

## Internet users 'still turn to traditional media' for GE news

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SINGAPORE — Traditional mainstream media sources, online or otherwise, still appear to be the main sources for Singaporean Internet users seeking General Election (GE) news, a survey commissioned by Today has found.

The telephone survey with 606 respondents also found that 63.7 per cent of the respondents — who are allowed to pick multiple responses — said they opt for newspapers, followed by 57.9 per cent for television and 57.7 per cent for the Internet.

Yahoo! emerged as the source of choice for those who use the Internet, as indicated by 48 per cent of the respondents, followed by Channel NewsAsia (23.8 per cent) and Facebook (17.4 per cent).

The survey was conducted between late last month and this month with Singaporeans over the age of 21 who use the Internet daily.

Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) deputy director Arun Mahizhnan said it was no surprise that the mainstream media, especially newspapers and their electronic versions, remain the dominant sources of information, as they “provide the most comprehensive news and information about Singapore life”.

“IPS’ own research also confirms that those who search for alternative sources of information online continue to read mainstream media. This mitigates the fear that a lot of people only read alternative media and become ghetto-ised,” said Mr Mahizhnan, whose area of research includes the media.

Political risk analyst Azhar Ghani noted that Yahoo! aggregates news from both mainstream and alternative sources but, while mainstream sources have been setting the agenda, it could change during the GE campaign period, when bloggers and citizen journalists do their own “first-hand reporting” at rallies and other campaign events.

The survey also found that more than half (57.2 per cent) of the respondents felt that the Internet increases the reach and influence of the Opposition, and 69.4 per cent felt the Internet offers a wider range of political views than the traditional media.

The latter, said Singapore Management University law professor Eugene Tan, suggested that mainstream media sources “need to offer a wider range of political views, if they are not to lose out as an information source”.

It also emerged that a high proportion (67.5 per cent) of those with primary school education said it is easy to tell what was true from false on the Internet when it came to GE news.

Conversely, a high proportion of those with tertiary education and higher said it is difficult to do so, as indicated by the 61.4 per cent of those with university and post-graduate degrees.

“Generally speaking, the better educated would be expected to be more discerning and, therefore, more able to distinguish truth from non-truth,” said Mr Mahizhnan.

“However, it is also the case that the better educated see things in a grey scale rather than in simplistic black and white terms,” he added.

Assistant Professor Tan noted: “For the political parties and candidates, this finding highlights the importance of real world engagement as a way of winning confidence, trust and ultimately the ballot.

“Cyberspace cannot replace the real world contact, engagement and rapport in the battle of the ballots.”

Indeed, for all they see or read online, it will not cause them to vote for or against a candidate or party, said nearly 80 per cent of the respondents.

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