

SiRC@WORK



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**WEE KIM WEE SCHOOL
OF COMMUNICATION
& INFORMATION**



**NANYANG
TECHNOLOGICAL
UNIVERSITY**



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

It has been a fruitful year for the SiRC.

We conclude calendar year 2011 with a major grant programme for Asia completed and a new one that includes Africa and Latin America replacing it; the SiRC was highlighted in a conference on the impact of new media on the general elections; we continue to attract scholars and researchers for collaborative projects; and we are serving the Internet community in Singapore.

It seemed only yesterday that we landed our major project, the SIRCA programme, abbreviated from the mouthful Strengthening ICTD Research Capacity in Asia. The two-year programme saw researchers from all over Asia, being mentored and trained in the research process to produce work of a calibre such that many were able to present them in an international conference and publish in a journal.

In the SiRC, we believe that quality research will help make better informed decisions. In the case of development projects, it means that money and other scarce resources are spent for maximum effect and with minimum waste. We believe that research can make the world a better place.

Marking the conclusion of one programme, a book tentatively titled Linking Research to Practice in Asia: ICT4D Research, Management and Perspectives will be published late this year or early next year. This is just in time for the launch of SIRCA II, which will now involve scholars from Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.

To accommodate the thrust from a regional to a global programme while still keeping the brand name, Assistant Director Arul Chib has been creative: the last letter A now stands for Alliance instead of Asia. The SiRC will be setting up coordinating offices in South Africa and Peru to manage SIRCA II.

“... WE BELIEVE THAT RESEARCH CAN MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE.”

We are excited about the potential for literally global influence. And the applicants are excited about being involved in a programme that they know has worked.

In Singapore, the recent General Elections saw much activity in the online world. Many expected that the new media—Singapore after all sees itself as an Intelligent Island—would have a major impact on the results. Careful research, facilitated by the SiRC and with many SiRC associates participating, showed otherwise. The impact may perhaps have been indirect but when it came to what mattered, the votes, the new media had had a negligible impact. Perhaps the impact will be at the next General Elections, where once again the SiRC will be ready and waiting.

Meanwhile, as good research attracts good researchers, so a continual stream of visitors from the world over has been coming to base themselves at the SiRC for their research. These Visiting Scholars bring with them fresh ideas and insights and a refreshing level of energy to the SiRC. Some publications from the collaborations have begun to appear and more are expected.

For the local Internet community, the SiRC continues to host the Community of Information Technology Experts (CITE), a non-profit volunteer group informing Singapore online users of their Internet rights and responsibilities. The members of CITE resembles the Who's Who in Singapore in their field. The number of cases responded was 20 in the last 12 months, since its inception in September last year.

The SiRC has also acted as pro-tem secretariat for the Singapore Chapter of the Internet Society. Membership is open to those who want to promote the use of the Internet. A major activity will be an annual conference that is planned for next year.

In our first ever issue of SiRC @ Work, we summarize all that we've achieved in this fruitful year. We hope that you'll enjoy your read, as we prepare for next year – it already looks to be very promising.

Sincerely,

Dr Ang Peng Hwa
Director, SiRC



SIRC ASSISTANT DIRECTOR BAGS UNU YOUNG SCIENTIST AWARD

SiRC Assistant Director Arul Chib was awarded the Prosper.Net-Scopus Young Scientist Award for Sustainable Development in ICTs by the Institute of Advanced Studies of the United Nations University and the ProSPER.Net network. Dr Chib, who concurrently serves as Assistant Professor of the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information was honoured for his research initiatives in developing innovative mobile healthcare systems and ICT learning tools for the youth in rural and marginalized communities globally.

Dr Chib has been involved in developing and evaluating ICT applications for health and education in remote areas in China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Peru, Singapore, Thailand, and Uganda.

Dr Chib has been using mobile phones and data transmission technology to enable the immediate transfer of medical information between health workers and local communities. After the tsunami disaster in Aceh, Indonesia, in 2004, this facilitated communication between remote midwives and urban doctors, thus enabling immediate and efficient medical response.

Dr Chib has collaborated with the NGO, Text to Change, to evaluate an SMS texting initiative that aimed to increase knowledge levels on HIV/AIDS in rural Uganda, and influence participants to access to HIV Counselling and Testing Service. From a public-health perspective, beyond the fact that SMS is a convenient and cost-efficient method of disseminating information immediately, the campaign contributed to increasing HIV/AIDS knowledge.

Apart from his extension activities, Dr Chib is a full-time assistant professor at the Division of Public and Promotional Communication at WKWSCI, also serving as assistant director of SiRC—supervising projects such as Strengthening ICTD Research Capacities in Asia (SIRCA), a capacity-building project for budding researchers in Asia, Latin America and Africa interested in the topic of ICT for Development. His research work has recently been profiled in the United Nation Chronicle journal in the article “Rewarding Scientific Knowledge for Sustainable Development”.

The ProSPER.Net-Scopus Young Scientist Award in Sustainable Development is given annually by the UNU to young scientists or researchers, based in the Asia-Pacific region, who have made significant contributions in the area of Sustainable Development, including ICTD. As part of his award, Dr Chib will serve a year-long research fellowship at Ludwig Maxmillian University, Munich, supported by the International Bureau of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

ProSPER.Net (Network for the Promotion of Sustainability in Postgraduate Education and Research) is a network of several leading higher education institutions in Asia and the Pacific that have committed to work together to integrate Sustainable Development into postgraduate courses and curricula. On the other hand, Scopus is the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature and quality web sources covering global research literature. Elsevier is a world-leading publisher of scientific, technical and medical information products and services.

THE STRENGTHENING ICTD RESEARCH CAPACITY IN ASIA (SIRCA I)

The Strengthening ICTD Research Capacity in Asia (SIRCA I) program was initiated in 2008, to build the social science research skills of emerging Asian scholars in the information and communications technology for development (ICTD) space. SIRCA was managed by SiRC, and was supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada.

SIRCA I was built on a three-pronged capacity-building approach of

- providing financial support in terms of research grants,
- providing research training workshops, where the workshops were focused on research methods, quantitative and qualitative analysis, and the importance of disseminating project findings effectively.
- through a one-on-one mentoring arrangement. This unique mentorship component provided principal investigators with the assistance and guidance to ensure steady progress and completion of project, while the mentors were able to enhance their own personal and professional knowledge. The learning and exchange between mentor and mentee facilitated the outcome of stronger and more rigorous research findings within the program.

To encourage dissemination, SIRCA I collaborated with the Media Asia Journal (published by the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC) in Singapore) to release two special journal issues in December 2010 (Vol. 37, No. 4) and April 2011 (Vol. 38, No. 1), comprising of papers from the ICA Mobiles Per-Conference event in June 2010, and from among SIRCA research grantees respectively. A book titled "Linking Research to Practice in Asia: ICT for Development Research, Management and Future Perspectives" is also in the pipeline for publication in 2012. The book will be published by ISEAS, and is edited by two mentors Arul Chib and Roger Harris. The publication showcases the intricacies of grant management within the SIRCA program, and research perspectives with views from mentors and articles from mentees.

The SIRCA I program drew to an end in December 2011. For more information, please visit www.sirca.org.sg.



Having successfully groomed and trained 15 junior researchers in the region over the past three years, with tangible results in the form of multiple academic publications and invitations to present at international conferences, the program has gained significant traction among the academic community. In keeping with these continuous efforts to build capacity, the next phase with SIRCA II.

The Strengthening Information Society Research Capacity Alliance – or SIRCA II – aims to improve the inter-disciplinary research skills of emerging scholars in information societies in the Global South. Learning from the experience of building capacity in the ICTD field in Asia, SIRCA II will include researchers from Africa, Latin America as well as Asia, in order to address the very lack of Southern scholars in this area of study.

The call for proposal has achieved encouraging results with a total of 130 eligible proposals went through a double blind review process. 15 competitive proposals were selected during the Grant Review Meeting held on 11-12 December 2011 in Bangkok, Thailand with collaborators matched and assigned to each. SiRC works together with the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa, and the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos (Institute of Peruvian Studies – IEP), Peru. This programme is also supported by IDRC.

For more information, please contact SIRCA Secretariat: sirca2@ntu.edu.sg. For more reading, please log on to: www.sirca.org.sg.

THE 2ND ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM (APRIGF)



The Internet today has evolved into an integral part of our lives. It is everywhere and is increasingly important as our world progresses. Distance is no longer a barrier and boundaries have been redefined in the online world. As a result, in 2003 and later in 2005, the United Nations organised the World Summit on the Information Society to discuss Internet governance. The topic is not about the rules of the Internet as much as how the rules are made and perhaps more critically, how good rules can be made.

Today, Asia has the strongest growing demand for Internet addresses. An increasing number of people in Asia are using the Internet. In contrast to North America and Europe, demand for the Internet in Asia is not only growing, but growing at an accelerated rate.

This year, the second Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum (APRIGF) was held in Singapore from 16-17 June. It brought together 200 senior government and private sector representatives as well as the technical and academic community from across the region to exchange ideas and shape the future of Internet governance in this part of the world. Hosting organisations included the Singapore Internet Research Centre (SiRC) of the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore and the DotAsia Organisation. The event was sponsored by M1, Google, and APNIC (Asia Pacific Network Information Centre), and supported by the Infocomm Development Authority (IDA) of Singapore and Lee Foundation.

Among the wide-ranging topics that were discussed was the accessibility to the Internet, intellectual property issues and online security concerns.

The outcomes of the second APRIGF conference were presented at the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), Kenya in September this year.



INTERNET GOVERNANCE: WHO WATCHES THE WATCHMAN?

This year, the SiRC participated in three major Internet Governance Forums. SiRC organised the 2nd Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum, and to include the leaders of tomorrow in the discussion, the first ever Youth Internet Governance Camp in Singapore. Cumulated findings were presented by Professor Ang Peng Hwa and four delegates selected from the youth camp at the 6th International Governance Forum.





YOUTH INTERNET GOVERNANCE CAMP 2011

The Youth Internet Governance Forum Camp 2011 was held on 16-18 June 2011 at NTU. It attracted participants living in Singapore, with facilitation from NetMission Ambassadors mainly from Hong Kong who had participated in the 2010 youth Internet governance forum camp. The goal was to challenge to the youth to think critically about governing the Internet in our age as well as learn to work together as different stakeholders in managing contemporary techno-scientific resources.

Participants were pressed to give thought about the most pertinent issues with regard to Internet governance, and were encouraged to engage in the discussion of these issues via enriching activities such as games, presentations and debates. Through the camp, they realised the importance of the vitality of the hitherto negligible Internet governance: that the Internet is no longer as simple a communication instrument as it possibly was perceived, instead it is now a critical governance issue whose access, usage, and response to such usage are important. It is a global concern as much as it is no longer limited to the field of ICT – having transcended into policy, business, community and welfare realms, the Internet is now an important component of global governance.

It is also interesting to note that the youth are very much aware of the challenges and intricacies involved in Internet governance from different stakeholder groups, and the difficulties of harmonising different positions. It is, however, generally acceptable that universal Internet access is the greatest concern, as the Internet becomes a critical component of contemporary socio-economic transformation and emancipation of marginalised and poor communities.

The youth who participated in the 2011 YIGF went back with a greater knowledge of what it takes to manage contemporary techno-scientific resources. Besides this, they also walked away with new friendships forged with others from other countries, and a freshly ignited interest in Internet governance. There is definitely more that can be explored, and SiRC hopes to carry this further in our next Asia-Pacific Youth Internet Governance Forum Camp.

This article is an adaptation of a report originally contributed by Sabastiano RWENGABO, Asia-Pacific Youth Internet Governance Forum Camp Report.



SiRC DIRECTOR AND SINGAPORE YOUTH PARTICIPATE IN THE 6TH IGF

SiRC Director Ang Peng Hwa led a delegation of four Singaporean youth who participated in the 6th International Governance Forum (IGF) held from 27 to 30 September, at the United Nations Office in Nairobi, Kenya. The three delegates were selected from a pool of participants in the Youth IGF Camp held in NTU in June.

This year's IGF adopted the theme "Internet as a Catalyst for Change: Access, Development, Freedoms and Innovation." The forum tackled four sub-themes: 1) Internet Governance for Development; 2) Emerging issues; 3) Managing critical internet resources; and 4) Security, openness and privacy. The forum included dialogue sessions and workshops that discussed specific issues as well as panel presentations on Internet Governance.

IGF not only highlighted the importance of intensifying initiatives on Internet Governance, but also created a profound impact on the delegates. "It was an honour to participate in IGF'11 as it was truly an eye-opening and enriching experience," says one of the delegates.

Sebastiano Rwengabo shares the same feeling of fulfilment from the IGF experience and expressed how IGF provided "different perspectives on techno-social development rarely addressed in mainstream political science training." He firmly believes that contemporary studies of politics and society must address the role of the internet in domestic and international politics.

On the other hand, Muhammad Fahmi Firdaus Bin Ismail reflects on how technology has become a significant part of today's lives, thus the need to constantly improve technology and its supporting systems. "IGF has helped to broaden my insight on the internet, which has become the forth human need, apart from the food, water and shelter. We should not take this technology for granted but instead embrace it for the betterment of mankind and our future generations," he adds.

COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT



The increased hype and hope surrounding the advent of low-cost computing devices, specifically targeted at rural children, called for scientifically established research to test their impact on education. In her study, Komathi Ale evaluated the psychological empowerment of children through an ICT in education intervention using the One Laptop per Child (OLPC) laptops.

The project was designed to influence the community aspects of unbiased access, local language, and teacher training. These claims were supported by formative findings from fieldwork conducted in 2009 at a village primary school in Thiruvallur, India. In the following year, the main study was carried out in the Himalayan regions of India using quantitative pre-post-intervention surveys. The quasi-experiment involved 68 children from test and control groups who interacted with the OLPC laptops during the five-month period. In order to assess the sustainability of impact, post-tests at short-term and medium-term periods were conducted.

There were significant increases in all three test variables for children exposed to OLPC. Findings also indicated significantly greater increases among children in the test group than that of the control group for these test variables. The study offered theoretical and practical recommendations for ICT implementations in education.

Komathi Ale received both her B.A. and M.A. degrees in Communication Studies from the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information at the Nanyang Technological University. Ms Ale's research focuses on the impact of information and communication technologies for development, with specific interest in addressing social issues among marginalised communities. The above project was funded by the SIRCA program.

A LINK BETWEEN PLAYING GRAND THEFT AUTO AND AGGRESSION?

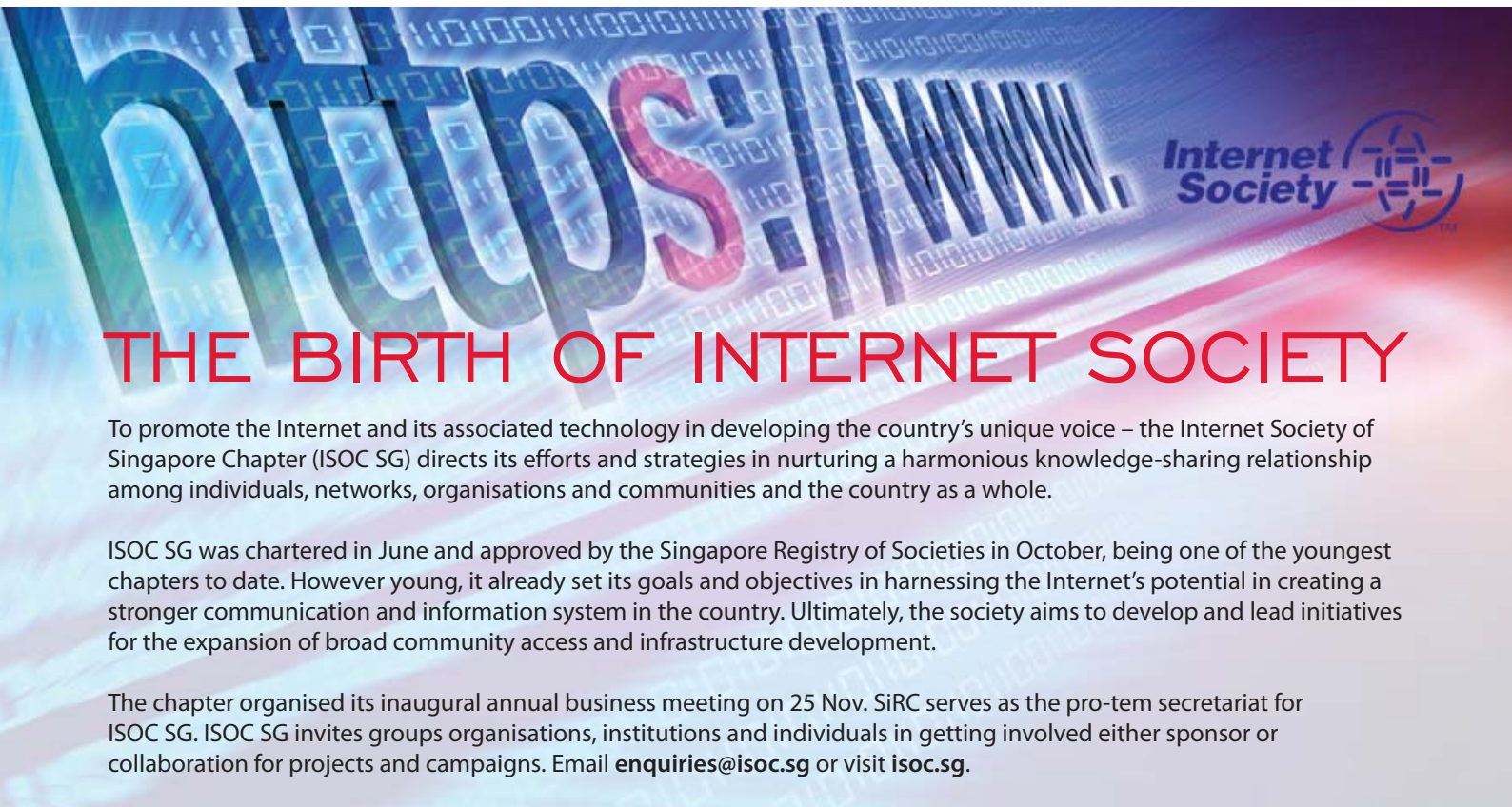
Video games with themes dubbed as "violent" have long been under the scrutiny of scholarly debate. Do these games encourage aggressive behaviour among its users?

Over the years, media has reported a positive link between exposure to such games and violent behaviour of their user-players. However, there were studies that found that the long-term impact of violent games are still vague.

A team of students, together with Dr Marko Skoric, associate professor at WKWSCI, recently authored a paper "Grand Theft Auto IV Comes to Singapore: The Effects of Repeated Exposure to Violent Video Games on Aggression." The article explores if there is, in fact, a pressing influence of such video game in the users' behaviour.

The study on which the article was based on employed a longitudinal laboratory-based experiment to examine longer-term effects of playing the video games. One hundred thirty five participants were assigned divided into: a treatment group (where subjects were asked to play Grand Theft Auto IV for a period of 12 hours a day, over three weeks); and a control group. The two groups were compared using post-test measures on trait aggression, attitude toward violence and empathy. Results showed that playing Grand Theft Auto IV did not increase aggression nor reduce empathy among its participants. However, a small increase in pro-violence attitude was suggested. The paper also stated that effects of such games as Grand Theft Auto IV may also depend on gender and age group.

The full journal article is published in Cyberspace, Behaviour and Social Networking.



THE BIRTH OF INTERNET SOCIETY

To promote the Internet and its associated technology in developing the country's unique voice – the Internet Society of Singapore Chapter (ISOC SG) directs its efforts and strategies in nurturing a harmonious knowledge-sharing relationship among individuals, networks, organisations and communities and the country as a whole.

ISOC SG was chartered in June and approved by the Singapore Registry of Societies in October, being one of the youngest chapters to date. However young, it already set its goals and objectives in harnessing the Internet's potential in creating a stronger communication and information system in the country. Ultimately, the society aims to develop and lead initiatives for the expansion of broad community access and infrastructure development.

The chapter organised its inaugural annual business meeting on 25 Nov. SiRC serves as the pro-tem secretariat for ISOC SG. ISOC SG invites groups organisations, institutions and individuals in getting involved either sponsor or collaboration for projects and campaigns. Email enquiries@isoc.sg or visit isoc.sg.



UPCOMING EVENTS

- Training workshop for the SIRCA II grantees on Sunday, 11 March 2012 at Atlanta, Georgia USA. The workshop allows grantees to
 - a. Meeting face-to-face for the first time with their Collaborators;
 - b. Exposed to general research issues such as ethical, gender, theory, inter-disciplinary and methodology;
 - c. Present their research proposals and obtain feedback from the audience on how best to proceed with the projects.
- Organization of the Open Session titled "Information Society Research in the Global South" at the ICTD 2012 Conference on Monday, 12 March 2012, Atlanta, Georgia USA.
- Internet Society Singapore Chapter activities, March 2012 to December 2012. Check ISOC website www.isoc.sg for the latest information.
- INET Conference Singapore, 2012
- SiRC Seminar Talks. Check SiRC website at www.sirc.ntu.edu.sg for updates.



USING THE INTERNET FOR POSITIVE GROWTH

More about Dr C.S.H.N. Murthy, SiRC Associate

The importance of internet for the positive growth of humanity, inclusive of development of third world countries and homogenizing the growth and development of agrarian as well as industrial economies in a globalised world, has been realised as far back as in the beginning of the new millennium.

Recognizing internet's immense potential to be a site of convergence with the fast developing technologies such as webcasts and iPods, Dr C.S.H.N. Murthy, an SiRC Associate, developed an educational model for the Ministry of Education, Eritrea (a sub-Saharan African Nation) and two of his papers dealing with this part of research on the Use of Media and ICT Strategies for Non-formal and Distance Educational Programmes have been published in two international journals (Journal of Adult and Continuing Education, NIACE, UK-Summer 2006 issue. Vol.12.1 pp. 45-75; Educational Media International Vol. 43 No. 2, June 2006 pp 181-196. Routledge UK). Furthermore, he has focused on developing innovative social network sites for the farmers in India in order to help the ailing farming sector with the global access and equitable sharing of information superhighways (Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, Vol No 9, No 11. Jan-Mar 2008).

Another work of combining the use of mobile phone for farming through the convergence and satellite networks to help the farmers has been accepted for presentation at Pan Commonwealth Forum 5 (PCF5) at London and was published (Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, Vol No 10 (3), July-Aug 2009). Later, he worked on the internet and new media regarding its potential as effective medium to curb corruption effecting the growth and development in India (Triple C Vol 8, No 2, 2010) and how to ensure websites as sites of a two-way flow of communication between the citizens and those who govern them (Journal of International Growth Vol 16.2, 2010). A similar work on Mediating through Web 2.0-Imperatives of an End User Perspectives of Websites of Universities of North East of India is currently accepted for presentation at the 20th Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC) Conference.

SIRC'S VISITING SCHOLARS PROGRAMME

The SiRC Visiting Scholars Programme supports research by individuals who are undertaking research projects related to information technology in Asia, especially Singapore. It is open to practicing scholars or advanced graduate students. The Programme is for a minimum of one month up to a maximum of two semesters.

Visiting Scholars are expected to:

- 1) Make a research presentation about their project to the faculty and graduate students of the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information;

- 2) Acknowledge SiRC's contribution in publications arising from the research undertaken at SiRC;
- 3) Upon completion of the fellowship, provide to the SiRC a short summary of the research objectives and findings for records and posting to the SiRC website (approximately 1000 words); and
- 4) Be available for consultation with SiRC faculty or students with relevant interests.

To apply, prepare:

- 1) Curriculum Vitae;
- 2) A scholarly paper you have written;

- 3) Statement describing your interest and intended research area while with us (4-5 pages); and
- 4) Contact details of two referees

And submit to:

Ms Yvonne Lim
Senior Manager
Singapore Internet Research Centre
Wee Kim Wee School of
Communication and Information
Nanyang Technological University
31 Nanyang Link Singapore 637718

Email: sirca@ntu.edu.sg

For Term and Procedures, please visit
www.sirc.ntu.edu.sg/Programmes/



THE FUTURE OF THE PARTICIPATIVE INTERNET?

A melting pot of cultures to describe a globalised population, a utopian society with participative democracy, or the 'information superhighway', just to name a few. In thinking through these metaphors, it is easy to notice the rise of a new breed of social applications: Facebook, YouTube, FourSquare, and Wikipedia, and so on. Many have come to refer to such applications as Web 2.0 or 'social media'. Yet it is not a term, not even a concept, as it still begs to be defined as new applications and services come under its umbrella. If anything, it serves to remind us of how the Internet will continue to be redefined.

Discourse on user participation had its roots in the 1970s in Scandinavia and Germany (Sandberg, 1979). Later, Cooley (1980) argued for the collective potential of constructive imagination of workers through participation—similar to the discussion of the 'wisdom of crowds' today.

The Internet provides the structure for enabling such participation, and this was especially evident in the recent General Election in Singapore. Since the election, the adoption of social media by politicians to solicit views from the ground and to express their own voices were apparent. Cultural institutions around the world, too, are adopting the use of such applications to engage and encourage participation. However, some significant questions remain: Can such participation translate into concrete actions for societies and cultural institutions, like how it was for organizations in Scandinavia and Germany? What are the actual implications in the short and long run? What are the effects of encountering and processing information that is more complex and plural, a likely scenario in the content of co-creation? What are the implications of participating at different levels of intensity?

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