

IPS Seminar: The Study of Blogospheres in Chinese, Malay and Tamil

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In Singapore, the public discourse on blogs has been focused on English-language blogs, particularly those of the political genre; scant attention has been paid to non English-language blogs.

In December last year, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) commenced a first-ever study to examine the contours of blogospheres in the three official mother-tongue languages. This study examined the topics and issues that bloggers wrote about, their blogging practices and the structural attributes of their blogs.

The study included blogs that have at least 50% of their content written in Chinese, Malay or Tamil, and are started by Singaporeans or Singapore-based bloggers. In cases where the nationality or the residency of the blogger is unknown, at least 50% of the blog content has to be related to Singapore. The study involved a content analysis of 201 Chinese-language blogs, 30 Malay-language blogs and 20 Tamil-language blogs. The researchers also conducted a survey with these bloggers in March 2014 and over 40 bloggers have responded so far.

On 2 April 2014, IPS organised a seminar on the findings of the study. It was attended by over 50 participants, comprising bloggers, policymakers, educators, academics, representatives from non-governmental and community organisations, and members of the media. IPS Special Research Adviser Arun Mahizhnan convened the seminar.

Dr Carol Soon, IPS Research Fellow and Mr Sim Jui Liang, IPS Research Assistant presented findings on the Chinese blogs. They found that personal experiences and issues pertaining to the Chinese language and culture are two dominant themes for these blogs. Bloggers tend to use standard Chinese when blogging, and there is little mixing of languages. Although a minority of bloggers discuss political issues, their commentaries are moderate and measured.

Next, Dr Mohamad Shamsuri Juhari, Director for the Centre for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs (RIMA) and Ms Atikah Amalina, IPS Research Assistant, shared their insights on Malay blogs. They highlighted the lack of online resources/blogs in the Malay language

and discussed implications for the utility of the Malay language and survival of Malay identity without (unmixed) language.

Next, Mr Mahiznan and Ms Nanditha Das, IPS Research Associate spoke about Tamil-language blogs. They drew attention to the dominance of non-Singaporean content and the usage of formal Tamil in blogging. The bloggers have a very good command of the language and the researchers felt that Indian Tamil bloggers could have influenced them. Language and literature are the most popular topics for Tamil-language bloggers, followed by personal experiences. The Tamil-language blogging community is dominated by non-Singaporeans and long-term Singapore residents.

IPS Senior Research Fellow Tan Tarn How then moderated the discussion session. The speakers and participants raised issues such as the apolitical and individualistic nature of Chinese blogs; the absence of political discussion in Malay-language blogs; the interest in India and other non Singapore-related subjects within the Tamil blogging community; and the possible displacement of content to social media. Bloggers who wrote in Chinese, Malay and Tamil also shared their experiences and insights during the seminar.

Details of the findings will be published at a later stage. Please contact Ms Nur Zahidah Binti Mohd Nasir at ips.event9@nus.edu.sg if you would like a copy of the report.

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