SMU data analytics research draws global firms

SINGAPORE is getting on the map of data analytics research.

Global companies, including Microsoft, are interested in technologies that the Singapore Management University (SMU) is building to collect data efficiently from cellphone users.

This data will be converted into usable information to be developed into services.

SMU will work with local and global companies to develop these services. They could involve, for example, recommendations for restaurants, special buys and the pinpointing of suitable spots for specialty stores.

SMU assistant professor Rajesh Krishna Balan said few organisations have been able to collect detailed data simultaneously and accurately from mobile subscribers, like the type of handsets they are using.

"This is ground-breaking research. We're collecting very fine-grained data that is very accurate up to 1m of where a user is. We're using all the components in the phones and later tablets such as Wi-Fi chips, accelerometers and gyroscopes.

"Microsoft Research and other international companies are interested in our research," said Prof Balan, from SMU's

DPM Teo (left) watching a presentation by SMU professors Rajesh Krishna Balan (centre) and Archan Misra (right) on LiveLabs. ST PHOTO: NURIA LING

School of Information Systems, who has more than 14 years' experience in data analytics research.

He heads the five-year research project, called LiveLabs Urban Lifestyle Innovation Platform.

LiveLabs was one of two data analytics research projects announced by Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean on Monday.

The other project is called SmartHub, undertaken by telco StarHub. The $50 million funding for the two projects is from SMU, StarHub and the National Research Foundation.

LiveLabs will focus on developing technologies used in data analytics, while SmartHub will be working with partners to develop services and applications.

Prof Balan's team of about

15 researchers took about eight months last year to develop the key components of this project.

The data to be captured includes users' locations at any time, the type of handsets they are using, their relationship with other users in the area, what they are doing, and their likes and dislikes.

The data will be collected from 30,000 people across the island in four areas: Changi Airport, Sentosa, the SMU campus and one CapitaMalls Asia property.

Already, 100 SMU students have signed up for the project.

Prof Balan stressed that data collected will have personal information scrubbed out so that only data sets such as age and gender will be captured.

Business partners will not have access to the data.

"We've developed an Android app, soon we'll have iPhone and Windows 8 apps to let people sign up," he said.

"Next year, we'll be working with our partners to incentivise people to sign up for our research."

He hopes to sign up about 350 people in the first year, starting from April next year.

The data processed will be used to validate the project.
GRACE CHNG