



The Role and Impact of Digitalisation on Our Well-Being and Resilience IPS Social Lab Workshop

By Natalie Pang and Neo Yee Win

Digitalisation presents a slew of benefits—increased connectivity, possibilities for collaboration and new modes of association—but also challenges, from cyberbullying and gaming addiction among youths to polarisation of public opinions. Individual and community efforts are needed to improve media literacy and strengthen digital resilience.

On 20 July 2018, the Singapore public was greeted with startling news about the data breach at SingHealth. With 1.5 million patients' personal data stolen, it is Singapore's worst cyber-attack thus far. Subsequently, computers in the public healthcare sector were quickly [disconnected from the Internet](#), and [all Smart Nation projects halted](#) until [3 August](#), as the Smart Nation and Digital Government Group re-examined existing online security measures.

Digitalisation comes with benefits but also challenges, and it is possible to feel detached, even helpless, when such attacks occur. For the majority of the population that is not at the frontlines of technological defence, what are our roles? How can we strengthen our resilience amidst the challenges that come with digitalisation?

Such questions and more were addressed at the “The Role and Impact of Digitalisation on Our Well-Being and Resilience” workshop held by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Social Lab on 27 June. Three discussion panels examined the impact and corresponding solutions for digitalisation at the individual, societal and national levels.

Online Struggles, Offline Impact

Chaired by IPS Social Lab Senior Research Fellow Dr Natalie Pang, the first panel set the stage by introducing the online behaviours and challenges of digital users in Singapore, particularly our youth (including those with special needs), and elderly. For these groups, the challenges in cyberspace are pressing.

Mr Shem Yao, Lead and Senior Coach from TOUCH Cyber Wellness, noted that youths actively compare among themselves online and that such social comparisons could undermine perceptions of themselves and others.

Mrs Liza Ow, Principal of APSN Tanglin School added that those with special needs are more susceptible to cyberbullying, online addictions, and online falsehoods. Though social media platforms offer alternative spaces for social interactions, differences in perceived norms (online and in real life) can result in inappropriate and emotionally-charged behaviour online for some youths. It is a recursive cycle that could render them even more vulnerable to cyberbullying and falsehoods.

As for older adults, most were keen to learn new technologies, especially electronic payments, said Mr Koh Juay Meng, President of RSVP Singapore. However, there are cohort differences, most noticeable between the Pioneer Generation and baby boomers. It is thus important to develop an extensive Internet infrastructure and a range of customisable Internet courses to facilitate the acceptance and adoption of new technologies.



(From L to R): Mr Shem Yao, Mr Koh Juay Meng and Mrs Liza Ow.

Developing a Sustainable Digital Ecosystem

The next session focused on the impact of the digital ecosystem on individuals, and how different actors can create partnerships that would aid the development of a healthier digital ecosystem.

Having established that parents often grapple with the inevitable existence of digital tools in their children's lives, Professor Lim Sun Sun and Ms Carol Loi offered different outlooks on technological domestication in families. Prof. Lim, Head of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at the Singapore University of Technology and Design, contended that technological demands from children's schools could reinforce academic competitiveness. For example, parents now find themselves more involved in their child's education through home-school conferencing tools, where they have access to classroom-related information such as test

score averages and overall class performance. Consequently, both parent and child are made more acutely aware of the child's relative standing in class. This reinforces social comparison, and once again feeds into Singapore's traditional emphasis on academic grades as a ticket to success—leading to academic stress for both parents and children.

Ms Carol Loi, Founder and Principal Consultant of Village Consultancy, believes that both parents and children can benefit from increased digital literacy. As a proponent of digital literacy able to bridge the generational divide, her organisation, Village Consultancy, had partnered with Google and professional gamers to conduct digital literacy training sessions for parents seeking to understand new digital trends to better connect with their children.

As for concerns about gaming addictions, Mr Nicholas Aaron Khoo, co-founder of Singapore Cybersports and Online Gaming Association (SCOGA) illustrated how his e-sports academy empowers youths to develop sustainable cyber habits. By nurturing and developing youths' interests in online gaming as a sport (or more specifically, e-sports) rather than an unhealthy addiction, youths learn how to manage their gaming habits, and ultimately become positive role models within the community.

Evidently, it is not just the platforms but the actors as well that matter in the digital ecosystem. In the panel discussion chaired by IPS Senior Research Fellow Dr Carol Soon, speakers agreed that the socio-economic inequality that impedes individuals' adoption of digital technologies can be potentially bridged with cooperation between multiple actors, such as industry players, government and schools. Future partnerships could possibly capitalise on the resources of these players while simultaneously addressing the concerns of parents unable to bridge the digital chasm on their own.



(From L to R): Professor Lim Sun Sun, Ms Carol Loi and Mr Nicholas Aaron Khoo.

Digital Nation, Digital Empowerment

The last panel, chaired by Head of IPS Social Lab Dr Leong Chan-Hoong, extended the scope of discussion to national and societal levels.

Government policy plays a key role as the main driver of digitalisation in Singapore. To ensure everyone has equal access to digital services, the national Digital Readiness Strategy was launched to promote digital literacy and expedite widespread adoption of technology, said Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) Senior Director Ms Koh Li-Na. However, she emphasised that digital readiness is a national effort; the realisation of the Smart Nation vision requires the support of the people and private sector.

An example of how citizens can be involved is through collaborations facilitated by digital platforms. Using the example of EunPyeong e-Poomasi, Dr Soon illustrated how local residents in a Korean community were able to exchange talents or goods with a local virtual currency. With Singapore's already high mobile penetration rate, Singapore has the potential to improve our knowledge and skill, self-sufficiency, community and material development through the adoption of such collaborative technology.

Also on the topic of community engagement, Dr Pang argued that the pursuit of active citizenry and participation on digital platforms comes with a unique set of challenges. While digitalisation facilitates the mobilisation and coordination of masses—and offers alternative channels of civic action beyond traditional means—it can also contribute to a polarisation of opinions, depending on the issue. She highlighted that the range of civic actions that have sprung up in recent years reflect not only evolving conceptions of citizenry, but also blurring boundaries between the local and the global. To strengthen resilience against external threats, it is important to articulate and identify common grounds, values and active citizenry within communities here, she added.



(From L to R): Dr Leong Chan-Hoong, Dr Natalie Pang, Ms Koh Li-Na, Dr Carol Soon

External threats manifest in different ways. As much as the average citizen is unable to ward off external threats solely with our technological capacities, individual and community efforts to improve media literacy do play key roles in strengthening our digital resilience. The workshop may have raised more questions than answers, but these questions need to be continuously pondered upon, if only to nudge our nation's progress onto the right track.

A full report of the workshop can be found [here](#).

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