



# SOCIAL MEDIA IN A CRISIS – EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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**S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL  
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NATIONAL SECURITY  
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# **SOCIAL MEDIA IN A CRISIS – EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

**REPORT ON THE WORKSHOP ORGANISED BY  
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# CONTENTS PAGE

<b>1. Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Opening Remarks</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3. Panel One – The Psychology of Social Media Users</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4. Panel Two – Collaborating with Social Media Influencers</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>5. Lunch Lecture – Social Media in a Crisis: Learning Lessons from the 2011 Civil Disturbances in England</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>6. Panel Three – Government Agencies and Online Credibility</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>7. Panel Four – Social Media in a Crisis: Case Studies</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>8. Workshop Agenda</b>	<b>24</b>

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*This report summarises the proceedings of the conference as interpreted by the assigned rapporteurs and editor of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this report.*

*The conference adheres to a variation of the Chatham House rule. Accordingly, beyond the points expressed in the prepared papers, no attributions have been included in this conference report.*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Welcome Remarks

*Kumar Ramakrishna, Head, Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS), RSIS, NTU*

**Kumar Ramakrishna** observed that from the point of view of strategic and particularly crisis communication, social media, at times, could be a double-edged sword. On one hand, social media, when skilfully used, could enhance the reputation and image of governments and other organisations, and could even help calm social tensions. On the other hand, social media could also create a crisis and make it even worse. Developing strategies and policies on how best to use social media in a crisis was, therefore, extremely challenging. In light of this, the *Social Media in a Crisis* workshop sought to make sense of what was happening in the social media domain in relation to crisis communication. To that end, the organisers brought together local and foreign experts from government, academia, industry and civil society to share their thoughts and insights on the issue. The workshop also aimed to serve as a forum where participants could share the expertise and knowledge of the speakers and each other.

## Panel One – The Psychology of Social Media Users

### Introduction

The panel discussed various psychological aspects of social media users to ascertain the thought and behavioural characteristics of such individuals.

### Plausibility, Trust and Belief: An Overview of Rumour Research and Implications for Government Communications Efforts

*Gregory Dalziel, Researcher, Global Security Research Institute (G-SEC), Keio University (Japan)*

**Gregory Dalziel** discussed how humans processed information to form beliefs as well as how they managed rumours in the digital age. With regard to beliefs, some researchers have suggested that people, in general, tended to believe in ideas they easily comprehended as quickly as they believed in objects that they saw. While the rejection of such beliefs could certainly occur, this would happen only at a later stage and would require

more effort to accomplish. With regard to rumours, Dalziel observed that they were: (a) not inherently false; (b) the outcome of the collective sense-making process; (c) a method of categorising information; and (d) meant to generate understanding to motivate action. Dalziel argued that individuals should not be regarded as mere passive consumers of rumours but were in fact able to discern between accurate and inaccurate information.

### Gratifications, Collective Self-esteem, Online Emotional Openness, and Traitlike Communication Apprehension as Predictors of Facebook Uses

*Nick Zhang Yin, PhD. Candidate and Part-time Lecturer, School of Journalism and Communication, Chinese University of Hong Kong*

**Nick Zhang Yin** discussed his study on whether and how gratifications and psychological traits affected an individual's Facebook usage. His findings showed that individuals obtained six types of gratification by using Facebook: (a) social surveillance, i.e. people using Facebook to observe others; (b) recognition-gaining, i.e. gaining a level of recognition which reinforces their self-identity; (c) emotional support where people can feel that they are not alone; (d) entertainment; (e) network extension, i.e. to be able to know more people; and (f) network maintenance where Facebook was used to maintain the current network of acquaintances. Zhang concluded that individuals exhibiting different psychological variances would perceive different gratifications from using Facebook, which in turn, influenced their usage behaviour.

### Conversations in the Blogosphere in the 2011 GE: What can be Learned about Social Media users?

*Natalie Pang, Assistant Professor, Division of Information Studies, Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, College of Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences, NTU*

**Natalie Pang** presented her research findings into various blogs, Facebook and Twitter messages during the 2011 General Elections in Singapore. She observed that social media had become a conduit and platform for discussing contemporary issues and events that were of great concern to Singaporeans. Pang found that in many instances events that generated significant controversy

were instrumental in guiding online discourse. Moreover, social media users were not content just to comment on controversial events, they expected engagement in the form of responses from the responsible government department and/or Minister. Pang's research also showed that several users had become online opinion leaders, and were using social media to influence and motivate others. These users had attained online celebrity status, with distinctive styles, cultural ethos and their own community of fans.

### **Youth, Radicalisation and the Influence of Social Media**

*Thomas K. Samuel, Director, Research and Publications Division, Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT)*

**Thomas K. Samuel** observed that the internet and social media had become key mediums through which terrorist organisations reached out to young people. The unregulated online environment enabled terrorist narratives to be communicated with ease and reinforced through e-magazines, chat rooms, Twitter, Facebook and other social media channels. Youths were particularly vulnerable to online radicalisation because: (a) they were prone to risk-taking; (b) they were emotionally-intense; (c) friends had more influence than family; (d) they were highly contemptuous of hypocrisy and superficiality of governments (domestic and foreign); and (e) they were in search of their identity. It was for these reasons that terrorist groups and terrorist narratives were often appealing to young people. To address this, Samuel suggested that youths should be provided with information that factually countered terrorists' arguments, and that the effectiveness of non-violence in attaining political objectives be emphasised. Counter narratives stressing that political violence was socially unacceptable should also be developed and promoted. Furthermore, youth should be taught and encouraged to think critically, and how to assess the information they received through the internet and social media.

## **Panel Two – Collaborating with Social Media Influencers**

### **Introduction**

Marketing and Public Relations (PR) professionals have long recognised and leveraged the persuasive power of influencers. It might be useful for government agencies to collaborate with social media influencers in order to get their message across more effectively. The speakers on this panel offered insights on how this could be accomplished.

### **Social Media Influencers in Singapore: Who are they? And are they Really Influential?**

*Syed Hyder, Social Media Consultant, Brandtology (A Media Monitors Company)*

**Syed Hyder** observed that in recent times the opinion of some netizens were actively being sought by other social media users to help them make decisions. These social media influencers were highly influential; however, collaborating with them could sometimes prove challenging. Hyder recommended a four-step approach to address the challenges: First, adequate planning was crucial. At this stage it was important to consider: (a) how audiences perceived the influencer; (b) the potential alignment between one's organisation and the influencer; (c) the authenticity of one's relationship with the influencer; (d) the potential impact of the influencer's content; (e) the medium(s) used by the influencer; (f) how audiences consumed the content; and (g) the engagement patterns of the influencer. Second, the devised strategy had to be executed carefully. Third, the results from the engagement had to be thoroughly analysed, and finally, the strategy had to be evaluated and tweaked if necessary. The key takeaway was that both parties must perceive value in the collaboration/partnership for it to work.

### **Success and Challenges of an Ordinary Singaporean Blogger: My Story**

*Alan Tang aka Gintai, Blogger, Gintai.Wordpress.com*

**Alan Tang**, better known by his *nom de guerre* Gintai, spoke about his experiences and challenges as a blogger. A train driver by profession, Tang began his blog *gintai.wordpress.com* on 20 October 2011. The blog discussed current affairs and issues/events that interested him and shared inspirational quotes, interesting jokes, stories, anecdotes and/or observations. Tang's

breakthrough occurred in December 2011 when his blog post pertaining to the two major train disruptions was re-posted on several websites. Tang believed that his strong following was due to the sincerity and truthfulness of his posts, and also because he wrote concisely, discussed topical issues, used correct grammar and backed up his claims with evidence. Tang was not immune to criticism and flaming. He has been insulted and condemned, especially when his views were perceived to be in line with the Government's. Tang advised organisations not to ignore social media users especially when it related to disagreement and/or contentious issues. This was because the negative post(s) by the aggrieved social media user could adversely affect the organisation's reputation. The organisation should in fact contact the social media user and attempt to resolve the issue amicably.

### **Lunch Lecture: Social Media in a Crisis: Learning Lessons from the 2011 Civil Disturbances in England**

*Sir David Omand GCB, Professor, Department of War Studies, King's College London*

**Sir David Omand** observed that the London riots were a prime example of how social media could be used negatively and positively. While social media was used to mobilise and organise mobs that attacked several public buildings, the police were also able to use social media to prevent crime, investigate crime and maintain public order in several areas. Two key lessons drawn from the incident were: (a) speed and effective targeting by police of the mobilisation efforts of the activists was critical; and (b) police forces that mobilised rapidly and had the intelligence to act pre-emptively, fared best. Sir David argued that social media had now become an accepted source of intelligence, and social media analytics were useful for that purpose. Several analytical tools were subsequently identified: (a) Multimedia Analysis; (b) Automated Entity Extraction; (c) Multilingual Analysis; (d) Geo-coding; (e) Semantic Search; (f) Sentiment Analysis; (g) Social Network Analysis; and (h) Familiar User Environment.

### **Panel Three – Government Agencies and Online Credibility**

#### **Introduction**

As government agencies were not always perceived as credible in the online domain, it was imperative for them to enhance their online credibility. The panellists discussed various strategies for doing so.

#### **Strategies to Assist Government Agencies Enhance their Credibility on Social Media**

*Bhavani K., Managing Director, International PR Training Pte Ltd.*

**Bhavani K.** argued that although the Government was using social media to reach out to the public, agencies were still adopting a traditional approach to public communication, which entailed a one-way, top-down method of communicating. To better engage the public, she opined that government agencies should use social media channels to explain issues and policies to individuals, and to engage them in more meaningful discussions and conversations. She suggested that a social media strategy for government agencies should involve: (a) determining the goals; (b) determining the target audience; (c) reviewing existing channels; (d) deciding on the messages; (e) choosing the best social media channels to reach the target audience; (f) providing good content; and (g) building and maintaining relationships. Bhavani also suggested that in order to enhance the online credibility of government agencies, they should: (a) increase social media presence; (b) build good-will and relationships before a crisis hits; and (c) provide content that was relevant, up-to-date and engaging of citizens. In times of crisis, it was imperative to provide timely updates to the public, to keep messages succinct, frame content that would make it appealing to the audience, and address untruths and misinformation quickly. It was also necessary to empower crisis managers on the ground to devote more resources to social media efforts, train staff with the right skills and empower junior staff to respond to certain queries and issues.

## **Government and Online Citizen Engagement: Opportunities, Risks and Challenges<sup>1</sup>**

*Syed Hyder, Social Media Consultant, Brandtology (A Media Monitors Company)*

**Syed Hyder** argued that Online Citizen Engagement (OCE) afforded many opportunities to government agencies, and in particular, the ability to connect with individuals who were now more open to connecting with the Government. This new development enabled government agencies to better understand citizens, improve governance and assure the public that they were responsive. The risks associated with OCE included: (a) slap backs; (b) not responding quickly enough; and (c) letting netizens become the primary sources of public information and dictating the message. According to Hyder, such risks were mitigated primarily through thorough analysis, and having an appreciation and deeper understanding of the social media domain. The challenges related to OCE included: (a) dealing with the dissonance that emerges from a perceived lack of communication; (b) changing people's perceptions of government organisations; (c) upgrading engagement channels; and (d) upgrading engagement strategies. To overcome these challenges, Hyder suggested that organisations needed to align themselves with social media influencers and capitalise on their considerable persuasive power. He also reiterated the need and usefulness of employing social media analytics for that purpose.

## **Social Media, Crisis Communication and Reputation Management<sup>2</sup>**

*Melvin Yuan, Founder of Social Business Consultancy – Omnifluence; Co-founder of Indoor Positioning Company – YFind Technologies*

**Melvin Yuan** argued that action management had replaced reputation management as a viable strategy in contemporary times. In an era of radical conspiracy, most organisations had little choice but to operate with as much transparency as possible. People were getting smarter; hence, it was clear that in order to effectively manage an organisation's reputation its actions had to be aligned with the public good. Yuan said the key to managing crisis communication and organisational reputation was

to focus on conversation and collaboration; people did not want to simply listen to your story but rather, they wanted to be part of the story with their own opinions and solutions. Yuan believed that conventional wisdom about social media was distorted, distracting and disempowering. Thinking about platforms like Facebook simply as "social media" limited their potential to be used in developing new engagement strategies. Social media was just a change in the way people communicated with one other, and the key to managing reputations online was greater collaboration and involvement.

## **Panel Four – Social Media in a Crisis: Case Studies**

### **Introduction**

Case studies can often provide meaningful takeaways and important lessons for practitioners. For this reason the final panel of the Workshop was dedicated to analysing actual case studies from Malaysia, Singapore and Australia.

### **Social Media as a Mobilisation Tool: The Malaysian Experience with regard to Bersih**

*Surinderpal Kaur, Senior Lecturer, Department of English Language, University of Malaya*

In her presentation, **Surinderpal Kaur** discussed the ways and the extent to which social media was used as a tool for mobilisation and support-generation for the Bersih rallies in Malaysia. Kaur argued that Bersih, as a collective body, operated more at the meso (middle) level in terms of mobilisation. This involved articulating the issue, setting out a course of action and launching mobilisation efforts. A mix of traditional resources and social media was used in the mobilisation efforts. Bersih attracted a strong global following, with protests organised in 35 countries. Global Bersih was subsequently launched, with an official website and Facebook page that provided detailed instructions on how Malaysians abroad could organise rallies in their cities. Social media and the internet served as mediums for mobilisation and broadcasting, serving to 'spread the word' among Malaysians abroad and locally as well as encouraging many Malaysians to join the protests. This largely changed the dynamics of social mobilisation and activism in Malaysia.

<sup>1</sup> The original speaker, Jim Macnamara, Professor of Public Communication, University of Technology, Sydney, was unable to attend the workshop due to unforeseen circumstances.

<sup>2</sup> The original speaker, Bob Pickard, former President and Chief Executive Officer, Burson-Marsteller Asia Pacific, was unable to attend the workshop due to a personal emergency.



### **Social Media and Crisis Communication: The SCDF Way**

*Abdul Razak Abdul Raheem (Director) and Umar Abdul Ngalim (Senior Staff Officer), Public Affairs Department, Singapore Civil Defence Force*

According to **LTC Abdul Razak Abdul Raheem** and **CPT Umar Abdul Ngalim**, the SCDF aimed to accomplish three media objectives in relation to crisis communication. These were: (a) to be visible 24/7; (b) to be proactive through live coverage and constant provision of reliable information; and (c) to be swift. To realise these objectives, the SCDF adopted several media innovations, and incorporated social media in their communications arsenal. There were many advantages for doing so, but it was primarily to ensure that the SCDF's version of events was told. The SCDF's approach to social media engagement involved C.A.R.E. (Credibility, Accountability, Relationship, and Engagement). To build Credibility, the SCDF endeavours to be the first to break the news and in so doing, set the tone for the discussion. With regard to Accessibility, the SCDF is responsive and approachable, and its replies are easily understood. In terms of Relationship, the SCDF attempts to build meaningful relationships with the public. With regard to Engagement, the SCDF makes it a priority to continuously engage the public even during periods of calm.

### **The Queensland Floods: Practical Strategies and Approaches for using Social Media in a Disaster/Emergency**

*Kym Charlton, Director, Media and Public Affairs Branch, Queensland Police Service*

According to **Kym Charlton** the Queensland Police Service (QPS) used social media during the floods because it was the quickest and most effective way to disseminate important safety information to the public. Individuals who were directly and/or indirectly affected by the floods were able to access real-time and detailed information from any of the QPS social media channels. Before long the mainstream media began relying on the QPS' social media newsfeeds as their primary information source, and were even referring members of the public to the QPS' social media channels. To prevent the spread of rumours and misreporting from becoming "fact" in the mainstream media, the QPS put out information through its #mythbuster hashtag. Individuals also began sharing useful information with the QPS via their social media channels. This provided situational awareness for QPS officers in the disaster-affected locations who would otherwise have had no means of communication. Information-sharing has since continued in the wake of the floods.

## OPENING REMARKS



Welcoming the participants to what was a timely workshop on Effective Engagement of Social Media in a Crisis, **Kumar Ramakrishna** pointed out that one could not run away from social media nowadays. However, from the point of view of strategic and especially crisis communication, social media could at times be a double-edged sword. While social media, skilfully used, could enhance the reputation and image of governments and other organisations, and even help calm social tensions, that same social media could create a crisis and make it worse.

Referring to the controversial video trailer, *The Innocence of Muslims* that was disseminated worldwide on YouTube and caused a global uproar, he said the fact that the violent reactions to the video resulted in many deaths including that of the US Ambassador in Libya, was most sobering. It might well be the case that the majority of those protesters had not even see the video, but they had nevertheless reacted angrily and violently. Hence the psychology of social media users was an important subject to be discussed.

Also of interest was how government crisis communication employed social media. It had been noted that the Japanese Government's crisis communication in the wake of the March 2011 Fukushima disaster could have been improved. However, several organisations such as the Queensland Police Service and Singapore's SCDF had successfully utilised social media in crisis communication and emergency response. Lessons could be learned from these cases.

Ramakrishna observed that many governments had taken note of the vast potential of employing social media in getting their messages across effectively. The British Government in May 2012 had published a handbook for civil servants and government departments titled *Social Media Guidance for Civil Servants* to help them better engage online.

In Singapore, too, the Government has acknowledged the power of social media. For example, the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts and Civil Service College had taken initiatives like setting up the Media Literacy Council, the Government Social Media Directory, and running training programmes on social media use for civil servants.

This workshop generally aimed to study what was happening in the social media domain, and how to employ such media in crisis communication effectively. It also served to provide participants with a forum where they could tap the expertise and knowledge of the panellists as well as each another. There was a mix of speakers and participants from Singapore and overseas who came from government, academia, industry, and civil society.

The various panels would discuss the psychology of social media users, and why they believed and behaved the way they did; examine how to engage and even cooperate with social media influencers who possess the street credibility and thus the ability to shape attitudes online; address the crucial task of building and enhancing the online credibility of government agencies and how to enhance the impact of governmental social media in crisis situations; and share actual experiences from Malaysia, Australia and Singapore to derive important pointers of effective and not-so-effective use of social media.

Ramakrishna noted that the current CENS Distinguished Visiting Fellow, Sir David Omand, a former Head of National Security of the United Kingdom, and a Professor at King's College London, had agreed to share his observations of social media use during the 2011 Civil Disturbances in England. In closing, he wished the participants an intellectually stimulating workshop.

## PANEL ONE – THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

### Introduction

Increasing one's knowledge of how social media users think and what exercises their interest is essential when developing social media strategies as well as when engaging them online. The panellists discussed various psychological aspects related to social media users in order to gain fresh insights into the psyche of such individuals.

### Plausibility, Trust and Belief: An Overview of Rumour Research and Implications for Government Communications Efforts



In his presentation, **Gregory Dalziel** explored how humans dealt with information and managed rumours in the online environment. With regard to beliefs, some researchers have suggested that people, in general, tended to believe in the ideas they comprehend as quickly and automatically as they believe in the objects they see. While the rejection of such beliefs could certainly occur, this would happen only at a later stage, and would require more effort to accomplish. In relation to rumours, he observed that such information was: (a) not inherently false; (b) the outcome of the collective sense-making process; (c) a method of categorising information; and (d) meant to generate understandings to motivate action.

Dalziel argued that individuals should not be regarded as mere passive consumers of rumours but were able to discern between accurate and inaccurate information. Using the example of the Japanese tsunami, earthquake and resulting nuclear disaster to support his argument, he observed that while there were many rumours circulating, especially when the situation at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant worsened, many Japanese were actively trying to dispel these rumours and provide the correct information.

Dalziel also noted that the process of generating understanding of one's surroundings must not be thought of as a linear process. Rather, it was complicated, highly complex and often messy. Citing the findings of a research project conducted after the 2010 Chile earthquake, he noted that rumours and other suspicious information that were circulated, were often questioned and discredited more often than confirmed as truths. This demonstrated that individuals were not content to take available and existing information at face value, and were determined to find out what was actually happening. Also, they were highly capable of sifting out what was true and what was not.

Dalziel concluded by suggesting that private sector organisations and governments must guard against falling prey to rumours and incorrect and misleading information as it could adversely affect decision-making and lead, ultimately, to disastrous outcomes. Hence, he believed that the fear of 'super powered' individuals online and the power of social media must be tempered, as the resources of the government could be negatively employed if they misunderstood a situation.

## Gratifications, Collective Self-esteem, Online Emotional Openness, and Traitlike Communication Apprehension as Predictors of Facebook Uses



**Nick Zhang Yin** discussed his research on whether and how gratifications and psychological traits impacted an individual's Facebook usage. The study employed gratification theory as a theoretical basis, and was based on an analysis of 437 Facebook users in Hong Kong. The majority of these users were young (aged 21 – 30), female and came from diverse occupational backgrounds.

Zhang began by first explaining the terms *gratifications*, *collective self-esteem*, *online emotional openness*, and *traitlike communication apprehension*. According to gratification theory, individuals would actively seek out mass media and/or other new media, e.g. social media, to fulfil their expectations and satisfy their needs.

*Self-esteem* was identified as an important need, and belonging to a group, whether on or off line, was critical in that regard. This was because the value individuals placed on their social group enhanced their psychological status of being a member of that community, that is, their *collective self-esteem*. From previous psychological studies, collective self-esteem was shown to have direct effects on social media usage, with individuals who have stronger group identities tending to participate more on social media sites.

With regard to *online emotional openness*, this referred to the confidence and assertiveness in the expression of an individual who did not attempt to hide emotions or avoid discussions. Existing studies have suggested that heavy internet users are motivated to use the internet more frequently because of the opportunity and ability afforded to them to show affection to other users online.

*Traitlike communication apprehension* was defined as an individual's level of fear or anxiety towards real or anticipated communication with another individual. Through communicating via the internet, such users could express themselves without having to come face-to-face with their interlocutor(s), hence, the rationale for using the internet as a primary means of communication.

Zhang then discussed the results of his study, which showed that there were six types of gratifications individuals obtained by using Facebook: (a) social surveillance, i.e. people using Facebook to observe others; (b) recognition-gaining, i.e. gaining a level of recognition which reinforces their self-identity; (c) emotional support where people can feel that they are not alone; (d) entertainment; (e) network extension, i.e. to be able to know more people; and (f) network maintenance where Facebook was used to maintain the current network of acquaintances.

Zhang concluded by noting that the integrative nature and networking capacities of Facebook appeared to be the main reason why the site had become so popular. Also, the element of entertainment was highly important for social media users. Individuals exhibiting different psychological variances would perceive different gratifications from using Facebook, and this in turn, influences their usage behaviour.

## Conversations in the Blogosphere in the 2011 GE: What can be Learned about Social Media users?



**Natalie Pang** presented her research findings on communications via Facebook, blogs and Twitter during the Singapore General Elections in 2011. She observed that social media had become a conduit and platform for airing contentious views, discussing controversial events and debating issues. Pang found that in many instances, controversial events were central in shaping online discourse. Furthermore, social media users were not content simply to post content but also expected responses from the Government and/or the government agencies involved.

With regard to the view that online actions do not necessarily translate into offline actions – referred to as the phenomenon of ‘slacktivism’ – Pang argued that there was some value and potential in regarding online spaces as public spheres where users could interact with each other in a substantive way. Participation online was easy, and this had become increasingly so with the advances made in technology. Of significance was the fact that social media users in Singapore were not only consumers of information but were also actively generating information as well as deliberating between options and ultimately, making choices. In the course of her research, Pang collected a total of 794 blog posts during the 2011 election campaign period and analysed their content. She found that only 6 percent were posts which were put up for informational purposes compared to 72 percent of the posts which contained information from primary sources and 22 percent which contained information from secondary sources but with the opinions of the users attached to it. In short, more than 95 percent were actively engaging with issues. From

the research, it appeared that social media users sought legitimacy through their online deliberations of social issues. The research also showed that in the Singapore social media landscape, several users had become online opinion leaders, and were using social media to influence and motivate others. These users attained online celebrity status, with distinctive styles, cultural ethos and their own community of fans.

Pang concluded by stating that online discourse was an essential part of democracy; however social democracy was not just about permitting free speech but also about encouraging real participation, promoting accountability and accepting a plurality of views.

## Youth, Radicalisation and the Influence of Social Media



**Thomas K. Samuel** spoke on the issue of youth radicalisation through the internet and social media. Youths, he said, were highly susceptible to online radicalisation, and were an easy target for terrorist organisations due in part to several reasons: (a) they were prone to risk-taking; often requiring high stimulation and possessed a false sense of invulnerability. This could be due mainly to the different growth rate of the various components of their brains; (b) they were emotionally-intense, and usually experienced oscillations in thoughts, feelings and actions, which could result, ultimately, to feelings of low self-esteem; (c) friends were becoming increasingly important for social validation and social companionship became priorities for young people. There was also a shift from ‘parent interaction’ to ‘peer interaction’, which suggested that youth were more open to manipulation by their friends and/or those who they considered mentors; (d) the disdain and contempt for hypocrisy and superficiality of government

(local and international), which they perceive were involved in the perpetuation of social injustices; and (e) the search for identity.

Samuel observed that the internet had become pivotal to terrorist organisations' outreach efforts to young people. This could be seen in the way the internet was used by such organisations to mobilise, radicalise, train, offer support (e.g. fund-raising and friend-raising activities), conduct financial transactions, organise logistics, and carry out surveillance and operational communications. With regard to internet radicalisation, online social interactions through e-magazines, chat rooms, Twitter, Facebook and other social media channels provided young people with instant interactivity in an unregulated environment. Also, participants in online communities could find their opinions constantly echoed back to them (the echo chamber effect), which further reinforced their beliefs however negative or stereotypical. There was consequently a strong likelihood that internet radicalisation could result in self-radicalisation.

Samuel also pointed out that many terrorist organisations were competent at crafting narratives to appeal to young people. Such narratives usually focused on injustices around the world that were attributable to a particular group, state or entity, and were often accompanied by videos to create a visual impact and give further credence to the message. The organisations would then appeal to the young viewers to take some form of action, usually violent action, to combat the real or perceived injustices. Such calls to violence were often legitimised by reference to religious texts, and acts of violence were strongly advocated as the only solution to the problem.

In light of this, Samuel argued that the terrorists' narrative should be actively challenged. Youths should be provided with information that showed the fallacy of the terrorists' arguments, and made to understand that political objectives were often only achieved through

non-violence. Counter narratives stressing that resorting to violence was socially unacceptable should also be developed, and youth should be encouraged to think critically and learn how to discern between the multitude of views online.

Samuel concluded by offering some suggestions that governments could use to combat internet radicalisation. These included: (a) creating awareness of the plight of the disadvantaged or targeted group, state or entity; (b) meeting the immediate needs of the people through humanitarian work; (c) shaming the enemy through public campaigns; (d) seeking support and solidarity from social media users; and (e) building soldiers of peace. Such activities could leverage various social media platforms to reach young people. It was also imperative to engage the youth, and to teach them how to question and challenge terrorist narratives and the motives behind terrorist organisations.

## **Discussion**

Asked which element was the strongest predictor of Facebook usage, a speaker replied that the highest predictor of Facebook usage appeared to be network maintenance and entertainment.

Asked whether there were ways to deal with netizens who frequently publish offensive posts, i.e. trolling, a speaker replied that different social media platforms attracted different users but in general, the online community was self-regulating, and trolls were often chastised and ostracised by other netizens.

As to whether self-radicalised youths displayed a predisposition towards violence prior to their radicalisation, a speaker replied that this premise did not appear to be the case; many led ordinary lives prior to radicalisation and many others possessed clean records prior to their involvement with terrorist organisations.

## PANEL TWO – COLLABORATING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

### Introduction

Marketing and Public Relations (PR) professionals have long recognised and leveraged the persuasive power of influencers. As such, it might be useful for government agencies to collaborate with social media influencers in order to get their message across more effectively. The speakers on this panel offered insights on how this could be accomplished.

### Social Media Influencers in Singapore: Who are they? And are they Really Influential?



**Syed Hyder** began his presentation by reminding the audience how almost everyone sought the advice of friends and/or family before making important decisions regarding purchases of electronic devices, apparel, automobiles and even vacations. Most of those whose advice was sought had a certain position and/or were knowledgeable of the product/service we were seeking information about, or a combination of both. Such individuals could not only influence our purchase decisions but could sometimes also influence our life choices, thus such social influencers were of great importance.

The same was true in the social media domain; there were individuals whose opinions were actively sought by other social media users to help them make important decisions. Such 'social media influencers' were indeed influential. However, Hyder pointed out, social media influencers could be a double-edged sword for organisations; on one hand, their positive reviews about the company, its products and services, which were virtually free of charge, could

enhance the organisation's reputation; on the other hand, negative reviews or sometimes misinformed assessments could negatively affect the organisation significantly.

In Singapore, the popular social media influencers included: (a) Mr Brown; (b) Xia Xue; (c) Ryan Ong (Moneysmart.sg); and (d) Pat Law (blankanvas.bypatlaw.com). The social media platforms used primarily by these social media influencers included: (a) Facebook – primarily to post pictures and text; (b) Twitter – for fast and short comments; and (c) blogs – for longer and more elaborate articles.

On the question of how best to engage social influencers, Hyder recommended a four-step approach. Firstly, any engagement had to start with careful planning. Here it was important to consider: (a) how audiences perceived the influencer; (b) the potential alignment between one's organisation and the influencer; (c) the authenticity of one's relationship with the influencer; (d) the potential impact of the influencer's content; (e) the medium(s) used by the influencer; (f) how audiences consumed the content; and (g) the engagement patterns of the influencer. Secondly, the devised strategy needed to be executed. Thirdly, the results from the engagement had to be thoroughly analysed, and finally, the strategy evaluated and tweaked if necessary.

Hyder then went on to discuss what services Brandtology offered in terms of social media analytics. The company monitors Facebook, Twitter and Weibo, and carries out social assets analyses. These included the number of retweets and mentions, analysis of positive or negative mentions, the identity of the retweeters as well as their level of influence. Other services included the identification of engageable and the most appropriate social media influencers for a given client.

Hyder concluded by suggesting that for successful collaboration with social media influencers to occur, communicators should identify what purpose the collaboration would ultimately serve. They should then set the metrics for success; find the best influencer for the organisation's needs; analyse available data to improve collaboration with the influencer; enrich the influencer's experience with their organisation and finally, turn the influencer into an advocate.

## Success and Challenges of an Ordinary Singaporean Blogger: My Story



**Alan Tang**, better known by his *nom de guerre* Gintai, spoke about his experiences and challenges as a blogger. Tang is a SMRT train officer by profession, and has been for 17 years. Prior to that, he was a police officer, and had about four years of investigation experience.

Tang started his blog *gintai.wordpress.com* on 20 October 2011. His blog discusses current affairs and miscellaneous issues/events that are of interest to him. He also shares inspirational quotes, interesting jokes, stories, anecdotes or observations on his blog. Tang's breakthrough occurred in December 2011 when he blogged about the two major train disruptions and his experiences as a train officer. His blog post was re-posted on several websites, and garnered around 35,000 hits. He attributed the popularity of his blog post to the curiosity Singaporeans have for train officers.

Tang believed that his strong following was due to the sincerity and truthfulness of his posts, underscoring that he "writes from the heart and straight from the shoulder". He also writes concisely, discusses topical issues, uses correct grammar and backs up claims with evidence.

Tang uses Facebook and Twitter primarily, and synchronises these accounts such that whenever he publishes a new post on his blog, an automatic Tweet is sent, and his Facebook-page is updated simultaneously.

Tang's post "Is this my Singapore, my home, my country?" is his most successful post to date. In this post, he first discusses the increasing costs of public housing in Singapore and the difficulties that people from the lower strata of society face when they want to purchase public

housing. He then talks about ethnic relations in Singapore, and emphasises that Singaporeans, regardless of their ethnic and religious backgrounds, do get along well, but are discomforted by the seeming privileges afforded to permanent residents. The post went viral, and within three days, it garnered 150,000 hits. A number of netizens also posted it on the Facebook pages of the Prime Minister, a Minister of State and the Minister for Foreign Affairs who subsequently invited him for a private discussion.

Tang is not immune to criticism and flaming. He has been insulted and condemned, especially when his opinions are perceived to be in line with the Government's view. Nevertheless, he keeps the 'comments' section on his blog open and only bars comments that are racist and/or defamatory so as to engage his readers more effectively.

Tang concluded by advising organisations not to ignore social media users especially when it relates to disagreement and/or contentious issues. This was because the negative post(s) by the aggrieved social media user could adversely affect the organisation's reputation. Rather, the organisation should contact the social media user and attempt to resolve the issue.

### Discussion

A participant asked both speakers how the Government could better cooperate with social media influencers. One responded that many bloggers would be willing to collaborate with the authorities especially in times of crisis and emergencies. However, their assistance would be premised on the condition that it would not be used to further political objectives. He also stressed that as social media influencers, bloggers should act responsibly and help de-escalate volatile situations by refraining from spreading rumours and/or false information. Another suggested that the Government should adopt the approach of the private sector and identify which social media influencers could be aligned with the Government's needs.

Another participant asked if SMRT had a position on Tang's blogging activities, and if SMRT employed social media in its public communications. A speaker said he was unaware of SMRT's official position on his blog or his blogging activities. In relation to SMRT's social media usage, he responded that the company had started using Twitter after the train disruptions last year and had a Facebook account.



## LUNCH LECTURE:

### SOCIAL MEDIA IN A CRISIS: LEARNING LESSONS FROM THE 2011 CIVIL DISTURBANCES IN ENGLAND



**Sir David Omand** began his presentation by identifying the basic characteristics and nature of social media. Social media was much faster than traditional media, it broke down the limitations of contiguity, and it facilitated various forms of communication: (a) one-to-one; (b) one-to-many; (c) many-to-many; and (d) many-to-one. While social media had positive impacts on democracy, such as crisis and incident reporting by ‘citizen-journalists’, there was also a dark side to its usage. Paedophiles and extremists, for example, often misused the anonymity of cyberspace to advance their agendas. In addition, cyberbullying had become a major problem. Furthermore, flash mobs and violent protests could be organised and mobilised more easily through social media channels.

The shooting of Mark Duggan on 4 August 2011 triggered the UK riots of 2011 when rumours spread that Duggan was ‘executed’ by the police. Social media played an important role as it facilitated the organisation of mobs that attacked several public buildings. Petty theft and looting was widespread, and investigations revealed that the perpetrators were individuals who had no criminal record but had capitalised on the lack of police presence to run amok. The riots left 5 people dead, 300 police officers injured, 2,584 commercial premises damaged, and 231 domestic properties attacked. The financial costs were estimated to be around GBP 300-400 million.

While social media was used to commit crime, the police were also able to use social media positively to prevent crime, investigate crime and maintain public order in several districts. During the riots, the police intercepted many social media conversations, and used the intelligence to deploy officers to the troubled areas. As a result, several riots were averted. The public also used social media to convey information and intelligence to the police. After the riots, the police utilised social media to disseminate pictures of the rioters and looters that CCTV cameras had captured to members of the public, which helped with the investigations.

To Sir David, the lessons that were drawn from the London riots included: (a) speed and effective targeting by police of the mobilisation efforts of the activists was critical – the rioters were able to use social media more efficiently and effectively than the police, and were thus able to stay one step ahead of them; and (b) police forces that mobilised rapidly, and had the intelligence to act pre-emptively, fared best – Scotland for example experienced no disturbances despite having similar trigger points (ethnic/unemployment) with London. Also, in dealing with security at the 2012 Olympics, Scotland Yard had run an advanced ‘All Source’ Hub (ASH) to monitor social media to gather intelligence and prepare for possible disturbances, which seemed to be effective.

Sir David observed that social media had now become an accepted source of intelligence, and social media analytics were instrumental for that purpose. Several analytical tools identified were: (a) Multimedia Analysis – searches systems identifying links in audio/video, text and data images and stores in a data repository; (b) Automated Entity Extraction – multi-lingual tool to identify people, organisations and concepts; (c) Multilingual Analysis – interrogates languages through analysis of data; (d) Geo-coding – converts names and places into geographic locations; (e) Semantic Search –

identifies word connections from various sources and following analysis helps the development of actionable products; (f) Sentiment Analysis – a word search tool identifying emotional states. Advanced systems can understand different words in varying contexts; (g) Social Network Analysis – identifies key players (ringleaders) and structures of online “chatter”; and (h) Familiar User Environment – a formatting tool to enable an intelligence analyst to post material in a format that police officers will understand.

There were inevitable privacy concerns related to the gathering of social media intelligence. The Home Office was developing a legal and policy framework to address this issue. While open Twitter feeds and/or public information could be used without restrictions, there were problems when attempting to gather information from closed or private social media channels, e.g. Facebook groups. In these circumstances, it has been suggested that authorisation be sought from a senior police officer. In the case involving Blackberry messages or PIN-encrypted messages, it was suggested that authorisation be sought from a higher-ranking official such as the Home Secretary.

## Discussion

A participant asked whether the lessons learned from the London riots were simply to build up capabilities in the use of social media and social media intelligence gathering. The speaker responded that if the police had reached out to the family of Mark Duggan earlier, the riots could probably have been prevented. Hence, proactive communication was just as important as increasing one’s technological expertise.

Another participant who had studied the London riots in detail, commented that she found it interesting that a simple but effective tool in the form of social media was empowering police officers to take preventive action. Police officers who threatened with arrest of those who called for riots or lootings on blogs or Twitter by e-mail proved very successful as a deterrent.

## PANEL THREE – GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND ONLINE CREDIBILITY

### Introduction

As many practitioners in the public sector were aware, government agencies were not always perceived as credible in the online domain. It was therefore imperative for government agencies to enhance their online credibility significantly. The panellists discussed various strategies for doing so.

### Strategies to Assist Government Agencies Enhance their Credibility on Social Media



**Bhavani K.** observed that the Singapore Government has been encouraging all its agencies to use social media platforms to engage the public. To date, 105 government agencies use Facebook, 22 blogs, 43 Twitter and 38 YouTube. More than 60 percent of government agencies have a social media presence to date. For example, the Singapore Police Force was one of the early adopters of YouTube and Facebook. It used these channels to reach out to the community and disseminate information, for instance on road closures, crime prevention approaches, road and personal safety campaigns, career and recruitment opportunities and so on. The Ministries of National Development, Health, and Manpower have set

up blogs that are written by the responsible Ministers themselves so that they can present their perspectives on policy issues, and these types of blogs have been gaining in popularity.

Although the Government was using social media to reach out to the public quite extensively, Bhavani opined that the agencies were still adopting a traditional model of public communication, characterised by a one-way, top-down method of communicating, e.g. press releases. To engage the public, government agencies should use social media channels to explain issues and policies to citizens, and engage them in more meaningful discussions and conversations.

Bhavani suggested several ideas that government agencies could adopt in developing a social media strategy. These were: (a) determine the goals; (b) determine the target audience; (c) review existing channels; (d) decide on the messages; (e) choose the best social media channels to reach the target audience; (f) provide good content; and (g) build and maintain relationships.

Bhavani also suggested several strategies to enhance the online credibility of government agencies. There were: (a) increase social media presence; (b) build good-will and relationships before a crisis hits; and (c) provide content that was relevant, up-to-date and engaging. In times of crisis, it was imperative to provide timely updates to the public, to keep messages succinct, frame content in a way that would make it more appealing to the audience, and address untruths and misinformation quickly. It was also necessary to empower crisis managers on the ground to devote more resources to social media efforts, train staff with the right skills, and empower junior staff to respond to selected queries and issues.

## Government and Online Citizen Engagement: Opportunities, Risks and Challenges<sup>1</sup>



**Syed Hyder** argued that Online Citizen Engagement (OCE) presented many opportunities for government agencies. The biggest opportunity, at present, was the ability to connect with a public who were now more open to connecting with the Government. This opportunity to connect, in turn, presented further opportunities for government agencies to better-understand citizens, improve governance and to underscore the responsiveness of agencies to citizen needs.

OCE also presented opportunities to mitigate unforeseen circumstances, such as the SMRT disruption, as it enabled the responsible agency to respond to online reactions almost instantaneously. Government agencies should be mindful of the nature and characteristics of the new generation of citizens, and should therefore endeavour to use social media to win over critics and dissenters. A useful strategy for agencies is to try and win a social media influencer over as this would encourage other influencers to do likewise and possibly assist the agency get its message across.

The risks associated with OCE included: (a) slap backs; (b) not responding quickly enough; and (c) letting netizens become the primary sources of public information and dictating the message. According to Hyder, such risks were mitigated primarily through thorough analysis, and having an appreciation and deeper understanding of the social media domain. For example, responsiveness was essential in de-escalating several crises such as the MRT disruptions, flash floods, and so on.

In addition, it would be useful to cultivate relationships with netizens who shared similar views and/or positions. Also, while responding quickly to negative views was crucial, emphasising positive views and sentiments were just as important. The positive silent majority were starting to engage a lot more, and as such, it was useful to actively engage them.

The challenges related to OCE included: (a) dealing with the dissonance that arose from a perceived lack of communication; (b) changing people's perceptions of government agencies; (c) upgrading engagement channels; and (d) upgrading engagement strategies. To overcome these challenges, Hyder suggested that organisations needed to align themselves with social media influencers, and capitalise on their considerable persuasive power. He also reiterated the need and usefulness of employing social media analytics for that purpose.

<sup>1</sup> The original speaker, Jim Macnamara, Professor of Public Communication, University of Technology, Sydney, was unable to attend the workshop due to unforeseen circumstances.

## Social Media, Crisis Communication and Reputation Management<sup>2</sup>



**Melvin Yuan** argued that in contemporary times action management had replaced reputation management as a more viable strategy. He observed that as we lived in an era of radical conspiracy, most organisations had little choice but to operate with as much transparency as possible. People were getting smarter; hence, it was clear that in order to effectively manage an organisation's reputation, its actions had to be aligned with the public good.

According to Yuan, a key to managing crisis communication and organisational reputation was to focus on 'conversation' and 'collaboration' rather than just 'communication'. People, he said, do not simply want to listen to your story; they want to be part of your story with their own opinions and solutions. For example, in the March 2011 tsunami and nuclear disaster in Japan, citizens were helping each other get fuel and food as they wanted to be part of the solution. The biggest opportunity presented by social media is to harness the wisdom of the crowds.

Yuan believed that conventional wisdom about social media is distorted, distracting and disempowering. Thinking about platforms like Facebook simply as 'social media', limited their potential to be used creatively to develop new engagement strategies. Social media was, arguably, just a change in the way individuals communicated with each other, and the key to managing reputations online was greater collaboration and involvement.

## Discussion

A participant wanted to know whether junior public officers should be allowed to post on their personal social media pages. He also wanted to know if such junior officers should be given more power to respond to queries on official blogs or Facebook pages. In response to the first part of the question, a speaker opined that it was prudent to be conservative, and restrict junior officers from posting on their personal social media pages. This was because it was often difficult to clearly distinguish between one's personal and official positions. In response to the second part of the question, the speaker felt that junior officers should be empowered to respond; however, it was essential that they were taught how to respond effectively, and that they understood the implications their responses could have on the organisation's reputation.

Another participant wondered how practitioners should deal with misinformation or hostility without being perceived as defensive. A speaker responded that if the issue pertained to misinformation, then the responder should simply address the issue head-on and attempt to dispel and correct the view. The responder would only be seen as defensive if the 'misinformation' was, in fact, true.

A participant asked how government agencies could be more assertive in standing firm on their positions and dealing with the belligerent minority. It was opined that there were few 'real' issues that such belligerent minorities could raise that would strongly influence the majority. The key was to examine the issues that caused contention rather than focus on the disgruntled individual(s). The reality was that some individuals would always be dissatisfied and angry, but the majority were not, and in fact, disliked Negative Nancys. Hence, it would be more useful to focus communication strategies on the positives.

<sup>2</sup> The original speaker, Bob Pickard, former President and Chief Executive Officer, Burson-Marsteller Asia Pacific, was unable to attend the workshop due to a personal emergency.

## PANEL FOUR – SOCIAL MEDIA IN A CRISIS: CASE STUDIES

### Introduction

Case studies can often provide meaningful takeaways and important lessons for practitioners. For this reason the final panel of the Workshop was dedicated to analysing actual case studies from Malaysia, Singapore and Australia.

### Social Media as a Mobilisation Tool: The Malaysian Experience with regard to Bersih



In her presentation, **Surinderpal Kaur** discussed the ways and the extent to which social media was used as a tool for mobilisation and support-generation for the Bersih rallies in Malaysia. She first provided the background to Bersih, which was a loose coalition of NGOs and organisations that came together to demand clean, fair and free elections.

The first Bersih rally was held in 2007, and this was followed by a much bigger rally in 2011, which came to be known as Bersih 2.0. Its success led to the organisation of Bersih 3.0 in 2012. Bersih 3.0 was better organised but more complex as the Green movement and the opposition parties had decided to get involved. Nevertheless, the main demands of Bersih remained more or less unchanged: (a) cleaning of the electoral roll; (b) reformation of the postal ballot;

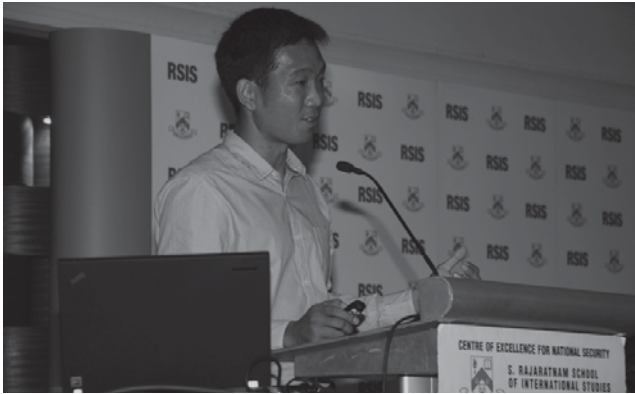
(c) using indelible ink; (d) free and fair access to media; (e) minimum 21 days of campaign period; (f) strengthening public institutions; (g) stopping corruption; and (h) stopping dirty politics.

Kaur argued that Bersih, as a collective body, operated more at the meso (middle) level in terms of mobilisation. This involved articulating the issue, setting out a course of action and launching mobilisation efforts. A mix of traditional resources and social media were used in the mobilisation efforts, e.g. news releases, leaflets, word-of-mouth promotions, press conferences in conjunction with websites and Facebook.

Bersih soon attracted a strong global following, with protests organised in 35 countries. Global Bersih was subsequently launched with an official website and Facebook page that provided detailed instructions on how Malaysians abroad could organise rallies in their cities. Thus, social media and the internet served as mediums for mobilisation and broadcasting in that they served to 'spread the word' amongst Malaysians abroad and locally, as well as encouraged Malaysians to join the protests. This largely changed the dynamics of social mobilisation and activism in Malaysia.

Kaur believed that social media provided enormous leverage for the Bersih rallies. The speed and interactivity of social media provided the means for broadcast and mobilisation to occur. Social media used alongside other more traditional resources for mobilisation was highly effective. The cross-over effects from traditional media and various social media platforms provided greater leverage, and the availability of social media as a resource and the efficacy of actors in using social media effectively was critical to the successful use of social media as a tool for mobilisation.

## Social Media and Crisis Communication: The SCDF Way



**Abdul Razak Abdul Raheem** and **Umar Abdul Ngalim** began their presentation by giving a brief overview of the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF). SCDF is a uniformed organisation under the purview of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Its main role is to provide fire-fighting, rescue and emergency ambulance services, responding to hazardous material incidents, as well as to formulate, implement and enforce regulations on fire safety and civil defence shelter matters.

The SCDF aims to accomplish three media objectives in relation to crisis communication. These are: (a) to be visible 24/7; (b) to be proactive through live coverage and provision of regular and reliable information; and

(c) to be swift. To realise these objectives, the SCDF has adopted several media innovations, such as an on-site media team who can capture and broadcast audio/video footage of emergency operations, incidents and other related activities in real-time from ground-zero. It has also incorporated social media in their communications arsenal.

Umar Ngalim explained why and how social media was used in the SCDF's crisis communication strategy. He said that social media was a natural extension of the SCDF's existing crisis communication framework, and as such, its incorporation was a logical move. The SCDF is mindful of the intensified public scrutiny of its operations that has been brought about by the increased usage of social media. In light of this, it employs social media to provide first-hand accounts of incidents and other related issues in order to set the record straight and put online discussions into perspective. Even if social media users are the first to generate and disseminate news of an incident or emergency, it is critical that the SCDF issue a response so as to get their side of the story out.

The SCDF's approach to social media engagement involved C.A.R.E. (Credibility, Accountability, Relationship, and Engagement). To build Credibility, the SCDF endeavours to be the first to break the news and in so doing, set the tone for the discussion. The Bugis Downtown Line scaffolding collapse incident was a case in point, whereby the public received regular updates, videos and photos of SCDF response activities through Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. With regards to Accessibility, the SCDF is responsive and approachable, and its replies are composed in an easily-understood manner. In terms of Relationship, the SCDF attempts to build meaningful relationships with the public. With regard to Engagement, the SCDF makes it a priority to continuously engage the public even during periods of calm.

## The Queensland Floods: Practical Strategies and Approaches for using Social Media in a Disaster/Emergency



**Kym Charlton** spoke on the practical strategies and approaches for using social media in a disaster. She used the Queensland Police Service's (QPS) social media response during the Queensland floods as a case study. The lessons learnt from the Mumbai bombings and various emergencies and disasters around the world had underscored the necessity for law enforcement agencies and/or emergency services to be proficient in the use of social media for emergency preparedness and disaster relief. This motivated the QPS Media and Public Affairs Branch to begin trials in May 2010 of using Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The objectives were to: (a) claim social media presence; (b) engage in a two-way conversation between the QPS and the public; and (c) develop an online community of followers before a disaster occurred.

In January 2011, a flash flood hit Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley in Queensland. Following this, significant flooding occurred in Ipswich and Brisbane. Subsequently, 200,000 Queenslanders were flood-affected and three-quarters of the state was disaster-declared.

According to Charlton, the QPS used social media during the Queensland floods because it was the quickest and most effective way to disseminate important safety information to the public. Moreover, it was felt that the mainstream media was not particularly reliable. Hence, by exclusively using their social media channels, the QPS was able to disseminate information quickly without relying on the mainstream media. Individuals who were directly and/or indirectly affected by the floods were able to access real-time and detailed information from any of the QPS social media channels. Thereafter, the mainstream media also began relying on the QPS' social media newsfeeds as their primary information source, and ironically, were even referring members of the public to the QPS' social media channels.

To prevent the spread of rumours and misreporting from becoming 'fact' in the mainstream media, the QPS put out information through its #mythbuster hashtag. Individuals also began sharing useful information with the QPS via their social media channels. This provided situational awareness for QPS officers in the disaster-affected locations who would otherwise have had no means of communication. Information-sharing has since continued in the wake of the floods.

Charlton concluded her presentation by reminding the audience that when there was an accident or emergency, a conversation of what the organisation was doing and what was happening would have invariably been started. If one's organisation was not part of that conversation, the conversation would proceed without your organisation's input, and as such, shape the way individuals perceived the organisation.



## Discussion

A participant was interested to know how the use of social media had evolved from Bersih 1.0 to Bersih 3.0, and if a Bersih 4.0 was organised, how it would differ from the previous Bersih. The speaker responded that blogs were the most important social media platform of Bersih 1.0. During the rally and pre-rally, traditional methods of mobilisation were primarily used, but after the rallies, there was a lot of reporting on blogs on post-rally developments. During Bersih 2.0, websites and in particular the Bersih website, were responsible for generating and disseminating a significant portion of Bersih-related information. There was also a considerable rise in Twitter and Facebook usage, and many individuals were posting information on their personal Facebook pages to spread the word. After the rally, a new hashtag, #Bersih 2.0 stories, was created for people who had gone through the rallies to share their experiences with others. For Bersih 3.0, social media was largely used for pre-rally mobilisation, information generation and dissemination as well as incitement to protest. In relation to a Bersih 4.0, the speaker observed that the name had already been hijacked by pro-government supporters, so it was very likely that the organisers would use an alternative name.

Another participant asked the speakers to comment on the fact that while transparency and speed were essential for social media use during crises and emergencies, legal concerns often hindered free and frank communications. One of the speakers responded by saying that transparency did not necessarily imply revealing everything in the public sphere, but simply meant telling individuals candidly what could be shared in the public domain. For example, when accidents occur, the SCDF only shares the gender and the age of the person involved with the public. If pressed, the SCDF makes it clear that it cannot share certain information, and this seems to appease the person making the inquiry as they appreciate and acknowledge the SCDF's constraints. Regarding legal issues, the speaker opined that saying 'sorry' is usually unacceptable from a legal standpoint as it is tantamount to admitting responsibility for the incident. To address this, he suggested that it was important to distinguish between moral and legal responsibility.

# WORKSHOP AGENDA

**Friday, 5 October 2012**

0800 – 0900hrs **Registration**

0900 – 0915hrs **RSIS Corporate Video + Welcome**

**Remarks** by **Kumar Ramakrishna**,  
*Head, Centre of Excellence for National  
Security (CENS), RSIS, NTU*

Venue : Marina Mandarin Ballroom  
(Level 1)

Attire : **Smart Casual** (Long-  
sleeved shirt without tie)

0915 – 1110hrs **Panel One – The Psychology of Social  
Media Users**

Venue : Marina Mandarin Ballroom  
(Level 1)

Chairperson : **Bilveer Singh**, *Associate  
Professor,  
Department of Political  
Science, National  
University of Singapore*

Speaker : **“Plausibility, Trust,  
and Belief: An Overview  
of Rumour Research and  
Implications for  
Government  
Communication Efforts”**  
by **Gregory Dalziel**,  
*Researcher, Global  
Security Research Institute  
(G-SEC),  
Keio University (Japan)*

**“Gratifications, Collective  
Self-esteem, Online Emotional  
Openness, and Traitlike  
Communication Apprehension  
as Predictors of Facebook  
uses”** by **Nick Zhang Yin**,  
*PhD. Candidate and Part-time  
Lecturer, School of Journalism  
and Communication,  
Chinese University of Hong Kong*

**“Conversations in the  
Blogosphere in the 2011GE:  
What can be Learned about  
Social Media users?”** by  
**Natalie Pang**,  
*Assistant Professor,  
Division of Information Studies,  
Wee Kim Wee School of  
Communication and Information,  
College of Humanities, Arts, &  
Social Sciences, NTU*

**“Youth, Radicalisation and  
the Influence of Social  
Media”** by **Thomas K. Samuel**,  
*Director,  
Research and Publications  
Division, Southeast Asia  
Regional Centre for  
Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT)*

1110 – 1130hrs **Tea Break**

Venue : Marina Mandarin Ballroom  
Foyer (Level 1)

1130 – 1230hrs **Panel Two – Collaborating with Social Media Influencers**

Venue: Marina Mandarin Ballroom (Level 1)

Chairperson : **Yolanda Chin**, *Research Fellow and Coordinator of the Social Resilience Programme, Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS), RSIS, NTU*

Speakers : **“Social Media Influencers in Singapore: Who are they? And are they Really Influential?”** by **Syed Hyder**, *Social Media Consultant, Brandtology (A Media Monitors Company)*

**“Successes and Challenges of an Ordinary Singaporean Blogger: My Story”** by **Gintai**, *Blogger, Gintai.wordpress.com*

1230 – 1300hrs **Distinguished Lunch Lecture**

Venue: Marina Mandarin Ballroom (Level 1)

Chairperson : **Kumar Ramakrishna**, *Head, Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS), RSIS, NTU*

Speaker: **“Managing Social Media in a Crisis: Learning Lessons from the 2011 Civil Disturbances in England”** by **Sir David Omand GCB**, *Professor, Department of War Studies, King’s College London*

1300 – 1400hrs **Lunch**

Venue: Libra, Gemini, Pisces & Aquarius Room (Level 1)

1400 – 1530hrs **Panel Three – Government Agencies and Online Credibility**

Venue: Marina Mandarin Ballroom (Level 1)

Chairperson : **Damien D. Cheong**, *Research Fellow, Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS), RSIS, NTU*

Speaker: **“Strategies to assist Government Agencies Enhance their Credibility on Social Media”** by **Bhavani K.**, *Managing Director, International PR Training Pte Ltd.*

**“Government and Online Citizen Engagement: Opportunities, Risks and Challenges”** by **Syed Hyder**, *Social Media Consultant, Brandtology (A Media Monitors Company)*

**“Social Media, Crisis Communication and Reputation Management”** by **Melvin Yuan**, *Founder of Social Business Consultancy – Omnifluence; Co-founder of Indoor Positioning Company – YFind Technologies*

1530 – 1600hrs **Tea Break**  
Venue: Marina Mandarin Ballroom  
Foyer (level 1)

1600 – 1730hrs **Panel Four – Social Media in a Crisis:  
Case Studies**  
Venue: Marina Mandarin Ballroom  
(Level 1)

Chairperson : **Sulastri Osman**, Associate  
Research Fellow and  
Coordinator of the  
Radicalisation Studies  
Programme, Centre of  
Excellence for National  
Security (CENS), RSIS, NTU

Speaker: **“Social Media as a  
Mobilising Tool: The  
Malaysian Experience  
with regard to the  
Bersih 2.0 and 3.0  
Rallies”** by **Surinderpal  
Kaur**, Senior Lecturer,  
Department of English  
Language, University of  
Malaya

**“Social Media  
Communications: The  
SCDF Way”** by **Abdul  
Razak Abdul Raheem**  
(Director) and **Umar  
Abdul Ngalim** (Senior  
Staff Officer), Public Affairs  
Department, Singapore  
Civil Defence Force

**“The Queensland  
Floods: Practical  
Strategies and  
Approaches for using  
Social Media in a  
Disaster/Emergency”** by  
**Kym Charlton**, Director,  
Media and Public Affairs  
Branch, Queensland Police  
Service

1730hrs **End of Workshop**

1900 - 2100hrs **Dinner (by invitation only)**

# ABOUT CENS

## WHAT IS CENS?

The **Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS)** is a research unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Established on 1 April 2006, CENS is devoted to rigorous policy-relevant analysis of a range of national security issues. The CENS team is multinational in composition, comprising both Singaporean and foreign analysts who are specialists in various aspects of national and homeland security affairs.

## WHY CENS?

In August 2004 the Strategic Framework for National Security outlined the key structures, security measures and capability development programmes that would help Singapore deal with transnational terrorism in the near and long term.

However, strategising national security policies requires greater research and understanding of the evolving security landscape. This is why CENS was established to increase the intellectual capital invested in strategising national security. To this end, CENS works closely with not just other RSIS research programmes, but also national security agencies such as the National Security Coordination Secretariat within the Prime Minister's Office.

## WHAT RESEARCH DOES CENS DO?

CENS aspires to be an international research leader in the multi-disciplinary study of the concept of resilience in all its aspects, and in the policy-relevant application of such research in order to promote security within and beyond Singapore.

To this end, CENS conducts research in three main domains:

### *Radicalisation Studies*

- The multi-disciplinary study of the indicators and causes of violent radicalisation, the promotion of community immunity to extremist ideas and best practices in individual rehabilitation.

### *Social Resilience*

- The inter-disciplinary study of the various constitutive elements of social resilience such as multiculturalism, citizenship, immigration and class. The core focus of

this programme is understanding how globalised, multicultural societies can withstand and overcome security crises such as diseases and terrorist strikes.

### *Homeland Defence*

- A broad domain researching key nodes of the national security ecosystem. Areas of particular interest include the study of strategic and crisis communication, cyber security and public attitudes to national security issues.

## HOW DOES CENS HELP INFLUENCE NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY?

Through policy-oriented analytical commentaries and other research output directed at the national security policy community in Singapore and beyond, CENS staff members promote greater awareness of emerging threats as well as global best practices in responding to those threats. In addition, CENS organises courses, seminars and workshops for local and foreign national security officials to facilitate networking and exposure to leading-edge thinking on the prevention of, and response to, national and homeland security threats.

## HOW DOES CENS HELP RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUES?

To educate the wider public, CENS staff members regularly author articles in a number of security and intelligence-related publications, as well as write op-ed analyses in leading newspapers. Radio and television interviews have allowed CENS staff to participate in and shape the public debate on critical issues such as radicalisation and counter-terrorism, multiculturalism and social resilience, as well as crisis and strategic communication.

## HOW DOES CENS KEEP ABREAST OF CUTTING EDGE NATIONAL SECURITY RESEARCH?

The lean organisational structure of CENS permits a constant and regular influx of Visiting Fellows of international calibre through the Distinguished CENS Visitors Programme. This enables CENS to keep abreast of cutting edge global trends in national security research.

## FOR MORE ON CENS

Log on to <http://www.rsis.edu.sg> and follow the link to "Centre of Excellence for National Security".

## ABOUT NSCS

The **National Security Coordination Secretariat (NSCS)** was set up in the Prime Minister's Office in July 2004 to facilitate national security policy coordination from a Whole-Of-Government perspective. NSCS reports to the Prime Minister through the Coordinating Minister for National Security (CMNS). The current CMNS is Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs Mr Teo Chee Hean.

NSCS is headed by Permanent Secretary (National Security and Intelligence Coordination). The current PS (NSIC) is Mr Benny Lim, who is concurrently Permanent Secretary (National Development) and Permanent Secretary (Prime Minister's Office).

NSCS comprises two centres: the National Security Coordination Centre and the National Security Research Centre. Each centre is headed by a Senior Director.

The agency performs three vital roles in Singapore's national security: national security planning, policy coordination, and anticipation of strategic threats. As a coordinating body, NSCS ensures that government agencies complement each other, and do not duplicate or perform competing tasks. It also organises and manages national security programmes, one example being the Asia-Pacific Programme for Senior National Security Officers, and funds experimental, research or startup projects that contribute to our national security.

For more information about NSCS, visit <http://www.nscs.gov.sg/>

## ABOUT RSIS

The **S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)** was officially inaugurated on 1 January 2007. Before that, it was known as the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS), which was established ten years earlier on 30 July 1996. Like its predecessor, RSIS was established as an autonomous entity within the Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

The School exists to develop a community of scholars and policy analysts at the forefront of Asia Pacific security studies and international affairs. Its three core functions are research, graduate teaching and networking activities in the Asia Pacific region. It produces cutting-edge security related

research in Asia Pacific Security, Conflict and Non-Traditional Security, International Political Economy, and Country and Area Studies.

The School's activities are aimed at assisting policymakers to develop comprehensive approaches to strategic thinking on issues related to security and stability in the Asia Pacific and their implications for Singapore.

For more information about RSIS, please visit <http://www.rsis.edu.sg>







