

## Abstract

This study examines the communicative grounds of citizen support for democratic policy-making in a hybrid political system, Singapore, by applying Habermas's theory of communicative action. The theory holds that citizens will be more likely to grant democratic legitimacy to government policies to the extent that citizens recognize a government's orientation as being communicative, oriented to increasing reciprocal understanding with the public. Assessments of communicative action are indicated by two conditions: whether citizens agree with government claims and whether citizens perceive opportunities to engage in dialogue with policy-makers in public discourse. The communicative action approach is tested using the case of Singapore anti-smoking policies. National survey results indicate that selected validity claims and speech conditions are positively associated with decision acceptance.

*Keywords:* legitimacy, communicative action, validity claims, speech conditions, procedural justice

## **A Communicative Action Approach to Evaluating Citizen Support for a Government's Smoking Policies**

Legitimacy refers to the basis upon which political authorities are entitled to make political decisions and why the public defers to political allocations of power (Weber, 1947). At the most general level, legitimacy is “the moralization of authority,” i.e., the normative grounds for the government to exercise its authority (Crooke, 1987, p. 553). Legitimacy represents the fundamental, enduring bond between the public and a political order. In Eastonian terms (1979), there are two kinds of citizen support. These include diffuse support comprising citizens’ regular acceptance of political control as being just and proper, and specific support stemming from citizen satisfaction with individual political decisions that may fluctuate over a short period of time. Legitimacy refers to the first type.

In recent years growing attention has been paid to the empirical examination of legitimacy appraisals in modern societies (Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004; Tyler, 2001; Zelditch, 2001). A need for more sophisticated framework for analyzing legitimacy and its sources has also been widely advised (Hechter, 2009). To advance knowledge of theory-guided measures of legitimacy, this study conceptualizes and tests the communicative sources of policy legitimacy based on Habermas’s (1984) theory of communicative action. The theory holds that legitimacy is based in communicative action, which refers to linguistic interactions aimed at increasing actors’ level of reciprocal understanding. Citizens are more likely to feel understood to the extent that they agree with government claims or believe they have sufficient availability of opportunities to communicate with political authorities about those claims. The perceived communicative interaction process can in return bring about political decisions that are considered just and fair. This is a thesis expounded first in *Legitimation Crisis* and expounded

most systematically in *Between Facts and Norms* (Habermas, 1975, 1996).

The present paper seeks to explore the extent to which communicative action and legitimacy can apply in the political system in Singapore wherein hybridity, i.e., a combination of authoritarianism and democracy, is its defining characteristic. This hybrid system has been known as “soft authoritarianism” (Means, 1996, p. 103) or “semi-authoritarian democracy” (Haque, 2004, p. 234). The hybrid nature of Singapore’s political system is a consequence of its colonial past, with which it inherited democratic mechanisms from the British but did not cultivate the democratic values deeply in political practices (Means, 1996). For instance, although Singapore holds regular elections with broad suffrage and devoid of massive fraud, the People’s Action Party (PAP) has kept the absolute majority in the parliament (e.g., 93% percent of parliamentary seats after the 2011 General Election) since the city-state gained independence in 1965. In another example, the PAP government’s strong leadership has led to effective government policies and remarkable e-government development (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2012). However, despite its responsive and efficient bureaucracy, human rights organizations such as the Freedom House (2010) and the Reporters without Borders (Julliard, 2010) consistently rank Singapore low on press freedom and democratic governance. Scholars such as Hill (2000) and Mutalib (2000) note that in Singapore citizen support is tied to the government’s efficiency in promoting economic growth and its ability to provide security and prosperity to citizens. This emphasis on performance legitimacy has stabilized the power of political authorities and has entitled the ruling party to employ a patriarchal approach to policy-making (Huntington, 1991; Wong & Hong, 2010).

The hybridity of this system calls attention to the tension between non-democratic and democratic components that may shape Singaporeans’ legitimacy attributions in different ways,

especially when the system is under rapid transition (Author, 2012b). Although deliberation has not yet become an institutionalized facet of policy-making, Singapore has practiced government-citizen consultation for a long time within a limited scope (e.g., meet-the-people sessions, closed-door policy debates, or [www.reach.gov.sg](http://www.reach.gov.sg)). Singapore thus serves as an alternative and meaningful context to examine Habermas's action theory, which focuses on legitimation processes that have a communicative ground.

Specifically, the paper focuses on a case study that involves Singaporeans' reports of their normative support for the government's action on smoking control. Anti-smoking policies serve to protect nonsmokers from involuntary exposure to environmental tobacco smoke and to reduce smokers' demand for cigarettes and other tobacco products (World Health Organization, 2003). While there is little doubt that a government can use its power to regulate cigarette use and protect public health, debates remain in terms of how, when, and under what circumstances the government should impose restrictions on smoking (Jacobson & Zapawa, 2001). Without denying the harmful impacts of smoking on health, researchers note that smoking policies can implicitly "demoralize" smokers and cultivate social disapproval or stigmatization of smoking behavior (Thrasher, Besley, & Gonzalez, 2010, p. 788). This reveals a tension between a government's right to secure the public's health and an individual's right to choose the way he or she lives, suggesting that smoking policies are justifiable laws that are nevertheless bound by citizens' perceptions of fair policy-making and their assessments of the government's communicative orientation.

Past research indicates that citizens' specific support for smoking policies has been associated with demographic factors such as age, gender, education, and income and smoking-specific factors such as smoking status, exposure to environmental tobacco smoke at home or at

work, and general attitude toward smoking (Borland, et al., 2006; Brooks & Mucci, 2001; Lader, 2007). Additionally, new research on procedural justice of tobacco control suggests that both smokers and nonsmokers' justice perceptions could be important in understanding citizen support for the government's smoking policy-making (Carter & Chapman, 2006; Poland, 2000; Thraser, Besley, & González, 2010). This line of research holds that the implementation of smoking policies can benefit from citizens' acknowledgment of the fairness of lawmaking and their approval of the authority's approach to enacting public health measures. When citizens feel that the government's action is procedurally fair, they would be more satisfied with its decision-making and consider the policy legitimate and worthy their support. As a complement to compliance, this diffuse support at the normative level is critical to the establishment of mutual trust and quality in long-term relationships among citizens and the political authorities (Logan & Longo, 1999; Rakow, 1989). Accordingly, our focus on the perceived procedural justice of the Singapore government's smoking regulations enables an examination of the extent to which citizens feel that the government's exercise of power yields fairly distributed outcomes. Insofar as smoking policies contain moral controversies and center on significant social issues that can be justifiably discussed in a democratic society, the studied case is helpful in showing how the measures of communicative action can be applied to analyze citizens' normative support for policy-making in a hybrid political system.

The paper begins with a review of two sets of empirical conditions, validity claims and speech conditions, that can be used to evaluate the communicative attributes of government action. The theoretical relationship between communicative action and legitimacy is presented and hypotheses are specified. In the second part of the paper an empirical study is presented that tests perceived achievements of communicative action in the Singaporean setting. The

conclusion summarizes results and discusses implications of the communicative action approach for future studies on democratic legitimation.

### **Theory of Communicative Action for a Legitimation Model**

#### **Validity Claims and Speech Conditions**

Habermas's analysis holds that communication necessarily involves interactants in two sets of assumptions. These are assumptions regarding validity claims and speech conditions underlying all utterances, explained below. The analysis derives from a range of philosophers and linguists, drawing in part on Wittgenstein's work, drawing heavily from that of John Searle on expressibility and John Austin on locutionary and illocutionary elements of language, and deriving as well as from a number of other philosophers and linguists. Its early introduction to the English-speaking world is found in the essay "What is Universal Pragmatics," (Habermas, 1979, pp. 1-68). Its later elaboration was advanced in the *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984, 1987), and in subsequent works. Our use of the theory here draws directly from this element of Habermas's work, though necessarily rather lightly. Our aim is to extract from it merely those conceptual elements required to identify a model of empirical conditions subject to systematic observation for the purpose of studying legitimation.

This model employing validity claims and speech conditions has been presented elsewhere (Author, 2004, 2010). Briefly, Habermas postulates that four kinds of basic claims are embodied in all speech acts or utterances. These are validity claims including: (1) whether the utterances are comprehensible; (2) whether the content holds true; (3) whether the speech act is normatively appropriate; and (4) whether the speaker sincerely means what he or she says. In action oriented to reaching reciprocal understanding, communicative action proper, speakers must have consciously or unconsciously accepted the promise to fulfill all four validity claims if

asked. Notably, these criteria for communicative action are not merely normative guidelines but are based on the empirical proposition that speakers actually make all these assumptions and are willing to discuss them during every day communication (Habermas, 1984, pp. 273-338).

When disagreement over a claim is challenged, communicative action may follow if the listener chooses to contest a claim and if the speaker is both open to being challenged and willing to use good reasons in defense of the claim. Ultimately, the fact of agreement is a separate matter from speakers understanding one another's viewpoints, or being oriented to understanding them.

The dialogically verifiable nature of validity claims relates to the second set of criteria for communicative action, referred to as speech conditions or "general symmetry conditions" (Habermas, 1984, p. 25; 1990, p. 88). Speech conditions are actors' presuppositions regarding the exchange of arguments that enable the examination of contested validity claims to take place. Speech conditions comprise expectations relevant to the structural settings of discourse insofar as they are essential to any dialogue. During communicative action speakers presume the freedom to engage in sufficient and unrestricted discussion on everything required to settle a contested claims, to make a collectively agreeable decision based on mutual understanding. Every actor should be able to "take part in a discourse," "question any assertion whatever," "introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse," and "express his attitudes, desires, and needs" (Habermas, 1990, p. 89). Additionally, all participants should not be "prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down [above]" (p. 89). Although ideal speech conditions are often not attainable in daily contexts, they operate as expectations in all communication, even during strategic or deceptive communication.

Previous research suggests that three speech condition indexes can be used to examine rules of democratic discourse in the context of public policy-making: (1) whether citizens believe that they or their surrogates can freely raise for discussion any problematic validity claim with which they may disagree – all proposals and counter proposals can be entertained; (2) whether citizens believe that all citizens have a symmetrical distribution of opportunities to engage in discourse - symmetry; and (3) whether citizens believe that they will receive full and fair responses from the government – fair treatment (Author, 2004, 2010). These indexes reflect the extent to which a communication environment is restriction-free. To the extent they are satisfied, they enable genuine dialogue instead of interactions coerced by external or internal factors.

It should be noted again, that this account of validity claims and general symmetry conditions only sparsely represents Habermas's elaborate justification of a framework for the "validity basis" of speech, and it relies somewhat more heavily on universalist and procedural aspects of the theory (1990, pp. 87-88). We intend our selective employment to be justified through predictive validity.

Given this interpretation of Habermas's theory, the validity and speech condition framework can be used as a practical guide to testing when actors believe communicative action has been possible. The two sets of communicative conditions can be used to test the extent to which citizens believe that a government's positions, or validity claims, are correct and the extent to which they feel that government's interactions with the public, or its enactment of speech conditions in the public sphere, are oriented to advancing mutual understanding between government and citizenry.

### **The Communicative Grounds of Democratic Legitimacy**

In Habermas's analysis of democratic legitimation citizens approve of a political order

because they have good reasons to believe in its rightfulness. In democratic political systems these reasons, according to Habermas, are enacted in large part through citizen reactions to a government's communicative rationality. "Specifically, the democratic principle states that only those statutes may claim legitimacy that can meet with the assent (*Zustimmung*) of all citizens in a discursive process of legislation" (Habermas, 1996, p. 110).

This is not a statement regarding interest calculations. Linguistic action is not merely sentential, a matter of well-formed sentences and proper interactions used to advance instrumental purposes. In addition, language produces and reproduces social relations in fundamental ways, enacting promises, threats, praise and so on, tying words to experienced social norms. Referring to Kant and Rousseau on the relationship between individual autonomy and collective norms, Habermas (1996) makes his case this way:

Both conceptions miss the legitimating force of a discursive process of opinion- and will-formation, in which the illocutionary binding forces of a use of language oriented to mutual understanding serve to bring reason and will together – and lead to convincing positions to which all individuals can agree without coercion. (p. 103)

In other words the value of free speech is not embedded in expectations due to natural law. Rather it is embodied in pragmatically necessary conditions of social interaction through communication.

It is this line of thinking that underlies Habermas's theory of the public sphere. The theory is very much rooted in the Western deliberative democracy tradition that values citizen expression of opinions and political authorities' fair responses to public concerns. What makes it unique is the formal pragmatic approach to examining structural properties required of dialogue in the public sphere if discursively democratic legitimation is to be possible and effective

(Habermas, 1984).

Critics charge that Habermas's dialogic approach is idealistic, rationality-driven, ignorant of power imbalances, and insensitive to otherness (White, 1991). These varied criticisms issue from a variety of philosophical positions and it is beyond the scope of this paper to review the large associated body of literature. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the theory fully recognizes such discourses are somewhat "improbable forms of communication" (Habermas, 1982, p. 235). The theory of communicative action does recognize power and its use in everyday interaction in a number of ways. Action that is not oriented towards the discursive negotiation of validity claims is analyzed as "strategic" action, as action oriented toward reaching purposive goals (Habermas, 1984, p. 333). Varieties of strategic action include imperative forms of communication, outright deception, and ideological control.

A growing number of studies apply the action theory empirically to the study of linguistic interactions in social and political processes (Barry, Stevenson, Britten, Barber, & Bradley, 2001; Leanza, Boivin, & Rosenberg, 2010; Ramella & De La Cruz, 2000; Sumner, 2001; Walseth & Schei, 2011; Webler, 1995). The study reported here expands on previous research on communicative action and legitimation in the United States (Author, 2006, 2010), by using it in the hybrid political system of the city-state of Singapore. The policy initiative whose democratic legitimacy is under consideration is recent government efforts to reduce the prevalence of cigarette smoking.

Singaporeans' perceptions of government validity and speech conditions are surveyed with regard to government efforts to reduce smoking among citizens. As of December 2010, the government had banned smoking in most indoor and outdoor public places (Ministry of Health, 2010). High cigarette taxes were imposed and duty-free cigarettes banned. The advertising of

tobacco products including tobacco brand names has been prohibited. Cigarette packs are required to carry fear-arousing labels that occupy fifty percent of their total surface area. Severe penalties are imposed on those who violate the smoking act. Additionally, public information campaigns carrying anti-smoking messages are intensively implemented (Health Promotion Board, 2009, 2010, 2011; Thulaja, 2003). Strong fear-based texts and visuals are frequently used in these campaigns to emphasize the harmful effects of cigarette smoking, of secondhand smoke, and of the purchase of illegal cigarettes (Liang, 2000; Poon, 2012).

Whilst policies represent the output of continual interaction between the public and political authorities, to what extent are Singaporeans satisfied with the government's communicative orientation and to what extent are the government's political decisions considered fair and just? From a communicative action perspective, the key questions lie in whether the government has a perceived inclination to seek a shared understanding with the public. If citizens consider the government's policy-making process communicative, their positive perceptions should cultivate their normative support for the smoking policies. At the empirical level, such a proposition should be presented in the form of a positive association between the measures of communicative conditions and legitimacy appraisals.

The concept of legitimacy is meant to capture members' regular approval of a political order. This type of citizen support needs not originate from the fulfillment of personal interests and demands alone (Easton, 1979). As such, citizens may differ in demographics and positions on smoking. Nevertheless, their personal characteristics should not account for legitimacy appraisals as much as their evaluation of communicative conditions would do. Habermas is not the first to argue a communicative basis for legitimation. Lucien Pye held that accountability requires communication. "The communications process provides a basis for limiting and making

explicit the legitimate scope of political causality so that leaders and citizens can all be compelled to accept the same sense of the plausible” (Pye, 1963, p. 7). Additionally, a number of theorists have addressed the subject of discursive or dialogic democracy in recent years (Dryzek, 2000; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Warren, 1995).

From a communicative action perspective citizens will evaluate government legitimacy based on their perceptions of the validity of government claims along with their perceptions of the willingness of government to engage in dialogue about these claims. To test such a theoretical prediction, this study hypothesized that communicative action variables, including both validity and speech condition perceptions, should effect citizen attributions of legitimacy. The action theory holds that in any given speech act all validity claims are assumed simultaneously. Nevertheless, some of them may be more important in a given setting than others (Cooke, 1997), and previous research seems to bear this out (Author, 2010). This suggests that the most salient validity conditions accounting for citizen approval or disapproval of government action may vary depending on individual contexts. For example, a political authority’s appropriateness may be excellent whilst its perceived grasp of facts pertinent to a health program may be doubted. Additionally, certain speech conditions might be more relevant than others for legitimacy attributions in political systems holding different legislative norms. In America communicative opportunities may abound through press conferences even while real exchanges in which citizen questions are fully answered to the satisfaction of citizens may be infrequent. In the case of Singapore, it is likely that speech symmetry could be rather weak, in spite of which citizens might believe government validity claims may be fairly strong.

Singaporean leadership fashions the country as a hybrid form of democracy, though from a Western perspective this may seem doubtful. If it is democratic from a Western perspective,

then citizens believing the smoking policy to be legitimate should both find that the government's related claims are acceptable and that its orientation to reaching understanding is communicative in the fulfillment of speech conditions. Thus, the following hypotheses are implied. H1: Perceived comprehensibility will be positively associated with legitimacy. H2: Perceived truth will be positively associated with legitimacy. H3: Perceived appropriateness will be positively associated with legitimacy. H4: Perceived sincerity will be positively associated with legitimacy. H5: Ability to raise any proposition will be positively associated with legitimacy. H6: Symmetrical opportunities will be positively associated with legitimacy. H7: Fair treatment of propositions will be positively associated with legitimacy.

## **Methods**

### **Procedures**

A random-digit-dial telephone survey of Singapore citizens and permanent residents, age 21 years and older, was conducted by trained interviewers from a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing Laboratory (CATI Lab) at a university in Singapore between January 17 and March 6, 2011. The questionnaire was made available in English, Mandarin, and Malay. The last two language versions were developed using a standard translation-back-translation process. Telephone numbers were drawn from a dataset provided by the national telecommunications provider. The last four digits of numbers were randomly generated to provide representation of both listed and unlisted numbers. Telephone numbers were called back up to four times in an attempt to complete interviews. Ethical approval was obtained from a university's institutional review board to protect the interests of participants.

### **Participants**

A total of 2,081 respondents completed the survey. The minimum response rate was 34%, using AAPOR formula RR1. Of all respondents reached, the cooperation rate (AAPOR COOP1) was 60% (American Association for Public Opinion Research, 2009).

The gender of the participants was approximately even with 1,046 males and 1,035 females. Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 90 years ( $M = 43.05$ ,  $SD = 14.02$ ). The distribution by ethnic background was: Chinese (75%), Malay (11%), Indian (10%), and other (4%). Respondents' gender, age, and ethnicity matched the known distribution of the Singapore population (Department of Statistics, 2011). Smoking prevalence in females (4%) corresponded to the National Health Surveillance Survey 2007 while that in males (16%) was slightly lower than the national average (Chua, 2009). With regard to environmental tobacco exposure, 21% of the respondents lived with at least one smoker at home and 48% of those who worked were exposed to secondhand smoke at work.

### **Measures**

This study tested four validity condition variables, three speech condition variables, ten demographic and smoking-related variables, and one dependent variable, legitimacy. Measures of theoretical variables were adapted from previous research on perceived fairness of smoking policy-making in the United States and Singapore that had demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity (Author, 2010, 2011, 2012a). Habermas's action theory holds that validity claims and speech conditions refer to different sets of communicative norms guiding individuals' assessments of policy legitimacy. To assess dimensionality of the two constructs, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted using Hu and Bentler's (1999) dual criteria of a comparative fit index (CFI) value close to .95 and a cutoff value close to .06 for the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Results indicated that all items were well-behaved.

Tests for all factor loadings were significant. The goodness-of-fit statistics indicated an adequate model fit for both measurement models, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .04 (90% confidence interval = .04, .05) and CFI = .98, RMSEA = .04 (90% confidence interval = .03, .05), respectively.

Results of CFA supported factorial validity of the theoretical constructs.

**Perceived validity conditions.** Measures of perceived validity conditions comprised four latent variables, each of which referring to a basic speech principle based on which citizens assessed their levels of agreement with government propositions. Indicators for all four validity condition variables were scored on a five-point scale with 1 representing “strongly disagree” and 5 “strongly agree.” “Perceived comprehensibility” was defined as citizens’ assessments of their understanding of government propositions. Four items were used to measure the extent to which respondents felt that the government’s explanations of the smoking control measures were intelligible: “I think the government’s messages about cigarette use are comprehensible”; “I think I understand why the government wants to control cigarette use”; “I think the government provides citizens with a clear explanation of its action on smoking control”; and “I think I understand the health issues associated with the government’s smoking control measures” ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = .51$ ,  $\alpha = .72$ ). “Perceived truth” referred to citizen agreement with the perceived accuracy of information provided by the government. A four-item measure was used to test the extent to which respondents felt that the government offered factually accurate information based on their current knowledge: “I think the government exaggerates the negative consequences of cigarette smoking”; “I think smoking-related information given by the government twists the known scientific facts”; “I think the government uses some form of dramatization to make cigarette smoking look worse than it really is”; and “Those dreadful consequences of cigarette smoking claimed by the government will not happen to most smokers in real life” ( $M = 3.19^1$ ,

$SD = .70, \alpha = .71$ ). “Perceived appropriateness” referred to citizens’ evaluation of the adequacy of the government’s approach to smoking control. Three items were developed to measure the extent to which respondents felt that the government implemented smoking regulations in an appropriate manner: “I think the government imposes too many restrictions on cigarette use”; “I think the government pushes too hard to control cigarette use”; and “I think the government’s forceful approach to controlling cigarette use is not appropriate” ( $M = 3.41, SD = .75, \alpha = .76$ ).

“Perceived sincerity” referred to citizens’ perceptions of the consistency between the government’s expression of concerns for public health and its real action on smoking control. A three-item measure was used to capture the degree to which respondents felt that the government’s genuine intentions were to protect public health: “I think the government controls cigarette use because they genuinely care about citizens’ health”; and “I think the government cares more about citizen welfare than public control”; and “I think the government is sincere in protecting the interests of both smokers and nonsmokers” ( $M = 3.58, SD = .58, \alpha = .63$ ).

**Perceived speech conditions.** Three latent variables were used to measure the extent to which the perceived speech conditions were close to the ideal argumentative situation on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). “Ability to raise propositions” referred to respondents’ perceptions of their autonomy in expressing concerns about the smoking policies. Three items were used to measure the degree to which respondents felt that citizens like them could freely raise any questions about the government’s smoking policies: “I think the government would not encourage citizens like me to express concerns about its action on smoking control”; “I think citizens like me have limited capacity to freely raise questions about the government’s action on smoking control”; and “I think if citizens like me question the government about its smoking control measures, we would get into troubles” ( $M = 3.14, SD$

= .69,  $\alpha = .65$ ). “Symmetrical opportunities” were defined as respondents’ evaluation of the symmetrical distributions of opportunities for them and other citizens to question the government’s action on smoking control. A two-item measure was used to test the extent to which respondents felt that there were sufficient opportunities for different social groups to engage in dialogue with the government: “I believe some social groups would have a larger voice when the issue is about smoking control” and “I believe some social groups have more avenues to affect the government’s action on smoking control” ( $M = 2.61$ ,  $SD = .72$ , Pearson’s  $r = .44$ ,  $\alpha = .61$ ). “Fair treatment of propositions” tested respondents’ perceptions of the government’s fair and full consideration of propositions raised by citizens. Three items were used to test the degree to which respondents felt that the government attended and responded to citizen concerns about the smoking control measures: “I believe the government would give a fair consideration to what citizens think about smoking control”; “I believe the government would respond fully to citizen concerns about smoking control”; and “I believe the government would listen to citizens like me even after they make the decision to control smoking” ( $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD = .68$ ,  $\alpha = .77$ ).

**Legitimacy.** In this study legitimacy was defined as citizens’ general agreement with the government’s use of political power to enforce smoking polices. As discussed above, legitimacy attributions are awarded in part based on citizen beliefs that government is willing to interact in explaining, or justifying, its proposals. It is a two-way process. But the outcome of the process is a one-way judgment from citizens who give or withdraw support. Thus, for the purposes of testing the legitimation hypothesis, it is sufficient to observe the legitimacy relationship from the viewpoint of citizens alone. Three items were used to measure the extent to which respondents believed that the government’s smoking control measures were worthy of their support: “I feel it

is right for the government to take action to control cigarette use”; “The government’s action on smoking control is worth my support”; and “I personally approve the way the government uses its power to control smoking” ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = .58$ ,  $\alpha = .79$ ).

**Control variables.** Demographic variables often associated with citizen support for smoking policies were tested in the applied setting (Thrasher, Besley, & Gonzalez, 2010). They were gender, age, ethnicity, education, employment, and monthly household income. Four smoking-related variables, cigarette use, exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) at home and at work, and attitude toward smoking, were included to check associations between respondents’ personal position on smoking and their moral approval or disapproval of the government’s action on smoking control (Borland, et al., 2006; Brooks & Mucci, 2001; Lader, 2007). The measure of attitude consisted of five items using five-point semantic differential scales: “In my opinion, I think smoking is... (bad/good, unhealthy/healthy, unsexy/sexy, unpleasant/pleasant, and harmful/harmless)” ( $M = 1.70$ ,  $SD = .57$ ,  $\alpha = .84$ ).

## Results

Prior to hypothesis testing, a series of preliminary analyses were performed to test the relationship between demographic and smoking-related factors and legitimacy attributions. Results indicated that respondents’ age was positively correlated with their legitimacy appraisals ( $r = .11$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Those who held negative attitude toward smoking were more likely to consider the government’s action legitimate ( $r = -.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Additionally, respondents’ legitimacy appraisals differed by gender ( $t(2042) = 6.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ), smoking status ( $t(2042) = 11.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and exposure to ETS at home ( $t(2033) = 4.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ) or at work ( $t(1928) = 3.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Female respondents ( $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = .52$ ), nonsmokers ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = .51$ ), and those who had no exposure to ETS at home ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = .55$ ) or at work ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD$

= .53) made more positive legitimacy appraisals than males ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = .63$ ), current smokers ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = .80$ ), and those who were exposed to ETS at home ( $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = .67$ ) or at work ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = .62$ ). These six control variables were included in the proposed model to control for variance in legitimacy unaccounted for by communicative action variables.

The study hypothesized that participants' perceptions of communicative conditions should be positively associated with their approval of the government's policy-making. Zero-order correlations of all theoretical variables are presented in Table 1. The predicted model was tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) in AMOS 20.0. The fit indices indicated an adequate overall model fit,  $CFI = .96$ ,  $RMSEA = .03$  (90% confidence interval from .026 to .031), suggesting that the predicted model was consistent with the data.

[Table 1 about here]

Altogether, the control variables and communicative action variables accounted for 67% of the variance in legitimacy. Beta coefficients indicated that perceived sincerity ( $\beta = .45$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p < .001$ ), perceived appropriateness ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $p < .001$ ), fair treatment of propositions ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and perceived comprehensibility ( $\beta = .09$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were positively associated with legitimacy appraisals. H1, H3, H4, and H7 were supported. Results did not support the direct association between perceived truth and legitimacy ( $\beta = .04$ ,  $SE = .03$ ). Ability to raise propositions ( $\beta = .08$ ,  $SE = .03$ ) and symmetrical opportunities ( $\beta = -.05$ ,  $SE = .02$ ) had no apparent association with legitimacy. H2, H5, and H6 were not supported. Smoking status ( $\beta = -.11$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was the only control variable that was significant in the predicted model. The data illustrated that apart from demographic and attitudinal differences, respondents were more likely to approve of the government's smoking policy-making if they felt strongly that the government: (1) was sincere in its efforts to protect

public health; (2) adopted a normatively appropriate approach to controlling cigarette use; (3) attended and responded to citizen concerns; and (4) communicated with citizens in an intelligible way. Figure 1 shows standardized path estimates associated with endogenous variables included in the model.

[Figure 1 about here]

### **Discussion**

This paper investigates the communicative ground of legitimacy in a hybrid political system, Singapore. Findings indicate that predicated theoretical relationships between perceived communicative conditions and public attributions of legitimacy are partially supported in Singapore. The results are consistent with Habermas's action theory and past studies sharing the same operational protocol (Author, 2010). For citizens who agree with government propositions or believe that the government would take their consideration into account, they are more likely to consider political decisions as fair and just, or legitimate, though results vary across validity and speech conditions.

Results from the SEM analysis identify some underlying communicative reasons that can account for citizen acquiescence to the government's patriarchal governing style and indicate the unique communicative characteristics of citizen support in a Singapore context. The different predictability of individual communicative action variables reaffirms previous findings that the importance of communicative conditions may vary depending on situational contexts. In the present study three validity variables are significant predictors of legitimacy, rather than all four, and their effect sizes vary. Perceived comprehensibility, perceived appropriateness, and perceived sincerity were found to have significant beta values. The finding suggests that in this political system wherein authorities make most decisions (after consultation with citizens

sometimes), citizens are much concerned about whether the authorities are sincere about the policy goals, execute the policies appropriately, and explain their policies to citizens clearly.

Among the three speech condition variables, only the government's fair treatment of public concerns accounts for sentiments of legitimacy in this sample, while neither ability to raise propositions nor symmetrical opportunities are statistically significant. This finding has to be understood within the context of Singapore. The political system in Singapore does not provide official channels for citizens to initiate policy proposals but does allow citizens to give feedback when they are called for consultations. Social groups are not organized for promoting political agendas and are limited to addressing social welfare functions (Author, 2012b). The lack of experience in pushing political agendas, either individually or through social groups, explains the lack of influence of the other two speech condition variables, i.e. symmetry and freedom to raise any proposal. The consultation process usually starts after the authorities decide to look into one policy area and ask feedback from individual citizens or social groups. Thus, all citizens have equal, or fair, opportunities to give feedback even if allowable challenges to government are restricted.

Habermas's expectation that communicative action should generate legitimacy was developed in a Western context. The results of this study support the theoretical proposition that certain validity and speech conditions can draw more critical attention from citizens than others, depending on the political system under examination. It further appears that the validity and speech framework might be able to differentiate between legitimization processes in societies where discursive communicative norms are more as compared to less well developed. Legitimacy in democratic settings might be more reliant on communicative speech conditions (Author, 2010), while in hybrid political systems, more authoritarian ones, validity conditions

would be more important.

The results suggest an approach to testing empirical relationships among validity conditions, speech conditions, and legitimacy within a comparative framework. If non-discursive and discursive communicative norms and expectations may weigh differently across contexts, then perhaps in some settings citizens' satisfaction with one set of communicative conditions would be able to account for their moral beliefs in a political order. Figure 2 displays three possibilities of attaining positive legitimacy appraisals. The first quadrant represents situations in which citizens are highly satisfied with government validity claims and speech conditions. Accordingly, legitimacy may stem from citizens' agreement with government action based on free and full deliberation. The second quadrant represents situations in which citizens disagree with government propositions but expect unrestricted dialogue between them and the government or among citizens as an opportunity for them to better understand each other's reasons for supporting or opposing government policy-making. When participants feel that their communication is geared toward seeking reciprocal understanding, they may approve of the rightfulness of the decision-making process, even if a consensus cannot be attained. The fourth quadrant indicates situations in which citizens may agree with government propositions on a non-discursive basis. This could happen when citizens attend more to the substantive fairness of a government. In such circumstances legitimacy might not originate from a Western sense of democratic deliberation but the political authority may still gain diffuse support based on public acceptance of government proposals. The Singapore data reported here may appear to fall into this fourth quadrant. Finally, if citizens feel negative about both sets of communicative conditions, they may consider the government's action strategic and not worthy of their support. The third quadrant represents such situations in which legitimacy is denied.

[Figure 2 about here]

Figure 2 certainly oversimplifies citizens' complex appraisals of individual validity and speech conditions. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that citizens may recognize the perceived fairness of government action in different ways. For example, unlike previous research conducted in American contexts that can rely on comparatively well-functioning political speech norms, legitimacy attributions in the present study are more likely to lie in the first or fourth quadrants. This finding reveals a unique bond between the Singapore government and its citizens regarding a government's legitimate right to rule. If more empirical evidence can be found, the categorization shown in Figure 2 might be useful in guiding investigations of citizen support across varied political systems. More research should explore its applicability in this regard.

Despite this study's findings, it is important to recognize its limitations. First, the reliability coefficients of perceived sincerity, ability to raise questions, and symmetrical opportunities are lower than expected. Past studies testing a similar model in the United States consistently showed high reliability of the measurements (Author, 2006, 2010, 2012c). In this study correlations among some question items are moderate, resulting in less satisfactory reliability. For theory testing purposes, these variables stayed in the measurement models and their dimensionality was supported by model fit statistics that could not be significantly improved further by removing indicators. However, it might be plausible that the relatively low reliability found in the data for this study is context relevant. In Singapore the fear of expressing personal opinion on controversial topics exists, which has shown negative impact on citizens' levels of outspokenness (Willnat, Lee, & Detenber, 2002). In addition, citizens' general lack of political experience, including the limited experience of serving as opinion poll respondents, may

affect their comprehension of and responses to political communication-related questions. These contextual factors may attribute to the unsatisfactory performance of some well-established political communication scales tested in Singapore (Lee, Detenber, Willnat, Aday, & Graf, 2004; Zhang & Chia, 2006). Reliability characteristics of this sample's data set might be seen as reflecting such a pattern. Further improvement in the measurement and research design adapted to the unique political environment in Singapore is needed. Notwithstanding, our theoretical variables show similar predictive power across our national survey and other studies, suggesting that the results remain worth reporting.

A second limitation regards objects to which legitimacy applies. Political scientists like Easton (1979) note that legitimacy can apply to different objects such as the legality of a political institution, public acceptance of ideological values, and regime support (Levi, Sacks, & Tyler, 2009). For testing purposes, this study focused on the rightfulness of government action. The selected setting makes it possible for respondents to rate validity and speech condition variables based on their own experiences. However, it is worth considering the extent to which communicative action measures might account for the legitimation of other political objects, such as a regime and its goals and values, the persistence of a system, and political solidarity. More research is needed to address these issues in the future.

In summary, the communicative action approach presented in this paper highlights the bond between procedural judgment and the fairness of political control. An index of procedural judgment is developed based on Habermas's conception of communicative conditions, concentrating on the extent of citizen acceptance of the propositional validity of government statements and on perceived opportunities for uncoerced argumentation. This shifts focus onto the communicative ground of citizen support and supplements examination of social

psychological influences on legitimacy processes studied in much previous research. The methodological significance of the validity and speech framework for the cultivation of legitimacy awaits more empirical tests. Key considerations for any such tests include objects to which legitimacy applies, specific roles that individual validity and speech conditions play, comparisons with other sources of legitimacy, and inclusion of other outcomes of fair lawmaking in analyses.

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Table 1

*Correlation Matrix of Perceived Validity, Perceived Speech Conditions, and Legitimacy*

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Perceived comprehensibility	.09***	.19***	.42***	.23***	-.05*	.31***	.41***
2. Perceived truth		.52***	.09***	.40***	.09***	.10***	.27***
3. Perceived appropriateness			.15***	.44***	.08***	.20***	.44***
4. Perceived sincerity				.25***	-.09***	.44***	.47***
5. Ability to raise propositions					.10***	.33***	.33***
6. Symmetrical opportunities						-.11***	-.10***
7. Fair treatment of propositions							.44***
8. Legitimacy							

Note. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

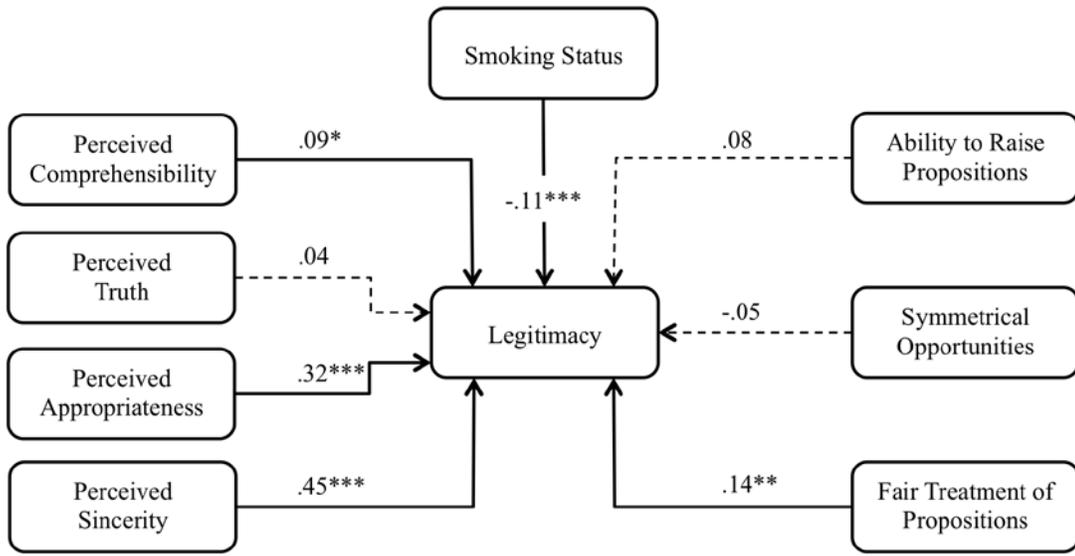


Figure 1. Final multivariate SEM estimates of paths indicating the effect of perceived validity conditions and perceived speech conditions on legitimacy. All path coefficients are standardized. Dotted lines indicate nonsignificant associations between communicative action variables and legitimacy. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

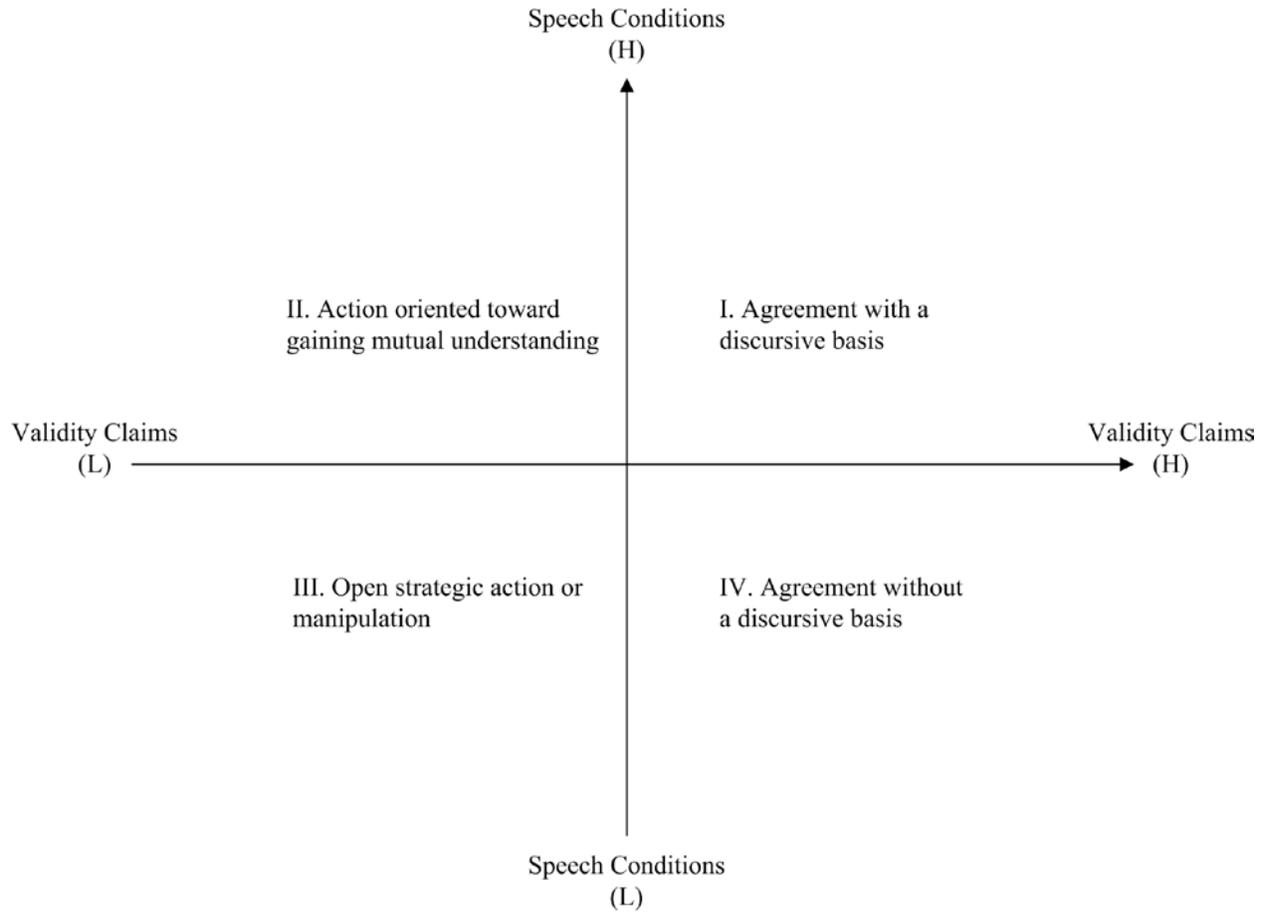


Figure 2. Possible associations of communicative action measures in accounting for legitimacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Mean values of all communicative action variables were calculated after recoding negative items.