

Chinese, Malay and Tamil 'blogospheres' here small, more apolitical than English ones: IPS

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Small but active Chinese, Malay and Tamil "blogospheres" exist in Singapore, but are significantly less contentious when it comes to local politics compared to the world of English blogs here.

These were the findings of the first ever study on mother-tongue blogs in Singapore, released by local thinktank the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) on Wednesday.

Researchers found about 200 blogs started by Singaporeans, Singaporean residents or Singapore-related issues, where more than half the content was in Chinese. They found 30 blogs in Malay and 20 in Tamil of the same nature. In comparison, there were already about 700 blogs in English, concerning Singapore issues, about five years ago, said IPS research fellow Carol Soon, who specialises in arts, culture and media.

Of the 201 blogs in Chinese, only about 10 could be considered political blogs where commentators wrote about politics and policy issues, said Dr Soon.

"Chinese bloggers talked about political issues from a more balanced and moderate way that acknowledged different points of view," she said. "The mainstream media was used as an information source and not an object of critique in the blogposts."

These bloggers also stopped short of using the medium to galvanise supporters for a campaign, unlike prominent English anti-death penalty blogs like "Save Vui Kong".

In the Tamil sphere, many talked about politics, but interestingly about Indian, and not Singapore politics. Most were written by non-Singaporeans who were long-time migrants from Tamil Nadu or Sri Lanka.

"This could be due to a fear factor of blogging about local issues, a lack of familiarity with Singapore or non-integration," said Special Research Adviser Arun Mahizhnan.

As for the Malay blogosphere, many of the 30 blogs were lifestyle ones, with popular blogs on marriage and wedding preparations. While Chinese and Tamil bloggers wrote purely in their language, about two-thirds of Malay bloggers were written in a mix of Malay and English.

"This raises concerns about the decline of the Malay language," said Director of Centre for Islamic and Malay Affairs Shamsuri Juhari.

Participants, some of whom were bloggers, said the study shed light on an interesting topic. But they also noted that online discussion has moved to Facebook.

Dr Soon said that studying Chinese, Malay and Tamil discussions on Facebook is possible in future, but users' privacy settings, which may not allow researchers to view everything, might be an issue.