The researchers were testing the feasibility of stealthily introducing vulnerabilities in OSS via hypocrite commits, i.e., seemingly beneficial commits that in fact introduce other critical issues.

And they chose the Linux kernel project to carry out their experiments.

Al Viro found that the "useless patch" from Aditya Pakki was likely to be part of this research. Greg Kroah-Hartman (GKH), the second-in-command of the Kernel project after Linus Torvalds, advised not to waste the kernel maintainer's time such patches.

[1]