



## INTERVIEW WITH YB JEFF OOI, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR JELUTONG AND PROMINENT BLOGGER

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*Interview conducted by panel members Shona Leppanen-Gibson (SLG), Vicknaraj Thanarajah (VT), and Wai Kiong Chan (WKC)*

*SLG: When and why did you start blogging and what has the reception been like?*

JO: I started blogging 2003, January the 2<sup>nd</sup>. It's significant for me because I signed up for an account on blogspot.com and then January the 1<sup>st</sup> it crashed so I could only get myself an account on January the 2<sup>nd</sup>. At that point I was looking at new forms of online media for me to project my ideas about how I perceive Malaysia as a country should engage itself with the new found land of the new media and the online citizens' activities and so on. So I took to blogging as something that fulfils my wish and three months later it was the US invasion of Iraq without UN sanctions so I use to the fullest more as an experimentation so that I can engage with my readers. Before that I already had



Yang Berhormat Jeff Ooi, Member of Parliament for Jelutong, Penang, for the DAP

some form of web presence through community websites for a county where I stayed and I started that 1999. Well in 2003, there was some – well 1999 to 2003, that's some four years, then that took me to blogging and that gave me an interactive channel for me to have conversations, meaningful conversations that I can engage my readers with, and that has been most illuminating in the sense that I shot from the hip at times with

the intention of provoking my readers so that they can counteract my positions whenever I am discussing any issue or a topic. So the invasion of Iraq gave me some kind of traction with my readers. And I thought that, well, I am gaining some ground and I pursued my agenda which was to come back to a Malaysian agenda.

And by then, 2003, I had already been very active in terms of issues that relates to electronic governance and Internet – proliferation of Internet in the country and how to promote greater broadband penetration for the country. So with that in mind I started to look into several issues that

affect the Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor project, so we explored a lot of issues. So I gained traction and then, you know, a blog is something that you have a platform, just like a surfing board, you put yourself on the rough sea, and you glide and ride along with it, with the turn of the waves. And I – from discussing on the Iraqi war, moved on to the Multimedia Super Corridor in Malaysia, and moved on into political issues, issues that affect us at the legislative level, at the development of policies level. And then we discussed the big gaps between policy development and policy implementation in all areas. But I chose a few focuses, one was on the technology front, secondly was the issues involving the Multimedia Super Corridor, third is how to leverage on the new found frontiers that Internet has given us. And then all this created another bigger monster that we are starting to look at – governance issues, not only on the public sector but as well as on the private sector, and whether good corporate governance prevails in Malaysia for example. And then that lead further to politics.

So the watershed had been 2004 when one of my blog entries became the headline of *Berita Harian* for three consecutive days whereby you have – I practice, or I advocate a non-filtering of Internet as well as the content that flows around it, so I never ventured into filtering the commentaries that were posted on my blog, and some of the commentaries were seditious, perhaps. But it was picked by this mainstream media and it was sensationalised into something that generated hatred, allegedly generating hatred against Islam. And I was implicated in that process. During the heat of it, I was threatened with imprisonment without trial under the ISA. Now with that kind of exposure – front page of *Berita Harian*, the best selling Malay newspaper in the country – I became instant personality. So that helps me in my unit visitors, my click-throughs and so on. So with that I thought, yes, let's take the best out of this. And then I went on into political issues. And by the time I ventured into active partisan politics, standing as a candidate in a parliamentary constituency, and try to raise funds through the websites and I think I have gone such a long way from experimentation stage, 2003, getting threatened with imprisonment without trial, 2004, and in between I had a defamation suit raised against me by the one of the big media organisations, that is the *New Straits Times Press*, together with three editors – that defamation suit is still pending, I'm still fighting it off, and I want to see it through. That happened 2007. 2008 I participated in the General Election, and I was successfully, democratically elected. So 2008 to 2009, I slowed down in blogging because of the new lifestyle as a politician, as someone who is helping the Chief Minister at the backroom, so I do not have the luxury of time in updating my blogs and I am coming back to blogging with some new greenshoots, like Twittering and Facebook. So I find, you know, it's an ongoing journey, I do not know what lies ahead in terms of technology. But to me it is still different

style platforms appealing to different segments of the audience that I'd like to engage, and I think it's through this it's still a continuing experimentation. I love it.

*WKC: Jeff, given your reputation of taking a keen interest in principles that embrace ethics, integrity and transparency, do you see new media as having a significant impact on Malaysian society?*

JO: New media empowers individuals to project their opinions, their thinking, as well as the positions they have chosen to take on issues, topics, problems, even scandals. Of course, you always have the dark side of Internet – Internet gives people the convenience of not having to having to verify facts the way journalists do with the newsroom and of course we expect the readers to be more discerning. There is always this dark side of the Internet, so right from the start I advocated to have full exposure of your personality, of who you are. I was dead against anonymous bloggers. I thought that you had to create credibility for this society of bloggers, so whatever that you said, whenever you are focusing on governance issues, transparency issues, you yourself will have to lead by example that you want to the agenda of integrity to be intact. So you start from point one that you have to be responsible for what you say in your blog, because once it's published it gets virally disseminated and the impact could be huge. And I thought that is what good bloggers, responsible bloggers must bear in mind. That is Blogging 101 that you can't miss. So I did that along that mantra, in order to discuss issues on integrity, transparency, and even good governance, you have to do that, and be prepared of getting sued for whatever that you have done wrong or quoted from unreliable sources.

So, whether it has created impact I think, yes, because the way that I have blogged right from 2003, I was vocal, critical, and I cross linked – I maximised on the features that a blog offered me, you have embedded links to original sources of articles that you use as a baseline. You also cross-



pollinate with other bloggers who are talking about the same issues – it gives you that kind of cyber networking. And thirdly is when you have provoked commentaries from your readers, you enrich the entire quality of conversation on the issues and from there it helps me in three ways. One is, I gain a balance of my personal opinion about issues; two, there are readers out there who are more knowledgeable than me in issues that I want to discuss, and they provide me the input free of charge almost instantly, and I can gather that, compile them into a more well structured thinking process and take a position; and the third one is, of course I can archive it for future referencing. Now all this became viral when Google came about in a big way, and people can Google me for things that I

talked about, and I was invited for international forum and so on and that helps me to further enrich the original discussion pieces I started with. So I think it became a snowball effect, and with that, I think the net effect of whether that methodology had been effective, I think it was put to good test during the General Election last year. And really people knew me way before I offered myself as a candidate and that really worked to my advantage.

*VT: Jeff, what is your perspective on new media freedom and censorship?*

JO: The problem with Malaysia especially among the professional journalists is that they self-censor, and sometimes they self-censor in order to survive. We have to understand the environment when opinions operate, opinion-shapers operate. Firstly, newspapers – you need to renew your publication licenses every year so you are sort of exerting that hand brake when you are zooming at full speed. So that is the trade-off. The casualty had been the editors who had been exercising self-regulation much more than they are expected to. That's one. Put it on the other side of the chasm had been the bloggers, the individual armchair critics, you know, people like me. You tend to go a little bit on the overdrive sometimes. But I think we were trying to push the envelope as much as we can, and sometimes we might find ourselves on the wrong side when laws apply as per whenever you touched on sedition, things that cause religious or racial disharmony, and defamation and libel, a lot of things. And sometimes you obtained information which are very much classified and if you were to publish it, you will arouse a reaction. Now that is where the problem lies, whether you want to cross that Rubicon or you don't want to. So that's when self exerted regulation comes into play. Personal conviction on my part is that I would want to seek larger windows for the freedom to access information for example. And in Malaysia we have to fight with this archaic law which is called Official Secrets Act. And a lot of things that have gone under wraps and we can't see the real picture of how much, of why a big scandal would have to come into reality, like the recent Port Klang Free Zone scandal. And more often than not when we realise issues like this is because there is a blackout of information, you do not have much access to information, you are restricted by the OSA. And that's where, I think, the antidote to this is to have some form of a legal framework that allows equitable access to information so one of those that we are looking at is the Freedom of Information Act but this will have to be tabled at the Parliamentary level so that it gets passed. But at the moment partisan politics are very thick so often than not if you were to run it as a private member's bill you'll get defeated. So we are working with people outside of the entire organisation, the NGOs, and people who advocate this Freedom of Information Act. So I thought this was something that we really had to put in place. So whenever you have free access to information and you have this understanding of responsibility of using information within your reach in a responsible manner and I

think that's how you monitor and you watch dog over government, for governance as well. And that's where you can avoid the pitfalls of having to pay a hefty price whenever a scandal happens. We do not want to do too much of the post mortem of bad governance, but rather let's have facts being exposed and we can make the best of the situation. So that is one of the key ingredients for a country to develop from real emerging democracy to a more mature form of democracy. I think individuals those of us who have tertiary education for example, and we are capable of making decisions, you came to a point when you have transparency, when you have information on tap, that's when you make informed decisions about issues, policies and so on. It's a must.

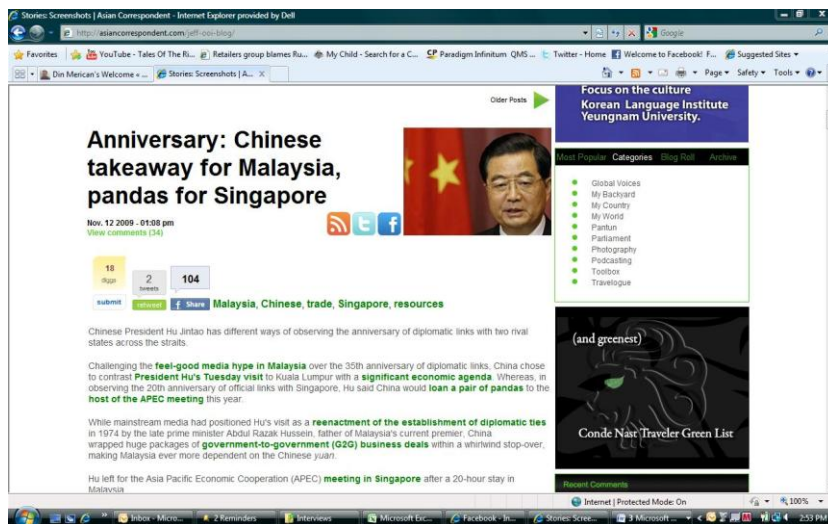
*SLG: In your view is the influence of new media on the political system significant? Has it altered the dynamics of the relationship between politicians and citizens?*

JO: Well if you were to take the last General Election for example you would see there had been an influx of politicians, of candidates who resorted to blogging as a form of communicating with the constituents, various constituents. And the opposition parties did it to the max and I belong to one of those who were contesting from the opposition front. You have a showcase in me. In my case even though my constituency has one of the lowest of PC ownership level, rate of ownership, and one of the lowest in terms of Internet penetration, especially broadband penetration – it's working class – but I managed to have their children who are working out of KL, to receive information that I tried to communicate with my constituents. So even though I am facing a large amount of hearing crowd, they hear based on hearsay, and I have not got a lot of reading crowd who are using new media, but it is those young generation, the reading crowd online, who pass on the information to the hearing crowd, and that helped me to really gain a big, a huge- to establish myself with this vote, even though I was fighting off facing a three cornered fight. And what infused me most had been this, there had been religious readers of mine who are working in Vietnam, Singapore, Taiwan, or Australia, or Hong Kong, and even Abu Dhabi, they had been following my blog and then within the blog you have YouTubes of what I say and what I sang even, and then they came back on the voting day. So I thought, yes, it has created that kind of dynamics – no longer are we victims of a news blackout exercised by the mainstream media. So we managed to find a way to circumvent the total blackout by the mainstream media, which are largely owned by the political parties that form the incumbent government, so we found a way out. So that we really pumped to the max, so it was a collective use of blogs, traditional websites, YouTubes which had been very viral by nature, and that was the key components that helped us to circumvent the claspings affects of the mainstream media. And after the General Election we have Twitter, Facebook and so on. In fact, Twitter – I was already on Facebook when I entered the General Election last year. So we thought it was a good

showcase and we wanted to do more because the last General Election allowed certain states to form the state government and with that power in hand we wanted to network the entire state through some form of Internet connectivity, be it wi-fi, or other forms of wireless broadband. So we that maybe in a position to enter some new frontiers which I am not in a position to tell, it is quite strategic. So I'm trying to do that. So we understand full well, whatever we have showcased using the new media, and won a General Election pretty prominently, the incumbent, who are slow starters, will emulate, imitate and replicate what we have done. So we need to remain two steps ahead, so we looking into new forms, so it is an ongoing thing.

*WKC: Jeff, what is your perspective on the Bill of Guarantees under the Communication and Multimedia Act of 1998 which guarantees non-censorship for the Internet and what is its legal status?*

JO: Yes, I think the present Government is tap dancing on this issue. The Bill of Guarantees was formed out of, you know, an academic belief that Internet opens up brand new world to attract, as a form of attraction to induce foreign investment, more so within the Multimedia Super Corridor territories. And it had been driven from the geographical boundaries. You have three defined locations that it must be called the MSC status and so on. So that had been that the way the government had been trying to tap dance, in a sense. They had found a big monster, they discovered a big monster, and that surfaced during the last General Election and they tried to contain it but that fact, because you had made that promise, through the IAP, the International



[YB Jeff Ooi's blog, Screenshots](#)

Advisory Panel, which comprised star studded celebrities in there that included Microsoft's Bill Gates, so you can't back track on that. So at certain times the Government tap danced on that saying the Bill of Guarantees, especially the one that you quoted, applies only a geographically

defined territories, but we thought it wasn't, it should be an open thing. And it should be applied across the board, throughout the country – that's number one. And that had been our key argument. Number two, apart from the Bill of Guarantees, there's this whole set of multimedia

laws, and one of those is, and what we call the Communication and Multimedia Act 1998, and Section 3 says 'no part in this Act should be construed as condoning or advocating censorship of the Internet'. That is a very important, ominous, clause within the act, and we want that to be practiced. But of course there are some other interlocking effects of other acts that have been passed prior to this CMA 1998, one of which had been this jargons – the freedom limiting acts like OSA, ISA, Sedition, Defamation, Printing and Publications Act, Publication and Printing Press and so on. So all of this painted another scenario for the Malaysian environment, whereby Internet may be free – you may have the Bill of Guarantees, you may have Section 3 of the Communication and Multimedia Act, which does not construe censorship on the Internet, but you still need to understand in Malaysia especially Internet and its contents do not operate in a legal vacuum. There are very simple mantra that have been dished out saying whatever had been illegal offline will be illegal online, so that formed some sort of handcuff even though you may have the Bill of Guarantees. Right now I think through the various court cases, police actions against bloggers, hauling them up, putting them behind bars under certain police provision and then have their statements taken, from Nicholas Tan, from a lot of other people, it painted a picture to us, that you may have Bills of Guarantees, you may have the CMA 1998, Section 3, but I think the archaic law still apply, and the arms of the law are rather reachable whenever they decide to take action.

*VT: Have you utilised new media applications to organise any activities or lobby for a certain cause?*

JO: I tried that during the General Election. Fundraising had been one. You know we had never had a model of using eBay for example to attract funds from people who are sympathetic to our cause, that we want to replace the incumbent Government – that was our cause. There were people who were residing overseas, and they do not want to go through the hassle of getting through the banking system. So they used eBay and that had been quite well, I would say, it had been very successful on my part. And the other part is basically is using the Internet to send out calls to the nation and calls for participation. In my constituency, I was more or less like a parachuted candidate on to this Jelutong constituency. I had been working in KL for 20 odd years. I may have a name for myself but coming face to face with the real voters who are basically Internet – who are insulated from Internet penetration, in order to reach out to them had been quite tough and I had only around ten days of campaign time to get that done. So I used Internet and all my sources available, Facebook, blogs, and so on, and even the short messaging system, to reach out to all these people to call for three things. Firstly, volunteers, I need volunteers to help me to run the campaign. Two, I need participation in terms of the vote counters to supervise the vote counting, you may have campaigned so hard, but at the last minute, if you don't really watch over the counting process, you

may lose it all. And there was a call just for donations. And I applied that. The main cause was basically to help put Jeff Ooi as the first blogger into the Parliament, which did happen, and I think it was rather successful. But ever since I have not used the media to call for another cause, like for example call for a mass rally. I haven't done that.

*SLG: You have answered some of these questions already in part, but we'll just continue with it to get a different perspective. What are your perspectives on social networking applications and sites from a socio-cultural and political standpoint, such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogging?*

JO: I would like to talk something about Twitter. Now Twitter – how do you squeeze information in a very concise manner, you know, within 140 characters, and you get a story out? We thought it was not a matter of getting the story out or getting the information out to the crowd the moment it happened. We thought that within Malaysia, we have to get a lot of challenge and pressure on to the mainstream media which are largely owned by the political parties that form the Government. So what we intend to do is that we put things on record, that we are the first – that we are key, live witnesses, within the Parliament, the chamber of the Parliament. For example, the day that the former Menteri Besar of Perak was sworn in there was some fracas, and we put it out, what happened. So once there had already been a record and people had already testified to that what credible sources members of Parliament, myself, Kit Siang, and so on. So we put it up – there would not be any more room for the mainstream newspaper to lie, or to distort what factually happened. So I thought Twitter helped us with those. 140 characters – we have to keep on pumping, but we set the record right, and so that the newspapers can't really distort it because their production cycle is about eight hours, you know, from news gathering to news production and circulation, eight hours. We beat them to the minute, to the second. So that is one of the key things that you pressure them, you give them a benchmark, and that sort of helped in maintaining the standard of professionalism when it comes to the newsroom manipulation. That's number one. Number two is that Twitter has its weaknesses, for example, it is sporadic, it is disorganised, the output are not streamed within certain topics, it's very chaotic. So I think for more discerning – that's right, you have the teeny, the tiny URL, to link people to more elaborate form of articles about issues. So I think Twitter itself is a new media phenomenon but it can't stand alone. It is a very critical component of the entire new media eco-system, and I think it complements what blogs have become. Some have become very verbose, some have become less concise, and this is how to get the story out, but it also provides a very factual context of what can be done. But there is only one more critical element, that is, the person who disseminated the information. Most Twitters, like for example, during the Iran upsurgeance, after Ahmadinejad was re-elected because of allegations of scandals and so on. Now

there had been an influx of Twitter messages but most cannot be verified. It came from unreliable sources – nameless faces, nameless handles, so as in my part, I was Twittering, I was blogging, within the hall of the Parliament, I thought that that key component, reliable source, credibility of the writer, I think that helped us put new media as something very mainstream. This is very critical for Malaysia because when blogs first appeared and the Government realised its impact, they tried to demonise us, that bloggers are a bunch of ranters, unreliable, and they just spew blasphemy online. So we need to reposition that with personalities like me, Lim Kit Siang – we managed to reposition that. It has become a very important tool for reliable sources, and I think because of that, the Government, the incumbent said, ‘ If you can’t beat them, you might as well join them.’ Yes, that’s what’s happening.

*WKC: Jeff, in terms of the democratic process, how has new media shaped the manner in which politicians communicate and the environment in which they operate?*

JO: Well, we can have cyber members of Parliament like me, but we can’t have cyber voters – you still need to face off with real life voters. So to me, whether it’s new media, social networking tools, to me it is just a set of tools for us to engage with the audience we want to interact with. Much as I would like to do a lot of say, activities online, but I still have to get back to the ground. More so for the people who are on the more non-urban constituencies – they really have to connect with the grassroots and so on. So there’s no alternative and replacement for face-to-face encounters with the voters and also to create that interactivity between the two parties. And I thought that process is very important and now that I am no longer just a member – blogger – but also a blogging legislator, so I need to get input for example whenever we are passing new bills in the Parliament, and our viewpoint more often than not, gets defeated because we are the minority group. And then certainly there will be implications. For example we are dead against replacing the IPCMC, the Independent Monitoring Commission, for monitoring the management and abuse of power within the police force. We want that to be a purpose built, tailor made Act to address police abuse, but due to various manoeuvring, objections by the senior members of the police force, it has mutated into a different form of devils. That is it is a huge commission that is taking care of various enforcement agencies which includes the election commission, all those things. Now they become non-specialised, this commission, and if it is to be set up, and it is going to be set up it becomes office boys, so we liked that – we opposed that but we got defeated during the legislative process. So how are you going to translate that back when you are going back to your constituencies? I do not think mere statements online, Twitters, Facebook, can do the job. We still have to go back and engage them and perhaps if the opposition, the groundswell has been huge, then we can bring it

back to make the government make more immediate, more frequent amendments to this law that has been pass, detrimental to our wishes. I thought that process was very important. And the other part is of course to also encourage transparency of what transpired, of the law making process and also the implementation. So I think online things, online tools, give us a lot of – take away a lot of leg work, help us reach a larger crowd with minimum of resources, but that still is no replacement for key component of meeting the voters, just like you have to meet the press most of the time.

*VT: Jeff, taking into account the results of the 12th General Elections in 2008, and its new media participants, do you think the Malaysian Government is likely to introduce measures to curb or limit the effects of new media on the political process?*

JO: I believe that kind of threatening tactics had started, had already started. And while the key methodologies had been intimidation – bloggers had been incriminated for whatever small off answers if you can call them. So I think that had started. And at one point, we thought there would be a repeat of the Operasi Lalang, in 1987, the infamy of Operasi Lalang, would have started when Raja Petra for example was cited for several wrongs that he had done. So I think that intimidation process has come out. But what I found very interesting was this, that the Government managed to infiltrate the bloggersphere within Malaysia, that when we first started it maybe just blogging socio-politically, but now you get to see partisan crowds among the bloggers. For example, Rocky, is still a good friend of mine, both of us were slapped with defamation suits together by the same organisation. But the thing is there has been a demarcation of the positions that you take. The Government has done very handsomely on this. They infiltrated the bloggersphere and they managed to create a section that became more pro-establishment. And pro-establishment had been the former establishment journalists, and you have the emerging group of bloggers, who may get burned out after two months after two years and so on. So this is very interesting. What had happened before March the 8<sup>th</sup> last year was almost a landslide, bloggers taking views that are anti-establishment. But post March 2008 you had a more balance coming from a group of savvy pro-establishment bloggers, typically in the form of Rocky, even (Akram?)Abdullah, he wasn't a blogger, he was a former NSTP journalist, he blogged very well, very critically, and now he is the news editor of TV 3. So that is a testimony that shows the government is learning fast, is learning fast. So to answer that question, it had certainly coloured the local politics, and you are seeing the formation of a two party system, and also a two, a dual political scenario. You have the Republicans and you have the Democrats for example. And you have the pro-establishment and you have the centre-left, perhaps. So it is kind of very interesting and challenging scenario. Because the opposition, people

like us, who had been the champions and the pioneers, no longer have the monopoly of this new found world, so we have to find a new way to project our dominance of the opinion space.

*VT: So what would your stance be if they were to limit this, if they were to curb it further and further? What would your stance be? How would it affect Malaysia's future?*

JO: Well, if you were to fight it from the full weight, the full weight of the law, we are Davids facing the Goliath. I don't think that practically is the best option. We will still maintain our position that we are advocate freedom of expression and not harassment of bloggers. Harassment of bloggers, opinion shapers, what is online, only happen in backward countries, dictatorial countries you know, Burma offhand, even Iran, Iraq. But we are a democracy, we are a Parliamentary democracy, you need to have all of this liberty and equality, all this thing must be there. So we thought one way to circumvent this is to continue with our clever smart way of leveraging on the new media social networking tools and all others forms that are transmitted electronically including the small SMSs. So one, we can interact and network with people who are online. These are basically the middle class. And I thought that those who are going to change the political scenario is those in the middle class and more so those who are along the urban corridors. That's number one. And continue to have sympathisers to our cause, and continue to engage them whenever we want to mobilise votes during elections. And I think one of the key ways to organise change that is significant is through the ballot box. And 2008 we managed to demonstrate that, you know, you engage people through the online space and they come answering to your call. I think that can only perpetuate in greater success in the next round. And that next round will be quite soon, maybe three years.

*SLG: In your view, under Prime Minister Badawi's leadership, did the national Government deal with the challenges of new media adequately?*

JO: Well I think they made a mistake, at one point. We have to thank, and we have to hate – we have to thank Abdullah Badawi because the entire regime, including his advisors, belittled, underestimated the power, the impact and the potentials of the online media as well as social networking tools. They underestimated that. We have to thank them for that. We have to hate them for that is because when they realised it and they lost it in the ballot box, and they were making counter measures, counter measures first they press on the denial mode, secondly they demonise you, and thirdly they haul you to courts. Most of the nabbing of bloggers happened during the second phase of Abdullah Badawi's regime, so we can't tolerate that. So in a way I think it happened due to tactical negligence on Abdullah Badawi's part – we were thankful for that. So that is the net take off I have of Abdullah Badawi's run.

*SLG: Prime Minister Najib has taken a very public leadership role in engaging with new media. What is your view of his approach?*

JO: I thought – I studied him since before he became Prime Minister, several months before April. And I thought he wanted to catch up with the Joneses. You have blogs, I have blogs, you have Twitter, I have Twitter, you have Facebook, I do have Facebook. And if you were to look at his Twitter and Facebook it is basically a chronology of his meetings, his schedule. I think whoever is managing his Facebook, I do not think Najib as a Prime Minister has the luxury of doing it himself, and that takes away some part. You know, when you are doing blogging and social media, if you don't do it by yourself, it is like having a marriage without sex. So you have to do it on your own. So he depended on his minders to do that and I think they have not really understood how to engage your constituents using this media. But he gained a lot of positive press because of the posturing was great, that he is no longer a person who is thrown out of this new media wave – he is very much a part of it at the forefront. So is Khairy for instance, he tried to Tweet when he saw both myself, Kit Siang and some others Tweeting. He'd like to be part of the Joneses, which is fine, but what I found interesting is this, is the value of thoughts. The kind of ideas, perspectives, that you impart through these tools. I thought Facebook, Twitter, online media of all forms are basically tools. It is a means to the end. Ultimately it is still the content, the ideas that count, that form as a magnet to attract similar people that will accommodate in votes to your favour. So I thought Najib has missed that part, for now. But, you know, he might be learning fast.

*WKC: Jeff, one of the hypotheses of this report is that political engagement via new media is more advanced in Malaysia than it is currently in Australia.*

JO: Oh really?

*WKC: Do you agree with this hypothesis, and if so, why do you believe this to be the case?*

JO: My clue is this – the opinion space. Malaysia is more oppressed, whereas Australia practices free press, almost. You know, Murdoch still owns a lot of, a stable of newspapers in all forms, you know that the Australian provincial group have been doing a lot of engagement with the local communities. But it's freedom of information for all. So it's not that suppressed when it comes to information flow. Whereas here we have suppression of news – blackouts, distortion even. So we have to find a new way to get our story out. So we were forced to a corner and we have to find new channels of getting onto our target constituents and I think that accounts for why if you were to say we are more prolific and active and prominent in terms of using online media to project our political ideas and messages, that would be one of the reasons. We don't have the freedom of press so we

have to find new ways, whereas Australia has democracy at play, so information is taken for granted, there is going to be a free flow. So when the resources are limited, we tend to become more resourceful.

*WKC: Well, Jeff, thank you so much for your time. We really appreciate it.*



**YB Jeff Ooi and the NMIC Project Team**