

PAP 'top in Twitter mentions'

Rankings of political parties in NTU study match voter share

BY PHUA MEI PIN

SINGAPOREANS were all atwitter about the general election last May and a sampling of their tweets shows the People's Action Party (PAP) attracted the most attention.

It scored mentions in 42.8 per cent of the posts on social media website Twitter, according to a Nanyang Technological University (NTU) study.

The Workers' Party was next, with 20.8 per cent, followed by National Solidarity Party (13.9 per cent), Singapore Democratic Party (11.1 per cent), Reform Party (5.2 per cent), Singapore People's Party (4.4 per cent), and Singapore Democratic Alliance (1.8 per cent).

Their respective rankings mirrored the eventual vote share the seven political parties snared on May 7.

TWEET AND VOTE

Party	% Tweets	% Votes	Error
PAP	42.80 (1)	60.14 (1)	-17.34
WP	20.83 (2)	12.83 (2)	8.00
NSP	13.86 (3)	12.04 (3)	1.82
SDP	11.07 (4)	4.83 (4)	6.24
RP	5.22 (5)	4.28 (5)	0.94
SPP	4.41 (6)	3.11 (6)	1.30
SDA	1.81 (7)	2.78 (7)	-0.97

Numbers in parentheses indicate relative rank.
Source: Predicting Elections with Social Media

ST GRAPHICS

The study is the first of its kind in Singapore to examine the use of social media during an election and was led by Dr

Marko Skoric, assistant professor at NTU's Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information.

Pointing to the match between the parties' share of tweets and votes, Dr Skoric concludes that tweets can be used to predict votes.

"In the absence of published scientific polls, social media data may be of considerable value," he said yesterday when he presented his study at a conference on political polling organised by German think-tank Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

The study was based on about 110,000 tweets, selected from almost 1.5 million tweets posted by about 13,000 Singapore-based users over 11 days, from Nomination Day to Polling Day.

But there are limitations to the study, Dr Skoric acknowledged.

The sample size is small, as Twitter's penetration rate here is less than 5 per cent, he said.

Also, it was not possible to determine the gender or age of the users.

Still, Mr David Black, managing director of Blackbox Research, believes social media gives governments more options for listening to and engaging with people than before.

"The question is whether they deny it, or embrace it to good effect," he said.

Associate Professor Kirpal Singh of Singapore Management University, however, is circumspect about the Internet's role in the elections.

While social media is developing a real presence, he is "wary of saying it was the Internet that most contributed to political dialogue".

He said: "There is still a lot of debate taking place in the coffee shop, in the shopping centres, and at the mahjong table.

"The use of the Internet for specific political purposes is still not as powerful as word of mouth."

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