

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

The multicultural aspect of Singapore provides diversity and uniqueness of the nation. The unique identity makes people to like those who look like them and dislike others who are not similar or do not identify with the same values and cultural norm. However, Singaporeans have learned to live in harmony with different ethnicity and respect the differences between them.

Although it has been praised as a shining example of modernity and progress in Southeast Asia in which equality, harmony, tolerance, and understanding are the integral tenets of their society. It remains a conservative state where homosexuals and other members of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community in Singapore face oppression, both societal and institutionalized.

An example issued in a concluding speech by Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in front of Ministers of Parliament (MPs) on the debate over the repeal of Section 377A, a penal code in which consensual sex between two men is illegal:

*"Singapore is basically a conservative society...The family is the basic building block of this society. And by family in Singapore we mean one man, one woman, marrying, having children and bringing up children within that framework of a stable family unit."*

Recently, a gay couple filed a constitutional challenge in Singapore court aimed at repealing a long-standing law that criminalizes gay sex. This couple filed their challenge because they thought that the section 337A, a penal code in which consensual sex between two men is illegal, label them criminal. This proved that LGBT individual does not share the same legal and family rights as its heterogeneous counterpart. However, there are also many groups in Singapore working to raise awareness about LGBT rights. One of the most prominent of those groups is Pink Dot Singapore (SG).

Pink Dot SG is a non-profit movement that was established in 2009 by a group of concern individuals who care about LGBT social rights in Singapore. It is a group for everyone who supports the belief that everyone deserves the freedom to love. This movement tries to spread an awareness regarding openness, understanding, acceptance, and tolerance for LGBT within the society.

LGBT social movements share inter-related goals in gaining social acceptance of sexual and gender minorities. LGBT people and their allies have a long history around the world of campaigning for LGBT rights.

Singapore is basically still living within a conservative societal nucleus, in which homosexuality is a taboo issue and yet this group have recently created an online and offline movement that have attracted 15,000 LGBT individuals and their allies through its official website and popular social network site, Facebook in participating with an offline movement last year. The movement has sparked an ongoing civic

engagement among Singaporeans in supporting this movement whether online or offline participation.

Civic engagement or civic participation has been defined as individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic participation and social participation are two terms that is often used interchangeably. Gil de Zúñiga et.al, (2011)

Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, and Delli-Carpini (2006) derived civic participation as involved behaviour aimed at resolving problems of community in which civic participation takes place within a community context, where people engage in social activities in many formal and informal social networks. In addition, Norris (2000) described three distinct dimensions of civic engagement: political participation (online/offline), political knowledge, and political trust.

Social media has become a platform that is easily accessible to anyone with Internet access. This increased the communication channels for individual to foster their own individual brand called “ME” in social media and participate in virtual communication that is limitless and free.

Social media such as popular social network sites (SNS) does not only foster individual brand but also encourage organisations, institutions to use these media as a tool to promote their cause or movement.

Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore tabulated on their website ([www.ida.gov.sg](http://www.ida.gov.sg)) that in 2012 Singapore’s internet penetration rate of 78.5% and 3,660,000 users in which Facebook top the most viewed social media (82.2%) it is by no wonder that users are able to search and interact with social networks that has the same interests or

beliefs as the user. Social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and more enabled activists to amplify and broadcast recent updates, issues or group's trends to its follower easily and effortlessly.

Pink Dot SG is one good example where individuals (Singaporean & Permanent Resident) in a societal nucleus engage in a social movement that support the LGBT individuals' freedom to love.

For the past four years, Pink Dot SG has been using participatory media and public voice to encourage online participation and also civic engagement. In June 2013, Pink Dot SG has 17,033 likes on its Facebook page, 2,058 and 9,577 followers on Twitter and Google + respectively. (source: pinkdot.sg/)

In understanding further regarding SNS usage among Pink Dot SG participants and its relationship with civic engagement, the author will be using Verba et.al,(1995) notions on civic and political participation, Sandor Vegh's (2003) conceptualization on social movement, Gil de Zúñiga et.al (2010,2011,2012) early works focusing mostly on social media, political participation, and civic engagement; his works has become the author's yardstick and integral references for this thesis. The author also uses other literature materials such as Harlow's (2011) case study, Delli-Carpini's (2006) research, and more.

In this study, the author would like to analyse and examine how does SNS use for news influence civic engagement. Hence the title for this thesis is ***The Influence of Social Media Use for News on Pink Dot SG Participants' Civic Engagement***

## **1.2 Research Question :**

RQ1: Does Social Network Sites for News have an influence towards civic engagement among Pink Dot SG participants?

RQ2: Does online political participation influence offline political participation?

## **1.3 Objective & Purpose**

### **1.3.1 Objective**

The research objectives are as follow:

1. To examine whether SNS use for news have an influence towards *civic engagement (civic participation, online and offline political participation)*
2. To examine whether online political participation influence offline political participation

## **1.4 Research Usability**

### **1.4.1 Theoretical**

The author wishes to apply the knowledge she gained into this research and compare its usability in the field of communication studies specifically in civic participation.

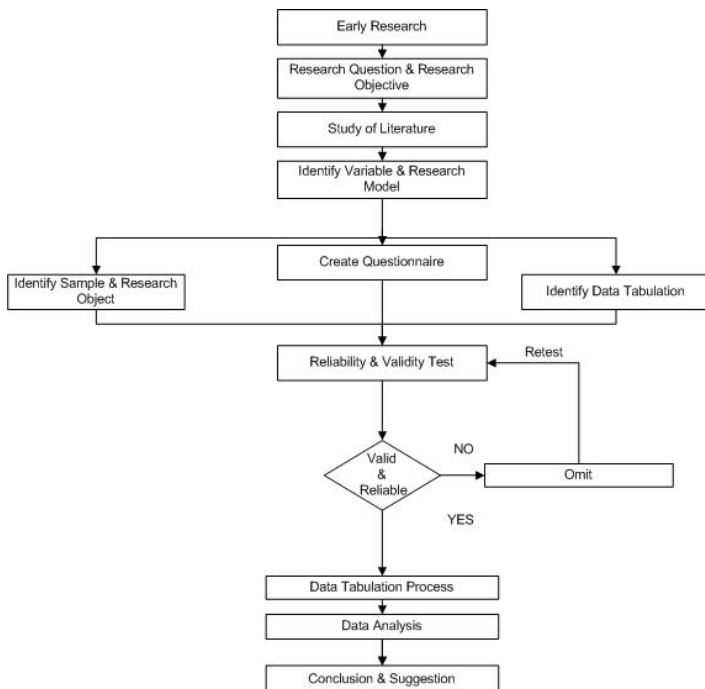
## 1.4.2 Practical

The author wishes that this study can be use to foster political or civic participation, also the author hope that this study may create awareness and encourage today's youth generation to participate in reforming and creating a better environment for an active and healthy citizenship.

## 1.5 Research Phase

The author starts by collecting basic information about Pink Dot SG and suitable literature for this thesis.

Figure 1.1 Research Phase



Source: Author

## **1.6 Time and Location of Research**

Research was conducted virtually to Pink Dot SG participant via its official Facebook page from January – July 2013. The author chose Facebook for sampling as Facebook is the top most viewed social media for the year 2012 in Singapore and also most of Pink Dot SG participants or supporters used Facebook as the main portal of communication with as of June 2013 more than 17,000 ‘likers’ and subscribers to its Facebook page.