

Empowering Citizens to Thrive in a Digital Age

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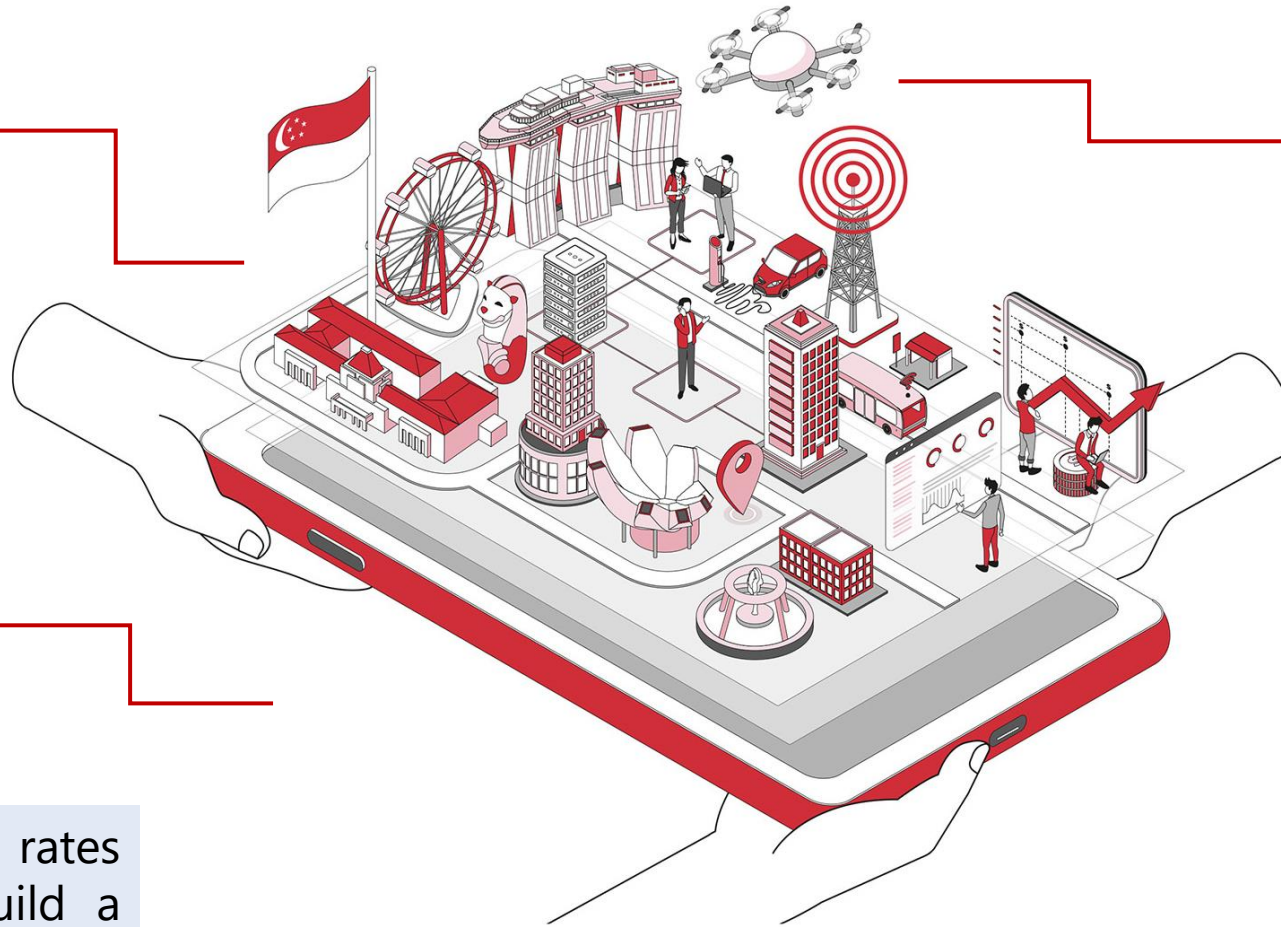
Building Blocks of Singapore's **Smart Nation** Journey

**Progressive
Digital
Government**

**Comprehensive
Digital Security**

**Stable & Inclusive
Digital Society**

**Vibrant
Digital Economy**



As digital participation rates increase, we need to build a digital society where we can all go online **safely** and **confidently**.

Ensuring that citizens can go online safely and confidently requires us to look at two key areas.

Digital Well-being



- i. Excessive / Problematic Use of Online Services
- ii. Online Safety

Digital Citizenry



Key issues

- As children and adolescents spend more time online, there are also growing concerns about the risks that digital technology use (e.g., use of social media, online games) can pose to child and adolescent mental health and well-being. In fact, over 60% of Singaporeans perceive social media to be responsible for a decline in mental health¹.
- In response to concerns about the risks that social media use could pose to mental health, the US Surgeon General recently proposed for social media platforms to carry a warning label stating that social media is associated with significant mental health harms for adolescents.
- Nevertheless, international evidence on the impact of digital technology use on the mental health and well-being outcomes of children and adolescents has thus far been mixed and inconclusive.
- To help children and adolescents in Singapore thrive in a digital age, it is important to understand how digital technology use can affect their mental health and well-being, address the risks that can arise from its use, and equip them to use technology in healthy and balanced ways.

¹YouGov Poll (2023)

Lines of inquiry

- What are the specific features associated with digital technologies (e.g., platform designs) that can result in (i) excessive / problematic use of digital technologies and (ii) poor mental health and well-being outcomes among children and adolescents?
- What are the protective or risk factors that influence the impact of digital technology use on the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents?
- How might digital technologies be harnessed to optimise the development of children and adolescents and positively impact their mental health and well-being?

Key issues (1/2)

- Online harms have become more prevalent in recent years. Between 2022 and 2023, the number of deepfakes detected globally has increased tenfold. In Singapore alone, the number of deepfakes surged by 500% during the same period¹.
- Despite the growing prevalence of online harms, Singaporeans may not be adequately prepared for and able to respond to and recover from risks and threats in the online space. In fact, nearly half of Singaporeans who encountered harmful online content did nothing about it².
- While Singapore has put in place measures to tackle online harms, such as the amendments to the Broadcasting Act and the Code of Practice for Online Safety, regulatory measures alone are not sufficient. It is also important to equip individuals with the know-how to protect themselves online and respond to risks and threats in the digital space.
- In addition, there is a need to understand the larger social and societal context in which online harms occur and consider ways to reshape that context.

¹SumSub Identity Fraud Report (2023)

²MCI Online Safety Survey (2023)

Key issues (2/2)

- It is challenging to motivate people to learn about and act on online harms. Some possible reasons include:
 - The general public may perceive that 'slow drip' falsehoods are not immediately harmful to them or their loved ones, unlike harms that have a more 'tangible' impact (e.g., financial loss through scams).
 - Online resources / safety features may be difficult to access and navigate.
 - The learning modality / approach may not meet the needs of the target segment (e.g., time-starved adults) or address the learning preferences of specific archetypes.
- Given that digital trends evolve rapidly, we need to ensure public education measures are effective and timely for the different target segments.

Lines of inquiry (1/2)

Individual-focused knowledge, skills and attitudes

- How might we best equip citizens with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to protect themselves online and respond to online harms, including those super-charged by AI, such as deepfakes and AI-generated misinformation?
- How might we better understand what drives individuals to share, consume, perpetrate online harms (e.g., psychological drivers, frames)?
- Given the fast-evolving nature of technological advancements, how do we ensure that our measures (e.g., regulation, public education resources and programmes) continue to stay relevant and effective for the different target groups?

Lines of inquiry (2/2)

Social/community-based measures

- How might we shape norms at the community level, e.g., through measures like building up networks of influential leaders online?

Ecosystem-centric measures

- How might we harness digital technologies to enable individuals to use the internet in meaningful ways while detecting and mitigating potential online harms, especially for young users?

Key issues

- Digital technologies can help to strengthen social connections among people as societies digitalise, but social cohesion can also be challenged through problematic online phenomena, behaviours and discourse such as 'echo chambers', polarising content, hate speech, 'cancel culture', and more.
- Today, the negative impacts of digital technologies to social cohesion appear to be taking centre stage – many are starting to be reluctant to participate online, due to a fear of being attacked by others. In fact, over 60% of Singaporeans undertake at least one form of digital disengagement, such as choosing not to engage in discussions with other people online¹.
- Companies, community partners and individuals all have a role to play in jointly developing norms that engender a positive online environment.
- As Singapore forges ahead in our digitalisation journey, it is important for us consider approaches to encourage and support our communities to collectively shape positive online norms and nurture a responsible and civic-minded online citizenry.

¹*SHE Online Harms Survey (2023)*

Lines of inquiry

Understanding the online landscape

- Is the online space in Singapore becoming more polarised? To what extent do echo chambers exist? Which issues do these trends coalesce around? Which population segments are most affected, and how?
- How far does online discourse / information consumed translate to problematic offline behaviours and attitudes? Which population segments are most affected?

Individual, social / community-based measures

- Individual skills
 - Might Singaporeans need new skills to navigate and shape a more positive online space?
 - How do we encourage them to pick these up?
- Social or community-based measures
 - How might we encourage companies, community and individuals in Singapore to play a role in shaping positive norms online?

Ecosystem-centric measures

- How might digital technologies be harnessed to combat polarization and strengthen social bonds? (e.g., apps to encourage neighborly ties, platforms to encourage positive civic discourse)
- What other interventions could we explore (e.g., platform design)?