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Online political participation and attitudes: Analyzing election user-generated videos in Singapore[*]

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Abstract

During the 2011 Singapore General Election (GE2011), user-generated videos (UGV) emerged as a new means for online political participation and discussion. This study first employed keyword searches for GE2011 UGVs and observed their content characteristics, and then selected 143 edited videos for textual analysis. Instead of a campaigning tool, GE2011 UGVs were primarily created by voters to share participatory experiences in elections or express their political opinions. In terms of content characteristics, the election UGVs can be categorized into "uncut recording UGVs" and "edited UGVs." The analyses show the former records participation in political events, while the latter reveals strong political attitudes and sensationalism. Sarcastic and controversial edited UGVs such as parodies tend to receive lots of view counts and emotional comments. In the context of one-party ruling and tight mass media control, the majority of active authors and GE2011 UGV content supported opposition parties and comments usually showed strong affirmative attitudes. UGVs, a second-tier alternative media, serve as an echo chamber for impressions and emotions when a small number of enthusiasts selectively expose themselves to like-minded political perspectives, which is likely to increase cynicism towards the government.

Keywords: election; user-generated content; user-generated video; political participation; political attitude; textual analysis; observation.

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1. Introduction

Social media played a vital role in political communication in the Singapore 2011 General Election (GE2011) (Black, Defir, & Behnke, 2013), which was characterized by significant use of social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, and blogs) and prolific production of politics-related user-generated content (UGC). Using new media tools, Singaporeans shared political news and perspectives among virtual interpersonal networks. GE2011 was regarded as a watershed election in Singapore's election history due to the dropping votes for the ruling People's Action Party (PAP). Singapore's Prime Minister attributed the election results partly to the prevalent use of new media and increasing number of young voters (Lin & Hong, forthcoming).

According to Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery (2006), UGC is defined as new media where creative content is made publicly available online outside of professional routines and practices. Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright (2008) regard UGC as media content created or produced by the general public and primarily distributed on the Internet. YouTube, the popular video-sharing platform in Singapore, house myriad user-generated videos (UGV) for public viewing. Some UGVs which went viral on social media and got tremendous attention made their way to traditional media headlines (Chowdhury, 2011). The GE2011 was the first time when election UGVs became a critical avenue for online political participation during Singapore's elections.

Prior studies on political videos largely focused on politicians' use of online videos for campaigns, with less emphasis on UGVs for political purposes (Bakøy & Kalnes, 2010; Roberts, 2013; Vesnic-Alujevic & Van Bauwel, 2014). Most studies examined user motivations for creating, disseminating, or consuming UGC (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008; Schaedel & Clement, 2010), instead of studying UGVs' contents and participatory interactions. Therefore, this research examines characteristics of GE2011 user-generated videos (UGVs) and analyzes Singaporean produsers' (i.e., video creators and commenters) online participation and political attitudes reflected on these YouTube videos and comments. The findings can enhance the understanding of grassroots' UGV usage patterns during elections and produsers' online political participation culture.

2. Literature Review

2.1 User participation in UGV

In this study, UGV is defined as "public accessible audiovisual content created by non-professionals for non-commercial purposes." Cheng, Dale, and Liu (2007) found that most UGVs on YouTube were short and of small file size. A large percentage of total view counts of YouTube videos were attributed mostly to some popular videos (Cha, Kwak, Rodriguez, Ahn, & Moon, 2009). The popularity of YouTube UGVs was related to how viewers were directed to them like through social media or peer recommendations (Cheng, Dale, & Liu, 2007).

Levels of user engagement in UGC range from consumption to production. Content creation is relatively rare in UGC participation as many play the role of passive viewers (van Dijck, 2009). Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright (2008) found that strong attitudes enhance UGC

consumption and creation. According to Shao (2009), majority of UGC users sought information or entertainment; those who participated in commenting, sharing, and re-distribution were driven by forces of social interaction and community bonding; UGC creators were motivated by the needs for self-expression and self-actualization. Bruns (2008a) termed UGC participation as "produsage" in which information and cultural products were produced in a networked environment with open participation, fluid hierarchy, unfinished artefacts/continuing processes, and common property/individual rewards.

Produsage in social media can be categorized as Gans' second-tier model (1980) which suggests off-mainstream activists and opposition members reanalyze and reinterpret first-tier mainstream media. However, Bruns (2008b, p. 264) argued that produsers of citizen journalism ought to move beyond the second tier, "gatewatching" tactical existence, and pursue a "gatecrashing" approach to develop and reformat stories to provide multi-perspective news outside the constraints of mainstream journalism. According to Atton et al. (2009), alternative journalism is produced by ordinary people outside mainstream media who report and write about communities of interest as citizens, activists, or fans. It is a form of democratized media. To date, non-elite activists or opposition members can use the second-tier alternative media like UGVs on YouTube to articulate and disseminate their political beliefs and causes in order to challenge established power and react against dominant mainstream media.

2.2 Political Use of UGVs

YouTube first became an influential social media tool for political campaigns during the 2008 US Presidential Election. In 2007, YouTube and CNN held joint debates for presidential candidates and attracted millions of Americans who sent in video-recorded questions. This event emphasizing citizen participation demonstrated the power of YouTube

comparable to the impact of television on Nixon and Kennedy's debate in1960. The debates were designed to engage young citizens and further influence their normative political attitudes (McKinney & Rill, 2009). According to American ambassador Herbold (2008), YouTube served as an online echo chamber for structured elements of the electoral cycle as it provided on-demand videos for millions of voters. UGVs supporting or attacking the 2008 US presidential candidates went viral and obtained myriad hits. Musser (2009) argued that the over 1,000 YouTube music videos which expressed a pro-Obama sentiment were highly influential on the 2008 campaign results. Hendricks and Denton (2010) thought that Obama's good use of viral video marketing resulted in his victory in the 2008 election.

In the 2012 US Presidential Election, YouTube's influence increased and the cycle of communications accelerated (Krashinsky, 2012). Candidates uploaded different online videos for target groups and the cycle of response videos became faster. In early 2012, Obama released the first 17-minute documentary on YouTube for his presidential campaign, instead of placing it on television channels (Peters, 2012). Several elections in the Western countries also saw YouTube extensively utilized by many political candidates to reach out to the electorate (Gibson & McAllister, 2011; Gueorguieva, 2008; Noguera & Correyero, 2010; Ragas & Kiousis, 2010). However, some studies, like Baumgartner and Morris (2010), argued that social media and UGC did little to inform or contribute to public discourse of political issues. McKinney and Rill (2009) found that the impact of CNN/YouTube debates on youths showed insignificant differences from the traditional ones.

In terms of comparing media exposure, Towner and Dulio (2011) experimented on a YouTube channel to examine the effects of the 2008 presidential campaign UGVs and traditional media videos on young Americans. They found that exposure to UGVs increased the level of cynicism towards the government. However, exposure to both types of videos did not affect viewer's perceptions and attitudes of candidates. Another study on the impact of

YouTube's political parody videos showed that videos from sources with highly persuasive intents had greater influence on political attitudes (Lim & Golan, 2011). They also found that these parody videos may even motivate certain viewers to engage in "corrective" action by participating actively in political discussions.

With respect to viewers' attitudes to political UGVs, English, Sweetser, and Ancu (2011) investigated the effects of political videos on human behavior from three aspects: ethos (i.e., viewers' perception of video source's credibility), logos (i.e., viewers' tendency to analyze videos rationally) and pathos (i.e, viewers' reaction to emotional appeals in videos). Participants in general rated ethos (source credibility) as the most influential, but politically cynical participants highly rated logos (rational analysis). However, the UGVs with a pathos (emotion) appeal showed no impact on political attitudes, though participants did react to them. These results revealed how different types of appeal in UGVs lead to varying viewer responses.

Notably, UGVs cannot be viewed as the sole determinant of political attitudes. Taking YouTube as a basis, Jenkins (2006) warned that such online videos could not be understood in isolation from other social media where they could be discussed in greater depth and substance. He argued that dialogues taking place on YouTube tend to take on a less rationale slant, littered with fractured logic and misinformation (Jenkins, 2006). Hence, the impact of UGVs on politics should be assessed in a greater context, including accompanying political debates that take place on various dissemination channels.

2.3 Singapore Elections and Social Media

The Singapore General Elections is held once every four years, with the country divided into constituencies where political parties would contest for representation through voting. Since independence in 1965, most constituencies have been won by the ruling party,

the People's Action Party (PAP). Some opposition parties won a few constituencies that granted them a minority in the PAP-dominated parliament. Due to lack of mass media exposure, Singaporean opposition parties and their supporters have used online media to disseminate political beliefs and party information since 2000 (Gomez, 2010). In 2006, PAP's decade-long dominance in governance experienced signs of weakening support from the electorate (Loh, 2011), with many questioning PAP's policies and long hold on ruling power in Singapore. GE2011 became a watershed event and resulted in the largest number of opposition seats in history (Saad, 2011).

Social media was widely regarded as the decisive factor for the boost in support for the opposition during GE2011 (Hodal, 2011). As official media were widely perceived as state-owned and often penalized for taking the ruling party's side in the coverage of politics and elections, many voters turned to the Internet for alternative socio-political viewpoints as well as discussions on politics and election issues (Kwang, 2011). In 2005, opposition parties and supports began to experiment with social media for strategic outreach and interactivity with supporters and voters. According to Lin and Hong (2015), young people's political attitudes and voting behavior in the GE2011were influenced more by social media than older Singaporeans. Singapore's political caricature bloggers received popularity among youths when they mocked current affairs in an entertaining and sarcastic style (Lin, 2013). Popular bloggers like Mr Brown also produced many edited video parodies. The salient political impact of the online platform has prompted the government to register political websites and popular news websites.

According to Gomez (2010), YouTube began to be utilized as a political platform during the 2006 elections when bloggers posted videos of speeches at opposition elections rallies. Opposition party members and supporters later used YouTube to post speeches of party leaders, events, and political activities. Some even created dedicated YouTube channels.

During GE2011, grassroots also created UGVs to share their political opinions and experiences. These UGVs included newly-made videos and re-uploads of historical or confidential videos. For example, a video recording of a political candidate debating on sensitive homosexual issues was reloaded, which caused a media uproar affecting voter attitudes (Low & Teo, 2011).

Some political UGVs which became viral on social media were reported by traditional media and affected political agendas (Tay, 2011). For example, many produsers produced short UGVs from media interviews, criticizing a PAP female candidate's young age and lack of public speaking skills (Yu, 2011). Some compared her with another young female candidate from the National Solidarity Party (NSP) (Ong, 2011). After these UGVs were disseminated rapidly via social networks, traditional media coverage started to discuss these controversies.

Both Singapore GE2011 and the 2008 US elections are considered as instances where social media played a key role in election results. However, there are differences in the two political systems: First, US political candidates can utilize videos in their campaigns without time limit, while candidates in Singapore can only campaign during the two-week period before elections, including using social media and UGVs (Chaudhry, 2011; Mydans, 2011). Further, the US had both parties' and ordinary people's election UGVs to shape electorate's political opinions and voting behavior, but most GE2011videos UGCs were produced by third-party authors instead of political parties or candidates. These political UGVs could be created and watched without the campaign period restriction.

3. Methodology

This study focuses on analyzing the use of UGVs in Singapore's GE2011 as no prior studies have dived into this emerging but critical political communication subject. Singapore offers a unique context for the election UGV research as political parties are curtailed in two-week campaigning, including using social media and UGC. Online UGVs are usually initiated by voters. Through textual analysis and observations, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1) What are the content characteristics of UGVs during the Singapore GE2011?

2) What is the participatory culture of UGVs on the YouTube platform during the Singapore GE2011?

3) What kinds of political attitudes of UGV produsers are shown in online political discourses during the Singapore GE2011?

After identifying keywords based on media reports, this study sought GE2011-related UGVs uploaded during the lawful campaign period (23 April to 7 May 2011) from blogs and Internet video sites, especially YouTube, the main platform for uploading and viewing of election videos. Table 1 lists the numbers of videos found corresponding to selected keywords. It should be noted that some UGVs appeared under more than one keyword search.

<Table 1 about here>

To obtain the full picture of GE2011 UGVs, this study took a covert observational approach to study its UGV produsers and interactions with no interference. On YouTube's mediated computing platform, the observation primarily looked at how produsers posted videos, commented, and interacted with others. The observation results showed although non-media affiliated produsers created thousands of "uncut recording UGVs" (i.e., timely uploading real-time video capture of events), a small amount of "edited UGVs" (i.e., pre-recorded topical videos with planned editing) the contents of which were highly persuasive,

sensational, or parodic, and had a lot more views and comments. As such, this study focuses on analyzing the edited UGVs because they are likely to have great influence on produsers' political attitudes or participation (Lim & Golan, 2011). The observation method also helps understand the UGV participatory culture during GE2011 through monitoring interactions among produsers.

Later, two research assistants conducted textual analysis on the 143 edited UGVs uploaded during the election period. The coding scheme was adapted from Shah and Marchionini's (2007) study on the US Presidential Election videos. UGV characteristics and users responses were examined by looking at video contents, subjects, "view" counts, "like" counts, mood, as well as comment counts and content. The textual analysis in the context of UGVs was targeted at both UGV videos and comments as this study attempted to examine different types of UGV produsers (authors/content creators and commenters) whose participation was captured by the YouTube system. Also, this study observed and analyzed interactions between produsers (authors and commenters), which provided insights into the impact of UGVs on participants of the YouTube platform. Finally, it selected four prominent UGV authors and analyzed their active participation and political attitudes by tracking online history, video uploads, and responses towards comments to UGVs.

4. Findings and Analyses

4.1 Content Characteristics of UGVs in GE2011

4.1.1 UGV Categories

After teasing out the repeating videos among search terms, the election UGVs can be divided into two categories: 1) "uncut recordings UGVs" of real-time election events to share authors' participation immediately with less effort in production, and 2) "edited UGVs"

which authors plan, film, edit and upload to express their political perspectives. The former contains unedited recordings of political rallies, speeches, rally crowds, or short recordings of candidates, while the latter usually includes self-edited video parodies of election issues. Length is a characteristic that differentiates the two types of UGVs. The selected edited UGVs are mostly around two to five minutes, while uncut recordings tend to be longer, ranging from nine to 17 minutes. However, there were a small number of long edited UGVs such as recordings of self-commentaries and a few short uncut recordings like highlight certain parts of election events or speeches.

The uncut recordings are usually filmed to show authors' participation in political events and share the historical moments with viewers. Often, UGV authors who filmed and uploaded random and uncut rally/speech recordings simply provided alternative venues for netizens to witness enthusiastic crowds in political rallies, especially during opposition events which were rarely seen in Singapore. In comparison, edited UGV authors tended to showcase video-making talent and included plenty of fancy illustrations and animations. The edited UGVs with clear messages, strong emotions, and funny parodies received many views, likes, and comments. After analysis, this study classified edited UGVs' purposes into three types: 1) to motivate and mobilize viewers (49%); 2) to mock political figures or candidates (38.6%); and to 3) provide political information (12.4%). The majority of edited UGVs provide messages to inspire viewers or even convince them to agree with authors' political stands. For example, to encourage UGV users to vote for the opposition, author wendyneo produced inspirational video montages depicting the wrongdoings of the ruling party. Certain video parodies which caught lots of attention utilized popular culture to make fun of socio-political issues. Famous blogger Mr Brown produced a UGV by rewriting the lyrics of a well-known Korean song and sang to criticize the political situation in a humorous but sarcastic way.

However, less edited UGVs provide only informational contents such as demonstrating the voting procedures.

The popularity of UGVs can be inferred from views, likes, and comment counts. The results showed that edited UGVs were more popular amongst viewers than the uncut recordings. Repetitive uncut recordings UGVs often were filmed by attendances of crucial rallies and election speeches with smartphones. Their picture quality was poor. As such, viewers would prefer to watch similar scenes on traditional media news, unless the authors captured some rarely seen election events. In comparison, edited UGV authors injected creativity and personal perspectives into the videos which made the content with originality and styles. As there are too many uncut recordings, our textual analysis focuses on selected edited UGVs uploaded during the election period. They usually portray stronger political attitudes and emotional viewpoints, which clearly reveal authors' opinions of political parties and election candidates. Not only are there more views, likes, and comments to edited UGVs, their unique content provides more room for analysis than repetitive and uncut recordings UGVs.

Majority of UGVs reflect highly-charged emotions. Popular UGVs were aimed at eliciting strong opinions on election topics with expressive emotional appeals. In the analysis, authors and commenters often emerged as angry or pessimistic about particular problems addressed by these UGVs. They might engage in antagonistic interactions with other produsers, especially when they disagreed on perspectives regarding election issues. The pro-opposition UGVs usually illustrate fervent themes of "change" or sarcastic comments on the ruling party. A short edited UGV that contrasted suggestive and controversial statements made by PAP candidates with inspiring images and speeches made by opposition candidates. Its comments took a highly antagonistic and patriotic front to criticize the ruling party's

leader. For example, an opposition party supporter responded to another produser's defense of the ruling party in this way:

> *IN REALITY YOU ARE JUST LIKE THE MAJORITY OF THE SHEEP THAT ARE SCARED TO STEP OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE AND CHANGE. Typical product of our useless education system that think we can "TEACH" creativity using a system. Hopeless.*

4.1.2 Popular Types of UGVs

With respect to UGV popularity, parodies are especially liked amongst produsers as they tend to combine humor and sarcasm – two genres that Singaporeans favor. Parodies made by popular blogger Mr Brown received more than 100 comments and over 1,160 "likes" on average. One of his podcast-turned-video used the humorous dialogue between a hawker and his customer to mock the relationship between the PAP and the voters. With limited visuals, the witty narration made this UGV a viral distribution via social networks. Mr Brown used the incorrect order of soup noodles to insinuate and poke fun at the government's perceived mishandling of the flood in CBD. The hawker, who represented the PAP, nonchalantly pointed out that such "incorrect orders" only happened once in fifty years, and dismissed it as an unfortunate occurrence. The UGV touched on a fervent social issue with funny insinuations resonated in the community. The comments revealed that produsers were generally impressed and amused by creativity and humor in such UGVs.

> *MR BROWN U R DAMN EPIC!!! i hope i get to shake your hand one day. im glad that i know more about the current affairs now, so i can understand jokes like these :) i cant wait for the day i get to vote!*

> *You are damn good. u should be in the parliament.*

It really sums up everything about this GE campaign. Well done!

Parodies using the remake of lyrics to popular songs also received many "likes" and view counts. An author recreated the lyrics to a teen hit song and sang with a political slant, thereby conveying his determination to support the opposition party. For example, the chorus starts with the line "she (Mama) was like, PAP, PAP, PAP", only to end with the line "I'm sorry, Mum. My vote is mine, mine." These UGVs accurately capture the generic political differences between the older and the younger generations in Singapore. The catchy tunes and witty lyrics also contributed to their popularity.

In addition, UGVs with sarcastic undertones were popular amongst produsers in Singapore. PAP young female candidate Tin was the frequent subject of mockery in GE2011 UGVs due to this young candidate's naïve comments in media interviews. A video that edited news clips of Tin's media responses in contrast with those of NSP candidate Seah received over 271,000 views and 400 comments. Tin was often portrayed as the meeker and less polished candidate. The side-by-side comparison of their answers created a stark contrast and led to many dismissive comments against Tin.

> *It's more than obvious from every angle of coverage that Tin Pei Ling is all fluff and a potential tragi-comedy unfolding as she enters parliament riding on the coat-tails of her far more qualified colleagues. One should have self-awareness as a basic qualification in attempting this serious office. Young as Nicole Seah is, she comes across as far more sincere. May she persist in her mission to serve Singapore and mature into a leader to watch. Majulah Singapura!*

Moreover, edited UGVs which appeal to serious causes like injustice and social changes received lots of attention and heated debates in comments. A solemn video montage that combines strong images of less-privileged Singaporeans with controversial arguments and

inspiring texts delivers a clear message of the necessity of political change. It received over 86,000 views and 280 comments. Another UGV which discussed the notion of citizens leading a peaceful life in Singapore caused a vehement battle of words between both sides.

Peaceful life? Aren't you having it right now? Being the lowest corruption country and one of lowest crime rates in the world. Mr Chiam listens? I was there at his rally, he made lots of promises that PAP will never make. A good political party will not make so many promises to make the citizens happy. Because some of them will turn into empty which is what PAP do not want. People from all over the world want to come into Singapore, and you are complaining? Tell me how old are you. (PAP supporter)

Peaceful life??? Lowest corruption country??? Hahahahaha XD Do u know what potong pasir said about their place, its quiet and peaceful coz nobody was there to disturb them. No one there will insist on upgrading for flats that are 30 - 40 years old and create so much noise for months on those old flats which they can't sell due to the 99 year lease. And most importantly, they can actually find their MP in his office. (Opposition supporter)

4. 2 UGV Participatory Behavior in GE2011

4.2.1 View, "Like" and comment

The view count and number of "likes" for each UGV are straightforward indicators of community members' levels of interest. Among the selected edited UGVs, videos with controversial topics can have as much as over 70,000 views and over 1,500 "likes." Comparing two young female candidates Tin Pei Ling and Nicole Seah is one of the more popular topics during GE2011. The majority of UGV produsers felt that PAP candidate Tin

was immature and unqualified to run for the election while opposition candidate Seah was perceived as genuinely concerned about people's well-being and showing leadership qualities. This new phenomenon drew much attention and led to the creation of several related UGVs and viral distribution.

The comment content and count reflects not only UGV produsers' interests but also their political attitudes. UGVs with controversial or entertaining content receive an average of over a hundred comments, with some obtaining as high as 450 comments. However, videos with irrelevant or repetitive content do not receive many responses. For example, a UGV that questions the transparency of the Worker's Party candidate Low Thia Kiang drew 275 comments, most of which were made up of fervent arguments among produsers on the validity of such an accusation.

As majority of the edited UGVs in the sample are pro-opposition, most comments are supportive of the opposition parties and pro-PAP comments are rare. It is also interesting to find out that most produsers only commented when they concurred with UGV authors' perspectives. Comments that disagreed with authors' message usually got shot down quickly. In a pro-PAP blog post with an edited UGV by a popular blogger Xiaxue, many pro-PAP comments surfaced, with almost no pro-opposition comments at all. These pro-PAP produsers might have felt more encouraged to comment on Xiaxue's blog entry as they shared similar sentiments.

Xiaxue, your post was really well written! I do know a lot of Singaporeans are pro-opposition only because they want a voice in Parliament to tell the government what they need and what they want. And I seriously wonder if they are just being self-centred here (it's all, I NEED THIS, I WANT THIS, YOU

HAVE TO GIVE ME, YOU HAVE TO SOLVE MY EVERY LITTLE PROBLEM!),

at the expense of this nation's wellbeing.

I was wondering previously that if I choose to vote GY is a wrong choice, judging by all the pro-opps on FB. I even feel fearful to tell my frez tat I am voting for PAP. Trust me, I get call/sms/fb msg/tweets that demand I MUST vote for WP since I am in Aljunied GRC. Your post is a huge relief to me that I did not make the wrong choice.

The above examples show that UGV produsers found it difficult in making comments on videos with different political attitudes because they were mostly likely to be refuted or condemned by others.

Moreover, the technological affordances of UGVs seem not to provide a venue for intellectual discussions or healthy debates because the analysis shows that UGV produsers tend to argue with one another emotionally and take things out of context. An example would be the response to a mockery video of PAP candidate Tin which pieced together unflattering shots of Tin and interview segments where she stuttered over her words. The comments were crude and irrelevant.

Tin Pei Ling actually epitomises the spirit of more than half our citizens - feet-stamping, fake, ignorant, materialistic... She is elected as a national symbol to remind us of ourselves.

The popularity of UGVs, regardless of categories, can be observed from view, "like" and comment counts. Additionally, it should be noted that the numbers of views, "likes" and comments may not be necessarily proportionate to each other. For example, a commentary UGV by a local celebrity and a self-composed song in support for the Worker's Party had

similar high view counts. However, due to the prominent author and controversial content, the former received 10 times more comments than the latter.

4.2.2 UGV Content Creation

Creating edited political UGVs required video production skills and investment in time, money, and effort. These authors of edited UGVs were strongly motivated by their political beliefs and usually conveyed clear political messages and revealed their support of political parties and election candidates. Usually pro-opposition UGV authors created more edited UGVs and uploaded them more frequently than pro-PAP authors. The former were more likely to continue content creation even after the election. Hence, the analysis show that opposition supporters created UGVs as means for political expression and discussions regardless of elections, which can have resulted from restrictions of alternative political views in Singapore's traditional media. These authors might view UGVs as a new digital space for them to freely voice out their political views via visual communication which could impress or move community members effectively. However, pro-opposition UGV authors who held determined political perspectives were not so responsive to negative comments.

4.3 Political Attitudes and UGV Discourse

4.3.1 UGVs' Political Inclination

Most UGVs take a clear stand on their political inclinations, with only a handful of neutral ones that are usually created for non-partisan, informative purposes (e.g., instructional videos on voting procedures). This study found more GE2011 UGVs in support of ~~the~~ opposition parties. While approximately 8% of edited UGVs were outwardly pro-PAP in nature, none of such pro-PAP videos were found in uncut recordings. Often pro-ruling party UGVs were condemned by other produsers, with relatively lower view and "like" counts. In a

short pro-PAP video that uses text animations to urge voters to look beyond the hype about the opposition and make careful decision to select the right party to vote for, 19 out of the 22 comments were dismissive of the author's message. The video only had around 2,400 views and 6 "likes".

However, it is interesting to note that even amongst the many pro-opposition videos, there is no clear majority as to which particular opposition party the UGVs support. Most videos are either anti-PAP or supportive of the opposition side in general. This may be reflective of the voters' general sentiment of simply desiring an oppositional voice to contend with the ruling party, regardless of which opposition party it may be.

4.3.2 UGV Author Attitudes

UGV authors/creators provide clear cases for analysis by tracking their online political behavior and attitudes from videos and responses to comments. In terms of author attitudes, there were three types of edited UGV creators: pro-PAP, pro-opposition/anti-PAP, and neutral authors. Neutral authors were rare, with the majority of their videos concentrated on relaying political and election information rather than conveying their political perspectives. Pro-opposition UGV authors created more edited UGVs than pro-PAP authors, and the former uploaded more frequently than the latter. For example, worshiper888, who belongs to the former category, uploaded 68 videos that were mostly centred on anti-PAP sentiments. Comparatively, thinkwiseSG, who was a pro-PAP author, only uploaded 7 videos that conveyed pro-PAP sentiment. Regardless, both authors received a significant number of comments in response to their UGVs. Hence, the quantity of videos that authors uploaded did not influence the popularity.

Additionally, pro-opposition authors tended to have a longer history of uploading political content than pro-PAP authors. They were more likely to continue uploading even

after the election, while anti-PAP authors usually stopped after election period. For example, anti-PAP author uncleyap was active on YouTube since 2009 and has uploaded 366 videos that mostly conveyed his dissatisfaction with the ruling party. His uploads continued even after the elections, though it was less frequent as compared to the election period. On the other hand, hong619, a pro-PAP supporter, only uploaded video commentaries on election issues and stopped right after the election.

Interestingly, the analysis shows that pro-PAP authors were more responsive to negative comments while anti-PAP authors only responded to comments affirming their stand. Both thinkwiseSG and hong619 often replied to negative comments about their pro-PAP videos. hong619 even collected the negative responses and answered these concerns in his follow-up videos. thinkwiseSG also refused to stop making his pro-PAP UGVs in response to the opponents:

> *I refuse to be shot down. I'm not asking you to be pro-PAP - Which of my videos have stated outright that you should vote for the PAP? I'm just a differing voice - criticism is healthy and if people are free to question the validity of PAP and their existing systems then why is it that no one can question the credibility of the opposition?*

4.3.3 UGV Commenter Attitudes

Based on comment analysis, most produsers tend to have strong negative attitudes towards the political status quo. UGV produsers were often critical of government policies or party candidates in their comments, citing their personal experiences to reinforce their arguments. Similar to the lack of neutral UGVs, neutral comments without political angst were few and far between. Most comments were bitter, dismissive, and even antagonistic with the use of crude language. Produsers selected their exposure to UGVs with similar

political inclinations and their attitudes were reinforced after watching videos that corroborated with their thoughts and experiences. Below is an example of an angry comment in support of a pro-opposition video.

> *my servant tells me wat i can and cannot do, decide how much he earns, give himself 30 months bonus, threatens me if i want to change another servant, gets me arrested when i protest abt his wrong doing, brings in huge number of foreigners into my home and get my job. U THINK I STILL WANT TO KEEP THIS SERVANT?*

Heated exchanges of opinions usually occurred when produsers felt strongly related to specific heartland topics. The comments tended to be assertive by using personal experiences as evidence. The hot topics discussed in GE2011 included housing, foreign workers, and education. One commenter responded to a UGV by complaining about expensive and overwhelming local education.

> *Hahas, yes the education is of course very cheap but the education is extremely difficult to cope for our younger generations, this means tuition fees, extra help. Do you even know how much tuition fees can cost nowadays? Some of my friend's kids who are Primary school are having tons of tuitions just because they can't cope with our education this days.*

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The rapid distribution of UGVs via social networks fueled the online political discussions in Singapore's GE2011. In this study, the results of observations and textual analysis examine content characteristics of GE2011 UGVs, participatory interactions among UGV produsers (i.e., authors and commenters), as well as their political attitudes in the

context of one-party politics and tight mass media control. Still, it would be premature to conclude that the UGV culture had a critical influence on voting decisions in Singapore. Firstly, UGVs were only one of the many venues from which voters could obtain political information and form their opinions. The majority of GE2011 UGV contents were opinionated and polarized into pro- and anti-ruling party. UGV produsers may assess other information sources before coming to a decision. Secondly, the majority of relevant UGVs were simple recordings of election-related events (i.e., uncut recording UGVs). They did not convey a clear political stand or opinion and thus had limited influence on produsers' political attitudes. Comparatively, original and emotion-laden edited UGVs, the focus of this study, are found to be more impactful in receiving lots of views and "likes" as well as comments.

Unlike forum or blog discussions where netizens can easily type out their opinions and post them online, a considerable amount of creativity, time, and effort is required to produce edited political UGVs with clear messages and video production aesthetics. People with strong political attitudes or those who feel dissatisfied with the political status quo are likely to be motivated to produce such UGVs. This may explain why these edited UGVs were dominated by anti-government and negative sentiments. If we were to put this in the Singapore context where most citizens are considered politically apathetic (Wee, 2011), the prominence of anti-ruling party GE2011 UGVs were the results of a few political enthusiasts, especially opposition supporters who lacked channels to express their views through mass media.

The political UGV culture is in an initial stage in this country with strict media control. The production of politics-related UGVs is considered a risk in Singapore, with many feeling fearful of the potential consequences. Though lots of produsers seem to enjoy making political UGVs, such as Mr Brown's podcasts and parodies, there are a relatively

small amount of political UGV creators. The surge in the number of UGVs and comments during the election period is likely to be caused by the loose control of online political expressions and voters' desire to voice out their political opinions.

UGVs seem to be a convenient venue for the expression and discussion of political frustration rather than an intellectual exchange of political opinions. The study found much political dissatisfaction and angst identified from UGV content and comments. Most UGV content contained highly-charged emotions that conveyed intense feelings of dissatisfaction. Sarcastic and mocking statements, crude language, and opinionated arguments dominate the UGVs and their comments. The UGV platform is shown to be a rare arena where Singapore's online produsers straightforwardly express their perspectives and discontent regarding the current state of politics.

Historically, opposition parties used more new media to reach out to Singaporeans and supporters due to the difficulty in obtaining exposure on mass media. They started to use YouTube to disseminate their beliefs beginning in 2006. This explains why the findings showed most of the election UGVs were pro-opposition/anti-ruling party and pro-opposition UGV authors tended to be more productive with longer histories of uploading political videos than pro-PAP authors. From the UGV responses, there is general dissatisfaction toward the PAP's hold on power and various actions and policies that they have implemented for the country. The results echo Towner and Dulio's (2011) findings that exposure to UGVs increase the level of cynicism towards the government, which is dominated by the ruling party in Singapore. To be noted, it was hard to identify from the edited UGVs videos which particular opposition party was supported by UGV authors or views. It seemed that the general sentiment was in the support of all opposition parties against the ruling PAP party, with less regard for the individual appeal of each opposition party. This could be the result of the one-party government which has ruled Singapore for the past five decades. The

phenomenon suggested a type of online networked politics (Kahler, 2009) in which opposition parties and supporters formed non-institutional politics of resistance and took collective actions against the dominant power.

According to English, Sweetser, and Ancu (2011), American users responded more to rational and credible 2008 election UGVs on YouTube than the emotion-laden ones. Yet it is interesting to find that rationality and credibility did not play such a significant part in the GE2011 UGVs. Instead, emotion and sensationalism were more critical to spur netizens to create and respond to Singapore's election UGVs. The discrepant findings are likely the result of two different socio-political systems: the US with its free political expression and press freedom, and Singapore with its controlled political participation and media censorship. UGVs in Singapore can be regarded as a crucial platform for citizens to express their political perspectives straightforwardly than in the US or other democratic countries where people can seek political information and voice out political opinions and party preferences freely via multiple channels. Moreover, YouTube videos in the 2008 and 2012 US Presidential Election were primarily created by professional political campaigners and played a critical role in shaping the voting results, while most GE2011 UGVs were produced by grassroots communities and individuals to express personal political views without high impact on online public discourses.

Additionally, this study found produsers primarily left comments to the election UGVs similar to their political attitudes and orientations. This is possibly because they tend to selectively expose themselves to videos that correspond with their pre-existing political attitudes (Towner & Dulio, 2011) and thus reinforce their perspectives. As such, YouTube's UGVs largely function as an echo chamber by attracting like-minded people to strengthen similar political attitudes during the creating, commenting, and consuming processes. These activists used the second-order UGVs (Bruns, 2008b) to create and circulate their political

perspectives to challenge the established power without being restricted by the first-order, dominant mainstream public views. However, the split views expressed by various clusters, or micro-publics, which support different political parties and candidates showed even more drastic discrepancies than what is shown in mass media and in reality.

Moreover, the popular responses to GE2011 political parodies with high impact on political attitudes do not show the "corrective" action mentioned by Lim and Golan (2011). Instead, produsers who held different political attitudes were found rarely to view or comment on UGVs with the political stances varying from theirs. In a society which exercise control on open political discussions and media content, UGVs in Singapore's political scene were used more for voicing out unspoken political discourses and venting cynical feelings about the status quo rather than rationally discussing political issues and exchanging viewpoints. Therefore, political UGVs are more a platform for impression and expression than rationale and discussion.

Although there seemed to be more pro-opposition sentiments online, the PAP still won the majority of the votes and retained their greater representation in the parliament in GE2011. There are two reasons for the phenomenon. Firstly, voters may have consulted a variety of information sources other than the strong opinionated or emotional UGVs. Jenkins (2006) also stressed that while UGVs were often widely disseminated onto many social media platforms, it was insufficient to just rely on political discussions on YouTube to understand the overall impact of UGVs on politics. Secondly, voters who supported opposition parties and expressed themselves online still formed the minority. They were not representative of the sentiments of the greater population. Hence, the loud and intense political debates on GE2011 UGVs have not made any significant shift in political circumstances.

Theoretically, this exploratory study contributes to the understanding of content characteristics and usage of election UGVs in a context with strong political and media control. This new media provides an echo chamber for politically like-minded produsers to express emotional perspectives and reinforces political attitudes through a selective exposure and participatory process via content creating, commenting, and consumption. The study also shows that contextual influence plays a crucial part in shaping UGV content characteristics, produser participatory culture, and political attitudes. In practice, UGVs can be used as a channel for Singapore politicians to listen to the voices of the discontented and thereby gather ideas on how to improve current policies and the status quo. Textual analysis and observations of the small amount of GE2011 edited UGVs is just an inital step. In the next election, mixed methods (survey, interviews, and content analysis) can be applied to investigate characteristics of election UGVs and their influence on various produser participatory behaviors and political attitudes.

Acknowledgements

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Table 1. **Numbers of GE2011 UGVs (categorized by keywords)**

Category	Search Term	Total Videos Generated
Generic Terms	Singapore Elections	1,030
	GE2011	1,670
	Singapore Vote	1,690
	Singapore Opposition	797
	7 May 2011 Singapore	1,820
Political Parties	PAP Singapore	1,503
	SDP Singapore	949
	RP Singapore	1,070
	SDA Singapore	580
	NSP Singapore	671
	SPP Singapore	489
	WP Singapore	1,050
	Worker's Party	955
Key Candidates	Lee Kuan Yew	1,290
	Nicole Seah	485
	Lee Hsien Loong	729
	Low Thia Kiang	504
	Tin Pei Ling	366
	Chiam See Tong	263
	George Yeo	448