GE2020 was an 'internet election': IPS survey
Unlike previous elections.

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The 2020 General Election was an "internet election"— a conclusion that was made based on findings from an Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Post-Election Survey.

Occurring in the middle of the Covid-19 global pandemic, GE2020 saw no physical rallies.

Press conferences were live-streamed, with new candidates introducing themselves via split-screen.

Political and constituency broadcasts were aired over every platform imaginable, from Channel 5 to Facebook.

But just because campaigning migrated online, it doesn't necessarily mean that the internet played an important role, said IPS Senior Research Fellow Carol Soon.

Discussing the findings of the IPS Post-Election Survey with other panellists in a virtual forum on Thursday (Oct. 8), she explained that GE2020 was an "internet election" due to these three reasons:

- Information dissemination
- Political engagement
- Internet's influence on voting behaviour

Information dissemination

Digital platforms rose in importance this election as compared to GE2015.

In GE2015, television was the most popular source for Singaporeans, but in GE2020, online websites including mass media became the most popular sources.

Parties and candidates had also made full use of social media to get their message out to the masses.

Chua Chin Hon, Chief Data Analyst at Analytix Labs, found that on average, the People's Action Party (PAP), Workers' Party (WP), Progress Singapore Party (PSP) and Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) posted about eight times more often on Facebook during GE2020 per day than they did before the election was announced.

In some cases, however, social media struck back— resulting in repercussions for two candidates in particular.

Political engagement

Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) and instant messaging (WhatsApp, Telegram, etc.) became the two most popular modes of political engagement in GE2020.

While older voters accessed traditional mass media (TV, print and radio) more frequently than younger voters, digital platforms were popular across all age groups.

Boomers, particularly, used instant messaging the most to learn more about political parties and candidates.

They also used instant messaging as much as other generations when seeking information on the election.

According to Natalie Pang, senior lecturer at the National University of Singapore (NUS), social media was also significant in shaping how Singaporeans engaged with the election—be it expressive, informational, or relational in nature.

Voting behaviour was influenced by internet use

The IPS survey also discovered that voting behaviour was influenced by internet use.

People who used online websites of Singapore mass media were 1.23 times as likely to vote for PAP.

On the other hand, people who engaged with political parties/candidates via social networking sites and via their websites were 1.36 times and 1.35 times as likely to vote for the Opposition.

Chua pointed out that some "surprises" from this election such as the outcome in Sengkang will be far less surprising if the parties had paid more attention to the signals coming from Facebook interaction data.

Parties can pick out the correct signal from the noise on social media will have a huge competitive advantage during future elections.