

Study: Most political blogs are balanced **Only three in 10 completely one-sided, but researchers say study had limitations**

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THE popular notion that the Internet is an irrational and vitriolic space has been debunked in a new study, which shows that most political blogs tend to be more objective.

The study, spearheaded by Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) research fellows Tan Tarn How and Carol Soon, shows that only three in 10 political blogs are completely one-sided in their commentaries.

The rest include alternative views for balance, albeit to varying extents.

Dr Soon suggested yesterday that this could perhaps be due to a "recognition that balanced arguments are required to sway minds and to change opinion".

The findings were presented at an IPS Digital Frontiers seminar yesterday, attended by about 50 academics, civil servants and bloggers.

The study, entitled Rationality Of Political Online Space, was launched to examine the validity of the views of Internet critics, who dismiss blogs and other online content as the "Wild Wild West".

It looked at more than 1,000 posts on 197 blogs between June and July last year, a two-month period Mr Tan called a "very busy political period".

News headlines at the time included the annual Pink Dot picnic, which was met with a Wear White campaign against homosexuality; the National Library Board's decision to remove and pulp three children's books that referred to same-sex couples; and a defamation suit by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong against blogger Roy Ngerng.

The researchers found that bloggers who identify themselves tend to be calmer and less emotional.

And those who write about the Government tend to be against the Government, while those who do so about opposition parties are more positive towards them.

But there are several limitations to the study, which is but a "timely snapshot of a very large, ongoing space", said Mr Tan. For one thing, it covered only blogs, and not other social media platforms. Also, political blogs like Yawning Bread fell under the radar because there were no posts in the two-month period.

Ultimately, the study assesses all the content available on the Internet, but does not look at metrics such as impact or readership.

Dr Ang Peng Hwa, director of the Singapore Internet Research Centre at Nanyang Technological University, found the findings "surprising" because they are "counter-intuitive".

"The question now is where do people spend time online," he said.

"This study does not tell you where the high-impact blogs are located - more readers, visits, likes and comments indicate that these sites have greater impact."