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Mohd Rizal Mohd Yaakop, Ali Seman, Roslizawati Taib, Hussin Yusri Zawawi, Norman Suratman Jazimin, Sharifah Aluya Alinda Dewi, Suhaimee Saahar

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## **Political Blogging Phenomenon to understand Information Behaviour and Digital Technology Use**

Mohd Rizal Mohd Yaakop, Ali Seman, Roslizawati Taib, Hussin Yusri Zawawi, Norman Suratman, Jazimin and Sharifah Aluya Alinda Dewi, Suhaimee Saahar

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

**Abstract:** The objective of this study is to examine political blogging, particularly in relation to electoral process in Malaysia. This study used Grounded Theory approach and content analysis method by analyzing 193 internet political blogs. The selected blogs were categorized into three main categories: the pro-government blogs, the opposition blogs and the neutral blogs. The finding reveals that the opposition parties utilized more blogs to discuss local political issues compared to the ruling parties. Both the oppositions and the ruling parties generally not refrained from attacking other political parties and saw it as a tool of campaigning. There was evidence that the popularity of certain politician was heighten because of their blog, even though many said such popularity did not contribute to vote payoff. The finding shows that 114 political blogs did not support the government and only 28 blogs supported the government. The main issues discussed by the bloggers were about the leadership of the Prime Minister. It also shows that Malay bloggers dominated the political blogs. They liked to use their pseudonyms to protect their real identities. Most of them were male and the youth were the most active. This study implies that political blog was widely used by the cyber society to share information and to speak their mind freely and openly. Therefore, more researchers should concentrate more on studying political blogging as key media of political communication especially in a multi-ethnic society. The contributions of this study include: (1) developing a holistic understanding on the mechanism of government website utilization, (2) identifying a few new theoretical concepts that were not explored in previous studies, (3) revealing that value acquisition is the essence of government website utilization, and (4) formulating a derivative conceptual model for delineating the process of information source selection.

**Keywords:** Political Blog, Voters, Election, Political Parties

### **Introduction**

Political blog has a potential to increase freedom of speech. With the emergence of an internet blog it has provided new avenues for people to express their voices in cyberspace. It is not a new

phenomenon that swept our society today but has begun to exist and grow since the early 1990s. Blog first appeared in the United States in 1994 and Justin Hall was the first person involved in this digital world of electronic literature. Blog is an online journal that contains personal experiences, comments and opinions arranged in reverse chronological order (reverse chronology) with a hyperlink. Freedom of information that occurs on this day has become one of the factors triggering the existence of blog in Cyberspace. Today all people have access to information and the existence of this new technology provides a new opportunity for the public to participate in democratic processes and information sharing. One of the facilities given the attention is how blogging is related to politics. Study by Sweetser (2017) shows how blogging is very much related to democratic political activities such as elections. Trammel (2006) investigate a strategy of campaign blogs in American election. He founds that bloggers from different political background tend to attack each other via blogs and the incumbent party attacked more than the challenger. This is no exception to a developing country like Malaysia. According to Kenyon (2010) news media in Malaysia is often constrained in covering political and public issues compared to plural democratic states in the world. However, this constrains was lifted up by the introduction of blogs as important means of political communication. In the early stages, blogging in Malaysia initiated by some individuals actively participating in blogging activities. Over time it has become a new trend in Malaysian society. Within a few years, political blogs have affected the political scenario in Malaysia. Bloggers in Malaysia take this opportunity to build a new social network where they are free to think and express their opinions. This is because the ability of bloggers to identify and record the most recent news that are known. There is also a significant increase in academic research on blogging, from 11 studies in the mid-1995 and 1999 to 647 studies in 2003 (Adamic & Glance, 2006). Gong (2010) studies internet politics in Malaysia and reveals the effectiveness of blogs in political communication especially during elections.

Similar to other countries, election in Malaysia has become the main mechanism adopted systematically to select leaders and to fill positions in government. The election candidates get votes and try to influence voters to vote out. Meanwhile, political parties will use their channels to deliver their political information. A study of Malaysian 2004 election by Moten and Mohar (2006) and Huat (2005) reveals that campaigns using internet is one of the best way to influence voters. Campaign via internet was also considered imperative in Malaysian election [9-11]. With the significance of internet in a context of election, the objective of this article is to analyze the political inclination of various political blogs in Malaysia.

## **Methodology**

### **Grounded Theory Approach**

This study is based on coding method in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser and Strauss 1974). Grounded theory is listed by John Creswell (1998) as one of five research traditions among biography, phenomenology, ethnography and case study and distinguished in terms of reporting approaches, philosophical assumptions, data collection activities including the logic of sampling, data analysis strategies and representation, rhetorical structures and terms about verification. Grounded theory's research interest is drawn from the good practice of a grounded theory approach to satisfy the criteria of quality qualitative researching through "validity of data", "reliability of method",

### Coding Method

Glaserian theoretical coding while choosing and developing suitable theoretical codes and coding families using a theoretical approach ones find suitable for the area under study. Glaser (1978:70) suggested that coding is a process combining the 'analyst scholarly knowledge' and his research knowledge of the substantive field (Glaser 1978:70). This study chooses theoretical code from decision theory (cost and benefit of supporting government) as the data material suggested it use. It also abides by the principle of discovering new patterns and relations in data.

### Content Analysis

193 blogs were studied and a grounded theoretical model for government website utilization was generated. Content analysis method was used for this study and the sample size is 193 blogs. Content analysis is a systematic study with objective and quantitative description of the pattern manifested in a communication. The analysis unit in this study is the political blog in Malaysia. Researchers take political blogs selected randomly from a website directory that contains various political blogs in Malaysia. With this, it facilitates researchers to randomly choose blogs that exist to meet the objective. Researchers conducted pilot tests on some blog where interpreter's code were selected and trained to test the level of inter-coder reliability and accuracy. In this regard, 193 of political blog in Malaysia were selected through simple random technique. This study is exploratory and descriptive. Therefore, the content analysis focused on categories of blogs. Categories are important as theory is defined as the relationship among categories, is inductively generated (or it starts) from "units of meaning or analysis," "theoretical categories" and "codes"

In this study, we record the URL of the blogs and read the content of each post or which was sent by the bloggers before categorizing it into three categories, namely blog that supports the government, does not support the government and neutral blog. Categories were also formed for the interpreter to code and record information in the form of coding data based on categories established. The categories are: 1. Profile - gender, age and race 2; Type of blog: 1. Filters, 2. K-logs (knowledge-logs); 3. Personal Journal. The other category is type of opinion: 1. supporting the Government; 2. not supporting the government; and 3. Neutral. Researchers also try to understand the identity of bloggers, whether they are supporters of any political party or not and type of issues bloggers interested most.

The focus and historical context of this study is blogs before, during and after the Malaysia General Election 2008, which includes a period from December 2007 to April 2008. A total of 193 political blogs were analyzed using descriptive statistics in a period before, during and after the election. During the study period, a total of 836 posts were posted.

### Results and Discussion

**The Frequency of Posts and the Identity of Bloggers:** Based the Table 1, March 2008 showed the highest number of posts submitted by bloggers in Malaysia. A total of 523 posts have been submitted in that month. This period was critical for Malaysians in order to determine the government that will govern them for the next five years. It is also an opportunity for bloggers to campaign for any party that they support and to response to any cyber-attacks. There was also decreased number of posts in April with only 179 posted. The lowest post was recorded in January with only 25 posting. In December, there were 47 posts and in February, there were 62

posts. This clearly shows bloggers took more opportunity to deliver political information during March.

**Table 1: Total Postings**

Month	f	%
1. December (2007	47	5.6
2. January (2008)25	3	
3. February	62	7.4
4. Mac	523	62.6
5. April	179	21.4
Total	836	100

Table 2 shows that out of the total of 193 blogs, 180 or 93 % of political blog in Malaysia is in the form of personal journals. There are only three political-shaped filters and 10 political blogs in the shape of k-logs. Results of the study clearly shows that political blogs in Malaysia is kept as personal journals so that bloggers will have the freedom to share ideas, opinions and current issues along with the cyber community. In fact, this blog is also a form of public interest in cyber communities because writing is more personal and less academic. Style of delivery is a simple and emotional to be the main attraction for blog like this. Reader feel more interested in reading blogs because it is more personal and seen as more independent and open. It is clearly shows that personal blog has the most number of posts compared to other blogs. A total of 773 or 92.5 % of posts was sent through the blog or posting to personal journals. As described earlier, the form of posting personal opinion is delivered over a blogger phenomenon of social-political phenomenon that occurs around them. It is also shown that political bloggers in Malaysia is more interested in posting the form in order to send their personal views.

**Table 2: Type of political blogs and Number of Posts**

Type	f	%	Number of Posts	f	%
1. <i>Filters</i>	3	2		17	2
2. Personal	180	93		773	92.5
3. <i>K-logs</i>	10	5		46	5.5
Total	193	100		836	100

Political bloggers in Malaysia prefer to use nicknames in their blog. A total of 118 political bloggers use the pseudonym compared with 75 bloggers who are using their full name. Majority of them only want to be known by the pseudonym and refuses to disclose the identity of their personal reasons. It is also found that Malay bloggers are the largest with 59 bloggers or 30.6 % actively in blogging activity. Chinese bloggers are as many as 28 or 14.5 %, 8 are Indian or 4.1 % and only 3 people from Sabah and Sarawak or 1.6 %. However, this study also found that there are 95 political bloggers or 49.2 % do not disclose their ethnic background. Hence, it is difficult to identify the actual number of political bloggers in Malaysia based on ethnicity. There is no significant difference in terms of language used in political blogs in Malaysia. Based on a total of 836 Postings analyzed, there were 390 posts or 46.7 % in Malay language and 446 posts or 53.3

% in English. Political bloggers in Malaysia choose to write in these two languages in order to facilitate dissemination of information to Malaysian. In term of gender, it is found that the largest political bloggers in Malaysia is made up of male. A total of 100 people political bloggers or 51.8 % are men actively involved in blogging activities and there are only 8 women bloggers or 4.1 % actively involved in these activities. However, a 85 bloggers or 44 % refused to disclose their gender identity.

Based on table 3, there are a total of 144 or 74.6 % political bloggers do not include age in their profile. However, results from study obtained clearly shows young people dominate the cyber space and about 14 people or 7.3 %, who are at the age of 26 to 30 are actively involved in these activities. Those aged 51 years and above are also active (11 people or 5.7 %).

**Table 3: Bloggers Age**

Age	f	%
1. 18-25	2	1
2. 26-30	14	7.3
3. 31-36	9	4.7
4. 37-40	5	2.6
5. 41-45	2	1
6. 46-50	6	3.1
7. 51	11	5.7
And above		
8. Not known	144	74.6
Total	193	100

### Categories of Blog

**Attitude towards Government:** A total of 114 political bloggers have political blogs that not supporting the government. Some social political issues that occurred in Malaysia, involving the National Front government was criticized a lot in these blogs. Only 28 political blogs are seen as supporting the government. This gap is too small compared to the blogs that do not support the government. There were 51 blogs that express their own opinions neutral. Clearly political blog that does not support the government dominated the cyberspace. On the other hand, the government itself has more access and control over prime mass media such as newspaper and that they can control the outflow of the desired information in accordance with the ideology championed by them. Therefore, looking at this problem, the opposition party use cyberspace more to disseminate their political ideology to the Malaysian society. It is also found that from a total of 193 political bloggers analyzed, 181 are individuals who are actively involved in blogging activities. There are only 7 bloggers who are members of political bloggers and there are 5 people are supporters of the party.

Based on data, a total of 193 political bloggers identified in this study, a total of 171 stated that they do not favor any political party or maybe do not want to disclose their party inclination or membership in their blog. It is also found that the number of opposition party bloggers supporters is larger than the National Front party supporters. A total of 15 bloggers support the opposition party comprising parties such as PKR, DAP and PAS compared to 7 of the BN political

bloggers who are active in these activities. However, the number of bloggers in the independent category should be viewed as a sign that most of Malaysian society has been using this alternative space for engaging in social politics in Malaysia online.

### Discussion

Generally, the role of political blogs during the election is significant. Blogging has opened up a space for the internet to be used as a political tool for campaigning and communicating with the community. Results from the study shows that huge number of political bloggers in this category is anti-government and had used blogs to attack the government during the election. It is also shown that people began to switch political direction by choosing new media as a place to voice their protest against the ruling government. If viewed in terms of number of posts, it is clearly proved that the many of the bloggers do not support the government. People are now begun to find information supplied the anti-government blogs because such information is indeed difficult to obtain in the mainstream media.

It is important to note that this study also showed that political bloggers are individuals who are active in the common blogging activities. This means, people are beginning to realize that they have found a space that is free for them to voice up their voices. However, political bloggers in Malaysia tend to use nicknames and do not want to disclose their identity. Perhaps they hide by using the nickname due to safety or other factors. From the study results also, obviously the Malays are more involved in this blogging activities (However, there are 95 political bloggers who do not disclose the identity of their nation). In terms of language use, clearly shows no significant differences exist in terms of language use in political blogs. Male gender dominated political blogging compared to women bloggers. Significant difference can be seen if comparison is done by not taking into account the bloggers who do not disclose their gender. In terms of postings also showed that male political bloggers write more active than women. This is clearly dominated by young people aged 26-30 years. Young people are already exposed to the internet in young age because they started access the Internet which has already begun in the early 1980's. With the creation of personal electronic journal facility, it is easier to share their opinion with the other cyber community.

It is also found that that the important issues that are often given serious attention by political bloggers in Malaysia is about election and leadership issues of ex-Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. Seen from the perspective of either blogs supporting or not supporting the government, the leadership of Abdullah was made key issue. As a result, he failed to win for state constituency in the hand of the opposition. Some people even asked him to resign as Prime Minister as an act of accountability and this also discussed in various blogs. The other important issues are about freedom of speech and the selection of the Chief Minister. The state of Terengganu Chief Minister's appointment issue is the most discussed issue because it involves the Terengganu UMNO leadership crisis with the Royalty and how the Prime Minister had to intervene in the course of appointing the new Terengganu Chief Minister. The other issue is related to political parties' cooperation in winning more votes during the election, especially amongst the opposition parties which enjoyed more seats in Parliament and State Legislative Assembly.

In addition, political blogs are also used as a token of appreciation to voters who had marvelously carrying out their duties. Some bloggers post comments that praise personal success

and condemn failures in the election. Bloggers used a strategy to fight and attack the ruling government and to instigate voters' anger to the party with various issues. The attack is so clear in anti-government blogs. Therefore, they took the opportunity to severely attack the government in order to ensure moral victory to the opposition.

### Conclusion

This study is motivated by the needs to understand election and blogging. It is found that political blog in Malaysia was viewed as the appropriate channel for delivering and disseminating information or issues that will affect the political landscape of the country. Speed of information is the key features in cyberspace. Active bloggers were always sensitive to issues that occur all around them. They only need a computer and access the Internet to disseminate information with only the twinkling of an eye. Without filter and control, bloggers are hardly controlled by anybody. They had become a hidden hand to ensure political victory to some political parties. Therefore it is recommended that more studies be done especially to understand racial background of the bloggers and their tendency to protest via internet. This will become a platform for a new understanding of politics in any countries in the world.

### Corresponding Author

Mohd Rizal Mohd Yaakop, School of History, Politics and Strategic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, UKM Bangi Selangor, Malaysia, E-mail: rizaly@ukm.my.

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