

Blogging and citizenship: The Malaysian experience

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Shafizan Mohamed^{1,*}

¹ Department of Communication, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia, 53100, Gombak, Selangor, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

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This study explicates the relationship between media and citizenship through the experiences of the Malaysian bloggers. The theoretical idea of Citizen's Media explains and makes sense of this relationship. The areas of focus are: (1) the blogging experience, (2) the types of blog, and (3) representation of citizenship. A purposive sample of 30 Malaysian bloggers was interviewed during a three-months period. The study identified two types of bloggers: The Activist and the Diarist. While the two blogger categories have contrasting characteristics, they are not entirely opposites. A detailed look into the bloggers' motivation, style, practices and rewards reveal that the experience of citizenship is very much evident in both blogging categories.

Keywords:

Citizen's Media, citizenship, Malaysia,
online ethnography, politics,
participatory culture

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1. Introduction

Through media laws and concentrated media ownership, the Malaysian Government oversees all the information circulating in the mass media. Media laws such as the Printing Press Act (1984) and Broadcasting Act (1987) limit political discussions in that news or stories deemed derogatory or overly critical of the government cannot be published. Freedom of speech and expression are also limited by laws that stipulate what can and cannot be discussed in public. Seditious and defamation laws restrict freedom of speech and protect political figures from being scrutinized; and laws such as the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 and the Official Secrets Act (OSA) enable the authorities to detain without trial anyone accused of disrupting the country's harmony. The University and College Act (AUKU) prohibit students from being involved in any form of political activity. As such, Malaysians have been inculcated to accept a culture of political apathy and fear of expression [1]. The ownership of media by the government and organizations close to the government also limits media freedom largely through management self-censorship. Thus, the media in Malaysia offers limited space for citizens to engage in political discourse. While some

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: shafizan@iium.edu.my (Shafizan Mohamed)

forums for political discussions are available in the alternative media produced by opposition parties or non-government organizations, they are often hampered by the media laws [2].

Opposition and dissenting voices do not have access to the mainstream media. Due to the lack of open access to the mainstream media, the opposition parties in Malaysia have resorted to creating their own alternative media. Malaysia's alternative media include "politically contentious" [2] professional online newspapers, NGO websites, and journalistic blogs. The primary objective of these alternative forms of communication is to challenge "the consensus that powerful interests try to shape and sustain through the mainstream media" [2]. Thus, the alternative media in Malaysia mostly adopt political, oppositional and radical inclinations. The alternative media often find it difficult to survive due to the lack of finances and barriers to license renewals.

Because of the continuous confrontation between the mainstream media and the alternative media, it is generally accepted that when it comes to political coverage, Malaysians are often left with an 'either-or option' [3-5]. The mainstream media is accepted as the state's media, while the alternative media is seen as the opposition's media outlet. Because of this contrast, the alternative media in Malaysia is often reduced to its oppositional nature and radical inclinations [3,2]

The availability of the Internet has further reinvigorated the Malaysian alternative media [6]. In the early years of the Internet, it is the opposition parties and NGOs that were fully utilizing the potential of online media. If they had previously been restricted from accessing the public, their presence online had enabled them to reach the Malaysian citizenry in larger numbers. As such, they were very much maximizing the benefits of the online media to accommodate their lack of presence in the traditional mass media [7]. However, while the opposition's use of online media indicates that the Internet has opened a new frontier for the Malaysian alternative media, it has yet to overcome the dichotomized political news media where the alternative is still thought to promote anti government sentiments [2].

The rise of the social media in the mid-2000 allowed average Malaysians to produce their own media content. The lack of barriers and regulations made it possible for Malaysians to write and express about issues and politics. In the 2008 and 2013 national elections, both the government and the opposition faced major challenges because voters had more access to information. They were no longer confined to the government controlled mainstream media nor the opposition-influenced alternative media. They were also exposed to citizen produced information that were less partisan and more demanding of the politicians. This new source of information are ideas coming from everyday individuals.

2. Theoretical Framework: Blogging and Citizen's Media

Technically, a blog can simply be defined as an online journal, arranged in reverse chronological sequence that facilitates interactive computer-mediated communication through text, images, and audio/video objects. Gurak *et al.* [8] offered a similar definition of blogs when they explained that, "at this point in their development, blogs are best described as websites that are updated frequently, most often with links to other sites and commentary on the other sites' content. Blogs enable everyday Malaysians to become interactive social activists and political actors. The majority of blogs express the voices of everyday citizens who represent neither the government nor the opposition parties [2].

These blogs discuss about Malaysia in a wide array of ideas and contexts. Some take a humorous approach while others are more serious and even explicitly political. Regardless of the blogs' nature, when discussing Malaysia, these bloggers are creating their own media and offering their own interpretation about Malaysia. They are very much moving away from the dichotomized

Malaysian media. They are not part of the politically-influenced mainstream and alternative media. Instead, they offer unique ways of talking and discussing about Malaysia. Hence, blogging about Malaysia can be an act of citizen participation when analyzed through a more receptive lens; one where the ideas of media and citizenship are accepted to be more fluid and encompassing.

Rodriguez [9] offers this fluid interpretation in her notion of the Citizen's Media. Citizens' Media emerges from the need to overcome the oppositional frameworks and binary categories traditionally used to theorize alternative media. Rodriguez [9] argues that the "alternative" in alternative media suggests it is an alternative to something, which traps scholars in binary thinking. This binary thinking fails to capture people's multiple identities and the transformations happening as a result of participating in what Rodriguez [9] called Citizens' Media, rather than alternative media. Rodriguez [9] claims that Citizens' Media represents the use of media to achieve empowerment, community cohesion, and express social and cultural identities.

Thus, Citizens' Media defines alternative media practice in terms of their role in promoting active citizenship and expression; not in terms of resisting or contesting the mainstream institutions. Citizens' Media is driven by notions of democracy, community and equality, and is created and driven by citizen participation [9]. To make sense of the many ways citizens' media can develop and challenge social and cultural meanings in media practice, such practices must be defined exclusively and not as a response or comparison to mainstream practice. More importantly, Citizens' Media highlights alternative media practices that focus on citizens' creative expression and democratic participation. Citizens' Media offers a framework for understanding alternative media practices that may not be intended to resist or challenge established powers and structures. The removal of radical resistance explains the Malaysian blogging experience, and overcomes the dichotomized stereotype of the Malaysian media.

Citizen's Media can become an important site for the creation of citizenship, enabling personal as well as collective participation in the negotiation of social definitions, their identities, cultures and lifestyles. Rodriguez argues that "citizens have to enact their citizenship on a day-to-day basis, through their participation in everyday political practices" [9]. Her fluid interpretation of citizenship allows participatory media practices to incorporate social, political and cultural phenomena, something very much related to the Malaysian experience of blogging and citizenship. The ability to understand and analyze the alternative media as more than just oppositional and radical can illuminate the unique complexities of everyday media experiences and their implications on the wider socio-political environment.

Part of Rodriguez's [9] interpretation of democracy hinges on the idea that democracy involves a constant struggle. She advocates that, "instead of thinking of democracy as an ultimate goal, a final state-of-things to reach, we should look at how democratic and non-democratic practices are being renegotiated constantly, and how citizens' media can strengthen the former, thus contributing to the- although sometimes ephemeral - swelling of the democratic" [9]. Thus, the understanding of political participation should include traditional forms like voting and protesting, as well as other forms of social and cultural production. Media can be a vital component in this dynamic by providing citizens the opportunity to express themselves and use the media in ways that transform their own understanding and practice of citizenship. The link between identity and narrative, and between citizenship and action, led Rodriguez to explore citizens' media as the promotion of symbolic processes that allow people to name the world in their own words. It is through this continual shifting of identities and active participation that citizens both challenge and emanate power.

This explains how blogging offers Malaysians more than democratic participation and freedom from institutional and commercial control; rather, it has also become an important site for the

creation of citizenship that enables personal as well as collective participation in the negotiation of social definitions, identities, cultures and lifestyles. The fluidity of power as suggested by Rodriguez [9] is also apparent when Malaysian bloggers are able to defy the authoritative system they live in and recreate their identity from a mere citizen to an active political actor. Therefore, Citizen's Media carefully captures the relationship between media and citizenship as it is experienced by the Malaysian bloggers. To support this contention, this study then asks: What is the blogging experience? most importantly, where is the connection between blogging and citizenship?

3. Methodology

In studies that look into blogging and political participation at the individual level, multi-site qualitative research that combines online and offline enquiries is not as widely used as a single site approach that either looks at the offline or online experience independently, such as textual analysis that analyses blog content [10], or case studies that focus on the outcomes of blogging [11]. Since this study aims to relate the bloggers' online experience with their everyday political experience, a mixed-method of combining both the quantitative and qualitative instruments is imperative. A mixed-method approach offers a form of flexibility whereby the researcher is guided by the structure of quantitative method but is still open to new ideas that may even assert unexpected or unplanned results [12]. Three online and offline data-gathering methods in the form of a survey questionnaire, intensive interviews, and online observation were used. Survey questionnaires were distributed to gather basic demographics and habitual characteristics of the participants in order to better contextualize the bloggers' life histories and current position. Face-to-face interviews is conducted to gather the bloggers' life histories, blogging experience and their understanding of those experiences. Lastly, online observation is done to analyze the bloggers' writings and other blogging activities. Data from the three methods were analyzed together to connect the bloggers' online practices with their everyday experiences.

Sampling wise, Li and Walejko [13] found that the majority of the research on bloggers employed the non-probability sampling technique because it provides the easiest and cheapest way to sample a large number of bloggers. However, they suggested that to guide the sampling process, it is important for the researcher to specifically operationalize the population of interest. For this particular research, the research population is blogs that were written by Malaysians about Malaysian life, issues and politics. Guided by this specification, I went through each blog listed on the Sopo-central directory (<http://sopo-sentral.blogspot.com>). Sopo-central is an initiative of the Malaysian bloggers' alliance to create a directory of Malaysian socio-political blogs. It lists almost all the existing Malaysian political blogs and provides a simple commentary on the blogs' activity status. Through sopo-central, I identified specific bloggers who fulfilled the basic criteria stated in the population of interest. I tried to approach bloggers with different demographic traits such as race, gender, age and education level. Differences in the demographic background were important because it could provide unique individual stories that allow for complex comparisons of the bloggers' experience in relation to the research themes.

I had difficulty recruiting participants at first. Sending email invitations proved to be ineffective. Out of almost 60 emails that were sent out, I received only six positive responses. Realising that I cannot depend on emails, I started to rely on snowballing sampling. I started using contacts from third parties by calling on friends of friends who were bloggers as well as friends of the bloggers that I had recruited. This was cautiously done with the consent of the particular bloggers. Before contacting them, I ensured that they had been sufficiently informed by the third party about my

research intent and that they had consented to my having their contact information. 24 bloggers were recruited through this method.

All in all, 30 Malaysian bloggers were sampled. The interviews were translated and transcribed. The thematic coding technique is used to analyze the data for categories of meaning and the themes that recurred. Data analysis is done before, during and after data collection with the help of handwritten notes and NVivo. The bloggers' real names are not mentioned in the research results to protect their confidentiality.

4. Results

The study found that there are generally two kinds of bloggers who write about Malaysia. They are the Activist and the Diarist bloggers. The activist bloggers are driven by the altruistic desire to promote change and encourage participation in relation to the specific issue that they championed. These bloggers want to create discourses that could attract more attention to the cause that they were fighting for. On the other hand, the diarist bloggers tend to blog about personal and everyday experiences rather than politics and community issues. They are more interested to share their everyday experiences with friends and family members. As such, they usually adopted an informal and conversational blogging style. Instead of trying to appear authoritative, these bloggers often shared their stories, views and opinions by writing and sharing stories as they experienced them. Unlike the activist bloggers who blogged with deliberate political intentions, the diarist bloggers understood blogging as acts of expressing and sharing.

While the two blogger categories seem to have contrasting characteristics, they are not entirely opposites. Rather, they are simply analytical categorizations of two ways of blogging. It is more useful to highlight each blogger category according to their descriptive blogging habits and everyday blogging experiences based on their own merit and not in direct comparison with the other. To do this, the everyday blogging experiences were analysed through dimensions of the blogging experience: the blogging motivation, style, practices and rewards.

Table 1

Summary of the Everyday Blogging Experiences of the Activist and Diarist Bloggers

	Activist Bloggers	Diarist Bloggers
Blogging Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Voicing and sharing opinion -Have a voice - Participate in issues - Influence change - Debate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Documenting everyday life - Get acquainted with family and friends - Archive thoughts - Meet others with same interest
Blogging Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authority/expert/moderator -Formal - Third-person narrative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conversational - Informal - First-person narrative
Blogging Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Factual - Do not filter comments - Access external resources for information - Discuss with others - Some are members of blogger groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Story-telling - Filter comments - Hardly refer to other sources - Own opinion/hearsay - Not involved in blogger groups
Blogging Rewards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Influence socio-political change - Possible link to authorities - Debate/discourse - influence local politics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better writer - More informed - Acquainted with others - Everyday life becomes significant

4.1 Blogging Motivation

Both the activist and diarist bloggers claimed that their main motivation to blog is mostly to express and to share. The freedom to write and reach audiences is one of the main advantages of blogging and it is apparent that these bloggers were attracted to blogging because of the lack of gatekeepers and requirements to set-up a blog [14]. According to Van Lear et al. [15], self-expression in blogging refers to the desire to show others one's identity and individuality. Blogging is a way to express oneself online by sharing personal thoughts and information while managing one's image or reputation through strategic selection of content. Self-expression can be direct by disclosing personal information, or it can be indirect, by revealing one's true self through words, pictures, opinions, and style.

However, the desire to express can only be properly measured and analyzed by understanding the desired implication of the particular act of expression. While both the activists and diarists claim that the ability to express themselves is their main blogging motivation, the study found that the desire for expression can articulate different justifications in the attempt to reach different outcomes. For the activist bloggers, the ability to express often connoted the intention of voicing opinions, influencing others and deliberating on important socio-political issues. For the diarist bloggers, to express usually means to share. The study argues that to influence and to share are evidently two different understandings of the desire for self-expression. For the activist bloggers, the desire for expression means a deliberate attempt to discuss and build support for a specific political stance or community issue. For the diarist bloggers, expression means the ability to share everyday life experiences with the hope of connecting with family members and friends. This difference in the bloggers' understanding and practice of expression could be seen by the way they explain their motivations to blog. Blogger A, a 36-year-old supporter of the ruling government has this to say about his motivation to blog:

I needed a place to express my thoughts and views and with blogging, I feel like I do have a voice. I realize there are friends who actually follow my blog. Sometimes they come and tell me that they are reading my blog... OK... that's good [laughs]. So, on my own... I try to open minds. I'd like to think that I am writing for my community. I hope some people will just read it and think 'Well, that makes sense'

For Blogger A, blogging gives him a "voice". The blog is a medium where he could express his thoughts and views. Like the other bloggers categorised as activists, Blogger A's thoughts and views are mostly about socio-political issues and having a voice means having others reading his arguments on the issues that he cares about. Blogger A is motivated to participate in issues and is determined to create (political) change. He claims that blogging makes him feel that he is able to influence others and in the course of doing so, he can "open minds" and does something for his "community". As such, his motivation to blog is more than just expressing his thoughts but extending it to involvement in political change.

There are cynical arguments in the literature about the ability of bloggers to actually instigate political change [16,17]. These bloggers are seen as standing on soap boxes, writing anything they want, with little thought, deliberation or accountability [17]. They have also been described as echo chambers that simply repeat and redistribute the messages of the political elites and the mass media and have a readership limited to a small group of family members and friends [18]. Despite these arguments about the bloggers' limited impact, Blogger A is indeed experiencing and promoting political change. When taken from the perspective of citizens' media, participation and

citizenship are understood by the change it brings to the particular media users. Thus, Blogger A's drive to educate others becomes significant as he himself considers it as a form of citizen participation.

For the diarist bloggers, their main motivation to blog is the ability to write and share everyday experiences. For this group of bloggers, who are considered to be less political in the traditional sense, the political potential of blogging do not appeal to them. Blogger B, a 23 year old IT enthusiast and explained:

I started early 2008. I guess I is mostly driven by my desire to share my interest and opinions. I think if you have something to share, why not? I started blogging about IT mostly. I've had people asking me to advise them about IT and I try to help wherever I can but I wouldn't say that it's a niche blog, it's more of a mixture of all things. I do write about my daily activities sometimes but IT would be the main thing I blog about. I would say that my blog is just a place I hang out...

Blogger B mainly blog about IT, a subject he is very much interested in. He indicates clearly that his motivation to blog is to share his knowledge about IT. Getting responses from his blog readers further motivates him to write about IT. Although IT is the main topic in his blog, Blogger B feels that his blog is more than just about IT because he also blogs about other activities in his life. Therefore, blogging to him is a medium that enables him to record his everyday experiences and share his personal interests with others. The blog becomes a place where he could "hang out" indicating that blogging to him is simply an extension of his everyday life. This shows that for the diarist bloggers, the motivation to blog mostly came from the personal desire to document everyday life, archive thoughts and opinions and be connected with friends or others with the same interests. These less definitive goals may be different from the goals of the activist bloggers whose motivations appear to be more external, public and political. However, in the recording and sharing of everyday interests and activities, the diarist bloggers are also able to engage with their circles of readers and promote specific lifestyles that can also be beneficial for the community. In this sense blogging allows this group of less explicitly political citizens to cut across the private and the public dichotomies by making a private interest a public discourse.

4.2 Blogging Style

Blogging style refers to the ways bloggers write and present their personae in their blogs. This presentation includes the tone and approach bloggers adopt in their blog posts in relation to how they position their roles as bloggers. Papacharissi [19] identifies that self-representation is important among bloggers as they are concerned about the image they present to their readers. She contends that bloggers understand that the right image can attract more attention to their blogs. For the activist bloggers, their blogging style works in parallel with their political stance and their desire to encourage political debate and promote socio-political change. In their attempt to highlight a particular issue, these bloggers often portray themselves as the authority or expert on the subject matter. By being formal, the activist bloggers often use the third-person narrative in their blog posts. They like to write from an analytical perspective. They want to appear objective and authoritative. Therefore, they express their thoughts and opinions as someone who is watching and analyzing, rather than someone who is merely experiencing the topic discussed.

Blogger C, a 48 year old Malay blogger had this to say about his blogging style:

Blogging allows me to archive my writing. I can retrieve them, re-analyse and edit. If possible I would like to compile them [his blog posts] one day and turn it into a book or a memoir. I don't simply write for the sake of writing. I write because I have something significant to share. That is why I am very concerned with how I write and what I write. My daughter once commented that my blog is too formal and boring [laughs]. I guess she reads my blog from a teenager's point of view. At that age, you know.... they [teenagers] just don't bother. But for me, all these issues are important. That is why I try to make it [the blog] formal and analytical. I want my readers to understand my opinions and analysis. I am not simply throwing thoughts or telling stories, I try to provide substantiated facts and arguments.

Blogger C's blogging style corresponded with his blogging motivation. He blogs about issues that affect his community and wants his readers to understand his arguments. He further admits that he wants to archive and even publish his writings. The affordances of blogging such as easy editing and data retrieval support Blogger C's intention to participate in discourses and record his thoughts. He made it clear that he did not blog for the sake of simply sharing experiences and this is why he tries to be as formal and analytical as possible in his blog posts. He shares that even his daughter thought that his blog is too formal, but he dismisses her criticism by claiming that as a teenager, his daughter could not fathom the seriousness of his writing. Blogger C presents himself as a serious blogger. He did not want to please his readers. Instead, he wants them to adopt his stance and as such he only focuses on readers who were as serious about the community as he is. Blogger C further stresses that he is not simply "throwing thoughts" or "telling stories" and that, as a concerned citizen, he provides objective, third-person narratives on issues.

In contrast, the diarist bloggers' limited interest in state politics is apparent in their blogging style. They tend to adopt a blogging style that is less formal and often resemble a storytelling approach. This group of bloggers write about personal and everyday experiences rather than politics and community issues. They are more interested in recording their everyday experiences and sharing them with friends and family. Thus, they are usually informal and conversational in their blogging, just as they would communicate with their close circle of acquaintances. Instead of trying to appear authoritative, these bloggers often shared] their stories, views and opinions in first-person narratives, writing and sharing stories as they were experienced. For these bloggers, blogging is personal; the blog is their journal in which they document their life experiences. Unlike the activist bloggers who adopted strict and formal blogging styles to represent their deliberate political intentions, the diarist bloggers use their own personal style, mostly hoping to be able to share their stories as they understand and experience them. Blogger D, a 20-year-old Chinese law student shares these thoughts on her blogging style:

I like to write in riddles, it's my way of writing because that's how I think. Some of my friends have mentioned the same thing - which I like to write 'beat around the bush' kind of way. The thing is, when I'm writing my postings, it is actually not for the public to read, it's more for me to express myself so sometimes I may write something that other people don't understand and only I can understand so it may seem like a teen novel(ish) thing but it is actually kind of like a little riddle... in that sense... you get what I mean? Maybe those who are really close to me, close friends and family who are familiar with the way I am can understand my blog.

According to Blogger D, she blogs "in riddles" and "beat around the bush kind of way". While

she shares her blog posts with friends and family members, she claims that when she blogs, she mainly does it to express herself, and to record her own thoughts and experiences as she understands them. She explains that this is why her friends sometimes find it hard to understand her postings, suggesting that only those who are close to her can understand what she shares on her blog. For Blogger D, blogging is very personal. She do not mind about public approval nor does she want to attract readers to her blog. Rather, she approaches her blog through a first-person narrative where she blogs informally according to her own style that probably limits her blog reach, but preserves the personal nature of her blog.

Thus, the ways the activist and diarist bloggers presented themselves on their blogs are in accordance with their blogging motivations. The activist bloggers who feel driven to blog as a mean of political participation tends to be formal and authoritative. To them, such a blogging style is important for having the readers take their views and analysis seriously. On the other hand, for the diarist bloggers whose goals are mostly to express, record and share everyday experiences, their blogging style often resembles their everyday way of conversing. They do not intend to appear authoritative. Instead, they present themselves as typically and as naturally as they are in everyday life. These blogging styles indicate that the bloggers reflect their existing political selves in their blogs and iss an extension of who they are as citizens.

4.3 Blogging Practices

The blogging practices show that habitual and sometimes mundane blogging habits can offer new and significant citizen experiences. For the activist bloggers who wants to present a serious political persona, their blogging practices are often strictly formatted. They usually took a long time to write their analysis due to the research they completed to substantiate their arguments. Blogger E, a 30-year-old engineer aptly explained how blogging can require a lot of time and effort:

It takes a lot of time, even to write a few sentences. I must have a stand and my own personal views which need to be verified and researched to ensure that they are substantiated. I need to craft my arguments convincingly and correctly. At the same time it is important that I don't put myself as easy target simply because I wrote a post that is unsubstantiated. It's never fun to get condemned in your own blog [laughs]. I don't filter the comments my readers put on my blog. I figured since I am free to blog about what I feel, it is only right that I also offer the same freedom for others to scrutinize my writings.

Blogger E took his time and put in a lot of effort to write a blog post. Since he wants to present his own views and recommendations on issues, he feels accountable to provide analyses that are substantiated. He wants to ensure that his writings are significant and are convincing to the readers. Moreover, he claims to not filter his readers' comments, allowing his analyses to be scrutinised and even criticized. In their study of bloggers' habits, Sepp et al. [20] identifies self-presentation, image management and reputation as especially important to serious bloggers who consider blogging a form of political advocacy. It is evident in the Blogger E's approach to blogging that he is a serious blogger. Blogger E's articulated and careful blogging practices also concurs with recent studies [21,22] that shows blogging as a social activity where the bloggers' awareness of their readers can have an impact on what they choose to blog about and what identity they present to their audience.

The blogging practices of the diarist bloggers are less disciplined. They mostly write instantaneously without prior research and discussions. The diarist bloggers rarely refer to any other sources. They wrote by experiences and memories and as such are mostly based on personal hearsay. Blogger F, a 38 year old blogger found it necessary to be political only during election periods. He says this about his blogging practices:

If I feel like writing, I just write it. I don't expect people to visit my blog. It's just for my own purposes. Although my blog is open to the public, I feel that it is really up to the readers what they make of my writing. It does not really matter because I don't write to please anyone. Anyway I don't think that I write about issues that can trigger anything, I mostly write about my experiences. I don't see the need for research and stuff. I do have some blogger friends who comment on my blog and I do the same in their blogs but it's mostly friendly, it's not a formal group where we formally advise each other.

Blogger F sees himself as a 'free agent'. He writes whenever he feels like writing and he does not feel accountable to his readers. He hardly refers to other resources for facts and information, relying instead on his own opinions and ideas. Blogger F defends the lack of effort he put in his blogging practices by saying that he does not find such practices important since he is mostly writing about his own experiences, which he feels are personal and not threatening to anyone. He does not feel accountable to his readers because, to him, the readers came to his blog on their own free will and are responsible for their own thoughts and behaviors when reading his blog. As a diarist blogger, Blogger F sees his blog as his private medium that he let others enter at their own risk. Blogger F is not a part of a formal blogger group or association. Instead he is usually in a "friendly" relationship with his blogger friends where they exchange comments on each other's blog posts. Essentially, the blogging practices of the diarist bloggers indicates that because they saw blogging as a private activity, the lack of research and the unstructured way of blogging exemplifies the notion that a blog is simply an open journal that records everyday experiences and is not a public medium used to influence others about issues.

4.4 Blogging Rewards

It is important to recognize that to continuously blog requires ongoing motivation that comes in the form of blogging rewards. This approach is in agreement with Liu et al. [23] and Ekdale et al. [24] who found that blogging activities are strongly related to perceived gratifications, Those who believe blogging would fulfil their desire to pour out feelings and connect with others are more willing to update and maintain their blogs. Similarly, Miura and Yamashita [25] found that the intention to continue blogging is positively affected by the bloggers' satisfaction with the benefits of blogging to self, relationships with others. Both the diarist and activist bloggers in the present study claim that they are mostly rewarded by the responses they received. The activist bloggers feel that they are rewarded by the possibility of causing some form of political change or influencing others by expressing their opinions. Since this group of bloggers mostly blog with the intention to participate in political discourses, the ability to connect with other politically-inclined bloggers and readers, as well as the responses they obtain for each blog post, are important indications that blogging is serving the purpose of affecting others and being part of the country's politics. At the same time, these bloggers are also satisfied by the belief that blogging is their material contribution to making a better Malaysia. Blogger G, a 28 year blogger claims that:

There are no monetary rewards. In fact I had to spend a lot of my own money. I just want people to free their minds; to deliberate on their own. Malaysians should learn to be more political. I want a better environment for my country. I'm happy to know that at least I've done my part [through blogging] to achieve something better for my country; at least my children will inherit a better Malaysia...

Blogger G is gratified by the belief that he is able to make other Malaysians think outside the rigid political dimensions they have been historically conditioned to accept. As someone who is very politically active, blogging is his access to the public. Through blogging he is able to reach others who he might not have been able to in his capacity as an everyday Malaysian. He is rewarded by the thought that his views and opinions are being read and deliberated on, and these results are an indication that he had achieved his goal of creating more politically critical and analytical Malaysians.

For the diarist bloggers, rewards often come in the form of the feeling of release and the positive acknowledgement from their blog readers. Blogger H, a 31-year-old blogger states that blogging helps her feel happy in her everyday life. She narrates her thoughts:

If I had a bad day at work for example, blogging is a good release. I don't necessarily need to blog about the things that are stressing me, I could blog about anything and it still helps. The comments from my visitors are also very rewarding. The intimacy between my visitors and myself has helped me build friendships. It feels good to know that there are people reading about me and sometimes they too share the same experience. It is not really about enjoying the attention but more about appreciating the connectedness between friends and even strangers. I'm happy to know that others are interested in my life. It makes me feel significant.

Diarist bloggers like Blogger H are gratified by the act of blogging and sharing as much as by the ability to put forth specific thoughts or experiences. Blogger H finds it fulfilling that there are responses to whatever she shares and this makes her feel that her experiences are appreciated and meaningful. She also claims that she felt connected to her readers who sometime share her experience. All these responses and acknowledgements made Blogger H feel significant. I argue that blogging is mostly rewarding to the diarist bloggers when their everyday experiences are magnified by the positive or even negative responses given by the blog readers. Everyday experiences becomes more important when they are blogged about. As such, while the activist bloggers are rewarded by their ability to be a part of public political discourses and the potential of influencing political decision-making, the diarist bloggers are gratified by the value blogging added to their everyday experiences. Blogging and its affordances for expression and connection make both the diarist bloggers and the activist bloggers feel more important and significant as bloggers, citizens and individuals. In a way, these bloggers are satisfied by the way they are able to fulfil their motivation for expression and, as proposed by Shao [26], these bloggers feel that they are able to actualize their self-potential through self-reflection and sharing of personal feelings and thoughts.

4.5 Blogging and the Citizenship Experience

When the blogging experiences are viewed through a Citizens' Media lens, it is evident that blogging is changing the way the bloggers understood politics and participation, as well as the way

they view and give meaning to their everyday lives. This resembles Rodriguez's [9] claim that the pivotal role of Citizens' Media in empowering citizens is to develop new understandings and images of themselves outside the corporate space of mediation created by mainstream media channels and outlets. More specifically in Malaysia, this means that citizens are able to make sense of their own lives and find meaning in their everyday lives through a media practice that is free from the patronage of partisan politics. Even for the most casual of the diarist bloggers like Blogger F whose blogging motto is "if I feel like writing, I just write it" and who did not feel accountable to his readers, the ability to blog, express and to connect with the readers and other bloggers is a significant change in everyday life and, to an extent, an important form of media engagement. The satisfaction and optimism that the bloggers experience not only come from the expression of specific thoughts or ideas, but also in the ability to take control of their own media as well as the ability to magnify and make significant the banality of everyday lives. Blogging also helps to bring into being what Cottle [27] explains as 'a new space for social inclusivity, group recognition and pluralized participation as well as different forms of political conversation and engagement'. As a result, these bloggers are able to dictate their own citizenship experience by personally defining political and everyday acts that are meaningful and material in their lives [28].

5. Conclusion

When it comes to measuring the significance of blogging on the experience of citizenship, both kinds of bloggers are transforming the ways they participate in politics and the way they understand their roles as citizens. Consequently, the ways these bloggers are able to create their own meaning through their blogging also signify that they are able to be part of a new form of media engagement that goes beyond and even challenges the dichotomized Malaysian media sphere that re-enforces the status quo. Blogging is a form of Citizen's media that enables the bloggers to defy the partisan and elitist political culture by proposing and deliberating on issues that can bridge the disconnection between everyday Malaysians, the media and politics.

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