

Furthering the reach of the mind



IPS Senior Research Fellow Tan Tam How speaking at the Impact of New Media on General Election 2011 conference held in October 2011.

By *Dr Carol Soon*

The arts and culture have played an integral part in making Singapore grow into a global city. What roles should the public, private and people sectors play in promoting arts and culture in Singapore? What more should and can be done to increase cultural capital?

The Internet has frequently been touted as a game-changer in politics. As broadband and mobile adoption surges, how will the Internet transform the electoral and media landscapes in Singapore?

Many from the public and people sectors have voiced concerns over uncivil and corrosive discourse present in cyberspace. How effective is a code of conduct in regulating online discourse? Should individuals develop self-protection mechanisms to help them navigate online space?

The Arts, Culture and Media Cluster probes such issues. By questioning theoretical assumptions, challenging conventional wisdom and thinking out of the box, it puts forth alternate views. Through rigorous analysis and working closely with different stakeholders, it determines how new practices are transforming the dynamics of interaction among the public, private and people sectors.

Some of the cluster's past projects have bridged policymakers, academics, the media, civil society and the public, and engaged them in analysing trending issues. In 2011, it conducted a national survey on Singaporeans' political traits and their use of mainstream and online media. On one level, the study



A seminar on digital information sharing, which was organised by the Arts, Culture and Media Cluster in July 2013, saw the attendance of media researchers, bloggers, policymakers and the media.

challenges libertarian assumptions of the Internet's effects on political engagement. On another level, differences in political ideology, political participation and media consumption observed among various segments of the population emphasise the need for viewing technology's impact on Singapore through more critical and nuanced lenses.

Two years ago, the political landscape revealed a visible shift. The 2011 general election has been referred to by many as a "watershed election", and by others an "Internet election". IPS spearheaded a study to investigate the impact of new media on the general election. Together with researchers from the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University, the study scrutinised the impact of different players (parties and candidates, bloggers, mainstream media, opinion makers, ordinary voters, and youth), the role of technology (social media and mobile telephony) and the consequences for voters. The study concluded that contrary to popular belief, the Internet had not played a decisive role in the general election.

Currently, the cluster is putting together Singapore Chronicles, an expansive collection of 50 monographs to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Singapore's independence in 2015. Covering a wide range of subjects, from the philosophical to the operational, the fundamentals to the expedient, and the esoteric to the mundane, the monographs will provide historical accounts and offer insights into what makes Singapore Singapore. And to provide an overarching perspective of Singapore's arts and cultural policy trajectory, and its ideological relevance to the nation-building project, IPS is helming a book project that contextualises and assesses key arts and cultural policies from the late 1950s to the present.

Moving ahead, and cognisant of the increasing use of communication technologies for government-citizen communication, IPS will develop recommendations for policy-makers on how best to maximise new communication technologies for government-citizen engagement. The cluster will also investigate the possibility of developing a nationwide platform whereby the Singapore government could communicate directly with every citizen, on a regular and sustained basis, and for citizens to communicate with one other, all within the context of e-governance.

Arts, culture and media never "arrive". There is no endgame. Ceaselessly changing, these areas are replete with both continuities and discontinuities. The cluster's job is to keep an eye on the future and an eye on the past and see how they both affect the present.