

SINGAPORE

Personal opinion trumped online criticism when it came to GE voting

TODAY reports: Several studies have found that social media had only a weak impact on voting behaviour during the 2015 General Elections.

By Kenneth Cheng, TODAY
Posted 29 Jan 2016 08:21

PHOTOS



CAPTION



SINGAPORE: Social media may have some influence in nudging voting behaviour at the General Election (GE) last year, but this did not override personal opinion, a study has found.

The study by Assistant Professor Elmie Nekmat from the National University of Singapore's (NUS), which focused on the opinion climate during the polls, drew from an online survey commissioned last September by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), which canvassed responses from 2,000 citizens.

Dr Elmie's study also found that voters' perceptions of how fellow users in closed social-media groups, such as WhatsApp, felt about the Government's performance on housing and transport issues were the second-most-significant influence on voting behaviour.

By contrast, voters' perceptions of how users on their open social networks such as Facebook felt about the Government's handling of housing, transport and population issues appeared to have no influence on voting patterns.

Both of these were, however, outweighed by the respondents' personal opinions, which figured most heavily in how they voted.

SOCIAL MEDIA NOT A STRONG FACTOR: RESEARCHERS

Dr Elmie was one of five researchers who presented the findings of their studies at an IPS symposium on Wednesday (Jan 27). Their studies, which offered a closer look at media and Internet use during GE2015, follow the release of the main findings of an IPS study with the same focus last November.

The IPS study had found that although social media had some impact, it was not a strong factor in GE2015.

Mainstream media, for one, was found to have played a bigger role than social media in the election.

Echoing this point on Wednesday, IPS senior research fellow Carol Soon, who moderated a panel discussion at the symposium, said mainstream media was used and trusted more during the election than social media.

"Within the media ecology, we (were) also seeing mainstream media posing to be quite a fierce competitor (to) social media," Dr Soon said, in response to an audience member's question on what likely negated the effects of social media during the election.

In a separate study, Dr Natalie Pang, an assistant professor at the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information (WKWSCI) at Nanyang Technological University, found that post-retirement users aged between 65 and 69 were more likely to use social media for informational purposes, such as requesting information on a candidate, than respondents from other age groups.

Those with primary or lower-secondary qualifications were most expressive and tended to seek or share information on social media more frequently than individuals with higher qualifications, the study found.

Read the original TODAY report [here](#).

-TODAY/mz