Media Restrictions as the Image Formation Tool: the Case Study of Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew Popularity

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Abstract. *We live in the world full of nice people. The media make us think so as we are surrounded by the images of sport, pop culture, fashion industry, entertainment media, and business leaders. We face them even in the news programs and the press. Of course, the photos and other visual outlets of politicians join the general publicity of personality cult. How do these people appear in the journalist media? Why are they exposed in a positive manner while the crucial role of journalism's "watchdog" function is to demonstrate weaknesses in order to get them into political agenda and improve?*

We live in the world where there is a huge business of personality promotion and selling beneath the media, and this business is called celebrity branding and news management. The media skip it from exposure. Journalism too, but why? Who is in charge that people in the media become cele-

brities? Who, the source or the media, is related to the fact that their audience becomes attached to the celebrities and is involved into a never-ending follow-up communication with them?

These questions arise when we focus on journalism's role in the public opinion formation process in general and image management in particular. The issue may be approached by various ways, but the present article narrows the scope of analyses mainly to the issue of political environment impact on the image of the political actor. Such a choice is made due on the factor that political environment covers both the macro (institutional) and micro (content) levels of restrictions the traditional media encounter, and due to the reason that the scope of mediated politics enables the holistic view of the media field professionals (public relations practitioners, sources, and journalists) performance and its influence on the final product. The disclosure of how the personality campaign is organised in order to reach a wide coverage and depict a positive image is of cognitive value also because the case study is made with the Singapore Prime Minister's example – the international aspect introduces the global patterns of the celebrity phenomenon and also allows to discuss the media regulation in Singapore.

First of all, the present article introduces the theoretical background for the case study, then it examines the state of the media in Singapore, showing the ownership specifics, regulation peculiarities and free speech constraints arising from regulation rather than from professionalism. The psychologically fair factor is disclosed through the analysis of legal acts, especially the Internal Security Act. The spiral of silence theory explains the supporters of such political environment that enables a long-lasting positive attitude towards the Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and explains his popularity and a successful image-making job.

Keywords: campaign, celebrity, censorship, constraint, framing, free speech, formation, image making, journalism (journalist media), law, legal acts, news management, personality campaign, politician, political actor, political environment, restriction, shaping, spiral of silence.

The celebrity phenomenon

The statistics show that during the period of 16 years Princess Diana could find herself on the cover of the magazine *People Weekly* 41 time (Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, Agee, 2007: 392). Tabloids and serious press (i. e. documentaries) in Great Britain still use her image in stories about the Royal Family so that generations that grew up after the tragic death of the Princess trying to escape with her lover from the French paparazzi recognize her as a celebrity. The scholars make the conclusion that a celebrity remains worshiped by the mass audience even after his/ her death (Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, Agee, 2007: 392); it is a visible feature of the glorified contemporary heroes, what is not so noticeable – the constant income that such their exploitation in the public sphere generates (Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, Agee, 2007: 392); the combined these features characterize the cult of a certain person's glorification to spread globally by the media communication. This example allows to agree with the Slovakian media scholar Peter Mikuláš who states that

> "the use of celebrities in the media communication is not a new phenomenon, but frequency of its use is on the rise" (Mikuláš, 2012: 103).

Like other scholars, Christina Schlecht from the Center on Global Brand Leadership in the Columbia Business School observes the general tendency that celebrities are people who enjoy public recognition by a large share of a certain group of people (Schlecht, 2003: 3), although she gives a significant insight that such recognition may be treated as the deviation from the dominant social norms:

> "whereas attributes like attractiveness, extraordinary lifestyle or special skills are just examples and specific common characteristics cannot be observed, it can be said that within a corresponding social group celebrities generally differ from the social norm and enjoy a high degree of public awareness" (Schlecht, 2003: 3).

Such a digression reminds what the USA sociologist John B. Thompson distinguishes in the essence of public resonance offered in his definition of political scandal – a transgression in actions of political actors

due to which the claim for reputation in publicity is gained (Thompson, 2000: 13). However, the scandal is but a natural media focus on a person, thus it is but a possibility to become a nationwide or worldwide known media star. The paradox may be explained by the famous affirmation "medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1964: 7) when the content of the message does not matter as the effect arises from the intensity of coverage:

> "for the "message" of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs" (McLuhan, 1964: 8).

The result whether after the media scrutiny a celebrity will remain loved or hated by the mass audience depends on his / her constructive actions with journalists, as scholars put it: constructive actions in publicity and a friendly personal relationship with journalists are the only means to render a plausible media message (Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, Agee, 2007: 394). These means also help to extend the scale of the media involved into a celebrity's exposure, we would add. Thus, why the factor of bad reputation is among the ways how to become a celebrity, the other two, according to public relations experts, are the achievements or duties of a person and a deliberate self-promotion (Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, Agee, 2007: 394). The latter is usually implemented by PR practitioners for their clients, while the first one is the way of a person's acclamation on his own efforts.

Usually, the categorisation of celebrities is based on the sphere of their activities. Christina Schlecht enumerates:

> "classic forms of celebrities, like actors (e.g., Meg Ryan, Pierce Brosnan), models (e.g., Naomi Campbell, Gisele Buendchen), sports athletes (e.g., Anna Kournikova, Michael Schumacher), entertainers (e.g., Oprah Winfrey, Conan O'Brien) and pop stars (e.g., Madonna, David Bowie) – but also for less obvious groups like businessmen (e.g., Donald Trump, Bill Gates) or politicians (e.g., Rudy Giuliani, Lee Kuan Yew) (Schlecht, 2003: 2–3)".

However, the factor of their relationship is more complex, although at the first glance it seems quite simple:

"celebrities exist in idealized but one-way relations (Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, Agee, 2007: 392).

Celebrities do not require anything from the audience unlike our relatives and family. We can choose the people of visibility to worship and admire and drop them when we want, but we cannot choose to leave our family so easily (Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, Agee, 2007: 392) – thus, the idealized world of celebrities becomes a space where a reader / a viewer / a listener may identify himself / herself with the desired *alter ego*: celebrities, unlike family members and / or superiors, may be chosen and changed without any restrictions but one's own wish. Such an identification with the dreamt *alter ego* (that such an *alter ego* is but illusion as it is constructed by media professionals and those in power is another topic; this issue is not an object of this article – A. J.) depends purely on a person's will. We can conclude that celebrities are consumed by the mass audience because of psychological needs.

Challenges for politicians in relation with journalists and vice versa

Despite the fact that celebrities have many fans and followers, thus despite the fact that people in publicity keep the relationship with the mass audience, celebrities must know how to start and keep the relationship with journalists. Politicians are the category that still makes lots of mistakes in this field. Accusations to journalists are the one done most often when the media scrutiny is focused on the political field. Instead of accusing, political agents should explain what they had in mind if they were misinterpreted and quoted inappropriately or to apologize for wrong sayings if they lost their temper during the interview or press conference (Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, Agee, 2007: 395). If the noisy gossip was spread, the effective way to communicate with the media is to deny the rumors. If the coverage is positive, the best way to gain further sympathies from the journalists is to tell short stories about the professional life and after that to disclose a little bit of the personal life. To sum

it up, in order to overcome the challenge of a sharp encountering with the workers of journalist media is to fit their criteria according to which the performance of politicians is evaluated in the public sphere. The Finnish scholars Pekka Isotalus and Merja Almonkari distinguish five criteria the journalist media formulate to scrutinize the public figures who became known in the media due to their duties and professional achievements:

1) professional competence;
2) personal characteristics and behavior;
3) trustworthiness;
4) maintenance of relations, and
5) communication skills (Isolatus, Almonkari, 2014: 3)

and conclude that "requirements imposed by the media are high" (Isolatus, Almonkari, 2014: 3).

It should be noted that while evaluating political actors, journalists also experience challenges. First of all, usually they are not within the systems they must evaluate, that is why their evaluation of politicians' professional competence is based on the external and not on the internal judgment, i.e. the journalist media often evaluate the state of *seeming* rather than that of *being*. Different baselines thus raise the conflicts in personal relationships between journalists and politicians and produce wrong understandings and quoting in the news media.

Another challenge is free publicity platforms that enable a direct communication of politicians with their electorate. Despite the purpose of communication, social networks and blogs allow to spread a political message without the filter of the media professionals:

> "whether the purpose is internal meetings or external mobilization, social media provide platforms for planning, reporting and communicating political activities" (Storsul, 2014: 17).

From the point of view of politicians, direct communication ensures a reliable and desired representation of a political actor. To generalize, not the journalist media but the social networks and grassroots media allow politicians to control their image, especially in the eyes of young

generations. However, young people use social networks purely for self-representational goals:

> "at the same time, politically engaged young people are hesitant about using social media for political deliberation. They are concerned about how they present themselves, and they are reluctant to stand out as highly political. One important explanation for this is that social media integrate different forms of communication and collapse social contexts. This causes teenagers to delimit controversies and try to keep political discussions to groups with more segregated audiences" (Storsul, 2014: 17).

The quotation allows to make a conclusion not only about the links between the use of the social media and youth behavior, but also about the social media as a powerful and controlled channel of image-making in political communication. Both conclusions are a challenge to the journalist media as they narrow the central role of political information dissemination. From the viewpoint of the media professionals, such a direct political communication seems too dangerous to change the media consumption habits of the audience and to weaken the media power. The fear is reasoned by the fact that, mediated by the journalist media political and corporate communication legitimates the journalism as a profession and gives the power of the media as an institution:

> "with regard to the mediatization of power, the case of corporate management suggests that one should look into societal and institutional structures of power rather than into the power of media" (Kantola, 2014: 29).

Before turning to the societal and institutional structures of power that have an impact on journalism during the politicians' image-making process, let us examine the ideology of the media power – professionalism.

The media professionalism as a self-regulatory mechanism

The news-making process is usually treated as proceeding in the environment described as unpredictable and constantly changing. The other typical features of the atmosphere in news departments are rapid

coverage and little time for discussion or group decision-making, independence, and self-support:

> "reporters and editors must have considerable autonomy in the selection and processing of the news" (Soloski, 1999: 309).

Such a situation evolved a unique and exclusive regulation of the news-making process based not on the administrative rules, but on a certain ideology of professionalism known as objectivity. This ideology guides the behavior of journalists while they are collecting the news in talks with their sources (it is a job that is done outside the office without a supervision) and also while they are in constructive thinking and text-writing. Professionalism also highlights the values that enable a soft shaping of the decision-making process avoiding the formal procedures that are natural in bureaucratic organizations:

> "professionalism *makes the use of discretion predictable*" (Larson, 977: 168) (emphasis in the original).

Thus, the ideology of the journalist media turns to the self-regulatory mechanism which is applied by the professionals of the field on their own will. The self-regulation of journalists' behavior is based on the ethical imperative towards their own award – casual duties and routines are conducted according to the established codes not because they are prescribed but because everyone in the field accomplishes them to win the name of a serious professional:

> "news professionalism controls the behavior of journalists in two related ways: (1) it sets standards and norms of behavior, and (2) it determines the professional reward system. (…) Professionalism, then, must be seen as an efficient and rational means of administering complex business organizations" (Soloski, 1999: 310).

Professor of journalism John Soloski finds three reasons why an old method of personnel management, when the rules are established, would be an insufficient form of control:

> "the bureaucratic form of administration would not be very efficient because (1) the rules would have to cover all possible situations that

journalists might encounter, including rules to deal with situations not covered by the rules; (2) elaborate rules are prescriptive and would limit a journalist's ability to deal with the unexpected, which is the essence of news; and (3) the news organization's management would have to establish an expensive and time-consuming system for teaching journalists the rules and regulations" (Soloski, 1999: 309).

Although these restrictions are removed from the management of media organizations, such interference is not completely eliminated from the laws regulating the journalist media performance. Manipulation with the regulative provisions of the law often becomes an image-making tool for politicians.

Political constraints to journalism

The use of law in order to construct a positive image may be considered as an element indicating the political culture of a country. Transgression from professionalism as well as partisanship are explicit and apparent indicators of the journalist media culture. According to the Scottish sociologist Brian McNair, the political culture describes the informal, non-institutionalized relationships which develop in every society between politicians and journalists over time:

"they (journalists – A. J.), like most other professional groups, must work within a political environment which contains a certain amount of regulation, control and constraint, exercised through a variety of formal and informal channels (…). Sometimes these controls and constraints are justified by the needs of good government and social cohesion; sometimes they are the product of political self-interest" (McNair, 1998: 82–83).

Thus, the political environment is related with the journalists' resistance to its shaping and to journalists' efforts to make the public sphere to act autonomously of the political field. As B. McNair states, four variables allow to indicate the political environment:

1) the nature of the political system;
2) the political culture;

3) the economic relationship between the journalistic media and the political apparatus;

4) the elite perceptions of the importance of journalistic media (McNair, 1998: 82–83).

The nature of the political system may be liberal democracy or authoritarianism. Liberal democracy is associated with intellectual freedom and pluralism, politicians' patience to criticism, and a constant legitimacy of the journalist media professionalism. On the contrary, journalism in authoritarianism is framing the official political line, is related with social engineering and politicians who do not allow public criticisms. The political culture usually is determined by the legal principles of information flow, the geopolitical conditions and national security; also, political culture is described by political trends:

> "whether functioning in the context of a liberal democratic or an authoritarian political system, the journalist is perceived by the politicians and those who would influence the politicians to be a key cultural player, the successful influencing of whom (by whatever means necessary) is worthy of considerable expenditure of resources" (McNair, 1998: 82).

Thus, we can conclude that journalists themselves are the element that has a crucial importance during the image-making process of a politician. Such a generalization allows elaboration about subjected and manipulated journalists, theoreticians like Daniel Boorstin, Noam Chomsky, Maxwell McCombs, and others that go this way. Nevertheless, it should be reminded that, as Brian McNair puts it,

> "the political actors' 'publicity' is at the same time the journalist's 'news'" (McNair, 1998: 147).

It may be summarized in conclusion that politicians as sources and their activities on journalistic output are quite equal to journalists as image-makers and their writings on political actors – both of them have the same opportunities to shape the representations:

> "thus developed a mutually beneficial relationship between the political actor (source of news) and the media (producers of news), mediated by the emerging public relations industry" (McNair, 1998: 145).

Today, public relations practitioners may be called professional sources. They not only generate events by spreading information, they even create them by convincing journalists to publish documents that later become political events. In such a form of mediation between politics and journalism,

"news become a form of promotion for politics and business" (McNair, 1998: 148).

The economic relationship between the journalists and the state also gives the clue about the most powerful constraints the media professionals can experience. Scholars indicate that

"authoritarian regimes of the left, for example, have tended to monopolize the ownership of the media or to wrap media organizations in forms of public ownership which are subject to state financing over which the ruling group has control. In such systems, the state and the government are usually the same thing" (McNair, 1998: 92).

B. McNair notices that this criterion reveals the extent of the politicians' power over the media but is not accurate enough to predict what political decisions the journalists will make while doing their job (McNair, 1998: 93).

One of the most important characteristics of such phenomena as *power* and *influence* is the belief that one is powerful as much as the other's belief he / she is. That is why the elite perceptions of the journalistic media are quite important: politicians will choose only the media channel as the platform for the image formation which in their mind is of crucial importance for the public opinion formation. Their beliefs sometimes are not based on statistics of the media use. However, the journalist media in the context of political environment exercises the political pressures used by politicians for image-making purposes. It is true for both liberal and authoritarian ruling regimes:

"even democratic societies, in time of genuine crisis (...) may with good reason apply authoritarian principles to their media for the greater good of the collective, brushing aside the professional ethic of objectivity and turning journalism to the production of propaganda" (McNair, 1998: 87).

Thus, a parallel between the liberal political culture that ensures pluralism and the fluid news environment may be drawn: the factors of influence are of mixed nature.

"The means available to politicians to control journalist media include a mix of formal and informal devices" (McNair, 1998: 93).

The Scottish scientist Brian McNair adds that these means may be divided into those within the law and out of it. He distinguishes:

1) physical force: "violence, including murder, is employed against dissident or troublesome journalists by political elites throughout the world" (McNair, 1998: 94);

2) the law: "journalists in democratic societies work within laws which seek to define and limit their rights and responsibilities and to strike an appropriate balance between the two, sometimes conflicting, categories" (McNair, 1998: 95);

3) censorship: "some censorship is clearly justified (on national security grounds and in time of war, for example, journalists accept that there should be constraints placed on what they can report). Some is not. Conflict arises when journalistic and public organizations disagree with government or the state on which of these categories a particular act of censorship falls into" (McNair, 1998: 96);

4) informal lobbying: "techniques intended to win journalists over rather than coerce them into slavish obedience" (McNair, 1998: 98):
   a) news management techniques: media content level (spin doctoring and rapid rebuttal);
   b) organizational management techniques: institutional level (contacts and contracts for cultivating media support and discouraging media hostility towards politicians and other elites).

To sum it up, political pressure is made through law regulation with the purpose to create political constraints for the journalist media functioning. These media restrictions serve for politicians as their image formation tool.

Case Study of the Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew

Having served as Singapore Prime Minister, Senior Minister and Minister Mentor from 1959 until 2011, it is no surprise that Lee Kuan Yew has had his fair share of controversies and negative portrayals. Yet despite this, Lee has proven to have developed an adept mastery of his country's media which has seen him to stay in office for a period of 52 years, 31 of which were served as the Prime Minister of Singapore.

Despite his controversial statements such as his eugenics argument (Barr, 2000), among others, Lee has also been described as a dictator (Kim, 1997) and "out of touch" (Rahim, 1999) by international scholars. Nevertheless, Lee still commands a high level of popularity, especially amongst the *baby boomer* generation who feel indebted to him for his exploits in transforming Singapore into the bustling metropolis that they are in today.

As such, we need to ask, how does the former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew manage to maintain a positive media image through the media? The argument in this article is that he was able to do so through creating a combination of strict laws and media ownership regulations which are supplemented by a fear factor environment of the local media (Keshvani, 2000) so as to protect himself.

State of the Media in Singapore

Currently, there is a distinct lack of freedom in the media in Singapore. In fact, Singapore ranks 149 out of 179 countries, with the situation described as being "difficult" (*Reporters without Borders,* 2013). Furthermore, the local press "does not view itself as a fourth estate" (Sim, 2001) and hence cannot be relied on to provide adequate checks and balances on the government, unlike the western media models where the goal of journalism is to be the "watchdog of the government" (Bokhorst-Heng, 2002). Instead, the local press and media are seen as being subservient to the government and are more a "government lapdog" (Edge, 2004) instead of being the traditional watchdog for the politicians.

The government similarly feels that the media, unlike them, do not have the mandate of the people. Instead, it is the government which has the mandate and hence has the trust of the voters and has been thus empowered by them, not the local media (Subramaniam, 2001) which were not elected. The media, therefore, are seen by the government as a tool to "inform the people of government policies rather than question them" (Roy, 1994).

With the situation as such, many journalists are thus hamstrung and unable to openly criticize the government and Lee. Instead, journalists are trained to be government mouthpieces and are taught to consistently echo the government rhetoric when writing their news pieces while covering the government as they simply do not have the authority to criticize the government. Editors, too, adopt a tough stance and remind journalists of their roles in the media sphere of Singapore, which is to be a government mouthpiece rather than a watchdog of the government. Even with Lee openly making controversial statements, journalists are unable to explore these controversies any further since they would be shut down by the government, or possibly even by their editors.

Usage of strict rules

To further solidify his relationship with the media, Lee has sought to implement a series of rules and regulations regarding the local press and its ownership as well as practices. All these inevitably seek to ensure that the local press becomes even more subservient to Lee himself as well as to ensure tighter governmental controls on the media.

Currently, there are two major media companies: Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) and Mediacorp, with all newspapers except one coming under the umbrella of SPH. While both are not government-owned, it is interesting to note that MediaCorp is owned wholly by Temasek Holdings (*Temasek Holdings*, 2012), which is the main investment arm of the Singapore government and also owned by them as well. With this, many would thus tend to question the authenticity of news programs published by MediaCorp based on the potential

amount of influence which Lee's government is able to have. Further complicating this relationship is the fact that Lee's daughter-in-law Ho Ching who is married to the current prime minister of Singapore (his son), is also the chief executive officer and director of Temasek. This again leads us to see a rather interesting dynamics with the media.

The government's relationship with SPH can also be illustrated with the Newspaper and Presses Printing Act, to be further elaborated later, which illustrates how the act introduced by Lee helped to ensure that the government had the media as their mouthpiece.

One of the laws introduced by Lee was the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPPA) in 1974. This act ensured a stricter control over the media and was a "watershed moment in suppressing the press" (Seow, 1998).

The key provisions of the NPPA included new regulations with regards to ownership and shareholding. One of them was the decree that all directors of newspaper companies had to be Singapore citizens. This ensured a greater level of control over the newspapers, since if any of them ran afoul of the law, it would mean that it would be more difficult for owners to simply run away to another country, what a foreigner might be able to do so more easily.

Further exemplifying the control, Lee was able to wield the newspaper which was the rule for the appointment of a "government-appointed chairman to serve as a monitor" (Tambyah , 2013). In fact, the first government-appointed chairman was SR Nathan who was director in the Ministry of Defence's Security and Intelligence Division and who would also later become the President of Singapore. Another former chairperson was Tjong Yi Min who was the head of the Internal Security Department. These raise questions since neither Nathan nor Tjong had any journalism training. Instead, they were both approved by Lee and his government so as to ensure that SPH did not run afoul and end up tarnishing Lee's image.

Furthermore, Lee and his government introduced a law to divide the shares of SPH into management and ordinary shares. Management

shares held 200 times more power as compared to the ordinary shares. Moreover, holders of management shares had to be approved by the government, and the newspapers could not refuse any government-approved shareholders (George, 2005).

All this served to ensure that when it came to making key decisions with regards to the newspaper, Lee would always be able to have a strong voice within the newspaper. The implementation that shareholders had to be approved by the government ensured that there would not be any potentially powerful dissident voices in the media since these dissident voices would not have been approved by the government and hence would not have been able to own any management shares.

In 1977, Lee sought to further strengthen this relationship with the media with the decision to spread newspaper ownership as widely as possible. Hence, he decided that no one person could own more than 3 percent of ordinary shares, ensuring that these shareholders who did not have to be government-approved, would therefore never be powerful enough to use the media to portray him in a negative sense.

The NPPA, coupled with the ownership of MediaCorp, thus ensures that the newspapers would be more likely to frame government decisions in a more positive manner. It is likely that Lee would be portrayed as a kind, gentle leader (Lean, 2008) rather than the dictator he is described in the international media.

Free speech

Officially, Article 14 of the Singapore statutes states that "every citizen of Singapore has the right to freedom of speech and expression". However, this freedom of speech comes with various conditions attached to it. The Singapore Statutes state that the right to free speech is limited on the grounds of security, and these conditions also extend to the media as well (*Attorney General's Chambers*, 2012).

The lack of clarity along with the vagueness of the wording only serves to make the situation obscure and hazy with journalists choosing to engage in self-censorship for fear of violating these conditions, and thus risking their lives.

It is these laws that shaped the political environment and which further complicate the media environment. Even though Singapore has free speech, the fact of the matter is that such free speech comes with conditions. If journalists were to decide to criticize Lee, they may very well face sanctions from Lee's government on the basis that a journalist was looking to "bring into hatred or contempt or to excite disaffection against the Government" or promote "feelings of ill-will" based on the sedition act (*Attorney General's Chambers*, 2012).

As a result of the NPPA, newspapers are also required to obtain a license from the government to continue operations. While such a rule may be seemingly innocuous, the reality is that if a newspaper runs afoul of the law too many times, Lee and his government may simply decide not to renew the permit of the newspaper, thus putting the jobs and livelihoods of those employed by the newspapers at stake. To ensure operations to continue smoothly, the key figures in the newspapers would thus not publish any material which may upset the government and cause them to think twice about issuing them a permit for fear of the negative repercussions associated with the denial of their permits.

The fear factor

With the multitude of laws being implemented, it is no surprise that the possibility of facing sanctions from the government has impacted Singapore's media environment. Many editors and journalists, therefore, adopt a hesitant stance with regard to publishing a controversial material. Many, also, are likely to engage in self-censorship. It is these efforts of self-censorship which have resulted in the media being less willing to ruffle any governmental feathers, which has enabled Lee to maintain the positive public image.

Such a stance to create the fear factor in the media ensures Lee's standing, in line with Machiavelli's stance that if "no one is afraid of (Lee), he would be meaningless" (Lee, 1997).

Singapore has an Internal Security Act (ISA) with which the government can imprison anyone for up to two years (which is renewable by

the president) if it deemed to be a "threat to security and maintenance of public order in Singapore" (*Attorney General's Chambers*, 2012). As such, the ISA can be used against the media if the published information is deemed as a threat by the government. However, similar to the NPPA, the fact that such wordings are vague leave a lot of space for interpretation, meaning the government is able to wield its authority if it is desired that its scope is broadened without the requirement for anything concrete. Hence, writers must be very careful since anything they write may be interpreted as being seditious.

This fear factor is further heightened as Lee has shown that he is not afraid to imprison offending journalists if the occasion requires, as seen from the scenario with a former Singaporean newspaper, the *Nanyang Siang Pau*. In it, Lee had its editor imprisoned after he declared that certain controversial statements made by its editor were guilty of a "deliberate attempt to stir up Chinese racial emotions" (Fong, 1971).

The fear that they are always being watched thus creates a panoptic society where journalists are never aware when they are being watched. Coupled with the need for a renewable license, it means that writers have to be very careful since they may not be aware that they are running afoul of the law, only to find out when they are denied a permit when their current permit is up for renewal.

Another key factor in Lee's consolidation of power is how his main support group members are born before 1965. This group, on top of feeling a strong sense of gratitude towards Lee, is also the group with the least access to the new media and hence obtain most of their information through the traditional pro-government mass media channels. This ensures that Lee is able to maintain a strong public image since his main support base is unable to access the new media channels who are more likely to criticize Lee as compared to the traditional media channels.

However, while such a scenario was the norm many years ago, this is changing, with the rise of an educated middle class who have access to dissident voices on the new media. Although it is likely that this new

generation would not affect Lee's legacy, with Lee no longer in office due to his retirement and thus no longer running for office.

While Lee was able to control the media, without worrying about alternative voices on the Internet, his son, the current Prime Minister, is unable to adopt a similar hardline strategy with the media since the new batch of voters do not feel the same sense of gratitude to him and, crucially, also have access to new media channels.

While examining the whole media environment in Singapore, one would likely wonder why people do not simply band together to voice their opinion. We can use the *spiral of silence* to understand this phenomenon.

As such, Singaporean writers may all believe that they are the lone dissident voices and thus would be unwilling to voice any controversial opinions in public newspapers. Despite this, we are aware from the new media circles that likely they are not the lone voices.

However, because of this fear, writers thus decide not to voice any opinion instead of choosing to maintain their silence, thus leading to a *spiral of silence* as they choose not to take the less popular option and choose to confirm to the government rhetoric instead.

As such, if Lee were to adopt such tactics today, it would surely not work, as confirmed by his deputy Tharman Shanmugaratnam (Wijaya, 2011).

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a feeling that it was through Lee's adept use of the media which helped him to maintain a positive public image in the Singapore media. The implementation of various laws and regulations ensured that he always was able to control the media and implement changes if required to ensure the result that rarely were any controversial statements published about him.

However, Lee governed in the time when access to alternative voices in the new media channels was limited. Instead, he governed in the time where the mass media news were usually the only source of news,

and citizens had no choice but to believe whatever was reported in the newspapers. Similarly, with many lacking higher education, many citizens were less likely to be discerning with regards to the mass media news, unlike the educated middle classes of today.

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