

Poll: Netizens distrust PM, false info fuels confusion
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A recent survey shows that most netizens on Twitter distrust Putrajaya and Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak over 1MDB and the RM2.6 billion in the prime minister's personal bank accounts.

Social media firm Politweet, which surveyed 193,893 tweets from 79,949 users over a span of 30 days, found the majority do not believe the colossal sum was political donation.

According to the survey findings released on Tuesday, netizens are not convinced that donation for Umno would be kept in a personal account and even went to the extent of calling Najib a liar.

The research was conducted after Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) announced its finding that the RM2.6 billion was indeed a donation.

Politweet summarised a persistent build-up of negative perception towards the PM in relation to 1MDB over the last few months from the 122,547 users who tweeted and shared about 1MDB.

"When we read criticism of Najib, we often found users blaming him for cost of living issues and the economic situation in general (before May).

"Anti-Najib users were quick to link the rising cost of living to 1MDB's debt and Najib's alleged theft of funds. As the value of the ringgit fell, this too became linked to Najib.

"It started becoming noticeable in May (the Tabung Haji deal with 1MDB), June (the no-show at the #Nothing2Hide forum), July (allegations by The Wall Street Journal and Sarawak Report) and finally August (confirmation of the RM2.6 billion deposits in his account)," Politweet said.

False info becomes truth

However, the research firm noted that some of the tweets appeared not to be supported by facts.

Citing the July 3 report by WSJ on the RM2.6 billion deposited into Najib's private accounts, the firm said it found that netizens believe the prime minister had in fact stolen the money from public funds.

"There is a pattern of changing perception by misrepresenting facts; using outdated facts; and spreading misinformation to create outrage as the 1MDB story develops.

"Whether this was done intentionally we do not know, but it has created confusion on the

part of social media users," said the firm.

Politweet also identified 21 influential users who tweeted negatively about Najib in relation to 1MDB, which had an influence on 47.64 percent users who retweeted.

However, Politweet said, journalists or the media did not tweet misinformation.

It also observed that the tweets by users in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor were fairly balanced.

"Over time, the willingness of the public to listen to Najib has continued to decrease. Distrust of the government is at such a low point that denials do not gain traction," it said.

Misinformation, it added, was readily accepted as truth, as long as it reinforced existing beliefs where an anonymous user is perceived to have more credibility than a government agency.

Politweet said false statements circulating online have succeeded in becoming the truth because Najib's supporters and 1MDB defenders do not have the same reach on Twitter.

"The lack of influence by Najib and 1MDB supporters means they cannot rely on official Twitter accounts to convince people of their side of the story.

"Corrections and clarifying statements do not reach the masses, allowing them to be influenced by more popular users," it said.

"This is why 'donation' was not an acceptable explanation for the RM2.6 billion in Najib's accounts – people are convinced there is a link to 1MDB," it added.

Politweet also said the users opined that Najib must step down as prime minister.

It noted the sentiment of netizens were affected by the RM2.6 billion, Nothing to Hide forum and the recent cabinet reshuffle.

They felt Najib and the government are dishonest, with the prime minister being a "coward", as well as "corrupt and stupid".