

Singapore residents optimistic that COVID-19 situation will improve this year: NTU study



Chia Han Keong

·Editor

Tue, 26 January 2021, 4:05 pm · 4-min read



People waiting to cross a street in the rain in Singapore. (PHOTO: Suhaimi Abdullah/Getty Images)

SINGAPORE — Nearly two-thirds of Singapore residents believe that the COVID-19 pandemic situation in the country will improve in the upcoming year, according to a newly-published Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Singapore nationwide study.

The online study, which surveyed 1,606 residents from 17 to 31 December last year, found that 63.1 per cent of the respondents believed that the COVID-19 situation will improve in the next 12 months.

In fact, 60.6 per cent of them are looking forward to travelling out of Singapore, and about half of them are hopeful that they can give handshakes (51.9 per cent) and hugs (46.4 per cent).

In a media release on Tuesday (26 January), NTU Singapore said the study aims to look at the new normal following last year's COVID-19 outbreak. The survey was commissioned by the Centre for Information Integrity and the Internet (IN-cube), a new research centre at NTU's Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, and conducted by a local polling company.

Continue adoption of social distancing measures

While there was optimism expressed by the survey respondents in seeing the COVID-19 situation improve in Singapore, they remained cautious on social distancing.

More than two out of three (68.7 per cent) said that they would likely or very likely continue to avoid places with large public gatherings, while a similar proportion (68.5 per cent) said they would continue to engage in social distancing even after the pandemic is over.

Face masks may also remain commonplace, as 64 per cent of the respondents said they would continue to wear face masks outdoors even after COVID-19, while 62 per cent of them said they are likely or very likely to continue to work from home whenever possible, even after the pandemic.

“The intention of Singaporeans to avoid large public gatherings – even though they believe that COVID-19 situation will improve – is a positive indication that people are still remaining vigilant as they adapt to the new normal,” said IN-cube's assistant director, Assistant Professor Edmund Lee.

“The challenge is how we can avoid becoming victims of our own success, ensuring that people do not get ‘COVID-19 fatigue’ and let their guard down as Singapore gradually opens up to the world.”

Many feel fatigue in video-conferencing

Fatigue is also an issue explored by the study with regard to online messaging and social media apps, which have seen a spike in usage among residents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Three in four respondents (75 per cent) said that their use of WhatsApp during the pandemic increased. This was followed by Telegram (60.3 per cent), Facebook (60.2 per cent) and Instagram (59.7 per cent).

But by far the online apps with the biggest spike in usage are the video-conferencing tools, with some 86 per cent of respondents reporting more usage of programs like Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Skype during the pandemic.

And nearly half of them said they feel tired from their video-conferencing calls (46.2 per cent) or drained from activities that required them to use video-conferencing platforms (43.6 per cent). Also, 37.1 per cent said they are frequently overwhelmed by the number of video-conferencing calls they have to make or attend.

“Social interaction through these online communication tools definitely brings about new challenges. Some may feel as if they are always on call at work or among their friends. Others may be uncomfortable with turning their cameras on during a video call or may not have a stable internet connection,” said IN-cube director, Associate Professor Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

“With these difficulties and limitations in mind, we need to be mindful of our expectations of others when we are using these tools or when we ask others to use them.”

Online communication usage driven by isolation

The study’s researchers also said that the increased use of online communication tools could in part be driven by feelings of isolation, amid the travel restrictions and circuit breaker periods brought about by the pandemic.

When asked how often they felt they lacked companionship, 35 per cent of the respondents indicated they have felt this way sometimes, while 19 per cent felt this way often or very often.

“The significant correlation between the use of online communication tools and feelings of isolation from the survey results may help explain why most of our respondents reported an increase in their use of online communication tools in the past few months, as they turn to these tools to feel connected to others even when physical interactions have to be limited,” said Assoc Prof Tandoc.

IN-cube, which was launched on Tuesday, seeks to promote information integrity – the creation and sharing of accurate, reliable, and relevant information – through its research.