

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Bonding and Autonomy: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Singaporean Youths' Internet Use and Identity Politics in Amos Yee's YouTube Videos

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**Abstract** The study aims to define and critically assess Singaporean youths' Internet use through “bonding” and “autonomy” using the data presented in the Singapore's National Youth Council report in 2015. Bonding as an analytical concept implies social interaction which forms cohesion, ties, and relationship with others via the Internet. Autonomy meanwhile specifies personal freedom to express oneself and a commitment towards participating online and/or offline in socio-political discussions and activities. Using critical discourse analysis (CDA), the paper interrogates the dominant social order and how it operates within economic, political, and discursive contexts by examining a counterdiscourse presented in two of Amos Yee's YouTube videos. It also seeks to illustrate how identity politics of the youth may have the power to critique this social order within the realm of the Internet or how it may fail in the light of Singapore's experience.

**Keywords** *bonding, autonomy, Singapore, Amos Yee, critical discourse analysis, ASEAN*

The idea and practice of social order in Singapore is discussed within the context of understanding the interplay of politics, economics, and discourse. Among other factors, these three dominant contexts describe and underpin a social order that is cemented, intertwined, and entangled with the day-to-day social practices of Singaporeans. By discourse, it means a social practice that suggests a relationship between “situations,” “institutions,” and “structures” (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997, p. 258) imminent and evident

which shape one another or one after the other. This paper therefore elucidates the meaning of social order as a discursive utterance, a social interaction and a meaningful symbolic identity formation vis-à-vis nation-building through (a) control, (b) regularity, (c) reward-system, and (d) pacification. These social order elements shall be discussed throughout the paper. The interplay of these social order elements is to be seen as a dominant ideology that permeates in Singapore. As such, using the Internet and social media as lens for and

site of counterdiscourse, the paper shall render a critical discourse analysis of bonding and autonomy in relation to power relations, critique of social order, hierarchy, and continuity using two of the many YouTube videos of Amos Yee, which deals with his tirade against the ruling political party in Singapore, the People's Action Party or PAP for short and when the great father of Singapore, Lee Kwan Yew, died. Though unpopular, controversial, and iconoclastic these two videos may seem in Singapore, the counterdiscourse enveloped within those videos is a critical voice and crusade of Yee's identity politics.

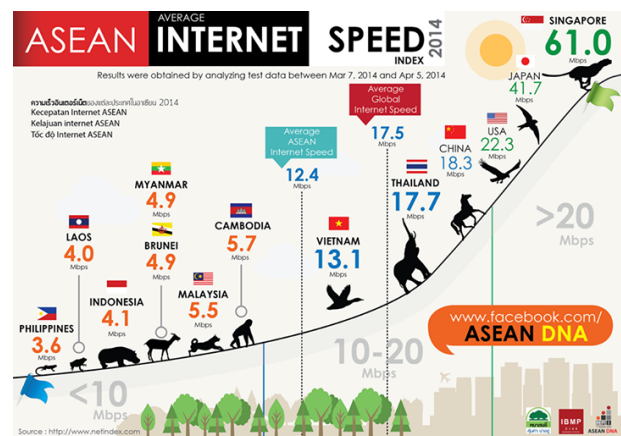
The paper employs both critical discourse analysis and secondary statistical analysis. In doing so, data from scholarly papers, economic figures, reports, and information from official government sites and credible agencies shall be classified as discursive utterances and iterations as current social, economic, and political situations in Singapore. At the same time these utterances are indicative and reflective of "institutions" (government and the PAP) and social structures (meritocracy and multiculturalism) that sustain a programmatic and pragmatic "social order" as ideological and hegemonic.

### Contemporary Youths in Singapore and Their Internet and Social Media Usage

Singapore has the highest Internet penetration in Southeast Asia, capping it with 82% rate, which is derived from its estimated Internet population of 4,653,067 as against an estimated population of 5,674,472 ("Internet Usage Statistics," 2015). The rest of the countries in ASEAN based from "Internet Users in Asia" (2015) registered the following Internet penetration: Brunei 74.2% (2<sup>nd</sup>), Malaysia 67.5% (3<sup>rd</sup>), Vietnam 48.3% (4<sup>th</sup>), Philippines 43% (5<sup>th</sup>), Thailand 34.9% (6<sup>th</sup>), Cambodia 31.8% (7<sup>th</sup>), Indonesia 28.5% (8<sup>th</sup>), Laos 14.3 % (9<sup>th</sup>), Myanmar 2.1% (10<sup>th</sup>), Timor-Leste 1.1% (11<sup>th</sup>) while the top five Internet users include Indonesia (73M), Philippines (47M), Vietnam (45.5M), Thailand (23.7M), and Malaysia (20.6M). Comparatively, this only shows that given the stable economic development in Singapore, coupled with its

manageable population size, it has managed to reduce into slim margins the phenomenon called digital divide. In a related study, digital divide in Singapore shows that "63% were Internet users and 37% did not adopt the new technology" which accounts for those who are elderly people (Choi, 2008, p. 153). However, still Internet growth in Singapore is phenomenal because of its 2-digit compounded growth of 12.8% from 2010 to 2014 (MarketLine, 2015).

Not only that low digital divide in sheer number is evident but digital divide in terms of bandwidth is virtually nil in Singapore. To date, Singapore has the fastest Internet connection in the region with 61.0 Mbps mark compared with Philippines at the bottom with 3.6 Mbps.



**Figure 1.** Internet speed of ASEAN and selected countries.  
Source: "ASEAN DNA" (2014)

The National Youth Council (NYC) in Singapore released the document *The State of Youth in Singapore* (National Youth Council, 2014) that provides an overall view of their social order, which could be inferred from its underlying framework—"social capital" (the power of relationship) and "human capital" (the human potential of young people). The youth in Singapore is defined as those who belong to the age bracket of 15–34 years old.

Bonding as an analytical concept to be used in this paper implies social interaction which forms cohesion, ties, and relationship with others via the Internet.

### *Bonding*

Using the report from the National Youth Council (2014, pp. 18-41), we can infer that bonding is manifested in the following:

- Youths' close friends are from schools (78%), workplace (29%), social networks (20%);
- Their close friends range from 2–3 (32%), 4–5 (30%), and beyond 5 (26%);
- Overall they have friends from different religion (80%), different race (53%), and from different nationality (42%);
- Among the youths, 72% are Chinese; 16% Malay; 10% Indian; and 3% others;
- 33% of the respondents said more than 10 hours are spent with family and relatives while 61% spent less than 10 hours with them;
- 23% spend more than 10 hours with friends while 65% spend less than 10 hours with them;
- 54% spend less than 10 hours for online activities like gaming, chatting, social networking, and reading blogs while 35% spend more than 10 hours for the same Internet activities;
- 63% access news and social media on a daily basis while 83% use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram on a daily basis;
- Mothers (33%) and close friends (26%) are the person the youths consulted when they have personal problems while for life's decision they turn to their mother (38%) and father (24%);
- They have the following life goals—74% to maintain strong family relationship; 70% to have a place of their own; 65% to acquire new skills and knowledge; 61% to have a successful career.

As the literacy rate of Singaporeans is considered highest in the region, it is tacitly inferred that the youths are mostly in school and have regularly gained friends from there. An extension of this interaction is carried over through online means using Facebook and other social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, to name a few. Singaporeans maintain a small closed circle of friends and are very open to meeting and having friends who are of different race, religion,

and nationality. Most of them interacted frequently with family members and consider their mother and father as key persons to rely on. They are most of the time on Facebook and therefore online in a daily basis. However, this excessive use of the Internet is seen as alarming in which a study of Mythily, Qiu, and Winslow (2008) concluded that this may have direct negative impact on the academic performance of young Internet users. In so much as media literacy is concerned, most youths are predictably exposed to entertainment and education but sad to say they lack skills for reading media critically and had limited opportunities for learning media production skills (Lim & Theng, 2011). This means that the youths have become more of a passive consumer than a creative co-creator of meanings and outputs relevant to their needs and interests. In fact, the study suggests that parents and teachers should guide and “supervise/monitor media usage and not leave it to our youths to learn via own mistakes or from their friend” (Lim & Theng, 2011, p. 4). The end goal of Singaporean youths as the data indicate is to have relational, financial, and economic security. Life itself is measured through and by success of each individual in his/her society, which promotes competitiveness and a lucrative reward system (Tan, 2008).

### *Autonomy*

Autonomy meanwhile specifies personal freedom to express oneself and a commitment towards participating online and/or offline in socio-political discussions and activities. Again using the report of Singapore's National Youth Council (2014, pp. 24–36) the data revealed that:

- The youths have socially participated online through these venues: 15% contacted a government official about an issue important to them; 15% commented on news or blog posts about social and political issue; 12% signed a petition online;
- Political activities or participation include the following: 10% posted pictures or videos related to political or social issues; 9% attended discussion on political and social affairs; 6%

attended political rally or speech; 1% attended an organized protest; 6% worked with fellow citizen to a problem in the community;

- 28% spend less than 10 hours for helping in a welfare home or a place of worship, voluntary welfare organizations, or grassroots activities.

Roughly the lower quartile of Singaporean youths are socially and politically aware and are critical about issues that are important to them as shown in data wherein they contacted government officials, commented on blogs, and joined online petitions. This is indicative that though with minimal political presence or participation, the small number of youths in Singapore had used the Internet instrumental to express their views and criticisms against the government. It shows however that among the youths in Singapore, they have favorably manifested their political presence online more than the offline political activities they are interested in like joining protest rallies and social action.

But how come only a few, one of which is Amos Yee, to be discussed later, have expressed autonomy as regards expressing their political views and identities? Let us explain the three contexts of social order in Singapore.

### *Economic Context: The Metadiscourse of Prosperity*

Singapore is admired for its robust economy with a GDP (PPP) of US\$348.7 billion and a 5.2% compounded 5-year annual growth (Miller & Kim, 2015). It also highlights its highest literacy rate among countries in Southeast Asia with a commanding lead of 99.8% youth's literacy rate (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2014). It is also the only country in Asia included in the top 10 of UNDP's Human Development Index in 2013 with the rank of 9. In the World Happiness Index (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2015) for the years 2012–2014 that measures GDP per capita, social support, life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity, perception of corruptions, and positive and negative effects, Singapore landed on the 24<sup>th</sup> spot.

It is interesting to note that Singapore is relatively a younger nation-state, which has just celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> independence day on August 9, 2015. It is known to be as one of the smallest city-states with a land area of 713 km<sup>2</sup> and therefore has no natural resources. From its expulsion from the Malaysian Federation in 1965 and through its rough sailing journey towards being an independent city-state through the years, Singapore remarkably registered the following growth milestones:

In terms of annual real per capita income, measured in purchasing power parity terms at 2000 constant prices, Singapore and Switzerland were at par with about \$30,000 in 2004. This stands in stark contrast to the situation in 1965, about \$4,500 in Singapore as opposed to about \$18,000 in Switzerland (Penn World Table Version 6.2). Even in terms of other development indicators, Singapore's progress since 1965 is unsurpassed. Infant mortality rate that stood above 26 per 1000 live births in 1965 dropped to 2 and 2.5 in 2005 and 2006 respectively, among the lowest in the world. Over the same period the proportion of people living in and owning publicly provided housing units increased from 4% to 85%. (Abeysinghe & Choy, 2007, p.1)

Singapore has undergone rapid urbanization and industrialization through the years that showcase towering skyscrapers, seamless transportation system, refurbished tourist sites and destinations, clean city environment, and a world-class airport among other things. Just recently Singapore has rebranded its tourism slogan from Uniquely Singapore to YourSingapore, which connotes openness, an invitation, and a sense of partaking in it. There in Singapore, a correlative spin of Disneyfication (Bryman, 1999) is present with its Universal Studios theme park; a simulacrum of giant solar-powered artificial trees that glow at night to offer a scintillating backdrop at Gardens by the Bay; an overwhelming 6,750 eating establishments with hundreds of Oriental, Asian, and Western delicacies to choose from; an impressive array of post/modern buildings and structures like the Singapore ArtScience Museum that resembles a robotic hand



and the world's first and highest 495 ft-rooftop pool at Marina Bay Sands; and a make-believe rainforest with indoor waterfalls and several species of flora and fauna nestled inside a big dome with automated climate control (Glennie, Ang, Rhys, Aul, & Walton, 2015). These world-class, cut above the rest, top of the line infrastructure developments are testimonies of Singapore's economic prosperity. This phenomenal growth is translated as an enduring and pervasive metadiscourse which attracts an average of 1.2 million tourists per month ("Statistics & Market Insights Overview," 2015). This in effect has become a visual, sensual, and perceptual attraction to imagine, consume, and reinvent Singapore as an open global city. In short, not only that Singapore is wealthy in terms of its economic score cards but it is all the more a feast to the eyes and to the senses. But how did Singapore manage to establish a social order that accentuates economic stability and prosperity? What is its secret formula?

*Political Context: The Authoritarian Praxis in a Democratic Set-up*

The answer lies in the political control and regularity sanctioned by the government and its powerful political party, the People's Action Party. It may be well said that the political party and government in Singapore are one and the same. A quick historical glimpse examines the underlying reasons for a unified and unitary party control in Singapore. The port city established by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles in 1819 was a former crown colony of the British Empire during the period of 1826 up to 1960. The British Empire benefited a lot in terms of the commercial, trading, and financial success of Singapore and other colonies including Penang and Malacca. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more Chinese, Indian, Malay, and Arab migrants fled to Singapore and that a communist takeover was imminent when the Malayan Communist Party was established in 1930. Japan attacked Singapore and the rest of the countries in Southeast Asia in 1941 that drove away British, American, and other remaining Western imperial allied forces during the outbreak of World War III in the Asia-Pacific region. After the war, the move for self-rule and independence in 1958 led to the recognition of Singapore as an independent

state by British forces and that the first ever local elections in 1959 were held. Lee Kuan Yew was elected Prime Minister. Prior to that, Malaysia was granted independence in 1957 and in 1963, Singapore joined the Federation of Malaysia. However, the marriage of the two did not last too long when Malaysia expelled Singapore from the Federation in 1965 because of the rising tensions, clashes, and riots between Malay and Chinese ethnic groups. Singapore declared its independence in August 9, 1965. Hence the political history of Singapore can be traced from the phenomenal relationship between Lee Kuan Yew (or LKY) and the People's Action Party. This explains the inner logic of authoritarian rule in Singapore. Singapore in a way is indebted to PAP and the legacy of LKY's stewardship and leadership, which in return brought forth independence, industrialization, and sustainable development in the city-state.

Singapore is a de facto one-party state. Through a variety of means, effective challenges to the ruling People's Action party (PAP) are obstructed. Historically, this included some crude forms of intimidation of political adversaries and critical elements of the media by invoking the Internal Security Act (ISA), under which people can be held indefinitely without trial. However, the more pervasive and definitive features of authoritarianism in Singapore involve a sophisticated and systematic combination of legal limits on independent social and political activities on the one hand, and extensive mechanisms of political cooption to channel contention through state-controlled institutions on the other. This suppression of a genuine civil society not only fundamentally hampers the PAP's formal political opponents, it generally blunts political pluralism, including interest group politics. The PAP's political monopoly is rationalized through an elitist ideology, which depicts government as a technical process that must be the preserve of a meritocracy. (Rodan, 1998, p. 65)

Meritocracy breeds inequality—an ideology of inequality (Tan, 2008). The perpetual rule of PAP is subscribed by meritocracy which becomes a systematic

and systemic mechanism to control. Leaders and members of the party are predominantly English-educated of Chinese and Indian origin (Heidhues, 2000, p. 164). One party state therefore espouses not just a unilateral democratic voice from top to bottom but an administrative mechanism on how to govern selection, admission, promotion, recognition, and extension of people who are highly qualified, loyal, and faithful to the principles, tenets, and pursuits of the party. Thus, only the best and the brightest gets in the party; only the elite circle gets elected and becomes members of the Parliament; hence, only a few gets on the top echelons to rule and govern Singapore. Simply put: “Singapore, under the leadership of the PAP, possesses a distinct political culture: authoritarian, pragmatic, rational and legalistic... Thus, Singapore is not administered by politicians, but by bureaucrats, in a meritocracy where power is gained through skill, performance, and loyalty to the nation and its policies” (“Introduction to Singapore’s Political System”, 2015, par. 2). PAP has ruled Singapore for more than 50 years and has become the unflinching target of the opposition, unfortunately to no avail. There are more than 20 political parties in Singapore (Mutalib, 2000), yet the election results consistently showed the winning streak of the ruling PAP through the years. A sense of indebtedness of the electorate to PAP is evident in every election or is it fear or separation anxiety that they feel, which explicates the notion that without PAP and the government everything may be in shambles. Mutalib (2000) explained that the end result of LKY’s rule is the citizen’s “abject political compliance and depoliticization” (p. 316). This in a way glorifies the notion that the end justifies the means and that by surrendering some rights to the “leviathan” using Thomas Hobbes’ (1988) famous analogy of the State, that is, PAP and/or the government, a “performance legitimacy” (Mutalib, 2000, p. 313) is sealed. Such political control over civil liberties is compensated through and by social and economic reforms (Rodan, 1998, p. 65). Read: sacrifice liberties in the name of progress. What liberties are legalistically limited in Singapore?

### *Constraints on Freedom of Speech:*

1. **Sedition act**—mindful of the divisive clashes and riots in the past this law “aims to retain political stability as well as racial and ethnic harmony. Any acts, tendencies, or statements which can be construed in such way as to make them a threat to the government (inciting criticism or hatred of the government and its institutions or rioting) or an affront against the multiracial and multiethnic Singaporean population are punishable under this act” (“Limitations of Civil Freedoms,” 2015).
2. **Control of the media**—its ownership, interests, and policies are linked with the government (Tey, 2008; Rodan, 1998).
3. **Internet censorship**—“The Singaporean Media Development Authority (MDA) monitors and regulates Internet use and connections which are made via the three major service providers SingNet, StarHub, and M1. A number of websites are inaccessible from within Singapore, as they are deemed “objectionable.” The undisclosed list of banned web addresses includes Malaysian news sites, homosexuality-related sites, pages with pornographic content, and a number of YouTube videos. Blog entries from Singaporean bloggers as well as comments made on popular social media pages are also subject to monitoring, having already led to a number of criminal charges and layoffs” (“Limitations of Civil Freedoms,” 2015).

Aside from these major laws and statues passed and mandated by the government, there are also regulatory penal laws that serve as threat to wrongdoers, as deterrent to possible commission of violations or infractions and as effective means to lower the crime rate in Singapore. Some of these include no chewing gum and no smoking policy; anti-littering, anti-jaywalking, anti-vandalism regulations, no homosexual relations, and anti-drug trafficking policy (De Veyra, 2015).

In gist, we would understand therefore why autonomy of expression is so limited and therefore stifled in Singapore.

**Channels of Critical Discourse**

It has been noted in previous studies (Rodan, 1998 & 2006; Mutalib, 2000; Kalathil, 2003; Kluver, 2005; Corrales & Westhoff, 2006) that the advent of the Internet is a counterforce against authoritarian social control in many countries. However, the case of Singapore is unique as Rodan (1998) aptly put:

In any evaluation of the impact of IT on authoritarian political structures, Singapore presents itself as a fascinating and essential case study. Here we have one of the most comprehensive strategies for the development of IT anywhere in the world, supported by huge state-led infrastructure investments. Indeed, Singapore’s policy makers are committed to the transformation of the island economy into an information hub, trading in ideas rather than commodities. Yet Singapore’s authoritarian leaders have no intention of surrendering political control in the process. (p. 64)

Let us put within a framework the reconfiguration of bonding and autonomy within the structure of power and control in society using critical discourse analysis. In Singapore, management of resources (financial, human resource, economic, infrastructure) includes management of power (socio-political control) as a resource and an asset emanating from the ruling party and the government.

*Dominant vs. Critical Discourse*

Discourse in one level as explained above is the dominant social order with regard to control, regularity, reward system, and pacification. Control has been clearly shown by the historical rise to prominence of the ruling party and through its regimented establishment of a clear vision for the country, an efficient administration, an effective delivery of service, a functional justice system and an unprecedented economic reforms and development. Regularity is maintaining this control with consistency, which is repeated and emphasized above many times, as the absence or minimization of political opposition. Regularity also means symmetrical regulation pervasive in society that heralds the importance of law and order and its concomitant effect to discipline and punish citizens. Regularity also emphasizes economic sustainability that brings about legitimacy for the hegemonic status and praxis of the ruling party. Reward system is a social practice embedded in the cultural capital of education, employment, profession, and political mainstreaming through meritocracy. Pacification is the ultimate goal of control, regularity, and reward system. In this scenario, political contradictions and opposition are mitigated and that the interplay of economic success and social satisfaction of people bring about a peaceful co-existence between the State and citizens. Ideally, this is so. The dominant discourse of social order is therefore ideological in nature. This is the reason why these four discursive tenets of control, regularity, reward system, and pacification with the intertwining of economic and political order bring about social homogenization in Internet use.

However, no matter how tight the system is in terms of social control, a counterdiscourse has become

**Table 1**  
*The Discursive Transition of Bonding and Autonomy to Binding and Monotony*

<i>Bonding</i>	to	<i>Binding</i>	<i>Autonomy</i>	to	<i>Monotony</i>
Social interaction using social media with family and friends; educational use for schools and universities; e-commerce for youths consumerist undertakings		Singaporeans and youths specifically are bound with the systemic and systematic control, regularity, reward system and pacification in society.	Freedom of expression Political assembly, protest and opposition		Non-opposition Pacification Submission and compliance

“cracks in the dominant discourse.” These so called cracks will be subjected to a critical discourse analysis to find out: (a) text’s contour, (b) critical meaning of discourse, and (c) effects of the critical discourse. Two YouTube videos of Amos Yee will be examined in this respect. The first video is the most controversial titled as “Lee Kwan Yew is dead,” which has generated (as of this writing) more or less half a million views; while the second video titled “PAP king manipulators” amplifies a critique against Singapore’s ruling party. The analysis shall focus on the audio-visual text (or in Fairclough’s [1989 & 1995] terms *verbal-visual text*) of the YouTube videos and **not** with the personality or personal background of Amos Yee.

### *Text’s Contour*

This is the descriptive analysis of the text. This is divided into two parts—video version as its audio-visual text—and the textual transcription of the video.

The anti-Lee Kwan Yew video (henceforth video1) presents in explicit words and statements the critical stance of Amos Yee against the persona of Singapore’s founder and prominent political leader. Without doubt, video1 is engineered or used as a device to “poison the well” in the perspective of the dominant ideology, which typecasts such verbal-visual theatrics as irreverent, unpatriotic, malicious, and derisive on the

one hand or a “bitter pill kind-of-realization”, which appeals to emotion and to people the reasonable merits, if any, regarding the structure of rule, domination, control, legitimation, and pacification in Singapore, on the other hand. As scholars, we cannot just be dismissive of the sensitivity of text and thus ignore totally its subscription to reason and validation. Let us work in detail what does this mean in video1.

The thesis of video 1 states that LKY is an “awful, horrible leader” (in S3 & S8) according to Amos Yee and yet digging the text and unearthing its political meaning sums up that what it states is that LKY is a dictator (S9). An awful and horrible leader can lead us to believe that X leader is a lousy, incompetent, and irresponsible leader. It could mean also that X is corrupt, abusive, and violent. Yet none of these pertains to him, LKY, specifically. But the text in question qualifies that he is a “dictator” yet made the “world to think he was democratic” (S9).

The overall technique is to use use expletive words with insulting hand gestures (verbal & nonverbal) as part of an “emotional outburst” then enunciating emotive words as form of “negative persuasion” to paint a picture of the persona under critique (awful, horrible leader S3, S8; deceitful S20; power hungry and malicious S25) and then finally salvaging the first two using lucid and coherent arguments, which by the way need further validation and verification through evidence.

**Table 2**  
*Textual Descriptions of Two YouTube Videos of Amos Yee*

<b>YouTube Video</b>	<b>Lee Kwan Yew is finally dead</b>	<b>PAP King Manipulators</b>
Duration of video	8:38	15:51
Date published	March 29, 2015	September 9, 2015
Uploaded by	Leon Wang	Amos Yee
Views (as of Oct 10, 2015)	464,548	286,745
Likes	2,908 (.06%)	2,965 (1%)
Dislikes	3,359 (.07%)	1,961 (.07%)
Average view duration	unknown	6:03 (38%)
Shares	unknown	1,968
<b>Transcription</b>	<b>Lee Kwan Yew is finally dead</b>	<b>PAP King Manipulators</b>
Number of words	1,281	2,590
Number of statements	75	125

Source: Yee (2015a) & Yee (2015b)



**Table 3***Discursive Highlights of Amos Yee's YouTube Video—Lee Kuan Yew is Finally Dead*

<b>Emotional outburst (verbal-nonverbal)</b>	<b>Negative persuasion (emotive words)</b>	<b>Arguments (coherent &amp; lucid premises &amp; conclusion)</b>
S1—expletive words S7—expletive words with gesture S12—sexual innuendo	Awful, horrible leader (S3,S8) Deceitful (S20) Power hungry & malicious (S25)	Conclusion: He is a dictator (S9), totalitarian (S21), Machiavellian (71) Premise 1: control of media & education (S11) Premise 2: Suing, jailing, and forcing to bankruptcy those who criticize him (S16, S48) Premise 3: ...controls the judicial system (as alleged S18)
S37—calling names and insulting parents who believe that Singapore is far better		Conclusion ( <i>implicit, unstated</i> ): Singapore has also problems. Premise 1: struggling to make ends meet (38) Premise 2: one of the longest hours in the world (39) Premise 3: highest income inequalities (S41) Premise 4: highest poverty rate (S41) Premise 5: government spends lowest in healthcare and social security (S41) Premise 6: taxes highest in the first world (S43) Premise 7: political leaders earn quadruple than United State's
S56—expletive words S65—sexual innuendo	Question about a depressing life (S56) Disrespectful in the way he suggested regarding death and suicide (S63, S66)	Conclusion 1: Biggest flaw of LKY's leadership is that money plus status equals to happiness (S57) P1: success measured on concrete results (S50) P2: love of major powers (S51) P3: positive public image (S52) P4: better house, the better results in exam, better degree is deemed more successful than the other person (S54) Conclusion 2: This emphasis on pure materialism, it sacrificed our happiness (S55)  Alternative conclusion: Quantifying a great leader (S59) Premise: It is by how he creates a place where people are able to live happily and prosper based on their own unique attributes (S60)

The PAP King Manipulators video (henceforth video2) extends Amos Yee's argument of authoritarian rule in Singapore through its government's unilateral political party. This gives us a view that using PAP as a catalyst and a central operating system, the traffic, flow, and transit of power or political control is cascaded from the central government to the very fabric of social institutions—government, media, education, and family. The main point therefore of video2 is to expose how PAP controls and manipulates society and its people.

### *Critical Meaning of Discourse*

In an average based from the National Youth Council report (2014), only 6% or roughly 47,000 (Singapore

Department of Statistics, 2015) youths have politically participated in Singapore, and Amos Yee is one of those 10% who posted online about his critical, or say ultra-critical, views against the current political hegemonic situation in Singapore. The two counterdiscursive videos aim to discredit, ridicule, critique, and argue against the ruling party, the hegemonic leadership of erstwhile founder and father-leader LKY, and the pervasive social order of pacification in Singapore. The videos are politically motivated through and by the identity politics of its creator/publisher, Amos Yee. To put into proper perspectives, let us examine what we mean by identity politics:

**Table 4***The Discursive Transition of Bonding and Autonomy to Binding and Monotony*

<b>Emotional outburst (verbal-nonverbal)</b>	<b>Negative persuasion (emotive words)</b>	<b>Arguments (coherent &amp; lucid premises &amp; conclusion)</b>
S5–hand gesture S11–expletive words S29–body and hand gesture	Mocking the party leaders and former leaders of PAP (S13–16, 21–25); Delusional (S17)	Conclusion: Manipulation through the media P1: entire mainstream media of our country is run solely by our government (S31) like <i>Straits Times</i> , <i>The New Paper</i> , <i>The Lianhe Zaobao</i> , <i>Today</i> (S32); Channel 5, Channel 8, Suria, Asantham, Channel U, Akto, Channel NewsAsia (38) P2: these TV shows and newspapers are not going to report or air anything that is offensive, anything that can be considered offensive, anything that can convince people to be anti- government (43) P3: manipulation through what the media do not say or broadcast like Amos Yee’s case (S46)
	Suggested teachers to wear swastika on their shirts (S75)	Conclusion: Manipulation through schools P1: forcing students to sing the national anthem and recite the national pledge every single morning, brainwashing them into thinking there’s such a thing as justice and democracy in our country (S63) P2: barrage of assembly talks in school celebrations that glorifies the false quixotic portrayal of our nation’s history and is leaders P3: social studies text book, which do not provide any opposing views towards the government (S65) P4: awarding students for providing false reasons on why government policies are good, and biologically programming them into thinking that PAP leaders are great people (73)
	Showing video of him being slapped (S103) as a spite and as to solicit sympathy	Conclusion: Brainwashing in the climate of fear towards criticizing the government is further facilitated by Singaporean parents and the older generations (S100) P1: whenever you criticize the government, your elders are not going to engaged in a political discourse with you (S101) P2: ...going to get scolded and beaten (S102) and if you aren’t able to explain yourself with some reasoning, you just result to a loud voice and violence (S103) P3: children are grown up of lies, like how without PAP there would be no Singapore (S104)
S99, S112, S125– expletive words S117–sexual innuendo	Ridiculing PM (S86–99), Calling PAP members as manipulative dogs (S112), parallelism of crumbling PAP with 9 11 in New York (S120)	Conclusion (implied, unstated): Do not vote for PAP P1: the climate of fear caused by school, the media and your parents, all of these constitute to the manipulation of PAP (109) P2: If you want to be lied to, cheated for another five years, vote for PAP (S117) P3: Are we going to continue letting fear dictate our decisions? (S111) Alternative conclusion: Vote for the opposition (S116)

Rather than organizing solely around belief systems, programmatic manifestos, or party affiliation, identity political formations typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context. Members of that constituency assert or reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant oppressive characterizations, with the goal of greater self-determination. (Heyes, 2014)

We can infer therefore that the identity politics of Amos Yee imbued in his two videos is predicated upon three aspects of Hilary Janks' (1997) critical discourse categories:

**a. *How is the text positioned or positioning?***

It is not institutionally organized through or via political opposition party and civil society (though at the receiving end they can benefit from it) yet it is self-initiated (close to being politically narcissistic) and mass-directed through the use of the Internet (blogs, Facebook, and YouTube);

**b. *Whose interests are served and whose interests are negated?*** It is intended, reconfigured, and orchestrated to psychologically, morally, and spiritually disturb his *ideal audience* by deriding and attacking the political establishment (structure) and the entire social and economic order (superstructure) by centering a counterdiscourse as personal attacks against *key figures in PAP and government*, as a form to offend religious, cultural, and racial sensitivity and sensibilities to awaken interest and demand reaction, and as a tactical ploy to heightened attention, emotion, and guilt of *those who will watch these videos*;

**c. *What are the consequences of this positioning?*** It provides a contrasting view against the backdrop or even the foreground of economic, social, and political order in Singapore that behind the veil of progress,

stability, and strong leadership, *cracks* in the total landscape start to appear.

It appears that throughout the videos examined in this paper, the text suggests an alternative and that is by espousing the opposition. However, this may sound to be the weakest part of the counterdiscourse as it relies on the possibility of power substitution and not essentially on empowering the people. Parker (2005) stated that all politics is identity politics but this could end up also to being pathological and unwanted. He argued that:

It follows that one of the more problematic identities in today's identity politics may be one of the most common. What I have in mind is the identification of a group not in terms of a trait such as race or ethnicity or sexual orientation, but as a "minority" group—and, worse, the identification of an individual "member" of such a group as "a minority." The banality of the label blinds us to its significance. (p. 57)

In Parker's insightful analysis, identity politics in this context operates through essentialism, demonization, blame, and prejudice (2005, pp. 56–57). Amos Yee highlights a binary contrast of good and bad leadership and glorifies self-indulgent meaning of negated freedom, absent autonomous expression, bleak sense of justice, and happiness. This also on the other hand is exploited by the dominant discourse, which in a way exalts Singapore as bastion of democracy, model of economic prosperity and sustainability, beacon of academic excellence, champion of free trade and globalization, and site of open and multicultural harmony. Demonization is already self-explanatory in Amos Yee's videos while for the dominant social order it means punitive justice and legal restrictions for those considered as the "enemies" of the State. Blame and prejudice narrate the consequences of battling identity politics of the hegemony and the minority. Enmity or hostilities against each other fuel at the same time each other's stamina and drive yet ironically through and by this same system strengthen and complete the cycle of control, regularity, reward system, and pacification in the absence of any critical anomaly (economic

meltdown, social unrest, and dissatisfaction) and formidable political opposition. The leviathan of hegemonic political structure interpellates and fortifies the superstructure (which is the reverse of Marxian model) of economic and social systems. The videos therefore need not to be hysterical, emotional, and irrational in its techniques and tactics of presenting counterdiscourse. The opposition needs to start within the ranks of PAP. The opposition needs to breed new forms of oppositional discourse both in face-to-face and online platforms.

## Conclusion

Amos Yee's video1 has stirred protest among Christians who felt offended because Yee compared and suggested that Jesus was a dictator. Singaporean people were also outraged when Yee maligned the name, reputation, and life of Lee Kwan Yew and disrespected his death at the time when many were still grieving. Quoting *The Straits Time*: "Yee was found guilty on May 12 of making remarks intending to hurt the feelings of Christians in an expletive-laden video and of uploading an obscene image" (Hussain, 2015). He was jailed for four weeks. This, in effect, weakened the lucid and coherent parts of his arguments presented in his two videos. The manner and method of his counterdiscourse backfired and thus in return he lost the sympathy and alliance he sought for from his intended and/or ideal audience. The political goal as explicitly stated in video2 which was to vote for the opposition had a negative impact as it also "demonized" the process of presenting "opposing views" construed and emboldened in Yee's verbal-visual texts. And thus the inevitable happened:

A few days ago, on September 10, 2015, Singapore's ruling party, the People's Action Party (PAP), was voted into power once again with an unexpected 69.9% share of the vote. This was an almost 10% increase from its 60.1% share in the 2011 elections. The main opposition party, the Worker's Party (WP), lost one ward and is left with six seats in parliament. (Lakshmanan, 2015)

Analysts say that PAP had dominated the elections because of five reasons: (1) there were policy changes in cost of living, housing, transportation, and foreign workers; (2) Singapore celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary which gives credit to LKY and PAP; (3) death of LKY, whose legacy spans many generations of loyal and patriotic Singaporeans; (4) popularity of the prime minister who happens to be the son of LKY; and (5) skillful timing (Lakshmanan, 2015).

The dominant social order and the youths' *binding* relationship with this regime of social control through the Internet is a force to reckon with. It is the status quo. The cracks in the dominant discourse may not have yet the equal force to break the *monotony* of illiberal democracy (Mutalib, 2000) and political monolingualism (Rodan, 1998; Rodan, 2006 in Singapore. Bonding that accentuates political participation using online platforms remains a singular act of the minority and of the opposition, which remained to be unnoticed, ignored, or to some extent ridiculed. The vision for autonomy and political activism to spark and initiate change is clouded by a pathological identity politics (Parker, 2005) as shown in the two videos analyzed using critical discourse analysis. It sensationalizes the counterdiscourse and that in the end bemoans the lack of sympathy and initiatives of the youths to participate in offline and online political activities. Yet to be optimistic about it, the youths play a major role in transforming the dominant discourse from binding and monotony towards a critical *bonding and autonomy within a plethora of all possible counterdiscourse*.

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