

Most still rely on traditional media

Those who go online for political news also read papers, watch TV: Survey

Cai Haoxiang,

The Straits Times, 15 September 2011



ONLINE alternative media like The Online Citizen (TOC) has not replaced mainstream media as the go-to source for Singaporeans to get their political news, according to a survey.

Only 12.6 per cent or 138 Singaporeans among the 1,092 polled said they go online for their political news.

They tend to be younger and better-educated and would, on average, spend 20 minutes a day at sites such as The Online Citizen, Temasek Review and Yawning Bread blog.

But the survey of Singaporeans aged 21 years and older found that they also read print newspapers and online mainstream media as well as watch TV for various types of other news.

In fact, only around 10, or less than 1 per cent, rely solely on online alternative media for their political news.

'Hence those who read online alternative media are also exposed to mainstream media,' said Mr Tan Tarn How, a senior research fellow of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) who led the study.

'Online media is complementary, not competitive, to the use of mainstream media,' he added, noting how blogs with alternative views would cite articles in The Straits Times they disagreed with.

Mr Tan was speaking at an IPS seminar yesterday when he disclosed these findings from the survey done around nine months before the General Election in May this year.

Two dons from the communications and new media department at the National University of Singapore, lecturer Chung Siyoung and assistant professor Zhang Weiyu, were also involved in the study on political traits and media use.

Some of its findings were released after the General Election, and these show, among other things, that most Singaporeans prize economic growth but also believe there are too many political restrictions.

Yesterday, the findings were about the people who get their political news from online alternative sites, that three in 10 voters distrust politicians, and how political participation is affected by whether a voter thinks he can impact society individually or as a group.

Online media played a bigger role in this year's general election than the 2006 polls.

With the advent of social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook, political observers have said that online media has allowed people to disseminate alternative political views to a much wider audience than before.

IPS deputy director Arun Mahizhnan noted that political leaders and government officials have expressed 'grave concerns' about people turning their back on mainstream media.

But, he added, the survey shows 'firstly, there are not that many people who are indulging (just) in the Internet, secondly, it is complementary'.

'These people are not ghettoising themselves,' he said.