

Mother tongue blogs few but active **Study finds they are less politically contentious than English blogs**

Kash Cheong

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SMALL but active Chinese, Malay and Tamil "blogospheres" exist in Singapore, but are much less contentious when it comes to local politics compared with English blogs.

These were the findings of the first-ever study on mother tongue blogs in Singapore, released by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) think-tank at a seminar yesterday. Researchers found around 200 blogs about Singapore-related issues that had more than half their content in Chinese. These were by Singaporeans, residents here or bloggers based overseas.

They found 30 blogs in Malay and 20 in Tamil of the same nature. In comparison, there were already about 700 such blogs in English five years ago, said IPS research fellow Carol Soon.

Of the 201 blogs in Chinese, only about 10 could be considered political blogs, said Dr Soon. This is a fraction of the 180 English blogs of a similar nature that already existed five years ago.

"Chinese bloggers talked about political issues in 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 blog posts."

These bloggers also did not use the medium to galvanise support for a campaign, unlike prominent English blogs such as pinkdot.sg, which holds an annual event to rally support for the freedom to love.

In the Tamil sphere, many blogs were on politics, but interestingly, that of India and not Singapore. Most were by long-time Singapore residents from India.

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

As for the Malay blogs, many of them were about lifestyle, with the popular ones focused on marriage and wedding preparations.

While Chinese and Tamil bloggers wrote purely in their own languages, about two-thirds of Malay bloggers used a mix of Malay and English. "This raises concerns of the decline of the Malay language," said Dr Mohamad Shamsuri Juhari, director of the Centre for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs, at the seminar.

Participants, some of whom were bloggers, said online discussion has moved to Facebook.

Tamil Murasu deputy editor and blogger A. Pandiyan said: "Facebook is a more social medium, people post and their friends comment. It's instant gratification."