

BN losing the cyberwar again
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What a difference a year makes. Around this time last year, I wrote an article entitled The Cyberwar of 2012 for my weekly Oon Time column in theSun newspaper.

In it, I wrote about how Barisan Nasional seemed to be getting the upper hand in the online space largely because many of the popular pro-Pakatan Rakyat bloggers had become MPs and had become too busy to blog.

Post-March 8, 2008, we saw the rise of pro-Umno bloggers who quickly went on to dominate the political blogging scene.

Also around that time, online news sites were full of stories about how Pakatan lawmakers were busy jumping ship or fighting amongst themselves.

"The balance of power in cyberspace is pretty even now," I wrote, adding: "If anything, BN has a slight advantage."

I also criticised Pakatan for its complacency, highlighting the fact that they had reigned supreme in the online space prior to the general election not because of their brilliant new media strategy - they had none - but because their supporters happened to be web-savvy.

Take Jeff Ooi (right). He was actively blogging about governance issues long before he decided to join DAP. Tony Pua already had a well-followed education blog before he became a DAP member. Elizabeth Wong was well known as a human rights activist and blogger before she joined PKR.

Many opposition supporters also took to YouTube and posted stuff critical of the BN. They weren't instructed to do so by Pakatan parties. They just did it out of conviction because they felt Pakatan parties got very little traditional media coverage.

Why didn't BN's supporters do the same? Prior to the 12th general election, they obviously didn't feel the need to take to new media because they had traditional media on their side.

That mindset completely changed after the elections and pro-BN guys responded with a vengeance. As I had mentioned earlier, by this time last year, the political blogosphere had become dominated by pro-Umno bloggers.

Momentum swings back to Pakatan

Fast forward to the present. What happened in the space of one year? Social media happened.

The rise of Facebook and Twitter was something BN supporters have failed to appreciate and have been slow to adopt. While they were busy blogging away - and sometimes having Utusan Malaysia picking up their conspiracy theories - Pakatan supporters were actively tweeting and setting up Facebook pages.

The recent Bersih rally clearly demonstrates that the new media momentum has solidly swung back to Pakatan (although Pakatan politicians can't claim credit for it) thanks to social media.

In the days leading up to the July 9 rally, social media networks like Facebook and Twitter were full of comments expressing outrage at what the authorities were doing - arresting people for wearing yellow Bersih shirts, outlawing an organisation that wasn't even really an organisation but a coalition of NGOs, and making unsubstantiated allegations about Bersih leaders.

Now it should be said that the people I follow on Twitter are not all into politics. In the case of my

Facebook network, even fewer are politically inclined. Yet, on July 9 - and the days immediately after that - my social media timeline was completely lit up with tweets and status updates about Bersih.

People who normally never even pay attention to political news were suddenly tweeting about Bersih and sharing links to pictures and videos of Bersih demonstrators being sprayed with chemical-laced water and being fired upon with tear-gas.

Videos like this became viral. Facebook pages like this became a hit. A Facebook page calling for Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's resignation became an even bigger hit.

And amidst all this, what were the hardcore BN supporters doing? They must have been busy blogging, I guess.

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