



Workshop on “The Role and Impact of Digitalisation on Our Well-being and Resilience”

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On 27 June 2018, the Institute of Policy Studies Social Lab held a workshop entitled “The Role and Impact of Digitalisation on Our Well-being and Resilience”. The workshop explored various aspects of our digital landscape today and how positive aspects of digitalisation can be harnessed while managing any adverse outcomes at the individual, societal and national levels. The workshop featured three panels, each comprising three distinguished speakers. A panel discussion was conducted at the end of the each panel. Close to 100 participants from academic institutions, voluntary welfare organisations, government agencies, corporate associations, and other non-profit organisations and societies attended the workshop.

Panel 1 – Understanding our Digital Landscape

The first panel sketched the digital landscape in Singapore, and focused on the usage of the digital space by various groups in the Singapore society, specifically the youths, elderly and youths with special needs. The emphasis was on the nature of social media engagement by these groups of people, and the challenges they faced.

Panel 1 started with a presentation by Mr Shem Yao, Lead and Senior Coach from TOUCH Cyberwellness, on how online communication permeate daily communication between youths and their peers. Mr Yao contended that the boundary between the online and offline world had become fuzzy. Spillover effects were observed in the offline environment where youths apply social media “lingo” to daily contexts of communication (e.g., hashtags and abbreviations). He noted that understanding and accepting these linguistic cues may be difficult for some. However, he reckoned that such effort is necessary and crucial in communicating effectively. Mr Yao also pointed out how usage of social media had affected and changed the way youths maintained relationships with their peers. Adapting the concept of “streaking” from a popular communication platform, Snapchat, he said that maintaining relationships with peers are now tracked and quantified. Finally, Mr Yao highlighted the detrimental effects of social media influence, especially aspects involving social comparisons that might potentially undermine young persons’ perception of themselves and others.

The second presentation focused on seniors’ adoption of mobile technologies, by Mr Koh Juay Meng, President of RSVP Singapore. The presentation highlighted seniors’ strong motivation in learning new technologies (e.g., e-payments and smart devices). Mr Koh explained that several factors, such as the wide broadband coverage in households in Singapore, are key to seniors’ acceptance and adoption of new technologies. He further highlighted that learning how to use e-payment is one popular skill that seniors were keen to master. Therefore, responding appropriately to senior’s demands for these courses and customising them is crucial. He also noted cohort differences amongst seniors, such as those between the pioneer generations and the baby boomers. With different skill sets and experiences, training courses for different cohorts need to be targeted and aligned to different levels of knowledge and gaps.



Members of the audience respond to Mr Koh Juay Meng’s presentation on Social Media Engagement by Seniors

The third presentation was about teenagers with special needs in the digital age, by Mrs Liza Ow, Principal of APSN Tanglin School. Mrs Ow discussed how marginalised youths benefit from social media platforms, but also experience hidden dangers in the cyber world. On one hand, the use of social media platforms enable teenagers with special needs to interact with others, improve their social networks and gain social capital. These platforms support their development of self-esteem and identity by providing them a sense of inclusion in the (online) community. However, Mrs Ow cautioned that the high usage of social media technologies, when combined with the level of cognitive development of the user, could be a recipe for

disaster—teenagers with special needs are vulnerable to cyberbullying, may respond inappropriately to fake news and become addicted to online activities.



Mrs Liza Ow explains some of the risks that teenagers with special needs face in the online world

In the panel discussion chaired by IPS’ Dr Natalie Pang, issues regarding online norms and offline support were discussed. Mr Yao highlighted that some youths’ emotionally driven tendencies might lead them to react to online incidents that were not socially acceptable. Mrs Ow emphasised the importance of developing an understanding of the norms of appropriate, responsible behaviour with regard to technology use as well as knowledge, skills, and values on how to protect oneself and other Internet users in the cyber world. Mr Koh also raised the vulnerabilities that seniors may face online, such as cybercrimes and online falsehoods.



(L-R) Members of Panel 1 Mrs Liza Ow, Mr Koh Juay Meng, Mr Shem Yao, and Dr Natalie Pang discussing the various aspects of our digital landscape today

Panel 2 – The Individual in the Digital

The second panel, chaired by IPS’ Dr Carol Soon, discussed how individuals and families navigated the digital landscape.

The first speaker, Dr Lim Sun Sun, Professor and Head of Humanities, Arts and Social Science at the Singapore University of Technology and Design, shared her recent research on how parents are coping with technological demands associated with their children’s school curriculums. Through her interviews with parents, Dr Lim found that parents are “stuck” in terms of mixed messaging about device use—as they try to keep device use at bay given cautionary messages about addiction and screen time, devices are needed for out of classroom learning. These tensions make it difficult to strike a balance between “access” and “excess”. Besides e-learning tools for the children, digitalisation has also made parents more involved through digital assessment tools and home-school conferencing tools. Such apps allow parents to have frequent feedback on their children’s academic progress, where access to information such as the median or average test scores and overall class performance is available. As a result, parents are acutely aware of where their child stood relative to their peers, putting pressure on both parent and child. “With all this technology reinforcing

competitiveness, we might be seeing some adverse trends and consequences down the road,” Dr Lim cautioned.

The second speaker was Ms Carol Loi, Founder and Principal Consultant of Village Consultancy, who shared about her organisation’s work in helping parents keep up with and manage their children’s use of technology. Village Consultancy partner with major players in the digital literacy (e.g., Google) and family welfare (e.g., Centre for Fathering, Help123) to provide training and support for parents seeking to understand new digital trends so that they could better connect with their children. For example, they co-organise digital literacy training workshops with Google, and also invite professional gamers to help them understand the e-sports industry. Ms Loi believed in a targeted-help approach that complements resources already provided by government agencies, tailoring the right assistance to where it is needed. She said, “It is not about giving parents another app or tool-kit, but to give them a space to discuss and hear personal stories, and through them encourage and motivate each other to try different things rather than feel a sense of helplessness.”

The third speaker was Mr Nicholas Aaron Khoo, who co-founded the Singapore Cybersports and Online Gaming Association, or SCOGA, an ecosystem builder for Singapore e-sports. SCOGA organise cyber wellness and digital literacy programmes to help young people manage their online and gaming behaviour positively. Instead of treating youths’ interest in online gaming and e-sports as an unhealthy addiction, SCOGA leans into their interest in this field to educate them on sustainable habits and encourage them to be a positive influence to their peers and community. SCOGA trains youths to become cyber wellness “ambassadors”, and their e-sports academy develops youths through empowering e-sports programmes, involving influential e-sports personalities as coaches. Even though the academy is in its infancy, many have passed through its doors with some going on to assist their peers as positive role models and mentors.



Mr Khoo explains how SCOGA leverages youth ambassadors to coach fellow peers

The panel discussion covered structural barriers such as socio-economic inequality that could affect parents' ability to manage their children's digital usage. Dr Lim remarked that her research found that many low-income families did have access to technology and the Internet, but they mainly used these for entertainment and communication, and less so in instrumental ways such as self-education and skills upgrading. Regarding the resources available to non-profits to assist people in digital literacy and cyber wellness, Mr Khoo said the government was not the only source, and that there were many other industry players who had “skin in the game”, who were willing to provide. On what other measures schools could take to address the problems arising from digitalisation, Ms Loi suggested that schools be more involved in helping parents adjust to the digital transitions that their children would undergo as they advance through the curriculum.



(L-R) Members of Panel 2 Mr Nicholas Khoo, Ms Carol Loi, Dr Lim Sun Sun, and Dr Carol Soon discuss the issues that individuals and families face in navigating the cyber space

Panel 3 – The Nation in the Digital

The third panel explored digitalisation at the societal and collective level, and was chaired by Dr Leong Chan-Hoong, Head of the IPS Social Lab.

The first speaker Ms Koh Li-Na, Senior Director at Info-communications Media Development Authority (IMDA), discussed digital inclusion in a Smart Nation. Beyond the digitalisation of government services and the economy, the very core of a Smart Nation is the digitalisation of society, where Singaporeans can take advantage of technology to improve their lives. However, not everyone has the skills and knowledge to fully embrace the opportunities of technology. The national Digital Readiness Strategy was developed to address this issue, in order to ensure that no one is left behind. Some of the recommendations in promoting digital readiness include expanding and enhancing digital access, infusing digital literacy into the national consciousness, and empowering community and businesses to drive the widespread adoption of technology. Ms Koh emphasised that digital readiness is a national effort—although the government is spearheading initiatives to help different population segments to be digitally ready, it needs the support of the people, private sector partners, and the community to achieve its vision.



Ms Koh Li-Na, Senior Director from IMDA addressing the audience on Digital Inclusion in a Smart Nation

Next, Dr Natalie Pang, Senior Research Fellow of the Social Lab, explained how digitalisation shapes civic engagement and citizenry. Dr Pang discussed two effects of digitalisation. First, it allows for easier resource mobilisation and coordination, for example, through crowdsourcing for funds and securing volunteers. Second, it increases civic engagement by providing more modes to do so such as through tweets, chat groups, and blogs. Dr Pang proposed that various forms of civic action also reflect changing conceptions of citizenry – which shaped but are also shaped by the ever-changing media environment. She highlighted that citizenship was also increasingly a choice, as those who chose to engage had many different ways to do so, besides the traditional modes of engagement. Dr Pang suggested that future research should investigate the interplay between digital citizenry and civic engagement – that is, how our ideas of being a good citizen could shape online and offline civic actions, and how those actions in turn could influence our notions of what it meant to be a good citizen.



Dr Natalie Pang explains how digitalisation influences civic engagement and our sense of identity

The third speaker Dr Carol Soon, Senior Research Fellow at IPS, shared how citizens are connecting and collaborating to solve problems by leveraging technology. In Singapore, mobile and Internet penetration rates are high and this contribute to the favourable conditions forming the backbone of our Smart Nation infrastructure. Dr Soon explained that there are four broad areas of online connections and collaborations: crowdsourcing, collaborative consumption, crowdfunding and civic crowdfunding. She indicated that another feature of online collaborations is that exchanges are often decentralised and centred around reputation and trust. Using the example of EunPyeong e-Poomasi, a Korean online platform that allows local residents to share talents or goods using a local virtual currency, Dr Soon touched on various possible outcomes of online collaborations such as knowledge and skill, self-sufficiency, community and material improvement. To encourage the adoption of technology to collaborate and connect, she suggested that it is necessary to change attitudes by building knowledge and framing initiatives, establish subjective norms by having a shared vision and exploiting social and community networks, and improve perceived behavioural control by increasing proximity to technology.

In the panel discussion, Dr Pang highlighted that while people are moving towards closer networks and chat groups for more meaningful and intimate interactions, one concern is the potential polarisation of views in such networks, as opposed to open, networks, where people can be exposed to different or conflicting perspectives that challenged their views. Dr Soon

also stressed that it is necessary to identify needs and gaps in order to use technology in order to improve the use of technology for social service enterprises. Finally Ms Koh stressed the importance of balancing between digitalisation and maintaining a sense of human touch, and reiterated the role that everyone can play in transforming into a Smart Nation.



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