



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

MALAYSIA BLOGGERS PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL BLOGS

SEE SILK INN

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MALAYSIA BLOGGERS PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL BLOGS

By

SEE SILK INN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science**

April and 2015

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in
fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Science

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By

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April 2015

Chair: Assoc. Prof. Siti Zobidah bt Omar, PhD
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New media in Malaysia have successfully turned into an influential political mobilizing tool. Internet became a crucial political battlefield with prominent bloggers fighting as candidates during election and the government appointed “cyber-troopers” to battle against the opposition parties. Since then, there are lots of incidents whereby bloggers (blog moderators and blog readers) being penalized by laws due to offensive comments posted.

Due to these issues, this study aim to look at how bloggers participate in discussing the political issues in terms of words used, main content discussed by blog moderators, themes emerged from blog readers discussion and process of framing. Besides, there are many researches that focused on blogs and its impacts caused during the election period hence for this study researcher would like to focus on non-election period.

In order to conduct this research, qualitative content analysis is applied. Purposive sampling is used to sample blogs and blog posts. Political blogs are selected based on ranking report made by *Tecnorati.com* and *Alexa.com* on Malaysia. While, blog posts with the highest number of comments and posted within the same time frame are selected. As a result, based on the criteria listed, *anwaribrahimblog.com* and *sloone.wordpress.com* are the top two political blogs visited by the public and twenty one articles has been identified to be used as research materials. Two trained coders including the researcher coded data for this research.

Findings show that there are seven themes emerge from blog readers’ discussion. Ethics and reforms, economy and election are the main categories of issues posted by blog moderators. Besides, there are three types of words used by bloggers, namely juggled words, enforcement of words and short forms. Framework for blog framing shows that bloggers successfully create negative frames towards government.

In a nutshell, bloggers utilize political blogs to criticize and to gain political support.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
Sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

PENYERTAAN PENULIS-PENULIS BLOG MALAYSIA DALAM BLOG- BLOG POLITIK

Oleh

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Di Malaysia, media baharu berjaya menjadi alat politik yang berpengaruh tinggi. Internet dianggap sebagai medan peperangan politik yang penting bagi para penulis blog yang ingin bertanding dalam pilihanraya dan pada masa yang sama terdapat juga wira maya yang dilantik oleh kerajaan untuk melawan parti-parti pembangkang. Semenjak itu, ramai penulis blog (moderator blog dan pembaca blog) telah ditahan di bawah undang-undang akibat menulis komen-komen berbentuk serangan politik. Lantaran itu, kajian ini ingin meninjau ke atas isi kandungan blog politik, jenis perkataan yang digunakan, tema-tema yang timbul daripada perbincangan pembaca blog serta proses pembingkasaan (*framing*) yang berlaku.

Oleh kerana, kajian-kajian lepas lebih mengutamakan impak blog semasa pilihan raya, maka dalam kajian ini penyelidik akan menjalankan kajian di luar tempoh pilihan raya. Penyelidik telah memilih analisis kandungan kualitatif sebagai kaedah penyelidikan. Persampelan bertujuan telah digunakan oleh penyelidik dalam mengenal-pasti blog dan artikel blog. Blog-blog politik dipilih berlandaskan ke atas laporan kedudukan blog yang dihasilkan oleh *Tecnorati.com* dan *Alexa.com*.

Manakala, bagi artikel-artikel blog pula, penyelidik hanya memilih artikel-artikel yang mendapat komen yang paling banyak. Maka berdasarkan kriteria yang ditetapkan, dua blog politik telah dikenal-pasti dan blog-blog tersebut ialah *anwaribrahimblog.com* dan *sloone.wordpress.com*. Dua puluh satu buah artikel blog telah dikumpulkan oleh penyelidik dan dijadikan sebagai data dalam penyelidikan ini. Dua orang pengekod terlatih termasuk penyelidik sendiri telah menjalankan proses pengkodan ke atas data yang terkumpul.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat tujuh tema yang diperoleh melalui perbincangan dalam kalangan pembaca blog. Selain itu, isu-isu yang paling kerap dibincangkan oleh moderator blog ialah etika dan reformasi, ekonomi dan pilihan raya. Manakala, tiga jenis kategori perkataan yang digunakan oleh para penulis blog termasuk perkataan sulap, perkataan berbentuk penguatkuasaan dan ringkasan kata. Melalui rangka konsep bingkai yang digunakan oleh penyelidik, penyelidik mendapati bahawa penulis-penulis blog berjaya mewujudkan bingkai negatif ke atas kerajaan. Sebagai kesimpulan, para penulis blog menggunakan blog untuk melontarkan kritikan dan mendapatkan sokongan politik.



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Dear God, I'm truly blessed and thank you for everything that happens in my life. Thank you for listening to my prayers and show me the ways to get through the toughest period I ever experienced.

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Before signing off, I would like to share the following lyric to those who wish to embark on research journey.

*"Confusuin hi confusion hai
Solution kuch pata nahin
Solution jo mile to saala
Question kya tha pata nahin"*

(Songs' title: *Aal Izz Well*, from *Three Idiots*)

Translation: Confusion and more confusion yet no sign of any solution; Finally the solution is found yet what is the question again?

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APCO	Arnold & Porter Independent Communications Consultancy
BN	Barisan Nasional
DAP	Democratic Action Party
DEB	Dasar Ekonomi Baru /New Economic Policy
FELDA	Federal Land Development Authority
GLC	Government-Linked Companies
KWSP	Kumpulan Wang Simpanan Rakyat
MACC	Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MCMC	Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission
PAS	Parti Islam Se-Malaysia
PERKASA	Pertubuhan Pribumi Perkasa Malaysia
PKFZ	Port Klang Free Zone
PKR	Parti Keadilan Rakyat
PR	Pakatan Rakyat
PRU	Pilihanraya Umum
UMNO	United Malays National Organization

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As a prologue, this chapter provides background of study, statements of research problems, research questions, research objectives, significance of the study, scope and keywords definitions.

1.1 Background of the study

Blogs at times might be overlooked as one of the influential online source when it compares to social networking sites. By the end of 2010, report showed that there were over 148 million blogs all over the world, as compared to 36 million only in 2006. In total, there are 6.7 million people post blogs on blogging websites, and another 12 million write blogs using social media networks (NMIncite, 2012).

In recent years, political blogging has become popular and is moving towards higher levels of authorship, readership and participation. Thanks to political bloggers that play pivotal role in analyzing, interpreting political information as well as to provide public the sources to validate information related to politics. More content can be produced through the active participation of blog readers that will not only read, but also interpret and comment on issues discuss. Through political blogosphere, many perceive it as a channel that will encourage greater participation, invite voices, opinions and theories that focus on daily political matters (Cushen, 2009).

Moreover, blogs have turned into a crucial political battlefield since the March 2008 General Election, with prominent bloggers fighting as candidates and the government appointed its own “cyber-troopers” to fight against the opposition (Ali Salman & Mohd Safar Hasim, 2011).

Online newspapers and blogs sprang up targeting at the government as an alternative to the mainstream media. *The Star* also reported that there are 500,000 active bloggers in the country. Research conducted by *Universiti Malaya* also acknowledged the power of blogs in influencing the mindset of people, especially in term of politic (The Star, 2008).

Lately, there have been some cases in which bloggers have been harassed or charged under Malaysia laws. Efforts were made to sway public opinion by government through showing its own presence online, while numerous online news portals and opposition linked are being challenged by cyber-attacks.

1.2 Media in Malaysia

Before moving further, let's start by taking a quick glance over media in Malaysia. The Malaysian media landscape includes diverse sites of participation. On the government side, we have the national broadcaster Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) and the *Bernama* news agency and also autonomous websites operated by individuals, businesses or civil society groups. There are also commercial newspapers, television and radio stations that operate under strict government supervision. Just like many countries, Malaysia's mass media are a big business, dominated by large profit corporations as well as from regulatory barriers to entry that shut out excessive competition. Economy and technological progress have increased the number and type of mass media outlets. Even though, there are a variety of media outlets that encourage media participation yet it is heavily regulated by the state. Tight control of government towards mainstream media had spurred the use of Internet communication among Malaysians (George, 2007).

1.2.1 Alternative media in Malaysia

The introduction of the Internet in the mid-1990s marked discontinuity how media worked for the past few decades. It became the first medium that allows many include Malaysians to use mass communication without having license from the government. One of the many factors that encourage the use of Internet mostly because of promise of no censorship on the Internet made by former Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohammad in 1997 (Surin, 2010).

Internet in Malaysia did not become a significant alternative media until the sacking of the former Deputy Prime Minister, Dato Seri Anwar Ibrahim back in September 1998. The sacking and subsequent arrest of Anwar led increasing numbers of Malaysians to turn to the web in protest. Within a few months lots of pro-Anwar web sites had emerged, circulating stories like Anwar's letters from prison, demonstrations, and foreign news report on the political crisis. Several commentators now argue that the internet has become both the main channel for opposition and increasingly a source of news for Malays. Over two million Malaysians now have access to the web, and it became even clearer during the '*reformasi* demonstrations' and the November 1999 election campaign (Abbot, 2001).

As refer to Tang (2009), due to the tight control of mainstream media by the government, several influential websites had "born" to provide alternative views on issues. The first significant news portal, *Malaysiakini* was formed in October 1999 right after the launch of Malaysia's Multi Media Super Corridor. Ever since the incident of former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's arrest, *Malaysiakini* has gained lots of viewership. *Malaysiakini* becomes popular, especially during the election period and the frequently updated hard hitting news and editorials has help this news portal to establish its name in cyber world. Besides, whenever there is any significant newsworthy event occurs, *Malaysiakini* would gain a lot of viewership.

The other website that became a thorn to *Barisan Nasional*'s side was *Malaysia Today* run by Raja Petra Kamarudin. *Malaysia Today* provides irreverent editorials, salacious gossip as well as conspiracy theories. Raja Petra's regular features like "The Khairy Chronicles" and "The Corridors of Power" are written creatively into a form of daytime soap opera featuring that pinpointed at the wrongdoings of politicians. The twists and turns of the Malaysian political scenes in recent years involving the mysterious murdered Mongolian citizen, sodomy allegations, body snatching that linked to religions, statutory declarations that are made and later hastily withdrawn, cause many to question on the trustworthiness of Raja Petra's stories. . Besides English language websites, there was also mushrooming trend of social and political blogs written in the Malay language. The Islamic opposition party, the *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS) also maintained a popular Malay news portal, *Harakahdaily.net* (Tang, 2009).

In 2007, Democratic Action Party (DAP) turned to the alternative media, especially the Internet, to publicize the party's views, comment on and criticize government policies, and expose corruption and other wrongdoings. Several DAP parliamentarians run their own blogs; in particular, Lim Kit Siang, the party chairman, runs three very popular blogs, in Malay, English, and Chinese plus a *Facebook* account. In terms of rejuvenating the DAP, the party has successfully recruited a number of high-profile individuals such as Jeff Ooi, one of Malaysia's best-known bloggers, P. Ramasamy, an activist and former academic, and Tony Pua, a former Chief Executive Officer of a Singapore-listed technology company. Yet, while DAP has been reasonably successful in attracting a handful of new Indian and Chinese leaders, the party has failed to recruit any new noteworthy Malay leaders (Lee, 2008).

The immediate impact of blogs could be felt from the changes in the socio-political landscape, especially during the recent Malaysia 12th General Election on 8th March, 2008. The 2008 General Election was considered historic, both local and foreign media from *Al Jazeera* to the *Economist* called it a "political tsunami". The results were so unexpected that left many wondering about the country's political future. *Barisan Nasional* (BN) still managed to rule the country with a simple majority in Parliament. Even so, it lost control of five states to the opposition parties. Many observers felt that the Internet and especially blogs played an important part in the election. Tun Abdullah Badawi, admitted the "serious misjudgment" in ignoring the Internet and blogs which in contrast, were fully utilized by the opposition to disseminate their messages (Lim, 2009).

Since 2008 the Malaysian government has made numerous attempts at asserting control over Internet and blogosphere specifically in order to maintain racial harmony among ethnics. Until today, the Malaysian government has backed down from its three most drastic regulatory proposals: implementation of a nationwide filter on the Internet, registration of bloggers, and identifying "professional" and "nonprofessional " bloggers. Although the government has not formally acknowledged these regulations as a type of online pressure, yet the formulation of these acts is definitely forming to monitor the Internet (Thien, n.d.).

1.3 Statements of research problems

Blogs is another influencing platform when it comes to election. Glancing through the *Barisan Nasional* (BN) landslide victory back in the 2004 General Election, indicated that individual blogs or alternative news portals did not perturb the BN's power yet the opposition performed better than the BN. The BN only secured 53% of the popular vote, and 50 of the parliamentary seats were won with majorities of less than 10% (Berger, 2010). Apart from the 2004 General Election and result of 2011 Sarawak State Election, some even argued that the daily spinning news and opinions in the blogosphere as well as other news portals on issues like abuse of power and bribery caused deterioration of BN support in the 2008 General Election. Thus, researcher is curious about what type of words used by bloggers that would cause such impacts as Zhang (2000) pointed out that certain types of words can use to initiate particular presuppositions, expose speaker attitudes, and ask reader agreement for interpretation.

There are various research that focused on blogs and impact caused during the election period. For instance, Mohd Sani and Zengeni (2010) that studied on the impact of social media in the 2008 Malaysia general election; Smeltzer and Lepawsky (2009) that discussed on how Malaysia's media framed the relationship between information and communication technologies (ICTs) with the country's electoral process and the impact of blogs on the election result; Moten (2009) that studied on the impact of 2004 and 2008 general election result towards political system in Malaysia.

On top of that, even though Saahar@Saabar (2008) conducted a quantitative research on issues discussed before, during and after the 12th General Election but due to the sample selection between the months of December 2007 to April 2008 which was just right after the general election, thus finding showed that the popular issues discussed after the election were still surrounded on the failure of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in maintaining the victory of *Barisan Nasional*.

Hence, in this study the researcher would like to explore the content discussed in the blogosphere during non-election period due to the sampling limitation and previous research focus that only studied the election time-frame.

In a previous empirical research, examining on the political effect of blogs on the 2008 general election in Malaysia, Gong (2011) suggest that more detailed studies of blog content, form, and readership are needed in Malaysia blogosphere. On top of that, while Gong (2011) focus on predicting the effects of having a blog to gain parliamentary passes, so for this research, researcher would like to draw attention to blog reader discussion instead.

Although, Tan and Ibrahim (2008) studied on blog reader, yet their finding only provide information like demography, reading habits (time spent in reading, choices of

reading material, types of blogs preferred by readers), and voting trends in the general election.

Incidents of blog readers posting offensive comments frequently happened in Malaysia. For example, on September 2004, Malaysia blogger, Jeff Ooi had been investigated by authorities like the Communications and Multimedia Commission over offensive comments posted by a reader that follow his blog in which that blog reader questioned on the concept of “Islam” in Malaysia. The blog post entitled “Islam Hadhari and Money Politics”. Jeff perceived that Islam Hadhari promoted by Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is inconsistent with political bribery. Then, the commenter who identifies himself only as “Anwar” made an offensive comment and Ooi later had deleted and blocked him from his blog (Zuckerman, 2005).

There is another case involved lawyer Datuk Seri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah versus Raja Petra. Muhammad Shafee filed a defamation lawsuit against Raja Petra, on the year of 2008 for posting three articles titled “Shafee Abdullah: Sodomologist Extraordinaire”, “Money, Power and Sex: What Motivates Man” and “The Real Dalang Behind The Anwar Sodomy Allegation”. Later, Muhammad Shafee obtained an ex-parte injunction from the High Court ordering Raja Petra to remove the three articles along with the comments related from his blog (The Star, 2011).

So, from the incidents of blog readers posting offensive comments along with past research limitations, in this thesis, researcher would also attempt to explore themes form through blog reader discussion.

Research will not be fun enough without the presence of theoretical framework. For the past years, cascading activation model by Entman, Matthes and Pellicano (2009) had been used in several research. These research include Entman (2010) that compare the White House frame after September 11 by using articles written by two journalists that focused on Saudi Arabia instead of Afghanistan; Examined media framing biases by looking at 2008 presidential campaign that focused on Republican Vice Presidential nominee Sarah Palin (Entman, 2010); and Beier (2010) that studied President Barack Obama’s speech “A World That Stands as One” to see how simulation worked in the context of presidential campaigns. There is limited blog research that applies this model. By taking this as one of the research gaps, so in this thesis, researcher would like to link this model with research finding later on.

1.4 Research questions

- i) What are the themes form through blog readers’ discussion on political blogs?
- ii) What is the main political content being discussed on political blogs by blog moderators?
- iii) What are the types of words used by bloggers in expressing their thoughts on political blogs?

- iv) How is the framing process created by bloggers in discussing political content on their blogs?

1.5 Research objectives

1.5.1 General objective

This research aims to study how bloggers participate in discussing the political content, type of words used, themes form through blogs readers discussion and framing pattern form by blogs.

1.5.2 Specific objectives

- i) To investigate the themes form through blog readers' discussion on the political blogs.
- ii) To investigate the main political content discussed on the political blogs by blog moderators.
- iii) To investigate the types of words used by bloggers in expressing their thoughts on political blogs.
- iv) To investigate the framing process created by bloggers in discussing political content on their blogs.

1.6 Significance of the study

Due to the advancement of technology and new media, people now had been offered with more creative and interactive ways to connect with one another. One popular and rapid developed form of new media is blogs. With the impact of globalization and free accessibility to the Internet, especially blogs, it successfully created *blogosphere* among society that enable public to share their view points, exercise their values and to advocate others to fight for their rights.

However, some might misused and twisted the truth through the use of blogs which contain seditious elements and create the feeling of ill-will and hostility among different races in Malaysia. Therefore, through this study, researcher hopes it can serve as a reference and educational tool to educate public on the usage and advantages of information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as blogs, thus help to prove that ICTs not just merely for the purpose of social networking.

Besides, researcher hopes to widen up the scope on the application of model of framing onto the blogging phenomenon and not just only journalism field. By providing a different perspective, it will also further enhance the academicians' references in

communication study. By using a qualitative approach, it may help to discover and explore in depth on the situation of blogger participation within the Malaysia context.

What is more, researcher hopes this research could help in strengthening our national policies such as Multimedia and Communication Act, by allowing public as well as government to alert on the rapid changes of the application of ICTs like blogs.

1.7 Scope

Throughout the recent years, there are various studies conducted on the phenomenon of blogging globally yet in this study the researcher would only focus its discussion on local context on blogger participation in political issues. This study will be focusing only on Malaysia blogs that actively discussed on the political issues, namely *anwaribrahim.com* and *sloone.wordpress.com*. Only Malaysian political and public bloggers viewpoints will be quoted as data in this research. The selection of issues will only be focused on the political context on certain period of study due to the time frame given.

1.8 Keywords definition

1.8.1 Blogger participation

Bloggers are part of the public itself, and act as a collective, collaborative force that aggregates knowledge, opinions and advice (Jones & Himelboim, 2009). Whilst, participation is in the essence of activity among citizens to influence political decisions, including blog reading (Quintelier & Vissers, 2008; Baumer, Sueyoshi & Tomlinson, 2011).

1.8.2 Blog

A blog as a web page consisting of a series of entries, or posts, listed in reverse-chronological order (Ekdale, Namkoong, Fung & Perlmutter, 2010). Blog are widely view as a type of personal journals or commentary for products (Kolari, Finin & Joshi, 2006).

1.8.3 Political blogs

It defines 'political blogs' as weblogs on which the content focuses on issues, events and policy in a constituency, national, international or party political context (Ferguson & Griffiths, 2006).

1.8.4 Blog readers

Who read blogs and search information which is unavailable from the mainstream media (Ekdale, Namkoong, Fung & Perlmutter, 2010). Blog readers are internet users that share similar interest in reading blogs (Chiou et.al, 2008).



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