2019). This particular subset of the population have been referred to in numerous terms in trade and academic literature, ranging from Digital Natives (Prensky, 2001), Net Generation (Tapscott, 1998), and Millennials (Brumberger, 2011). For consistency’s sake, this thesis will simply refer to this demographic cohort as millennials.

The experiences of this cohort differ from preceding generations for several reasons. Born between the early 1980s to early 2000s, Singaporean millennials are the beneficiaries of country's rapid economic growth of the 1970s (Vu, 2011). A corollary of this economic progress is a host of other positive developments, including the eradication of extreme poverty and a sharp increase in homeownership and education attainment. As mentioned earlier, unemployment is much lower today than when the country first gained its sovereignty in 1965 (~9%) (Menon, 2015). A comprehensive public housing program managed by the state's Housing and Development Board (HDB) includes not just the development of housing estates but the allocation of schemes and grants to purchase such properties (HDB, 2020). This is arguably a major factor contributing to Singapore having one of the highest homeownership rates – around 90% of the population – in the world (Müller, 2020). Because education is heavily subsidised by the state, the nation enjoys a skilled workforce – more than half of young adults (25-39 years) today have received a university degree. In addition, the Ministry of Education has at the turn of the millennium established an Internationalisation Fund to specifically enable a third of secondary and junior college students to partake in overseas exchanges and/or immersions (Chen, 2015). Put together, it is fair to comment that Singaporean millennials are socialised in better living conditions than earlier cohorts. This generation no longer has to strive as hard for basic needs and are able to dedicate time and resources to participate in civic life if they desire. Moreover, as a young, affluent, mobile, and educated demographic, they're less tolerant of traditional hierarchical structures and more inclined to have a say on issues that affect their lives. As Fu and Nah (2013) noted of millennial conscripts in Singapore:

“...being more educated than their predecessors, Gen Y members have a tendency to want to know the reason and intent of an instruction before carrying it out. Education has

taught them to think rationally and independent, thus the traditional ‘do as I say’” is not as effective anymore.”

Secondly, unlike its regional neighbours (Chan & Westcott, 2016; Walker, 2006), Singapore too has not experienced any major social or political instability since the late seventies. Demographically, it is a multi-racial immigrant society with a Chinese majority, in a region flanked by Muslim countries. Building national cohesion in such a pluralistic society proved to be a challenge for its founding leaders. The Maria Hertogh riots in 1950 and the Sino-Malay riots of 1964 demonstrated that the different ethnic groups did not live harmoniously during its early years of self-government and independence (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2020). The threat of armed insurgency by communist groups in Malaya (present-day Malaysia) was also present. Under these conditions, it not surprising that the government was able to consolidate its power through a politics of survival ideology (Sim, 2011), that is, only an authoritarian style of governance could provide what is perceived to be inextricably linked to national survival – safety, security, and prosperity. What is expected in return of the polity is economic discipline and social conformity. Priorities, however, maybe shifting among the younger cohort. A recent survey by *Channel NewsAsia* found that compared to the pre-independence generation (79%), 68% of millennials were willing to sacrifice their personal interests for the greater good (of the country) (Paulo et al., 2019). Similarly, citing a recent controversy over an e-payment advertisement and user-generated rap video involving race, the same article pointed to the deepening fissure of what is deemed socially offensive among generational lines. Expectedly, the younger generation had a greater threshold for engaging with issues that their older counterparts would consider contentious or out-of-bounds. Millennials in Singapore it seems, are less likely to buy to the

social harmony/nation-building argument, as the need for strong intervention by the government does not seem to be as urgent as before.

Perhaps the most identifying characteristic of Singaporean millennials is that like their counterparts in the rest of the developed world, this generation grew up in a considerably media-saturated culture facilitated by the internet and new media technologies, such as computers, mobile phones, video games, etc. Thus, it is often suggested these younger people have a natural affinity and aptitude towards new media technologies, whereas the older generation are characterised as “digital migrants” (Prensky, 2001) – being one or several steps behind and unable to read the kind of finesse that comes with growing up in such an environment. As mentioned earlier, particularly with regards to Singapore, the internet hosts a wider spectrum of perspectives and socio-political news not available through government-controlled newspapers and television. Their heavy reliance on internet-enabled communication technologies increases their opportunities to encounter and engage with politically mobilising information beyond those sanctioned by the state. Accordingly, they’re likely to become what Loader et al. (2014) would describe as “networked young citizens” – Contemporary young individuals who co-opt the digital space to practice citizenship. Such forms of citizenship need not necessarily result in explicit forms of political activism or mobilization. Indeed, as evidenced by the cases mentioned in the previous section, Singaporeans face tight regulations that limit activities of that sort. Instead as Liew and Abidin (2019) noted, they may manifest in provocative online postings that challenge social norms, baiting moral outrage and public indignation. Like Putnam (2000), the authors point our attention to newer, emerging forms of civic life – one that extends beyond the dutiful, routine civic norms held by older generations (e.g. belonging to community civic associations, attending resident dialogues organised by the community centres or government)

and towards a more individualised, self-interested vision of engagement with society. Singaporean YouTube duo Munah and Hirzi are one such example. The pair, who are an ethnic minority themselves, leverage on parodies and cultural stereotypes to provide critical commentary on systemic issues, including immigration and xenophobia, discriminatory practices against Malays, and the hyper-policing of Muslim religiosity (Abidin, 2019). Overall, millennials differ from earlier cohorts as they're better educated, exposed to wider perspectives, and have more opportunities to voice their concerns and participate in civic life. The authoritarian political culture laid down decades ago during the birth of the nation may not be as poignant to this generation.

Several research findings lend support to this proposition. First, while it has been consistently documented that the use of instant messaging applications, SNS, and email are the top three online activities conducted via mobile equipment, it is worthy to note that the former two activities are more prevalent among younger internet users (Infocomm Development Authority (IDA), 2013, 2015). According to data compiled in July 2016, 73% of users aged 15-24 and 25-34 go online to use SNS (IMDA, 2017a). A significant number of youths also used instant-messaging – 69% of users aged 15-24 and 66% aged 25-35. The consumption of online news has also risen recently among this cohort, with 36% for those aged 15-24 and 48% in the 25-34 age range now engaging in this activity. The statistics show that new media, especially social media, are frequently used by a large percentage of this demographic.

Prior to Singapore's Generation Election 2011 (GE2011), T. H. Tan et al. (2011) showed that while political participation was generally low among all age groups, younger Singaporeans – specifically those who were between 21 to 39 years old – were less apathetic about politics than older Singaporeans. They participated more in political activities, were more likely to



consume political content from both traditional and new media sources and were less authoritarian than older citizens. These results were further corroborated by Lin and Hong (2015), who found that young voters' political attitudes and voting behaviour during GE2011 were more likely to be influenced by social media as compared to those who were older than 34 years old. More recent post-election studies revealed a continuation of this trend. Soon & Samsudin (2016a) concluded while the internet had not displaced mainstream media in GE2015, social media users were younger and more active in traditional civic activities such as participating in charitable causes (27% of social media users vs 9.2% of social media non-users), and being a member or volunteer of a welfare organisation or NGO (18% of social media users vs 4.4% of social media non-users). Additionally, Koh (2015) observed that the young, just like older voters, placed equal importance on bread and butter issues such as "cost of living" and "wealth & income inequality". At the same time however, she found statistically significant differences on political issues. Younger voters gave heavier weights to "need for different views in parliament" and "legal status of homosexuality", whereas the "LKY legacy" was especially important to older voters. Put together, these findings suggest that younger Singaporeans are not only more likely to embrace liberal ideals and new media but are also less reticent in participating in political or civic affairs. In light of this and the unique media environment, the millennials in Singapore are an ideal population to examine the ways in which new media is being harnessed for democratic and civic practices, hence providing an Asian perspective in the transformative potential of emerging media ecologies outside Western liberal democracies.

### **Aims & Objectives of Study**

The core purpose of this study is to propose a theoretical framework for understanding the antecedents, characteristics and outcomes of social news use. The data from this research will be derived from a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design (J.W. Creswell et al., 2003): An analytical analysis of a national survey of Singaporean millennials followed by a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with millennial activists. Accordingly, the following key objectives are set:

- To explore how media and individual factors affect millennials' engagement in social news use.
- To understand how civically or politically engaged millennials engage with social media as sources of news and information.
- To examine how social news use facilitates or inhibits citizen participation.

Study 1 addresses these objectives by relying on quantitative data to support the conceptual model that will be presented in a more detailed manner in Chapter 3. As discussed above, while survey data will allow the researcher to make more generalisable claims about the relationship between the predictors and outcomes of social news use, it does not allow him to probe deeper into respondents' motivations and experiences of social media as new sources. Furthermore, due to the brevity of the instrument, skillful lying cannot be detected – participants may report socially desirable answers (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Thus, to mitigate these limitations, Study 2 refines and broadens our understanding of this phenomenon by utilizing qualitative data solicited from those who are already engaged in civic or political activities. Through intensive interviews, the researcher will have the opportunity to develop a closer rapport with respondents, which in turn will encourage trust and elicit richer, more accurate answers.

## Overview of Thesis Structure

This thesis comprises of six chapters. Following this introductory chapter, the rest of the manuscript will be structured in the following order:

Chapter 2 – *“Literature Review”*. This chapter reviews the literature providing insights into concepts, theories and themes related to the research project. The review of literature has four main interrelated parts: first, a summary of extant literature on the relationship between news media use and citizen participation, which underscores the participatory nature of social media and the mobilising potential of social news use; second, a survey of social presence literature from within the field of communication and information studies so as to understand its impact on individuals’ social news use behaviours; third, a discussion of the concept of self-presentation and information control, which not only outlines the dependence of one from the other, but elaborates their importance in influencing social news use. Finally, the chapter explores U&G literature in related CMC research, providing an overview of motivations that will lead to social news use.

Chapter 3 – *“Conceptual Model”*. This chapter will introduce the conceptual framework underpinning the thesis and develops the research questions and hypotheses for testing. The conceptual model is divided into three parts. Drawing from literature discussed earlier in Chapter 2, the first two parts are concerned with how individual and media factors influence social news use, whereas the third part focuses on how the characteristics of social news use in turn influence citizen participation.

Chapter 4 – *“Study 1”*. This chapter details the methodology, findings, and discussion of the first study undertaken for this thesis. This chapter aims to answer the research questions and

test the hypotheses developed in Chapter 3 through an analytical survey. The sampling frame and data collection method are introduced first, followed by the measures and data analysis process. Subsequently, the results are presented, and the implications of this study are discussed.

*Chapter 5 – “Study 2”*. This chapter presents the methodology, findings and discussion of the second study, which will be conducted on existing civically or politically engaged millennials. Through a series of in-depth interviews, this phase of the study is designed to validate the findings from the earlier survey and to describe the relationship between social news use and participation in greater detail. The chapter concludes by comparing and discussing the findings found between Study 1 and 2.

*Chapter 6 – “Conclusion”*. The final chapter discusses the findings in relation to the research aims underpinning the research questions and hypotheses. The thesis is then concluded by highlighting the implications of the combined results from both theoretical and practical standpoints, enumerating the limitations of the project, and providing directions for future scholarly work.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter is organised into four major sections: news engagement and citizen participation, social presence, self-presentation & information control, and uses & gratifications. The first section reviews definitions and conceptualisations of citizen participation before discussing the indirect process through which (social) news use is expected to shape it. The suitability of adopting Shah et al's (2007) Orientation-Stimulus-Reasoning-Orientation-Response (O-S-R-O-R) model into this project is explored here. This is followed by an overview of key theories and empirical work related to the antecedents of social news use – namely social presence theory, processes in self-presentation and information control, and U&G theory. The first two focuses on perceived characteristics of the platform itself whereas the latter takes a more psychosocial approach to understand the motivations possibly guiding engagement with news on social media. This chapter concludes with a summary explaining how the literature reviewed in each of the sections pertains to the conceptual research model that will be presented in Chapter 3.

### **News Engagement & Citizen Participation**

#### **Citizen Participation**

In political science, an early definition of participation was restricted to acts related to electoral activities such as voting or campaigning for a political candidate (Conway, 1985). Since then, the concept has been augmented to refer to activities that have “the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies” (Verba et al., 1995, p.

38). Following this conceptualisation, researchers have usually operationalised political participation as the frequency of involvement in activities such as attending a political rally, signing or distributing a petition for a candidate or an issue, working or volunteering for a political party, promoting a candidate, party or cause through the display of political paraphernalia, and contacting authority figures and government bodies (Brady, 1999; Delli Carpini, 2004; Kenski & Stroud, 2006).

For more than two decades, political observers and scholars have noted a deteriorating level of participation, particularly among the young adults cohort, in many developed countries (Delli Carpini, 2000; Dennis & Owen, 1997; H. K. Leong, 2000; Putnam, 2000; Zukin et al., 2006). They point to the decreasing voter turnout, distrust in government and mainstream press, and decline of involvement in government-linked organisations or institutions for consultative democracy. This disaffected citizen perspective tends to assume a top-down approach to citizenship, which may be a narrow or archaic means to understand what constitutes as political participation in contemporary societies (Griffin, 2005; B.D. Loader, 2007). In other words, we may have to “see beyond the formal political system”, including not just established patterns of political behaviour and attitudes, but also extra-parliamentary political engagement and commitments, with a focus on daily life, personal values, and single issues (Dahlgren, 2003, p. 164).

A handful of authors have explicated the evolving norms of citizen participation. Bennett (2008) posits that in many post-industrial democracies, there is a progressive shift in citizenship style, with people transiting from “dutiful” citizens to “actualising” citizens. Dutiful citizens (DC) make an effort to participate in government-sanctioned activities, vote, become more informed about politics and current affairs via the mass media, and generally sees government as

the site of politics. The older generation, in general, tends to exercise citizenship in terms of duty. Actualising citizens (AC), on the other hand, experiences political engagement on a more personal level, preferring instead to chart their own democratic agenda, for instance, through support for causes like environmental or animal rights, local volunteerism, and consumer activism (Bennett, 2005). In contrast to DC, they generally mistrust traditional top-down organisations and mass media, and get political information from peer-shared information sustained by interactive information technologies. Bennett's (2008) AC/DC model is consistent with Dalton's (2008) work on shifting citizenship norms, in which the latter suggests the terms "dutiful" and "engaged" citizens. According to Dalton, there are four dimensions to citizenship: public participation in politics, autonomy generated through access and deliberation of information, commitment to social order, and ethical and moral responsibility to others. He posits that all facets of citizenship norms, not the least of which is public participation, have changed. Conducting factor analysis on survey data, he finds that the dutiful citizen is oriented towards law and order, valuing institutional participation such as voting or serving on a jury, whereas the engaged citizen (EC) is aligned more towards liberal or communitarian ideals, favouring instead to be politically independent and is focused on single issues such as voluntary welfare aid.

In both Bennett's (2008) and Dalton's (2008) frameworks, younger citizens are identified as AC or EC because they are often excluded from the public discourses of government, policy arenas and elections. They feel disconnected from institutional politics; that which is discussed does not seem relevant to them personally, and hence are less inclined to be involved (Dahlgren, 2007). With this cohort, it is argued that we are witnessing a trend from the "politics of loyalty" to the "politics of choice" (Norris, 2004). As institutional expressions of citizenship – e.g. voting,

participation in government-centred activities – lose their appeal, an individualised, self-interested vision of engagement with public life becomes more pervasive and political interest groups give way to new norms of citizenship. This reconfiguration has “altered the *agencies* (the collective organisations structuring political activity), the *repertoires*, (the actions commonly used for political expression), and the *targets* (the political actors that participants seek to influence)” (Norris, 2002, p. 88).

Building upon the conceptual understandings in previous literature, this research acknowledges that citizen participatory behaviours can occur in both the political and civil domain. It will, however, as cautioned by Hustinx et al. (2012), refrain from assuming that all young citizens will align with new norms or favour direct forms of participation, thereby treating old and new as relatively tidy binaries, creating a dyadic model into which younger and older cohorts of citizens can be siloed. Indeed, regardless of citizenship style, the boundaries between civic and political activities can be quite porous. Putnam (2000), for instance, demonstrates a positive relationship between volunteering in grassroots events and political interest. From this he infers that people who volunteer are less cynical about political leaders and show a positive engagement with politics than those who do not volunteer.

Following the definition of Verba and colleagues (1995), participation at the political level in this study includes traditional top-down activities such as working for political groups, donating money to candidates, and attending a hearing or dialogue organised by the government. Voting, however, has been intentionally excluded as Singapore has universal suffrage and all citizens above the age of 21 are required to vote by law. Civic participation, on the hand, refers to individual or collective behaviour aimed at solving problems at the grassroots level or improving conditions for specific groups in society (Zukin et al., 2006). Fundraising for charity,



volunteering to help the needy, or being an active member of a welfare organisation or single-issue group (e.g. LGBT support and advocacy organisation) would fall under the purview of civic participation. By including different types of activities under the umbrella of citizen participation, I also acknowledge that different repertoires of participation may exist. Some may be inclined towards civic participation but are less active in political matters; others may be oriented towards political participation but less civically engaged; still others may be both politically and civically active.

### **Online & Offline participation**

With the advent of the internet and social media, new ways of participating in elections and public affairs have emerged (Chadwick & Howard, 2009). Many forms of traditionally offline participation may now be executed online, such as writing an email to a politician or signing and forwarding an online petition (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2010). Additionally, the internet has given rise to other forms of participation that are unique to the medium, such as posting or commenting on campaign rally videos, following and interacting with official SNS accounts of governmental or political institutions, and participating in online collective actions against or for certain policies (Vissers & Stolle, 2014; X. Zhang & Lin, 2014). Hence, many scholars have identified online political participation as a related but separate construct from offline participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2010; Oser et al., 2013; Skoric et al., 2009). Unlike traditional mass media, internet-based communication today provides new opportunities for participatory action because it has unique affordances, including the capacity to facilitate content co-creation (users are involved as producers in that they create, manipulate, and reassemble cultural products), immediate and widespread diffusion of (political) information, and decreased costs to

communicate and mobilise beyond one's immediate social network (Haynes & Pitts, 2009; Ward & Vedel, 2006). The possibility of connecting politically to others is arguably enhanced online through the lowered barriers to access and expression of information.

However, while online participation is arguably less resource intensive than offline participation (Vitak et al., 2011) – as they generally require less time, money, and commitment – related studies by Wellman et al. (2001) indicate that rather than undermining or supplanting interaction, the internet complements traditional modes of communication. The same can be suggested for political activities: online participation supplements traditional modes of participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2010). A growing body of scholarship has demonstrated support for this proposition by identifying how a range of activities online can provide for a convenient means of swift and coordinated mobilisation of political efforts (Postmes & Brunsting, 2002; Shah et al., 2005). Perhaps events during times of social unrest or upheaval demonstrate the positive relationship between new communication technologies and participatory behaviours most prominently. Based on a survey study involving over 1000 participants in Egypt's Tahrir Square protests, Tufekci and Wilson (2012) concluded that social media played a critical role in protest attendance, organisation of event logistics, and overall likelihood of the protests' success. Protestors used Facebook and Twitter, in tandem with telephone and face-to-face communication, to disseminate information about the events and transmit visuals of the demonstrations. Similarly in Singapore, Pang and Goh (2016) conducted an infield survey with participants involved in a peaceful protest against the government's immigration policy and found out that social media (blogs, Facebook, Twitter) was an important source of information about the event. More than half (61%) indicated that they learnt about the protest through social media and out of which, at least seven in 10 of them continued to promote

the event using the same platform. Given the context that there was a dearth of reportage of the protest from the national media until post facto, the authors concluded that informational use of social media played a critical role in informing and mobilising protestors.

While these studies underscore the potential of social media as a pathway to real-world political action in times of a crisis or unrest, the more general relationship between online and offline participation have also received much scholarly attention (George et al., 2014; Holt et al., 2013; Vaccari et al., 2015; Valenzuela, 2013; Valenzuela et al., 2009b; Yang & Dehart, 2016). In a mixed-method study involving content analysis of online political group pages and survey research of undergraduate students, Conroy and colleagues (2012) found a strong, positive association between increased levels of online political group participation and levels of offline political participation. However, they also failed to find a corresponding positive relationship between participation in online political groups and political knowledge, suggesting that other communicative behaviours (i.e. interpersonal and mediated discussion) mediated the effects of the site's influence on this political outcome. This finding was corroborated by a separate study conducted prior to the 2008 United States (U.S.) presidential election. Based on a national 2-wave panel survey conducted among young teenagers, Bode et al. (2013) found that political SNS use in the first half of the year strongly predicted traditional political engagement in the second half. This relationship held even after controlling for demographics, political identity, and various forms of news media use, including newspapers, television and online news websites.

It is necessary at this stage to indicate that this research is not suggesting that all forms of online activity will influence or engender participatory behaviours. Previous studies have produced conflicted findings when scholars deviated from deliberative uses of the internet. Kenski & Stroud (2006), for instance, studied the influences of internet access and online

exposure to political information and found that only the latter was significantly associated with offline participation. In yet another study prior to the 2008 U.S. presidential election, Zhang et al. (2010) found that reliance on social media was not significantly associated with measures of traditional political participation but with civic participation. Theocharis & Lowe (2015) recruited young Greek participants without a Facebook account and randomly assigned a subset to create and maintain an account for a year. In this study, the researchers combined various types of SNS activity – political and otherwise – into one combined measure. To the authors' surprise, participants reported lower levels of political and civic engagement following the experiment. All in all, the literature suggests that new media's political effects are highly conditional and that there is a need to move from examining it as a one-dimensional construct and focus instead on the type of use.

As the scholarship now stands, assumptions about the participatory consequences of online interaction need to be threaded carefully. Hence in this study, I intentionally focused on active forms of participatory behaviours, excluding actions that are related to consuming information about politics and current affairs. For online participation, this includes civic or political activities that are traditionally performed offline such as writing an email to the op-ed section of a newspaper or participating in an online petition, as well as activities that only take place in an online context, such as organising a social movement on social media, or starting or joining an online group to support a political or social issue. As will be elaborated in the following subsection, news media use or consumption in this study is considered a prerequisite of or a factor that influences civic or political participation, rather than a subset of citizen participation itself (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Mcleod et al., 1999).

## **News Media, Citizen Participation, and the O-S-R-O-R model**

Early work on media effects has found support for the “time displacement hypothesis”, demonstrating that heavy television consumption or internet usage is correlated with reduced participation in social, recreational, and community activities (Kraut et al., 1998; Nie, 2001; Putnam, 1995). According to this strand of literature, the media privatizes leisure time of individuals, and thus distracts them from social activities outside the home, including participation in civic or political causes. A competing body of studies, however, has posited that the influence of media on participatory behaviours is contingent upon the type of media content individuals consume and their individual attributes (Calenda & Meijer, 2009; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001; Tolbert & McNeal, 2003).

Indeed, there is a consensus now that news consumption – particularly news about politics and public affairs – has a positive influence on individuals’ involvement in political or civic activities (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012; Kim, 2007; Kim & Han, 2005; Norris, 2000). However, research evidence suggests this influence is indirect, passing through three intervening antecedents: knowledge, efficacy, and interpersonal discussion. Numerous studies have shown that public affairs knowledge is a corollary of news use and a predictor of civic and political engagement (e.g. Dimitrova et al., 2014; Kaufhold et al., 2010; Park, 1940; Weaver & Drew, 1995). Conversely, depressed levels of political knowledge have also been shown to contribute to lower levels of political participation among college students (Kaid et al., 2007). This is understandably so, as people need information in order to decide how to voice their concerns or participate in public life.

Public affairs knowledge in turn can stimulate feelings of efficacy, or the perception that “individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process”

(Campbell, et al., 1954, p. 187). Political efficacy is arguably an impetus for participatory behaviours because people who doubt their capacity to affect their political environment will tend to avoid opportunities for involvement. It is traditionally accepted that political efficacy comprises of two dimensions: (1) internal efficacy – the confidence about one’s own ability to understand politics, and to participate in political activities effectively, and (2) external efficacy – the perceived responsiveness of public officials and government institutions to citizen demands (Balch, 1974; Niemi et al., 1991). More recently however, the concept of political efficacy has been explored together with citizenship self-efficacy – individuals’ belief in undertaking specific tasks in the context of civic participation (Schulz et al., 2008; Solhaug, 2006). Findings from empirical studies strongly indicated that all three types of efficacy beliefs are closely related to various types of civic and political participation, including voting, contacting government officials, and joining an organisation for a political or social cause (Manganelli et al., 2014; Yang & Dehart, 2016). Thus, this study considers efficacy a three-dimensional construct, defining it as the beliefs about one’s own competence and the capacity of the electorate as a whole to engage in the social and political process.

On top of knowledge and efficacy, news media also provides a resource for discussion and creates opportunities for exposure to perspectives not readily available in one’s immediate community or social circles (Mutz, 2006), encouraging further discourse on issues that might not otherwise take place. The communication process among citizens is likely to further raise awareness about collective problems, underscore opportunities for involvement, foster further reflection and efficacious feelings about matters of public concern, and motivate participation in these issues (Klofstad, 2007; Walsh, 2004). Accordingly, a substantial body of empirical work has established the positive consequences of interpersonal discussion on various types of

community or political participation (W. W. L. Chan & Ng, 2017; Knoke, 1990; J. M. McLeod et al., 1999; Verba et al., 1995).

Both the aforementioned findings and theoretical explanations are consistent with the perspective of the Orientation-Stimulus-Reasoning-Orientation-Response model (Shah et al., 2007), which this study adopts as a baseline for part of the proposed research model explaining the effects of social news use on citizen participation. The Orientation-Stimulus-Reasoning-Orientation-Response (O-S-R-O-R) model builds on earlier research on the *communication mediation model* (McLeod et al., 1999), which posits that news media use and communication among citizens are important arbiters between pre-existing orientations and participatory behaviours. One of the strengths of the O-S-R-O-R model is the integration of two distinct yet related bodies of literature. From political science, it acknowledges that mass and interpersonal communication work in concert to facilitate information acquisition and dissemination through social networks (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). The model also draws upon the basic O-S-O-R framework from social psychology (Markus & Zajonc, 1985), which suggests that “internal states” (second Orientation, (O)), or the cognitions and attitudes that arise from media use, mediate Stimuli (S) and Response (R), and determines what “what stimuli are attended to and what stimuli are ignored” (p.138) (first O). The O-S-O-R model marks a shift in political communication research, from examining the media as a uniform platform which can mobilise participation, to placing more emphasis, and indeed discovering, that the incorporation of different politically related variables and interpersonal communication more closely reflect the role of media in public life (McLeod et al., 1994).

A traditional application of the O-S-O-R model uses the first “O” to represent socio-demographic antecedents and “R” as the behavioural outcomes. Such was the study of McLeod

et al. (1999), which included age, gender, education and income as the first “O”, local public affairs media use and discussion of local issues as “S”, political knowledge and efficacy as the second “O”, and offline participation in a local forum as the eventual response behaviour, “R”. Their findings showed that while exposure and attention to hard news on TV (S) did not predict participation in forums (R) directly, it nonetheless showed an indirect influence through interpersonal discussion, supporting the argument that elaborative information processing mediates the effects of mass communication. Subsequently, Shah et al. (2007) proposed the O-S-R-O-R model by distinguishing between “consumption” of information and its “expression”, with the latter becoming the first “R”. This new additional mediating step, known as the reasoning process, refers to both the intrapersonal and interpersonal cognitive processes that occur upon receiving the stimuli. According to this updated model, interpersonal discussion about public affairs is regarded as a reasoning behaviour. This is because mental elaboration (i.e. reflection on media content and composition of ideas for expression) is required during an exchange of opinions with others.

More recently, scholars have begun investigating the role of online political messaging as a reasoning process or behaviour. As discussed earlier, the internet, particularly social media, provides new avenues to interact with others politically. Sharing of perspectives and concerns with a much wider and geographically dispersed array of people is now possible through activities such as discussing politics or news events on online forums, posting comments on political blogs, and posting personal experiences related to politics or campaigning on SNS (Jaeho Cho et al., 2009; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). Cho et al. (2009) argued that because online political messaging is mediated, it provides an opportunity for an even stronger degree of elaboration due to the compositional effects associated with preparation for communication.



Other researchers have also supported this view by suggesting that the reasoning process could take place outside of a face-to-face discussion if individuals are invested in expressing and defending their perspectives (Delli Carpini, 2004; Lindeman, 2002).

Subsequent empirical tests lent credence to these assumptions. Min (2007) compared the effects of online and face-to-face deliberation in an experimental setting and found that both modes of discourse increase participants' issue knowledge, political efficacy and willingness to participate in politics. Later studies explicitly testing the model considered and operationalised media use as the passive consumption of content. Jung et al. (2011) demonstrated that the relationship between news media use (S) and offline and online political participation (second R) was mediated by both offline interpersonal discussion and online political messaging (first R) and internal political efficacy (second O). Focusing on social media, M. Chan et al. (2017) replicated this research across three Chinese societies (i.e. Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China) and produced very similar results, finding that social media political expression, offline interpersonal discussion, and political efficacy mediated the relationship between social media use for news and political participation. Gil de Zúñiga et al's (2014) two-wave study demonstrated that while both social media use for news and social media political expression contributed directly to offline participation later, expression was a stronger predictor.

All in all, the O-S-R-O-R model is a suitable framework in approaching the effects of social news use as it not only explicates the mediating variables between media use and citizen participation but also the order of these relationships. While the study's theoretical framework will be addressed in a more detailed manner in Chapter 3, it is useful to note at this stage how the model will be employed in this study and how it varies from preceding research. In the current research, sociodemographic variables and traditional mass media consumption pose the first set

of orientations (first O). Similar to earlier studies, these variables serve as statistical controls. Social news consumption would represent the stimulus (S), which is expected to lead people to interact with this information through means of offline interpersonal discussion and social news participation and production (first R). Unlike Jung and colleagues (2011) who have combined various types of online and offline news use into a single measure, this study focuses on social media as a news source after controlling for offline media use. In regards to the first R, I focus on specific activities in relation to the stimuli as a reasoning behaviour, excluding other forms of online or social media political expression/participation which can arise independently (e.g. “friending” a political advocate or politician). This offline and online discourse is then expected to alert them to novel information, thereby raising their public affairs knowledge and efficacy (second O), and finally leading them to greater involvement in citizen participation (final behavioural R).

So far, this chapter has discussed relevant literature explaining the indirect process through which social news use is expected to influence citizen participation. In the following sections, the chapter will focus on some of the possible antecedents of social news use. The next two sections will more specifically look at how structural media factors – social presence and information control – can contribute to news engagement on social media.

### **Social Presence**

One of the most seminal concepts relating media characteristics to user experiences is the concept of presence, which is defined as “a psychological construct dealing with the perceptual process of technology-generated stimuli”, regardless of whether the feeling is physical or otherwise (K. M. Lee, 2004, p. 30). Lombard and Ditton (1997) divided presence into six

dimensions, highlighting the multiple facets of virtual experience. Several scholars later collapsed these six subcomponents into two main categories: physical and social presence (Biocca et al., 2003; IJsselsteijn et al., 2000). Physical presence, also identified as telepresence, relates to the illusion of being physically present in one setting simulated by the medium (Slater, Usoh, & Steed, 1994), whereas social presence refers to the extent to which users perceive one or many others as being present in a mediated environment (Biocca et al., 2003). In other words, telepresence describes the sense of “being there” and is distinct from social presence, or the sense of “being together” by means of a communication medium. In IS research, social presence has often been considered a central design principle for social computing technologies, including Multi-User Dungeon (MUDs), e-mail, online chat, and online communities (Ijsselsteijn & Riva, 2003). In the field of CMC, a long line of research has suggested that SNS use is closely related to the formation and maintenance of social ties (boyd & Ellison, 2007; N. B. Ellison et al., 2007; Kalpidou et al., 2011; Steinfield et al., 2008). Thus, in this project I focus on the social aspect of presence – social presence.

An early theory addressing social presence directly was advanced by the Communication Studies Group at University College, London (Short et al., 1976). Under the original social presence theory, communication technologies are sorted in accordance with their capacity to transmit information on expressions, gestures, and vocal cues, and these characteristics in turn influence the awareness of the other person(s) in the interaction and consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships. This approach considered interpersonal communication, or face-to-face (FtF) interaction, the “gold standard” in social presence whereas predominantly text-based CMC would occupy a relatively low ranking, somewhere between the telephone and business letters (Spears & Lea, 1992). From this theoretical perspective, social presence is understood as

an objective property of a medium, derived solely from technical constraints or affordances. Following this unidimensional conceptualisation of social presence, most prior research studied and measured the construct as the extent to which a person perceives an interaction through a medium as impersonal-personal, unsociable-sociable, cold-warm, and insensitive-sensitive (e.g. Kumar & Benbasat, 2002; Qiu & Benbasat, 2005; Shen & Eder, 2011; Venkatesh & Johnson, 2002; Yoo & Alavi, 2001).

However, studies testing the basic tenet of the original social presence model has not consistently validated this construct as a stable property of a medium. For instance, Connell et al. (2001) examined the effectiveness of different media of communication and how they influenced interactions in the workplace. They noted that while power differences – a person’s position in the organisation relative to his or her interaction partner – did not influence communication patterns across media, the use of the telephone was associated with stronger feelings of social presence than FtF communication and instant-messaging. This suggests that social presence is also dependent on the subjective perceptions of media by individuals due to their “pre-existing attitudes, familiarity, and preferences” (Rice, 1984). Another study by Ijsselsteijn et al. (1998) found that the reported level of presence varied considerably over time depending on the image content and the extent of sensory information available in the stimulus material. Walther (1995) demonstrated that given time, interpersonal relationships developed online can achieve the same levels of intimacy as those developed in FtF – an indication of a strong sense of social presence. Heeter (2003) further argued that presence can be a learned experience and thus should be considered an experience that varies in a moment-to-moment fashion. Given the above, it is not surprising that the linear association between the number of social cues supported in a

communication medium and the degree of social presence experienced has been called for re-examination.

More recent work in CMC has developed social presence into a psychological variable that goes beyond the virtual presence of other social actors and includes the subjective experience of closeness and connectedness in mediated communications (Al-Ghaith, 2015; Biocca, 1997; Tu & McIsaac, 2002). Following a comprehensive review of social presence literature and its related studies, Biocca et al. (2001, p. 2) defined mediated social presence as:

the moment-by-moment awareness of the co-presence of another sentient being accompanied by a sense of engagement with the other . . . as a global, moment by-moment sense of the other, social presence is an outcome of cognitive stimulations (i.e., inferences) of the other's cognitive, emotional and behavioural dispositions.

The key difference between the original theory and this reconceptualisation is that social presence is now understood as a multi-dimensional social aspect of presence and is more focused on the properties of the communicative interaction rather than the specific attributes of the medium per se. According to these authors, social presence in online settings can be experienced on three distinct dimensions: 1) co-presence, 2) psychological involvement, and 3) behavioural engagement (Biocca et al., 2001, 2003). The first dimension – co-presence – delves primarily at the focal user's belief that other beings coexist in the same environment and are able to respond to him/her (Heeter, 1992). In online communities, an awareness of social others can develop peripherally through the reception of other users' statuses (e.g. online/offline, location check-ins, what he/she is doing), self-presentation features (e.g. avatars and display pictures), and participation in the form of postings. However, while the sense of co-presence is arguably a

prerequisite, it is not a sufficient condition to experience social presence wholly, since social presence can be experienced in both one-way and two-way communication situations (K. M. Lee, 2004).

The second dimension extends social presence beyond the peripheral sense of spatial co-presence to a user's awareness of relations among members, and includes the feeling that one has some level of access or insights into another's intentional, cognitive or affective states (Harms & Biocca, 2004). This aspect embodies the psychological aspects that are derived from social interaction (e.g., interpersonal relationships, empathy, and mutual understanding) and is consistent with Walther (1992)'s argument that while CMC is communicationally impoverished when compared to FtF interactions, impressions of and relations with others are still possible albeit at a slower rate of development. Similarly, other communication scholars have agreed that through virtual social interactions, users can develop cognitive and affective social presence – emotional connection and meaning about his/her relationship with others and the social space (Chang & Hsu, 2016; K. N. Shen & Khalifa, 2008). Lastly, while the first two dimensions are largely related to a phenomenal state, the behavioural engagement dimension refers to the sense of belief that all users' actions are linked, reactive, and interdependent (Biocca et al., 2001). This angle is not regularly studied or corroborated due to its presumed limited applicability to high-bandwidth media applications such as multi-player computer games and immersive virtual reality (Biocca et al., 2003). There is, however, empirical support to suggest that behaviour engagement can also be observed from reaction and interactivity rather than physical social cues (e.g., eye contact, nonverbal mirroring, and turn taking). Sivunen and Nordbäck (2015) performed a content analysis on a series of meetings conducted in a virtual environment and reported that behavioural engagement and psychological involvement were the most frequently

occurring social presence dimensions. In that study, high behavioural engagement was characterised in statements that alluded to dependence on others' feedback or a response to a query for help, whereas low behavioural engagement were coded in instances where there was a response lag or no response. Similarly, Han et al. (2015) conducted a cross-sectional survey of Twitter users and concluded that social presence on Twitter was influenced by immediacy of feedback and responsiveness of others. The sense of feeling that others are perceiving the focal user and being part of a group are therefore central to this dimension.

In sum, the literature above strongly suggests a shift in focus from technology-centred views and unidimensional approaches when it comes to understanding mediated social presence. Consistent with this, the current study defines social presence as the extent to which a social media platform facilitates the experience of being psychologically present with others and can be manifested via co-presence, psychological involvement, and behavioural engagement.

### **Influence of Social Presence on CMC usage**

Social presence has been widely employed to explain user behaviours or intentions in distributed or virtual environments. Early empirical investigations have found that undergraduates who rated e-mails and bulletin boards as more socially present were more inclined to use them and find them more helpful in learning (Perse et al., 1992). Gefen and Straub (2003) showed that the sense of social presence contributes to customer trust and purchase intentions with e-commerce websites. K. Shen et al. (2006) demonstrated that social presence contributes directly and indirectly to active participation (i.e., posts created, threads initiated) in online virtual communities. Similarly, findings from Miranda and Saunders's (2003) study indicated a positive effect of social presence on information sharing in CMC. All these studies demonstrate that such

a feeling of presence is an important impetus for active engagement online. However, a caveat is that they have adopted a broad or unidimensional conceptualisation of social presence (Short et al., 1976), which by itself may not accurately capture aspects of user experience within a virtual environment.

Indeed, with regards to the relationship between social presence and social media specifically, researches that have defined social presence simply as a sense of human contact have produced a set of conflicted findings. Some find that social presence has a significant positive effect on social media use (Cheung et al., 2011; C. Xu et al., 2012), while others find a lack of significance (Oliveira et al., 2016; Scholtz et al., 2017). Conversely, studies employing a more nuanced approach have produced more consistent evidence on the positive influence of social presence on social media users' behavioural intention or actual use. Following the approach advanced by Biocca et al. (2001), Lin et al. (2014) identified the first two levels of social presence as awareness and connectedness and found that both factors were strong determinants of a sense of belonging to SNSs, which in turn influenced intention to continue using it. Similarly, Al-Ghaith (2015) identified co-presence, intimacy, and immediacy as a function of social presence and found that these three factors had a positive impact on user attitude and usage behaviour on SNSs. B. Xu et al. (2011) focused specifically on co-presence and demonstrated its role in influencing the intention to continue using instant messaging applications. In a series of experiments conducted within a Facebook game application, Farzan et al. (2011) demonstrated that features which facilitated the salience of other individuals and/or a group identity increased users' commitment to the site and encouraged longer participation. The former condition was induced with features such as individual avatars, regularly updated scores of all individuals and opportunities for pairwise communication, whereas the latter was induced



with assigned group names and avatars, aggregated group scores, and group-oriented communication. Although not explicitly discussed in their study, their study also shows that designs which encourage relationships among members – such as those in the former condition – promote co-presence and psychological involvement, and designs which emphasise the community as an entity – such as those in the latter condition – encourage behavioural engagement. These facets of social presence in turn can be argued to contribute to users’ engagement to the site.

These findings also underscore the low barriers of entry and interactivity features within social media which afford a variety of capabilities to consume, post or share news and information (Lee & Ma, 2011; Leonardi, 2007). Most social media applications share key technological features that allow its users to represent themselves through public or semi-public profiles, articulate their social networks, and accumulate or maintain new ties with others (boyd & Ellison, 2007). In such applications, users are automatically notified about content updates from their network contacts through stream-based updates. This “running stream gives participants a sense of those around them” (boyd, 2010, p. 6). For instance, when users comment on news posted by a news outlet, this comment becomes public not only to other users who are subscribed to the news outlet’s social media page, but also to their social networks, forming more “open” communities through bounded contacts. Social media thus affords opportunities for co-presence whereby individuals regularly receive and broadcast information to their networks. In addition, social media applications also offer news audiences consuming similar content to interact with one another and establish communities of similar interest by transmitting bandwagon cues such as tags and hastags (Hwang & Lim, 2015). Tags are a feature in which a user can append the usernames of their social network contacts to a post in such a way that the

former will be notified that they have been included in that post. Hashtags on the other hand, are keywords of a post preceded by the pound sign (#). By using the hashtag, users can initiate, reply or follow conversations about a certain news topic because the hashtag automatically becomes a hyperlink on the said social media application. Any user who clicks on a hashtag has the possibility to view the content of all other posts that contains the same hashtag, thus allowing for easy following of any news topic with both pre-existing and latent contacts. Such conversational tagging “elicits social interaction and social links among people” (Hoang et al., 2011, p. 344), and can be argued to also contribute to the social presence of the medium.

It is important to mention at this point that because instant messaging applications like WhatsApp are a “closed” social network, it does not share the affordance of stream-based updates or conversational tags. In this regard, instant messaging should theoretically offer an inferior level of perceived social presence. However, instant messaging’s near-synchronous and private communication channels allow for deeper and more sustained exchanges between communication partners, emulating in-person conversations, and emphasising the presence of other users’ involvement or feelings of human contact, whereas more public social media platforms tend to support the exchange of shorter messages (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). Extant quantitative studies has largely supported this position, finding that the amount of instant messaging use is positively associated with affective and social intimacy (Hu et al., 2004; Karapanos et al., 2016). Similarly, through qualitative in-depth interviews, Skoric and Poor (2013) found that while young adult activists may use SNS for message amplification and mobilisation, they do not regard SNS as an ideal platform for meaningful discourse, preferring instead other platforms with more segregated audiences for political discussions. Hence it can be posited that regardless of the discrepancy in affordances between “open” or “closed” social

media platforms, users are still able to experience social presence in their respective communication medium.

Overall, social presence is likely to be a crucial construct to be facilitated, developed and sustained in relation to social news use as preceding studies have identified it as a key variable influencing online media use, including social media. More importantly, conceptualising social presence as properties of the communication interaction rather than a medium's capacity to simply support visual, aural, and contextual cues has been found to be more predictive of online engagement. The various communicative functions in social media facilitate awareness and affective exchanges between users, contributing to a much more fulfilling experience and thereby influencing users' participation in these platforms. Based on these, it is thus reasonable to consider social presence as a predictor of social news use in this study.

## **Self-Presentation & Information Control**

### **Self-Presentation**

Self-presentation refers to the process by which individuals engage in controlling for their *face*, or information about themselves which influences impressions others form of them (Goffman, 1959, 1967; Zizi Papacharissi, 2002). Self-presentation thus, is a goal-driven behaviour (Leary & Kowalski, 1990), a strategic effort to convince others to view them, or to continue to view them positively (Leary, 1996) and/or to present themselves in a way that is socially acceptable. In Goffman (1959)'s seminal work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, he conceptualised self-presentation as an ongoing process of information management and distinguished between expressions one *gives* (communication in the deliberate sense, e.g. choice of words) and the

expressions one *gives off* (presumably involuntary cues, such as non-verbal responses).

Expressions one gives is arguably easier to manage and manipulate than expressions one gives off. Additionally, he suggested that individuals are performers in a daily “information game”, presenting different facets of his or her real core self to different audiences based on the congruity between what is expressed and what is perceived to be idealised by the audience.

Through verbal and nonverbal acts such as tone of voice, posture, and physical attire, performers articulate some facts that might, otherwise be unapparent or obscure, thereby making the invisible visible, or divert an appreciable amount of energy from certain routines in order to express and communicate a particular public persona. In doing so, they also forego or conceal certain aspects that are inconsistent with the desired image perceived by that specific audience.

As the title of Goffman’s (1959) work suggests, self-presentation is part and parcel of everyday life and necessary for social interaction. This strategic communication of information about oneself that is not readily available is a vital aspect of relational development in interpersonal communication (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Hays, 1984). Both FtF and mediated self-disclosure are associated with a variety of beneficial outcomes in relationships, including goodwill (AliAlassiri et al., 2014), intimacy (Aron et al., 1997; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007), and certainty (Prisbell & Andersen, 1980; Tidwell & Walther, 2006). People are also motivated to engage in strategic self-presentation to enhance and manage their self-esteem derived from audiences’ positive feedback (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Conversely, a loss of control or unregulated face can result in unfavourable social encounters, such as embarrassment, relational tension, and ultimately social rejection (Binder et al., 2009; Tokunaga, 2011). As Goffman (1953, p. 311) argued, an awkward encounter arises when “there is too much variance between the role the actor (an individual) assumes and what is already known about the actor or what he comes

unwittingly to reveal about himself'. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that under normal circumstances, all individuals have a tendency to want to be well-received and will act accordingly to present favourable or appropriate images to others. The following subsection explores how these social mechanisms are preserved, if not magnified, in the context of social media.

### **Self-presentation in CMC**

As with other mediated communications, social media presents novel opportunities and challenges for self-presentation. One strand of related literature describing how the characteristics of a communication medium work in accordance with users' impression development intentions is Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal model of CMC. Consistent with the aforementioned literature, the hyperpersonal communication model assumes that all communicators (i.e. senders and receivers) in CMC innately desire to develop interpersonal impressions and posits two critical features that facilitate rather than limit this process: reduced communication cues and editability.

In the case of the former, the lack of nonverbal and social cues enables the communicator to contain the information exchanged to only aspects of themselves they wish to communicate (Zizi Papacharissi, 2002). Indeed, while individuals can attempt to make salient certain aspects of themselves in FtF interactions, they are disadvantaged as they have to dedicate some level of attention resources to monitor expressions given off – non-verbal or non-deliberate cues such as facial gestures, interruptions, and speech disfluencies (Walther, 2011). If the expressions given and given off do not complement each other, i.e., if the nonverbal contradicts the verbal, then positive self-presentation is compromised. In CMC, however, this potential disparity is easier to

manage as most of it takes place in physical isolation from the receivers. Further to that, Walther et al. (2015) argued that cognitive resources normally dedicated to managing expressions given off can now be reallocated to presenting oneself in an ideal and intended manner. Another channel characteristic of CMC pertaining to impression management is the affordance of editability. Many CMC applications offer some flexibility in planning and refining the content of a message before it is delivered, thereby potentially offering the users “unlimited time for editing (and) composing” (Hesse et al., 1988, p. 151). This relaxation of time constraints allows for more mindful and deliberative message composition compared to FtF situations where response latencies are likely to interfere with the conversational flow (Walther, 2011). Moreover, this affords senders greater control over what content is voluntarily shared by allowing them more time to contemplate and construct messages strategically in response to others’ feedback (Walther, 1996). Synchronous communication such as instant-messaging may vary in the degree to which editing may be executed inconspicuously. In such instances, interactants often have a shorter time allowance to construct a favourable message or response lest it results in conversational lags. However, in most of forms of CMC, there is a level of editability that is non-existent in FtF communication, where the words communicated can only be rectified through corrections or further clarifications on the preceding message rather than before it is emitted (Walther, 2007).

It is important at this stage to note that the original hyperpersonal perspective as introduced by Walther (1996) was primarily focused on text-based CMC. Nonetheless, other scholars have argued that the current prevalence of multimodal CMC, such as social media, also encourages strategic and positive self-presentation behaviours that “showcase” the self in an exclusively positive manner (Lyu, 2016; Qiu et al., 2012). In particular, Hogan (2010) compared

social media sites to exhibition spaces where users upload “artefacts” of themselves – in the form of images, videos, status updates, etc – to show to each other. This is similar to off-line personal exhibitions where one might find in someone’s personal space (e.g framed photos in homes); however, the distinction is that on social media, because the information is mediated via a third-party platform with a large user base, these presentations might be made available to non-intended recipients. More recently, Davis (2017) highlighted the emerging practices of consumptive and productive curation on digitally mediated platforms. The former refers to how users leverage on the affordances of the platform to limit the amount or type of information to which they are exposed to whereas the latter refers to how they manage their disclosure to others in turn.

These theoretical claims are consistent with empirical work across the world. Studies in western nations for instance have demonstrated that individuals tend to enhance or promote themselves on social media by curating their profiles, including through status updates, photos uploads, notes writing, and group joining (Collins & Stukas, 2008; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Tufekci, 2008). Similarly, Chinese social media users have also been reported to aspire to an ideal-self through their social media profile pictures (Shu et al., 2017). Specifically, insecurely attached users of both Sina Weibo and WeChat are more likely to use a dyadic photo of themselves and their partner as an impression management strategy to appear happier in their relationships. Gosling et al. (2007) examined Facebook profiles of college students and found a correlation between how users portrayed themselves and how they were perceived by their close acquaintances. They concluded that students were inclined to show certain types of personality that were generally interpreted as positively valanced (e.g. “emotionally stable”, “open to new experiences”), whilst maintaining reasonable credibility. Other scholars have proposed that

individuals use other implicit means, such as the regular maintenance and articulation of one's connections within the social network – otherwise referred to as “public display of connections” by boyd and Ellison (2007, p. 213) – to deliver a statement about their identity through the company they keep (boyd, 2007; Liu, 2007; Tong et al. 2008). Rather than supplanting or undermining it, these features thus run parallel with text-based information to support the construction of a desirable image. Put together, the scholarship not only suggests that people would engage in different types of self-presentation to help them maintain an appropriate or desirable image on social media, but also indicates that social media is no less editable or malleable than text-based only communication. Through this perspective, social media may even present a heightened level of control over self-provided information (SPI) (Rui & Stefanone, 2013b).

However, it has also been pointed out that the current CMC environment is a multi-source environment (Ramirez & Walther, 2009). Online, entities and individuals are not the only sources of information about themselves. For instance, shopping and travel websites now allow users to post reviews about products or places of interest. In the context of social media, users can by default contribute information to other users' profile pages directly, by posting texts or images on each other's “walls”, and as well as indirectly, by publicly responding to one another's status updates or tagging digital content of each other. On SNSs such as Facebook, when a user is tagged in a picture or mentioned in a status update, the content becomes visible on his/her timeline, making it visible to all connections in his/her network. Even if that individual is not tagged by the original uploader of the content, Facebook's “tag suggestion” feature may suggest his/her name to others, based on tagging and facial recognition algorithms (Butcher, 2013). Similarly, on microblogs such as Twitter, social tags (e.g. quote-tweets, retweets) of



messages by users with public accounts may reveal the topic of an otherwise exclusive or private tweet. The information derived from these interactions – known as other-provided information (OPI) (Rui & Stefanone, 2013b) – is considered problematic for strategic and positive self-presentation because the content may contradict the carefully constructed image users themselves have tried to portray (Besmer & Lipford, 2010; A. Smock, 2010).

Additionally, it has also been pointed out that while networked technologies such as social media have given individuals the opportunity to maintain connections with several social groups simultaneously, the same affordance has resulted in the blurring of social contexts (boyd, 2008; Marwick & Boyd, 2011). As discussed earlier, Goffman (1959) regarded social interaction as a performance. A corollary of this dramaturgical approach is the assumption that each social sphere represents an audience for the demonstration of self (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998), including aspects of the self that are contextually appropriate for a specific audience (Zizi Papacharissi, 2012). Traditionally, individuals use temporal and spatial boundaries to segregate incompatible social realms, such as colleagues and non-work friends, and may even purposefully organise their activities to prevent them from overlapping. This separation enables individuals to adapt to expectations of different audiences effectively and comply with their respective social roles. As Leary (1996, p. 109) pointed out, “by keeping different targets away from one another, people can avoid the awkwardness of trying to present disparate images of themselves to two or more targets simultaneously.” In online settings, however, particularly social media, there is a tendency towards aggregating multiple formerly distinct social groups or audiences into a single space or homogenous mass (e.g. “Friends”) – a process known as multiple online audience problem (MOAP) (Marder et al., 2016) or “context collapse” (Marwick & boyd, 2011). By

subjecting individuals to the constant surveillance of a heterogeneous network with varying expectations, MOAP thus complicates expectations of appropriate behaviours.

Research has highlighted a range of technical and social strategies social media users employ to address these challenges. Firstly, individuals may leverage on the features of the application to limit the audience for content. These include actions such as the creation of “lists” that allows users to create groups and restrict their access to specific pieces of information, and as well as the deletion or blocking of audience members from one’s network (Litt, 2013; Marwick & boyd, 2014). The use of these tools ostensibly allows for the creation of deterministic rules that govern what self-provided text and image-based information is shared or replicated. In addition, other authors have also found that users actively ‘self-cleanse’ by removing unwanted OPI linked to their account through means of untagging or deletion of content (Madden, 2012; Marder et al., 2016; A. Smock, 2010). A more drastic strategy dealing with MOAP is the “lowest common denominator” approach (Hogan, 2010), whereby users limit all self-initiated communication to information that is acceptable to all members of the network. Users of this strategy ‘self-censor’ content they disclose about themselves with their audiences in mind – or more specifically, the standards of their strictest audiences (Lampinen et al., 2009; Vitak et al., 2015). This results in less specific disclosures and overall content shared on the platform.

### **Information Control & CMC Usage**

So far, the preceding overview illustrates how individuals are concerned with how they present themselves online and will leverage on the affordances of the medium to manage the impressions others form of them. Specifically, these impression management behaviours can be observed in

the way users manipulate an application's features to either reveal positive SPI or mitigate unfavourable information about themselves from being shared (Rui & Stefanone, 2013a, 2013b). Additionally, the literature suggests that if individuals believe they are unable to control the reach of their disclosure, it is likely they will withdraw from use or reduce the amount of information revealed. These expectations are consistent with Feaster's (2010) Feaster (2010)'s conceptualisation of information control, which refers to individuals' perceived abilities to disclose information they wish to express and restrict the flow of information they wish to keep private when using various mediated communications.

Feaster's (2010) understanding of information control as a media affordance builds off earlier work from O'Sullivan (2000), who posited that individuals would select different interpersonal communication channels depending on how helpful or hindering the use of the medium is in the management of difficult social situations. Accordingly, in an experimental study involving various communication media (i.e. telephone, answering machine, e-mail, and letters), the latter found that respondents preferred mediated forms of communication over FtF when their own impressions were expected to be threatened. Consistent with Walther's (1996) viewpoint, O'Sullivan (2000) explained it was because the slower rate of information exchanged in these channels afforded users better control over expressing what is desirable to their image (face supporting) and concealing what is damaging (face-threatening). However, while O'Sullivan's (2000) findings does underscore how channel features can support individuals in regulating information, one caveat in his research is the assumption that individuals already possess the need and ability to utilise them. As Dutton (1996, p. 9) explained, "technologies can open, close, and otherwise shape social choices, although not always in the ways expected on the basis of rationally extrapolating from the perceived properties of technology". Recognising this,

Feaster (2010) proposed studying the affordance of information control beyond just the resources available in a communication environment. Instead, he argues, attention should be directed towards incorporating users' perceived efficacy in exploiting these features to express or withhold social information exchanged during interactions.

In this approach, information control thus comprises of two dimensions: expressive information control and privacy information control (Feaster, 2013). Expressive information control is conceived as the ability to manage the flow of information revealed/expressed as needed when using a medium. Specifically, this dimension focuses on how information control facilitates positive self-presentation by taking into account how much a user is able to present information that supports his/her positive face concerns, keep interactions in line with intentions, perceive and react accordingly to situational demands, and adjust the pace and flow of interactions in a medium. On the other hand, privacy information control refers to one's ability to prevent or restrict information from being shared in an interaction as required. This dimension is primarily concerned with mitigating negative face concerns (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and as such, the focus is on *social privacy* rather than *institutional privacy*, where the former refers to how individuals protect themselves from other users and the latter refers to how commercial agents such as marketers collect, store and process available social media user data (Raynes-Goldie, 2010). In addressing social privacy, it is argued that those who perceive a greater sense of privacy information control in a medium recognise how to contain both the breadth and depth of content disclosed during interactions, limit unintended thoughts and emotions from being expressed, and avoid or exit an interaction when necessary efficaciously (Feaster, 2010).

Employing this operationalisation of information control on a study conducted on college students, Feaster (2010) found that greater expressive information control perceived over CMC

(e-mail and IM) and traditional channels (telephone) positively predicted respondents' selection in recalled interactions. His work not only provides greater explanatory power to the aforementioned literature that argues how CMC can be used as a tool for managing self-relevant information but also indicates how that its usage may also be contingent on individuals' ability to exploit these features. A more recent research by Kuo et al. (2013) corroborated with this perspective. In their study of SNSs, the authors found that both expressive and privacy information control had a positive and direct effect on its usage. Conversely, a perceived lack of control over disclosure has been shown to influence the volume and type of content shared on social media. For instance, Staddon et al. (2012b) showed that Facebook users who reported less control and comprehension over sharing of information were also less likely to be engaged on the platform across several measures, including frequency of visits, posts, comments, and "likes". Similarly, Brandtzæg et al. (2010) found that young adults' active engagement with privacy tools on Facebook attenuated their privacy concerns compared to those of older generations and this in turn led them to share more about themselves on the platform. While extant published research has not investigated the effects of information control on social news use directly, this affordance is arguably more relevant to those who also use the same platform to engage with materials that are potentially contentious. Prior work in political communication has consistently revealed that young adults' awareness of context collapses on social media led them to employ similar technical and social strategies as mentioned above (e.g. limit sharing of political content to private groups; self-censorship) (Hayes, et al., 2015; Storsul, 2014; Weiyu Zhang, 2013).

As this discussion reinforces, because virtually every social situation presents an opportunity or threat to face concerns, individuals are constantly engaged in managing what

aspects of the self is emphasised or concealed. The need for this management is present in both FtF and CMC contexts, including social media. In these situations, people are more likely to use a medium if it provides them with controls that meets their needs for expression and privacy. In other words, “The greater degree of information control a medium affords an individual through use, the greater will be that individual’s expected satisfaction with the result, and hence, the individual’s preference for using that medium” (Feaster, 2010). Thus, based on this, it is reasonable to consider information control as key variable to be studied in relation to social news use.

It is important to point out that while the literature so far describes how the characteristics of technology may influence engagement in social news use, it may not per se be sufficient to explain individuals’ social news use behaviour. Indeed, the abundance of studies demonstrating how individuals use various CMCs effectively to meet similar communication and relational goals behoves researchers to include the focus of inquiry from technology characteristics to the people who use these technologies (e.g. Ellison et al. 2006; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Papacharissi, 2002; Walther, 2007). Therefore, to complement the scholarly body of work in social presence and information control discussed thus far, the present study intends to integrate the influence of individual factors into the current research model. Specifically, this study will also incorporate the theory of U&G.

### **Uses & Gratifications**

One of the most dominant theories addressing the relationship between human factors and media usage behaviours is the uses and gratifications theory (UGT) (Katz et al., 1973). More specifically, UGT seeks to understand how psychological dispositions and sociological factors

shape media use, which in turn influences the effects of the medium or content itself (Blumer & Katz, 1974). Under this approach, media users are characterised as goal-directed (Stanley & Davis, 2006), deliberately interacting with the media and interpreting the messages they receive for their own benefit (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 2007). In this study, gratification is explored as a motivation. Motivation includes both effort (which is related to need) and direction (which refers to the processes and structures that engenders action towards satisfying a need (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Reeve, 1997). Motivation can thus be understood as that which instigate or sustain activities (Medalia & Brekke, 2010) or the product of an interaction between needs, cognitions, and emotions (Reeve, 1997). While various typologies have been developed to describe media users' motivations, they are often either instrumental or ritualised (Perse, 1990; Alan M. Rubin, 1984; C. Xu et al., 2012). Instrumental motivations reflect needs that are obtained through the functional aspect of media usage, such as knowledge and understanding when giving or receiving information through participation in virtual communities, whereas ritualised motivations takes into consideration the emotional benefits derived from the process (i.e. pleasure, diversion from problems and routines) (Rafaeli & Ariel, 2008).

There is a consensus among U&G scholars on the assumptions of this user-oriented theoretical approach (e.g. Katz et al., 1974; Palmgreen, 1984; A.M. Rubin, 2009). First, media consumers are active participants in the communication process. While actual media activity may vary across individuals, media consumers are presumed to take the initiative in selecting their media fare and its accompanying effects. Second, individuals are motivated to engage in specific communicative behaviours because they anticipate and form expectations of the media and its contents to coincide with their interests. In other words, the deliberate choices people make in using media are based on the perceived gratifications from such use. Third, people's

psychological characteristics and social settings – such as personality, social status, involvement in social groups and relationships – shape media choices and gratifications. Fourth, the approach also recognises that media usage does not exist in a vacuum. People deliberately make a choice from other available communication or functional alternatives, including those that don't involve media exposure, for attention and use. Finally, the users themselves play a more pivotal role in the media effects process than the media itself. While the communication vehicle is the means in which information is received and transmitted, individual differences – such as motivations – will cause each person to seek and use media content differently, thereby resulting in varying attitudinal and behavioural consequences. The key difference between UGT and other classical media effects approaches thus is that in the case of the former, audiences are expected to actively engage in media sources to satisfy their respective needs, whereas in the latter, the audience are characterised as passive targets of media messages (Bryant et al., 2013).

U&G research began as early as the 1940s in an attempt to identify and develop a categorisation of individuals' motives in traditional mass communication channels. For example, Berelson (1949) interviewed why people missed reading newspapers during a newspaper strike and concluded that, after controlling for economic status, readers' needs to be informed about and to interpret public affairs, to be guided for daily living, to escape from personal problems, to appear informed in social situations, and to feel connected to people in the news motivated this activity. Rubin (1979) identified six adolescent television viewing motivations – learning, passing time, companionship, escape, arousal, and relaxation. In addition, his findings demonstrated that audience members orient themselves to not just the medium but content; for instance, arousal motivation was positively associated with viewing of dramatic programmes while passing time and escapist motivations predicted viewing of comedy programmes.



Similarly, a study involving a talk radio programme concluded that individuals who called in to participate not only spent more time listening to the show but were more likely to be driven by motivations of relaxation, entertainment, information-seeking, and convenience than non-callers (Armstrong & Rubin, 1989). These findings suggest that distinct motivations can lead to different behavioural engagements with the same medium.

However, while UGT was originally developed to identify the underlying motivations behind traditional media use, its theoretical relevance is particularly poignant in the age of the internet. In contrast to traditional media, information from web-based applications are more likely to be intentionally consumed, as users must make conscious decisions about not only which platform to visit but also how they will interact with the content (Y. H. Chen & Corkindale, 2008; T. J. Johnson & Kaye, 2000). As argued by Ruggiero (2000), the U&G notion of the active user is strengthened in online communication because its tools allow for greater customisation of content received and the flexibility of roles between communicator and recipient. One of the earliest studies investigating the relationship between personal motivations and internet usage was by Kaye (1998). He found that entertainment, social interaction, passing, escape, information, and website preference was positively associated with various attitudinal and behavioural outcomes of internet use, including time spent, affinity, and perceived realism. Later studies by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) and Ferguson and Perse (2000) also produced similar results. In addition, other researchers have indicated that different expected gratifications can lead to different activities on the internet. Sun et al. (2008), for instance, observed that information-seeking motivation positively predicted internet web-browsing whereas convenience and interpersonal control motivation predicted the use of e-mails. Similarly, Ko et al. (2005) discovered that people with strong motives to seek information are more likely to engage in user-

to-content activities (i.e. click into deeper links) on a website than those who had strong motives for social interaction, who were more likely to engage in user-to-user activities (i.e. participate in customer discussions).

In the last decade, the common motives behind social media use have also been thoroughly investigated and well established in existing literature (Dogruer et al., 2011; Joinson, 2008; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Ross et al., 2009). For example, Quan-Haase and Young (2010) conducted a factor analysis of gratifications obtained from Facebook and found six categories of motivations: past-time, affection, fashion, share problems, sociability and social information. These findings were later corroborated by Ku et al. (2013), who reported that people primarily sought amusement and relationship maintenance gratifications on SNSs, followed by information-seeking, sociality, and style. Similar motivations are found in studies that focus on microblogging applications such as Twitter. Chen (2011) and Han et al. (2015) demonstrated how Twitter allows people to gratify their social connection needs, which in turn influenced their continued usage intentions or frequencies. Lee and Kim (2014) classified Twitter use motivations into four groups, namely surveillance, network expansion, intrapersonal and relationship maintenance. In the same study, different motivations were found to predict different social media usage behaviour. Specifically, those who had a stronger surveillance motivation were found to have spent more time on Twitter and maintained a larger “follower”/“following” list, whereas those who were using the platform for network expansion posted tweets and retweeted others’ posts more frequently.

In sum, preceding U&G studies have demonstrated support for the assumption that individuals are active in their media selection and they engage with communication technologies to fulfil their varying needs. This is particularly so for internet-based communication, which

unlike mass media of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, affords its users interactivity, asynchronicity, and demassification (i.e. greater control of the individual over content) (Ruggiero, 2000). Moreover, the literature also suggests that to fully grasp the mechanisms and effects of media use, care must be taken to identify both the content and the usage of the media itself. Hence, in the following subsection, we shall focus on U&G particularly in the context of news media use.

### **Gratifications & News Use**

Prior to social media, numerous studies in mass communication have applied UGT to explore what motivational factors drive individuals to seek news content (Henningham, 1985; McLeod & McDonald, 1985; Perse, 1992; Vincent & Basil, 1997; Walter, 1978). The most common motivation observed in this stream of research is information and social utility. McQuail et al. (1972) suggested that political news on television is able to fulfil audiences' various instrumental needs, including general awareness of the political environment, reinforcement of existing decisions, and anticipated utility in interpersonal issue discussions of politics and community issues. More recent research has confirmed the value of this perspective (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2004; Eveland, 2001), finding that surveillance, anticipated interaction, and guidance gratifications were positively associated with reliance or attention to news content on television and newspapers. The influence of this motivation held even after controlling for demographic variables. In general, this body of research highlights that news consumers can be actively seeking content to exploit. However, some researchers have argued that because news consumers often consult a repertoire of sources, there is also a trend towards "news grazing" – periodically checking in on the news without a particular motive in mind (Morris & Forgette, 2007). In such stances, news consumption may be motivated by a need to pass time or to take a break from

everyday routines. Accordingly, a study by Diddi and LaRose (2006) found that while information-seeking needs demonstrated a consistent positive association with news consumption across various forms of media, escapism needs also predicted consumption of “depth coverage” news, which included both television (e.g. The News Hour) and print (e.g. The Wall Street Journal) sources.

It is necessary at this stage to point out that while the aforementioned studies do provide some understanding of what social and psychological needs motivate audiences to engage with certain news media channels, its focus on traditional media consumption may no longer be sufficient in the current new media environment. As mentioned in the first chapter, news engagement has taken new online forms with the rise of the internet, particularly with the advent of social media; social media has allowed individuals to transit effectively from passive consumers of news content to active producers by lowering the threshold in seeking, creating, and distributing information (Glynn et al., 2012). It is thus more productive to understand how different kinds of motivations influence specific social news use activities, which may in turn provide better insight into the outcomes of these communication activities.

In contrast to the generic use of social media, the motivations for the use of social media in the context of news are not as often explored. An early study in this direction was conducted by Hanson & Haridakis (2008), who investigated how individual dispositions, including motives, influenced viewing and sharing of traditional news videos (e.g. segments of CNN, ABC, local newscasts or videos of actual events) on YouTube. A factor analysis identified four categories of motivations: information-seeking, leisure, interpersonal expression, and companionship. However, further regression analyses revealed that only information-seeking motives predicted news viewing whereas interpersonal expression motives predicted news sharing. A more recent

study by Choi (2016) distinguished motivations of more nuanced news-related activities on SNSs. According to this strand of literature, the motivation of “surveillance” and “socialising” were found to be significant determinants of news reading, posting and endorsing activities, whereas the motivation of “getting recognition” was reported to be positively associated with news posting activities only. His work corresponds largely to the motivations of social media use Lee and Ma (2011) identified among Singaporean college students: information-seeking, socializing, entertainment and status-seeking. In the latter, the researchers found out that only respondents who were seeking entertainment gratifications were unlikely to share news on social media. Similarly, Holton et al. (2014) pointed out that by sharing links to latest news and information to their followers on Twitter, individuals were seeking to gratify both social and informational needs. These studies not only affirm the appropriateness of applying UGT in understanding social news use, but also indicate that social news use may no longer be observed as a homogenous process but as a heterogenous one. Multiple motivations, rather than a single one, is likely to contribute to an individual engaging in a certain social news use activity. In addition, while the extant research provides crucial clues to the effect of gratifications on social news use, one caveat about these works that the authors have defined news in relatively simple terms such as information and stories relating to recent events or issues that are reported by mainstream media journalists. This is an oversight as related research on online news consumption have shown that different motivations drove exposure to different news content (Diddi & LaRose, 2006; Zhang & Zhang, 2013), which in turn could influence their news-related activities on social media.

The studies reviewed above also indicate that the diverse functions afforded by social media serve to gratify news users’ needs differently (Nie & Erbring, 2000). More specifically,

this review of UGT and its related studies suggest four common motivations for participating in social news use: information-seeking/surveillance, socialising, status-seeking, and entertainment. In this study, information-seeking refers to the extent in which participating in social news use is able to provide desirable information and fulfil the desire to learn (Nambisan & Baron, 2009). Socialising is related to how social news use is able to gratify people's intrinsic need to form and maintain relationships with others through its range of communicative functions (S. Han et al., 2015). Status-seeking describes how social news use can help one to gain acceptance and approval from other users, or improve his/her social status within the community by contributing to it (Dholakia et al., 2004a). Entertainment refers to hedonistic gratifications such as escape and diversion from reality (Shao, 2009).

In sum, this chapter first offered an overview of prior studies explicating the positive relationship between news media use and citizen participation. In particular, the literature demonstrates support for the O-S-R-O-R framework of communication effects, showing that the influence of news media on participatory behaviours is largely mediated by knowledge, interpersonal discussion, and efficacy. Subsequently, this study proposed to apply the O-S-R-O-R model in understanding the effects of social news use by identifying social news consumption as a stimulus, and news participation and production as a reasoning process. Next, this chapter reviewed related work in social presence theory, self-presentation and information control, and as well as UGT to assess and posit its suitability in explaining social news use behaviour. By applying social presence theory and information control, this study attempts to highlight the environmental factors that facilitate or deter involvement in social news use. To complement these theories, the present research further incorporates UGT to understand how individual needs – namely, information-seeking, socialising, status-seeking, and entertainment – produces

different behavioural outcomes with social news. Based on the four theoretical approaches, the present research aims to propose a conceptual model in explaining the antecedents and effects of social news use. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPTUAL MODEL**

This chapter presents the conceptual model that the current research applies to understand the antecedents and effects of social news use. Discussion on the conceptual model will be divided into four main sections: (1) the effect of social presence on social news use, (2) the effect of information control on social news use, (3) the effect of perceived gratifications on social news use, and lastly, (4) the indirect influence of social news use on citizen participation based on the O-S-R-O-R approach. In each section, I will, based on theoretical arguments or empirical work, discuss how each respective construct relates to social news use or each other. In doing so, the research questions and hypotheses concerning these potentially influential factors will be proposed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the overall research design adopted, and how it serves to test the assumptions laid out.

### **Social Presence**

As discussed in Chapter 2, this study adapts the definition from preceding research and regards perceived social presence as properties of the communication interaction, or more specifically, the extent to which a medium facilitates the experience of co-presence, psychological involvement, or behavioural engagement (Biocca et al., 2001, 2003). The influence of perceived social presence on user behaviours or intentions has been widely examined in a range of social media contexts. For instance, Al-Ghaith (2015) observed social presence as co-presence, intimacy, and immediacy respectively and found that these experiences positively influenced user attitude and behaviour on SNSs. Similarly, Xu et al. (2011) demonstrated the importance of



co-presence in influencing intention to continue using IM applications. Han et al. (2015) looked at behavioural engagement on Twitter and found that receiving rich and relevant responses in a timely manner influenced a communicator's perception of social presence. Their study also revealed that respondents who reported feeling higher levels of social presence were more satisfied with their connectedness to other people, which resulted in a greater intention to continue using Twitter.

These findings are possibly due to the user-friendly interfaces within social media, which by lowering the barriers to interact with other individuals and establish communities of shared interests, cultivates psychological proximity among users (Joyce, 2010; Shirky, 2009). This is particularly so for the context of social news use, in which the platform not only facilitates the awareness of other individuals' news-related involvement through stream-based updates, but also promotes interactivity by allowing social news users themselves to share their own opinions and emotional reactions when consuming news content. Unlike traditional media, this interaction varies from a reactive process (e.g. "liking" or "favouriting" other users' news postings) to a more proactive process (reproducing news-related content with comments in the form of a wall post) (Choi, 2016). Such affective exchanges arguably evoke a sense of connectedness and psychological closeness between users (Ellison et al., 2014). This in turns contributes to a much more pleasurable or fulfilling experience, thereby influencing users' behavioural intentions or actual usage. Hence the present study expects social presence to be a key determinant of news-related activities on social media. However, because social news use encompasses a range of activities, it would be inefficient to postulate a directional hypothesis for each of them. Instead, the following research question is raised:

RQ 1: How is perceived social presence associated with social news use (news consumption, participation, and production)?

### **Information Control**

Earlier studies have suggested that individuals are inclined to engage in self-presentation processes to gain social rewards or avoid social stigmas (DePaulo et al., 1996; Goffman, 1959). This impression-management behaviour can be categorised into two primary actions of information control in in-person communications: 1) revealing or highlighting desirable aspects of one's own identity and 2) concealing potentially stigmatizing information (Goffman, 1963). Consistent with this, Feaster (2010) framed information control as a media affordance – expressive and privacy – taking into consideration one's perceived efficacy to effectively utilise the features of the medium to express or withhold information as required. Accordingly, Feaster (2010)'s research discovered that the greater expressive information control was reported for a communication medium (e.g. IM, email), the more likely individuals would select it in face-threatening situations. A subsequent study has confirmed the value of this perspective (Kuo et al., 2013), demonstrating that both expressive and privacy information control perceived on SNSs positively influenced its usage.

Aside from the two notable studies mentioned above, there is a dearth in research explicitly testing the affordance of expressive and privacy information control in the context of social media. However, related studies in online impression management have also lent support to this perspective. For instance, Mehdizadeh (2010) and Young (2009) showed that Facebook users actively self-promoted themselves by intentionally selecting appealing or edited photos of

themselves for their profiles, or revising text in features such as Status Updates to construct a particular or positive quality. Similarly, Qiu et al. (2012) concluded from both self-reported and observer data that social media users tend to disclose more positive than negative emotional experiences online so as to evoke a better impression of their emotional well-being. Other work in this area has examined the use of more implicit means, such as the inclusion of a large number of photos with others (Zhao et al., 2008), or actively curating and displaying their friendship links (Donath & boyd, 2004), so as to construct an active social image. These studies provide evidence that individuals will capitalise on technological affordances to disclose positive SPI relevant to the interests of their intended audiences in a social media environment. It is therefore reasonable to presume that within a social news use context, features which support identity construction through news engagement can also influence its use. For instance, the “share” function available on most social media platforms can facilitate one’s aspiration or efforts to maintain an impression of being an opinion leader – a broker of news and information – to his or her network (Ma et al., 2014). Therefore, the second research question the present study poses is:

RQ 2: How is perceived expressive information control associated with social news use?

At the same time however, some scholars have argued that social media users, including young adults, are concerned with their privacy online and are actively ensuring that the system does not overexpose their disclosed data beyond their desired boundaries (Y. J. Park, 2013; Zhao et al., 2008). Specifically, several studies have shown that users’ privacy concerns were inversely associated with both the amount and depth of information they shared on these platforms (Krasnova et al., 2010; Ng, 2016; Staddon et al., 2012), and had an indirect influence on continuance intent (Huang et al., 2017). This is arguably so for individuals who engage in materials or participate in activities that could be perceived as contentious. As a participant from

Storsul (2014)'s study on politically-engaged young adults revealed, "On Facebook I say less than I usually do." (p.24). Her unwillingness to run the risk of receiving negative feedback or criticism from others with discordant political views underscores young adults' awareness of MOAP.

On a similar note, other empirical studies have also suggested that such selective information disclosure behaviours – i.e. "lowest common denominator approach" (Hogan, 2010) – decrease once a user is cognisant and experienced in utilising the site's tools to control the audience of their content (Brandtzæg et al., 2010; Stutzman & Kramer-Duffield, 2010; Vitak, 2012). Jeong and Coyle (2014) found that young SNS users who were concerned about information breach to authority and distant connections tended to use SNSs more. While this might seem contradictory to the literature above, the same study also reported that heavy SNS users were also actively engaged in protective behaviours online – including changing privacy settings, and untagging or deleting content. Another study by Litt (2013) corroborated with this finding, demonstrating that individuals with a higher intensity of social media usage also used more technological privacy tools. Put together, the studies suggest that while audience-related privacy concerns are an inhibitor of social media usage, these concerns can be mitigated by the perceived ability to contain personal information. Accordingly, the third research question is advanced:

RQ 3: How is perceived privacy information control associated with social news use?

## **Gratifications**

While the arguments in first two sections were largely based on perceived capabilities allowed by the communication channel, this section takes a more psychosocial approach to explore how cognitive factors can lead to divergent practices in social news use. To this end, the uses and gratification (U&G) framework provides a useful conceptual base in understanding how the media is deliberately exploited by individuals for the purpose of achieving some desired end or satisfying some need (Katz et al., 1973). Since the turn of the millennium, U&G work in a range of internet-based media services, including online news and information sources (e.g. Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000; Johnson & Kaye, 2010; Zhang & Zhang, 2013), as well as social media and online forum sites (e.g. Ku et al., 2013; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Richardson, 2003) have instantiated this perspective. Building on the literature review in Chapter 2, the present research investigates how the perceived gratifications of information-seeking, socialising, status-seeking, and entertainment are associated with news engagement on social media.

### **Information-Seeking**

Information-seeking is a time-honoured motivation frequently identified in media use research – although not necessarily the most pre-eminent one – and is regarded as the need to obtain information so as to understand and form opinions about one’s environment (Blumler, 1979; Nambisan & Baron, 2009). There is a consensus that communicators driven by this motivation are highly selective and attentive to a media source and its contents (Zizi Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Alan M. Rubin & Perse, 1987). Scholarly work has demonstrated support for the positive influence of information-seeking motivation on various news-related activities on social media. For instance, Lee and Ma (2012) found that the information-seeking, among other variables, was a significant and immediate antecedent of intention to share news on social media. A more recent

study by Choi (2016) revealed a positive association between surveillance motivation and news reading, posting, and endorsing activities on social media. Their studies echo an earlier study by Flavián and Gurrea (2009), who, after holding a series of in-depth interviews with young adult digital news consumers, concluded that their motivations were primarily epistemic – e.g. “Search for specific information”, “keep abreast of updated news” (p. 166).

While research establishing humans as natural information seekers are not novel (Dervin, 1999), the internet – and arguably social media – provides additional resources for fulfilling information needs. An active social news user, with subscriptions to several news media outlets can receive and forward information regularly with ease, essentially becoming a node in the news diffusion process (Holton, 2010). As users tend to associate with others of similar opinions, interests, and backgrounds ( danah boyd & Ellison, 2007), it is more convenient for them to come across or locate relatable content through their networks. On a related note, research from Holton et al. (2014) and Low et al. (2010) have indicated that people who reproduce information on social media are not only expecting to support other users’ information needs but are also expecting to receive relevant information from others as well in the future. Thus, news-related activities on social media can be argued to be motivated by the platform’s potential to meet present and future information needs. Based on the above review, the fourth research question is proposed:

RQ 4: How is the motivation of information seeking associated with social news use?

### **Socialising**

Another key motivation of social media use commonly discussed is that of socialising (Barker, 2009; Pempek et al., 2009; Reich et al., 2012; Sheldon, 2008). It is intrinsic to the need for

integration and social interaction and has received various labels, including “relationship maintenance” (Ku et al., 2013) and “interpersonal connectivity” (Oliveira et al., 2016). Nonetheless, the crux of the literature points to the importance of social needs in motivating human behaviour. Much has been written in the preceding chapter and elsewhere about how social media enable and encourage this process through a range of communicative features (e.g. Hsu, Chen, Huang, & Huang, 2012; Leonardi, 2007).

A substantial body of empirical research corroborates the influence of this motivation on social media use. For instance, focusing on the more active and expressive forms of Facebook engagement, Smock et al. (2011) found that the motivation of social interaction predicted the use of comments, wall posts, and private chats. Similarly, Chen (2011) reported a positive relationship between active Twitter use – frequency of use, tweets, and @replies – and social connection needs. Meanwhile, while the literature with regards to news-related activities on social media is still developing, extant work has also demonstrated that socialising is one of the prime motivators driving SNS news sharing, posting, and endorsing (Choi, 2016; C. S. Lee & Ma, 2012). Further to that, Hanson & Haridakis (2008) showed that YouTube users who shared news videos on the platform were motivated by interpersonal communication needs. Their work is consistent with other CMC research that have suggested a positive relationship between the motivation of socialising and browsing of online news sites (Go et al., 2016; Heather et al., 2014).

The present research posits that news engagement is and has always been a social experience – that is individuals are inclined to discuss what is happening around them and journalism products are a resource for such interactions. Studies exploring the participatory culture of online news have corroborated with this argument, finding that on top of the perceived

ability to influence politics and self-expression needs, the desire to connect with others in their network is also a key motivator in reproducing content (Lotan et al., 2011; S. Robinson, 2011). This is particularly so for time-sensitive or unexpected events, where research has also documented the willingness of people to share news even with complete strangers, so as to have someone to talk to (Rogers & Seidel, 2002). Hence, it is reasonable to expect that need to form and maintain relationships with others will play an important role in social news use. As such, I put forward the fifth research question:

RQ 5: How is the motivation of socialising associated with social news use?

### **Status-seeking**

As mentioned earlier, impression management needs can have an influence over how communicators conduct themselves over a medium and their interaction with its contents. A more nuanced motivation derived from this wider notion is the need to feel accepted or respected from one's peers (Dholakia et al., 2004), and thereby support for one's self-image as a capable person. The outcomes of status-seeking on generic social media use have been widely examined and substantiated in multiple studies (e.g. Cheung et al., 2011; Dong et al., 2012; Oliveira et al., 2016; Pempek et al., 2009; Syn & Oh, 2015). However, of particular interest to this study is the potential increase in involvement in news-related activities resulting from this perceived gratification.

Early U&G research has already demonstrated status-seeking to be a significant predictor of news use. Participants from Berelson (1949)'s study revealed the need for social prestige as a motivation for reading newspapers, whereas Gantz and Trenholm (1979) found that maintaining or improving one's credibility was a primary reason that people gave for passing news along to



others. In the case of the former, it accords with what Payne et al. (1988) describes as anticipated interaction – which involves obtaining information from news media so as to feel competent among their peers in hypothetical future conversations. More recent work in internet news browsing have corroborated with these studies: Zhang and Zhang (2013) observed that participants driven by status gratifications were more likely to seek soft news topics on professional news portals (e.g. CNN). In regards to news-related activities on social media, the motivation of status-seeking was found to be significantly associated with news sharing and posting activities (Choi, 2016; C. S. Lee & Ma, 2012).

Taken together, this research argues that because social media offers a variety of means to actively collect and disseminate information, perceived social status can be obtained by social news use. One such case in point is in the sharing of news – by forwarding relevant information, a user may feel well-informed or intelligent in relation to his/her peers, and if he/she receives positive comments in return, this status gratification is arguably enhanced. Therefore, the sixth research question raised is:

RQ 6: How is the motivation of status-seeking associated with social news use?

## **Entertainment**

The perceived gratifications of social news use may not necessarily be instrumental, but also embedded in the way news on these platforms are engaged. The fact that media usage could become addictive indicates that some gratifications are derived from the perspective of usage experience (Can & Kaya, 2016). Indeed, scholars have long pointed out that the need to stimulate or alleviate emotions can lead to internet usage (Kaye, 1998; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Young, 1998). This is related to the hedonistic motive of internet usage, including social media,

which is an end in itself. Feelings of relaxation and fun can be evoked from social media use because the platform offers a rich resource of sensory stimulation – multimedia content, community feedback, and novel ideas – from other users (Pöyry et al., 2013). People are entertained not just through the exchange of personal information with others but by reading about news from various sources on social media. This is because news reproduced on social media deviate from the formal news reporting style (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2018), particularly when users co-create news stories with personal commentaries and customised images, making these stories more appealing and thereby increasing their entertainment value. The feelings of enjoyment that users develop from consuming such materials can encourage future consumption intention or to provide their own personalised news content in response.

The importance of entertainment needs in predicting social media engagement is widely supported by a range of empirical studies (Ku et al., 2013; et al., 2014; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Syn & Oh, 2015). Similarly, Lin et al. (2005) suggested that entertainment gratifications, among others, were a key motive for seeking offline and online news media. This was corroborated later by research from Diddi and Larose (2006) and Kang et al. (2013), who both found a strong, positive relationship between online news consumption behaviours and information-seeking and entertainment gratifications. However, with regards to news-related activities on social media particularly, conflicting results exist in the literature. Lee & Ma (2012) found that entertainment gratifications did not have an impact on news sharing intentions, in contrast to prior work by Hanson and Haridakis (2008). More recently, Choi (2016) identified perceived entertainment to be a positive predictor of news reading and endorsing activities. The divergence in findings could be attributed to the broad or inconsistent conceptualisation of news

content. Accordingly, the current study focuses specifically on news relating to politics and public affairs in an attempt to resolve the inconclusive influence of entertainment gratifications. Notwithstanding the mixed findings, the lines of reasoning discussed above still point to the importance of enjoyment in news-related behaviours, particularly on social media. Thus, the seventh research question proposed is:

RQ 7: How is the motivation of entertainment associated with social news use?

### **Understanding the Effects of Social News Use via the O-S-R-O-R Approach**

In this section, relationships between variables derived from the perspective of the O-S-R-O-R model are discussed. Specifically, hypotheses are developed involving four important associations: (a) social news consumption and communication variables (offline interpersonal discussion, social news participation, and production), (b) social news consumption and political orientation variables (knowledge and efficacy), (c) communication variables and citizen participation variables (online, political, and civic participation), and (d) political orientations and citizen participation variables. Essential as well is the role of communication and political orientations in mediating the effects of social news use on citizen participation.

#### **From social news consumption to communication**

The notion that communicative behaviours are intrinsic with news consumption is not recent; it can be traced back to Mcleod et al. (1999)'s work on the Communication Mediation Model, in which the authors demonstrated a nondirectional causal link between local public affairs media use and interpersonal issue discussion. In that particular study, the authors concluded that

exchanging opinions on these issues generally require a deeper mental elaboration of information, which entails a need to seek more information from news media so as to present consistent and reasoned arguments. Other scholars have also viewed interpersonal discussion as a sense-making process: news consumers follow up with others so as to better interpret news media messages or create meaning about public issues (J. Kim & Kim, 2008; Southwell & Yzer, 2007). Subsequent empirical studies showing how interpersonal discussion intervenes between news consumption – including those from online sources – and citizen participatory behaviours lend credence to these assertions (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2010; Shah et al., 2005, 2007).

More recently, research has shown that social media users tend to interact with pre-existing relationships established offline (Hampton et al., 2011; Pempek et al., 2009), indicating that these platforms also present additional opportunities for everyday discourse on social and political issues. That said, the multiple channels of communication available on social media not only facilitate ambient exposure to related news content distributed by individuals and news organisations, but also provide the means to react, elaborate, and share perspectives on content received. This is consistent with what Bruns and Highfield (2012) identify as “produsing”: A trend in which social news users are not simply consuming news content but building upon and sharing what is created from another source. Accordingly, there is evidence to suggest that consuming news on social media is a distinct but related activity from other forms of social news use. For instance, Choi et al. (2017) explored the effects of social news internalising (i.e. accessing news) and externalising (i.e. posting news) and found that the news externalising mediated the relationship between news internalising and political participation. In a cross-regional study of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China, Chan et al. (2017) demonstrated a direct correlation between the frequency of accessing news and current affairs on social media and the

frequency in which this information was shared. Similarly, Hampton et al. (2017) found that respondents who reported using SNS as source of political information were also more likely to discuss these issues on the same platform; however, this effect was not observed in the frequency of generic SNS use alone. Once again, this study underscores the importance of understanding the context of use on social media. Therefore, I advance the following hypothesis:

H1: Social news consumption will be positively related with communication process variables.

### **From social news consumption to political orientations**

A long line of research has established that conventional news media use, such as newspaper reading, is an important predictor of public affairs and political knowledge (e.g. Chaffee et al., 1994; Eveland, 2002; R. E. Park, 1940). Indeed, several political communication scholars have stressed that while knowledge of such matters can be gained through other means (e.g. formal education), news media often provides the most current and pressing issues of the day (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Eveland et al., 2005). A considerable body of empirical work has corroborated with this perspective, providing evidence of a positive relationship between the level of political knowledge and news consumption on digital platforms, including social media (Beam et al., 2016; Diddi & LaRose, 2006; Dimitrova et al., 2014; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Kaufhold et al., 2010; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; C. S. Park & Kaye, 2018). The internet, particularly social media, offers a constant stream of up-to-the-minute information from various sources, thereby increasing users' likelihood of encountering a wider diversity and openness of news and information.

Another important variable in this stream of research is the perceived self-ability to influence one's community and the government. This self-assessment has also been closely linked to news media consumption – the assumption being that people's awareness of politics and public affairs, via the media, stimulates confidence in what and how to contribute to society (Delli Carpini, 2004; Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; Mcleod, Scheufele, Moy, et al., 1999). This relationship has been shown to exist in both traditional and as well as in digital media. In a longitudinal study, Moeller et al. (2014) demonstrated a causal relationship from consumption of online news and print newspapers to increases in internal political efficacy. Similarly, a study by Kenski & Stroud (2006), which utilised a national survey of American voters conducted in 2000, found that both internet access and online exposure to political information had a positive influence on external political efficacy. Taken together, I expect that news consumption on social media will have a positive effect on knowledge and efficacy:

H2: Social news consumption will be positively related to political orientations.

### **From communication processes to citizen participation**

While exposure to news content has been shown to be predictive of citizen participation, the effect size of this relationship is often dwarfed by other communicative factors, particularly interpersonal discussion on politics and current affairs (e.g. Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; J. Kim et al., 1999; Mcleod et al., 1999). This is because discourse on these matters involves exchanges of interpretative frameworks that facilitates elaboration or comprehension of news information. As Miller et al. (1987) explained, elaboration involves “associating new ideas and new information with what is already known...looking for similarities with prior experiences and looking for new ways to apply the information” (p.399). By allowing individuals to confront

countervailing ideas, as well as to organise and articulate their thoughts, conversations provide an alternative means to mobilising information. This information processing action is arguably more effective than simply reflecting about news content in isolation.

With the diffusion of the internet, scholars have also considered the applicability of this proposition on computer-mediated interactions, including activities such as discussing politics or news events online, forwarding news stories, and publishing materials in relation to public affairs as explicit forms of deliberation (Jung et al., 2011; Shah et al., 2007). A study on social media and political participation in Singapore found that while only a small proportion of young adults posted comments about politics and current affairs on social media (6.3%), this activity was significantly correlated with both online and offline civic engagement (George et al., 2014). The authors attributed this relationship to the intuitive interface designs of social media which allow for effortless discussion and information sharing. A subsequent two-wave panel study corroborated with this perspective: Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2014) showed that political expression via social media was not only a stronger predictor of offline and online political participation than social media use for news, it also mediated the relationship between the latter two variables. Similarly, a survey study by Yang and Dehart (2016) during the US 2012 elections found that political use of Facebook and Twitter (e.g. discussion and tweeting of political topics) positively predicted college students' online political participation. These studies suggest that regardless of communication channels, discourses on news and information is likely to have an influence on participatory behaviours. Therefore, I contend that:

H3: Communication process variables will be positively associated with all forms of citizen participation.

## **From political orientations to citizen participation**

As noted earlier, the effects of traditional news reading and viewing on political knowledge are well established. With an increase in knowledge, further development of political understanding and deliberation among users are expected to follow, thus contributing to a more informed and efficacious electorate (Carpini et al., 2004), which in turn enhances their likelihood of being involved in civic and political actions (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982). This assertion is derived from a rich body of political communication research predating the pervasiveness of the internet (Kaid et al., 2007; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001; Verba et al., 1995), and its relevancy is being contested today.

Indeed, more current research involving online news gathering and consumption has documented inconsistent effects of knowledge. Some have reported a positive association between knowledge and civic and political participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Vissers & Stolle, 2014), while others find a lack of significance or negative relationship (Bachmann & Gil de Zúñiga, 2013; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2016; Saldaña et al., 2015). Findings in the latter ostensibly provide support for the reinforcement hypothesis – which holds that part of the reason why the internet as a new medium neither changes political involvement or interests is because news consumers who access such information online are already interested in politics (Norris, 2001). However, the conflicted findings mentioned above could also be explained by the fact that these studies have not considered the influence of news exposure over knowledge and have employed knowledge as an antecedent or control, rather than as an outcome of news use. Moreover, related research has indicated that, unlike other media platforms, social media like Facebook and Twitter facilitate incidental news exposure and confrontation with varying opinions and ideas (R. A. Hayes et al., 2015; Amy Mitchell et al., 2013). For example, in a two-



wave panel study, Diehl et al. (2016) demonstrated that both the use of social media for news and social interaction played a direct role in predicting change in political views. In tandem with this strand of work, other studies have also shown that such serendipitous exposure promotes both online and offline political participation (Kim et al., 2013; Vaccari et al., 2015). Hence, this study supports the countervailing view that posits that the internet encourages citizen participatory behaviours because it lowers the threshold for political learning and collective action (Ward & Vedel, 2006; Wellman et al., 2001), and expects public affairs knowledge to be an important construct in public spiritedness.

Unlike knowledge, efficacy is a time-honoured psychological construct that remains closely related to citizen participation. For instance, Gil de Zúñiga and colleagues (2010) found that among a purposive sample of bloggers, political efficacy and online political participation were significant and direct predictors of offline participation. In another study, Velasquez & LaRose (2015) explored what contributed to student activist groups' political use of social media, and found that social media political efficacy was positively related to political activities on the platform. Outside the United States, research has also shown similar patterns. For example, looking at a national sample of young adults in Singapore, Skoric (2015) found that civic efficacy was the most salient factor driving civic participation, followed by informational and entertainment uses of social media. Accordingly, I posit that:

H4: Political orientations will be positively associated with all forms of citizen participation.

### **The mediating role the role of communication and political orientations**

So far, the studies and hypotheses mentioned above are in line with the O-S-R-O-R model, which asserts that the effects of news use are contingent upon communicative behaviours and psychological dispositions (Cho et al., 2009). In the last decade, empirical work formally testing the model in its entirety or partially has demonstrated its relevancy in understanding the effects of social news use. For instance, Jung et al. (2011) showed that news media use predicted both interpersonal political discussion and online messaging, which in turn had a positive effect on political knowledge and efficacy. In the same dataset, the latter four variables were also found to channel the effects of news media use on online and offline political participation respectively. More recently, Chan (2016) demonstrated that news consumption on Facebook did not have a direct effect on offline political participation; instead, this relationship was mediated by political efficacy and the use of Facebook for expressing political and current affairs issues. Similarly, Li and Chan (2017) found that, among mainland Chinese and Hong Kong respondents, online and offline public affairs discussion provided a pathway from seeking information on social media to online political engagement. Not unexpectedly, the direct effects of information seeking on participatory behaviours were also reported to be negative.

This study thus incorporates the O-S-R-O-R framework in exploring the effects of social news use. As explained in Chapter 2, the current research proposes structural relationships in which demographic variables and offline news media use serve as pre-existing orientations; social news use as the stimuli; interpersonal discussion, social news participation and production as the reasoning process; public affairs knowledge and efficacy as the second set of orientations; and online, political, and civic participation as the final response behaviour. Consistent with the O-S-R-O-R perspective, I do not expect to find a significant relationship between social news

consumption and citizen participatory behaviours once orientations and reasoning processes have been controlled for. Therefore, I hypothesize:

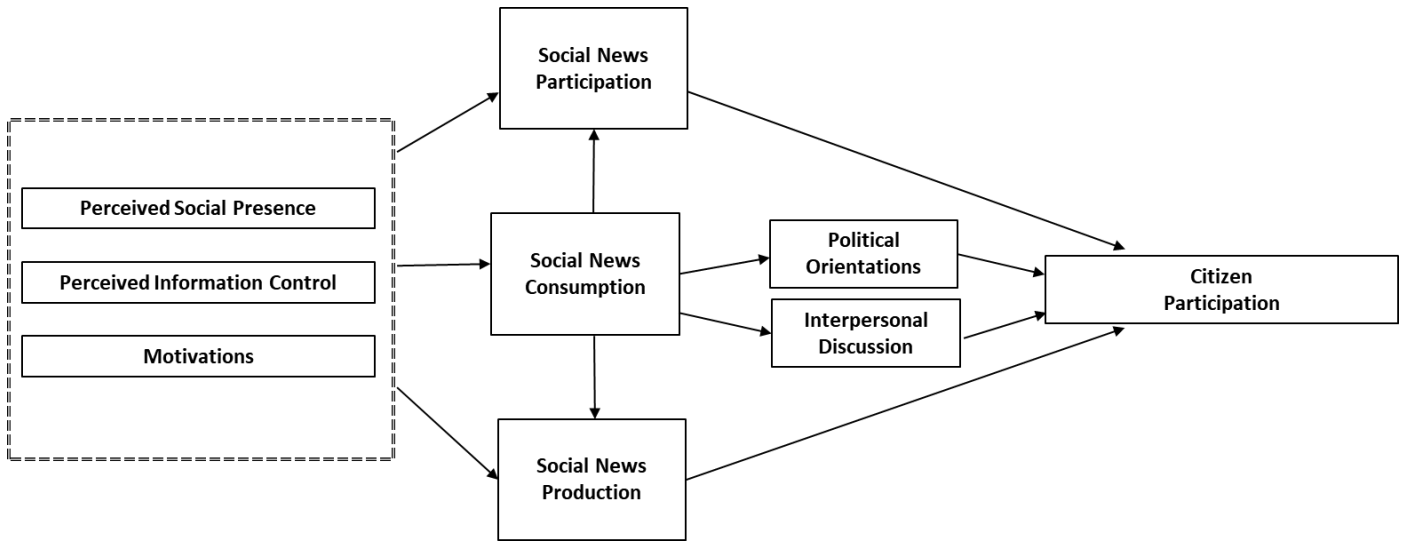
H5a: Communication process variables will mediate the relationship between social news consumption and offline citizen participation.

H5b: Communication process variables will mediate the relationship between social news consumption and online participation.

H6a: Political orientations will mediate the relationship between social news consumption and offline citizen participation.

H6b: Political orientations will mediate the relationship between social news consumption and online participation.

To summarise, the current project investigates both the antecedents and outcomes of social news use. In order to understand how motivations, perceived social presence, and information control shape social news use, this research provides an integrated perspective from theories in U&G, social presence, and self-presentation. In exploring the outcomes of social news use, the project favours the approach advanced in the O-S-R-O-R model and takes into account how elaborative strategies and personal psychological orientations mediate social news consumption and citizen participation. Accordingly, the entire research model is presented in Figure 1.



Note:

Motivations

- a. Information-seeking
- b. Socialising
- c. Status-seeking
- d. Entertainment

Perceived Information control

- a. Expressive
- b. Privacy

Political orientations

- a. Public affairs knowledge
- b. Efficacy

Citizen participation

- a. Online participation
- b. Offline political participation
- c. Offline civic participation

**Figure 1.** Conceptual model of social news use

**Research Design**

While the specifics of the methodology (e.g. measures, sampling) will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 4 and 5, it is apt at this stage to describe the research design, and how it serves to investigate the research objectives, research questions, and hypotheses that are central to the thesis. A sequential mixed-methods explanatory design has been chosen as the most appropriate method for this project; it is a type of design which involves two distinct, sequential phases –

quantitative followed by qualitative (Creswell et al., 2003). This two-phase structure allows for the triangulation of data (Denzin, 1978), that is, it allows the researcher to draw more accurate inferences by comparing and contrasting the results of two complementary studies. The emphasis in this design is on increasing the validity of the research by corroborating the quantitative data with qualitative data. This is arguably more effective than a single methods approach, which investigates a phenomenon primarily from a specific orientation or angle. As Erzberger and Kelle (2003, p. 64) pointed out, "... Empirical research results obtained with different methods are like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that provide a full image of a certain object if put together in the correct way."

The quantitative phase pertinent to this project is Study 1. Based on national survey data gathered in Singapore, this study aims to provide insights on how media and social psychological factors predict social news use activities, and how these activities in turn are associated with different citizen participatory behaviours. This phase aims to test and answer the hypotheses and research questions put forward earlier underpinning research objective one and three: To explore how media and individual factors affect millennials' engagement in social news use, and to examine how the different modes of social news use facilitate or inhibit citizen participation. A key merit of this phase is that it allows the researcher to make more generalisable claims regarding the relationships between social news use and the pre-established variables mentioned earlier. However, like most quantitative studies, this part of the research offers "little insight into the social processes which actually account for the changes observed" (Clarke & Dawson, 1999, p. 55).

Study 2, the qualitative phase, complements Study 1 to help explain the quantitative results. In this exploratory follow-up, analysis of in-depth interviews with millennial activists is

expected to address research objective two: To understand how civically or politically engaged millennials engage with social media as sources of news and information. By exploring the views of those who are more civically or politically engaged more deeply, this phase refines the statistical results established earlier by confirming how and why millennial activists engage with news on social media. Moreover, the qualitative data is expected to shed light on why certain motivational and environment factors identified in Study 1 are more predictive of social news use than others, and how the potential of social news use in cultivating a more active citizenry is hindered – hence also addressing the first and third research objective.

Overall, the two phases of the project, although from different methodological backgrounds, is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the social news use phenomenon. Adhering to the sequential mixed-methods explanatory approach, the next chapter will focus on Study 1 – elaborating on the methodology and results specific to the quantitative phase. Subsequently, Chapter 5 will focus on the qualitative phase (Study 2) in a similar way; however, this chapter will conclude with an interpretation and explanation of the overall mixed method results.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: STUDY ONE**

In this chapter, the hypotheses and research questions developed in Chapter 3 are tested through a quantitative approach. The data collection method and sample are introduced first, followed by the measurements of the variables involved in the research model. My analytic strategy is then proposed to test the various theoretical arguments that have been presented in the literature before presenting my findings. The chapter concludes with a description of the implications of this empirical study.

### **Methodology**

#### **Procedure & Sample**

A door-to door survey was collected in Singapore from eligible voters under the age of 36 years old, and who have had some prior experience with social news use. The decision to limit the inclusion criteria to older millennials in the electorate is crucial as the study will also investigate their level of interaction and involvement in the political process. To facilitate the data analysis process and to overcome the shortcoming of illegible responses, the survey was administered using Qualtrics, an online survey-hosting service to which the author has a current university-wide subscription.

Participants in this study were recruited through means of stratified cluster sampling (Babbie, 2013). In the first stage, only residential districts containing Housing Development Board (HDB) blocks – public housing apartment blocks – were included in the study. Thus, only 24 out of 28 residential districts were included in the sampling in this research. Subsequently, a specific number of HDB blocks were randomly selected from each district based on the

proportion of the number of HDB blocks in each district to the number of HDB blocks nationwide. Next, the selection was narrowed down to every second household of the apartment block; finally, in each household, the youngest millennial of voting age was requested to participate in the study. As an incentive to participate, respondents were offered a shopper voucher of SGD \$10 upon completion. In the event that the selected unit was unoccupied or none of the residents were able to participate in the survey, the immediate next unit was selected and so forth. This stratified sampling method deviates from more conventional probability sampling procedures but is capable of producing comparable data (Putnam, 2000), with a higher response rate (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

All prospective respondents were briefed about the purpose of the research and provided with information regarding the confidentiality of their participation. Following their consent, the first part of the survey included questions on demographic as well as general social news use activities to determine their eligibility for the study. The survey was terminated if participants were found to be ineligible (i.e. below 21 years old, are not Singaporeans, and/ or did not use social media).

The final sample consisted of 199 males (49.8%) and 201 females (50.2%). Respondents ranged in age from 21 to 35 years old (*Mdn* = 28, *M* = 27, *SD* = 4.36). The median monthly household income ranged from S\$6000 to S\$69,999. The response rate was 59.6% based on the American Association for Public Opinion Research's formula RR3 (2015, p. 53). The sample was found to reasonably approximate the general population in terms of gender and race, and it also reasonably approximated the youth population in terms of education level (Ministry of Manpower, 2018). In terms of income, upper-middle class groups (\$7,000 and above) were



slightly over-represented (DoS, 2017). The demographic profiles of the participants are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1. Sample Demographics (N=400)**

<b>Demographic variable</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	199	49.8
Female	201	50.2
<b>Age</b>		
21-25	148	37
26-30	136	34
31-35	116	29
<b>Race</b>		
Chinese	294	73.5
Malay	58	14.5
Indian	35	8.8
Others	13	3.3
<b>Education</b>		
PSLE / Primary school	7	1.8
‘O’ levels / Secondary school	26	6.5
‘A’ levels / Junior college	21	5.3
Polytechnic diploma / NITEC	146	36.5
Undergraduate degree	179	44.8
Postgraduate degree (Masters and Doctorate)	21	5.3
<b>Household income</b>		
None - \$1,999	29	7.2
\$2,000 - \$4,999	102	25.5
\$5,000 - \$6,999	97	24.3
\$7,000 and above	172	43

## **Assessment of measurement**

A copy of the questionnaire detailing the measures of each construct is shown in Appendix A. Except where noted, the measures in this study were borrowed from previous research in various areas of social sciences and measured using a 7-point Likert scale. For each respective variable, items were added and averaged together to create an index. Specifically, perceived social presence was assessed using four items from Biocca et al. (2003) while expressive and privacy information control were measured with 4 items each from Kuo et al. (2013). Based on questions used in previous U&G research (Kang et al., 2013; Lee & Ma, 2012; Leung, 2009), 16 items were adapted to measure individual's various motivations in engaging in social news use. Similarly, the instrument assessing social news use comprised of 10 items drawn from earlier studies in news consumption and sharing on social media (Choi, 2016; C. S. Lee & Ma, 2012; Pothong & Nielsen, 2016). Efficacy was measured using 10 items modified from the general efficacy scale (Tipton & Worthington, 1984) and the Self-efficacy Towards Service (SETS) scale (Weber et al., 2004). Three items were applied from Shah et al. (2007) to measure frequency of interpersonal discussion and another 14 items were adapted from various research in political communication to measure aspects of citizen participation – namely civic, political, and online (Valenzuela et al., 2009; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). An index for public affairs knowledge was created by adding and averaging the scores of five multiple-choice questions regarding local politics and current affairs. Correct responses were given one point, whereas incorrect responses were given no points. Finally, on top of demographics, this study also took into account people's offline news media use to isolate the effects of our variables of interest on citizen participation. Thus, a traditional news media use index was computed by averaging the scores of two items inquiring how often they consumed news on print newspapers and television.

To test measurement reliability, Cronbach's alpha was employed, and this yielded acceptable to excellent values for all constructs except public affairs knowledge (See Table 2.1 to Table 2.4). The low reliability scores for the latter scale is not surprising, considering that these questions vary in difficulty and are not necessarily weighted measurements of a single general dimension (Shanahan et al., 1997). Accordingly, there is a fair number of published articles in which knowledge was excluded from reliability tests (Dimitrova et al., 2014; Hao et al., 2014; Jung et al., 2011; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). With this in consideration, the low reliability is not expected to impede further analysis.

In addition, a principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation was conducted on each variable to evaluate its validity. Only components that had eigenvalues greater than one were retained in this study. The full factor analysis results are presented in Appendix B and the loading factors of components were included for further analysis are displayed in Tables 2.1 to 2.4. Convergent validity is observed when each measurement item loads strongly (exceeding the 0.5 threshold) with its assumed theoretical construct and/or does not cross-load on more than one construct (Costello & Osborne, 2005). In line with this, items that did not fit this criterion were dropped from further analysis. Specifically, two items of the efficacy variable (i.e. "I do not think that I can make a difference in my community," and "If the government is not interested in hearing what people think, there is really no way to make them listen.") were eliminated due to their low loadings. Similarly, social news use items "Read news on social media," and "Post or repost news links together with your own thoughts or comments about the story's content?" were removed because they cross-loaded on more than one construct. Moreover, it should be noted that items from civic and political participation loaded together – indicating that among our respondents, involvement in offline political and civic activities are not necessarily independent

of one another. This finding is in tandem with preceding scholarly work that points to the potential spill-over effect of civic participation into political participation (H. O. Jeong, 2013; Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998). As such, civic and political participation were combined into one factor – offline citizen participation.

**Table 2.1. Measurement and factor analysis of motivations**

	Scale Items	Factor loadings	Mean	Standard Deviation	$\alpha$
Status-seeking	Because it helps me gain support and respect from others.	.89	5.85	1.70	.91
	Because it shows who I am to others.	.86			
	Because it enhances my personal reputation.	.82			
	Because it promotes my expertise and knowledge.	.75			
Socialising	Because it helps me to create and maintain relationships with others.	.84	6.17	1.46	.90
	Because it helps me to compare my ideas to those of others.	.80			
	Because it helps me to share my views, thoughts and experiences.	.80			
	Because it gives me something interesting to talk about.	.77			
Entertainment	Because it helps me to relieve boredom.	.86	6.73	1.59	.91
	Because it helps me to pass the time when I don't feel like doing anything else.	.85			
	Because it is entertaining.	.79			
	Because it helps me to relax.	.64			

Information-seeking	Because it helps me to keep up with the latest issues and events.	.86	6.69	1.45	.90
	Because it helps me to find out first-hand information about important issues.	.83			
	Because it helps me to acquire new ideas and perspectives.	.77			
	Because it helps me to learn something.	.71			

**Table 2.2. Measurement and factor analysis of social news use**

	Scale Items	Factor loadings	Mean	Standard Deviation	$\alpha$
Social News Consumption	Click on links to news stories that you receive on social media?	.81	5.10	1.11	.75
	Read news headlines on social media?	.80			
	Receive news links from individuals not affiliated with media organisations?	.66			
Social News Participation	Respond with a “Like” or similar reaction feature to other users’ comments on news stories?	.82	4.10	1.46	.78
	Share news links from other online news sources?	.74			
	Respond with a “Like” or similar reaction to a news story posted by others?	.73			
Social News Production	Contribute your own original news-related content? (e.g. articles, opinion pieces, pictures or videos)	.91	3.31	1.86	.91

Write and post a summary of news or news headlines? .91

**Table 2.3 Measurement and factor analysis of media factors**

	Scale Items	Factor loadings	Mean	Standard Deviation	$\alpha$
Social Presence	I feel like I am physically communicating with others when I engage in social news use.	.89	4.60	1.24	.84
	I feel like a participant in a national panel discussion when I engage in social news use.	.89			
	I feel like I'm communicating with friends when I engage in social news use.	.87			
	I feel like many people are also consuming news content with me at same time when I engage in social news use.	.62			
Expressive Information Control	I am able to control the pace of an interaction when I need to with the features available.	.91	5.76	1.22	.93
	I am able to plan the way interactions will proceed with the features available.	.89			
	I am able to communicate in ways that I feel are most suitable to the situation with the features available.	.88			
	I am able to control the flow of communication between myself and those in my social network with the features available.	.87			

Privacy Information Control	I can ignore things about an interaction if I need to with the features available.	.87	6.16	1.11	.89
	I can avoid topics that I do not wish to discuss with the features available.	.86			
	I can easily end an interaction if I need to with the features available.	.84			
	I can generally hide any information that I do not wish to be disclosed with the features available.	.80			
Traditional news media use	How often do you consume news through print newspapers?	.71	8.00	6.46	.72
	How often do you consume news through television?	.52			

**Table 2.4 Measurement and factor analysis of political attributes**

	Scale Items	Factor loadings	Mean	Standard Deviation	$\alpha$
Efficacy	I am confident that I can deal efficiently with unexpected events in my community.	.86	4.29	1.10	.81
	I can have a positive impact on social issues.	.83			
	I feel people like myself can influence the government.	.81			
	I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics.	.79			
	I have confidence in my ability to help others.	.78			

	I can make a difference in the lives of the less fortunate.	.76			
	I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues in Singapore.	.76			
	The government will respond to the needs of the citizens if people band together and demand change.	.76			
Knowledge	What political office does Mr S. Iswaran currently hold?	.56	.41	.19	.42
	What is the maximum term a Singapore Member of Parliament is elected for?	.52			
	What is the total number of seats in the Singapore Parliament?	.57			
	Which one of the following was not included in the Budget 2017 speech?	.50			
	Recently, a scheme known as _____ was introduced to allow Secondary 1 students from the Normal (Academic) and Normal (Technical) streams to take subjects at a higher academic level.	.51			
Interpersonal Discussion	Engage in an offline conversation about public affairs with colleagues and acquaintances?	.92	10.80	1.59	.83
	Engage in an offline conversation about public affairs with family and friends?	.89			



	Engage in an offline conversation about public affairs with strangers?	.79			
Offline Citizen Participation	Work or volunteer for political groups or candidates?	.94	2.71	1.69	.96
	Wear or display a political paraphernalia?	.94			
	Attend a meeting of discussion or dialogue organised by the Residents' Committee, Community Centre, or the government?	.93			
	Contribute financially to a political cause?	.93			
	Raise money for a charity or run/walk/bike for charity?	.87			
	Participate in a welfare organisation/ non-governmental organisation activity as a volunteer or member?	.84			
	Inform relevant authorities of a problem in your community?	.83			
	Work or volunteer in a community/grassroots project?	.82			
Online Participation	Organise an activity about a political or social issue on social media?	.96	2.73	1.81	.97
	Write an email to the forum or commentary section of a newspaper/magazine?	.95			
	Sign up online to volunteer to help with a political or social cause?	.94			

Send an email to a politician or government official?	.94
Start or join an online group to support a political or social issue?	.94
Sign or share an online petition to support a political or social issue?	.85

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Finally, to ensure discriminant validity, I observed if the squared correlation between one latent construct and the other is lower than the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each variable. As reported in Table 3, all square roots of each latent variable's AVE are greater than the latent variable's correlation with other constructs in the model, thus adhering to Fornell and Larcker (1981)'s criterion of discriminant validity and indicating that each respective construct is different from the other. All in all, the measurement model of this research showed adequate reliability and validity.

**Table 3. Zero-order correlations among key variables and squared root of average variance extracted (AVE)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Social Presence	<b>.82</b>															
2. Expressive Information Control	.51***	<b>.89</b>														
3. Privacy Information Control	.49***	.42***	<b>.84</b>													
4. Information Seeking	.55***	.38***	.51***	<b>.79</b>												
5. Socialising	.49***	.36***	.41***	.51***	<b>.80</b>											
6. Status Seeking	.61***	.48***	.49***	.51***	.52***	<b>.83</b>										
7. Entertainment	.47***	.28***	.45***	.67***	.57***	.50***	<b>.79</b>									
8. News Consumption	.51***	.40***	.48***	.52***	.39***	.45***	.47***	<b>.76</b>								
9. News Participation	.58***	.40***	.41***	.35***	.37***	.51***	.38***	.44***	<b>.77</b>							
10. News Production	.50***	.39***	.25***	.17**	.33***	.45***	.15**	.33***	.56***	<b>.91</b>						
11. Efficacy	.58***	.46***	.42***	.41***	.44***	.56***	.33***	.42***	.46***	.44***	<b>.79</b>					
12. Knowledge	.09	.18***	.04	.09	.05	.05	.07	.20***	.04	.05	.07	<b>.71</b>				
13. Interpersonal Discussion	.46***	.35***	.28***	.25***	.28***	.36***	.22***	.33***	.38***	.34***	.67***	.15**	<b>.87</b>			

14. Citizen Participation	.38***	.32***	.15**	.06	.19***	.33***	.03	.19***	.35***	.52***	.59***	.08	.65***	<b>.89</b>		
15. Online participation	.45***	.34***	.19***	.06	.18***	.38***	.05	.23***	.41***	.59***	.57***	.01	.56***	.80***	<b>.93</b>	
16. Traditional news media	.32***	.24***	.15**	.09	.15**	.25***	.05	.20***	.27***	.31***	.31***	.08	.33***	.37***	.36***	<b>.53</b>

Note: \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001. Boldface numbers on the diagonal are the square root of the AVE for each construct.

## **Analytical Strategy**

All analyses were conducted using SPSS 23. Prior to testing the hypotheses and research questions, zero-order correlations were performed between the independent variables to learn about their relationships (See Table 3). The results showed there were no high correlations (0.7 or above) among the independent variables. At the same time, the values for variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance were all below 5 and above 0.1 respectively (See Table 4). Put together, this suggests little evidence of multicollinearity.

Three hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine RQ1- RQ7, which asked how various individual and media factors influenced social news consumption, participation, and production. In this series of regressions, respondents' age, ethnicity, education background, and monthly household income were controlled in the first block. Next, media technical factors – social presence, privacy, and expressive information control – were in the second block. Finally, the motivations of information-seeking, socialising, status-seeking, and entertainment were entered in the third block.

To test H1 and H2 regarding the influence of social news consumption on communicative processes and political orientations, five linear regressions were employed. Accordingly, demographics and traditional news media use were entered as controls. Two multiple hierarchical regressions predicting citizen participation and online participation were then conducted to test H3 and H4. Consistent with the O-S-R-O-R framework, respondents' demographics and traditional news media use were controlled in the first block. Next, social news consumption was entered in the second block. Social news participation, social news production, and interpersonal discussion were entered in the subsequent block. Public affairs knowledge and efficacy were entered in the fourth block as independent variables.

Finally, to assess the mediating function of social news participation, social news production, interpersonal discussion, knowledge, and efficacy (H5a- H6b), a bootstrapping technique using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013, Model 4) was employed. I analysed the 95% confidence intervals associated with the intervening effects of communication processes and political orientations on offline and online participation, adopting 5000 bootstrap samples.

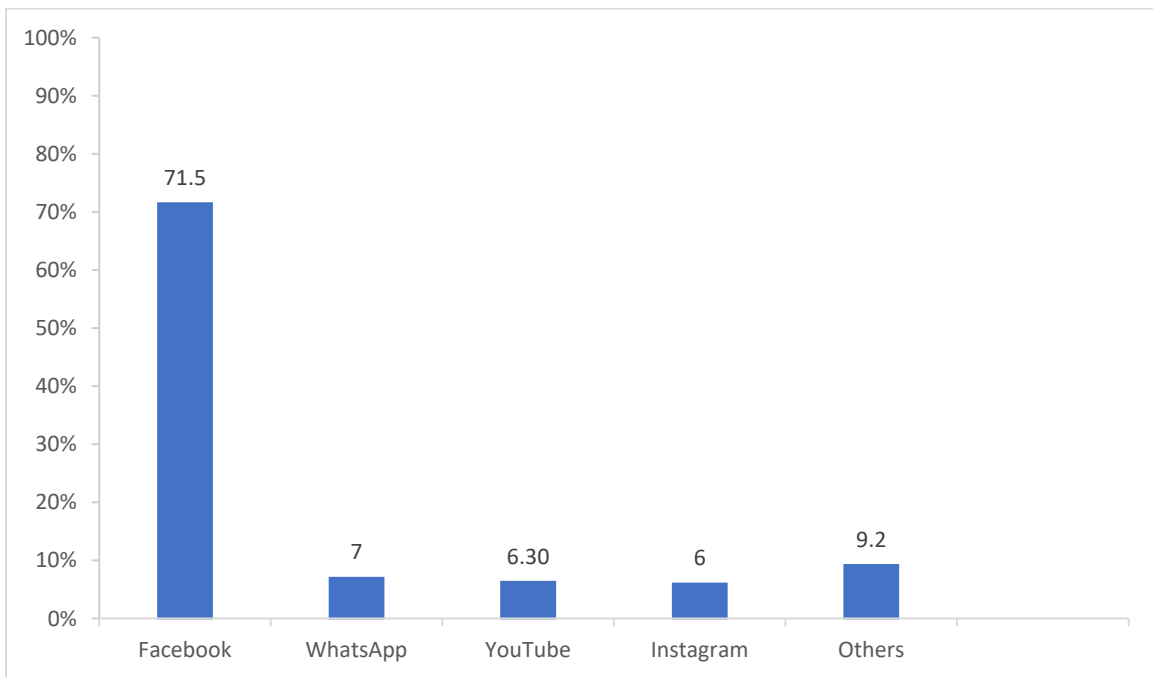
**Table 4. VIF and tolerance statistics of independent variables**

	Tolerance	VIF		Tolerance	VIF
Social Presence	.39	2.57	News Consumption	.57	1.76
Expressive Information Control	.62	1.61	News Participation	.51	1.95
Privacy Information Control	.58	1.72	News Production	.55	1.82
Information-Seeking	.41	2.46	Efficacy	.39	2.59
Socialising	.55	1.81	Knowledge	.91	1.10
Status Seeking	.46	2.20	Interpersonal discussion	.51	1.95
Entertainment	.43	2.32	Traditional news media use	.82	1.23

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

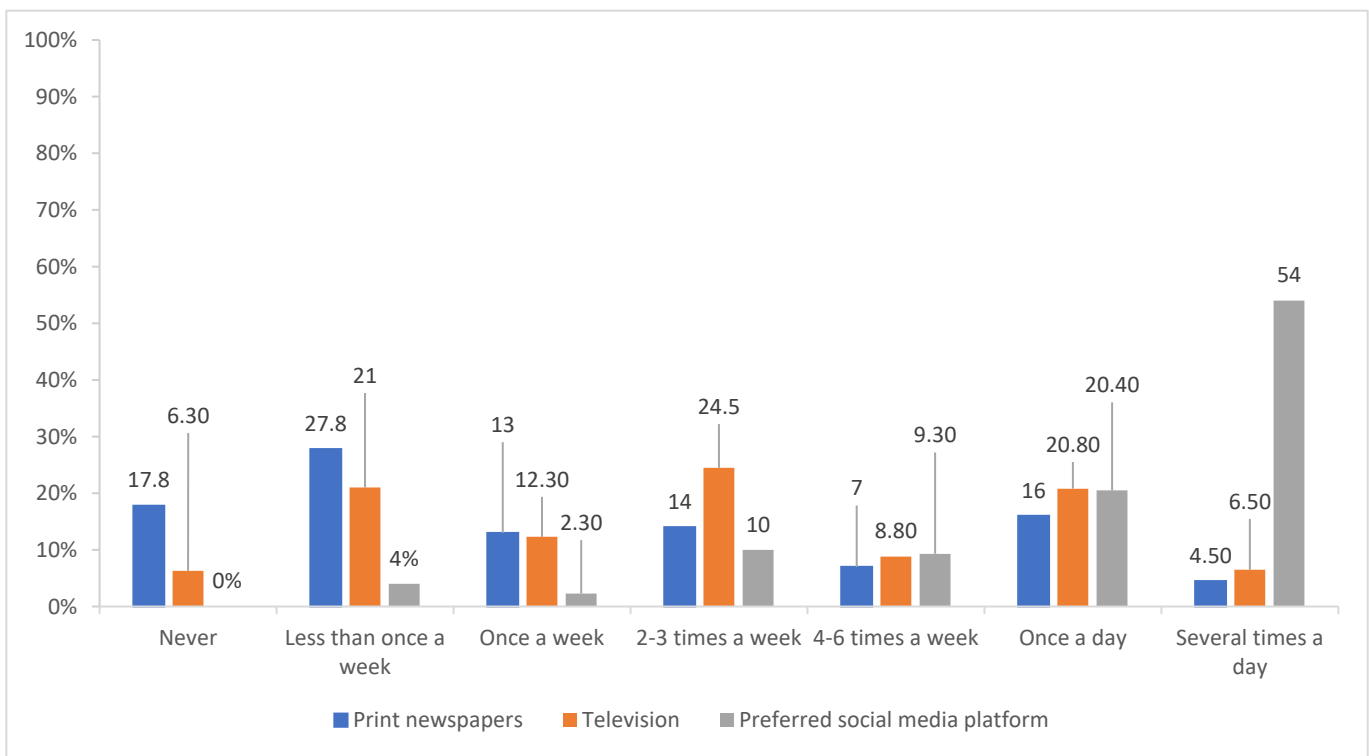
Descriptive statistics concerning respondents' primary social news use platform is presented in Figure 2.1. Specifically, Facebook was the most used medium, with 71.5% (n = 286) of the sample indicating that they used it as main source of local politics, economy and social issues on social media. This was followed by WhatsApp (7%, n = 28), YouTube (6.3%, n = 25), and Instagram (6%, n = 24) respectively.



**Figure 2.1.** Primary Social News Use Platform (N=400)

Respondents were also asked to indicate the frequency of their existing news consumption habits across print newspapers, television, and preferred social news platform. The results indicate a clear preference for social news use over news via traditional media. Majority of respondents used social media as a source of news, with 20.4% (n = 82) using the platform

once a day and 54% (n = 216) several times a day for news. In comparison, newspapers and television served as functional alternatives to social media as news sources for respondents, of whom 16% (n = 64) read print newspapers once a day and 20.8% (n = 83) consume news through television once a day. Noteworthy as well is that while all respondents were social news users – attributed to the inclusion criteria of this study – 17.8% (n = 71) said they spent no time on newspapers and 6.3% (n = 25) reported no exposure to television news.

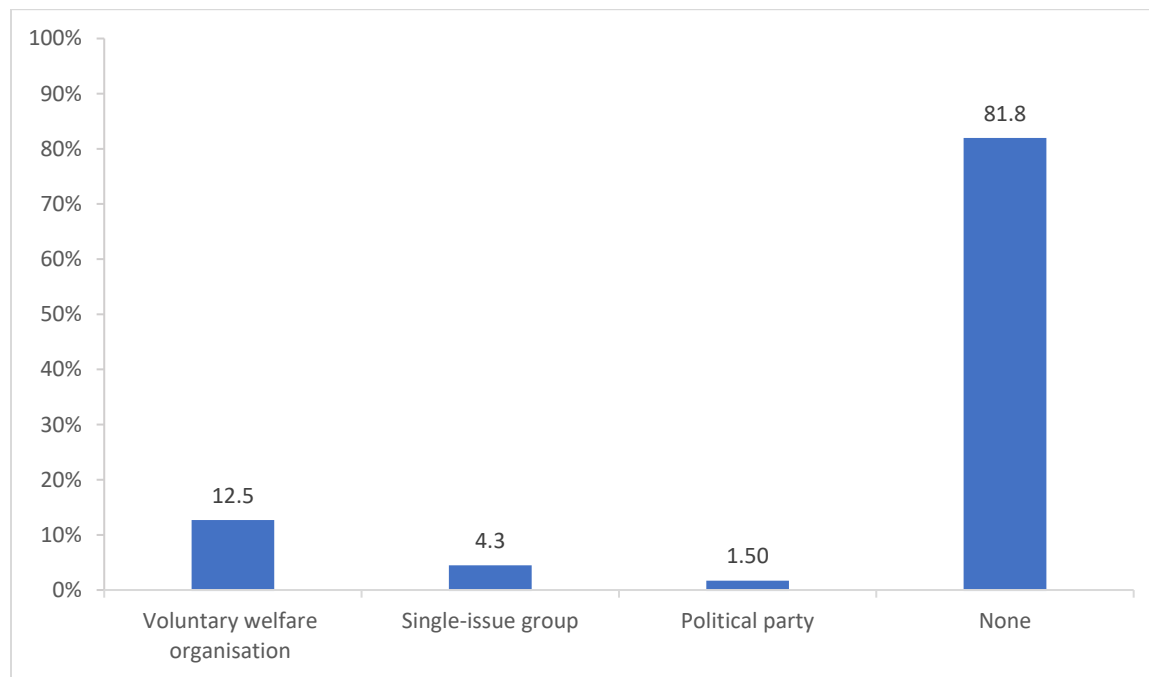


**Figure 2.2.** Frequency of news use on print newspapers, television and social media (N=400)

Descriptive analysis also reveals respondents' current ongoing involvement in political or civic activities. As shown in Figure 2.3, majority of respondents (81.8%, n = 327) are not members of any civic or political groups. Among those that were involved, the most common type of group that participants reported being affiliated to are voluntary welfare organisations



(i.e. communities committed to philanthropy work) (12.5%, n = 50). On the other hand, the group that saw the lowest membership is political parties (1.5%, n = 6).



**Figure 2.3.** Affiliation in political or civic organisations (N=400)

## **Inferential statistics**

### ***Regressions predicting social news use***

As shown in Table 5, the different regression models explained  $R^2 = 42\%$  of the total variance for social news consumption (hereon referred to as news consumption) and social news participation (hereon referred to as news participation), and  $R^2 = 37\%$  of variance for social news production (hereon referred to as news production). Each block significantly adds to the amount of variance explained, with the most important block being the media technical factors (i.e. social presence and information control). Among the control variables, higher educated ( $\beta = .10$ ,  $p < .05$ ) respondents were found to engage more in news consumption whereas those from lower

income ( $\beta = -.09, p < .05$ ) groups were more involved in news participation activities. Traditional news media contributed positively and significantly to news production ( $\beta = .11, p < .05$ ). That is, the more people consume news from offline sources, the more likely they were to engage in creating their own original news-related content on social media, such as writing opinion pieces or summaries. Overall, the control block accounted for 8% of the variance in news consumption and news participation, and 11% of the variance in social news production.

As a block, technical factors accounted for 29, 30, and 20% of the variance in news consumption, participation, and production respectively. To answer RQ 1, social presence was significantly and positively associated with all social news use measures ( $\beta = .15, p < .05$  for news consumption,  $\beta = .37, p < .001$  for news participation, and  $\beta = .35, p < .001$  for news production). In fact, among the three types of technical factors, social presence was found to be the only constant predictor of the criterion variables. The association between information control and the different types of social news activities was another interest of the present study (RQ 2-3). The findings show that those who perceived greater expressive information control on social media were more likely to be engaged in one particular type of social news activity: news production ( $\beta = .13, p < .01$ ). On the other hand, the results also indicate that those who perceived a greater sense of privacy information control were more likely to consume or participate reactively to news-related content in these spaces. The strength of association with privacy information control and news consumption ( $\beta = .18, p < .001$ ) was stronger than with news participation ( $\beta = .12, p < .05$ ).

In regards to RQ 4-7, Table 5 also displays the patterns of how the varying motivations are associated with different social news use activities. Specifically, the motivation of information-seeking was a positive predictor of news consumption ( $\beta = .19, p < .01$ ), but a

negative predictor of news participation ( $\beta = -.14, p < .05$ ) and production ( $\beta = -.19, p < .01$ ).

The motivation of socialising showed significant positive predictive power in news production ( $\beta = .15, p < .01$ ), but not in news consumption and participation. The findings also show that status-seeking motivation was a significantly positive predictor of news participation ( $\beta = .17, p < .01$ ) and production ( $\beta = .23, p < .001$ ). Entertainment motivation was also found to significantly influence news participation ( $\beta = .14$ ) and production ( $\beta = -.13$ ), but in different directions at the  $p < 0.5$  level. Both status-seeking and entertainment motivations were not significant determinants of news consumption however. In total, the motivations block accounted for a statistically significant incremental variance of 5, 3, and 6% in news consumption, participation, and production respectively. Ultimately, the models suggest that while many factors predict social news use activities, the role of social presence and information-seeking are particularly paramount in encouraging or inhibiting news activities among Singaporean millennials.

**Table 5. Hierarchical regressions predicting Social News Use**

Independent variables	Social News Consumption $\beta$	Social News Participation $\beta$	Social News Production $\beta$
<b>Block 1: Demographics</b>			
Gender (1 = Male; 0 = Female)	.01	.08	.10
Ethnicity (1 = Chinese; 0 = Non-Chinese)	.00	.01	.03
Educational attainment	.12*	.02	.01
Monthly income	.11*	-.07	-.00
Traditional media use	.16**	.26***	.29***
	$\Delta R^2$ .08***	.08***	.11***
<b>Block 2: With media technical factors</b>			
Gender	-.02	.05	.07
Ethnicity	.03	.01	.01
Educational attainment	.09*	-.02	-.03
Monthly income	.07	-.10*	-.02
Traditional media use	.01	.09*	.15**
Social Presence	.29***	.44***	.37***
Information Control			
o Expressive information control	.11*	.10*	.18**

○ Privacy information control		.29	.15**	-.03
	$\Delta R^2$	.29***	.30***	.20***
<b>Block 3: With motivations</b>				
Gender		-.01	.03	.04
Ethnicity		.04	.02	.04
Educational attainment		.10*	-.02	-.04
Monthly income		.08	-.09*	.00
Traditional media use		.04	.09	.11*
Social Presence		.15*	.37***	.35***
Information Control				
○ Expressive information control		.09	.08	.13**
○ Privacy information control		.18***	.12*	-.00
Motivations				
○ Information-seeking		.19**	-.14*	-.19**
○ Socialising		-.01	.00	.15**
○ Status-seeking		.07	.17**	.23***
○ Entertainment		.13	.14*	-.13*
	$\Delta R^2$	.05***	.03**	.06***
	<i>Total R<sup>2</sup></i>	.42	.42	.37
	<i>Total adjusted R<sup>2</sup></i>	.41	.40	.35

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

### ***Regressions predicting political orientations & communication process variables***

H1 seeks to find out if social news consumption is a predictor of communicative behaviours.

After applying appropriate controls for demographics and traditional news media use, social news consumption showed significant positive associations with offline interpersonal discussion ( $\beta = .26$ ), news participation ( $\beta = .43$ ), and news production ( $\beta = .29$ ) at the  $p < .001$  level (See Table 6). The equation for social news participation predicted more of the variance (25%) than did the equation for offline interpersonal discussion (20%) and social news production (19%).

Thus, H1 was supported.

H2 is focused on the association between social news consumption and political orientations. Similarly, after applying appropriate controls for demographics and traditional news media use, social news consumption showed significant positive associations with public affairs knowledge ( $\beta = .18$ ) and efficacy ( $\beta = .37$ ) at the  $p < .001$  level. The regression model accounted for 5% of the variance in public affairs knowledge and 24% of the variance in efficacy.

Accordingly, H2 was also supported. Noteworthy as well is that among the control variables introduced in these models, traditional news media use was also statistically significant in explaining why people engage in offline interpersonal discussions ( $\beta = .25, p < .001$ ), news participation ( $\beta = .19, p < .001$ ), news production ( $\beta = .25, p < .001$ ), and efficacy ( $\beta = .21, p < .001$ ). This further suggests that even among social news users, traditional news media still has an important role to play in influencing political antecedents.

**Table 6. Linear regressions predicting communication processes and political orientations**

Independent variables	Offline Interpersonal Discussion	Social News Participation	Social News Production	Public Affairs Knowledge	Efficacy	
	$\beta$	$B$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	
Gender (1 = Male; 0 = Female)	.09	.08	.09*	.05	.10*	
Ethnicity (1 = Chinese; 0 = Non-Chinese)	.10*	.01	.03	-.02	.01	
Educational attainment	.01	-.04	-.03	.10	.06	
Monthly income	.02	-.12*	-.03	-.01	-.02	
Traditional media use	.25***	.19***	.25***	.02	.21***	
Social news consumption	.26***	.43***	.29***	.18***	.37***	
	$R^2$	.20	.25	.19	.05	.24
	Adjusted $R^2$	.19	.24	.17	.04	.23

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

### ***Regressions predicting political participatory behaviours***

As shown in Table 7, the different regression models explained approximately  $R^2 = 58\%$  of the total variance for offline citizen participation and  $R^2 = 55\%$  of variance for online participation. Comparing the  $R^2$  contributions of the various blocks reveal that while all blocks contributed statistically significant incremental variances, the reasoning block explained offline citizen participation and online participation more than did the other variables. Among the first orientation variables, ethnicity ( $\beta = .08, p < .05$ ), education levels ( $\beta = .08, p < .05$ ), and

traditional news media use ( $\beta = .10$ ,  $p < .01$ ) had a significant relationship with offline citizen participation. Similarly, education levels ( $\beta = .10$ ) and traditional news media use ( $\beta = .08$ ) contribute to online participation as well at the  $p < .05$  level. In other words, among our respondents, the more educated one is, coupled with greater exposure to news from print and broadcast sources, the more likely he/she would be politically engaged. Overall, this block of control variables explained 19% of the variance in offline citizen participation and 17% of the variance in online participation.

As a third set of hypotheses, this study predicted that communicative behaviours would be significantly and positively associated with offline citizen participation and online participation. As shown in Table 7, this proposition was partially supported. News production was significantly and positively associated to both participation measures at the  $p < .001$  level ( $\beta = .32$  for offline citizen participation, and  $\beta = .41$  for online participation). Similarly, interpersonal discussion contributed positively and significantly to offline citizen participation ( $\beta = .42$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and online participation ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $p < .001$ ). News participation, however, was only a significant determinant of online participation ( $\beta = .03$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The reasoning block explained 36% of the variance in offline citizen participation and 33% of the variance in online participation.

The fourth set of hypotheses stated a positive relationship between political orientations and offline citizen participation, and political orientations and online participation. This was also partially supported. Efficacy was significantly and positively associated with offline citizen participation ( $\beta = .20$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and online participation ( $\beta = .21$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Conversely, public affairs knowledge did not reach significance for either participation measure. As a block, second orientations was significant in explaining 2 and 3% of the variance in offline and online

participation respectively, after the contribution of the prior three blocks was taken into consideration.

It should also be noted that news consumption was initially significantly and positively associated with the criterion variables, accounting for a small but still statistically significant incremental variance of 1 and 2% in offline citizen participation and online participation respectively (See Block 2 in Table 7). However, this effect was reduced to non-significant in the final models after communication processes and political orientations were entered into the equation. This suggests that the latter variables have relaying effects of social news consumption on political participatory behaviours (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Therefore, to ascertain this mediating role, a series of mediation analyses was conducted to examine the indirect effect of each predictor towards offline citizen participation and online participation (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

**Table 7. Hierarchical regressions predicting Citizen Participation**

Independent variables	Offline Citizen Participation $\beta$	Online Participation $B$
<b><i>Block 1: First Orientations</i></b>		
Gender (1 = Male; 0 = Female)	.14**	.12**
Ethnicity (1 = Chinese; 0 = Non-Chinese)	.14**	.11*
Educational attainment	.10*	.11*
Monthly income	-.06	-.04
Traditional media use	.33***	.32***
$\Delta R^2$	.19***	.17***
<b><i>Block 2: Stimulus</i></b>		
Gender	.14**	.12**
Ethnicity	.14**	.11*
Educational attainment	.09	.09
Monthly income	-.07	-.06
Traditional media use	.31***	.29***
Social news consumption	.11*	.15**
$\Delta R^2$	.01*	.02**
<b><i>Block 3: Reasoning</i></b>		
Gender	.07	.05
Ethnicity	.08*	.06
Educational attainment	.09*	.11**
Monthly income	-.07	-.05
Traditional media use	.10**	.09*
Social news consumption	.05	.09

Social news participation		-.03	.03*
Social news production		.34***	.44***
Interpersonal discussion		.52***	.38***
	$\Delta R^2$	.36***	.33***
<b>Block 4: Second Orientations</b>			
Gender		.06	.04
Ethnicity		.08*	.07
Educational attainment		.08*	.10*
Monthly income		-.07	-.05
Traditional media use		.10**	.08*
Social news consumption		-.14	.03
Social news participation		-.05	.03*
Social news production		.32***	.41***
Interpersonal discussion		.42***	.28***
Public affairs knowledge		-.01	-.07
Efficacy		.20***	.21***
	$\Delta R^2$	.02***	.03***
	Total $R^2$	.58	.55
	Total adjusted $R^2$	.57	.54

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

### ***Mediational analyses***

A parallel multiple mediation was conducted with all five communicative behaviour and political orientation variables as mediators (See Table 8.1 and 8.2). The indirect path is considered significant when the confidence interval does not include zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The analyses reported controlled for demographics and traditional news media use. H5a was mostly supported; the effects of news consumption on offline citizen participation was significantly mediated by interpersonal discussion ( $b = .03$ , Boot CI = [.02, .04]), as well as by news production ( $b = .02$ , Boot CI = [.01, .03]). As expected (H5b), the effects of news consumption on online participation was significantly mediated by interpersonal discussion ( $b = .12$ , Boot CI = [.06, .18]), news participation ( $b = .00$ , Boot CI = [.06, .07]), and news production ( $b = .19$ , Boot CI = [.12, .27]).

The mediating effects of political orientations on offline citizen participation and online participation parallel one another. Efficacy mediated the relationships between news



consumption and offline citizen participation ( $b = .02$ , Boot CI = [.01, .03]), and news consumption and online participation ( $b = .12$ , Boot CI = [.06, .20]). Accordingly, H6a and H6b were partially supported. Collectively, the results indicate that those who consume news through social media platforms are more likely to discuss related issues offline, reproduce news-related content on social media, and feel more efficacious, which in turn leads to greater levels of involvement in civic life.

**Table 8.1. Mediation analysis of Reasoning and 2<sup>nd</sup> Orientations on Offline Citizen Participation**

Path towards offline Citizen Participation	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% bootstrap CI	
			Lower limit	Upper limit
Social News Consumption → Interpersonal discussion → Offline Citizen Participation	.03	.01	.02	.04
Social News Consumption → Social News Participation → Offline Citizen Participation	-.01	.01	-.01	.01
Social News Consumption → Social News Production → Offline Citizen Participation	.02	.01	.01	.03
Social News Consumption → Knowledge → Offline Citizen Participation	-.00	.00	-.00	.00
Social News Consumption → Efficacy → Offline Citizen Participation	.02	.01	.01	.03

Note: Entries are unstandardised regression coefficients. 5000 bootstrap samples. SE = Standard error; CI = confidence interval. Demographics and traditional media use were included as covariates. Entries in grey are indirect effects that were non-distinguishable from zero.

**Table 8.2. Mediation analysis of Reasoning and 2nd Orientations on Online Participation**

Path towards Online Participation	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% bootstrap CI	
			Lower limit	Upper limit
Social news Consumption → Interpersonal Discussion → Online Participation	.12	.03	.06	.18
Social News Consumption → Social News participation → Online Participation	.00	.31	.06	.07
Social News Consumption → Social News Production → Online Participation	.19	.04	.12	.27
Social News Consumption → Knowledge → Online Participation	-.02	.01	-.05	.00
Social News Consumption → Efficacy → Online Participation	.12	.04	.06	.20

Note: Entries are unstandardised regression coefficients. 5000 bootstrap samples. SE = Standard error; CI = confidence interval. Demographics and traditional media use were included as covariates. Entries in grey are indirect effects that were non-distinguishable from zero.

## Discussion

This study is intended to quantitatively investigate why social media users engage with news content on the platform differently and the effects of this engagement on participation in civic and political life. To answer this question, it first distinguished between three main types of social news use and investigated the influences of information-seeking, socialising, entertainment, status-seeking, information control, and social presence on the former. In general, the results suggest that different user motivations and technological affordances can encourage different social news practices. Further, through the O-S-R-O-R framework, the current study explored the indirect relationships between news consumption and participatory political behaviours. Findings provide considerable support for the model, demonstrating that various

communicative processes and orientations positively mediate the association between news consumption and offline and online citizen participation.

### **Facilitator and inhibitors of social news use**

In interpreting the findings, first, it is notable that user involvement in news content depends on the social affordances of the site, particularly those that facilitate the presence of other users and those that enable users to take an active role in reproducing news content with their networks. Social presence was found to be the only antecedent to positively and significantly predict all social news use activities. Indeed, aside from news consumption, the beta coefficient for this variable is the largest in the final model, suggesting that it is the most salient factor predicting social news use. This finding is consistent with earlier research that argues that the presence of other people's involvement is an importance concept related to online media use (Cheung et al., 2011; Xu et al., 2012). While social media has primarily been seen as a tool for maintaining personal relationships (Glynn et al., 2012), the results of this study show that the sense of awareness that others are also present and are able to respond is an equally important impetus of news-related activities too.

Moreover, the findings also show that expressive information control was positively associated with news production whereas privacy information control was a significant predictor of news consumption and participation. The significant influence of expressive information control indicates that users who proactively engage with news content are more likely to perceive greater control over how they communicate. This is consistent with Goffman's (1953) theory of self-presentation and suggests that people may be engaging in social news use as a form of impression management behaviour. The lack of a significant relationship between privacy

controls and news production use appear to be inconsistent with preceding research that demonstrates a negative relationship between privacy concerns and information disclosure online (Krasnova et al., 2010; Nemeč Zlatolas et al., 2015; Staddon et al., 2012b). However, rather than interpreting from these results that young adults are not cognisant or concerned about who is in their potential audience, I reason that young adults do not simply rely on privacy settings to circumvent unwanted interaction. Indeed, research has shown that instead of cutting down on the amount of information revealed, young adults also engage in other privacy-protecting tactics such as “content encoding” or “the lowest common denominator” (Hogan, 2010; Marwick & boyd, 2014). In the former, users reduce the information to be interpretable to a selected audience whereas in the latter, users only disclose information that is appropriate to all members of the network. Future research would benefit from a content analysis to explore how these strategies apply in a social news context.

Another notable finding concerns the influence of status-seeking motivations on news participation and production. This finding is consistent with earlier studies on the gratifications attained from news consumption/sharing on social media (Choi, 2016; Lee & Ma, 2011). As discussed earlier, media users are inclined to exploit the features of a medium to manage the impressions of others. In the context of social news use, those who make news more personally relevant to their networks by reproducing it may be motivated by the desire to obtain a reputation as a gatekeeper or opinion leader (Burke et al., 2009). While they might not necessarily be the original sources of information, by posting news stories and sharing it to their contacts, these individuals may be viewed as sources by their networks and receive important psychological benefits. The motivation of socialising was the other significant predictor of news production. The concept of socialising around news content is not a recent phenomenon. Early media

research has posited that receiving news information offers resourceful topics for offline discussion and that these two activities reinforce each other (McLeod et al., 1999). Our findings suggest that news engagement remains “socially driven” (Purcell et al., 2010). However, in contrast to traditional media where news engagement was primarily sequential, social media supports interpersonal interaction with features that allow users to proactively engage with news content.

Echoing the work of Choi (2016), this study found that entertainment motivation was positively associated with news participation but was negatively associated with news production. On the other side of the ledger, information-seeking motivation positively predicted news consumption but negatively predicted news participation and production. This reinforces the observation that social media use – or social news use in this case – consists of heterogeneous practices derived from varying motivations (Shah, Kwak, et al., 2001). With regards to the role of entertainment motivation specifically, the findings indicate that affectively driven social news users are not likely to partake in interactions that require more time and effort if a lower threshold alternative is available. This is consistent with prior U&G studies that posit that non-instrumental media uses are more concerned with the medium – or in this case, the process of engaging with others – than the functional outcomes of the process – i.e. information gained from such activity (Rafaeli & Ariel, 2008; Alan M. Rubin & Perse, 1987). Future studies, however, should consider exploring how expressing one’s opinions in the form of endorsements (e.g. “Likes”) is able to elicit inherent satisfaction or pleasure in the first place.

The varied influences of information-seeking motivation show that while receiving news on social media may satisfy users’ needs to stay informed of the political environment or verify existing decisions, it is not necessarily a resource for those engaged in more expressive forms of

social news use. Given that those who are involved in the latter activities are also motivated by status-seeking gratifications, it is less likely they will gain that sense of agency simply by consuming and passing along information that is already circulating widely in their network. Instead, they may be adapting news consumed elsewhere. This is plausible as recent research has also shown that those who contribute their own news content on SNSs are likely to have a larger media repertoire – including traditional news media such as network and cable television, as well as other digital platforms (Choi, 2016; A. Mitchell et al., 2013).

### **Predicting citizen participation**

Consistent with previous research, reasoning processes interpersonal discussion and news production largely channelled the effects of news consumption on offline and online political outcomes. News participation however, only mediated the effects of news consumption on online participation. Collectively, this finding suggests while there may be an expanding range of ways people communicate about news in online settings, not all forms of expressions are necessarily equal in terms of underlying cognitive processes and level of commitment required, and this in turn is likely to have an effect on one's involvement in civic or political affairs (Eveland et al., 2011; Pingree, 2007). The small or otherwise insignificant influence of news participation in this study demonstrates that the relatively reactive experience of sharing and responding with a bandwagon cue (e.g. "Like") does not necessarily elicit complex deliberative qualities – i.e. opinion elaboration in anticipation of future discussions or exchange of ideas while discussing news content with others (Eveland et al., 2004). Moreover, as discussed earlier, those driven by entertainment motivations are more likely to engage in news participation. Entertainment uses of media are often argued to have muted or adverse political consequences because unlike more

instrumental uses, this form of usage entails lesser attention to the content consumed or integration of the content into interaction with others (J. Cho et al., 2003; Skoric, 2015).

The strong influence of interpersonal discussion and news production in facilitating both online and offline forms of citizen participation also reveal that even though discourse on public issues remain an important pathway to political participatory behaviours, young adults do not simply rely on virtual platforms nor offline resources to do so. However, while the results of this study corroborates with preceding research that argues that both online and offline expressions complement rather than supplant one another (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2010; Jung et al., 2011), here I'd also like to point out that the mode social news users choose to deliberate in will also have an effect on how they participate in civic and political life. Indeed, a closer look at the findings reveals that, while news production had a significant positive effect on both offline and online citizen participation, this association was stronger for the latter. Conversely, interpersonal discussion was a stronger predictor of offline citizen participation than online participation. Put differently, those who prefer online methods to express themselves are more likely to encounter and be receptive to political participatory practices within the platform. The opposite could be argued for those who prefer engaging in offline discussions. Explicating what motivates social news consumers to deliberate on online or offline spaces following news consumption on social media remains a question for future research.

Another point worth noting is the role traditional news media continue to play in civic life. Although to a smaller extent than communicative processes, traditional news media had an effect on both offline and online participatory behaviours, demonstrating that despite being typically portrayed as new-media savvy, young adults may not necessarily be as dismissive of conventional news sources as argued by some scholars (Bennett, 2008; Mcmillan & Morrison,

2006). This could be explained by the gatekeeping process intrinsic to traditional news media production, in which news stories pass through several stages where it is selected, rejected, and edited by various professional news workers before it is released to their audience (White, 1950). As a result, news from these sources may be “socially constructed” but is still expected to be accurate and reliable enough to provide citizens with the information they need to participate in everyday life, including politics. Conversely, while social media is increasingly seen as a gateway to news consumption, information reproduced on these spaces are not necessarily subjected to traditional news gatekeeping and is therefore more prone to misinformation (Waisbord, 2018). It appears that social news consumers in the current study realise this and are choosing not to accept or act on the information they receive from these sources so readily. Instead they may choose to ascertain the veracity of this information through more discursive means. This active form of engagement may manifest in offline discussions and news production, as explored in this study, or in exchanging news stories with other users on social media as pointed out by Choi et al. (2017). However, as I will discuss in the following paragraph, the effects of interpersonal deliberation can be precarious – discussions among like-minded people are unlikely to correct but perpetuate misconceptions (Druckman & Nelson, 2003).

Finally, this study also found that among social news users, efficacy was a significant and direct positive predictor of both offline and online citizen participation. The results of this inquiry largely reaffirms the proposition that people’s awareness of public affairs, through news media consumption, encourages feelings of efficaciousness, which in turn leads to political participation (Delli Carpini, 2004; Kenski & Stroud, 2006). However, unlike preceding research (Gastil et al., 2016; N. Jung et al., 2011; J. M. McLeod et al., 1999), public affairs knowledge was not found to be a mediator between news consumption and politically-oriented behaviours in



this study. In this regard, I argue that fact-based understanding of public affairs on social media may not necessarily be an impetus for citizen participation as it is for traditional news media. Indeed, in an era increasingly described as “post-truth” (Marmot, 2017; McIntyre, 2018), objective facts are less influential in triggering participation in public life than appeals to emotions and personal beliefs. There is evidence to support this reasoning. Following in-depth interviews with 61 emerging adults, Marchi (2012) concluded that younger people gravitated towards news from non-dedicated sources, such as social media or blogs, because they desired news coupled with interpretations and judgements. Conversely, reliability of information from these sources was of secondary concern. In a mixed method study, Conroy et al. (2012) noted from his survey data that online political group participation was positively associated with offline participation. However, in the second portion of their study, a content analysis revealed that information shared in these spaces were generally of poor quality – inaccurate and unsupported by evidence or were highly opinionated. Collectively, their study indicated that information shared in these spaces are likely to be mobilising not so much because it was enlightening or educational but because it reinforces political concerns and objectives members were already concerned about.

All in all, on the basis of UGT, social presence theory, and processes in information control, the present research validated the proposed model in explaining social news use. While news consumption, participation, and production were predicted by a varied pattern of media affordances and users’ needs, social presence was found to be a core force driving all news related activities on social media. This underscores how the characteristics of the platform, or more specifically, the perceived characteristics of the platform, are a crucial factor in this line of research. In addition, the positive associations found between news consumption,

communication processes, political orientations, and offline/online citizen participation in this study are generally supportive of the O-S-R-O-R model and lend further external validity to its assumptions. Specifically, interpersonal discussion, news production, and efficacy explained the indirect effects of news consumption on all politically oriented behaviours, with the former demonstrating to be the most important contributor.

However, while data from this quantitative study largely responds to research objective (1) to explore how media and individual factors affect millennials' engagement in social news use and (3) to examine how social news use facilitates or inhibits citizen participation, a key limitation intrinsic with this study is its reliance on predefined categories or variables of interest. Consequently, other underlying mechanisms influencing social news use or citizen participation may not have been covered. For instance, while the current research controlled for traditional news media use, it did not explore how social news users manage content from other internet-based news sources or even across different social media platforms. In the same vein, even though this study explicates the positive role of news production, participation, and production in citizen participation, it is not clear if there are any other confounding factors that might undermine this relationship. As such, the findings from this study should be refined using qualitative data that can directly explain how social news users manage their news engagement in multi-media environments, their reasons for doing so, and the challenges they face in translating these activities into civic/political involvement. One of the key findings so far suggests that politically engaged individuals are more likely to proactively engage with news content on social media. It is therefore apt to follow up with in-depth interviews with millennial activists in Study 2 – as opposed to ordinary young people with normal or low levels of political/civic engagement. Consequently, the qualitative study discussed in the following

chapter is expected to not only address the limitations mentioned above but also research objective two: To understand how civically or politically engaged millennials engage with social media as sources of news and information.

## CHAPTER FIVE: STUDY TWO

This chapter focuses on refining and explaining the statistical results of Study 1 by examining civically/politically engaged young adults experiences with social news use. The primary objective therefore is to integrate the statistically relevant relationships identified in the quantitative study into the analysis of the qualitative data so as to validate the prevalence of these variables and pathways. In the following, the method of investigation – in-depth interviews – and the composition of the sample are discussed in detail. Thereafter, the analytical strategy and empirical findings are presented. Finally, the chapter concludes at the integration stage, where results from the quantitative phase are summarized with the addition of examples or counterexamples from the qualitative phase. Areas of discussion are also provided for inconsistencies in findings.

### **Methodology**

#### **Sampling**

A purposive and snow-balling sampling method was used to recruit participants. The initial call for participants was first emailed to organisations of the following three communities: 1) welfare organisation groups, 2) single-issue movements or associations, 3) political party groups. The first category refers to communities involved in philanthropy work such as free assistance to old and needy individuals, the second refers to groups that are involved in a specific cause such as gender equality, and the latter groups are those whom are involved in party politics. Recipients were requested to forward it within their personal networks. To qualify, participants had to be

between the ages of 21-35 years old, are current members or volunteers of either of the above-mentioned three communities and have been involved with them for at least a year. Based on the findings of Study 1 and extant literature indicating a relationship between news media use and citizen participation, this non-probability sampling allowed the researcher to focus on how social news use affects and is affected by involvement in public life.

A total of 20 interviews were conducted, with an average age of 27, 11 of whom were female. An effort was made to ensure racial minorities were represented as well (13 Chinese, 4 Malays, 2 Indians, and 1 'Other'). The sample showed an average of 15 years of formal education in Singapore, which is equivalent to an undergraduate degree. The interviewees reported that they were somewhat, or very interested in local politics or social issues ( $M = 4.45$  on 5-point scale). In the same vein, they paid close or very close attention to news concerning these issues ( $M = 3.9$  on a 5-point scale) and somewhat agreed or agreed that people like themselves could influence the government ( $M = 4.65$  on a 7-point scale). They also reported discussing current affairs with others once a day. These figures indicate that the sample was indeed not representative of the general youth population, but rather, more active members of society. Moreover, the sample was also a social news use experienced group – they had an average 8-year history of engaging with news-related content on social media several times a day. Conversely, they only consume news on more traditional channels, such as radio and television, once a week on average. This suggests that the sample is a group of young adults well-socialised with the changing news media landscape.

## **Procedure / Data Collection**

The primary instrument used to gather the data was a semi-structured interview protocol (See Appendix C for sample questions and probes). Semi-structured interviews allowed for some consistency in data collection as well as the opportunity for participants to expand upon their responses (Berg, 2004). Other advantages of this approach included the opportunity to probe deeper into participants' motivations, reflections and behaviours that might not have been covered in the earlier quantitative study.

Prior to the actual interview, respondents were provided with an information sheet to read and a consent form to sign. This was to help them understand the nature of the project better and confirm their willingness to participate. In addition, they were reminded that their participation would be voluntary and anonymous. Hence, while names of the individuals and their communities were recorded in this research, they will not be presented in this paper. Instead, the respondents were assigned letter labels (e.g. A, B, C, etc.) and their communities were identified broadly, such as "human rights group". In addition, while there have been instances in the interviews where they referred to the names of their communities specifically, these have been replaced with "my organisation" and a \* in this report. Following their consent, informants were asked to fill in a short questionnaire (Appendix D). The survey form is designed so as to collect some demographic and other basic information on interviewees' existing social news use behaviours and motivations. This data was also used as background information during the in-depth interviews.

The interviews were conducted between October 2017 and February 2018. Each was conducted face-to-face at a time and place convenient to the interviewees and took about an hour to two hours to complete. All interviews were audio recorded (with the interviewees' permission)

and transcribed by the researcher. Minor corrections in grammar and sentence structures were made during transcriptions to maintain coherency and legibility.

### **Data analysis**

Since the primary purpose of the qualitative study was to better understand and expand on quantitative findings, this study employed a three-step analysis. First, an overall reading of all transcripts was done, with descriptive codes added as annotations on the documents. Descriptive codes as Saldana (2015, p. 102) explains, “summarises in a word or short phrase – most often a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data”. Accordingly, phrases related to concepts or variables explored in the earlier study, such as gratifications, social presence, and self-presentation, were highlighted as descriptive codes in this step. In the second step, excerpts from these codes were then entered into a matrix and an examination of response patterns was conducted to create pattern codes – or codes which group descriptive codes into smaller number of themes (Saldana, 2015). Finally, different themes were organised under three major topics: the roads to news engagement, interacting with sources and platforms, and the double-edge effect of social news use. These are presented below, as the main findings of this analysis.

## **Results**

### **The roads to social news engagement**

As mentioned earlier, most of the interviewees expressed a predilection towards consuming news online rather than offline. News consumption in the latter is often incidental and non-committal. All who reported listening to the news on radio did so while commuting in private transportation (i.e. cars). Despite the existence of dedicated news and current affairs radio stations (e.g.

CNA938), none of the participants tuned into such stations and were only exposed to such information when their respective stations presented the top-of-the-hour news. Similarly, exposure to television news did not occur purposefully. Some reported watching television news while doing chores around the house whereas others saw it as a means of spending time with older family members. Participants who read printed news materials had ready access to it – their households, workplaces, or student lounges had a current subscription. In these instances, the participants said they read these materials whilst having a meal or if someone else prompted them to read a particular story. To a certain extent, these findings coincide with scholarly and trade literature that points to news consumers’ – particularly among young people – shifting preferences from traditional to online/social media (Craft et al., 2016; Amy Mitchell & Holcomb, 2016; N. Newman et al., 2019; Sveningsson, 2015). So, what was it about the latter that made news engagement a more satisfying experience for these young activists?

Analysis of all the comments yielded four key motivations for engaging in social news use: a) to broaden one’s perspectives, b) to self-express, c) for amusement purposes, and d) for convenience. It is worthwhile to note that all respondents reported engaging in social news use for at least two or more purposes. One of the most common motives – 13 out of 20 participants – for engaging with news on social media was to expand their perspectives on local politics and social issues beyond mainstream views. They understood that unlike mass media, the internet is not as aggressively regulated by the government, and is therefore home to alternative sources of local news:

Because in Singapore we have the Printing Presses Act, which limits the publication and the distribution of newspapers that are not preapproved by the government. So, if I were



to rely on the traditional outlets for news, my news would be very limited in terms of depth and opinions. (A, a human rights activist)

I think in Singapore, because we don't have that kind of diversity, we may not realise the political leanings that our very non-diverse traditional media sources have. And so what social media does is that it allows you to juxtapose those traditional media forms that are also on social media now with all the other news producers. (B, a political party member)

Moreover, they pointed out that it is not just the content from alternative social news pages that they were interested in but the perspectives of non-media professionals. These personalised opinions increase the relevancy of news consumed from official news media sources:

Because you have your intellectuals and intelligentsias there. Whom (sic) start to give their first level interpretations of events. And some of them have their own pages with their own followers so they curate the news for others to a certain extent as well. In fact, some of these posts are of a certain standard, so they might be curating the news as well as traditional media. (C, a grassroots leader)

I think one of the good things is that when you go into the comments, you can find people who actually know a lot more than the original writer. And that is very interesting to me. Social media is a very easy way to crowd source for new information. (D, a student activist who focuses on LGBT issues)

So, especially with the social aspect of commentaries. Like your friends commenting. So, that actually helps to bring the other side of the conversation even though it's still within mainstream media, like *The Straits Times* online. So, they can actually comment, maybe say that some policy is insufficient. Because sometimes, the light that shines on these policies is too positive. (E, an active social services agency volunteer)

Another common motive for engaging in social news use was for self-expression. More than half – 13 – of all participants felt that the features of social media facilitated engagement with issues they felt were pertinent. Because of their sustained involvement, many identified themselves as an authority on the topic of their respective causes and the platform offered an opportunity to demonstrate that knowledge:

I specifically comment sometimes not just for friends, but also because I know that there are a lot of people following me on Facebook and things like that. I sometimes comment because I deliberately want to highlight certain points, or I want to bring things up that I feel have been missing. So I would comment on say, a *Straits Times* article saying they didn't cover this or this is completely wrong. I have a different experience because I've interviewed different people. And I specifically bring those up to add awareness to the issue. (F, a prominent blogger and human rights activist)

...it's because a lot of us in this organisation can relate or empathise to these issues personally. And we know that there are things that are not actually putting it across in traditional print or online articles...because most of these articles are primarily produced

by like people of privilege. They're mostly heterosexuals, a majority race, or from a class background with specific biasness and they're blinded to another perspective that they can't form because of where they are in society. (G, an ethnic minority and an advocate for gender equality rights).

With Facebook, sometimes I make my posts public. And I do that because I know that there is a wider community out there that is sometimes reading some of my stuff. So I do that just to encourage that kind of participation. And I think it became a lot more obvious when I became PR rep with the network. I started receiving a lot more attention. (D)

However, not all self-express to promote their public identity or expertise. H, a member of an environmental group, denied communicating news on social media as a means of influence but to manage social connections, particularly with close ties such as her husband. Similarly, U, who works on issues related to support and advocacy for sex workers, admitted:

Sometimes it's because you're just so angry about it and you just want to shout and *kao peh kao bu* (sic) about it. So recently I shared that piece of news about (how) foreign talents are not pissed off about the fact that trains keep breaking down in Singapore. I reposted with the comment, "How is this relevant to what is going on at all?"

Regardless of whether this motivation is manifested as a deliberate action or visceral reaction, the thread that binds is the desire to be heard. When probed to compare how expressing oneself is fulfilled differently on other channels, they alluded to how the functions afforded by the online

space on social media accentuate the awareness of an audience not within their immediate proximity. For instance, J, a minority rights advocacy activist, mentioned how exchanging comments creates a bond with other social news users:

Especially recently with all the sexual assault harassment sort of news on Facebook. You also see other people commenting something in solidarity with the victims. ...You feel like, "Hey maybe like not everyone in Singapore feels like they need to victim blame someone, you know? ...So, in that way, it's like forming some kind of solidarity that he or she doesn't even know about.

Similarly, K, who advocates for gender equality rights, said:

When I hear the opinions of others through quote-tweets or quote-tweets of quote-tweets (later), it's nice to know that there are people out there who are as invested in the world as I am, or even more invested. And that they're consuming similar content as I am.

Conversely, L, a political party member, pointed out how this sense of presence (or lack of) has influenced what she shares on Facebook:

The funny thing is that sometimes when I push very political news out, I find myself more alone than ever. Because there'd be like only three people that "like" it only...So that has actually altered the way I share stuff...for the things that I do share, I actually try

to share things that I think my audience would want to read or will be interested in knowing. So that I don't feel alone.

Earlier CMC work involving social presence helps explain how the affordances or interactive features of social media raise awareness of other users (e.g. Farzan et al., 2011; B. Xu et al., 2011). This in turn is expected to contribute to overall satisfaction and continued engagement in the medium. Yet, the findings of this study also suggest that self-expression needs and social presence feelings may not necessarily be independent of one another.

A quarter of the informants also reported engaging in social news use because they found it relatively convenient or free of effort. They pointed out however, it was not just because social media simplified or facilitated news engagement with easy-to-use tools but because they – the users themselves – were already highly engaged with the platform. O, a political party member, alluded to this when he explained his preference for social news over other channels:

Unlike traditional media...Everything is in the palm of your hands on social media. So, I guess it's the matter of fact that almost everyone engages via social media nowadays and so, that's like the main point of reference when it comes to such things for me now. Or when it comes to news at least.

Similarly, P, a political party volunteer, commented: "Because most of the time I'm already on social media". These statements show that social media had become an integral component of our respondents' lives, deeply embedded in their daily routines, as is typical of pervasive

technology. Social media is arguably used for a gamut of activities, and exposure to news-related materials may not be intentional, even among young activists.

Finally, a small minority – three respondents – reported engaging with news-related materials on social media for entertainment purposes. Specifically, M, a minority rights advocacy activist, and N, an active grassroots volunteer, mentioned respectively that they do enjoy reading the comments of news articles from time to time:

...And then, at other times, it's really purely for amusement because people do say the darnest things online.

Sometimes I read the comments to laugh...Because you see a lot of idiots posting a lot of nonsense. And it makes you wonder whether they've been living under a rock all their lives.

While M and N would just show these commentaries to whoever is around their immediate vicinity, H goes one step further and occasionally shares selected screenshots of published forum letters to a small group of peers via a private Facebook album:

...So letters like, "Why are we making people walk on one side of the escalator?" or "We should clean up Little India". That was my favourite. Things that are just (sic) when you read it, you just can't help but laugh. But it's just a private album...

While researchers have often identified enjoyment as one of the key motives for social media use (e.g. Go et al., 2016; Lin & Lu, 2011), the entertainment utility in news-related activities on social media appears to be secondary among respondents.

In general, the desire to gain and offer alternative perspectives to news was a salient theme, and to a lesser extent, the desire to be entertained. Social news use also complemented their already digitally networked lifestyles. As the young activists elaborated on their preferences toward internet-based news media, it became clearer that even within this landscape, not all media outlets or social media platforms were treated indiscriminately. In the following section, we will look at how our participants manage multiple news media contacts from two angles: 1) sources (online mainstream versus online alternative) and 2) platforms (e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp, etc).

## **Interacting with sources and platforms**

### ***Sources***

When it comes to staying informed on local issues, all but two of the respondents did not consume exclusively from mainstream or alternative sources online. As pointed out earlier, their decision to form a more eclectic media diet comes from their desire to obtain a more rounded understanding of current affairs. Consistent with Bennett's (2008) AC/DC model, several informants expressed a certain level of media scepticism, or a "feeling of mistrust toward[s] the mainstream news media" (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003, p. 506):

So when I see a post by the *The Straits Times*, I know I'm going to approach it with a truck load of salt because I know what they did before and I know their intentions. But

like I said, sometimes I get pleasantly surprised at the accuracy of the article. (Q, a political party member).

I consume mainstream media, but I tend to look at it with more scepticism. Just because I've learnt to be sceptical with mainstream news media outlets. Especially when it comes from Singapore. Because it's controlled by the government and stuff like that. (K)

I do follow mainstream media actually, but my issue is not so much that they straight out lie. It's lying by omission. (F)

However, at the same time, it is also inaccurate to suggest that this means that they are, by default, partial to alternative media sources as well. K later noted, "...to an extent, I also do regard them [alternative news media] with scepticism because it maybe hearsay". Similarly, Q and F added respectively:

I don't like things like *All Singapore Stuff*, where they post a lot of click-bait articles. I think that is completely lacking in terms of journalistic integrity. What's the other one called? *The States Times*. Oh my God, the stuff there is just bullshit. They're very anti-government but there's no critical thinking at all.

I was very turned off by *The Independent Singapore* and they had this tendency of skewing headlines in a way that fed to a specific tribe. So they were always emphasising



issues with headlines like this foreigner did this, or this PRC did that. I did not like that sort of editorial judgement.

These instances also suggest these young activists are not passively consuming news but are also evaluating the messages they receive, or are at least wary of sensational, exaggerated or unsubstantiated content. Their experience as news workers or activists who have produced their own media messages helps explain this healthy scepticism. Like many Singaporeans in a recent study (Ng, 2018), they prided themselves on their ability to differentiate between reliable and suspicious news and information sources. In defence of this claim, they pointed out several strategies in identifying potentially non-credible content. One approach, as D noted, is to trace the credentials of these information producers:

So, *The Middle Ground* for example, is run by Bertha Hanson, a former news editor, and Daniel Yap, who has had a good career in PR before coming over to journalism and has also been commenting over the internet for years and years. So I trust the people who have been running behind... *Must Share News, All Singapore Stuff, Fabrications about the PAP, Fabrications Lead by the Oppositions*, all these subpages where the background is shady, you don't know who exactly is running it. Nothing has been tracked. Nothing has been checked. These are the pages that I avoid. These are the pages I don't think are legitimate.

In addition, they also paid attention to how the news or the message is constructed. Many of the interviewees recognised that subjectivity is part and parcel of news making and does not

necessarily compromise the legitimacy of the message. Nevertheless, they are likely to doubt the veracity of the information if it is presented in a tabloid-like or over simplified manner. For instance, R, a human rights activist, stressed that one should not just look out for bias in statements but the depth of coverage when evaluating information:

There are certain criteria of course. Like, what sort of words do they use? What language are they using? And what about their sources, right? So, let's say if *The Independent* [Singapore] writes something based on a person's Facebook post or a screenshot of a Facebook post. And if we read further down, we find out that they actually did not have any contact with that person. No interviews. Nothing. Then I'll be like, "Is this gossip?"

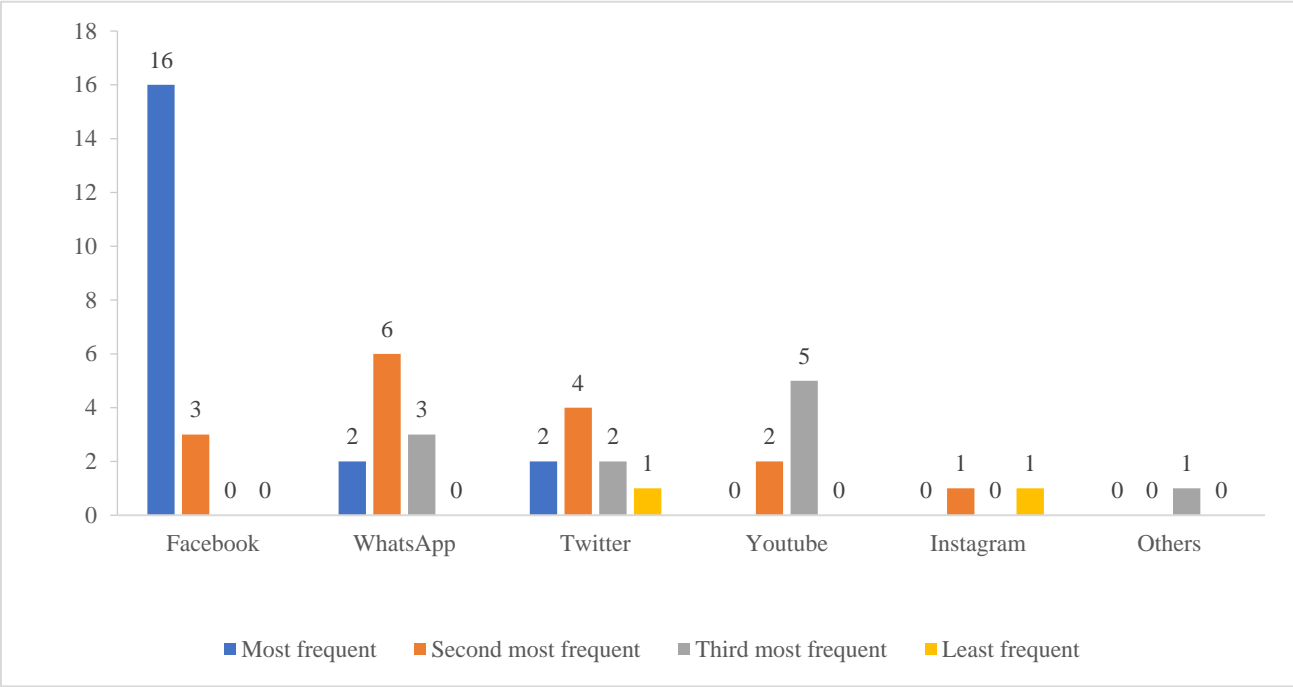
In the same vein, U interpreted empty referents in the headlines as a sign of untrustworthiness:

In fact, recently there was this article posted by Business Times, I think? ...It was a terribly written article. Like a primary school kid wrote that article. The headline was about how pimping was on the rise in Singapore. But the article had no statistics, no trends, no analysis of the situation, and no mention of pimping except in the first sentence.

It should also be noted that none of the respondents consume news (mainstream or otherwise) on social media only. Several interviewees mentioned that they also included news apps or content aggregators in their repertoire. The latter in particular facilitates verification of news pieces by allowing its users to compare and contrast them on one platform. U said:

It [Google Alerts] helps me compare headlines. Because in Google Alerts, similar news articles would be combined in a list or there would be a link to another article. So the first one could be The Straits Times, and then they will put, “Also, see this or that related article”. Then from there you can clearly compare the news already.

The findings thus far are instructive. Consuming news in the online environment requires discernment and most of the informants are applying various critical thinking strategies. Further, their general sense of ambivalence or unwillingness to rely on a particular media organisation wholly suggests an awareness of the influence of the media. However, as mentioned before, online news use – particularly social news use – differs from accessing news on other media channels because it also allows its users to be part of the production or dissemination process as well. The following subsection looks at how this engagement is influenced by the platform’s perceived affordances.



**Figure 3.** Top social news platform in order of frequency

***Platforms***

As shown in Figure 3, Facebook was the primary social media platform for news engagement for most informants. However, four participants identified either WhatsApp or Twitter as their primary channel. A majority also used a second platform, the most common of which was WhatsApp. Conversely, only about half of them used a third platform and a minority (two) used a fourth platform. When the young activists studied discussed how they engaged with news on different platforms, it became obvious that for most of them, their primary social news platform was also the platform in which they engaged with news more proactively. A for instance, disclosed that he runs a Facebook page known to regularly produce content that contest or discredit mainstream views on politics and social issues. However, when asked to explain what

he does when engaging with news on WhatsApp, his second most frequently used platform, he responded: “I use WhatsApp for news in a consumptive way. Usually when there’s breaking news or something like that, I will receive it through WhatsApp... like, “Hey this is happening”. In the same vein, M expressed that while she does not (re)produce news content regularly, either as an individual or on behalf of her organisation, it is “comparatively more” than her second platform, YouTube where she has never gone beyond consuming or direct resharing. She revealed that in the last year, she and her team prepared a report containing recommendations for local universities with regards to the treatment of LGBT+ students. While this report was never released publicly, a by-product of this project was a series of “Did you know” infographics released on her organisation’s Facebook page. It should be noted as well that for this project, social media was not a source of information. Instead, the team relied heavily on academic journals and industry reports for secondary data. This also instantiates how diffusion of news and information does not necessarily have to originate or be contained within social media.

As elaborated in Chapter 1, all social media support interaction albeit with differences in technological features. Most informants acknowledged that compared to other platforms, Facebook provided the means to construct richer messages of image and text. Nevertheless, a commonality that emerged from most participants was the perception that their primary social news use platform offered the most efficient means to interact with their target audience. S, a minority rights advocacy activist, pointed out:

If you want people to see something, then Facebook is the most convenient because you’re broadcasting to everyone unless you set it otherwise... In WhatsApp you can only forward to a specific group or person unless you broadcast it but then you’ll also have

create a list anyway so that is kind of irritating. So, Facebook has the best features for outreach.

G expressed similar ideas about Twitter, her preferred platform, “I guess because Twitter has more of the youth demographic that I’m reaching for... Because we want to impact the youth the most”. K expounded on this, explaining how affordances like tweet threads enable her to quickly connect with other interlocutors not in her immediate network:

Specifically, in terms of connectivity through threads. Thread discussions are just something that you can very easily click on and then get linked to another, and another, and another [related tweet]. Kind of like jumping posts. Whereas on Facebook, I feel like if you comment on Facebook, it tends to remain on that particular page.

Studies in information control have often focused on “the capacity to control the timing, duration, and nature of information” in a communication environment (O’Sullivan, 2000, p. 214); the above statements suggest that more active social news users will also exploit the technological aspects of the platform to enhance the range of their engagement.

At the same time however, none of the participants rejected the phenomenon that Marwick and boyd (2011) call context collapse. The informants explained they had ‘friends’ or followers from diverse networks – family members, colleagues, acquaintances, etc – on their primary social news platform. Unsurprisingly, many participants also articulated their concerns over how the information they share or reproduce maybe problematic to some of these contacts. These anticipated relational tensions were based on their own experiences or of other users of

whom they've witnessed before. For example, J highlighted why she considers her mother one of her strictest audiences online:

There was once I posted something the "F" word on my wall and my mum told me to delete it straight away. She was so pissed off. My parents are quite conservative...there's a lot of emotional baggage that I have to deal with if they read my posts.

Similarly, P said:

I had some friends telling me that I was posting too much things that is very...they call it negative. They told me I always seem to be complaining about the government. And some people don't like it. They might start to unfollow or block you after this. And your relationship with them might become more distant after that.

Both examples underscore that these young activists were aware of the potential negative implications of sharing information, particularly with known pre-existing ties. In line with prior research (e.g. McGuinness & Simon, 2018; Tufekci, 2008), participants in this study also adopted various practices to prevent the disclosure of certain materials from reaching these unintended recipients. The most common strategy was the utilisation of privacy settings or features inherent with the platform. While they did not often ignore or deny requests from known or unknown others to follow their accounts, they actively managed acquaintance lists or 'friend groupings', of whom will have restricted access to their posts by default. Further, several participants also reported using ephemeral features as an added layer of privacy protection.

Ephemeral features – e.g. Instagram’s Story – allow the user to predetermine the expiry of a message/post. J, quoted earlier saying she was wary of her parents’ surveillance, used Stories on both Facebook and Instagram to relay quick responses to a selected few. On a related note, G, acknowledging that not all of her engagement with social issues are refined, relies on the low archiving capacity of Twitter:

I also feel like on Twitter, there is a high turnover of Tweets that you see. If you’re a regular poster like me, things are unlikely to come back to haunt you years later. That also helps me to be more uninhibited.

In addition, half of all participants also admitted circumventing concerns over divergent audiences by presenting their political or civic identity – which, uncoincidentally, is also the same facet which is more engaged with news – on one social media platform or account specifically. L and D who both listed Facebook as their primary social news use platform and Instagram as their second and fourth platform respectively, pointed out:

I use Instagram as way to like, split my “zen” self away from my political activist self. And the people that are on my Instagram are also slightly different from the people on my Facebook. Actually, quite different. And so on Instagram a lot it is about sharing my yoga journey. Sharing a lot more “lifestyle” stuff. Occasionally I will put in a photo or two on political matters. But they will be ideological, abstract posts.



I speak about issues that I feel very strongly about. But what I present to the public is a persona. I present a persona of someone who is active in these issues. But I keep a lot of my private life to myself. So my Instagram account is private. I don't post about my relationships on Facebook. I don't post about family on Facebook...I make a very active attempt to curate it. So that people will only get that perspective.

Such segregation through multiple accounts allows them to not only leverage on the differences in interactive affordances across platforms, but also reduce the discrepancy between the imagined and the actual audience within these platforms. Arguably, this explains why they engage more actively or full heartedly with news in their primary social news platform and limit engagement to consumption only on their secondary platforms, if adopted at all.

Although uncommon, a few participants dealt with context collapse by ensuring that their online news engagement was appropriate for the widest audiences in their network, otherwise known as the "lowest common denominator" (LCD) (Hogan, 2010). Users of this strategy often relied on more ambiguous disclosures, as observed in E's comment, "So, I wouldn't comment anything outright usually. I'll just maybe repost it with '...'." Alternatively, this strategy could also result in the reduction of disclosures altogether. T, a member of an environmental group, said:

I don't think I've ever commented on a public news item. Maybe I have but maybe it was only once. And that's because I like to preserve my privacy. And yea, I suppose I'm too lazy to set up a separate Facebook account.

It should be noted that their tendency to apply the LCD approach does not stem from a lack of awareness in privacy settings, but a general distrust towards other users who might disseminate their posts to unintended recipients. All in all, the young activists were aware that the affordances inherent within social media facilitated message amplification, thus giving them the means to communicate with people whom they could not otherwise reach. At the same time however, they were concerned with their self-presentation, or more specifically, mitigating offense across diverse social groups. Accordingly, many dealt with this issue by adopting and/or manipulating certain features to exclude those deemed unsuitable for a specific piece of information. Others who were more critical of the limitations of these technical affordances preferred to use a dedicated platform for news engagement or restrict their news-related activities completely.

### **The double-edge effect of social news use**

Responses from the interviewees showed that both reinforcement and mobilisation hypotheses might be at work, in line with earlier research (Nam, 2012; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). In the case of the former, it has been posited that the effects of new media's positive influence on political participation is limited to those who are already politically engaged (Norris, 2001). Consistent with this argument, half of the informants in this study denied that their trajectory to activism was initiated by news engagement or the internet, although it has facilitated their ongoing civic or political participation. C for instance, emphasized that the internet only expanded the existing modes of interaction with his community, and that he would still be very much involved with or without online media. He said:

I will still be equally invested. Because being involved in grassroots, I'm already part of coordinating messages between government and people, such as through organising dialogue sessions. When social media came around, it gave people like me a lot more job to do because we had to start engaging these spaces. We had to stake our space there and start responding to content. So even if social media didn't come around, I'd continue doing the dialogue sessions, the walk-about, and the house visits.

Similarly, L initially claimed that she was not influenced by the media to be involved in politics or animal welfare activism, but rather, the community with which she surrounded herself with at university. However, she later acknowledged a cycle in her involvement:

... I think it works both ways. Searching and finding about such things online does make [me] more interested in politics. But also, I'm in politics myself so I am keen to be more exposed.

On the other hand, some participants indicated that if it weren't for social media, it would have been more unlikely they would have been drawn into activism because their opportunity to engage with political news and information would be reduced. P, for example, recalled how her current political involvement was prompted by social news use:

I think my friend shared something from ToC. At that time, I was just curious because it was General Elections that year. So, I learned about this very interesting party that has

been saying things that pretty much made sense. Then I started to “follow” them. Started to “share” news related to them. Eventually I also went for their rallies.

Likewise, A claimed that he was recruited into advocating for public causes after interacting with issues related to public affairs on social media. He pointed out that he was invited to participate in offline advocacy forums after some activists noticed his musings on Singapore’s education system on social media. It was during such sessions he was introduced to the founder of the human rights group he later joined. Such accounts ostensibly provide support for the view that the internet informs and mobilises those who would otherwise be disinterested, underrepresented or unaware in the existing political system (Norris, 2000). Nevertheless, a more nuanced reading would reveal that serendipitous exposure to news of this nature alone would not be beneficial for political participation. Consistent with the O-S-R-O-R view, many of these engaged activists also cognitively engaged with such content through mediated and non-mediated means.

Despite the somewhat mixed responses about the mobilising and reinforcing effects of social news use, almost all perceived social news use as an empowering activity. As discussed earlier, one of the main motivations for consuming news on social media was to access a greater breadth of related information and perspectives. Accordingly, when talking about how social news use has benefited their involvement, several interviewees pointed out how the information gained informed their activist work or causes:

Yes, it has helped my work quite a lot...Because part of my work involves research and surveillance of policies. And so, it helps me keep up with some nuance changes in policies...Such news can be easily overlooked on print mainstream media. (L)

It has increased my awareness of what needs to be done for the community in order for us to progress or at least have a better life. In Singapore, you don't even hear about social support groups for gay people or lesbians, and so what more trans people right? Social news has made me aware that there are a lot of trans-people are committing self-harm because of family estrangement or not having friends or social support to get through the day. (S)

It definitely feeds into the content that I produce on behalf of my organisation\*. Because the news that we push out doesn't happen in a vacuum. I mean, I'm able to write about our work better if I can have an understanding of the context we operate in. So for example, recently, I was drafting a press release for my organisation\* to encourage restaurants to switch to sustainable palm oil. Before I even get to that, I had to be aware if any environmental groups are doing or did similar things. So yea, in that case, social media channels provided a good resource for coming into contact with this type of news. (T)

It gives me something to say in those discussions [in Youth Hangouts, an offline forum targeted at young adults]. I can contribute to the discussions more fruitfully after learning from about these issues online. (O)

Several aspects of the above-mentioned quotes require comment. First, the underlying assumption that news engagement shapes feelings of efficaciousness in participating in civic life is supported here. Indeed, the respondents believed that social news use, even in its most passive

form, allowed them to discover new opportunities or problems related to their causes, which in turn helps them to carry out their respective activist roles. Accordingly, the motivation of broadening one's perspective is arguably fulfilled or gratified. I caution, however, that the reported knowledge gained here is subjective rather than objective (Brucks, 1985) – the informants may be inclined to think they've become more informed about politics and current affairs than they really are.

While the significance of social news use in facilitating their own activist involvement was fully acknowledged by the informants, they were also not blind to its limitations or disadvantages. Nearly half of all participants voiced concerns of being potentially trapped in an “echo chamber” or “filter bubble” – an online communication space that only reinforces views and ideas that are consistent with their own (Wohn & Bowe, 2016). They cited previous instances where there was an incongruity between their expectations stemming from online discourses and what developed in reality – such as the 2015 General Elections – as an awakening to this phenomenon. Accordingly, many have since developed certain strategies to mitigate this, including deliberately sourcing for other media sources that is uncongenial to themselves or their causes. However, there is still a suspicion how filtered their news is by algorithmic measures beyond their control. N, for instance, after mentioning how diverse kinds of news can be obtained through information sorting tools on social media, added:

On one hand, it's helpful but on the other hand, it's scary. We don't exactly know how the algorithm works. It could be based on pure numbers. It could be based on intelligent word search. We don't know. Only Facebook would know exactly how it works. And at

the end of the day, Facebook might want to monetise this, so there are a lot of question marks about algorithm-led news and tunnel vision.

Unsolicited attention from disingenuous individuals was named as another side effect of engaging in social news use. While most were willing to avail themselves to constructive debate on their primary social news platform, they expressed their annoyance with *trolls* – users who deliberately cause disruption by making baseless and derisive posts (Herring et al., 2002). The following quotes from F and C highlights how they were “trolled”:

So, there’s the page that hasn’t been updated for a long time but when it was active, it was very bizarre. It specifically seemed to specialise in screen capping social media accounts of people whom they identify as activists and then publishing these screencaps with very weird insinuations...when it’s (sic) published, it’s clearly not in good faith. For instance, they screen-capped my stuff about Detention without Trial and twisted it to say she’s pro-terrorist.

I was harassed by the opposition trolls. They started stalking some of my posts. They don’t privately message me but what they do is when you ‘share’ an article that is pro-government, they start to comment a lot of nonsense in there.

The primary concern over the presence of trolls is not so much the fear of being ridiculed, but the undermining of efforts to disseminate mobilising news and information. A related challenge facing many of the young activists was translating social news use activities of others into citizen

participation, particularly in offline settings. R admitted that compared to the content he produces on behalf of his organisation, interest and engagement in related offline events have been lacklustre. He rationalised:

It's difficult to convert people to want to actually do something. And that's when reality also hits most people. When social media is not the safe barrier anymore. Because now it's like, "Oh I'm actually going to be doing something. I'm actually going to be involved in something". A lot of people get more cautious with that.

While engaging disengaged peers is arguably a universal challenge for activists across the world, one contextual factor that makes this a more critical issue for these young activists is the perceived lack of responsiveness from government officials or authorities. As Q noted:

I think this goes back to one of the questions just now – To what extent do you think people like myself can influence the government? So if you ask me on a scale of 1-10, I probably would rate it on a six or seven. Because it has happened before. But it's not direct influence. Because as far as most of the news sites I engage with are concerned, the government either doesn't acknowledge their existence or they think that they're illegitimate.

M shared a similar sentiment when she stated her strategy in influencing the political process through a bottom-up approach:



For me it's not about what I say getting through to the policy makers. It's more of me trying to influence the people in my network. Because while I do have a lot of people on my social media who share a lot of my values, there are also a lot of people who don't.

Overall, despite the varied pathways into activism, all informants regarded social news use as an important means of continued political socialisation. They reported that engaging with news in socially networked spaces further stimulated their efficacy and awareness of politically salient issues and problems. A caveat in this finding however, is that that may be a discrepancy between their subjective and factual knowledge levels. In addition, potential obstacles preventing social news use from promoting citizen participation were also expressed. These ranged from homogeneity of views or opinions due to algorithmic measures, to trolls hindering opportunities of others to learn and participate in civic activities, to difficulty in drawing those who only engage in network-mediated news to be more involved in their specific causes. Overcoming the latter is seen as more effective in eventually influencing and affecting institutions of government than direct or online communication, including social news use.

### **Results from Study 1 and 2**

As pointed out in Chapter 3, this project follows Creswell et al. (2003)'s sequential mixed-methods explanatory design. In such a design, the authors suggested that the researcher, after analysing the quantitative data in the first phase, uses the quantitative data to determine a purposeful sample that can best provide further explanations. This sample usually comprises of individuals who participated in the first phase; However, this is not mandatory (Creswell &

Clark, 2018). Next, the follow-up qualitative data is collected and analysed separately. Finally, an analysis of how the qualitative data complements the quantitative data to answer the research questions/objectives is carried out.

We have now arrived at the final step where I will summarise and discuss how the findings of the quantitative and qualitative study work in tandem to respond to research objective (1) to explore how media and individual factors affect millennials' engagement in social news use, and research objective (3) to examine how social news use facilitates or inhibits citizen participation. A comparison of results for research objective two is not possible as the quantitative phase did not include variables of how civically or politically engaged millennials engage with social media as sources of news and information. Instead, a separate discussion on how the qualitative study responds to research objective two will be carried out in Chapter 6, "Summary of Accomplishments". The following integration of results is appropriate despite coming from different samples. This is because from a theoretical perspective, one of the key findings in the quantitative phase indicated that politically engaged individuals were more likely to proactively engage with news content on social media. It was therefore apt to follow up with in-depth interviews with millennial activists in the qualitative phase – as opposed to a generalised sample with normal or low levels of political/civic engagement. Further, in terms of demographics, the proportions of gender, race, and education in both samples are closely similar.

One purpose of this mixed methods research was to identify how social news consumption, participation, and production was influenced by individual motivations. As shown in Table 9, information-seeking motivation was found to be positively associated with news consumption but negatively associated with news participation and production in the quantitative phase. The subsequent interview material elucidated this relationship – participants were

cognisant that legacy news media was a strong purveyor of mainstream views, particularly those supported by the government, and considered social media a means to broaden their exposure to other perspectives not readily available in those channels (in traditional form or otherwise).

These findings, to some extent, are consistent with previous research that argues that young people are becoming more mistrusting of legacy news media sources (Bennett, 2008), and are shifting towards computer-mediated spaces to obtain a greater understanding of news or exposure to differing opinions (Marchi, 2012; Sveningsson, 2015). Nonetheless, the significance of accessing alternative news and information on socially networked spaces is arguably more poignant within the context of Singapore. In an environment where mass media and physical spaces allowed for public discourse (e.g. Speakers' Corner) are highly structured and regulated by the state, the internet becomes a crucial venue for acquiring such information. On the other hand, the quantitative study also revealed that the motivation of status-seeking was positively associated with news participation and production. This result was expected based on findings of previous studies in social news or online news consumption in general (e.g. Lee & Ma, 2011; L. Zhang & Zhang, 2013), which suggests that certain news users are motivated to share news-related materials with their peers so as to be valued by them. In other words, by curating or sharing content that proves to be credible and useful for others, a person may be seeking to establish or improve his/her reputation by appearing to be well informed or as an authority of a subject.

The qualitative analysis has shown support for this position. The activists considered themselves as more involved than most in their network in various areas of civil society and matters of the state, and thus, a number of them self-express by engaging with or reproducing news-related content to demonstrate this eruditeness. With regards to hedonistic-type

gratifications, the quantitative findings were generally complemented by the qualitative ones. In the former, participants who were motivated by this gratification were more likely to engage in news participation but not production, indicating that social news users may also be seeking enjoyment through low level user-to-user interactions and/or user-to-content interactions such as “sharing” or “liking”. In the same vein, qualitative analysis revealed that a handful of participants sought entertainment in consuming and sharing news-related materials on these platforms, specifically in the absurd, personal commentaries of others. Collectively, this reflects the observation that news on these platforms are more affectively engaging than their offline counterparts because of its communication features, which allow users to further modify and transmit content with personal experiences, opinions, and emotions (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2012). By sharing or indicating their initial reactions to their peers, users are arguably eliciting further conversation with them in which they can raise the entertainment value of the content through derisive discussion and gossip. Thus, given this expected outcome, it is unlikely affectively driven social news users will partake in news-related activities that require more time and effort (i.e. news production) if a lower threshold alternative is available.

One discrepancy between the quantitative and qualitative findings concerning individual motivations is that of socialising. Results from the former indicated that those who were motivated by the desire to form or maintain relationships with others were more likely to engage in news production. A strong support for the prevalence of this motivation was not found in the interviews, however. One possible explanation for this is that the participants in the quantitative study were more representative of young adult Singaporeans whereas the informants in the second study were active members of the civil and political sphere. Unlike most young adults who primarily use social media to facilitate social relationships (Hew & Cheung, 2012; Pempek

et al., 2009), the young activists were more likely to prioritise raising awareness or mobilisation efforts in news production. Lastly, the qualitative results also revealed that the convenience of accessing and engaging with news was another motivation as well. Some respondents were inclined to engage in social news use because they found it easy or relatively free of effort to partake in. This was because the activity in general was compatible with their already highly digitally networked lives – in Singapore, residents aged between 15-34 years of age form the biggest proportion of laptop and smartphone users (IMDA, 2018). Further, the use of social networking and instant-messaging applications are the top two online activities on these devices within this demographic.

This research was also interested in exploring how the (perceived) characteristics of the technologies themselves – namely, social presence and information control – were able to influence certain social news use behaviours. With regards to social presence, quantitative results revealed that social presence was a salient factor motivating social news use – particularly news participation and production. This finding is consistent with extant work that argues for the positive effect of social presence on an individual's commitment and participation in CMC (Al-Ghaith, 2015; Farzan et al., 2011; Miranda & Saunders, 2003; Xu et al., 2012). The qualitative findings further illustrated this relationship when participants explained how various feedback features, such as comment threads, allow them to not just develop a sense of awareness or human contact with other social news users, but also personal connections with them, even if it's on a parasocial level. In contrast, the lack (or lag) of relevant responses negatively affected their perception of other users, which in turn influenced their own engagement. Together, these findings support the argument of Biocca et al. (2003, 2001) that research involving social

presence should move beyond a unidimensional conceptualisation and also include the psychological and behavioural engagement within the medium.

With regards to information control, both dimensions of this variable were found to be determinants of social news use in different ways. Survey findings showed that expressive information control significantly predicted news production whereas privacy information control significantly predicted news consumption and participation. In the case of the former, it is expected that those who are proactively involved in creating news-related content on social media recognise and regard the features inherent as useful in expressing such information. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, qualitative findings further revealed that those partake in the news production process might be exploiting it as a means to not just mobilise but advance their identity as an opinion leader in their networks. This is consistent with literature in self-presentation and information control – the perceived affordance of a medium to either express or restrict certain details will have an influence over its use because individuals are inclined to engage in impression management (Feaster, 2010; Goffman, 1963; Kuo et al., 2013; Leary, 1996). Additionally, it should be noted that the qualitative analysis also suggests that the current concept of expressive information control may require expansion or reconfiguration. Current work exploring this dimension focuses on a user's efficacy in manipulating the contents or temporal aspects of an interaction; however, the participants in the qualitative study also pointed out that their preferred social news platform affords them the ability to communicate to a wider target audience.

In the case of privacy information control, it was suggested in Study 1 that the lack of a significant relationship between this affordance and news production activities was because users are not just dependent on a site's features or tools to safeguard their privacy preferences. The

findings from the qualitative interviews corroborated with this conjecture. Almost all interviewees reported familiarity and use of certain technological strategies, such as the creation of “lists”, which restricts certain individuals in their network from accessing their content, or “stories”, which allow for automatic deletion of posted content. However, at the same time, they also complemented the use of such features with social strategies; in particular, the use of multiple social news platforms or an LCD approach. Maintaining a separate account for active news engagement allowed them to be less inhibited in sharing content because they had a better idea of their imagined audience – or with whom they are communicating with (Litt, 2012). Regulating related news and information shared through LCD was also employed by those who expressed doubts over human and technical flaws. All in all, the qualitative and quantitative findings support earlier scholarship that indicate that youth or young adults are not apathetic or naive in their disclosure practices on social media, despite being heavy users themselves (boyd & Hargittai, 2010; Jeong & Coyle, 2014; Marwick & boyd, 2014). They adopt appropriate measures to protect themselves; however, if their privacy concerns cannot be addressed technically or socially, it is likely they will withdraw from usage.

This research also explicated the mechanism behind the effects of social news consumption on citizen participation (see Table 10 for summary). With regards to communicative behaviours in particular, the findings in the quantitative phase were largely consistent with earlier research investigating the effects of news media and political participatory behaviours (e.g. Chan et al., 2017; Cho et al., 2009; Mcleod et al., 1999) – as hypothesized, news consumption was found to be a positive predictor of offline and online citizen participation primarily through its influence on interpersonal discussion and news production. Meanwhile, data from the qualitative phase demonstrated support for both the reinforcement and mobilization hypothesis, suggesting

that there are multiple socializing agents that provides young adults with the resources required for participating in public life. Indeed, as pointed out by Shah, McLeod, and Lee (2009), the typical agents often explored in political communication literature include family, school, media and peers.

However, while it is expected that most news consumers in the current media landscape receive news from a variety of sources, it should be emphasized that just reception alone to news media is not a precursor to active civic or political action. Often, regardless of how they first came to learn about the ways they could contribute to their communities meaningfully and effectively, the activists in this study were – and still are – active participants in the socialisation process themselves, engaging the information received with others through various mediated and non-mediated means, and thereby developing their knowledge and interests further. Accordingly, the findings in this research reaffirms that communicative behaviours – a manifestation of elaboration or reflective processes – is essential and works in tandem with news consumption to promote citizen participation. However, a caveat is that despite the lowered threshold to engagement with news afforded by social media, not all forms of expressions propagate the same level of deliberative activity. News participation in particular is a relatively reactive or *lean-back* communicative behaviour (Picone, 2007) as it often does not require a close evaluation of the information acquired. Conversely, news production activities are more proactive because it entails communicating news content with new perspectives and/or materials. The need to synthesise new information with current knowledge and past experiences is greater with such activities. Consequently, this more purposeful, intensive form of news engagement is likely to lead to even greater involvement with the content and a stronger pathway to civic and political participatory behaviours.



Consistent with existing scholarship in political communication (Beam et al., 2016; N. Jung et al., 2011; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; K. M. Lee, 2006), both qualitative and quantitative phases provided evidence linking news consumption with efficacy, which in turn favoured political or civic behaviours. However, with regards to the political orientation of knowledge, results from the quantitative and qualitative phases appear to be inconsistent with one another and with literature. Statistically, news consumption was found to be positively correlated to knowledge, but the latter was not found to mediate the relationship between news consumption and citizen participation. On the other hand, according to the informants in the qualitative phase, social news use as a whole facilitated knowledge acquisition that was relevant and beneficial to their ongoing involvement. A possible interpretation to this mixed finding is that the influence of factual political knowledge is indeed waning among this demographic, and that the informants in the qualitative phase had reported their subjective instead of factual knowledge levels. Indeed, rather than ruling out divergence in responses as an aberration, I argue that young news consumers may no longer be contented with information that is simply “independent, reliable, accurate, and comprehensive” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 11) – or traditional elements of news ideals – but are also relying on personal opinions and interpretations of others to orient themselves politically.

In line with this reasoning, a qualitative study by Marchi (2012) involving interviews with youths revealed that while most of them recognised the importance of mainstream news media in educating the public on current affairs, they preferred news stories informally curated by their peers on social media because it often included commentaries which increased its relevancy. Similarly, participants in the qualitative phase of this study also pointed out that part of the reason for their shift towards social news use was that they saw the value in learning issues

from a broader (albeit more subjective) perspective. Nevertheless, I caution that this is not to suggest that mainstream news media is no longer regarded as an important information channel among young Singaporean adults; both quantitative and qualitative findings provide evidence that they were not exclusively reliant on alternative news media sources despite their predilection towards digital platforms. Rather, like digital natives reported elsewhere (Meijer, 2007; Singer et al., 2009), they are comfortable being informed from a range of sources and applying various sensemaking strategies to discern its authenticity.

Finally, while both quantitative and qualitative phases were able to complement each other in explaining how social news use could serve as a pathway to citizen participation, only the latter was able to illustrate how this relationship could be confounded. As mentioned earlier, this includes concerns over an echo chamber, unsolicited attention, and difficulty in motivating a generally politically apathetic populace. Although the findings from this particular phase is based on interviews with civically/politically engaged young Singapore adults and cannot be generalised statistically to all young people in Singapore, it nevertheless contributes to our conceptual understanding of some of the limitations of social news use. The implications of this finding, as well the implications of the aforementioned findings, will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

In sum, the current research – underpinned by theories in U&G, social presence, self-presentation & information control, and as well as the O-S-R-O-R model – shed lights on the antecedents and outcomes of social news use. In particular, information-seeking and convenience needs had a positive effect on news consumption, whereas news participation was primarily motivated by status-seeking and entertainment needs. News production on the other hand, was driven by socialising and status-seeking needs. Collectively, both qualitative and quantitative

results also suggested that expressive information control was a determinant of news production, whereas privacy information control remained a predictor across all dimensions of social news use. Social presence too, had a positive influence on social news use overall. In terms of the effects of social news use, and in line with past research, results indicate that interpersonal discussion, production, and efficacy are crucial intervening variables between news consumption and citizen involvement in civic/political life.

**Table 9. Summary of quantitative & qualitative findings with regards to research objective 1**

	<b>Study 1</b>	<b>Study 2</b>
<b>Motivations</b>	Information seeking predicted news consumption Socialising predicted news production Status seeking predicted news production & news participation Entertainment predicted news participation	a) to broaden one’s perspectives, b) to self-express, c) for amusement purposes, and d) for convenience.
<b>Social Presence</b>	Social presence predicted all social new use variables	Alluded to how the functions afforded by the online space on social media accentuate the awareness of an audience not within their immediate proximity.

<b>Information control</b>	Expressive information control predicted news production	Primary social news use platform offered the most efficient means to interact with their target audience.
	Privacy information control predicted news consumption	Relied on a set of sociotechnical strategies to maintain privacy.
	Privacy information control predicted news participation	

**Table 10. Summary of quantitative & qualitative findings with regards to research objective 3**

<b>Study 1</b>	<b>Study 2</b>
Interpersonal discussion, news production and efficacy mediated the relationship between news consumption and offline citizen participation.	Other forms of political socialisation raised; social news consumption was never an end but a means.
Interpersonal discussion, news production, new participation, and efficacy mediated the relationship between news consumption and online citizen participation	Almost all perceived social news use as an empowering activity. This is subjective, however.
	Drawbacks include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Echo chamber/Filter bubble</li> <li>• Trolls</li> <li>• Difficulty in translating social news use activities of others into citizen participation.</li> </ul>

## **CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION**

In the last decade, social media has not only become a major communication channel in supporting social ties but has also provided a new avenue for news consumption and distribution. Unlike audience practices typically associated with traditional media, the diverse communication features within these platforms allow its users to easily partake in the news process themselves via commenting, sharing and/or posting. Given the current prevalence of social news use – particularly among younger age groups (Newman et al., 2017) – it was appropriate to investigate what factors drove different aspects of this phenomenon, and how this in turn affected civic and political engagement. The rest of the chapter is organised as follows: The first section of this chapter summarises the accomplishments of the present research in relation to the research objectives as set out in the first chapter. The second and third section respectively assesses the theoretical and practical implications of this project. Finally, the last section presents the limitations of this study and provides recommendation for future studies.

### **Summary of Accomplishments**

The research objectives of this project were set as follows: 1) to explore how individual and media factors affect millennials' engagement in social news use; 2) to understand how civically or politically engaged millennials engage with social media as sources of news and information; and 3) to examine how social news use facilitates or inhibits citizen participation. To achieve the research objectives, a multi-theoretical research based on UGT, social presence theory, processes in self-presentation and information control, and the O-S-R-O-R model was proposed. The augmented model laid the foundation for this research to investigate how motivations, social

presence, expressive and privacy information control influenced the different dimensions of social news use. Additionally, it indicated how personal-psychological outcomes following social news consumption can encourage citizen participation.

The first research objective was achieved when Study 1, through a regression analysis of a national survey of young adult Singaporeans, showed how each dimension of social news use was predicted by a varied pattern of motivations, information controls and social presence. This reinforces the argument that the internet – or in this case, social news use – consists of heterogeneous practices derived from varying motivations and perceived affordances (Shah, Kwak, et al., 2001), and should be studied as such. Notable however, is the role of social presence in driving all news-related activities, including news consumption. News engagement on social media, as argued here and elsewhere (Hermida, 2012; Papacharissi, 2015), differs from news consumption on other outlets because its affordances contribute to the participatory culture of news; consequently, it is conceivable that even the most passive social news users can develop a sense of other users simply by encountering fragmented streams of news-related content on their newsfeed. Study 2 – based on qualitative data derived from interviews with young adult activists – largely supported the quantitative results regarding the first research objective. The interviews not only exemplified how certain motivations are fulfilled through social news use, but also helped explain how psychological proximity with other users can be cultivated in the form of community feedbacks (i.e. comments). This in turn influenced overall involvement. In addition, while the participants in the qualitative phase acknowledged that different social media platforms varied in its capacity to transmit media content (i.e. video, pictures), they believed that their primary social news platform provided the best means to communicate or engage with as many intended recipients at a time. This bears some resemblance to the affordance of “large fan-

out” (Resnick, 2002, p. 11) and scalability (d. boyd, 2011) in previous literature. Though the terms employed differ slightly, the underlying principle is that one of the main affordances of the social web is its potential for enhanced visibility. Put together, this indicates that current conceptualisation and measurement of expressive information control, which is focused on the “the capacity to control the timing, duration, and nature of information exchanged” (O’Sullivan, 2000, p. 412), can be further developed. The qualitative phase also clarified the inconsistencies found between Study 1’s findings and that of previous literature on online privacy management (e.g. Krasnova et al., 2010; Kuo et al., 2013). While the quantitative study did not find a significant relationship between privacy information control and news production, the latter phase revealed that those who are more involved in creating news-related content are not necessarily unfazed about privacy concerns but are instead relying on a set of sociotechnical strategies.

To address the second objective, this research relied primarily on data obtained through Study 2. Consistent with the AC model (Bennett, 2008), the young adults in this study expressed an inclination towards a variety of social media pages and digital outlets as news sources over traditional mass media. One possibility for this fragmented or “a la carte model of news gathering” (Marchi, 2012, p. 248) is that they find formal sources of news and information limited in terms of perspectives, which in turn prevents them from participating fruitfully in public affairs. In Singapore, it is widely accepted that the mass media is under the close control of the government (Rodan, 2004), and is therefore likely to be partial towards promoting views of the ruling party. On the other hand, the internet is not as aggressively regulated and is consequently a host to a range of news outlets purveying both mainstream and alternative views. Nevertheless, it should also be pointed out that the present research suggests that usage does not

necessarily equate to unequivocal trust in the medium. The activists were also generally cautious of news emanating from social media, understanding that its content can be highly subjective as well. However, they did not perceive this to be a serious problem. They were confident of, and preferred to, assemble and critique news-related content messages widely from both mainstream and alternative news sources on this channel. All in all, the way civically or politically engaged millennials engage with social media as sources of news and information in this study fits partially into Bennet's (2008) cross-generational DC to AC shift: while they're increasingly choosing to be informed through peer-shared information sustained by interactive information technologies, they are also dependent on mass media sources which have now established a presence on these spaces. The dyadic model of DC and AC may require contextualised adjustments.

With regards to the third research objective, Study 1 found that social news consumption – through news production, interpersonal discussion, and efficacy – can have a positive effect on political or civic behaviours. This is in line with expectations proposed in the O-S-R-O-R model of communication effects (Cho et al., 2009; Shah et al., 2007). Unexpectedly, inconsistent or insignificant effects of factual knowledge and news participation on citizen participatory behaviours were observed, however. Qualitative analysis in the follow up study further revealed a potential link between subjective knowledge (or perceived knowledge obtained through social news use) and an active citizenry, suggesting that the former may be taking its place of factual knowledge in terms of mobilizing effects. Admittedly, this assumption needs to be substantiated with direct questions in future work. With respect to the nil or negligible effect of news participation found in Study 1, most of the informants in the qualitative phase, too, did not simply engage with social news passively (i.e. consuming) nor reactively (i.e. “sharing”).



Instead, proactive expressive behaviours – namely creating original news-related content or participating in offline discussions – was also an integral part of their ongoing involvement in public life. This provides further support for the argument that while social media has lowered thresholds to news engagement, not all forms of communicative actions evoke the same level of deliberative qualities required to trigger interest and participation in civic/political life (Skoric & Zhu, 2016).

Study 2 also responded to the third research objective by highlighting some of the drawbacks of social news use, particularly in regards to citizen participation. Firstly, there is a concern over the homogeneity of news and perspectives received as a result of a platform's recommendation algorithm. While most social media platforms allow its users to partially customise and prioritise their exposure to certain content – through means such as “follow”/“unfollow”, or selection of “most recent” or “top stories” on their walls – part of the algorithmically driven process also involves gathering users' overall activity on the site, including tracking “likes”, shares, and comments, so as to recommend content that is ostensibly more relatable to their interests (Oremus, 2016). The experienced social news users in this study were worried that this form of news personalisation, not directly determined by their own actions, potentially leads to an even narrower exposure of news sources and perspectives not readily apparent. Consequently, this factor is a deterrent of social news use, let alone activism. Coping with trolls was also voiced as an unintended by-product of engaging in social news use actively. While they understand that receiving negative attention is a perennial aspect of engaging in public or semi-public online spaces, they have felt, from time to time, to engage in “pointless and time-consuming discussions” (Herring et al., 2002, p. 372) which undermines meaningful civic discourse. This is not so much because they do not recognise the presence of

trolls or trolling initially but are wary that less discerning news consumers might be convinced of the trolls' intentions – which in this case, is to discredit or silence their perspectives – if they do not respond. Finally, the current political culture was suggested as a contributing factor hampering the link between social news use and a more active citizenry. Well-established normative and structural mechanisms – including legislation that curtails freedom of expressions, association, and assembly – have contributed to what Chin (2016) describes as a depoliticised polity. Despite an increase in opportunities for accessing and expressing alternative views afforded by new media, the activists have pointed out that for most Singaporeans, part of their reluctance to become more involved in politically oriented activities stems from their fear of legal recriminations. At the same time, however, they noted that overcoming this challenge is paramount because they believe the current administration does not recognise social news use, or online participation in general, as a valid mechanism for policy inputs. Rallying collective action or support for their respective causes is seen as more meaningful in effecting change in governmental and policy matters.

Taken all together, the two phases of this research, although from different methodological backgrounds, did generally support each other in responding to the objectives of this project, thus providing further evidence of the value of mixed-method studies. The data from the door-to-door survey identified the predictive power of the various individual and media factors on social news use, as well as the mediators between social news consumption and citizen participation. The interview material from the activists helped further confirm or clarify these relationships, for instance, by exemplifying how entertainment motivations could predict news participation and well as providing possible explanations as to why privacy information control was not a significant predictor of news production in the quantitative phase.

## Theoretical implications

The present research contributes to literature in several aspects. Firstly, this research adds to the growing literature that explains how the different aspects of social news use can influence citizen participation. In the last decade, many scholars have redirected their attention from looking at the effects of generic social media use to comparing or incorporating the effects of social news consumption with more expressive forms of online engagement (e.g. Chan et al., 2017; Choi et al., 2013; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). For instance, Skoric and Zhu (2016) differentiated between egocentric (platforms driven by social ties) and interest-oriented social media platforms (platforms driven by shared interests) and found that only discourses on the latter platform were a significant predictor of offline citizen participatory behaviour, including political rally attendance. More recently, Park and Kaye (2019, p. 455) showed that news curation, or “the reconstructing, reformulating, repurposing, reframing and sharing of news through social media”, mediated the relationship between social news consumption and political knowledge. News curation as explored by the authors is undoubtedly a deliberative form of news engagement, not unlike the concept of news production explored in this research. The current inquiry, in adopting a more nuanced distinction between the different levels of news-related activities on social media, continues to demonstrate that news production, not news participation, is a stronger mediator between news consumption and citizen participation. In other words, between news participation and production, only the latter entailed a depth of engagement with the materials required for shaping a participatory citizenry. Considering the layered patterns of social news use, this finding, which expands upon previous research that has indicated a direct relationship between online news consumption and citizen

participation (Bachmann & Gil de Zúñiga, 2013; Hao, et al., 2014; Saldaña, et al., 2015), or that all online communicative actions work in concert with news consumption to encourage citizen participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010), is appropriate.

Secondly, by integrating UGT, social presence theory, processes in self-presentation & information control, and the O-S-R-O-R model, this study improves our current understanding of O-S-R-O-R model by revealing a combination of unique factors driving social news use. Extant studies investigating the antecedents of social news use are skewed towards individual social-psychological factors, such as motives, media repertoires, prior experiences, and opinion leadership (Bobkowski, 2015; Choi, 2016; Hanson & Haridakis, 2008; C. S. Lee & Ma, 2012). Only a handful of scholars like Ma, Lee, and Goh (2014) have considered exploring the effects of individual differences in conjunction with the characteristics of the platform itself. However, even in such cases, the authors focused on just one aspect of social news use – “sharing”. Similarly, despite the popular adoption of the O-S-R-O-R model in (news) media effects research, most communication scholars have failed to consider how individual and media factors work in tandem to guide exposure to the communicative stimuli. Rather, studies employing this framework have often observed the initial orientations (first “O”) as socio-demographics (Chan et al., 2017; Jung et al., 2011), overall media use or exposure (Cho et al., 2009; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Shah et al., 2007), and political interest (Muñiz et al., 2017; Reichert & Print, 2017). This research has addressed the research gap by first showing how social presence, together with processes in information control, complements UGT in improving the explanatory ability of the conceptual model examining the antecedents of social news use. Further, it provides a preliminary step for future work formally testing the complete O-S-R-O-R model. While the original O-S-R-O-R model places pre-eminence on the reasoning process/communicative

behaviours (Shah et al., 2007), here it is demonstrated that attention should also be allocated to initial orientations, both in the form of individual and media factors, as it is likely to have a direct influence on this process as well.

Thirdly, the current research continues to elucidate how young adults assert control over privacy with social technologies. Prior studies have discredited the myth that young people do not care about privacy online and are in fact, aware of the negative relational implications of sharing content discriminately (e.g. Krasnova et al., 2010; Storsul, 2014; Uski & Lampinen, 2014; Vitak et al., 2015). To better manage the often contradictory expectations of a diverse network, or context collapse (Marwick & boyd, 2011), individuals often consult a range of sociotechnical strategies. Technological strategies rest heavily on users' use of the platform's features to avoid unwanted audiences whereas social strategies relate to social decisions and how users adjust their behaviour in these spaces. The findings of this research reveal that Singaporean young adults are not necessarily disinclined towards technological privacy tools but are sceptical of its comprehensiveness. Thus, like their counterparts elsewhere (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Lampinen et al., 2009; McLaughlin & Vitak, 2012; Vitak et al., 2015; A. L. Young & Quan-Haase, 2013), they employed self-censorship or a LCD approach. Moreover, most of them also had a dedicated social media platform in which they engaged with news proactively. This primary social news platform was purportedly larger and more heterogenous than their other accounts; at the same time, the persona presented in their primary social news platform was limited in disclosures about their personal lives. To the best of my knowledge, this strategy is not frequently explored and deserves to be included in future studies exploring the link between context collapse and social strategies in social news use.

Another major contribution of this research is methodological. Despite the growing academic attention towards social news use in the last decade, only a handful of published qualitative and quantitative-qualitative studies exist (Kümpel et al., 2015). By employing a mixed methods approach, the findings of this research were able to deepen our developing understanding of this phenomenon by providing more context into the patterns of relationships typically found via quantitative approaches. In particular, as with this study, earlier quantitative research has also demonstrated the existence of positive and significant influences of various hedonistic and utilitarian gratifications on social news use (Choi, 2016; Hanson & Haridakis, 2008; C. S. Lee & Ma, 2012). While undoubtedly informative, less is known about the nature of these relationships, or why certain motivations were significant or insignificant predictors due to the nature of the data. Scholars have instead often relied on related studies on internet news consumption or traditional news media to explain these results. Conversely, the present research has responded to this weakness by qualifying the findings and interpretations of the quantitative phase, as well as the findings of earlier studies, with qualitative data. Further, as mentioned before, analysis of the latter also helped directly explain unexpected results.

Fifth, this project also adds to the ongoing discourse of the suitability of new media, including social media, in rejuvenating Haberman's (1989) view of the public sphere. At its essence, the public sphere is a site where private citizens have the opportunity to engage in open and rational discussion about public issues, uninfluenced by the government, market forces, or other organisations. This in turn is expected to further critical knowledge and encourage participation in democratic politics (Dahlgren, 2009). The provision of all relevant information, opinions, and debates about such issues is therefore a necessary condition of a public sphere. On the outset, it appears that social media has the potential to facilitate the emergence of such

spaces. The architecture of most social media platforms allows individuals to easily access a wealth of information and to participate widely with others on these issues, free from social or geographical barriers (Fuchs, 2012; Brian D. Loader & Mercea, 2011; Z. A. Papacharissi, 2010). Moreover, by facilitating “access, participation, reciprocity, and peer-to-peer rather than one to many communication” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 208), it attenuates the influence of corporate media or political power. To a certain extent, the findings of this project corroborate with this utopian rhetoric. Singapore enjoys a deep internet and social media penetration (Kemp, 2020), and unlike offline mass media, the new media realm is not as heavily managed by the state. Accordingly, the young activists in this research acknowledged this. They leveraged on these spaces actively to not just access alternative news sources but also to produce and distribute information they think is relevant but underreported in mainstream media. The permutations and reach in which they could express their views to others, and who in turn respond to others and raise their own thoughts and concerns is possibly indefinite.

At the same time however, there are certain aspects of this medium and its users that undermine the full potential of the public sphere and the engagement necessary for genuine public deliberation. Previous research have suggested that in general, political exchanges that occur on social media are of poor quality – lacking well-articulated information or deliberation (Conroy et al., 2012; Halpern & Gibbs, 2013). Similarly, in this project, the participants reflected on their ongoing peeve with trolls, or users who deliberately cause disruption for political or entertainment reasons. Such disruption increases the chances of other, more genuine users leaving the page or content before meaning discourse of multiple points of view can occur, thereby weakening the free exchange of information.

Another poignant hinderance as highlighted by this research is the phenomenon of filter bubbles. Filter bubbles can result from both active or passive selective exposure to information (Mutz & Young, 2011). In the case of the former, it is argued that individuals prefer media that reinforces their existing views rather than challenge it; hence, they actively manage the amount or type of information they're exposed to (Lewis et al., 2008). On social media, this includes "unfollowing" certain people to hide their posts, "liking" pages that matches one's interests, and selecting "top stories" instead of "most recent". As experienced social news producers themselves, the activists in this research avoided such practices because they understood that the democratic value of connecting on socially networked spaces is dependent on the diversity of news sources and political opinions they are exposed to. Nevertheless, they expressed concerns over social media's recommendation algorithm, which automatically prioritises information according to the behaviour of users and others with whom they interact digitally on the site. They pointed to previous instances where there was a discrepancy between their expectations stemming from the information they received on social media and what developed in reality as an awakening to this form of passive selective exposure. Arguably, when social media platforms do not explicate the mechanisms of how or whether their platforms filters information, they fail to provide citizens sufficient information to voice their concerns and participate in civic life. All in all, the findings of this research corroborate with earlier work that refutes claims of social media revitalising a public sphere (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Dijck, 2011; Fuchs, 2012; Jenkins, 2006). The requisites for such a space – access to information and competing points of view in particular – remains to be developed.

Lastly, this project as a whole contributes towards existing literature produced outside of a Western liberal-democratic context. When Shah et al. (2007) first proposed the O-S-R-O-R



model, attention was paid to how different news media (internet, television, and newspaper) could yield differential direct or indirect effects. However, in light of the declining trend in print and broadcast mass media consumption globally, many scholars adopting this model have overlooked the effect of this media, subsuming it with other types of online media (N. Jung et al., 2011) or focusing on social media solely (e.g. Chan, 2016; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Li & Chan, 2017). Nevertheless, this research has demonstrated that despite the above-mentioned trend, generally discussing news media as a singular online element is not nuanced enough, particularly in the context of Singapore. The young adults in this study are still partially dependent on traditional news sources – or more accurately, the online version of these sources – as part of their political socialisation. This can be attributed to the political environment which had curbed the existence of an independent, alternative news media until the arrival of the Internet. While these channels now offer perspectives beyond those sanctioned by the government, they still lack the resources to produce quality news reports as frequently as their established mainstream counterparts (George et al., 2014). Accordingly, I posit that for regimes where the mainstream media generally favours the political status quo, a more suitable approach would be to treat the communication stimuli according to its content (mainstream, alternative) – as opposed to how it is transmitted (offline, online).

### **Practical implications**

The findings of this study also provide some insights and suggestions for practice. As a groupware technology, the success of social media platforms is dependent on the number of users they can attract and the interactions between them. Therefore, in an age where news

engagement is becoming a significant component of overall social media activity, social media service providers should strive to provide an ideal platform for such usage. As this research suggests that social presence is one of the most salient factors driving all forms of social news use, providers should focus on developing features that facilitate social connectedness between news audiences. One way this can be achieved is by providing more bandwagon cues or feedback features on materials that a user (re)produces, particularly with original news-related content. For instance, most social media platforms currently do not have a mechanism to show how many people have seen a post on a wall unless it is responded to publicly via a comment or a reaction feature. Developing such a feature which does not require active communication would create more avenues for social news users to develop awareness of each other, and to a certain extent, a sense of closeness and familiarity. This in turn is likely to increase their attachment to other users and encourage them to continue using the platform for news engagement.

Social media service providers can also improve overall news engagement by looking into implementing policies that mitigate privacy concerns. Despite the availability of privacy settings, this research indicated that social news users do not fully trust or understand them and are inclined to supplement these features with social strategies – including alternating between different platforms and reducing use altogether. To surmount this, social media providers should continue to provide more clear-cut procedures on how to activate various privacy management tools, and furthermore, the range and implications of such customisations should be explained clearly. Changes in available settings should also be communicated promptly and as succinctly as possible. This is particularly so for social networking sites such as Facebook, which offers a variety of granular privacy tools, such as friend groupings, item-level access controls, block lists,

etc. By making privacy controls more consistent and user-friendly, social media service providers would encourage the adoption of such tools and alleviate users' sense of privacy breach. Consequently, social news users can be expected to be more confident in engaging in expressive forms of news-related activities because of this strengthened perception of information control.

The findings of this inquiry also contain some practical applications for local media entities – independent ones in particular – aspiring to connect and engage with news audiences on social media. As pointed out in the first chapter of thesis, the internet has facilitated the emergence of alternative news and socio-political sites not available previously. However, the turnover rate of such players is high (S. Chua, 2017). Major news start-ups Inconvenient Questions, Six-Six News, and The Middle Ground ceased operations after two years or less in 2017, citing unsustainable financial overheads. Similarly, while The Online Citizen is still around after more than a decade since it was launched, it has been roiled with changes for similar reasons. Today, it is led by a sole editor, down from its original team of four editors, and has had one occasion gone on hiatus (Yong, 2016). Unlike their mainstream counterparts, alternative news sites do not attract as many advertisers as the latter are wary of reprisals from the government (Yap, as cited in S. Chua, 2017). Their funding model thus is heavily reliant on having a sustainable number of paying subscribers.

Under this backdrop, it behoves alternative news media organisations in Singapore to exploit social media aggressively to attract potential subscribers. For them, the findings of this research, which provides some insight as to what motivates individuals to engage in various aspects of social news use, could inform their social media optimisation (SMO) strategies. For instance, it has been demonstrated in this research that one of the drivers of social news

consumption, particularly with alternative news pages, is the need to expand one's perspectives beyond mainstream views. Therefore, rather than compete with legacy new media organisations to produce news reports frequently for the masses, news start-ups should first identify their target (niche) news audience and concentrate on producing in-depth content for them. Then, to increase traffic flow to their site and ultimately subscribers, social media could then be used to roll out abbreviated versions of these exclusive materials, including podcasts, video snippets, and articles. Local online news start-ups would also benefit from engaging with those who are social news participators and producers. The findings of this research have indicated that those who share news content (news participators) and those who recreate and repackage news content to others (news producers) are likely to be driven by status-seeking gratifications. Such activities are ideal for professional news organisations as it increases the potential readership or viewership of the original content. Therefore, to leverage on such opinion leaders and their networks, it would be appropriate for news organisations to give due recognition when they engage in such activities, especially with materials that originated from them. This could be in the form of simple words of encouragement or a "react" response.

Lastly, this research also presents some recommendations for policymakers in Singapore. In the last decade, several observers have commented on a widening class divide based on socio-economic inequality (Donaldson et al., 2013; Paulo, 2018; Teo, 2018; Wah, 2012). Their concerns are not unwarranted. Despite not having an official poverty line, Singapore has one of the world's highest Gini coefficients (a measure of income distribution across a nation where 0 indicates complete equality and 1 indicates complete inequality). Since 2007, this figure has hovered between the 0.45 to 0.48 mark (Abdullah, 2020). The findings of this research do not permit me to comment directly on this issue. One of the prerequisites for participation in both

studies was that informants had to be experienced social news users; this excluded many individuals from the low-income group as they did not even possess the means to engage in such activities. Instead, I shall focus on the middle-class/income group as the samples from both phases were more representative of them in terms of monthly household income and education level. Post-election surveys from 2011 and 2015 indicate that the middle-income majority in Singapore are more critical of the incumbent government and desire change or greater political pluralism (Institute of Policy Studies, 2011; Welsh, 2016). A common explanation proposed is that in recent years, this class has grown disenchanted with having to cope with the rising cost of living independently. Unlike their peers from the low-income group, this group does not qualify for many of the government's financial assistance schemes. While I do not dispute this, I also like to point that other factors could be at play as well. In line with the experience of other developed economies (Atkinson, 2015; Bennett, 2005), the young middle-class explored in this project are now better educated and exposed to worldly affairs, and are thus more predisposed towards post-materialistic values – such as the desire to advocate for environmental or LGBT rights. Given that Singapore is a well wired and computer-literate nation, it is not surprising that a large amount of activism work hinges on the use of computer-mediated channels to raise awareness and mobilise support for these issues. Social news use thus, is not slacktivism (H. S. Christensen, 2011), but a genuine effort to be involved in public affairs, albeit in a less formal and more individualised form. As I will elaborate below, it behoves the incumbent government to not ignore this bottom-up process but consider how they can co-opt this phenomenon to maintain its status quo.

Since 2011, the Singapore government recognised the deep potential and function of social media and have quickly adopted the medium as means to engage citizens, especially

younger voters (W. K. Leong, 2011). Politicians from the ruling party have engaged professional aides to manage their online presence, particularly in developing empathy between them and the public, through sharing personal experiences and thoughts (D. Chin, 2015). The Ministry of Communication and Information currently uses a broad spectrum of social media channels to explain new policies, provide public education, and market official events and public engagement on behalf of various government agencies. Arguably, however, the engagement on these platforms can be considered a predominantly top-down process, a “one-way relation in which government produces and delivers information for use by citizens” (Macintosh, 2003, p. 32). One backlash of this as indicated by the present research is a general sense of cynicism – that the current system regards grassroots voices as trivial – thereby putting the efforts of the institutions and personnel involved in maintaining these channels in a bad light. Particularly in the qualitative study, it was found that much of the proactive forms of social news use were aimed at gathering public support through information dissemination and awareness building, rather than communicating with state institutions and actors directly. Therefore, the existing policy decision-making structure can be further improved to include online discourses into its regular routines. This may include regularly interacting with citizens on its own pages, as well as with selected social news producers who have attracted a prominent following. Such a consultative or participatory approach, where citizens are given greater legitimacy in shaping policy discussions or providing feedback is likely to have a positive influence in their confidence and trust in the political system. The challenge of course is to figure out how to triangulate this with offline mechanisms (e.g. offline dialogue sessions organised by the government) in order to gain a more accurate assessment of public opinion.

## Limitations & Suggestions for Future Research

Although the mixed-method approach adopted in this study yielded insights not achievable through one data source, the procedures could have been executed in more optimal ways in order to take full advantage of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Firstly, due to the nature of a doctoral study, the qualitative data was coded and the themes were identified by an individual researcher. The analyses were then presented to and discussed with a supervisor. This approach may have facilitated consistency in analysis but ran the risk of conflating what the interviewees said with the researcher's interpretation of what they said. Nevertheless, as recommended by Guest et al. (2011), two rounds of coding – a week apart from one another – were conducted to mitigate this issue. In future, a more effective approach in ensuring reliability and validity of data would be to involve two or more researchers code and compare a sample of the transcripts. During this comparison, they can discuss and refine coding categories and schemes before proceeding to code the entire data set. In addition, peer debriefing, a process in which another person other than the researcher reviews and ask questions about the qualitative study (J.W. Creswell, 2009), can be employed for further validation of future qualitative findings.

Secondly, it should be noted that the sample frame of this research comprised of young adults from Singapore and therefore its generalizability is limited beyond this cohort. Sampling from this population was intentional due to the fact that this age group in Singapore is at once most likely to be engaged with news on social media and to be involved in civic/political affairs (Soon & Samsudin, 2016a), and thus most pertinent to the purview of study. However, recent trade literature suggests that the increasingly, older Singaporean adults (35 years and above) are also going online to access SNS and news regularly (IMDA 2017b, 2018). Generally, older

adults have been found to have different social media usage patterns, preferences, and expertise from their younger counterparts (Brandtzæg et al., 2010; E. H. Jung & Sundar, 2016; Pfeil et al., 2009), and may also have different needs regarding privacy and information control (Karahasanović et al., 2009; Raynes-Goldie, 2010). As such, it would be worthy to explore and verify whether the antecedents and outcomes of social news use for young adults extends to this demographic group.

Another caveat of this research is that it is entirely based on self-reports. Although self-report techniques are fairly common in social sciences, and have been employed in related earlier studies (e.g. Choi, 2016; Lee & Ma, 2012), actual social news usage can be over- and under-reported this way. Measuring behaviours using self-reports might not be accurate due to a variety of human errors, including social desirability bias or limited recall ability (Abelson et al., 1992). For instance, there is a tendency for people to avoid admitting to nonvoting or over-report their exposure to news media so to present oneself as a model citizen (Presser & Traugott, 1992; Prior, 2009). People also do not accurately remember time spent online even if they wanted to: Comparing self-reported time spent on Facebook and actual usage as measured by computer monitoring software, Junco (2013) found that the former was significantly higher than the latter. Acknowledging these potential errors, this study sought to reduce this by examining explicit domains of social news use behaviour from its participants, rather than overall social news behaviour. Moving forward, a more rigorous approach in future studies would be to complement self-reported data solicited through traditional means with secondary data harvested from social media platforms. Specifically, one possibility for future work analysing the predictors of social news use and social news use itself would be to examine survey data containing the same scales employed in this study with server logs of participants' activity on their preferred social news



platform. Such an approach, while still not entirely immune to user errors, would improve the veracity of the data and provide a more accurate depiction of the social news use phenomenon.

Along these lines, another limitation due to the cross-sectional nature of the data is that the relationships and associations identified in this research must be qualified as correlational (as opposed to causal). Although the research model proposed in this study is in line with extant theorising and empirical work, and I supplemented the quantitative results with qualitative data to reduce the plausibility of alternative explanations, the possibility of ambiguous temporal precedence and spurious effects remain (Shadish et al., 2002). For instance, while the effects of news use on civic and political life are well-established in literature (e.g. Mcleod et al., 1999; Shah et al., 2007), it was not possible to rule out a reciprocal relationship in this research. In other words, it is possible that social news use allows new people to be drawn into a more active civic/political life because it provides more avenues for them to be exposed to such information incidentally (thereby supporting the mobilization hypothesis, MacDonald & Tolbert, 2008); at the same time, however, it is also possible that those who are already politically/civically oriented are inclined to engage in such activities more aggressively (as argued in the reinforcement hypothesis, Norris, 2001). Therefore, future studies should consider employing longitudinal panel designs or experiments to affirm causality of this relationship, as well as the other associations found in this research.

Fifth, the present research explored social news use from an Asian perspective to culturally balance present research and literature. Yet it should be noted that Asia is a politically diverse region, with some countries being identified as flawed democracies (i.e. Singapore), hybrid regimes (i.e. Thailand), and authoritarian regimes (i.e. China) (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2019). Partly attributed to the development of new media technologies which enhances

people's ability to share news and information, many of Singapore's regional neighbours – such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Hong Kong – have experienced the rise of democratic movements in recent years (Lee et al., 2015; Siriyuvasak, 2005; Tsatsou, 2018; Weiss, 2012). However, such a movement has not occurred in Singapore, despite having an equal if not, deeper ICT penetration, indicating that the relationship between social news and citizen participation could also be mediated by the local context. Indeed, in Singapore, the ruling party has been successful in establishing their authority through a “politics of survival” ideology – ensuring widespread security and economic prosperity in exchange for individual, civil liberties (B.-H. Chua, 1995). Singaporeans by and large have acquiesced to this unwritten social contract, having voted for the same regime repeatedly since independence. It could be conjectured then, that the general polity in Singapore is oriented towards authoritarian values (Adorno et al., 1950) – placing priority on security, subservience and respect for authority figures, as well as order and social control. This is in contrast to liberation values, such as equality and freedom, independence, and the right to challenge social rules and legal authorities, which are commonly associated with more advanced democracies. Therefore, I suggest that in future research, particularly those that involve cross-national comparison within Asia, it would be appropriate to include political orientation in the form of authoritarian/libertarian values in the first O of the O-S-R-O-R framework. This would provide additional insights as to how political culture influences the way one engages with news on social media, and how this in turn impacts citizen participation.

Finally, it should be noted that this research focused on the relationship between Singaporean young adults, social news, and citizen participation from late 2016 to early 2019. It thus excluded exploring the effects of a controversial bill that commenced on late 2019 –

Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act 2019 (Singapore) (POFMA). POFMA vests the government to order individuals or organisations to remove online content ministers deem false and/or potentially harmful to public interest and/or circulate corrections alongside the original material. The penalty for non-compliance includes incarceration and fines of up to \$1 million SGD. In an age where social media is increasingly under fire for being a purveyor of misinformation and disinformation (Chew, 2020; Guess et al., 2020; Silverman, 2016), this bill is ostensibly timely. Nevertheless, critics like Han (2020) have argued that it vests the executive branch with the power to stifle opinions and political dissent. It is worthy to note too that almost every order issued so far has been directed at an opposition political party (member) or alternative news media provider (Ministry of Communications and Information, 2020). In this project, I demonstrated a strong link between social news production and involvement in civil society. I've also shown that when it came to surveillance and privacy, young activists are concerned over how the information they shared might have unintended social implications. Thus, they undertook certain sociotechnical strategies to mitigate this. With the introduction of this bill, activists might perceive that their privacy is at threat again – this time by governmental surveillance – and will either modify their tactics or withdraw from social news use altogether. This in turn is likely to have an impact on the potential of social media to serve as a public sphere and facilitate citizen participation. Per Habermas (1989), protected free speech is integral for communicative action and a public sphere. If citizens do not feel comfortable voicing their concerns on social media because of the way more powerful entities might react, than civil discourse in pursuit of a participatory democracy is arguably not occurring in this space. Accordingly, I encourage future work to revisit the impact of this bill on social news use to ascertain these assumptions.

## **Concluding Statements**

As a final remark, I believe the findings of this thesis have shed light on the relationships between the antecedents, characteristics, and outcomes of social news use. Previous research has observed the influence of various individual social-psychological factors on this activity, as well as how expressive forms of social news use play a bigger role in impacting citizen participatory behaviours than consumption. This study moves beyond such effects. It provided evidence on how both media (social presence and information control) and individual factors (motivations) predict the various dimensions of social news use differently. Further, while the findings of this research are largely consistent with the theoretical assumptions about the relationship between news use and citizen participation in literature, it also demonstrated that not all news-related expressions on social media encourage an active citizenry. The findings of this study will be of particular interest to media organisations and social media providers seeking to enrich the experience of existing and potential social news users, as well as policymakers who want to improve their online communication/outreach strategies with their citizens. It also displays sufficient non-generic distinctions to justify future research attention, especially for scholars investigating the social news use phenomenon beyond a western representative democracy context.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix A: Social News Use and Citizen Participation Questionnaire

#### Section A – Filter questions

Please tell us some information about yourself. All data will be kept strictly confidential.

A.1 What is your age today?

\_\_\_\_\_ years old.

[PROGRAM: If less than 21 or above 35, survey terminates]

A.2 Which among the following best describes you?

Singapore Citizen	1
Not a Singapore citizen	2

[PROGRAM: If Not a Singapore citizen, survey terminates]

A.3 News in this study refers to news about local politics, economy and social issues.

Social media refers to social networking sites (e.g Facebook), microblogging applications (e.g Twitter), content communities (e.g Youtube), and instant-messaging applications (e.g WhatsApp).

Please indicate one social media platform that you use most to access news.

Facebook	1
Twitter	2
Youtube	3
Instagram	4
Google+	5
Pinterest	6
LinkedIn	7
WhatsApp	9
Others	10
Not Applicable – I do not access news on social media.	99

[PROGRAM: If Not Applicable, survey terminates]

**ATTENTION: Please answer all of the following questions based on THIS selected social media platform.**

A.4 In general, how often do you use the selected social media platform (including via mobile application)?

Never	1
Less than once a week	2
Once a week	3
2-3 times a week	4
4-6 times a week	5
Once a day	6
Several times a day	7

[PROGRAM: If Never, survey terminates]

A.5 In general, how often do you access *news* on the selected social media platform (including via mobile application)?

Never	1
Less than once a week	2
Once a week	3
2-3 times a week	4
4-6 times a week	5
Once a day	6
Several times a day	7

[PROGRAM: If Never, survey terminates]

A.6 In general, how often do you consume news through print newspapers?

Never	1
Less than once a week	2
Once a week	3
2-3 times a week	4
4-6 times a week	5
Once a day	6

Several times a day	7
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A.7 In general, how often do you consume news through television?

Never	1
Less than once a week	2
Once a week	3
2-3 times a week	4
4-6 times a week	5
Once a day	6
Several times a day	7

### Section B – Social News Use

The following questions relate to your news-related activities – or social news use - on the selected social media platform.

Please indicate your response using the following scale:

- 1 – Never
- 2 – Rarely, in less than 10% of the chances when I could have.
- 3 – Occasionally, in about 30% of the chances when I could have.
- 4 – Sometimes, in about 50% of the chances when I could have.
- 5 – Frequently, in about 70% of the chances when I could have.
- 6 – Usually, in about 90% of the chances I could have.
- 7 – Always

In general, how often do you ...		Never							Always
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
B.1	Read news headlines on social media?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
B.2	Read news on social media?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
B.3	Receive news links from individuals not affiliated with media organisations?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
B.4	Click on links to news stories that you receive on social media?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
B.5	Respond with a “Like” or similar reaction to a news story posted by others?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

B.6	Respond with a “Like” or similar reaction feature to other users’ comments on news stories?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B.7	Share news links from other online news sources?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B.8	Post or repost news links together with your own thoughts or comments about the story's content?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B.9	Write and post a summary of news or news headlines?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B.10	Contribute your own original news-related content? (e.g. articles, opinion pieces, pictures or videos)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Section C – Perceived Social Presence**

Social news use refers to news-related activities on social media such as reading, commenting, sharing or producing related content.

Please indicate your degree of agreement to the following statements in regards to the selected social media platform.

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – Somewhat disagree
- 4 – Neither agree or disagree
- 5 – Somewhat agree
- 6 – Agree
- 7 – Strongly agree

		Strongly disagree <span style="float: right;">Strongly agree</span>						
C.1	I feel like many people are also consuming news content with me at same time when I engage in social news use.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C.2	I feel like I’m communicating with friends when I engage in social news use.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C.3	I feel like a participant in a national panel discussion when I engage in social news use.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C.4	I feel like I am physically communicating with others when I engage in social news use.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### Section D – Perceived Information Control.

Please indicate your degree of agreement to the following statements in regards to the selected social media platform.

		Strongly disagree					Strongly agree	
D.1	I am able to control the flow of communication between myself and those in my social network with the features available.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D.2	I am able to communicate in ways that I feel are most suitable to the situation with the features available.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D.3	I am able to control the pace of an interaction when I need to with the features available.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D.4	I am able to plan the way interactions will proceed with the features available.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D.5	I can generally hide any information that I do not wish to be disclosed with the features available.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D.6	I can easily end an interaction if I need to with the features available.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D.7	I can avoid topics that I do not wish to discuss with the features available.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D.8	I can ignore things about an interaction if I need to with the features available.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### Section E – Motivations

Please indicate your degree of agreement to the following statements in regards to the selected social media platform.

I partake in social news use ...		Strongly disagree					Strongly agree	
E.1	Because it helps me to find out first-hand information about important issues.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E.2	Because it helps me to keep up with the latest issues and events.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7



E.3	Because it helps me to acquire new ideas and perspectives.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E.4	Because it helps me to learn something.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E.5	Because it helps me to create and maintain relationships with others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E.6	Because it helps me to compare my ideas to those of others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E.7	Because it helps me to share my views, thoughts and experiences.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E.8	Because it gives me something interesting to talk about.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E.9	Because it enhances my personal reputation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E.10	Because it promotes my expertise and knowledge.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E.11	Because it shows who I am to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E.12	Because it helps me gain support and respect from others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E.13	Because it is entertaining.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E.14	Because it helps me to relieve boredom.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E.15	Because it helps me to pass the time when I don't feel like doing anything else.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E.16	Because it helps me to relax.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## Section F – Online Participation

Please indicate your responses to the following questions using a scale of 1 to 7.

- 1 – Never
- 2 – Rarely, in less than 10% of the chances when I could have.
- 3 – Occasionally, in about 30% of the chances when I could have.
- 4 – Sometimes, in about 50% of the chances when I could have.
- 5 – Frequently, in about 70% of the chances when I could have.
- 6 – Usually, in about 90% of the chances I could have.

7 – Always

In the past 12 months, how often did you ...		Never						All the time
G.1	Write an email to the forum or commentary section of a newspaper/magazine?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
G.2	Organise an activity about a political or social issue on social media?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
G.3	Sign up online to volunteer to help with a political or social cause?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
G.4	Start or join an online group to support a political or social issue?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
G.5	Sign or share an online petition to support a political or social issue?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
G.6	Send an email to a politician or government official?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### Section G – Offline Citizen Participation

Please indicate your responses to the following questions using a scale of 1 to 7.

In the past 12 months, how often did you ...		Never						All the time
H.1	Work or volunteer in a community/grassroots project?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
H.2	Participate in a welfare organisation/ non-governmental organisation activity as a volunteer or member?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
H.3	Raise money for a charity or run/walk/bike for charity?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
H.4	Inform relevant authorities of a problem in your community?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
H.5	Work or volunteer for political groups or candidates?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

H.6	Contribute financially to a political cause?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
H.7	Wear or display a political paraphernalia?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
H.8	Attend a meeting of discussion or dialogue organised by the Residents' Committee, Community Centre, or the government?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### Section H – Interpersonal Discussion

Public affairs refers to news about local politics, economy and social issues.

Please indicate your responses to the following questions using a scale of 1 to 7.

In the past 12 months, how often did you ...		Never <span style="float: right;">All the time</span>						
I.1	Engage in an offline conversation about public affairs with family and friends?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I.2	Engage in an offline conversation about public affairs with colleagues and acquaintances?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I.3	Engage in an offline conversation about public affairs with strangers?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### Section I – (Internal) Self-efficacy

Please indicate your degree of agreement to the following statements using a scale of 1 to 7.

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – Somewhat disagree
- 4 – Neither agree or disagree
- 5 – Somewhat agree
- 6 – Agree
- 7 – Strongly agree

		Strongly disagree					Strongly agree		
J.1	I can have a positive impact on social issues.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
J.2	I have confidence in my ability to help others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
J.3	I do not think that I can make a difference in my community.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
J.4	I can make a difference in the lives of the less fortunate.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
J.5	I am confident that I can deal efficiently with unexpected events in my community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
J.6	I feel people like myself can influence the government.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
J.7	I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues in Singapore.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
J.8	The government will respond to the needs of the citizens if people band together and demand change.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
J.9	I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
J.10	If the government is not interested in hearing what people think, there is really no way to make them listen.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	

## Section J – Public Affairs Knowledge

K.1 What is the total number of elected seats in the Singapore Parliament?

73	0
79	0
83	0
89	1

K.2 What is the maximum term a Singapore Member of Parliament is elected for?

5	1
3	0
4	0

4.5	0
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K.3 What political office does Mr S. Iswaran currently hold?

Finance	0
Trade & Industry	1
Foreign Affairs	0
Social & Family Development	0

K.4 Which one of the following was NOT included in the Budget 2017 speech?

Water tariffs	0
Silver Support Scheme	1
Personal Income Tax Rebate	0
Additional Registration Fee for motorcycles	0

K.5 Recently, a scheme known as \_\_\_\_\_ was introduced to allow Secondary 1 students from the Normal (Academic) and Normal (Technical) streams to take subjects at a higher academic level.

Subject-based banding	1
Direct subject admission	0
Aptitude-based banding	0
Special-admissions banding	0

## Section K – Demographics

L.1 What is your gender?

Male	1
Female	2

L.2 Which of the following best describes you?

Chinese	1
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Malay	2
Indian	3
Others	4

L.3 What is the highest education level you have achieved?

No formal education	1
Primary level/ PSLE and or equivalent	2
Secondary level/ 'O' levels or equivalent	3
Junior college/ 'A' levels or equivalent	4
Polytechnic / Diploma / NITEC or equivalent	5
College / University undergraduate degree	6
Postgraduate (Masters and Doctorate)	7

L.4 Please indicate your family's monthly household income from work (before taxes):

\$1,999 and below	1
\$2,000 - \$2,999	2
\$3,000 - \$3,999	3
\$4,000 - \$4,999	4
\$5,000 - \$5,999	5
\$6,000 - \$6,999	6
\$7,000 and above	7

L.5 Of which of the following kind of groups or organisations are you a member of?  
(Please select the one you are most active in).

Voluntary welfare organisation (e.g. Autism association)	1
Single-issue group (e.g. Gender equality advocacy)	2
Political party	3
Not applicable – I am not a member of the above-mentioned groups or organisations.	99

You've reached the end of the survey.  
Thank you very much for your time and participation!

## Appendix B: Factor Analyses

**Table B.1. Factor analysis of media factors**

	1	2	3	4
	Social Presence	Expressive information control	Privacy information control	Traditional news media use
I feel like I am physically communicating with others when I engage in social news use.	<b>.892</b>	.121	.189	.061
I feel like a participant in a national panel discussion when I engage in social news use.	<b>.886</b>	.330	.028	.013
I feel like I'm communicating with friends when I engage in social news use.	<b>.865</b>	.069	.097	.128
I feel like many people are also consuming news content with me at same time when I engage in social news use.	<b>.621</b>	.157	.179	.002
I am able to control the pace of an interaction when I need to with the features available.	.076	<b>.908</b>	.202	.128
I am able to plan the way interactions will proceed with the features available.	.093	<b>.887</b>	.143	.031
I am able to communicate in ways that I feel are most suitable to the situation with the features available.	.128	<b>.879</b>	.197	.011
I am able to control the flow of communication between myself and those in my social network with the features available.	.112	<b>.872</b>	.201	.129

I can ignore things about an interaction if I need to with the features available.	.121	.154	<b>.869</b>	.251
I can avoid topics that I do not wish to discuss with the features available.	.072	.175	<b>.863</b>	.221
I can easily end an interaction if I need to with the features available.	.073	.223	<b>.843</b>	.201
I can generally hide any information that I do not wish to be disclosed with the features available.	.133	.232	<b>.798</b>	.197
How often do you consume news through print newspapers?	.211	.245	.248	<b>.713</b>
How often do you consume news through television?	.160	.270	.258	<b>.521</b>
Eigenvalues	5.12	1.28	1.30	1.09
Variance (%)	40.71%	11.71%	12.86%	9.21%

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Retained loading of a variable on factor is indicated by a boldface type.

**Table B.2. Factor analysis of social news use**

	1 News production	2 News participation	3 News consumption
Contribute your own original news-related content? (e.g. articles, opinion pieces, pictures or videos)	<b>.907</b>	.150	.147
Write and post a summary of news or news headlines?	<b>.905</b>	.227	-.032



Post or repost news links together with your own thoughts or comments about the story's content?	.595	.568	.090
Respond with a “Like” or similar reaction feature to other users’ comments on news stories?	.315	<b>.819</b>	.240
Share news links from other online news sources?	.327	<b>.742</b>	.041
Respond with a “Like” or similar reaction to a news story posted by others?	.284	<b>.731</b>	.339
Click on links to news stories that you receive on social media?	.083	.025	<b>.810</b>
Read news headlines on social media?	.090	.225	<b>.802</b>
Receive news links from individuals not affiliated with media organisations?	.298	.339	<b>.662</b>
Read news on social media?	.681	.024	.511
Eigenvalues	4.81	1.48	1.01
Variance (%)	32.12	12.8	5.14

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.  
Retained loading of a variable on factor is indicated by a boldface type.

**Table B.3. Factor analysis of motivations**

	1	2	3	4
	Status-seeking	Information-seeking	Socialising	Entertainment
Because it helps me gain support and respect from others.	<b>.889</b>	.215	.037	.119

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Because it shows who I am to others.	<b>.863</b>	.223	.129	.107
Because it enhances my personal reputation.	<b>.824</b>	.214	.164	.151
Because it promotes my expertise and knowledge.	<b>.750</b>	.171	.180	.324
Because it helps me to keep up with the latest issues and events.	.299	<b>.860</b>	.164	.170
Because it helps me to find out first-hand information about important issues.	.248	<b>.829</b>	.229	.272
Because it helps me to acquire new ideas and perspectives.	.271	<b>.772</b>	.248	.256
Because it helps me to learn something.	.159	<b>.708</b>	.337	.276
Because it helps me to compare my ideas to those of others.	.076	.212	<b>.842</b>	.254
Because it helps me to share my views, thoughts and experiences.	.094	.181	<b>.806</b>	.302
Because it helps me to create and maintain relationships with others.	.159	.279	<b>.796</b>	.312
Because it gives me something interesting to talk about.	.406	.341	<b>.767</b>	.152
Because it helps me to relieve boredom.	.119	.214	.255	<b>.863</b>
Because it helps me to pass the time when I don't feel like doing anything else.	.199	.163	.212	<b>.849</b>

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Because it is entertaining.	.225	.290	.268	<b>.790</b>
Because it helps me to relax.	.217	.304	.318	<b>.637</b>
Eigenvalues	8.47	2.02	1.18	1.08
Variance (%)	52.93	12.62	7.37	6.77

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.  
Retained loading of a variable on factor is indicated by a boldface type.

**Table B.4. Factor analysis of political attributes**

	1	2	3	4	5
	Offline Citizen Participation	Online Participation	Efficacy	Interpersonal discussion	Public affairs knowledge
Work or volunteer for political groups or candidates?	<b>.941</b>	.124	.035	-.010	-.131
Wear or display a political paraphernalia?	<b>.936</b>	.106	.016	-.008	-.094
Attend a meeting of discussion or dialogue organised by the Residents' Committee, Community Centre, or the government?	<b>.934</b>	.113	.018	-.023	-.055
Contribute financially to a political cause?	<b>.928</b>	.126	-.036	.021	-.115
Raise money for a charity or run/walk/bike for charity?	<b>.869</b>	.133	.002	-.012	-.114
Participate in a welfare organisation/ non-governmental organisation activity as a volunteer or member?	<b>.842</b>	.155	-.032	.015	-.061

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Inform relevant authorities of a problem in your community?	<b>.830</b>	.155	-.055	.021	-.087
Work or volunteer in a community/grassroots project?	<b>.819</b>	.136	-.038	.016	-.143
Organise an activity about a political or social issue on social media?	.144	<b>.957</b>	-.028	.048	-.053
Write an email to the forum or commentary section of a newspaper/magazine?	.128	<b>.945</b>	.080	.017	.153
Sign up online to volunteer to help with a political or social cause?	.197	<b>.939</b>	.066	.093	.068
Send an email to a politician or government official?	.190	<b>.938</b>	.063	.045	.195
Start or join an online group to support a political or social issue?	.078	<b>.936</b>	-.023	.158	-.013
Sign or share an online petition to support a political or social issue?	.104	<b>.845</b>	.106	.052	.312
I am confident that I can deal efficiently with unexpected events in my community.	.262	.262	<b>.860</b>	.022	-.154
I can have a positive impact on social issues.	.141	.141	<b>.828</b>	-.327	-.106

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I feel people like myself can influence the government.	.119	.119	<b>.808</b>	-.313	-.091
I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics.	.457	.016	<b>.788</b>	-.047	-.069
I have confidence in my ability to help others.	.287	-.056	<b>.780</b>	-.063	.093
I can make a difference in the lives of the less fortunate.	.297	-.046	<b>.763</b>	-.040	-.116
I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues in Singapore.	.171	.029	<b>.761</b>	.034	.353
The government will respond to the needs of the citizens if people band together and demand change.	.442	.158	<b>.755</b>	.127	-.167
If the government is not interested in hearing what people think, there is really no way to make them listen.	.274	.116	-.324	.002	.141
I do not think that I can make a difference in my community.	.209	.203	-.236	.030	.222
Engage in an offline conversation about public affairs with colleagues and acquaintances?	.040	.006	.056	<b>.918</b>	.030
Engage in an offline conversation about public affairs with family and friends?	.102	-.045	.013	<b>.885</b>	-.088

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Engage in an offline conversation about public affairs with strangers?	.110	-.028	.036	<b>.793</b>	.094
What political office does Mr S. Iswaran currently hold?	.170	.102	.170	.131	<b>.561</b>
What is the maximum term a Singapore Member of Parliament is elected for?	.272	.184	.188	.068	<b>.520</b>
What is the total number of elected seats in the Singapore Parliament?	.256	.114	.153	.019	<b>.571</b>
Which one of the following was not included in the Budget 2017 speech?	.276	.078	.076	.051	<b>.500</b>
Recently, a scheme known as _____ was introduced to allow Secondary 1 students from the Normal (Academic) and Normal (Technical) streams to take subjects at a higher academic level.	.207	.205	.181	.041	<b>.511</b>
Eigenvalues	15.70	7.23	2.82	1.06	1.01
Variance (%)	30.56	14.44	4.33	1.62	1.20

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.  
Retained loading of a variable on factor is indicated by a boldface type.

## **Appendix C: Semi-structured Interview Questions and Probes**

### **Section 1: Antecedents of Social News Use**

- 1) Why do you want to participate in social news use?
  
- 2) What do you think are the advantages of social news use as opposed to assessing news on other media channels?
  - What specific affordance encourages your social news use behavior? (i.e. bandwagon cues such as hashtags; options to manage exposure to and disclosure of information.)
  - Elaborate your process and usage. (i.e. please describe a situation in which you would utilize this feature).
  
- 3) Has your participation in social news use generated feelings of co-presence or awareness of other users who are also consuming similar news content?
  - How has such feelings influence your engagement in social news use?
  
- 4) Have you ever felt a sense of community while engaging in social news use?
  - How has this feeling affected your online social interactions?

### **Section 2: Social media as sources of news and information**

- 5) You mentioned that that you usually use \_\_\_\_\_ (refer to response on Q.3 in pre-interview survey) for social news use. Please elaborate why this is your preferred social media platform compared to others (i.e. more features, friends, etc).

- 6) Who do you communicate or interact with mostly when participating in social news use?
- Offline friends and family? Online community with similar video interests? Online community with topical interests? Random strangers? Why?
- 7) What local news on politics, economy or social issues have you responded to actively when consuming news on social media?
- List some instances of these issues and how you participated (i.e. re-share link, comment).
- 8) Unlike traditional mass media in Singapore, the Internet is home to a wider spectrum of socio-political news and information. How do you negotiate these different sources of information? Explain your process and usage.
- Describe how you would approach or interact with news content on a *mainstream news* social media page as opposed to an *independent news* social media page.
- 9) If your views were different from those expressed by the majority on the social media news page that you frequent, how would you respond?
- What action / strategy have you taken to avoid or alleviate this situation?
  - What if the trend persists?



### **Section 3: Social News Use and Citizen Participation**

10) Do you think you will be less involved or interested in civic or political issues if social media as a news source did not exist? Why or why not?

11) How has social news use affected your participation or work in \_\_\_\_\_? (Refer to response on ‘Organisation’ in pre-interview survey).

- Please elaborate how it has impeded or advanced your cause.

12) Do you think engaging in social news use helps you participate in the national policy-making process? How so or how not?

- Please provide a personal example of how it has complemented or affected the process.

13) While the government has employed a “soft touch” approach towards regulating the Internet, legal restrictions on expression – including the ambiguous ‘out of bound markers’ (race, religion and sensitive political issues) – remain in place. How has this restriction influence your social news use behavior?

14) What are the major drawbacks from participating in social news use? (i.e. privacy concerns, information overload, filter bubble, unsolicited attention – engaging in discussions with people who have differing beliefs in social or political issues).

## Appendix D: Pre In-depth Interview Survey for Social News Use Research

News in this study refers to information pertaining to local politics, economy and social issues.

Social media refers to social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), microblogging applications (e.g. Twitter), content communities (e.g. Youtube), and instant-messaging applications (e.g. WhatsApp).

Social news use refers to news-related activities on social media such as reading, commenting, sharing or producing related content.

1. On average, which of the following social media applications do you access most often?

<b>Application</b>	<b>Rank in order of frequency 1 = most frequent 6 = least frequent</b>
Facebook	
Instagram	
Twitter	
Google+	
Youtube	
WhatsApp	
Other app (please specify) :	

2. Approximately how long have you had an account on the application that you use most frequently?

\_\_\_\_\_ years.

3. Typically, which of the following social media applications do you use for *social news use* most often?

<b>Application</b>	<b>Rank in order of frequency 1 = most frequent 6 = least frequent</b>
Facebook	
Instagram	
Twitter	
Google+	
Youtube	
WhatsApp	
Other app (please specify) :	

4. Which of the following local *mainstream media* social media pages do you frequent?

<b>Page</b>	<b>Tick appropriately</b>
Channel NewsAsia	
The Straits Times	
Lianhe Zaobao/Wanbao	
Berita Harian	
Today	
The New Paper	
Other (please specify) :	

5. Which of the following local *independent media* social media pages do you frequent?

<b>Page</b>	<b>Tick appropriately</b>
The Mothership	
The Middle Ground	
The Independent SG	
The Online Citizen	
Must Share News	
5 Stars and a Moon	
All Singapore Stuff	
TR Emeritus	
Public House	
Yahoo! Singapore	
Others (please specify):	

6. On a typical week, how much time on average do you consume news on the following media channels?

	Never	Less than once a week	Once a week	2-3 times a week	4-6 times a week	Once a day	Several times a day
Television							
Radio							
Newspaper							
Social media							
Internet (overall)							

7. How often do you engage in a conversation about politics or current affairs with others?

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Tick appropriately</b>
Never	
Less than once a week	
Once a week	
2-3 times a week	
4-6 times a week	
Once a day	
Several times a day	

8. How would you describe your level of attention to news pertaining to local politics or social issues?

<b>Level of interest</b>	<b>Tick appropriately</b>
None	
Little attention	
A moderate amount of attention	
Close attention	
Very close attention	

9. How would you describe your level of interest in local politics or social issues?

<b>Level of interest</b>	<b>Tick appropriately</b>
Not at all interested	
Not very interested	
Neutral	
Somewhat interested	
Very interested	

10. To what extent do you agree with the following statement:  
 “I think people like me can influence government.”

<b>Level of agreement</b>	<b>Tick appropriately</b>
Strongly disagree	
Disagree	
Somewhat disagree	
Neither agree or disagree	
Somewhat agree	
Agree	
Strongly agree	

**Your Particulars**

**(NOTE: Your real name and organisation will not be linked together in this project)**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex (circle): Female / Male

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest education achieved: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_