

'Deluge of BN tweets during GE13 had little impact'

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Pro-BN tweets outnumbered pro-Pakatan Rakyat ones during the campaign period for the May 5 general election, but their effectiveness on voters is in doubt, says a researcher.

There were eight million tweets recorded during the 13th general election period, between April 26 and May 13, Universiti Malaya Centre for Democracy and Elections (Umcedel) research fellow Surinderpal Kaur said.

"On election day alone, for example, we collected 900,000 tweets. Sixty-eight percent were re-tweets and the person re-tweeted most was Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak," Surinderpal told a forum hosted by Umcedel yesterday.

Her research led her to conclude that the BN seemed to have high visibility on Twitter, but it did not necessarily help the coalition to perform better.

"Does volume equals impact? No," said Surinderpal, a lecturer with UM's Language and Linguistics Faculty.

Her work suggests that there may have been an 'echo chamber effect', and she cited that the high volume of tweets or re-tweets linked to Najib were confined to a small circle and were not widely discussed.

The work of cybertroopers?

There could be a possibility, she said, that this might have been the work of "cybertroopers". However, such a conclusion could only be drawn upon further study on where the tweets came from and whether these were from a single location, such as Putrajaya.

Immediately after the general election, Surinderpal (right) said, the Malaysia's Twitterverse shifted attention to other topics represented by hashtags such as #black505, #penipuan and #cina.

This period also saw a rise in tweets about PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim and coincided with a decline in pro-BN tweets.

"Anwar was not a name that came out frequently on Twitter before the election, but

after that it became higher," she noted.

In summary, Surinderpal concluded that Twitter deserved attention as it provided a platform for people to speak in a manner that would be reflected by the mainstream media.

However, she warned that since users could stay anonymous, own multiple accounts and possibly even not of voting age, the data used for such political analysis may not necessarily be useful.

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