

**Using newspaper reports to glean insight into current affairs.  
A Case study : The Singapore Parliamentary and Presidential Elections.**

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**Abstract**

The Parliamentary Election and Presidential Election were held in Singapore in 2011. In previous years, such elections were considered as non-events but the 2011's elections generated a lot of interest and discussion among Singaporeans, both in the public domain and especially in the internet as well as the social media. Singaporeans have been becoming increasingly vocal and critical in voicing out their dissatisfaction with the ruling party's perceived poor performance.

Analysing the statistics of NewspaperSG, Singapore's online newspaper archive, this paper looks at the use of newspaper reports by members of public in helping them out to form opinion, present their arguments and make political decisions. The paper will also discuss the role and responsibility of the library in providing news library services to an increasingly internet-savvy population.

**Background**

Discussions on Singaporeans being politically apathetic had already surfaced since the 1970s. They were perceived to be more concerned about economic well-being and material wealth. Generally, Singaporeans were still viewed this way - until the last Parliamentary Election and Presidential Election in 2011. The "stifling political environment" and the lack of platform to express their views have been cited as reasons for Singaporeans not to be more politically involved. The mainstream media are perceived as being controlled by the government and bias towards the ruling party when reporting on Singapore politics.

**Introduction**

Since achieving independence in 1965, there were 10 Parliamentary Elections held in Singapore between 1968 and 2006. In each of these elections, the People's Action Party (PAP) was comfortably returned to power, winning all the seats in 1968, 1972, 1976 and 1980 and has always enjoyed a majority of the popular votes. The 2011 Parliamentary Election has

been described as a “watershed election” with the opposition parties securing six seats and the PAP garnering only 60.14% of the casted votes - its lowest since independence.

Following the 2011 Parliamentary Election that was held on 7 May, the fourth Singapore Presidential Election was held on 27 August 2011. Similar to the Parliamentary Election, there were a lot of interest and discussion among Singaporeans especially in the internet and on social media. As one of the world’s most wired societies, the new media provided an alternative source for Singaporeans to voice their feelings, thoughts and concerns. This paper looks at the usage patterns of NewspaperSG, Singapore’s online newspaper archive, during the period of the two above Elections as internet-savvy Singaporeans looked for information to form or support their political opinion.

### Usage of NewspaperSG in 2011

Table 1 illustrates the monthly statistics for NewspaperSG throughout 2011. As can be seen, the months of May and August represent the highest number of page views for that year (611,861 and 523,321 respectively). May also saw the highest number of unique visitors (66,527) and number of visits (116,862) to the portal for 2011.

Table 1

Month	Unique visitors	Number of visits	Pages
Jan 2011	35285	65453	395319
Feb 2011	36412	64109	376205
Mar 2011	49841	90780	473786
Apr 2011	42936	76677	412861
<b>May 2011</b>	<b>66527</b>	<b>116862</b>	<b>611861</b>
Jun 2011	47421	85069	522151
Jul 2011	48929	90345	517565
<b>Aug 2011</b>	<b>51222</b>	<b>94665</b>	<b>523321</b>
Sep 2011	49802	93781	509233
Oct 2011	48486	94649	506465
Nov 2011	46601	105525	495306
Dec 2011	43821	107918	490345
<b>Total</b>	<b>567283</b>	<b>1085833</b>	<b>5836418</b>

Table 2 illustrates the most accessed articles in May 2011. Eight of the top 10 articles viewed in May were related to Chen Show Mao, Chan Chun Sing and Tan Cheng Bock – the former

two were candidates from Workers' Party and the PAP respectively while the latter was a former Member of Parliament who would later run for the position of President in the Presidential Election in August.

Table 2

	Articles	No. of times viewed
1.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19800308.2.7.aspx</a>	58079
2.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19880820.2.23.28.3.aspx</a>	12473
3.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19860730.2.55.aspx</a>	9234
4.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Page/straitstimes19800308.1.1.aspx</a>	5630
5.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19870730.2.26.2.aspx</a>	4169
6.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Page/straitstimes19880308.1.11.aspx</a>	1309
7.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19810524.2.43.aspx</a>	1222
8.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Page/straitstimes19880820.1.18.aspx</a>	769
9.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19790110.2.59.aspx</a>	743
10.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19880308.2.21.1.1.aspx</a>	723
11.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19830705.2.48.1.aspx</a>	694
12.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19860730.2.7.aspx</a>	436
13.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Page/straitstimes19860730.1.26.aspx</a>	397
14.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19880827.2.71.aspx</a>	356
15.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Issue/straitstimes19810602.aspx</a>	340
16.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Page/straitstimes19800308.1.2.aspx</a>	333
17.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19880820.2.4.aspx</a>	330
18.	<a href="#">/Digitised/Page/straitstimes19850302.1.10.aspx</a>	252

Montage of a few of the most viewed articles in May 2011



Here Mrs Ma phone his mother to tell her the good news.

**I've done it, top scholar Show Mao tells mum**  
By JUNE TAN



See Back Page (Col. 6)

**Most think Govt acted rightly, says Cheng Bock**

THE majority of Singaporeans are now satisfied that the Government had acted appropriately when it recently arrested those involved in a Marxist conspiracy, Dr Tan Cheng Bock (Ayer Rajah) said yesterday.

"But there is a certain group of solid citizens who, because of their links with the detainees either through a shared religion or community work, have yet to accept the reasons for their detention," he added.

It was because of this second group that he was "compelled" to join in the debate at the recent ISA arrests, said Dr Tan who heads the supervisory panel of the Feedback Unit.

Dr Tan began by classifying dissent as coming from two sources: external and internal. Protest from abroad, he said, came mainly from the West. Most of these focused on the Internal Security Act, which they said was abhorred because it gives to detain people without trial disrupted human rights.



There is a certain group of solid citizens who, because of their links with the detainees either through a shared religion or community work, have yet to accept the reasons for their detention. — Dr Tan Cheng Bock (above).

Arrests not aimed at Church

"How can we make them understand our conditions?" Dr Tan asked. "The threats to which preventive detention was introduced continue to exist."

On internal reactions, Dr Tan said the unsubmissiveness stemmed from the misconception that the Government's action was aimed at stifling opposition.

He said: "It appears to be so coming in the wake of the departure of the MP for Anson from the House."

However, Dr Tan said the question to ask was this: "Has the action or previous actions under ISA ever discouraged dissent or political activities?"

"Have political rallies been banned, political forums been banned? Has anyone who attended the meeting been arrested? Have publications of political parties been banned? Have people who spoke up or who asked questions in any forum or dialogue sessions been dealt with?"

The arrests were also not aimed

at the Church. "In reality, it was against individuals who were using the Church as a cover for clandestine subversive activities," Dr Tan said.

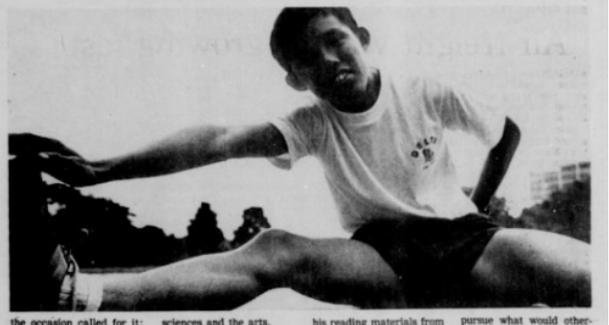
The MP then recalled how Singapore's Roman Catholic Church's leader Archbishop Gregory Yong went on to accept the Government's evidence of a Marxist conspiracy and the clandestine activities among some members of church organisations.

"All these were reported by the Vatican Radio," Dr Tan stressed.

Dr Tan also cautioned Singaporeans against being deceived by the "barrenness" disposition of the detainees. "Look at Chia Peng, who has a mild, smiling, rosy and kind-looking face. But he is the boss of the Communist Party of Malaysia."

**Chun Sing: 'Ridiculous dream' comes true**

**MR CHAN Chun Sing, 19.**  
Academic results: Four distinctions at A level, a distinction for mathematics and a merit for economics in the S-papers, eight distinctions at O level.  
Schools: Raffles Institution and Raffles Junior College.  
Activities: Chess, vice-head of the Students Council (Functions Department), scouting, jogging, reading political and economic issues.  
Languages: English and Chinese.  
Family: Madam Kwong Kai Fong, 50, his mother is a machine operator in a plastics company. Sister Siew Yin, 24, is a third-year student at NTL.  
Proposed course: Economics Tripos at Christ's College, University of Cambridge.



Chun Sing may appear a little timid and shy. But as Miss Seah Hui Hui, his Raffles Junior College classmate pointed out, he is "small but dynamic".

She was referring to Chun Sing being articulate and confident and of speaking his mind when

the occasion called for it: Be it Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia or the dangers of protectionism to the world economy.

But it is the world of economics that fascinates him no end. He explained that it is because economics strikes the "perfect balance" between the pure

sciences and the arts.

That goes some way to explain why he has chosen to read economics at Cambridge. And as for his interest in politics, he said that "a good economist must have a fairly competent grasp of the political current".

Chun Sing gets most of

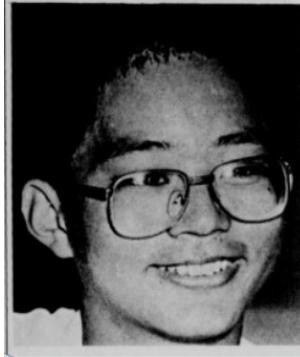
his reading materials from public libraries.

"My mum earns only about \$200 a month. Where can I afford the luxury of books and magazines?" he said.

And given his family's financial status, Chun Sing said the scholarship has made it possible for him to

pursue what would otherwise be a "ridiculous dream" — getting a university education abroad.

Chun Sing has been provisionally nominated for the Singapore Armed Forces (Overseas) Scholarship and plans to serve in the SAF as an officer after graduation.



**Patrick: Like father in some ways**

**MR PATRICK Tan Boon Ooi, 19.**  
Academic results: Four distinctions at A level, merits for Chemistry and Biology in S-papers, seven distinctions at O level.  
Schools: Anglo Chinese Secondary School and National Junior College.  
Activities: Choir member, drama, enjoys swimming, reading, writing

poetry and essays, and likes science.

Languages: English and Chinese.  
Family: Dr Tony Tan, the Education Minister, is his father. His mother, Mrs Mary Tan, is a housewife. He has a sister, Patricia, and brother, Philip.  
Proposed course: Liberal Arts Pre-Medicine at Harvard University.

PATRICK is like his father Dr Tony Tan, the Education Minister, in some ways, said Mrs Mary Tan in a telephone interview.

She said Patrick has plenty of determination, a drive to succeed and a great love for books.

"When he sets himself a task — be it swimming, drama or singing — he goes all out to achieve his goal," she said. "The teachers in ACS and NJC were very good and gave him a lot of opportunities to develop himself."

Mrs Tan said that what she appreciates most about Patrick, who is already in Harvard, is his willingness to start from the very bottom.

In other words, he does not expect special treatment, she said.

She explained: "For instance, in singing, he may not be very good and may be singing a very small part in a choir but he still gives all he can."

The same applies to drama, which he picked up to

build up his confidence, she said.

As for Patrick's love for reading, Mrs Tan said, half in jest, that if certain books or magazines in the house are missing, she knows just where to find them — in Patrick's room.

Patrick also reads some of his father's books, she noted.

"I'm afraid his reading is beyond me," she added when asked to recall some of the titles of the books he reads.

**Business-minded**

■ Top Catholic Junior College student **Ang Hwa Chong, 19**, who had perfect scores in all six subjects and a distinction for the Mathematics S-Paper:

"Business — that's where the money and my interest lie. It is boring to be an academician. But business is different — you have to be clever and shrewd to succeed. I guess I must have inherited the interest from my father who is in the insurance business."



**Thanks, Mum**

■ Chan Chun Sing, 19, one of four top scorers from Raffles Junior College, who had six distinctions, a distinction for the Mathematics S-Paper and a merit for the Economics S-Paper:

"My mother is a machine-operator. I do not stay with my father because my parents are divorced. I think my poor background has made me more determined to succeed."

**Hwa Chong students keep spirits — and scores — high**

Overall results up on last year's; Excellent showing by other colleges, too

ITS former school building might be defective but the spirit of Hwa Chong Junior College remains high: Its students emerged tops in the A level results this year.

Most other junior colleges also bettered their previous year's results — and jubilation was all around yesterday as students smiled and cheered with some hugging or kissing their teachers and principals.

Four Hwa Chong students achieved perfect scores in six subjects and 123 students got at least four A level dis-

two Os, including a pass in General Paper, has gone up — from 85 per cent last year to 89.59 per cent.

Said Hwa Chong's principal, Mr Bernard Fong: "I am pleased that despite the crisis and the inconveniences, the students have done well."

Top students interviewed said perhaps the best thing that could have happened to Hwa Chong was the crisis in May last year.

**Had to prove a point**

Analysis of the keyword search terms used in NewspaperSG revealed the following as most popular in May 2011:

- a) chen show mao – member of Workers’ Party
- b) chan chun sing – member of PAP, now a minister
- c) low thai kiang – leader of Workers’ Party
- d) chiam see tong – leader of Singapore Democratic Party
- e) election
- f) pap – the ruling party in Singapore
- g) workers party – one of the opposition parties in Singapore
- h) tin pei ling – member of PAP

Apart from that, our records also showed that articles in NewspaperSG covering political personalities and parties were referenced and linked from external sites in May 2011 from political sites such as Temasek Review and the Online Citizen and popular Singapore blogs such as Mr Brown. Table 3 indicates the number of access to a particular article from the aforementioned external sites (highlighted in yellow).

Table 3 (links from search engines excluded)

External links	Number of access to NewspaperSG articles
<a href="http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/05/30/tan-cheng-bock-spore-is-...">http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/05/30/tan-cheng-bock-spore-is-...</a>	243
<a href="http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/index.aspx">http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/index.aspx</a>	229 (NLB’s site)
<a href="http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/05/17/workers-party-will-pose-...">http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/05/17/workers-party-will-pose-...</a>	201
<a href="http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/05/picking-up-where-ong-teng-ch...">http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/05/picking-up-where-ong-teng-ch...</a>	185
<a href="http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_45_2005-01-06.html">http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_45_2005-01-06.html</a>	174 (NLB’s site)
<a href="http://www.mrbrown.com/blog/2011/05/our-acting-mcys-minister-ask...">http://www.mrbrown.com/blog/2011/05/our-acting-mcys-minister-ask...</a>	162

Similarly for the month of August 2011, the most popular keyword search were the names of the four presidential candidates: Tan Cheng Bock, Tony Tan, Tan Jee Say and Tan Kin Lian. Table 4 below illustrates the different combination of keyword search related to the four names above. The keyword records in a way showed that Singaporeans were interested in the career and political history of the presidential candidates, where they stand on certain issues and their relationships with other political personalities such as Lee Kuan Yew.

Table 4

keyword	Keyword count
Tan Cheng Bock Philip yeo	221
tan cheng bock	4495
"Tan Cheng Bock"	1563
tan cheng bock marxist	14
tan cheng bock lee kuan yew	445
tan cheng bock nominated mp	166
think singaporeans first tan cheng bock	131
tan cheng bock goh keng swee	501
"tan cheng bock" "jeyaretnam"	73
"Tan Cheng Bock" Marxist	13
streaming tan cheng bock	31
"Goh Keng Swee" "Tan Cheng Bock" streaming	10
tan cheng bock election	278
tan jee say	828
tan jee say goh chok tong	78
Tan Jee Say marxist	1
PPS TAN JEE SAY	3
tan jee say results school	65
Tan jee say isd	1
"tan jee say" population	4
"tan jee say"	43
Tan Jee Say 1987	8
tony tan	33456
"Tony Tan"	14660
Tony Tan graduate mothers	67
dr tony tan	14155
Tony Tan MRT	5545
tony tan casino	177
tony tan keng yam	710
Tony Tan CPF overseas education	48
Tony tan graduate mother scheme	16
"tony tan" National transport workers union	16
"tony tan" electronics	210
lee kuan yew tony tan nathan	102
dr tony tan graduate mother scheme	14
tony tan graduate mothers scheme	51
"Dr Tony Tan"	4568
tony tan son of	2789
"tony tan" scout	24
patrick tan son of tony tan	371
tan kin lian	5171

tan kin lian submit form	12
"Tan Kin Lian to submit eligibility forms today"	1
Tan Kin Lian Ministers' pay	9
Tan Kin Lian petitions Government to take action	7
"Tan Kin Lian"	1561
"tan kin lian" casino	3
tan kin lian ntuc income early resignation	5
tan kin lian ntuc income	1338

Table 5 indicates the number of access to NewspaperSG from external sites for the month of August 2011. Highlighted in yellow are external links related to the Presidential Election.

Table 5 (links from search engines excluded)

External links	Number of access to NewspaperSG articles
<a href="http://www.facebook.com/l.php">http://www.facebook.com/l.php</a>	2494
<a href="http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/08/04/old-newspaper-articles-d...">http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/08/04/old-newspaper-articles-d...</a>	1405
<a href="http://furrybrowndog.wordpress.com/2011/08/03/old-newspaper-arti...">http://furrybrowndog.wordpress.com/2011/08/03/old-newspaper-arti...</a>	1353
<a href="http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/08/03/more-questions-for-dr-pa...">http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/08/03/more-questions-for-dr-pa...</a>	1197
<a href="http://forums.hardwarezone.com.sg/showthread.php">http://forums.hardwarezone.com.sg/showthread.php</a>	1118
<a href="http://libguides.nl.sg/content.php">http://libguides.nl.sg/content.php</a>	897 (NLB's site)
<a href="http://www.nl.sg/NLWEB.portal">http://www.nl.sg/NLWEB.portal</a>	736 (NLB's site)
<a href="http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/08/old-newspaper-articles-disap...">http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/08/old-newspaper-articles-disap...</a>	644

HOME

Focus on parliament

Highlights of yesterday's Parliament sitting

Good intentions not enough... A thick skin bridge... What people want... Arguments on the warpath... What makes us tick? That's the question... Don't take growth for granted, Chen tells the young... Blair's maiden speech... General's bus ride

'No more blank cheque for Government'

Dr Tan Cheng Bock kicks off the debate on the Presidential address

THE new wave of young PAP led by Dr Tan Cheng Bock has kicked off the debate on the Presidential address...

100% after 20 years of nation-building, these are the words of the late President S. R. Nathan...



Dr Tan Cheng Bock

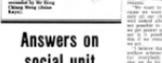
Take the right bus for a safer ride

THE SAFETY of the public bus system is a key issue for the Government...

Dr Tan Cheng Bock

Soo Khoon is Deputy Speaker

Dr Tan Cheng Bock has announced that Mr Soo Khoon will be the Deputy Speaker...



Soo Khoon

Answers on social unit

Dr Tan Cheng Bock has provided answers to questions on social units...

Dr Tan Cheng Bock

Dr Tony Tan: If only I had studied Chinese ...

IF HE had studied Chinese as a second language in school instead of Latin, he would be better off today, Education Minister Dr Tony Tan told a group of PAP members.

"In school I learnt a lot of subjects totally irrelevant. I learnt Latin, English history and English geography."

"If only I had spent that time learning Chinese, it would have given me added advantage today," he said.

Dr Tan, who is the MP for Sembawang, was quoted in the August issue of Petir, the official newsletter of the People's Action Party.

Speaking at a gathering of the suburban central district of the PAP, Dr Tan stressed that second language was no barrier to students who wanted to enter the university and that the time spent on it did not affect students' performance in other subjects.

The minister said that Singaporean schoolchildren scored high in science and mathematics for their O levels compared with those in other countries.

"He said that students who did poorly in a second language but qualified for the university were given provisional entry and help in their second language."

The newsletter noted that Dr Tan had called on party members to air their views on education policies that affect politics so that changes can be made to solve the problems.

Zoom-in on this fabulous festive offer! The best time to buy your TAMRON 35-135mm 'Floating Element' Zoom Lens is now. Because: 1. It's being offered at a very special price this festive season. Only \$399 net. 2. You get a custom-fitting Adaptor-A mount for your SLR. It's worth \$40 net. FREE!



Patrick: Like father in some ways

MR PATRICK TAN Born Oct. 18. Academic results: Four distinctions. As a level, merits for Chemistry and Biology in S'pore, seven distinctions at O level. Schools: Anglo Chinese Secondary School and National Junior College. Activities: Choir member, drama, enjoys swimming, reading, writing.

PATRICK is like his father Dr Tony Tan, the Education Minister. In some ways, said Mrs Mary Tan, he is a top-notch student. She said Patrick has a great love for books. "When he gets himself a book - be it swimming, drama or singing - he goes all out to achieve his goal," she said. "The very good and give him a lot of opportunities to develop himself."

High economic growth rates is better for us because it leads to higher living standards and more jobs.

MORE EMPHASIS ON HDB FLATS? Foolish to build MRT now: Tony Tan

HE construction industry has become overheated and if Singapore were to build its proposed mass rapid transit (MRT) system now, it is ill-fated in the long run.

This warning was made by Dr Tony Tan at Friday at a forum on economic affairs at the US East Plaza. The session was moderated by SDC at night.

On a brighter note, Trade and Industry Minister also said the construction labour shortage easing and building cost appear to be stabilising, thus hinting that investment may be able to step up the public housing programme soon.

With the completion of Changi Airport (except for the second runway) which took a large part of Singapore's construction resources over the last five years, there will be capacity for other projects.

He said there are also signs the construction labour market has cooled and that prices of materials have stabilised.

Replying to another question on Prof Milton Friedman's assertion that Singapore might have performed much better economically with less government involvement, Dr Tan asked a government spokesman if the public housing programme could become a better and cheaper alternative.

He compared Singapore with Hongkong, pointing out that the average house price in Hongkong is three times that in the British colony.

Also, the average flat price in Singapore is \$1,000 per sq ft (in the case of public housing), he said.

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ITF issue proves most popular

THE issue of the International Trade Federation (ITF) has proved to be the most popular among voters in the recent election.

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## **What does it mean to the National Library?**

NewspaperSG is now of the most visited portals of NLB. Its high usage indicates that NLB users are more comfortable in accessing information online. As illustrated by the usage patterns of NewspaperSG during the elections period, Singaporeans are increasingly relying on the digital platform to fulfil their information needs. NLB must keep up with the trend of information consumption by its target audience in terms of its newspaper service in order to remain relevant. At the same time it must remain neutral, objective and make information freely available so as to remain a credible and trustworthy institution. On one occasion when the NewspaperSG portal was down in August 2011, NLB received the feedback not to censor any articles.

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