

THE PHENOMENON OF BLOG CAMPAIGNING: AN  
EXPLORATORY STUDY OF WEB LOGS DURING  
MALAYSIA'S 12<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL ELECTION

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By

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## **ABSTRACT**

# **THE PHENOMENON OF BLOG CAMPAIGNING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF WEB LOGS DURING MALAYSIA'S 12<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL ELECTION**

**Lim Shin Teng**

Recently, politicians contesting in contemporary campaigns have opted to include blogs as part of their overall campaign strategy. Media pundits claimed blog have influenced the outcome of an election, but how powerful blogs really are will remain as a clue. This research aims to determine if blogs have any impact in an electoral campaign.

The research utilised online survey as its primary methodology supplemented by content analysis to examine how blogs have been used as electioneering instrument. A total of 357 responses were gathered and evaluated through an online survey system. Candidates' blog are chosen to evaluate how the new media are utilised three months before and after the election campaign.

Data obtained suggests that blogs play a role in disseminating alternative information. Candidates have used blogs as part of their

communication strategy but it was mostly a conventional one-way, top-down communication channel. Although data strongly suggests that people perceived blogs to be influential, statistical analysis indicated that blog's influence is still weak and in its infancy stage. Data presented here may have provided some interesting insight that suggests why people patronise blogs and how blogs have been utilised by both the candidates and the voters, but further experimental investigation is required to suggest clearly how blogs can impact an election campaign.

Keywords: blog, election campaign, impact, voting decision, uses and gratification

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## APPROVAL SHEET

This dissertation entitled **“THE PHENOMENON OF BLOG CAMPAIGNING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF WEB LOGS DURING MALAYSIA’S 12<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL ELECTION”** was prepared by LIM SHIN TENG and submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Communication at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman.

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**SUBMISSION OF FINAL YEAR PROJECT /DISSERTATION/THESIS**

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I understand that University will upload softcopy of my dissertation in pdf format into UTAR Institutional Repository, which may be made accessible to UTAR community and public.

Yours truly,

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LIM SHIN TENG



## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the dissertation is based on my original work except for quotations and citations, which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UTAR or other institutions.

Name: LIM SHIN TENG

Date: 29<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2012

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Blog	Web Log
BN	National Front
DAP	Democratic Action Party
Gerakan	Malaysian People's Movement Party
MCMC	Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission
PAS	Islamic Party of Malaysia
PKR	National Justice Party
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
URL	Uniform Resource Locator

## CHAPTER 1.0

### INTRODUCTION

The explosion of the Internet over a decade ago has changed the environment of political communication. The creation of electronic media has revolutionised the way information is disseminated and received. Since 2004, the world has experienced an enormous growth in online political activity. The emergence of social media and social networking sites has given room for a new political era. It has offered an opportunity for people to reach wider audiences, breaking the conventional regulatory mechanism and allows more flexibility in information flow (Verhulst, 2006).

With Internet, people can engage in political activities through a computer, provided that they have access to the Internet. This new form of political engagement has created a new and attractive market of voters for politicians to target. In an effort to optimise their reach to this new segment of voters, a growing number of politicians have started to embrace some of the technologies that have emerged from the social media scene, counting them into their overall political strategy.

One of the latest and fastest growing technological developments to emerge from the social media scene that has been adapted by the political parties and candidates in their overall communication strategy is the *weblog* – more often referred to as *blog*. In the 2004 United States presidential election, blogs were for the first time added by political candidates into their political



communication strategy (Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005). Few claimed then that the tool has a significant impact on the election. In United Kingdom, blogs in political campaign is in its infancy and appeared to have significant campaigning role (Stanyer, 2006; Jackson, 2006). Political party blogs were basically used as a single communication channel that may have encouraged visitors to revisit but they were not effective conversational, campaigning, or promotional tools (Jackson, 2006).

However, the blog phenomenon has changed. Experts have begun to claim that blogs play a larger part in the political campaigning process than conventional ways of informing the public. According to Sean Mussenden (2007) of Media General News Service, candidates are redefining online politics by communicating directly to voters through text and video on their web pages, aside from “lobbying political bloggers for endorsement” (Mussenden, 2007). Nonetheless, the effectiveness of this new online communication instrument as a campaign tool is questionable. Academician Gill said that: “It is unlikely that the Net or a candidate blog will provide sufficient motivation for individuals to become politically active; the desire to be involved in politics must come first.” (Gill, 2004, p.4)

### *1.1 Problem Statement*

The Internet has gained an entrenched position in the United States electoral campaigns and is steadily evolving in the United Kingdom as well.

The new media were not widely used by politicians from the Asian counterparts for their overall communication strategy, until recently. The paradigm shift is happening in the Asian political landscape, especially among the opposition parties in countries where mainstream media are tightly controlled by the ruling coalitions. Here, blogging become the alternative route for candidates from the opposition parties to promulgate their ideologies and to reach voters. But just how effective blogging is in triggering attitude or behaviour changes remains a puzzle.

Some media pundits have commented on the possible impact blogs have towards an election campaign. Academicians and scholars have revealed mix findings on the impact of blogs. Porter, Trammell, Chung and Kim (2006) who conducted a study on blog and its power revealed that there are no significant influences of blog use and power. Local political analysts such as Ooi Kee Beng and Khoo Kay Peng on the contrary, believe that the Internet plays a bigger role such as seen in the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election (Tan, 2008). Former Energy, Water and Communication minister and Gerakan president, Dr Seri Lim Keng Yaik commented that the opposition parties have skillfully exploited the new media to reach voters (Lee, 2008). Even former Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi claimed they, the National Front, lost the battle because they have overlooked the power of blogs and Internet (Lee, 2008). The National Front lost a few states and Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has admitted they lost to the cyberwar (Rajendra, 2008). Media pundits claimed that the National Front will need more internet-savvy members to make headway in this new world (Lee, 2008).

According to a survey by Zentrum Future Studies Malaysia which was conducted in March 2008, findings indicated that alternative media such as blog had a big influence on voters in which approximately 65 percent of the respondents trusted blogs and online media for reliable information whereas only 35 percent trusted the conventional media (Abdul Rasheed Moten, 2009).

In Malaysia, blogging continues to thrive despite heavily curtailed by the government. In fact, the Internet seem to be the only available option for the opposition parties during political campaign as traditional media were confined to the National Alliances. The phenomenon of blog campaigning was seen in the recent 12<sup>th</sup> general election, with opposition parties employing the alternative media to reach their voters. The election also saw several bona-fide bloggers such as Jeff Ooi, Tony Pua, Nik Nazmi and Elizabeth Wong campaigned online, raising funds through the vessel and won against the ruling party. Political analyst Ooi Kee Beng claimed that “politics has taken over the Internet in Malaysia because of constraints on the mainstream media” (Lee & Toh, 2008). Nonetheless, he doubts the efficacy of the Internet to influence the voting decision.

On the other hand, few experts believed that the blogs would be able to insert a certain amount of influence in a political campaign. Jun-E Tan and Zawawi Ibrahim (2008) concluded in their research on blogging and democratization in Malaysia by stating that blogs “facilitate the civil liberties of society” and it also helps to set agenda and frame discussion for public policy making. Political analyst and blogger Khoo Kay Peng told *The Edge*

*Daily* that the Internet plays an important role in certain elections and people will utilise the Internet way before the election (Tan, 2008). Tricia Yeoh, director of the Centre for Public Policy Studies, added that the Internet influence would be a crucial factor in urban areas, as voters there are more likely to be critical of the government. Yeoh added that urbanites are more exposed to issues whereas the rural constituents may not have such access to the Internet due to the digital divide (Tan, 2008).

Khoo and Yeoh's statement raises an interesting question: What impact does an online communication instrument such as a blog have on the election process? To what extent a blog can influence the urbanites?

How powerful blogs really are will remain inconclusive without a proper research. It is not a question to determine if the Internet affects politics, but rather how and why the new media technologies such as blog itself can have any influences towards the whole political campaign. Addressing the problems or research questions in this study will generate new information that may be useful for future academic studies and to increase our understanding of the impacts blogs have in political communication.

## *1.2 Study objective*

The emergence of the new media in the early 1990s has posed challenges to the conventional media. During the 1990s, Internet became an

important tool in political campaigning and a source for political information (Bryant & Thompson, 2002). Although the Internet seem to be another mean of information retrieval and a tool for the politicians to reach voters, the Internet merely appear to be publishing news and information that is readily available in most of the conventional media.

New communication technologies have created new media tools such as blog that is different from the Internet newswire. Blogs manned by individuals seem to challenge the existing media experts by claiming that they are more reliable and more credible source of information as they are free from controls and restraints of media ownership. However, blogs influence presents a mystery, a puzzle; given the differences and disparity in resources and organisation with regard to other factors, how can a collection of decentralised, non-profit and discordant websites exercise any influence over political and policy outputs?

The objective of this study is therefore initiated to draw attention to the influence blogs may have towards an election campaign, specifically on how influential blogs are in the decision-making process of audiences to vote for a particular party or candidate. As shown in Figure 1.1, the researcher intends to identify blog and its influence on voting behaviour and on the overall political campaign process. It is also the objective of this study to identify how political individuals or candidates used their blog during the election campaign.

### **Figure 1.1: Study Objectives**

1. Examines the possible influences blogs have on the voting decisions in an electoral campaign.
2. Determine how and why blogs have any influences towards the whole political campaign.
3. Determine if blogs have any influences in voter decision making.
4. Determine if blogs help candidates shape public opinions which influence voting decision.
5. Identify how candidates utilised blogs.

### *1.3 Significance of Study*

It is crucial to study and research on the media effect issue, specifically new media such as blog itself. Drezner and Farrell (2004) stated that “when key weblogs focus on a new or neglected issue – blogs can socially construct an agenda or interpretive frame that acts as a focal point for mainstream media, shaping and constraining the larger political debate” (p. 2). Sroka (2006) who seconded Drezner and Farrell’s statement suggested that blogs function as the “watchdog” of the mainstream media has much stronger voice being heard by legislators than previously considered. These more recent studies proposed that blogs play a greater role in a mediated society, thus more studies are needed to provide answers on the relationship between blog readership and voting decisions, which in turn affect policy decisions.

There are several objectives pointed and discussed earlier. It is crucial to identify these objectives for several significant reasons:

1. To increase our understanding of the potential influence and the role blogs can play in future election campaigns particularly when it comes to affecting voting behaviour.
2. To understand the relationship between blog readership and voting decisions so that blog can be fully utilised in ways that is beneficial in a political communication effort.
3. To understand what opportunities blog produce and how this opportunities can strengthen the strategy of an election campaign.

Theorist studying media effects have argued that it is crucial for us all to understand the power media have upon individuals and the society (Bryant & Thompson, 2002). The area of media effects on political process is very complex and there is no simple answer to the question. Perhaps Barelson says it best when he muses about his own findings over the years and claims, “some kinds of communication on some kinds of issues, brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of conditions, have some kinds of effects” (Diamond & Bates, 1984, p. 347). It is therefore not the intention of revolutionising the area of media effects studies that this study goes on to look at one of the newest and more exciting technologies within the area. Rather, the intention is to explore new perspectives that can help us

understand the opportunities that lie within the complexities of the modern media sphere for political campaigns to produce desirable effects on the political process.

#### *1.4 Research Questions*

In an effort to reach a better understanding of this issue, this study sought to examine the following research questions:

RQ1: What impact does blogs have on the outcome of the 12<sup>th</sup> General election?

RQ2: What impact does blogs have on voter's decision?

RQ3: Can campaigning through blogs help politicians shape public opinion or influence voting decision?

The first research question (RQ1) examines the possible influences blogs have on the final results in an electoral campaign, in this case, the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election. This research question aims to determine how and why blogs have any influences towards the whole political campaign.

The second research question (RQ2) intends to determine whether blogs play any influential role in voters' decision making. It aims to



determine if reading blogs affect one’s views and perceptions towards a political party or candidate.

The last research question (RQ3) aims to determine if blog helps candidates to shape public opinion. It is important to examine how blogs have been utilised by the candidates during the electoral campaign as a mean to determine the blog campaigning phenomenon in Malaysia. The question “how” examines the frequency candidates updated their blogs, the content of the blog and the type of applications or gadgets used in their blogs for generating supports. Figure 1.2 highlights the research questions of this study and how each research questions relates to the study objectives.

**Figure 1.2: Summaries of Study**

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Study Objectives</b>	<b>Methodology</b>
What impact does blogs have on the outcome of the 12th General Election?	Examines the possible influences blogs have on the voting decisions in an electoral campaign.  Determine how and why blogs have any influences towards the whole political campaign.	Online survey
What impact does blogs have on voter’s decision?	Determine if blogs have any influences in voter decision making.	Online survey
Can campaigning through blogs help politicians shape public opinion or influence voting decision?	Determine if blogs help candidates shape public opinions which influence voting decision.  Identify how candidates utilised blogs.	Online survey  Content analysis

### *1.5 Scope of Study*

The researcher aims to examine the influence blogs have on the recent general election. Previous studies have revealed that only certain groups of people participated in blogs, particularly among better-educated people living in urban cities (Cornfield & Rainee, 2006).

Therefore, this study; which employed a quantitative methodology, selected Internet users who are eligible to vote and have voted in the March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008 elections. As the study aims to determine the influence blogs have towards voting decisions, it is only logical to select respondents who are Malaysia citizens and will exclude foreigners in this study and also Malaysians residing abroad. Apart from that, respondents must have been patronising socio-political blogs. They must have read or commented in these blogs as the study focuses only on socio-political blogs.

The researcher also analyses blogs' content of candidates from the opposition parties and the ruling party, if any. There is no constraint on language selection as the researcher only aims to seek answers on how blogs have been utilised by candidates. By studying this, researcher is able to establish whether there is a growth in blog campaigning after the Election Day.

### *1.6 Definition of Terms*

The objective of the study is to increase our understanding of blog influences towards election campaigns and voting decision by examining how blogs can have significant campaigning role and influences towards voting decisions. This study also aims to unfold how candidates have utilised blogs during the campaigning period.

The term blogs are essentially the equivalence of an online diary (Campbell, 2004) containing interactive contents that is updated on a frequent basis. They are similar to print except that they have added dimensions which allow response from readers by interactively posting comments (Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005). However, blogs enable bloggers to publish not only text but also images, audio, video, and other forms of multimedia by the use of web applications such as Blogger, Xanga LiveJournal and so on (Tan, J & Zawawi Ibrahim, 2008).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher only selects socio-political blogs. Socio-political blog is a common type of blogs which focus on political commentaries. They are mostly news driven and contain links of articles from news web sites or feature original commentary, with occasional hyperlinks to back up blogger's opinions. Political blogs set up by candidates should not be confused with political websites that contain blog because these types of blog function as an additional tool in the website. The political blogs

discussed over this study are those set up either by the candidate themselves, or individuals (political bloggers).

The word *campaigning* within the political context generally can be defined as an organised effort that aims to influence the decision making process of a specific group (Oxford student's dictionary, 1988). Campaigning through blogs carries similar meaning, except campaigning activities were conducted online. Propaganda, manifesto, fund raising and other interactive advertisements are part of campaigning via blog (Rice, 2003).

It is the study's aim to examine blog's impact. The *impact* here is defined as any attitudinal effects blogs may have towards respondents and of the research. According to Richard Jackson Harris (2004), attitudinal changes may consist of intellectual (belief) and emotional components. A respondent may not favour one candidate's position over another on certain issues, but they re-elected the candidate in the election because they liked and trusted him or her.

To determine the overall effects of blogs towards the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election, candidates' blog were also measured to determine if there are any effects towards respondents. The purpose of examining blog's impact is mainly to examine the influence it plays towards voting decision. *Influence* is defined in the Oxford Student's Dictionary (1988) as the power of a person to be a compelling force on another actions, behaviour, or opinions. In this study,

influence can be in the form of initiating a respondent to act, view or perceive a candidate in a positive way.

### *1.7 Conclusion*

As a conclusion, this study sought to examine the potential influence and the role blogs play in general election. This study indicates findings which may be important to understand the relationship between attitude change and exposure to political blogs during the 12th general election.

This study consists of three research questions, each with its own objective. However, the main objective of this study is to understand the power of blogs in the context of influencing votes in an election campaign. The next chapter in this thesis is organised by introducing the relevant conceptual and empirical researches conducted on blogs, its uses and gratifications, and its involvement in the political communication and campaigns. As there are limited resources from the local scene, most of the journals are based on the United States and other European phenomenon.

## **CHAPTER 2.0**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In recent years, there have been increasing interests in the online communication studies. Due to its changing landscape and the fact that the phenomenon of blogging is relatively new, there exists little academic research to date on political blogs and the politics of blogging (Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005). Far too little attention has been paid on the study of the blogosphere in regards to its possible influence, measurements, and impacts towards the society and political landscape.

Political communication researchers have long been interested in the media effects on voting behaviour. According to Bryant and Thompson (2002), studies have disclosed that media effects may be direct, indirect, or sometimes, a mixture of both. There are various researches, which supported the notion that media coverage usually shapes perceptions, which affects voter perceptions. The press plays a big role in disseminating news and provide information about governmental operations and other aspects. Unfortunately, the press often does not fulfil this role satisfactorily (Bryant & Thompson, 2002) due to media concentration and ownership, which led to the uprising of the Internet news and blogs as an alternative source of information (Gomez, 2004).

During the course of the twentieth century, numerous attempts have been made to explain the effects of the mass media on the political process

(Stockwell, 2005, p. 114). The findings that have emerged from these studies are exceedingly inconclusive, so inconclusive that the state of research in the media effects area is “one of the most notable embarrassments of modern social science” (Bartels, 1993, p. 267). Over time, theorists have gone from claiming that the media have a strong, almost hypodermic effect that can shape opinions and beliefs (McQuail, 2000), to suggesting that the media have only minimal effect on citizens because they cannot deliver political messages with any predictable effect (McQuail, 2000).

In more recent times theorists have again been claiming that the media have the power to set the agenda and affect what people talk about (Littlejohn, 2002; McQuail, 2000). Nevertheless, theorists such as Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974, as cited in Severin and Tankard, 2001) claimed that people have motives when they use a certain media to satisfy their very own personal needs. People choose what type of media they want to turn to, actively making decisions that meet their beliefs and ideologies. This is very much in line with the priming effects that occurs when “one exposure to a mediated message activates related thoughts in the mind of the audience member” (Bryant & Thompson, 2002, p. 311).

However, these are just a few examples of the work that have been done over time. Today, the debate of what effects the media have on the political process is still ongoing. If anything, researchers have come to realise the complexity of the issue itself, and that there is no simple answer to the question. In this chapter, the researcher will examine journals and articles that

were related to blogs and political campaign and identify the impact blog have towards the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election in Malaysia.

## *2.1 The blogosphere*

New media will never replace traditional media. But new media will continue to grow, to develop strength, and to challenge traditional media in setting the news agenda and driving public opinion. (Bevin & McIntyre, 2005, p.11)

The Internet, which was first introduced in the early nineties, has given opportunity for the rise of alternative media and the birth of new media. However, Bevin and McIntyre (2005) explained that conventional media is irreplaceable. New media cannot replace the conventional media but they serve as an alternative source of information, which has the potential to shape and drive public opinion.

There have been a considerable amount of literature published on the phenomenon of blogosphere (Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Li, 2005; & Rice, 2003) but the emphasis on the impact of blog is still novel. Literatures on the power of blog and its influence in political communication were limited, with the first serious discussions and analyses of the particular area emerged in the 2004 US presidential election (Gill, 2004; Mack, 2004; & Rice, 2003). Democratic presidential candidate Howard Dean was the first to create a blog in his electoral campaign. Dean's former campaign manager, Joe Trippi told Agence France-Presse in 2006 that: "The web will be playing a bigger role



than ever in the 2008 campaign, so much so that for the first time, it will actually change the outcome of the election” (Zablitz, 2007). What Trippi tried to say is that the Internet has gained a solid position in the political campaign with the increasing number of Americans adapting the online communities.

On the local front, the Internet is fast becoming an alternative media due to mainstream media deficit. While US election candidates started using blog several years ago, Malaysia political candidates only embark to utilise digital media strategy in the 2008 general election recently. The opposition coalition, namely Democratic Action Party (DAP), National Justice Party (PKR) and Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), actively utilised the new media tools to leverage online social networks. The 12<sup>th</sup> general election saw the opposition candidates sweeping most of the contested seats, with PKR winning most parliamentary seats for the opposition with 31 seats, followed by DAP with 28 seats and PAS with 23 seats (Figures retrieved from Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya Website). The ruling party, National Front (BN) tried to penetrate the Internet activism, but fails to do so. Political analyst Khoo Kay Peng stated that BN failure to penetrate into the new media because “it has access to traditional media ... it doesn’t have the determination to cultivate strength in another media that it has to relearn” (Tan, 2008).

The ruling party may have secured 140 parliamentary seats but face severe defeat by losing four states and the Federal Territory to the opposition, with Kelantan remains under the PAS leadership (Khairiah & Mahmud, 2008). Local media pundits such as Khoo Kay Peng, Ooi Kee Beng, Bakri Musa to

name a few, believe that the application of blog in a political scenario proves to be successful. A study by academician Abdul Rasheed Moten (2009) highlighted that alternative media have influenced the votes as people trusted alternative media such as blogs more than the mainstream press and media. However, it is unclear if it was blogs itself that transformed the voting decisions, as there may be other factors that drive such action.

In the following segment, the researcher will discuss on impacts and political values of blog based on available literatures. Although this paper focus primarily on the use and impact of what is here defined as *candidate blogs* or *political blogs*, it is essential that blogs' role in campaign communication are known.

### *2.1.1 What are blogs?*

There are many definitions of web logs, or better known as blogs, but it has been technically defined as “a web page with minimal to no external editing, providing on-line commentary, periodically updated and presented in reverse chronological order, with hyperlinks to other online sources” (Drezner & Farrell, 2005, p.5).

Blogs are essentially the equivalence of an online diary (Campbell, 2004) containing interactive contents that is updated on a frequent basis. They are similar to print except that they have added dimensions, which allow

response from readers by interactively posting comments (Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005). Through such comments or responses to other online sources in the postings, as well as through links to other blogs in the sidebar, termed *blogroll*, a clustered network of interlinked texts are formed, namely the *blogosphere* (Schmidt, 2007). Blogs are, by and large, digital publication that enables interactive dialogue.

Blogs generally follow a similar format and they come in various subject matters including politics, technology, current affairs, culture, entertainment, and specific hobbies and interests (Rice, 2003). According to Blood (2000), there are two types of blogs; one emphasis is on diary and comment aspect that may be used to influence wider public opinion or just to raise profile of the blogger. The other type is emphasizing on hyperlinks, which act as a filter system, looking at what exists on the Internet that might be of interest to visitors. Combinations of both types are commonly practised today in the blogosphere. Political blog, for example, are a type of blog, which comments on politics. It can be opinion-based or a hybrid of comments and hyperlinks. This is the usual practice in most political blogs today to gain more readerships and in the hope to engage with people directly.

Increasingly, politicians and their advisers are realising the potential for running their campaign online. Researchers have discussed several reasons as to why blogs have become a tool for politicians. Stanyer (2006) commented that blog is different from the mainstream media as they, “offer an unmanaged space for attitude expression that is not controlled by gatekeepers of various

kinds” (p. 405). A blog’s interactivity nature allows visitors to leave comments for the blogger (Stanyer, 2006) and this encourages two-way communication where the blogger can create dialogue with the readers on the blog itself. Another attraction is the blogroll function. Sroka (2006) claims that linking blogs with one another has created conversation among the bloggers, which in turn transform the blogosphere into something more than a bunch of individuals ranting in the cyberspace. Drezner and Farrell (2004) pointed out that posting comments are a key form of information exchange in the blog world.

Communications and the public sphere created by blogroll and other linking system present a new ground where politicians target messages, spread information, receive feedback and actively engage with potential supporters. But, what are the exact applications in a blog that attracted readers? What sort of application used by candidates in their blog, if any, to promote themselves during the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election campaign? Therefore, it is essential to understand the nature and structures within blogosphere for anyone interested to know how blogs may impact politics or how politicians may influence blog readers.

### *2.1.2 The history of blogs*

According to Perlmutter & McDaniel (2005), blogs were officially introduced in December 1997. Blogs were not an instant hit when first

launched, growing very slowly with the number of blogs estimated below fifty in early 1999 (Drezner & Farrell, 2004). However, when Pyra Labs released a software programme called Blogger that makes blogging accessible and user-friendly in late 1999, the growth rates have been surging dramatically.

It was not an exaggeration when Drezner and Farrell (2004) state, “the blogosphere has grown at an astronomical rate”. By 2004, Technorati estimated over 14.2 million blogs and more than 1.3 billion links as at July 2005, with a verdict that the blogosphere will continue to double about every 5.5 months (Perlmutter & McDaniel, 2005). Last year, there are approximately 170 million bloggers and 340 billion blog readers worldwide, primarily in emerging Internet markets in Asia (Ooi, 2007). But do numbers alone reflect the impact blogs have on politics and the possibility politicians have to influence bloggers?

According to Lawson-Borders and Kirk (2005), number of blog sites is “certainly one measure of importance”. In contrary, the current study argues that it is not necessarily so. The size of the blogosphere obviously reveals that all blogs are not equally active nor are they equally influential. It is misleading and potentially bias to claim blogosphere’s importance based on its scale. In a survey conducted by Perseus Development Company in 2003, 66 percent of all 4.12 million surveyed blogs have been permanently or temporarily abandoned (Dalton, 2007). Another study by Gartner Incorporation reveals a calculation of abandoned blogs at more than 200 million by end of 2006 (Dalton, 2007). As a result, the number of dying blogs will continue to grow

in the future. This will be one complication for measuring blogs and its influence.

An option to counter the difficulty would be “to examine how different directories and search engines rank blog authority” (Skoland, 2007, p. 17). There are few measuring methodologies; measuring by traffic which monitors the hit rate of all blogs that subscribe to it (Stayner, 2006), or measuring by counting the total links a blog receives from other blogs (Gill, 2004; Drezner & Farrell, 2004).

Generally, there appear to be only a small group of blogs that receive huge amount of readership and links, despite the growing number of blogs created each year. Jackson (2006) argues that political parties are competing in the blogosphere, but their political outreach and influences may be limited in comparison to socio-political bloggers who have made an establishment long before the politicians. In another study, Stanyer (2006) claims that:

The most regularly updated blogs belonged to a relatively few elite bloggers, many media or political pundits – so called A-listers or the bloggerati. This group consists largely of full time bloggers, many media or political pundits ... it is these ‘elite’ blogs that receive most traffic (p. 406).

As a summary, the blog phenomena has arrived and it is here to stay. It is plausible that the readership in prominent blogs will continue to rise despite the increasing number of dead blogs. Initial researches also seem to suggest that the blogosphere is dominated by few well-connected blogs, which draw most of the traffic (Stanyer, 2006).

Such intensity raises several questions which require answer. In essence, what are the factors that make blogs so interesting for readers and politicians? What are the values that attracted both politicians and individuals to start blogging? These questions will be discussed in the next few segments to identify the political value of blogs and its impacts towards the readers, and publics in general.

### *2.1.3 The political value of blogs*

The Internet and emerging technologies has proven to be a powerful breakthrough in presidential campaigning and will continue to evolve through future campaigns and innovations. (Rice, 2004, p. 2)

Rice (2004) is accurate when she says Internet and new technologies will evolve. Today, we have seen candidates utilising the Internet and blogs as part of their campaign strategy; including some other more recent innovations such as social networking sites. In the early twentieth century, blog has become a standard strategy of political campaign in the United States and United Kingdom. The main surge could be traced back to technology convergence in the nineties, which literally transform the mode of communication. However, there are several reasons as to why politicians are attracted towards the blogosphere.

The key motivation is that the blogosphere offers a horizontal form of communication that encourages conversation. Joe Trippi, the then campaign manager for Howard Dean in the US 2004 election noted that:

It is open for free discussion.... We have seen so many comments that I am sure that there is stuff that someone has posted that we haven't even seen yet.... Negative comments that are challenging or questioning Dean are left up all the time, it is only when they are super obnoxious that we have taken it down – and that happens very rarely (Rice, 2003, p.5).

Majority of blogs encourage feedback from visitors and as a result, blogs have been considered as an excellent tool for circulating new ideas. As suggested by Lawson-Borders and Kirk (2005), using blog creates opportunity for campaigners to glean ideas from supporters as well.

Increasingly, political party and candidates set up blog to create grassroots networks and support. During early nineties before the rise of blog, campaigns have always been creative to gain supporters. But in the Internet age, communicating directly with supporters has gone high-tech, not to mention its simplicity and cost effective way to mobilize its supporters. A survey of 3,747 web users revealed that blogs are viewed as a credible source, which provides balanced and thoughtful analysis (Jackson, 2006). This might suggest as to why more and more people turn to blogs as their main source of political news (Rainie & Horrigan, 2007).

In more recent campaign, one can witness how blogs democratise on politics. One of the main factors that attract people to blogs is the freedom to



voice and opine. According to Susan Gardner, an executive editor of The Daily Kos, blogs have “given normal citizens a feeling of contributing to the process... It’s allowed people to feel a little more ownership” (Baumann, 2008). Such value caused candidates, even Barack Obama and John McCain to be aware of blog’s power. Michelle Malkin, a blogger, columnist, and founder of conservative site *Hot Air* claimed that political blogs served as:

1. An early warning system for candidates to bounce potential campaign strategies off of the electorate.
  2. An amplifier to spread the campaign’s message.
  3. A newsgathering force capable of writing and reporting its own stories.
- (Baumann, 2008, pg. 35)

As witnessed in the Malaysia 12<sup>th</sup> General Election, there are several candidates from the opposition parties who have promulgated its campaign messages through their blog. Based on various researches and claims by publishers, blog indeed is a powerful information channel. Blog helps them in terms of spreading the news and information, but their influences towards readers remain a puzzle.

#### *2.1.4 The impact of blogs*

Determining the impact of blog may prove to be difficult at best because it is not immediately obvious how one would show impact. (Simmons, 2005, p. 1)

The effect of blog is not something that is easily proven. Researches to date have yet to firmly prove if blog has any impact towards an election campaign. Methodologies utilised by past researches such as interviews, content analysis and case studies were questionable, particularly how using these methods can measure the impact of blogs towards an election campaign. Simmons (2005) clearly indicated that measuring the impact of blog could be quite tough due to the anonymity of the Internet, which hinders accurate measurement of audiences' effects. Nonetheless, Simmons (2005) argued that impact of blogs could be measured through other indicators, such as taking into account the differences between mainstream media and the Internet.

Scholars such as Drezner and Farrell (2004), Jackson (2006), and Gill (2004) argue that blogs serve as a major asset for political campaign. Despite the challenges faced to measure the possible impacts blog may have on a campaign, Jackson (2006) claims that there are several aspects about blogs that might influence elections.

One primary facet is that "blog is a potential alternative to traditional media as gatekeepers of information and news" (Jackson, 2006, p. 295).

According to Jackson (2006), bloggers have on several occasions proved that they can break major news stories. According to Jackson (2006), blogs appear as the gatekeepers, setting agenda for the mainstream media during the Rothergate and the resignation of The New York Times editor in June 2003. His claim is similar to that of Drezner and Farrell (2004); claiming important blogs under certain circumstances may shape an agenda and shift the attention of the mainstream media. Therefore, blogs impact appears to be helping politicians to set the political news agenda.

Secondly, blogs are more than a reciprocal tool of information. In a Pew study in 2006, blogs are reshaping the political landscape, transforming political fundraising, advertising and mobilization (Cornfield & Rainee, 2006). With blogs alone, even without a web site, politicians can use them as a constant pitch for money (Gill, 2004).

It is argued the success of raising funds on blogs and mobilise grassroots support in the 2004 US presidential election has transited blog into maturity stage. It is likely political parties can reach a range of voters who visit the blogosphere. However, people who read blogs come from a certain segment; they are more tech-savvy, younger and educated, and live in the city.

There is indication that people retrieved political news and information online is more likely to vote compared to those who do not get such information online (Cornfield & Rainee, 2006). However, such indication do not necessarily say that Internet influence voting decision as there are various

factors that affects the probability of a person voting for a particular candidate or party. Internet may just be one of the many factors that contribute to the decision, and those having strong association with Internet or blog are most likely to vote. As what Michael Cornfield and Lee Rainee (2006) mentioned, “better educated people are likely voters, and the impact of having a college degree on the chances of voting in 2004 was about twice as powerful as someone’s use of the Internet for political purposes” (p. 3).

The arrival of blogs in the Asian counterparts was rather slow. Nonetheless, many have anticipated the possible influence blogs have towards political campaign. In Malaysia’s 12<sup>th</sup> general election, ruling party BN saw its worst election result albeit its victory in the campaign. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi told MetroStar that BN’s miserable election results were that “it lost in the cyber war” (Rajendra, 2008).

The use of the Internet by political parties has resulted in the emergence of new laws and regulations that intents to control how politicians use the tool during election. In Singapore, party websites are “not allowed to conduct pools, transactions services, announcements or notices referring to the sale of political merchandise and other fund raising activities” (Internet Campaigning Rules, 2001). However, there are no such laws created in Malaysia during the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election in 2008 to stop candidates from posting campaigning messages or gaining monetary supports.

The number of political parties and candidates utilising blog in their overall strategy campaign are growing. Since Howard Dean's online campaign, the rise of politicians turning to the contemporary media is overwhelming. Many politicians have turn to the blogosphere in the hope to reach out and engage with this new segment of voters.

Several scholars claimed blogs hardly have any influential power whereas other scholars claimed otherwise. Jackson (2006) studied the British 2005 general election by examining the use of blogs by political parties. By analysing the blog of five political parties and conducting intensive interviews with eight party e-campaigners, Jackson concluded that blogs were not all that powerful. According to Jackson (2006), blogs were used as one-way communication, which added colour to the parties' web sites. These blogs "may have encouraged visitors to return because of some form of voyeurism, but they were not either effective conversational, campaigning, or promotional tools" (p. 292).

Jackson's argument highlighted an interesting insight as his study identifies why a political party use blog, why they do not use blog, and how blogs are used during the election campaign. From Jackson's study, the value of blog could be measured but one question that needs to be asked, however, is whether his findings can be generalised. The method of analysis focuses on the politicians who utilise blogs and the power of blog is measured based on these blogs itself. Interviews conducted were comments and opinion of the e-

campaigners, thus, we do not know for sure if there is enough evidence to show that blogs can have a tangible effect.

Another research similar to Jackson is Stanyer's (2006) study on the phenomenon of blogging during the British 2005 general election campaign. His research aims to establish "how widespread blogging was, the extent of bloggers' partisanship, what issues blogs were concerned with, and what impact blogs had beyond the immediate community of users" (Stanyer, 2006, p. 404). By conducting a content analysis on 300 blogs and 1,300 comments, Stanyer concluded blogs to have no significant impact on the campaign news agenda.

The key problem for Stanyer research is that it relies too heavily on content analysis, which has a number of limitations. His approach has given insights to the phenomenon of blog campaigning, and reveal that the blog community is really small; which is pertinent for this current research as it reflects that blog campaigning is meant for certain target audiences.

The same result derives from a study by Trammell (2007) who conducted a study on campaign blogs and influences towards young voters. Trammell study examines how effective blogs can reach young voters, and as defined in her studies, these young voters are below 30 years of age. In her study, Trammell conducted a content analysis by examining the blog post, which targeted young voters. Her analysis, which focuses on how candidates

reach voters via blogs, concluded, “campaigns failed to fully employ blogs as a strategic tool to reach out to young voters” (Trammell, 2007).

One of the limitations of Trammell study is that the research is encapsulated within the American political system, hence it cannot be generalised. Trammell unit of analysis focuses on contents related to youth, but how many of these youth actually do something after reading the blog? Besides that, how many of the e-campaign blog actually created to target on the youths?

Rather than analysing how candidates use blogs to reach voters alone, Trammell study could perhaps be improved if she includes action items as part of her unit of analysis to determine if blogs influence the young voters. This is because analysing topics, issues discussed in a blog and types of images used in blogs hardly reflect whether blogs inject any influence to the young voters in any way. Trammell has suggested future researches to determine if young voters patronise blog because people want to see others like themselves and hear stories on the campaign via blog, or people generally prefer receiving information before an event so that they can connect with the campaign.

Past researches, which reflected an impact of blogs in an election campaign, have shared similarities. Several studies have discussed that blog affect or influence an election campaign only if the medium is used as a reciprocal communication tool. A survey on the German 2005 election campaign proved that blogs set up by individuals or candidates played an

important role for voters (Abold, 2006). Through the findings from an online survey, Abold argued that blog campaigning would only be successful only if the candidates interact openly with the voters. Abold claimed that the strategy of “pseudo personal” communication would not gain attention as voters unmasked them as pure propaganda (Abold, 2006).

From this study, Abold identifies two implications for his hypothesised mobilization effect of weblogs: (1) There are active internet users who participate in net-based discussions about political topics, and (2) campaign activists can learn from the voters and their activities in the political blogosphere. Blog campaigning only will be successful if an activist connects with the readers by posting authentic post and published in a non-party blog. Abold explained that publishing normal press releases as personal statements in blogs could not work as readers look at it as a pure propaganda and has no chance of getting attention.

Form Abold’s study, it signifies that blog content plays a part in determining the degree of blog impact towards and election campaign. Having merely personal statements readily found on the mainstream media could not work because they were not original and nothing new. That is why the current study would proceed to examine how candidates utilise blogs to determine if candidates post press releases or do they take the initiative to write something new and informative for their readers.



Simmons (2005) comparative study on the United States and Iranian blogs disclosed interesting findings. Simmons study which relies on a content analysis attempt to investigate the diversity of opinion in blogs and the mainstream media. According to Simmons (2005), blogs can be most influential in environments where they assume a unique role. What Simmons implied is that different situation, or environment, affects the role of blogs. Other than that, readers' willingness to participate is stimulated by need. So what drives Malaysian blog readers to patronise candidates' blog? What are their needs and what sort of satisfaction derived from getting what they desired? Through Simmons study, the present research is inspired to test whether the environment plays a role in affecting people voting decision. Does the environment changes and affects how people see blogs? Does media bias, for example, creates a sense or urgency for people to know what is going on with the opposition parties?

Skoland (2007) study on blog's impact towards election campaign indicated that blogs could be influential. The data in Skoland's study claimed, "A campaign can successfully exploit the web and community blogs, and in doing so, even impact the outcome of a specific election race" (Skoland, 2007, p.59). Unlike other researches, which opted for content analysis or survey, Skoland bases its findings mainly on ethnographic research and an unconventional data gathering method. Perhaps the most serious disadvantage of this method is that it cannot be generalise. In fact, one might even question if the number of participants exchanging views and opinions in the blog explicitly created by Skoland are sufficient to say blogs impact the outcome of

an election. The findings might have been more persuasive if Skoland considered the demographic of the subject study.

Although there appear to have mix findings on the impact of blog, there are some similarities despite different findings. Those who claimed blogs to have no impact such as Jackson and Stanyer's research have suggested future research to consider examining individual blogs instead of party blogs. Jackson (2006) stated that individual blogs might be a more appropriate channel to reach electors rather than party-controlled blogs. This idea is supported by other studies (Rice, 2003; Lawson-Borders & Kirk; 2005) and Abold (2006) who claimed that individual blogs set up by public or candidates themselves have higher readership and acceptance compared to party blogs which are perceived by readers as another propaganda tool.

## *2.2 Uses and Gratifications of Blogs and Election Campaign*

It is pertinent to acknowledge how blog has been utilised in campaigning effort and for what reason. As it is part of this study to understand the use and what kind of satisfaction derived from utilising blogs during an election campaign, the researcher will briefly look into previous journals, which studied on blog and its uses and gratifications.

The uses and gratifications (U&G) approach is centred on identifying how people use the media to gratify their needs. According to Blumler and

Katz (1974), the choices which people decide are strictly motivated by their desire to satisfy a range of needs.

The uses and gratification study on election campaign was first initiated by Blumler and McQuail in 1964 to find out “why people watch or avoid party broadcast; what uses they wish to make of them; and what their preferences are between alternative ways of presenting politicians on television” (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 294). The study was instigated to challenge media effects theory such as Lazarsfeld’s limited effects theory that claims voters are not influenced by the mass media (Baran & Davis, 2003). The question was: “If voters are not influenced by mass media election programming, why do they follow it at all?” (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 294).

Although Blumler and McQuail’s study on campaign election is centred on the mainstream media, the study has contributed to the area of active audience studies, which is still applicable to date. It has directed our attention to the audience of mass communication rather than focusing merely on the media alone.

Academic literatures examining uses of blogs in political campaigns has mainly focused on the 2004 U.S. presidential election as this was the first campaign ever to see a political candidate use a blog as an integral part of a campaign (Rice, 2004; Skoland, 2007). Howard Dean may not win the presidential election then, but his online campaign strategies have made a

significant impact on the political agenda (Rice, 2004; Williams et al. 2005; Skoland, 2007).

Howard Dean's political campaign in 2004 was deemed the first online political campaign (Carpenter, 2004). There are mix reviews about the success of utilising Internet and blogs in political campaign. Some media pundits and scholars claimed that Dean's strategy a success (Baumann, 2008, Simmons, 2005) whereas certain scholars said otherwise (Gill, 2004; Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005).

At present, the power of the blogs became apparent in the recent Obama-McCain U.S. Presidency campaign, in which the Obama's formidable online fundraising depicts how one can actually gain something out of the digital mechanism (Baumann, 2008).

The Asians are also fast adopting the new social media culture with China, South Korea and Malaysia taking the lead (Ooi, 2007). However, there was no real experience in Malaysia of using blogs during election. That is, not until recently.

Long before the arrival of Internet, political parties, especially the oppositions had a hard time promulgating their ideologies to voters. Most of the candidates from the opposition party relied on "house to house visits, party publications, public forums and rallies to get the word out" (Gomez, 2004, pg.1). Gomez (2004) claims that:

In countries where there is a controlled press, the Internet offers political parties, especially in opposition, an opportunity to use their website to put out alternative news. Most often political parties not in power and suffering a disadvantage at the hands of mainstream media try to maximise outreach opportunities both during election and non-election times. (p. 4)

Malaysia is one of the Asian countries that face strict media regulations. The Internet seems to be the next best option to interact and informing the publics. One of the primary reasons why political parties go online is to overcome the constraint on the mainstream media, which are by and large controlled and owned by the ruling party. “Politics has taken over the Internet in Malaysia because of constraints on the mainstream media”, commented academic Ooi Kee Beng (Lee & Toh, 2008).

Furthermore, reportage is mostly favouring the ruling coalition, while news and activities of the opposition are often omitted. With Internet, opposition parties are given a new outreach tool to counter misinformation that was previously absent.

The recent general election saw politicians utilising blogs as an information and interaction tool. In fact, media pundits in Malaysia have named 2008 the year Internet “come of age” (Lee, 2008). Many candidates equipped their blog with other killer applications such as *YouTube* to attract voters. Experienced blogger, such as Jeff Ooi who contested in the campaign, included fundraising in his blogs, aside from keeping in touch with readers

and staging events. Some candidates such as DAP's Tony Pua use the Internet to recruit volunteers. "So far, we have secured between 50 and 100 volunteers for the PJ campaign via websites", claimed Pua, in which those figures were secured in early February 2008, a month before the general election (Lee & Toh, 2008).

A study on political blogs' audiences by Graf (2006) revealed that blogs served as alternative information and enhanced democratic discussion. Regular blog readers state credibility as the motivation to read blogs rather than attaining information from the mainstream media. Graf's study, which utilised survey methodology, highlighted an interesting point that is pertinent for the present study. According to his analysis, daily blog readers are proactive and this group of readers' forward news stories, petitions, or emails to politicians at the prompting of political blogs (Graf, 2006, p.4). These actions would eventually affect the political campaign; and simultaneously, influence how an individual view a candidate. At the same time, a candidate who considers the readers' advice may strategise his or her campaign in such ways that appeals to readers; hence directly gaining support as his/her campaign would be deemed as the public's campaign since his/her ideas or gleaned from the public themselves. One question that needs to be asked, however, is whether the subjects of this study are the same. Graf interpretation fails to provide facts and data on the relationship between the actions and effects.

Graf (2006) has indicated credibility as a motivational factor for people to obtain information via blogs. Credibility is audience centred because it is not a characteristic in a message or a media channel, but rather a perception held by the audience (Metzger et al., 2003). Johnson et al. (2007) has revealed that there is a connection between dependency on blogs and credibility. Politically-interested blog users view blogs as more credible in terms of accuracy, believability, fairness and depth of information when compared to the conventional media. They rely on blog content as it is considered more independent than news reported in corporate-controlled media. Blogs also provides an open forum for them to interact with one another on top of a more personal and interactive venue for acquiring information.

Rice research (2004) that employed content analysis methodology concluded that the Internet and emerging technologies proved to be a “*powerful breakthrough*” in election campaign. Nonetheless, it is said that the Internet does not serve to be the motivator to inject influences to the readers to be politically active, but only help to “inform, educate, and activate citizens” (Rice, 2004).

Previous study revealed that 29.3 percent out of 1537 survey respondents chose political content as their preferred genre (Tan, J & Zawawi Ibrahim, 2008, p.41). The study, which focuses on general blogs, also provides an interesting insight as to why people blog. From the study which is conducted based on a survey and also an interview, it revealed that political

bloggers such as Jeff Ooi and Tony Pua blog in an attempt to aspire and be a role model to its readers (Tan, J & Zawawi Ibrahim, 2008, p.50). Readers, on the other hand, do trust political bloggers content, to a certain degree. Out of 1537 respondents, 30.9 percent of them believe in blog content compared to 19.8 percent who distrust. However, this study was incapable of reflecting if blogging effectively stimulate political and social actions that signal any democratic change. It also does not reveal why blog users read political blogs and what they gained from it; what do they do with the information they have learn and to what extent those information affect them.

### *2.3 Theoretical Justification*

Mr. Obama's campaign changed the way politicians organise supporters, advertise to voters, defend against attacks and communicate with constituents. (Miller, 2008)

The Barack Obama campaign has been cited as one of the more successful e-campaign after Howard Dean's in 2004. Mr. Obama used the Internet to organise his supporters in a way that would have in the past required an army of volunteers and paid organisers on the ground. His campaign was a success, but the questions that need to be asked are: why do people become involved in blogs, and what gratifications do they receive from it?



The Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory may very well explain the questions above. The Uses and Gratifications approach is generally recognised to be a sub tradition of a media effects research (McQuail, 1994). The U&G theory explores the intended uses of the Internet and the expected and latent gratifications. This theory has at most time provided a progressive theoretical approach in the initial stages of each new mass communications medium (Ruggiero, 2000).

The U&G theory assumes that individual differences caused each person to search for different messages utilise those messages differently and respond to them in a different manner. It is based on the notion that media cannot influence anyone unless they have some use for the media or its messages. Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974, as cited in Severin and Tankard, 2001) state that the theory is concerned with:

(1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended one (p.295)

In the past, U&G Theory has been used to identify people's motives for watching the television, listening to a certain radio programme and reading the newspapers (Bryant & Thompson, 2002). Researchers have used this theory to identify "links between viewing and attitudes and behaviours toward the media, comparison of motives for using media and viewing particular

content, and the identification of social and psychological characteristics that influence the use of media” (Bryant & Thompson, 2002, p. 133).

Over the years, the theory has evolved. The more recent studies have begun to examine the impact of new technology on how people use the mass media. Previous scholars have researched on the use of computers and the Internet, and its consequences towards the conventional media. In fact, many researchers believe that “a synthesis of media effects research and uses research ... would explore what effects particular gratifications might have, or what effects particular uses of the media might have” (Bryant & Thompson, 2002, p. 135).

Dunlevy and Weir (1998) claimed that the Internet forms a significant part of a new era of electronic democracy. Both theorists claimed the Internet to have potential to improve access to the government and at the same time, invigorate representative democracy. According to Dunleavy and Weir (1998), Internet provides far more reliable basic information than any conventional media source, allow individuals to e-mail queries and get answers during the British 1997 election. Similarly, past researches, which have been discussed earlier, agreed that Internet offers two-way communication and an e-campaign is only successful if candidates actually communicate with his or her readers. Using the U&G approach is the best method to understand what turns people towards a medium such as the Internet, and in this case, the candidates’ blog. This may also be one of its limitations, as the U&G approach does not reflect how media effects actually occurred.

Researchers of the U&G model have suggested that future study need to ask what effects particular gratification may have or what effects particular uses of media may have. Earlier studies (Rubin & Windahl, 1986) show that people depend upon media to fulfil certain needs such as vicarious experience and escapism or involvement or interaction.

To determine if blog holds any influence towards voting behaviour and impact on the general election, researcher opted for the Uses and Dependency Model instead of the U&G Theory. The Uses and Dependency model is an extension of the U&G Theory and it seeks to understand media uses and its effects by focusing on media consumption and relevant concepts (Rubin & Windahl, 1986). It argues that people depend upon media to fulfil certain needs such as vicarious experience and escapism or involvement or interaction.

Rubin and Windahl (1986) argued that media effects could be measured via the relationship between gratification sought and dependency on a medium. According to the Uses and Dependency Model, needs and motives that produce narrow information-seeking strategies might lead to dependency on certain channels. In turn, dependency leads to the behavioural effects in itself, which means that attitude change might occur. Simply, the Uses and Dependency Model describe the likelihood of media effect to occur when the dependency upon a medium is great.

## *2.4 Conclusion*

There are mix findings from previous researches on the topic of blog and its impacts towards an election campaign. Scholars who claimed blog to have no significant impact argued that blogs served only as a tool to attract and serve as an information channel, but it does not have a direct impact to change perceptions and voting behaviours. This group of scholars share the idea that blogs may be successful only if it serves as a conversational tool, and most importantly, created by candidates or individuals.

Methodologies employed by researchers in previous studies are content analysis, surveys or intensive interviews, except for Skoland (2007) who seek a contemporary methodology by setting up a blog. Each methods have its own drawbacks, but what we can conclude base on the past researches is that most of it fails to take generalisation into account.

Jackson (2006) suggests that future research needs to consider examining blogs set up by individual and candidates as previous study on party blogs reveal that party-controlled blogs have no influential elements, which could be due to the fact that the blog emerge as an additional tool in a party's web site. Elsewhere, Abold (2006) argued that candidate must be able to connect with the voters in order for a blog to campaign successfully. From this point of view, we question whether candidates from the Malaysia 12<sup>th</sup> general election interact actively with the voters and what is the outcome for doing so, or not doing so.

Skoland (2007) suggests that it would be interesting to learn how many people actually read blogs and go to vote for that particular candidate. Trammell (2007) study on blog impact on youth fails to provide insight on this element, which is actually crucial because this is the element, which tells us that blog, could have influence voters to vote. Therefore, study of the readers is as important as examining how candidates use blog because both is actually interrelated in some ways. Candidates rely on blogs due to various circumstances such as limited mainstream media exposure, but understanding what motivates readers to read blogs and how do they perceive these candidates' blogs tells us if blogs really are the core towards influencing attitudes.

Simmons (2005) study enlightened a new perspective, which is to consider environment to measure blog's impact. This sort of environment could be gathered from the policy, government, or media ownership that affects the citizens' needs. In Malaysia, mainstream media are strictly controlled, or within the power of the ruling coalition. Gomez (2004) explained that this media consolidation and ownership have driven the opposition party to start the cyber strategy. Now, the question is: does readers aware of such media biases and how do they see it? Do they patronise blog because of the environment in which mainstream media has lost its touch of objectivity?

In conclusion, there is still enormous gap in this research area. So far, little has been mentioned about the immediate effect of blogging on a

particular campaign. Less has been said about how we can actually measure this relationship. In an effort to generate a better understanding of this relationship, this research will further present new data that views the subject from the blog readers' perspective.

## CHAPTER 3.0

### MATERIAL AND METHODS

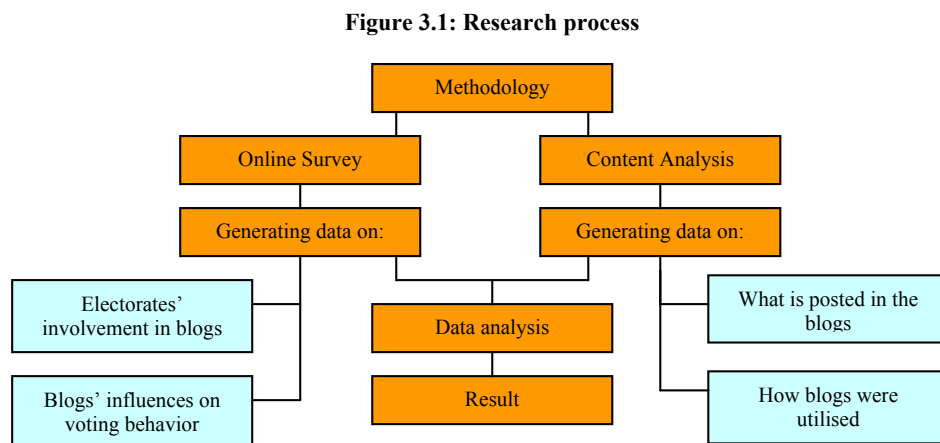
Most of the previous researches on similar topics have employed different methodologies for their papers to examine the impact of blogs towards an election campaign. Studies have shown how content analysis has been used as the principal methodologies to document blogging activities (Stanyer, 2006; Jackson, 2006; Skoland, 2007). Although these researches serve as a basis for this paper, the researcher has selected a different method to measure the impact blogs may have towards the Malaysian 12<sup>th</sup> general election.

An online survey will be utilised as the main methodology rather than employing content analysis due to several reasons. Content analysis has been considered as a limitation to most of the studies, as these methods cannot serve as a sole basis for making statements pertaining to effects of content on an audience (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). According to Wimmer & Dominick (2003), the findings of past researches using content analysis may be “limited to its framework of categories and definitions used in that analysis.” Nonetheless, content analysis will be used as a mean to obtain data pertaining to how candidates utilise blogs during the election campaign. Therefore, the present research employs two methodologies: (1) online survey and (2) content analysis.

The researcher employed two methodologies to conduct this study: Internet survey to obtain primary data on the impact of socio-political blogs

towards the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election and voting behaviour, supplemented by a content analysis of all the candidates' blogs to compile data on how candidates have used blog as a campaigning tool. Through this, researcher would be able to identify the growth of blogs after the election. As have been discussed earlier in Chapter 2, media pundits have commented that blog has an impact and the National Front lost many of its votes due to blog.

Figure 3.1 below reflects the research procedure; findings from both the online survey and content analysis will help us understand better the blogosphere during the election period.



Two different methodologies are employed in this research. The online survey aims to generate data which helps reveal voters involvement in blogs and to gauge whether it has any influence towards voting behaviour. The content analysis, on the other hand, helps to generate data which highlights how candidates' utilised blogs and what post have been updated on their respective blog. Both data are then analysed in order to retrieve the result.



### 3.1 Online Survey

The usage of survey methodologies to gain general election studies can be traced back in 1964 when Blumler and McQuail conducted a survey to understand why people watch or avoid broadcast; and what uses they wish to make of them during the 1964 America general election (Severin & Tankard, 2001). Although this paper employed online survey rather than the conventional way of conducting survey, and studying blog and its impact rather than the use of blog, Blumler and McQuails study have given insight on how survey can be useful in the present study – measuring data that can be generalise, determining the *why* and *what* to issues brought up, and predicting the outcome of utilising certain media.

Like any other methodologies, survey has its own drawbacks. One of the major limitation is that researcher may not be able to obtain the desired response from the respondents, particularly if the question requires in-depth explanation. Respondent may leave the column blank, or just skip the question entirely.

Jackson's (2006) study which utilised intensive interview may provide wealth of information as it provides elaborated information concerning respondents' views and opinions, motivations, experiences and feelings. This could counter the drawbacks of survey methodology but data from intensive interviews have been proven to be difficult to generalise due to its varied set

of questions for its different respondents. On the contrary, survey gathering data method counter the problems faced in previous researches. Unlike intensive interviews that does not have a standardised set of questionnaires; surveys are conducted with a set of structured questionnaires. Structured questions ease data tabulation and analysis as each respondent are probed with the same set of questions. Now, the question is, can survey obtain wealth of data and eliminate or minimise errors pertaining to sample and validation?

According to Fricker and Schonlau (2002), online survey offers an improved form of surveys in terms of “data validation, skip pattern automation, and the elimination of transcription errors.” This means that despite not having someone to administer the survey, conducting online survey could actually minimise measurement errors as it can be programmed in a way to conduct input validation. It can also be programmed to manage the process of skipping questions.

Online survey reaches the right respondents for the study: active internet users who read socio-political blogs. As the study subjects for this research aims at active internet users who read socio-political blogs, it is only sensible to opt for internet survey rather than other survey data gathering methodologies such as personal interviews or telephone. Using the online survey automatically targets the right study subjects, hence eliminates time to select the right sample, and decrease sampling errors.

A structured survey questionnaire is designed that contains both close- and open-ended questions to have greater depth and detail. Hence, survey is one of the more appropriate methods to obtain both descriptive and analytical data. The results allow researchers to examine the correlation among variables and to develop an explanatory inference; that is survey helps to determine or predict the outcome of reading socio-political blogs.

### *3.1.1 Online Survey - Methods and Procedures*

The present study utilised survey as the primary methodology to gather information on the involvement and impact of blogs towards voting behaviour. There are various ways to gather survey data, and internet survey is one of the modes available, and the most suitable in this study.

The researcher creates and launched the online survey using eSurveysPro.com (eSurveysPro) which is an online survey product offered by Outside Software Inc, a Romanian software company. The product allows the creation of online survey – from setting questions, sending survey to respondents, and tabulating the responses. As this study is not funded, the researcher has opted for this free online survey product. Unlike other similar freeware, eSurveysPro allows unlimited questions set up and unlimited responses. The researcher then utilise SPSS Version 14 to tabulate the survey responses.

Online survey needs to be marketed, or to create awareness so that people could participate in the survey. The researcher aims to do that by posting the online survey link to various socio-political blogs as well as community forums. The researcher has located a list of Malaysia socio-political blogs via a web directory, [blogmalaysia.com](http://blogmalaysia.com) for socio-political bloggers. The researcher then reviews the blog to determine if it is still active, especially during the general election period. Only blogs which are active and still operating after the general election were selected for this study. The survey link is then posted on the chatbox within the blog itself and an email was sent to the blogger to inform about the survey and its purpose. Apart from that, the survey link is also distributed in various forums such as Lowyat and Hardwarezone. Researcher did not post a link in political discussion forums because forum such as [malaysiatoday.com](http://malaysiatoday.com) may introduce a bias in sample.

As the survey is conducted online, it is difficult to ascertain the exact population who read socio-political blogs. There is no census by the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) which records the number of people who read socio-political blogs. A Household Use of the Internet Survey was conducted by MCMC in 2008 to gauge how people use the internet. Findings show that respondents frequented blogs but it does not specify if they patronise socio-political blogs (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2008).

There are 4,925 Internet users in household recorded by MCMC in 2008 (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2008). However, the figure does not represent the entirety of Internet users because it

excludes those who access Internet via a wireless connection. In view that this study aims to study only respondents who have patronised socio-political blogs and does not take into account how they access it, the figure cannot be used to provide a sub-group estimate. It also cannot be used to determine the sample that could be utilised for the present study, as there is no indication if they read socio-political blogs.

Fricker & Schonlau (2002) noted that online surveys are mostly conducted based on convenience samples as there is no “equivalent to random digit dialling for email.” Therefore, a non-probability sample is used instead of a probability sample. Non-probability sample does not follow the guidelines of mathematical probability; hence some researchers have questioned its merit. However, mass media researchers claimed that all researches conducted in mass media uses non-probability samples all the time. This is because “respondents in research projects must agree to participate and they cannot be forced to answer questions” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003).

Present study relies on volunteer sample, in which respondents willingly participate in the survey by clicking on the link provided and completing the questionnaire online.

As such, it is also difficult to ascertain and verify the identity of respondents. Verifying respondents’ identity still remains as one of the areas in Internet survey that require further clarification (Smith, 1997). None is known if respondent are who they claimed to be on the Internet. Nonetheless,

what matters most for this study is to obtain wealth of feedbacks and information on the possible impacts and influence on voter's decision, than on respondents demographic information.

Respondents would be brought to the introductory page when they clicked on the URL link posted in blogs or forums, in which they are required to read the instructions before continuing with the survey. In order to ascertain that respondents do not repeat the survey, the online survey would automatically record each respondent's IP address to avoid repetition. With their IP address recorded, respondents could continue the survey at where they left off due to disruptions. This way, researcher can eliminate statistical error and can be assured that the disadvantages of internet survey can be minimised.

A pilot test was launched from March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2008 until April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The purpose of launching a pre-test is to check question wording and to determine if any of the questions require reformulation or elimination. Twenty respondents tested the online questionnaire and several changes have been made prior to feedbacks from these 20 pilot testers. The pilot testers are selected from the Lowyat online community forum and have met the requirements set for this study. From the initial 35 questions, it has been shortened to 34 questions by eliminating a redundant question. Apart from that, several errors including grammatical and choice of word has been amended.

The online survey questionnaire was officially launched for 30 days from April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008 until May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Initially, researcher aims to published the questionnaire online for 2 weeks, but due to low response rate, it has been pushed to a month. As the study aims to understand how influential blogs are in influencing voting decision and what impact it has, participants for the survey must be 21 years old and above when they voted for the March 8, 2008 General Election. Those who did not vote and illegible to vote were classified as sampling errors.

### *3.2 Content Analysis*

Content analysis served as a method that describe communication content, which means it serves to identify what is existing at that particular period. Content analysis alone “cannot serve as a basis for making statements about the effects of content audience” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003) which is why the findings from the content analyse does not serve to provide insight of how blogs could influence the respondents.

The reason why content analysis is hardly used to measure media impact is due to its descriptive manner that is limited to a particular study framework and the definitions used in that particular study. Content analysis examine what is being communicated; therefore the messages may be lacking relevance to the study objective, which are to divulge if blogging impact on the election through influencing people’s voting decision and opinion shaping.

Nonetheless, content analysis is utilised as a secondary methodology to support findings obtained from the online survey. It will be used to identify how blogs have been utilised by the candidates. In Chapter Two, the researcher has discussed that people's needs and motives that produce narrow information-seeking strategies lead to dependency on certain channels. The dependency would then lead to the behavioural effects in itself, which means that attitude change might occur. In order for respondents to rely or depend on the blog, it is crucial that the blog itself contain certain elements to ensure gratifications of respondents are met. These elements are further discussed in sub-section 3.3.2 .

### *3.2.1 Content Analysis - Methods and Procedures*

In order to gain a list of candidates campaigning in the March 8, 2008, General election, the researcher has made references via Malaysia Central, a Malaysia online directory for a list of candidates with blogs. The researcher then records how candidates have used blogs three months before and after the election. As there are 27 parties registered for the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election, the researcher has selected blogs which belong to the main five parties for this monitoring effort – the National Front (BN), Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), Democratic Action Party (DAP), National Justice Party (PKR), and Malaysian People's Movement Party (Gerakan).



Candidates' blog listed in the Malaysian Central website are investigated to determine its availability during the research period, which is between the months of January to June 2008. Candidates' blog which are deactivated before January would not be taken into consideration of this study, but it will be recorded down for future reference. Only blogs that is still available, without a broken link, will be analysed.

### *3.3 Research Design*

The study employed two methodologies to analyse the impact blogs played during the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election – online survey as the primary method, followed by a content analysis as a secondary methodology to understand how blogs have been utilised by the election candidates. The following sub sections would further explain on the mechanism used to gather the data of this study.

#### *3.3.1 Survey Design*

The survey is composed of 34 questions separated into three sections. The questionnaire is set with both open- and close-ended questions, in which the latter aims to gauge more responds from the respondents. Open-ended type of questions allows respondents the freedom to express their views and opinions and an opportunity to provide in-depth responses. It allows answers

that researcher did not anticipate in designing the questionnaire. On the contrary, close-ended questions allow respondents to select an answer from a list provided which in turn gives greater consistency of response and answers are measured with least complications.

The first section in the questionnaire consists of 10 questions which aim to gather respondents' demographic details (see Figure 3.2). The last question in this section is crucial as it acts as a qualifier which determines whether the participant is qualified for this study; if the participant is above 21 years old, but has not voted for the March 2008 general election, he or she would still be considered as a sampling error in this case.

**Figure 3.2: Demographics**

11. Gender
12. Marital status
13. Are you currently employed?
14. What is your occupation?
15. What is your age?
16. Please indicate the highest level of education completed
17. Which of the following categories most closely represents your annual household income?
18. What is your ethnic group?
19. What is your religion?
20. Were you able to vote in the last election and for your political representative in parliament, in March 8, 2008?

The second section of the survey dealt with uses and gratification of the Internet and blogs. This is the section that draws attention to *what people do with blogs, why people use it and what sort of gratifications gained by*

*using the blogs* during the election campaign. Consisting of 16 questions (see Figure 3.3), this section is important as questions here have correlation value which answer part of the research questions. Consequently, the findings from this section would also highlight whether candidates were able to shape perception and inject influences through their respective blogs.

The first six questions in this section queried on the Internet usage, and this is followed by questions regarding usage of blogs during the election period. Internet and blog differs; Internet can be referring the a series of interconnected networks which allows communication between computers worldwide, while blog is part of the internet which offer users to pen and upload contents on the World Wide Web. Most news organisation uploads news content on the Internet, but all these news are similar and readily available on their printed or broadcasted materials.

Question 11 to question 15 enquired on participants' perception of the mainstream media. Although the study focuses on blog and its impact, it is pertinent to understand what are the participants' views and opinions of the conventional media as well because it may reflect their perception of conventional media's credibility, which perhaps drives them towards blogs. The answer is reflected in question 16, in which participants are queried on whether decrement in the conventional media credibility actually impels them to read socio-political blogs. A Cronbach reliability test was carried out with  $N=357$  and has establish a value of  $\alpha = .833$  for media bias in news

organisation. The result can be considered as good, as cited in Gliem & Gliem (2003).

**Figure 3.3: Uses and Gratification of the Internet**

11. Do you obtain campaign news from the local mainstream media, such as the local dailies, television, or radio news?
12. Do you obtain similar news content via the Internet?
13. On an average weekday, how much time do you spend on the Internet?
14. In the way that they have been covering the General Election so far, do you think that news organizations are biased in one way or the other?
15. To what extent do you see political bias in news coverage?
16. Could this be the reason why you turn to blog?
17. On an average weekday, how much time do you spend reading socio-political blog(s)?
18. How long have you been patronizing socio-political blogs?
19. What do you seek in socio-political blogs? (You may tick more than one)
20. How much do you enjoy keeping up with political news about campaigns and elections via blogs?
21. Based on what you have just answered in the previous question, can you please tell me why?
22. Which of the following local socio-political blogs do you read? (You may tick more than one)
23. The 12<sup>th</sup> General Election saw a number of candidates taking up blogging as part of their campaigning strategy. Which of the following candidates' blog have you been reading? (You may tick more than one)
24. Based on the answer(s) given above, which candidate's blog do you read the most?
25. How long do you spend on that particular blog on an average weekday basis?
26. Can you please tell me what motivates you to read that particular socio-political blogs?

Question 17 onwards aim to determine participants' uses and fulfilment gained from patronising blogs. Answers to question 21 reflects why

participants find blogs pleasurable or a displeasure, and questions that follow reflect which blog the participants patronised, and what stimulated them to continue patronising the blog. It is much more interesting if a participant finds reading blogs a displeasure, but continue reading that blog he or she has stated in question 22, 24 and 25. The reasons and rationales that may have encouraged participants to patronise blogs is queried in question 26.

The last section of the survey is most crucial, and perhaps the toughest to gain responses from participants as it consists of eight questions, in which seven are open-ended questions. This last section is pertinent as it attempts to evaluate the outcome of patronising blog. The researcher preferred to have open-ended questions in this section in the hope that participants would provide answers that may not be anticipated before.

The section starts by enquiring what participants did before or during the general election upon patronising blogs. Question 28 is indicated for RQ1 which aims to determine the outcome of the 12<sup>th</sup> general election. RQ1 queried on *what* impact blogs had and this question directly provide answers as to *what* they had done. The questions that follow are all open-ended questions, in which researcher would have to code each responses and group similar ones using a code sheet. The questions range from enquiring participants' perception towards blogs' impact on the politics and election campaign, to enquiring what is their stand on the political ground. Question 31, for instance, queried on participants' self-perception whether they are influenced by the blogs they read. This question seeks for an elaborated

answer in the hope that the data retrieved are strong enough to answer the second research question. The last question is an optional question due to sensitivity issue, and respondents may choose to answer or leave the question alone.

**Figure 3.4: Web Logs and its Impact**

27. Which of the following have you done in the past 2 to 3 months before the General Election? (You may select more than one option)
28. In your opinion, how much of an impact do you see blogs having in the 12<sup>th</sup> general elections? Why do you say so?
29. Do you think blogs left a demonstrable impact on the socio-political climate of Malaysia? If yes, can you please provide some example(s)?
30. Do you think blogs have changed the nature of governance in Malaysia?
31. Do you think reading blogs influenced your voting decisions? Why?
32. Majority of the blogs are from opposition parties' candidates. Even some of the famous socio-political bloggers are rather supportive of the opposition candidates and parties. Does reading blogs from these 'anti-government' bloggers cum politicians affect how you judge the ruling coalition?
33. The ruling coalitions are not actively utilizing blog during the March 8, 2008 general election campaign. If they were active, do you think reading their blogs would change your opinion of the government and voting decision making in the general election?
34. Which party/ candidate have you voted for during the March 8, 2008 general election?

Internal consistency reliability test was established using Cronbach alpha with a score of 0.705 across 18 items. In view that there are multiple responses for several questions, the responses were grouped into similar categories before the test was established.

Figure 3.5 illustrates the survey questions relevance to the research questions. Questions from Part I will not be accounted for but they served as data for future references.

**Figure 3.5: Research Objectives and Survey Questions**

Research Questions	Study Objectives	Survey Questions
What impact does blogs have on the outcome of the 12th General Election?	Examines the possible influences blogs have on the <b>voting decisions in an electoral campaign.</b>  Determine <b>how and why blogs have any influences</b> towards the whole political campaign.	Q27, Q31  Q14, Q15, Q16, Q28, Q29, Q30, Q32, Q33
What impact does blogs have on voter's decision?	Determine if blogs have any influences in voter decision making.	Q19, Q20, Q21, Q27
Can campaigning through blogs help politicians shape public opinion or impact voting decision?	Determine if blogs <b>help candidates shape public opinions which influence voting decision.</b>  Identify how candidates utilised blogs.	Q19, Q21, Q26  Content analysis

### 3.3.2 Content Analysis Design

A content analysis was carried out as one of the means to obtain data on how blogs could possibly shape public opinion. Before understanding how blogs are capable of influencing voting decisions, the researcher has to investigate how blogs have been utilised before and after the election campaign. Therefore, content analysis in this study was used to find out how blogs were utilised by the candidates during the election campaign. The way it has been used and the responses it gathered would illustrate the degree of involvement by the publics. By linking the result here with the one results

from Part II of the questionnaire, researcher would be able to conclude whether candidates were able to shape public opinion through their blogs and determine what attracts people to patronise blogs.

**Figure 3.6: Sampling stages in Content Analysis Study**

*Research Question: Can campaigning through blogs help politicians shape public opinion, impact voting decision?*

*Sampling stage 1: Selection of Titles*

Socio-political blogs can be defined as online directories which focus on political commentaries. A list of socio-political blogs created by candidates will be selected for this analysis. The list of blogs will be obtained from online directory, Malaysia Central. Only blogs which has been set up at least three months before the election campaign are selected.

*Sampling stage 2: Selection of Dates*

At least from January 2008 – June 2008

*Sampling stage 3: Selection of Content*

All selected socio-political blogs.

*Source: Wimmer and Dominick, 2003*

This study involved analysing how blogs were used three months before and after the election campaign; how frequent does a candidate cum blogger updates it; and what type of widgets or applications involved in their blogs. Candidates blogs obtained from Malaysia Central would be considered as the sampling of content involved in this study. However, there are several considerations to be made before selecting the blogs – blogs selected must have been launched at least three months before the election campaign. Blogs set up after the election would also be identified; this is to determine how many blog have emerged after the election in view that media pundits have claimed ruling coalition's defeat due to their lack of online penetration.



Media pundits have claimed that one of the main reasons that brought the defeat of the ruling coalition was due to their lack of interest in the new media, in which they failed to penetrate and grasp the internet votes. But just how true this claim to be would be revealed in the next chapter where researcher will discuss the amount of blogs arisen from the ruling coalition and also the opposition parties.

**Figure 3.7: Summaries of Content Analysis Study**

<b>Purpose of Study</b>	To assess how election candidates are using their blogs
<b>Sample</b>	Sample of blogs by type and blogger
<b>Unit of Analysis</b>	Candidates complete blog site
<b>Representative Categories</b>	Set up date Type of news : Candidates' opinion/ Newsclips/ Both Advertising Widgets Update frequency Involvement in feedbacks/ commentaries : Yes/ No Affiliation

*Source: Wimmer and Dominick, 2003*

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings from this content analysis, the researcher has employed an additional coder in order to achieve acceptable levels of reliability. Both the researcher and the coder have gone through a discussion to reach a reciprocal understanding of what is to be measured. Category definitions, instructions and unit of analysis were then listed in a sheet, which was then handed to both the researcher and the coder. Unit of analysis can be defined as the smallest element of a content analysis or the thing that is counted whenever it is encountered (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). It is the entity that is being analysed or the unit that is being measured.

In this research, candidates' blog is the unit of analysis rather than any other socio-political blogs. Only blogs created by the candidates will be taken into account. Base on Figure 3.7, elements or variables that will be measured in a candidate's blog are types of advertisements, types of widgets (web applications), types of news, the update frequency, involvement in feedbacks and commentaries, the blog set up date, and the party affiliation.

The coder instructions sheet has been prepared for the coders to reach a standardized coding system. As the data will be tabulated by hand, the coding sheets were also constructed to ease tabulation (Figure 3.8).

The candidate entire blog is the unit of analysis for this research. There are six criteria which will be examine: (A) the blog set up date, (B) the type of widgets used, (C) advertisements or other images, (D) update frequency, (E) feedbacks and commentaries involvement, (F) type of news, and (G) affiliation. Examining set-up date allows researcher to determine how many blogs occurred before and after the election campaign. This will show us whether the blog phenomenon is growing and reveal how many of the candidates used blogs as a campaigning tool before the election. Widget is a term to describe web applications that can be installed and run within any separate web page by an end user. It can be easily attached in a blog, in which readers who clicks on the widget would be directed to the application. Some widgets can allow users to utilise it within the same page, such as chat box.

**Figure 3.8: Coder Instruction Sheet**

<b>Blog Description Code Sheet Instructions</b>	
<b>A. Set up Date</b>	Write down the month and year (e.g., Dec-07) under respective column. Blog set up before the election (March 2008) should be coded under 'before' column, and blogs set up after March 2008 should be coded under 'after' column.
<b>B. Widgets</b>	Code all multimedia applications and widgets. List out names of applications as well. <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. All social networking sites (List out names: e.g., Facebook, Friendster)</li><li>2. Videos and video-related widgets (List out names: e.g., YouTube)</li><li>3. Pictures and picture-related widgets (List out names: e.g., Flickr)</li><li>4. Chatbox</li><li>5. None</li><li>6. Others, list description</li></ol>
<b>C. Advertisements/ Images</b>	List all advertisements and party-related images in the blog. <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Party related banners such as any banners with party logos.</li><li>2. Donation banners or links. A banner or a hyperlink to the fundraising site.</li><li>3. Others. List description of the advertisement if it is not identified.</li></ol>
<b>D. Update Frequency</b>	To code average post update per week in between the period of January-June 2008. An exception for those who established blogs after June 2008 (if any).
<b>E. Feedbacks and Commentaries Involvement</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Active – Actively answer and comment on the feedback column. Frequent participation in commentaries.</li><li>2. Inactive – Did not comment or communicate with audiences at all.</li><li>3. Occasionally – Provide feedback once a while, although rare.</li></ol>
<b>F. Type of news</b>	Type of posting. Code as: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Opinion-based – Solely original commentaries of the blogger. No news articles from mainstream media.</li><li>2. News clips – Blog post updated via posting of news article from the mainstream press or online news portal.</li><li>3. Both – Blog consists of opinion-based and news clips. A mixture of both which includes content from the mainstream media as well as own opinion content.</li></ol>
<b>G. Affiliation</b>	Party association. Code as: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. UMNO/BN/MCA</li><li>2. PKR</li><li>3. DAP</li><li>4. GERAKAN</li></ol>

Therefore, how many candidates adopt these tools in their blog? Does having these tools help candidates to influence voting decision? How many of them actually connects and interact with the readers? Studying these elements

could support findings from the online survey later as respondents' gratification is connected with what blogs contained and how difference they are from the available conventional media.

Involvement or the ability to connect with readers is important for a blogger cum e-campaigner. But how many of the candidates actually reply to the readers? Do the feedback and commentary columns appear only as a space for readers to communicate with each other? Researcher intends to examine whether candidates actually took time to write their thoughts on issues or they are merely updating the blog by posting press releases or news articles. Type of news allows us to determine the degree of involvement of candidates with blogs. Did they took time to pen their own thoughts or update their blog by repeating what has been read, seen and heard from the mainstream media? Lastly, the content analysis ends by determining candidates' party association. This allows us to examine who blog most, which party blog most, and how many of them emerged after the election.

Two coders were trained to identify how candidates utilise blogs within the study period. To check for intercoder reliability, the researchers randomly selected 7 candidates' blog, or just over 10 percent of the sample, for the coders to review. Intercoder reliability was tested using Holsti formula. The method measures the number of judgements that are the same and divides this sum by the total of judgements made. This means that Holsti formula determines reliability in terms of percentage of agreement, where M is the

number of agreed coding decision of the two coders and  $N_1$  and  $N_2$  are the total number of coding decisions by the first and second coder:

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}$$

$$R = \frac{2(37)}{42 + 42}$$

Using the Holsti formula, the researchers measured the consistency between the coders. Holsti formula was used in order to gain a correlation coefficient that ranged from .00 (no agreement between coders) to 1.00 (full agreement between coders). The intercoder reliability test on the coding sheet produced a coefficient of 0.88, which exceeded .70, the minimum requirement for reliability (Holsti, 1969).

### *3.4 Reliability and Validity*

The concept of reliability and validity is pertinent to survey and content analysis. Reliability can be defined as a measurement that consistently gives the same answer at different times and validity refers to the “degree to which a research measures what it purports to measure” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). The definition that is relied for this study is that the survey represents what it intends and claims to represent (Parry & Crossley, 1950).

There are two types of validity, namely the internal validity and external validity (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). External validity refers to the degree to which the results of a study can be used or generalised to other samples, whereas internal validity refers to the rigour of measurement in which concepts one set out to measure are actually measured (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003).

There are several reliability tests which would provide reliability estimation in a different way. An inter-rater reliability test is used to assess the degree to which different interpreter of the instrument provide consistent estimation of the same phenomenon. Test-retest reliability refers to assessing consistency of a measure from one time to another. Split half reliability refers to establishing good correlations between responses of half of the questions to the other half on the same questions (Trochim, 2006). There is also the internal consistency reliability which is used to assess the consistency of results across items within a test (Trochim, 2006).

In earlier sub-sections of this chapter, researcher has given insight on how the methodologies would be conducted. A pretest was initiated on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2008 to detect errors and to determine if the online survey is operating correctly. Amendments have been made prior to feedbacks and comments by pre-testers. This study has also conducted and used internal consistency reliability estimation to check on questionnaire's reliability. Cronbach's Alpha tests were conducted and a value of  $\alpha = 0.705$  has been observed across 18 items with  $N=357$ .

As for content analysis, Holsti formula was adopted to test intercoder reliability of 10 percent of the sample. Result indicated a coefficient higher than .70, which means that the agreements achieved by both coders are reliable. Content analysis is conducted to examine how candidates have utilised blogs during the election campaign. Understanding how blogs have been used could perhaps predict why people patronise socio-political blogs, particularly those created by candidates. Nonetheless, the current analysis conducted could not possibly predict any behavioural changes as it is not the study intention to evaluate commentaries and feedbacks communicated between readers in the candidates' blogs. What the current study aims to achieve is by understanding how blogs have been utilised by candidates, and to see whether applications embedded by candidates are exactly what motivated readers to patronise blogs.

## CHAPTER 4.0

### RESULTS

There were three interrelated research questions developed in an effort to better understand how blogs impact the democratic election process: *What impact does blogs have on the outcome of the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election; what impact does blogs have on voter's decision; and can campaigning through blogs help politicians shape public opinion or impact voting decision?*

The study employed online survey as the primary methodology, followed by a content analysis of candidates' blogs on the internet as its secondary methodology. The survey gathered views and opinions which reflected why people read blogs and what consequences achieved when they read political blogs. On the contrary, analysis on political blogs set up by candidates revealed how they have utilised blogs to reach the voters.

A total of 389 online survey responses were retrieved. Out of the 389, only 357 responses were taken to be part of this study. The remaining 32 surveys were rejected, as they did not meet the requirements set earlier for this study. The following sections in this chapter highlight the results and findings obtained from the survey and content analysis. The results and findings will be reviewed according to the research questions, while the last section will review on other results obtained from the survey and content analysis, which could be helpful in other future studies.



#### *4.1 What impact does blogs have on the outcome of the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election?*

The first research question aims to determine (1) the influences blogs have on voting decisions in an electoral campaign, and (2) how and why blogs have any influences towards the whole political campaign. Survey questionnaire has been set to obtain data to measure the impact and data from the content analysis helps to establish further if there are any link or relationship between blog use and effects.

The uses and dependency model, which was discussed in Chapter 3, define a link between media use and its effect. Therefore, it is also pertinent to know the reason people patronise blogs, particularly why do they read blogs and what do they do with it. Based on this model, media effect is great when people depend greatly on a certain medium, thus, influencing individuals' attitudinal or behavioural change.

Based on the data found via online survey, it illustrates that people perceived media to be bias. Media organisations were perceived as favouring the ruling coalition, with 76 percent of respondent claimed media to be bias at a certain degree (See Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1 Perceive media bias**

		Extension of political bias in news				
		A great deal	A fair amount	Not too much	Not at all	Don't know/ Refused
Media bias	Ruling party bias	185	89	0	0	0
	Opposition party bias	0	0	0	0	0
	Both party bias	19	46	0	0	0
	No party bias	0	0	0	0	0
	Don't know/ Refused	0	0	0	0	18

Although 72 percent of respondents claimed media to be bias, majority claimed that was not the reason why they turn to blog. Based on the data retrieved from the survey, the occurrence of media bias did not motivate respondents to patronise social political blogs, as illustrate in Table 4.2 below. Out of the 76 percent of respondents who claimed media to be bias, only 13 percent claimed media bias as a motivator for them to patronise socio-political blogs, which means that these 13 percent of respondents started patronising blog due to media bias.

**Table 4.2 Media bias**

		Reason turning to blog		
		Yes	No	Don't know/ Refused
Media bias	Ruling party bias	48	226	0
	Opposition party bias	0	0	0
	Both party bias	0	65	0
	No party bias	0	0	0
	Don't know/ Refused	0	18	0

Mainstream media bias may be one of the reasons that drives minority of the respondents to patronise blog. In Table 4.3, data shows that respondents

read certain candidates' blog due to several reasons, with credible news source cited as the top most motivator. There were 48.2 percent of respondents who claimed credibility as one of the reasons that keep them reading a candidate's blog.

**Table 4.3 Motivation to read blog**

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Reason(a)			
He/she is famous	138	21.2%	39.1%
Credible news source	313	48.2%	88.7%
Representative of the place I'm voting for	26	4.0%	7.4%
Friend's recommendation	21	3.2%	5.9%
Follow up what's happening on the candidate's side of story	82	12.6%	23.2%
Curious to learn more	29	4.5%	8.2%
Their courage to condemn the ruling party's actions	22	3.4%	6.2%
Their ability to speak and act on behalf of citizens	16	2.5%	4.5%
No comment	3	.5%	.8%
Total	650	100.0%	184.1%

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

It is said that blogs can be influential in a campaign if it is being used to its full advantage. Findings from the survey depicts perceived blog's impact to be rather influential, with 35 percent of respondents who perceived blogs to have a certain degree of influence over the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election. A total of 19 percent respondents believe that blogs have not much impact, while only 8 percent thinks blogs have no impact at all (see Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4 Perceived blogs impact in the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Impact(a)	Huge impact/ Impactful	66	13.9%	18.5%
	Conventional media has lost its credibility	36	7.6%	10.1%
	It targets IT savvy people, educated ones who may be influential	6	1.3%	1.7%
	Viral marketing works faster and more influential	6	1.3%	1.7%
	Learn about events/ activities via blogs	18	3.8%	5.0%
	Act or take an action from what we learn from blog - attend talks, activities or other events	12	2.5%	3.4%
	Quite impactful/ Some impact	60	12.6%	16.8%
	Not much impact	67	14.1%	18.8%
	Don't have/ No impact	29	6.1%	8.1%
	Strictly targetted on a smaller scale of audience	19	4.0%	5.3%
	It is just another newssite with a smaller audiences	15	3.2%	4.2%
	Digital boundaries/ gaps	5	1.1%	1.4%
	Not many people read political blogs	2	.4%	.6%
	No comment	135	28.4%	37.8%
Total	476	100.0%	133.3%	

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

The table above shows that people perceived blogs to have impact for several reasons. Data show that people believed conventional media has loses its credibility that explains why blogs can be influential. Several respondents claimed media to have an impact because it triggers actions such as attending events and activities. Nonetheless, those who have claimed blogs to have no impact have commented digital boundaries as one of the restrictions that hinder blogs outreach. Other comments made which claimed blogs to have no

impact were: (1) small audience, (2) similar to other news site, and (3) people's interest in political blogs.

**Table 4.5 Perceived blogs demonstrable impact on socio political climate in Malaysia**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Effect(a)	Yes	215	40.4%	60.2%
	Government become more active in their internet activities	24	4.5%	6.7%
	Started blogging after election	45	8.5%	12.6%
	Government takes a more serious stance monitoring bloggers activities	72	13.5%	20.2%
	More sedition and defamation suit thrown at bloggers	15	2.8%	4.2%
	Citizens can now lodge complains through candidates blogs and reach them	19	3.6%	5.3%
	No	43	8.1%	12.0%
	No comment	99	18.6%	27.7%
	Total	532	100.0%	149.0%

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 4.5 above depicts findings of people's perception towards the demonstrable impact of blogs observed. Sixty percent of respondents claimed there were demonstrable impacts observed on the socio-political environment of Malaysia. From the data, respondents stated that government has become more active and serious with the Internet activities. Monitoring efforts and laws were initiated, and some of the politicians have begun blogging.

The survey results shows people believed blogs to have changed the nature of governance in Malaysia. As illustrated in Table 4.6 below, 52 percent of respondents claimed there were changes made in the governance due to blog and 13 percent claimed no impact towards the governance.

**Table 4.6 Blog changes Malaysia governance**

Perceive impact of blog changing governance	Yes	184
	No	47
	No comment	126

Although half of the respondents claimed blogs to have an impact towards the governance, data shows blogs do not affect their judgement towards the ruling coalition. Table 4.7 below shows more than 50 percent of respondents do not think blogs impact their perception of the ruling coalition, despite reading much anti-governmental news via blogs.

**Table 4.7 Blogs impact on shaping people’s perception towards ruling coalition**

Impact		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	186	52.1	52.1	52.1
	Maybe/ Not sure	40	11.2	11.2	63.3
	No comment	131	36.7	36.7	100.0
	Total	357	100.0	100.0	

Data from survey also reveals that reading blogs created by the ruling candidates would not affect their opinions about the government nor their voting decision. Fifty-nine percent of respondents claimed that blogs do not affect their perception or sway their voting decisions, while 26 percent of respondents are unsure.

**Table 4.8 Ruling party candidates’ blog and impact on voting decision**

Impact on voting decision	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
No	209	58.5	58.5	58.5
Maybe/ Not sure	93	26.1	26.1	84.6
No comment	55	15.4	15.4	100.0
Total	357	100.0	100.0	

Although findings revealed people perceive blog to be non-influential, data analysis illustrated otherwise. Majority of the respondents believed that blog has changed the nature of governance in Malaysia. They see the conventional media to be bias, but they do not think media bias drives, or have motivated them to patronise blog. What is interesting about this data is that after conducting a regression analysis, the Pearson correlation coefficient value is 0.248, with a  $p < 0.01$ . Although the association is rather weak, the result shows that there is a positive association between these two. The R-square value is 0.062, which means that 6.2% of the variation in Q16 is accounted for and can be explained by the variation in Q15. From the Anova table, the p value is less than 0.001. Therefore, Q15 can be used to explain Q16, or to put it in words, media bias does motivate an individual to patronise blogs.

According to the uses and dependency model, people may be influenced by a medium when they rely or depend on it. Data reveals that people seek out blogs for various reasons. Although there were only a small percentage of the respondents (23 percent) who said they rely on blogs to keep up with the campaign news, 88 percent of respondents claimed blogs to be credible mainly because they think the candidate is a credible news source. When an individual is dependent on a credible news source for highlights, it means he or she trusted the news. The higher believability of a blog would in turn affect an individual's perception towards certain issues, shaping his or her mindset towards what is desired by the candidate.

Nonetheless, based on the data retrieved from the survey, it can be concluded that blogs could have certain influential power when the candidate is credible. People would not continue to patronise a blog if they do not have needs to be gratified. Blog could affect a campaign because people who read blogs generally have search for the blogs with a certain intention, which could later affect or change their attitude and behaviour.

#### *4.2 What impact does blogs have on voter's decision?*

Data from the survey has reflected blog's impact towards the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election campaign. As have been highlighted earlier, blog is most influential when it is penned by a credible news source cum candidate. The second research question aims to determine if blogs have any influence in



voting decision-making. It intends to know if (1) reading blogs affect one's view towards candidates, (2) how blog influence and in what ways, and finally (3) why it fails to influence.

Based on the uses and dependency model, people who are dependent on a certain medium are more likely to be influenced. Earlier studies (Metzger et al. 2003; Graf, 2006; and Johnson et al. 2007) have revealed people use candidates' blog because the candidate is credible, on top of many other factors. These factors can be seen as the promoter of attitudinal or behavioural changes, such as swaying voting decisions.

**Table 4.9 Uses and gratifications of blogs**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Uses of socio-political blogs(a)	To know more about opposition candidates and parties' news	299	38.5%	83.8%
	To obtain alternative news	353	45.5%	98.9%
	To engage directly in campaign activities	21	2.7%	5.9%
	To help decide to vote for or against a particular candidate	14	1.8%	3.9%
	To help decide to vote for or against a particular party	13	1.7%	3.6%
	To communicate with the candidate	14	1.8%	3.9%
	To have discussions and debate issues with other people in the blog	62	8.0%	17.4%
	Total	776	100.0%	217.4%

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 4.9 depicts more reasons why people utilise socio-political blogs. A high percentage of respondents (99 percent) have stated alternative news as the reason they patronise blogs. Besides that, they were also curious to learn more about the parties, particularly the Opposition parties (84 percent). The data here reflects that people have already sought out blog to meet their needs, which is gaining alternative news or information regarding the election campaign. A total of 8 percent of respondent have claimed blogs helped them in voting decision making while 27 percent have used blogs to communicate and exchange ideas on the candidate's blog.

Majority of the respondent enjoy keeping up with political news about campaign and election via blog. Table 4.10 (Appendix B) indicated that 73 percent find blogs to be quite entertaining, while 23 percent like it a lot.

**Table 4.11 Reasons keeping up news via blogs**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Reasons(a)	Enjoyable	194	29.8%	54.3%
	Different from local news	53	8.1%	14.8%
	Contain news which media fails to cover	76	11.7%	21.3%
	Can keep up what's going on	106	16.3%	29.7%
	More objective	37	5.7%	10.4%
	Can interact, chat and communicate with others	128	19.7%	35.9%
	There are videos of speeches and campaign events	56	8.6%	15.7%
	No comment	1	.2%	.3%
Total		651	100.0%	182.4%

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

People generally find socio-political blogs to be interesting and they enjoy patronising blogs for their own purposes, as shown in Table 4.11. Contrary to what they use blogs for, Table 4.11 highlights why people continue to patronise blogs, and why do they find it enjoyable. Approximately 52 percent of respondents claimed interactivity to be one of the reasons they find blogs enjoyable. Alternative news ranked in 36 percentage of respondents' support, while 30 percent of respondents claimed they enjoy keeping up political news through blogs.

**Table 4.12 Actions done 2/3 months before election**

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Visited a news website for news about politics and campaigns	357	48.3%	100.0%
Received any kind of political e-mail	3	.4%	.8%
Donated money using the Internet to a candidate or political organization	41	5.5%	11.5%
Visited the web site of a political party or candidate	176	23.8%	49.3%
Sent or forwarded to someone else any kind of e-mail about politics or current events	5	.7%	1.4%
Visited or posted information to a web log that discusses politics or current affairs	82	11.1%	23.0%
Visited a political discussion group or chat room online	62	8.4%	17.4%
Attended an election campaign event of any kind	13	1.8%	3.6%
Total	739	100.0%	207.0%

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Data from survey suggests that people rely heavily on political blogs for alternative news. Table 4.12 illustrated 49.3 percent of respondents who have visited web site belonging to a party or a candidate. A total of 28 percent of respondents have participated in activities related to election such as donating funds (11.5 percent) and corresponding via forums or commentaries in blogs (23 percent). Respondents have claimed blogs to be influential in the 12th General Election, as illustrated earlier in Table 4.4 and Table 4.5. However, most of them also have said that blogs do not affect their judgement about a candidate or a political party.

**Table 4.13 Blogs and voting decision**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Blogs impact and voting decision(a)	Yes	18	3.4%	5.0%
	Learn what candidates doing	7	1.3%	2.0%
	Dictates why I should vote for them	9	1.7%	2.5%
	Get to know candidates better and gain better judgement	10	1.9%	2.8%
	No	249	47.4%	69.7%
	Pick who I want to vote long before I read blogs	16	3.0%	4.5%
	Blogs reinforce my ideologies but does not influence my decision	25	4.8%	7.0%
	It's only an information channel, similar to that of newspaper or TV news	72	13.7%	20.2%
	Dislike government since I'm in secondary school	29	5.5%	8.1%
	No comment	90	17.1%	25.2%
	Total	525	100.0%	147.1%

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Data from survey revealed that 70 percent of respondents were not affected, or influenced, by candidates' blog. Among the reasons highlighted were that blog posts were synonymous with respondents' views and opinions about political matters. Table 4.13 illustrates 7 percent respondents who think blogs act as a reinforcement tool. Almost 5 percent of respondents claimed they have already set their mind whom to vote long before they start reading blogs, while 8.1 percent claimed they have disliked the ruling candidates long ago. Approximately 20 percent claimed blogs served as an information channel; hence it does not influence their voting decision.

Compared to what was highlighted earlier for RQ1, data reflected certain factors, which motivates people to be dependent on the issues discussed in blogs, primarily because there seek for alternative information pertaining to election campaign and from a credible news source. Data presented here showed that people were not influenced by blogs with regards to voting decision. Nonetheless, the reasons mentioned by respondents as to why blog does not affect them, depict a possible influence, because blog strengthen and reinforce their beliefs about certain issues.

#### *4.3 Can campaigning through blogs help politicians shape public opinion or impact voting decision?*

Findings discussed earlier depict blog as an influential tool when it is being used sensibly. Although respondents have claimed blogs do not

influence their voting decision making, many of them do not deny that blogs have had an impact in the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election. Data shows minority have seek out blogs and used it for voting decision making, while most have claimed blogs merely reinforce their existing belief. This means that blogs could still manage to influence by strengthening what they believed in.

The final research questions aims to determine how candidates utilised blogs during the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election, as a mean to establish a relationship between respondents' gratification and need obtained and candidates' persuasion through their blog.

Data reflected that people visited blogs to gain information, particularly alternative political news. A blogger's credibility is important, as it is one of the motivator, which pulls people to read and participate in discussion with other readers. This could explain why certain candidates such as Jeff Ooi have more readerships compared to other political candidates, as shown in Table 4.14 (Appendix B).

Findings from content analysis aim to provide insight how candidates have been utilising blogs during the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election campaign. Determining how they use the medium enables researcher to determine if blogs help candidates shape public opinion and influence voting behaviour. Based on the content analysis, there were a total of 69 blogs found in Malaysia Central, the online directory the researcher relied upon. However,

there are several broken links out of the 69 blogs. Only 53 candidates' blogs remain available and relevant when the content analysis is conducted.

**Table 4.15 Web logs creation before and after election**

Party	Before Election	After Election	Total
DAP	17	4	21
PKR	11	1	12
PAS	2	2	4
BN/MCA	4	12	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>53</b>

\*Broken and irrelevant links = 15

\*\*Stopped blogging before election = 1

It has been discussed in previous chapters that a blog can be a successful tool if it is used genuinely. This means that candidates themselves must take the initiative to provide information, typing their thoughts and opinions and other news pertaining to their party as a mean to provide alternative news to readers. Data from the content analysis shows that only six percent of candidates posted or updated their blogs by writing opinion-based pieces. Seventy-nine percent provide both type of news, a mixture of opinion-based news and materials derived from the mainstream media as part of their blog topic of discussion (see Table 4.16).

**Table 4.16 Type of news in blog**

Party	Opinion-based	Newsclips	Both	Total
DAP	2	1	18	21
PAS	0	0	4	4
PKR	0	1	11	12
BN/MCA	1	6	9	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>53</b>

Previous researches have also revealed that candidates need to communicate with the readers to have a successful e-campaign. Having commentaries left in their blog by readers provide opportunities for candidates to glean ideas for their campaign strategies. However, as shown in Table 4.17, a high majority of the candidates were inactive, leaving feedbacks solely as a mean to provide space for visitors to comment or rant on certain issues. However, there were two candidates who occasionally respond to feedbacks in their blog, although such occurrences were inconsistent.

**Table 4.17 Involvement in feedback and commentaries**

Party	Inactive	Occasionally
DAP	19	2
PAS	4	0
PKR	12	0
BN/MCA	16	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>2</b>

The analysis also revealed the type of advertisements used in candidates' blogs. Although majority did not have any advertisements in their blog, there are several candidates who posted banners such as fundraising banners in an effort to gain monetary support, as shown in Table 4.18.

**Table 4.18 Type of advertisements**

Advertisement	Party				Total
	DAP	PKR	PAS	UMNO/MCA	
Donation banners	4	3	0	0	7
Publication banners	2	1	0	0	3
Party-related banners	7	6	1	1	15
None	10	4	3	13	30



Based on the analysis, majority of the candidates who blog have make full use of other multimedia applications, or widgets in their respective blog. Many candidates have embedded videos in their blog but social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter remain as the more famous widgets for blogs. Table 4.19 illustrates other type of widgets utilised by candidates to maximise their campaign strategy and communication efforts.

**Table 4.19 Type of widgets**

<b>Widget</b>	<b>DAP</b>	<b>PKR</b>	<b>PAS</b>	<b>BN/MCA</b>	<b>Total</b>
Chatbox	1				<b>1</b>
DIGG	1				<b>1</b>
Facebook	6	6	3	5	<b>20</b>
Flickr	1	3		2	<b>6</b>
Friendster		1			<b>1</b>
Google Friend Connect	4	1	1	3	<b>9</b>
Picasa		1			<b>1</b>
Twitter	5	6		2	<b>13</b>
YouTube/ Videos	12	10	3	9	<b>34</b>
None	6	2	1	4	<b>13</b>

Candidates can shape public opinion and influence voting decisions via blogs when the medium is utilised to its full advantage. Based on the data attained from the content analysis, it depicts blog as a channel of information rather than a communication channel between candidates and the readers. Approximately 96 percent of the candidates do not connect with the readers through the commentaries or feedback column in their blog. Despite updating their blog post quite frequent (see Table 4.20, Appendix B), data also reflects that communications with readers are very low.

Widgets were widely used by candidates, particularly with videos embedded onto their blog and a link to their social networking profiles such as Facebook and Twitter. However, not much can be told if these widgets help shape public opinions or perceptions, but people do generally find candidates' blogs to be enjoyable because of these multimedia functions available on blog.

#### 4.4 *Other findings*

Data from the survey also highlight several indications about the uses and gratification of blogs and the users behind it. Part I of the online survey comprises of questions that relates to a respondent's demographics, which can be useful for us to understand who are they and where they come from. The screening question also helps as it automatically disqualifies any respondents who claim they have not voted in the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election.

There were a total of 357 respondents attained from the online survey, in which 53.2 percent of respondents are male and 46.8 percent are female.

**Table 4.21 Gender and marital status**

Marital Status	Gender	
	Male	Female
Single	125	101
Married	65	66

The data also indicated that majority of the respondents are white-collar workers. Forty-five percent of respondents fall in the age group of 25-29. All of the respondents are educated, with 64.4 percent graduated from university, 31.1 percent from college and 4.5 percent from high school (See Table 4.22 – Table 4.24 in Appendix B). The demographic also revealed that 37 percent of respondents earned approximately RM4001 to RM5000 household income on a monthly basis. There are 42 percent of respondents who are Chinese, 31 percent of respondents are Indian and 27 percent of them are Malay (Please see Table 4.25 and Table 4.26 in Appendix B respectively).

Although data shows people desire for alternative news, majority of them remain as a user of mainstream media, as shown in Table 4.27 below. Fifty-seven respondents who obtain news from the mainstream media continue to retrieve similar news from the Internet, while 43 percent did not obtain such news again on the Internet.

**Table 4.27 Obtain news from mainstream media and Internet**

		Obtain similar news on Internet	
		Yes	No
Obtaining news from mainstream media	Yes	203	154
	No	0	0

Majority of the readers spend at least 1-2 hours on the Internet on an average weekday (See Table 4.28 in Appendix B). The time spent on socio-political blogs, however, is 31 minutes to less than an hour for 92 percent of the respondents. All the respondents have been patronising socio-political blogs for

more than a year (See Table 4.29 – Table 4.30 in Appendix B). Survey data also revealed which socio-political blog respondents patronise. Table 4.31 depicts that Jeff Ooi’s *Screenshots*, Raja Petra Kamaruddin and Ahiruddin Attan’s *Rocky’s Bru* received more readership compared to others. Approximately 78 percent of respondents read Ooi’s blog, while 40.6 percent of respondents read Raja Petra and 34.5 percent read Ahiruddin Attan’s blog.

**Table 4.31 Socio-political bloggers**

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Ahiruddin Attan/ Rocky's Bru	123	9.3%	34.5%
A Kadir Jasin/ The Scribe	64	4.8%	17.9%
Anwar Ibrahim	119	9.0%	33.3%
Jeff Ooi/ Screenshots	277	20.9%	77.6%
Lim Kit Siang	83	6.3%	23.2%
Marina Mahathir	25	1.9%	7.0%
Susan Loone	83	6.3%	23.2%
Syed Azidi Syed Aziz/ Kickdefella	55	4.2%	15.4%
Aisehman	45	3.4%	12.6%
Raja Petra Kamaruddin	145	10.9%	40.6%
Sivin Kit	39	2.9%	10.9%
Hannah Yeoh	91	6.9%	25.5%
Nathaniel Tan	73	5.5%	20.4%
Patrick Teoh	19	1.4%	5.3%
Teresa Kok	58	4.4%	16.2%
Tony Pua	16	1.2%	4.5%
Nurul Izzah	10	.8%	2.8%
Total	1325	100.0%	371.1%

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1

From the blogs listed in Table 4.31, it shows that respondents read mostly from certain group of bloggers who are connected to one another. It can also be

observed that respondents have named mostly candidates from the Opposition party, and there is no blogs from the ruling candidates named.

Table 4.32 in Appendix B shows which candidates' blog respondents read. In Table 4.33, data reflects Jeff Ooi to top all the other candidates' blog with 37.3 percent of respondents read it most, followed by Anwar Ibrahim (19 percent), Hannah Yeoh (15.9 percent), Teresa Kok (13.7 percent), Lim Kit Siang (10.4 percent), Nurul Izzah (2.2 percent), Tony Pua (1 percent) and Khairy Jamaluddin (0.3 percent). Respondents spent as long as an hour to less than two hours on candidates' blogs, but majority spent approximately 31 minutes to less than an hour on candidates' blog, as illustrated in Table 4.34.

All in all, the survey also shows that respondents had voted for PKR (39.8 percent), DAP (21.6 percent), PAS (5.6 percent), BN (3.9 percent) and 29 percent of respondents chose not to reveal who they have voted.

**Table 4.35: Party voted in the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid BN	14	3.9	3.9	3.9
DAP	77	21.6	21.6	25.5
PKR	142	39.8	39.8	65.3
PAS	20	5.6	5.6	70.9
No response	104	29.1	29.1	100.0
Total	357	100.0	100.0	

## CHAPTER 5.0

### DISCUSSIONS

This research developed the following three interrelated research questions in an effort to better understand how online communication tool such as blogs impact the election process: *What impact does blogs have on the outcome of the 12<sup>th</sup> General election; what impact does blogs have on voter's decision; and can campaigning through blogs help politicians shape public opinion or impact voting decision?*

Findings of this research were highlighted in the previous chapter. This chapter will continue to further present an in-depth discussion on the meaning behind the findings and its significance towards this research. The chapter will first debate on the first research question which is on what impact did blogs have on the election; did we see any specific moments where blogs played a significant role in changing the direction of the campaign or the outcome of an election?

The second section here will continue to look at how voters used socio-political blogs during the election campaign and will review how people so far have interacted with websites run by the contestants in the Malaysian 12<sup>th</sup> General Election. It will further analyse what this can tell us about the impact blogs have on people's voting behaviour.

The final and last research question here will review the success of utilising blog as a campaigning tool to shape public opinion and impact on people's voting behaviour. This highlights what we need to test in future studies assessing the impact of blogs on political elections.

Lastly, the chapter wraps up by discussing on the limitations of research and suggestions for future research.

### *5.1 Blogs' Impact on 12<sup>th</sup> General Election*

Jackson (2006) and Drezner and Farrell (2004) claimed that blogs appear as the alternative to conventional media as gatekeepers of information and news, which in turn under certain circumstances shaped agenda and shift attention. This is through constant posting of news in the blogs and the believability of it that proves blogs to be successful.

Abdul Rasheed Moten (2009) has claimed that alternative media can potentially influence people's voting behaviour when readers trust the source. As how Rice (2003) puts it, blog provides a horizontal form of communication that actually motivates people to continue reading blogs.

Based on the data presented in the previous chapter, it shows that respondents return to blogs for political news because they find it enjoyable. The term 'enjoyable' however, can be defined in various terms. It could be

something which respondents find pleasant and agreeable to what they expect from a candidate's blog. As Littlejohn (2002) puts it, "first you will become more dependent on media that meet a number of your needs than on media that provide just a few." If a person finds a medium that provides them with various functions that are central to their desires or interest, they will be more inclined to use that particular medium in the future (Spring, 2002). Therefore, we can conclude that respondents of this study continue to patronise blog because it meets their desires.

From the data presented in Table 4.11, respondents used blogs for several reasons. One of it is in the form of interactivity, which garnered a total of 28.3 percent and 19.8 percent of the respondents commented that seeking alternative news and a differentiation is why they prefer to keep up with political news via blog. What motivates them, however, is the credibility of the blogger. From Table 4.3, it shows that credibility of the blogger remains as the top criterion that motivates people to continue patronising blogs.

The following sub section here would draw attention to how blogs may have impact on the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election based on the findings obtained from previous chapter.



### *5.1.1 Perception Shaping and People's Voting Decision*

According to Cornfield and Rainie (2006), there is an indication that people who seek out news and information online are more likely to vote compared to those who do not get such information online. Such influences however, are affected by various factors such as an individual's educational background and peer pressure. In this research, it has been identified that 95.5 percent of the respondents from the online survey have at least attended college. This shows that respondents are educated, not to mention tech-savvy as more than 90 percent of the respondents spent at least an hour on the Internet and at least 30 minutes on socio-political blogs on a daily basis.

Cornfield and Rainie may be right when they claimed that people who obtained news and information online are likely to vote. The findings from the survey showed that all respondents have voted in the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election, but sadly, it does not reveal anything more than that. What really churned their voting decisions remain as a mystery although the findings from this research managed to reveal certain factors such as enjoyment and credibility of a blogger which may have played a part in encouraging the voting decision making process. Data obtained show that credibility is an encouragement for them to read blogs. This finding is congruent with Graf (2006) and Rainie and Horrigan (2007) who state credibility as a motivator. Past studies also claimed that people continue to use certain media gratify their needs and desires. A Pearson Correlation Coefficient analysis of enjoyment and influence on voter's decision reveal has an  $r = 0.211$  with a  $p\text{-value} < .01$ . The correlation

shows that there is a significant relationship; the more respondents enjoy patronising a blog, the more likely they would be influenced.

**Table 4.36 Correlations of enjoyment and voter’s decision**

		Enjoyable	Influence voter’s decision
Enjoyable	Pearson Correlation	1	.211(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	357	357
Influence voter’s decision	Pearson Correlation	.211(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	357	357

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the content analysis conducted, we know that there were only a small number of candidates who blog. The opposition candidates, particularly candidates from the DAP party, were mostly senior bloggers who have started blogging long before the commencement of the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election. In fact, socio-political blogger cum politician such as Jeff Ooi himself has already gained prominence for being a credible news source.

Based on the survey, we knew that credibility remains as the top motivation for individuals to read a blog but it does not tell us if a candidate with high credibility could affect readers’ opinions and voting decision. Table 4.3 depicts a total of 313 responses who claims credibility as a motivational factor. This is congruent with past researches (Graf, 2006; Rainie and horrigan, 2007) that claim credibility as a motivation factor, but a correlation analysis shows that there is an insignificant relationship between credibility and voter’s decision, as depicted in Table 4.37.

**Table 4.37 Correlations of credibility and voter's decision**

		Credible news source	Influence voter's decision
Credible news source	Pearson Correlation	1	.073
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.167
	N	357	357
Influence voter's decision	Pearson Correlation	.073	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.167	
	N	357	357

The Pearson Correlation Coefficient has an  $r = 0.073$ , with a p-value of 0.167, which is more than alpha 0.05. That means blogs would not have influential power on voter's decision even when the blog is perceived as credible.

Although analysis did not suggest credibility as a factor that influence voter's decision, it remains as a high motivation factor that keeps respondent patronising blogs. Theorist of the Uses and Dependency model claims that motivation might lead to reliance on a medium which in turn would leads to behavioural effects. Therefore, media effect is more likely to occur when the dependency upon a medium is great.

It could most probably influence, as trust is a characteristic, which is not easily gained, more so when the target audiences are strangers who may just happened to bump into the blog and become frequent visitor overtime. It can thus be suggested that blogs may shape perception and influence people's voting decision overtime because they see blogs as believable and trustworthy. Most importantly, people turn to blogs because it reinforces their beliefs.

There are mix findings from previous researches regarding blog impacts towards an election campaign. Some scholars (Jackson, 2006; Stanyer, 2006; and Trammell, 2007) claimed that it does not have the power to change people's voting decision whereas other scholars claimed otherwise (Simmons, 2005; Abold, 2006; and Skoland, 2007).

There are approximately 48 percent of respondents in the online survey who have said that reading blogs do not influence their voting decision. Majority of the respondents also stated that reading blogs did not affect how they see the ruling parties. On the same note, several respondents have claimed that reading blogs have helped them to make a voting decision. Table 4.13 shows that only 3 percent of respondents have claimed blogs to have influenced their voting decision as they learn more about the candidates' routine. As have mentioned earlier, there are various factors which could have manipulate an individual's choice and decision. Reading blog may have influenced these few respondents, but there may be other external factors, which affect the decision making process. One of the factors which claimed to have trigger people towards blog is their perception on mainstream media bias. The constraints on the conventional media have also driven politics to take over the Internet in Malaysia.

The objectivity of conventional media falters when people perceive these mainstream media in a negative way. From the survey, it can be observed that more than 50 percent of the respondents claimed mainstream media to be very bias particularly towards the ruling coalition. However,

media bias may not be the only one factor which has triggered people to start obtaining news and information through blogs. Although findings revealed that media bias prompt individuals to patronise blog, the variation obtained from regression analysis is only 6.2 percent, which is too low to strongly suggest or be certain that mainstream media bias is the driver that actually stimulate individual needs to read blogs.

Those who frequent blogs have commented that they trust the news source due to factors such as credibility of the blogger. Once trust is gained, things are made easier for the candidates campaigning via blog as they can utilise the medium to its full advantage by posting genuine news and information. People turn to blogs for alternative news. The data presented in the previous chapter is congruent with Simmons' (2005) claim: readers' willingness to participate is stimulated by need. It can be assumed that people have to have a need to know in order to read blogs and participate in politics. Only those who trust the news and information, and only those who strongly believe in the alternative news would most likely continue to patronise blog and more accepting to be influenced. It can then be concluded that blogs have certain level of influence over perception shaping and manipulating voting decision, but blog act as reinforcement to readers' beliefs and strengthen their perception towards an issue.

### *5.1.2 Perceived Impact*

Despite the findings that revealed that blog more or less shape perception and impact on people's voting decision, the survey findings for perceived blogs' impact on the General Election were rather strong. Base on the online survey findings, about 54 percent of respondents perceived blogs to have a certain degree of impact towards the election campaign and only 8.1 percent of the respondents feel that blogs have absolutely no impact. Among the feedbacks received from the respondents as to why they think blogs impact the election campaign were:

1. Conventional media lost its credibility
2. Narrowed target audiences – tech-savvy and educated individuals who may be influential
3. Viral marketing
4. Blog as information channel – learn about events and party manifestos better through blogs
5. Act upon request – attend talks and activities

Respondents also believed that blogs have demonstrated certain impact on the socio-political climate of Malaysia. Based on Table 4.5, Respondents

believe that the government has become more involved in cyber activities, such as starting their own blog and have an e-complaint link in their blog. Respondents also observed that government has monitored bloggers more closely and those bloggers who have deemed to violate the rules have been thrown with sedition and defamation suit.

## *5.2 The Use of Blogs*

A study by academician Katy E. Gill claimed that the Internet does not have sufficient motivation for people to be politically active but rather the desire of the people to get involve in politics must come first (Gill, 2004). Gill's assertion may be true; why would people read socio-political blogs, more so a candidate's blog who would post nothing but political news? Certainly, that individual who read such blog must have an interest and desire to know more about the political news and happenings which may not be covered on the newspaper, or that particular individual is interested to read *rants* and *ramblings* of candidates just for the fun of it. Whatever it may be, the desire and interest and the need-to-know must be there for the people to start patronising blogs. What motivates people to read blogs, as have been discussed earlier, lies possibly in various factors such as bloggers' credibility. The following sub section here underscore how blogs were used by the candidates and citizens to analyse what this can tell us about the impact blogs have on people's voting behaviour.

### *5.2.1 The Use of Blogs by Candidates*

The blog has taken centre stage during the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election. There were 34 candidates who own a blog before the election started and the amount increased by 18 candidates after the election campaign. From the findings, candidates used blog to promote their party campaign. Majority of the candidates' blog contains updates and blog post on their thoughts and views about the election campaign. The phenomenon of blog campaigning can be explained. In fact, the very main reason why blog has been thriving during the election campaign is due to Malaysia's unique environment where majority of the traditional media is owned by the ruling coalition parties. The explanation is consistent with Gomez (2004), Lee and Toh (2005) and Simmons (2005) who claims that online campaigning mushroomed due to controlled press and constraints on the mainstream media.

Abold (2006) has claimed that a successful campaign via blog means frequent connection and interaction between the candidate and the readers. However, data indicates that some of the candidates merely keep their blog updated by posting relevant news clips and uploading press releases from the mainstream media onto their blog. Results from the online survey have indicated that people read blogs to seek out alternative news. Those respondents patronised blogs because they find it enjoyable. In Chapter 2, it has been highlighted that people use blogs because it satisfy their needs and desire. The Uses and Dependency model further predicts that people who rely on certain media are more likely to be influenced. Therefore, it can be



assumed that candidates who merely published press releases and news articles will most likely fail to influence readers. Such news is no different from what appeared in the newspapers; hence these types of blogs hold no impact. Abold (2006) research claimed that candidates can only have a successful e-campaign if they connect with the readers by posting authentically. Data from the content analysis shows that majority of the candidates' blog contains a mixture of genuine post and news articles from the mainstream media. There are only two candidates from the opposition party and six candidates from the ruling party who updated their blog post by publishing normal news that is available from the mainstream media. These bloggers may not be churning the desired effect as people may feel indifferent from obtaining news from the news portal.

According to Bloom and Kerbel (2005), blogs were primarily used for diffusing information to internal audiences, building up a volunteer base and setting the agenda of the mainstream media. As for this research, findings have shown that candidates have used blogs for three functions as claimed by Bloom and Kerbel. Blogs were utilised as an amplifier to spread their campaign message. To make their blog interesting, many candidates have equipped their blogs with various widgets such as social networking sites and videos to increase interactivity among its readers and blog owners. Politician Tony Pua, for example, has utilised blog in an effort to garner support and recruitment (Lee & Toh, 2008). This could be done through networking sites such as Facebook, Friendster, Google Friends Connect and Twitter. However, based on the content analysis, candidates rarely communicate with its readers.

The comment or feedback column in the blog appears to function as a channel of communication between the readers rather than a column of dialogue between the blogger and the readers. There are only two candidates who occasionally correspond with the feedbacks provided in their blog. Despite the lack of feedback involvement from the candidates, it is not known from the analysis whether they communicate with people through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

Blogs also appear as an alternative fundraising machine for some of the candidates, particularly those from the opposition parties. This is congruent with Baumann (2008) and Cornfield and Rainee (2006) findings which reveal that blogs are used as a fundraising mechanism. Only six bloggers from the opposition parties have banners and links equipped in their blog in an effort to raise awareness and funds at the same time. Based on the content analysis, the bloggers who have fundraising banners are mostly prominent figures in the political sphere and the blogosphere. As people are generally sceptical towards online donation, these candidates have to practice transparency in order to gain people's trust. Jeff Ooi, for example, has revealed the names of donators and informed people where the fund goes to and how will it be used. A separate link was created on his website for this fundraising event, in which readers only need to click on the link to be directed to the page containing donators name.

In contrast to earlier findings such as Jackson (2006) and Abold (2006), blog appears to be quite an effective conversational campaigning tool for the

candidates. Although they rarely converse with the readers through feedback and commentary, this form of communication is seen through the use of other widgets such as social networking sites. It may not be a two-way communication, but the data indicates that there is a possibility where candidates might have set up a grassroots networks and support by grouping this rather small community who are, as identified in the online survey, educated and politically-interested individuals.

### *5.2.2 The Use of Blogs By Voters*

A study by Graf (2006) on political blogs' audiences revealed that the blog served as an alternative information channel. He explained that blog impact political campaign when proactive blog readers forward news stories, petition and emails to other acquaintance. Congruently, findings from the online survey also documented that people visit socio-political blogs to seek out alternative news. A high percentage of respondents have claimed that they have patronised socio-political blogs, at least three months before the election campaign started, to seek variance of political news coverage. People who read blogs aim to learn something from it and this information may not be available in the mainstream press.

From the survey, it shows that people have utilised candidates' blogs mostly for information retrieval purposes. Action items were relatively low; there were only 34.7 percent of respondents who would actually do something

upon reading the blog, such as leaving commentaries, engage in activities, and in the hope to communicate with the candidate. This shows that audiences were not active participants, but rather information seeker. This finding is rather different from previous researches aforementioned. While readers tend to communicate with the candidates by sending emails to candidates or forwarding mails to acquaintances, data here presents readers to be rather passive – they merely seek alternative news; discussing issues with the other readers and other acquaintances, but not communicating directly or forwarding questions to the candidate via blog.

Survey data also reveal that several respondents have relied on blogs for voting decision-making. Approximately eight percent of respondents have claimed that blogs help them make better decision of who to vote for. Majority have said blogs allow them to learn more about the opposition parties and to gain more information; researcher could not gauge from this answers alone to conclude whether blogs influence people's voting decision. It is difficult to explain base on this data alone whether blogs impact people's voting choice. Referring to other data obtained, it strengthens the assumption that people need to learn about the other party so that they can make better judgement. Another possible explanation is that blogs may have some impact towards their voting decision because these readers may already hold some favouritism towards the candidates.

Every individual have their own reason to read blogs, and data has indicated that majority of the respondents have claimed that they patronise

blogs for alternative news. Blog is potentially an alternative to traditional media for these groups of people because they trust news from the blog. The explanation is consistent with previous researches which explained that traditional media has lost its touch due to media ownership which resulted in media constraint and biases. As people become more educated, they are aware that mainstream media bias exists. Hence, people who are aware of it start to question the reliability and validity of news published in the press, and for some, they turn to blogs which are deemed more objective and credible for political news coverage.

Therefore, the evidence from the online survey suggests that people, who use blogs have various needs to gratify and they do, to a certain extent, may be influenced by blog. People generally have intention when they utilise a medium, and findings also depicts that respondents enjoy patronising blog for various reasons and they do rely and depend on blogs for information retrieval. It can then be concluded that they seek out blog because they have a motivation. For them to have the interest to patronise such blogs also means that they have a certain mindset, and the reason why they continue patronising blog is due to the motivator (e.g enjoyment, credibility). It is possible that the blog first and foremost reinforce their interest, and overtime, it takes respondents with similar interest to another level (influenced) of understanding an issue discussed over the blog.

### *5.3 Blog as a Campaigning Tool*

Rice study in 2004 on Internet and its influences on political campaign concluded that the Internet does not serve as the motivator to influence its readers to be politically active. According to Rice, the Internet merely informs, educate and activate the citizens (Rice, 2004). This is consistent with the current research, as blog were used as an information tool to educate and activate audiences. Although evidence in the present study cannot suffice to say blogs influence towards the shaping of public opinion and influence voting decision, we cannot deny that blog has a certain influential power as findings have revealed that some of the respondents have reacted after reading blog. Twenty-seven percent of respondents have claimed that they enjoy “a lot” utilising blogs and 73 percent claimed that they quite enjoy it. Earlier, findings have revealed that respondents are more likely to be influenced when they enjoy patronising blog. This also means that candidates’ blogs must have contained the right elements which grab respondents’ desire in order for them to enjoy and continue to patronise their blog. A blog which contained elements such as alternative news would be more likely to influence as respondents have more than once claimed the availability of alternative information as a reason they use blog, as depicted in Table 4.9 and Table 4.11.

Undeniably, blogs helped raise candidates’ profile. There were 83.8 percent of respondents who said they patronise candidates’ blog to learn more about the candidate and the party news. About 52 percent of respondents also claimed interactivity as the reason they patronise blog. Although the

percentage of respondents' participation in blogs' commentaries were low, the interactivity function here reflects how an audience finds blog to be interesting when he or she can choose to interact directly or indirectly with one another, or viewing multimedia such as videos and live feeds.

Based on the data presented from the online survey and content analysis, campaigning through blogs may help politicians shape public opinion and impact voting decision. We know from the data that people patronise blogs because they believe it, they enjoy it, and they are aware that blogs offer another dimension of news that is different from what they see or heard daily from the conventional media. We knew what motivates these people to read candidates blogs, and based on the analysis of how candidates have utilised blogs, it is possible that people may have been influenced to go on and vote for the candidate. However, there is no clear indication that respondents actually voted for the candidate after patronising his or her blog.

Simmon (2005) has suggested considering environment to measure the impact of blogs. Simmons further suggests questioning if people turn to blog mainly because conventional media has lost their objectivity due to media ownership and consolidation. The present study found that respondents do perceived mainstream media to be bias. However, a regression analysis concludes that the variation is too low to strongly suggest mainstream media bias as the factor which drives people towards blogs. Rather, they have turned to blogs simply because they enjoy obtaining news and information, particularly alternative news from blogs. Objectivity does not seem to be the

motivator that drives people to read blog, but rather having the interest itself, and the awareness of blogs must come first. According to the Uses and Dependency model, people are viewed as active audiences who continuously seek out media which satisfy their personal needs. This means that respondents have to have an interest in blog for them to utilise it in order to fulfil certain needs. Therefore, it can be said that people patronise blog because they have interest to do it for fulfilling their needs, not because blog is more objective than the mainstream media.

Blogs may have encouraged people to return because of some form of voyeurism, but blogs were not either effective conversational, campaigning, or promotional tools. Data in Table 4.17 shows that candidates did not communicate with the readers, and even when they do, it was inconsistent. Although Abold's (2006) claim which stated that campaigning online can only be successful if a candidate connects with the readers through communication via feedback and commentaries or chat room, the data presented from this analysis clearly indicates that candidates did not communicate frequently with readers. However, researcher cannot conclude that they do not communicate with readers via other forms of communication as the analysis did not further study if candidates communicate with readers through widgets posted on their blog (Facebook, Twitter), as depicted in Table 4.19.



#### *5.4 Summary of Findings*

Three interrelated questions have been posted to investigate whether blogs impact the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election. The research questions intent to examine the possible influences blogs have towards voting decision in an electoral campaign. The questions also determine how blogs influenced, or why they have influential power towards the whole political campaign.

Furthermore, the question also identify how candidates utilised blogs and if blogs have helped candidates to influence voting decision. The findings and its implications, as discussed earlier in previous chapters, are presented in Figure 5.1.

**Figure 5.1: Findings and its implications**

Research Questions	Study Objectives	Implications
<p>What impact does blogs have on the outcome of the 12th General Election?</p>	<p>Examines the possible influences blogs have on the voting decisions in an electoral campaign.</p>	<p>Candidates' blog proves to be influential.</p>
	<p>Determine how and why blogs have any influences towards the whole political campaign.</p>	<p>Blogs, when used genuinely, can influence people's voting decision as people rely on blogs for information and to gratify their needs. By 'genuine' means publishing opinion-based post on the blog, not mere news articles and news clips because people seek blogs for alternative information. The more people enjoy utilising blog, the more likely they are to be influenced.</p>
<p>What impact does blog have on voter's decision?</p>	<p>Determine if blogs have any influences in voter decision making.</p>	<p>Blog influenced people's voting decision overtime. It reinforces readers' beliefs and further strengthens the views and opinions.</p> <p>However, there is no clear indication from data that strongly suggest blog affects one's view. Motivational elements such as credibility and objectivity do not seem to have an effect on influencing an individual's perception. Having alternative information seem to have more influential power to sway voter's decision, as people rely on this information to satisfy their needs.</p> <p>People who are most dependent on blogs' alternative news tend to be affected most.</p> <p>Blog would hold no impact should it holds none of the elements which intrigue respondents, such as alternative news.</p>
<p>Can campaigning through blogs help politicians shape public opinion or impact voting decision?</p>	<p>Determine if blogs help candidates shape public opinions which influence voting decision.</p>	<p>Blog helps candidates to garner support and pitch for money.</p> <p>Data indicates blog could help candidates shape perception and influence voting decision only if the blog contains factors which respondents seek, such as new information that is different from mainstream media, and blogger's own opinions on issues.</p>
	<p>Identify how candidates utilised blogs.</p>	<p>One-way, top-down communication channel. Blog purely used as a mean of information channel. Almost no interaction spotted between candidates and readers.</p> <p>Inclusion of various interactive applications such as social networking sites and images to attract readership.</p>

## CHAPTER 6.0

### CONCLUSION

The present research intends to seek out answers for three interrelated research questions. Data obtained by the current study suggests that blogs played a role in disseminating information to potential voters. Unlike socio-political bloggers who have used blogs mostly to voice dissatisfaction and discussion over current issues, candidates opted blogs as part of their communication strategy but it was mostly a conventional one-way, top-down communication channel. Despite data indicating that people strongly perceive blogs to be influential, statistical analysis indicated that blog's impact is still weak and in its infancy stage. Further experimental investigation is required to suggest clearly how blogs can impact an election campaign. Data here may have provided some interesting insight that suggests why people patronise blogs and how blogs have been utilised by both the candidates and the voters.

#### *6.1 Limitation of Studies*

A number of caveats need to be taken note regarding the present study. Firstly, content analysis could have provided better information other than what is available from the surface. Given time, an in-depth analysis could possibly reveal the content of commentaries for us to know better who the readers are. Based on this information, it could possibly reveal reader's stance, whether they are pro-government or anti-government. It would be great if

researcher could analyse what issues have been communicated among the readers and what has been posted by the candidates themselves – whether their post is positive news regarding their own association, or a negative one of their opposition – as this will further lead to a comprehensive research of the blog phenomenon by candidates during the campaigning period.

Online survey is also a limitation of this current study. Although it is most suited to obtain views and opinions from Internet-active respondents, there are several factors that this research fails to overcome. First, the project has distributed the survey link to various forums such as Lowyat and Hardwarezone. The most obvious drawback of this method lies in its target audience limitation. By posting the survey link in community forums, it limits responses from other community. Respondents who answered the online survey may largely come from a certain community who shared similar interest; hence results may be biased if data cannot ascertain where respondents come from. Perhaps, this could be avoided by questioning how respondents come across the online survey.

The current study intends to examine some questions, which require much input. However, data retrieved reflects insufficient information, probably due to the fact that respondents could not explain their true feelings, perceptions and beliefs. An elaborated data is hard to achieve from survey because respondents, as aforementioned, cannot provide an elaborate answer, or they just refuse to provide anything more than a simple answer such as ‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘no comment’. Based on the survey data, many respondents

have chosen the simple way out to complete the survey by answering ‘no comment’. Respondents also chose to skip certain open-ended questions, which makes data tabulation difficult as results obtained may not be 100 percent accurate.

Finally, this present research limitation also lies in the fact that prestige bias may occur. It is difficult to gauge whether respondents actually are influenced by the blog to do something. Asking them a direct question may not be appropriate because some of them may be unaware of it or some may just refuse to admit that the candidate influences them.

## *6.2 Recommendations and Suggestions*

This research embarked to broaden our understanding of the potential influence and the role blogs can play in election campaigns. The research attempted to locate different aspects about the medium that can influence a political campaign or people’s voting decisions. The data presented in this study reflects what we can learn about the voters and how blogs have been utilised by the candidates. Generalisations or future predictions can be drawn from the survey data but not data drawn from the content analysis as those data reflects only what we learn from the specific timeframe.

Findings retrieved by the current study suggest that blogs played a role in disseminating information to potential voters. While more candidates are

engaging the blogosphere as part of their communication strategy, most of them were using the medium as a conventional one-way, top-down communication channel. It is undetermined if candidates themselves view all the comments and plan their communication effort base on the issues and concerns conversed in their blog. Perhaps, future research could look into this element to gauge whether candidates read all the commentaries to come up with a campaign strategy. As it is almost impossible to interview all candidates who owns a blog, therefore it is then suggested future research to look into the few prominent ones, such as highlighted in the present study, to examine what candidates learn and earned from utilising blog as their campaigning tool.

Survey data strongly suggests that people perceived blogs to have impact the outcome of an election. What respondents have observed is that blogs have created a sense of urgency among the ruling coalition to start a cyber strategy for the purpose of controlling and promoting their ideologies to the cyber community.

However, data analysis also revealed that blogs impact were rather weak as only several respondents were actively involved in online activities and have admitted that blogs have influenced them to vote for the party or the blogger itself. Data presented here also fails to determine whether people actually vote for the candidate in the end. It does not reveal whether people vote a certain candidate because he or she is a credible news source or people voted for a candidate mainly because he or she comes from a certain party.

Future studies clearly need to learn more about how many people that read or interact with a candidate's blog, actually go on to vote for that specific candidate. It would also be good to find out how many people that read a candidate's blog go on to vote for the candidate party, but not the candidate. In this scenario, are people voting the opposition for a change, or are they merely voting against the ruling coalition? It is difficult to answer these questions from a survey or a content analysis, as these require an in-depth reply. It is then suggested then an intensive interview to be conducted for future research, on top of content analysis, to determine what respondents think about the Malaysia political parties, and examine the basis that determine their vote.

Additionally, future research needs to discover about the persuasive elements that make the blog successful. Past researches have claimed that interactivity is one crucial factor which determine the success of campaigning via blog, but, as data has indicated here, it suggest otherwise. People did find interactivity to be entertaining, a factor which generate returns and visits, but it is not the persuasive element that influence attitudinal or behavioural changes. Instead, credibility and the availability of alternative news appear to be most crucial for an e-campaign to be successful. However, there is no strong indication that these factors may suggest for an impact in the present study.

Future study could perhaps determine the use of social networking by candidates to see how it has been utilised. Present study has observed the inclusion of social network links in candidates' blog such as Facebook, Twitter or Friendster. A separate study could potentially examine this facet in order to gauge what is communicated between readers and candidates. It would be very time-consuming to analyse all the candidates who owns a blog and have social networking sites. It is then suggested that future research select certain candidates from each party and compare how they use it and what outcome can be observed from it.

An intensive interview would perhaps be a better method to study the persuasive elements accompanied by a textual analysis of the blogs. It should provide insight of which blog elements that make a person want to act or react to vote. Could it be the fact that blog permits audiences to participate in a deliberative process? Is it the experience of participating in something, assisting a candidate or a party reach an objective through their blog? Could it also be the mere pleasure of freedom to lash out against the candidates they dislike by trashing their blog with spam? These are the facets that will not only teach us more about the effectiveness of blogs when used as a campaign tool, they will also help us learn more about how citizens can decentralise the political power that arises from the centralised role of conventional media in mass society and create a more deliberative democratic process.



### 6.3 *Conclusion*

The research presented here aims only to explore new ideas on how we can develop ways to measure blog and its impact towards voting behaviour. Data may not serve as the final answer to the research problems but it rather provides clarification of the issue from a new perspective. What the study does present of value is a better understanding of issue discussed and the measuring methods we need to develop in order to identify how blogs can play a role in political campaigning and affect voting behaviour.

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## APPENDIX A

Dear participant,

You have been invited to take part in an academic research to learn more about the political blogosphere and its impact towards the Malaysia 12th General Election 2008. This study is conducted by Lim Shin Teng, a postgraduate candidate of Masters in Communication of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman.

The purpose of this research is to enhance knowledge about the role political blogs played during the election period particularly on how blogs can change the decision-making processes of voters to vote for a particular party or candidate.

This survey is being conducted for academic purposes only. You need to be a Malaysian citizen or resident to participate. You have to be 21 years old and above, and have voted in the March 8, 2008, General Election.

This research is not being funded by any interest group or any of the candidates or parties. You can rest assured that your demographic details will be kept confidential.

You are reminded that your participation for this survey is voluntary. Your participation in this survey is truly appreciated.

For any inquiries of this research study, kindly contact the researcher at the following email: [carynstlim@yahoo.com](mailto:carynstlim@yahoo.com).

## APPENDIX A

### **PART I – Demographic**

*This section contains ten questions that mainly serve as a record for this research study.*

**1. Gender**

- Male
- Female

**2. Marital status**

- Single
- Married
- Separated, widowed, or divorced
- Don't know/ Refuse

**3. Are you currently employed?**

- Full time
- Part time
- Self-employed
- Don't know/ Refuse (ignore Q4)

**4. What is your occupation?**

---

**5. What is your age?**

- 21-24
- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40-44
- 45-49
- 50-54
- 55-59
- 60 and over
- Refuse

**6. Please indicate the highest level of education completed.**

- Less than high school graduate
- High school graduate
- College
- University
- Other
- Don't know/ Refuse

**7. Please tell me which of the following categories most closely represents your monthly household income?**

- Less than RM2,000
- RM2,001 – RM3,000
- RM3,001 – RM4,000
- RM4,001 – RM5,000
- RM5,001 – RM6,000
- RM6,001 and over

**8. What is your ethnic group?**

- Malay
- Chinese
- Indian
- Other

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**9. What is your religion?**

- Islam
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Christian
- Other

**10. Were you able to vote in the last election for your political representative in parliament, in March 8, 2008?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/ Refuse

**Part II – Uses and Gratification of the Internet**

*The following section intends to understand how you use the Internet during the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election campaigning period. The term 'socio-political blog' generally refers to the weblogs that particularly highlights and discusses politically-natured and social matters. As this paper's intention focus mainly on socio-political blogs, the term 'blog' would herein onwards refer to this type of blog alone.*

**11. Do you obtain campaign news from the local mainstream media, such as the local dailies, television, or radio news?**

- Yes
- No

**12. Do you obtain similar news content via the Internet?**

- Yes
- No

**13. On an average weekday, how much time do you spend on the Internet?**

- Less than 30 minutes
- 31 to 59 minutes
- 1 hour to less than 2 hours
- 2 hours to less than 3 hours
- 3 hours to less than 5 hours
- 5 hours or more
- Don't know/ Refuse

**14. In the way that they have been covering the General Election so far, do you think that news organizations are biased in one way or the other?**

- Ruling party bias
- Opposition party bias
- Both are bias
- No party bias
- Don't know/ Refuse

**15. To what extent do you see political bias in news coverage?**

- A great deal
- A fair amount
- Not too much
- Not at all
- Don't know/ Refuse

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**16. Could this be the reason why you are turning to blogs?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/ Refuse

**17. On an average weekday, how much time do you spend reading socio-political blog(s)?**

- Less than 30 minutes
- 31 to 59 minutes
- 1 hour to less than 2 hours
- 2 hours to less than 3 hours
- 3 hours to less than 5 hours
- 5 hours or more
- Don't know/ Refuse

**18. How long have you been patronizing socio-political blogs?**

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to a year
- More than a year
- Don't know
- Refuse

**19. What do you seek in socio-political blogs? (You may select more than one option)**

- To know more about the opposition candidates and parties' news
- To obtain alternative news aside from what that has been published in the mainstream media
- To engage directly in campaign activities (e.g. donating money, learning and attending event, etc)
- To help decide to vote for or against a particular candidate
- To help decide to vote for or against a particular party
- To communicate with the candidate
- To have discussions and debate issues with other people in the blog
- Others (please specify):

---

---

**20. How much do you enjoy keeping up with political news about campaigns and elections via blogs?**

- A lot
- Some
- Not much
- Not at all
- Don't know
- Refuse

**21. Based on what you have just answered in previous question, can you please tell me why?**

---

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**22. Which of the following local socio-political blogs do you read? (You may select more than one option)**

- Ahiruddin Attan/ Rocky's Bru
- A Kadir Jasin/ The Scribe
- Anwar Ibrahim
- Jeff Ooi/ Screenshots
- Lim Kit Siang
- Marina Mahathir/ RantingbyMM
- Susan Loone
- Syed Azidi Syed Aziz/ Kickdefella
- Aisehman
- Refuse
- Others (please specify):

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**23. The 12<sup>th</sup> General Election saw a number of candidates taking up blogging as part of their campaigning strategy. Which of the following candidates' blogs have you been reading? (You may select more than one option)**

- Anwar Ibrahim
- Jeff Ooi
- Khairy Jamaluddin
- Lim Kit Siang
- Teresa Kok
- Refuse
- Others (please specify):

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**24. Based on the answer(s) given above, which candidate's blog do you read the most?**

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**25. How long do you spend on that particular blog on an average weekday basis?**

- Less than 30 minutes
- 31 to 59 minutes
- 1 hour to less than 2 hours
- 2 hours to less than 3 hours
- 3 hours to less than 5 hours
- 5 hours or more
- Don't know/ Refuse

**26. Can you please tell me what motivates you to read that particular socio-political blogs?**

---

---

## APPENDIX A

### Part III – Web Logs and Its Impact

*This section inquires the possible influences blog has towards voting decision. This section is pertinent in determining the power of blogs in inciting changes of Malaysia political landscape. Questions may be sensitive and you may choose not to answer, but your answers would provide greater depth and understanding to the issues discussed in this study.*

**27. Which of the following have you done in the past 2 to 3 months before the General Election?  
(You may select more than one option)**

- Visited a news Web site for news about politics and campaigns
- Received any kind of political e-mail
- Donated money to a candidate or political organization
- Donated money using the Internet to a candidate or political organization
- Visited the Web site or a political party or candidate
- Sent or forwarded to someone else any kind of e-mail about politics
- Visited or posted information to a Web log that discusses politics or current events
- Visited a political discussion group or chat room online
- Attended a election campaign event of any kind
- Others(please specify):

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**28. In your opinion, how much of an impact do you see blogs having in the 12<sup>th</sup> general elections?  
Why do you say so?**

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**29. Do you think blogs left a demonstratable impact on the socio-political climate of Malaysia? If yes, can you please provide some example(s)?**

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**30. Do you think blogs have changed the nature of governance in Malaysia?**

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**31. Do you think reading blogs influenced your voting decisions? Why?**

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**32. Majority of the blogs are from opposition parties' candidates. Even some of the famous socio-political bloggers are rather supportive of the opposition candidates and parties. Does reading blogs from these 'anti-government' bloggers cum politicians affect how you judge the ruling coalition?**

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33. The ruling coalitions are not actively utilizing blogs during the March 8, 2008 general election campaign. If they were active, do you think reading their blogs would change your opinion of the government and voting decision making in the general election?

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34. Which party/ candidate have you voted for during the March 8, 2008 general election?

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**THE END**

**– THANK YOU FOR YOUR RESPONSE AND COOPERATION –**

## APPENDIX B

**Table 4.1 Perceive Media Bias**

		Extension of political bias in news				
		A great deal	A fair amount	Not too much	Not at all	Don't know/ Refused
Media bias	Ruling party bias	185	89	0	0	0
	Opposition party bias	0	0	0	0	0
	Both party bias	19	46	0	0	0
	No party bias	0	0	0	0	0
	Don't know/ Refused	0	0	0	0	18

**Table 4.2 Turning to Blogs due to Media Bias**

		Reason turning to blog		
		Yes	No	Don't know/ Refused
Media bias	Ruling party bias	48	226	0
	Opposition party bias	0	0	0
	Both party bias	0	65	0
	No party bias	0	0	0
	Don't know/ Refused	0	18	0

**Table 4.3 Motivation to Read Blogs**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Reason(a)	He/she is famous	138	21.2%	39.1%
	Credible news source	313	48.2%	88.7%
	Representative of the place I'm voting for	26	4.0%	7.4%
	Friend's recommendation	21	3.2%	5.9%
	Follow up what's happening on the candidate's side of story	82	12.6%	23.2%
	Curious to learn more	29	4.5%	8.2%
	Their courage to condemn the ruling party's actions	22	3.4%	6.2%
	Their ability to speak and act on behalf of citizens	16	2.5%	4.5%
	No comment	3	.5%	.8%
	Total	650	100.0%	184.1%

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

## APPENDIX B

**Table 4.4 Perceived Blogs Impact in the 12th General Election**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Impact(a)	Huge impact/ Impactful	66	13.9%	18.5%
	Conventional media has lost its credibility	36	7.6%	10.1%
	It targets IT savvy people, educated ones who may be influential	6	1.3%	1.7%
	Viral marketing works faster and more influential	6	1.3%	1.7%
	Learn about events/ activities via blogs	18	3.8%	5.0%
	Act or take an action from what we learn from blog - attend talks, activities or other events	12	2.5%	3.4%
	Quite impactful/ Some impact	60	12.6%	16.8%
	Not much impact	67	14.1%	18.8%
	Don't have/ No impact	29	6.1%	8.1%
	Strictly targetted on a smaller scale of audience	19	4.0%	5.3%
	It is just another newssite with a smaller audiences	15	3.2%	4.2%
	Digital boundaries/ gaps	5	1.1%	1.4%
	Not many people read political blogs	2	.4%	.6%
	No comment	135	28.4%	37.8%
Total	476	100.0%	133.3%	

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

## APPENDIX B

**Table 4.5 Perceived Blogs Demonstratable Impact on Socio-Political Climate in Malaysia**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Effect(a)	Yes	215	40.4%	60.2%
	Government become more active in their internet activities	24	4.5%	6.7%
	Started blogging after election	45	8.5%	12.6%
	Government takes a more serious stance monitoring bloggers activities	72	13.5%	20.2%
	More sedition and defamation suit thrown at bloggers	15	2.8%	4.2%
	Citizens can now lodge complains through candidates blogs and reach them	19	3.6%	5.3%
	No	43	8.1%	12.0%
	No comment	99	18.6%	27.7%
Total		532	100.0%	149.0%

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

**Table 4.6 Blog Changes Malaysia Governance**

Perceive impact of blog changing governance	Yes	184
	No	47
	No comment	126

**Table 4.7 Blog Impact on Shaping People's Perception towards Ruling Coalition**

Impact		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	186	52.1	52.1	52.1
	Maybe/ Not sure	40	11.2	11.2	63.3
	No comment	131	36.7	36.7	100.0
Total		357	100.0	100.0	

b

## APPENDIX B

**Table 4.8 Ruling Party Candidates' Blog and Impact on Voting Decision**

Impact on voting decision	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
No	209	58.5	58.5	58.5
Maybe/ Not sure	93	26.1	26.1	84.6
No comment	55	15.4	15.4	100.0
Total	357	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4.9 Uses and Gratifications of Blogs**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Uses of socio-political blogs(a)	To know more about opposition candidates and parties' news	299	38.5%	83.8%
	To obtain alternative news	353	45.5%	98.9%
	To engage directly in campaign activities	21	2.7%	5.9%
	To help decide to vote for or against a particular candidate	14	1.8%	3.9%
	To help decide to vote for or against a particular party	13	1.7%	3.6%
	To communicate with the candidate	14	1.8%	3.9%
	To have discussions and debate issues with other people in the blog	62	8.0%	17.4%
	Total	776	100.0%	217.4%

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

**Table 4.10 Degree of Enjoyment**

The degree of enjoyment	A lot	97
	Some	260
	Not much	0
	Not at all	0
	Don't know/ Refused	0

## APPENDIX B

**Table 4.11 Reasons Keeping up News via Blogs**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Reasons(a)	Enjoyable	194	29.8%	54.3%
	Different from local news	53	8.1%	14.8%
	Contain news which media fails to cover	76	11.7%	21.3%
	Can keep up what's going on	106	16.3%	29.7%
	More objective	37	5.7%	10.4%
	Can interact, chat and communicate with others	128	19.7%	35.9%
	There are videos of speeches and campaign events	56	8.6%	15.7%
	No comment	1	.2%	.3%
Total		651	100.0%	182.4%

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

**Table 4.12 Actions Done 2/3 Months Before Election**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Actions done 2/3 months before election(a)	Visited a news website for news about politics and campaigns	357	48.3%	100.0%
	Received any kind of political e-mail	3	.4%	.8%
	Donated money using the Internet to a candidate or political organization	41	5.5%	11.5%
	Visited the web site of a political party or candidate	176	23.8%	49.3%
	Sent or forwarded to someone else any kind of e-mail about politics or current events	5	.7%	1.4%
	Visited or posted information to a web log that discusses politics or current affairs	82	11.1%	23.0%
	Visited a political discussion group or chat room online	62	8.4%	17.4%
	Attended an election campaign event of any kind	13	1.8%	3.6%
Total		739	100.0%	207.0%

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1

## APPENDIX B

**Table 4.13 Blogs and Voting Decision**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Blogs impact and voting decision(a)	Yes	18	3.4%	5.0%
	Learn what candidates doing	7	1.3%	2.0%
	Dictates why I should vote for them	9	1.7%	2.5%
	Get to know candidates better and gain better judgement	10	1.9%	2.8%
	No	249	47.4%	69.7%
	Pick who I want to vote long before I read blogs	16	3.0%	4.5%
	Blogs reinforce my ideologies but does not influence my decision	25	4.8%	7.0%
	It's only an information channel, similar to that of newspaper or TV news	72	13.7%	20.2%
	Dislike government since I'm in secondary school	29	5.5%	8.1%
	No comment	90	17.1%	25.2%
	Total	525	100.0%	147.1%

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1

**Table 4.14 Candidates' Blogs**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Candidates blog(a)	Teresa Kok	59	8.3%	16.5%
	Hannah Yeoh	89	12.5%	24.9%
	Tony Pua	17	2.4%	4.8%
	Nurul Izzah	14	2.0%	3.9%
	Anwar Ibrahim	116	16.3%	32.5%
	Jeff Ooi	283	39.8%	79.3%
	Khairy Jamaluddin	42	5.9%	11.8%
	Lim Kit Siang	91	12.8%	25.5%
	Total	711	100.0%	199.2%

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1

## APPENDIX B

**Table 4.15 Web Logs Creation Before and After Election**

Party	Before Election	After Election	Total
<b>DAP</b>	17	4	21
<b>PKR</b>	11	1	12
<b>PAS</b>	2	2	4
<b>BN/MCA</b>	4	12	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>53</b>

\*Broken and irrelevant links = 15

\*\*Stopped blogging before election = 1

**Table 4.16 Type of News in Blog**

Party	Opinion-based	Newsclips	Both	Total
DAP	2	1	18	21
PAS	0	0	4	4
PKR	0	1	11	12
BN/MCA	1	6	9	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>53</b>

**Table 4.17 Involvement in Feedback and Commentaries**

Party	Inactive	Occasionally
DAP	19	2
PAS	4	0
PKR	12	0
BN/MCA	16	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>2</b>

**Table 4.18 Type of Advertisements**

Advertisement	Party				Total
	DAP	PKR	PAS	UMNO/MCA	
Donation banners	4	3	0	0	7
Publication banners	2	1	0	0	3
Party-related banners	7	6	1	1	15
None	10	4	3	13	30



## APPENDIX B

**Table 4.19 Type of Widgets**

<b>Widget</b>	<b>DAP</b>	<b>PKR</b>	<b>PAS</b>	<b>BN/MCA</b>	<b>Total</b>
Chatbox	1				<b>1</b>
DIGG	1				<b>1</b>
Facebook	6	6	3	5	<b>20</b>
Flickr	1	3		2	<b>6</b>
Friendster		1			<b>1</b>
Google Friend Connect	4	1	1	3	<b>9</b>
Picasa		1			<b>1</b>
Twitter	5	6		2	<b>13</b>
YouTube/ Videos	12	10	3	9	<b>34</b>
None	6	2	1	4	<b>13</b>

**Table 4.20 Update Frequency**

<b>Update frequency/ Party</b>	<b>DAP</b>		<b>PAS</b>		<b>PKR</b>		<b>BN/MCA</b>	
	<b>Before</b>	<b>After</b>	<b>Before</b>	<b>After</b>	<b>Before</b>	<b>After</b>	<b>Before</b>	<b>After</b>
Once a week	4	3	1	1	2		3	8
2 per week	3		1	1	4	1	1	1
3 per week	2							
4 per week	1	1			2			1
5 per week	3				1			2
7 per week	0				1			
9 per week	2							
10 per week	1				1			
21 per week	1							
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>

## APPENDIX B

**Table 4.21 Gender and Marital Status**

Marital Status	Gender	
	Male	Female
Single	125	101
Married	65	66

**Table 4.22 Occupation**

	Employment			
	Full time	Part time	Self employed	Unemployed
Accounting/ Finance	27	0	0	0
Admin/ Human Resources	45	0	0	0
Businessman/ businesswoman	26	0	7	0
Sales and Marketing	117	0	0	0
Arts/ Media/ Communication	34	0	0	0
Computer/ IT	53	0	0	0
Engineering	29	0	0	0
Services	12	4	0	0
Retiree/ Housewife	2	0	0	1

**Table 4.23 Age**

		Gender	
		Male	Female
Age	21-24	26	14
	25-29	81	78
	30-34	52	48
	35-39	23	26
	40-44	8	1
	45-49	0	0
	50=54	0	0
	55-59	0	0
	60 and over	0	0

## APPENDIX B

**Table 4.24 Highest Education Level**

		Gender	
		Male	Female
Highest education	Less than high school graduate	0	0
	High school graduate	13	3
	College	40	71
	University	137	93
	Other	0	0

**Table 4.25 Household Monthly Income**

Monthly household income	< RM2000	0
	RM2001 - RM3000	0
	RM3001 - RM4000	108
	RM4001 - RM5000	131
	RM5001 - RM6000	76
	> RM6001	42

**Table 4.26 Religion and Ethnic Group**

		Ethnic group			
		Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others
Religion	Islam	98	0	0	0
	Buddhist	0	81	0	0
	Hindu	0	0	94	0
	Christian	0	41	15	0
	Free-thinker/ atheist	0	28	0	0

**Table 4.27 Obtain News from Mainstream and Internet**

		Obtain similar news on Internet	
		Yes	No
Obtaining news from mainstream media	Yes	203	154
	No	0	0

## APPENDIX B

**Table 4.28 Time Spent on the Internet on an Average Weekday**

Time spent on Internet	Less than 30 mins	0
	31 - 59 mins	33
	1 hr to less than 2 hrs	176
	2 hrs to less than 3 hrs	56
	3 hrs to less than 5 hrs	92
	5 hours or more	0

**Table 4.29 Time Spent on Socio Political Blogs**

Time spent on blogs	Less than 30 mins	0
	31 to 59 mins	329
	1 hr to less than 2 hrs	28
	2 hrs to less than 3 hrs	0
	3 hrs to less than 5 hrs	0
	5 hrs or more	0

**Table 4.30 Years Spent Patronising Blogs**

Duration spent on blogs	< 6 mths	0
	6 mths to a year	0
	More than a year	357
	Don't know/ Refused	0

## APPENDIX B

**Table 4.31 Socio Political Bloggers**

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Ahiruddin Attan/ Rocky's Bru	123	9.3%	34.5%
A Kadir Jasin/ The Scribe	64	4.8%	17.9%
Anwar Ibrahim	119	9.0%	33.3%
Jeff Ooi/ Screenshots	277	20.9%	77.6%
Lim Kit Siang	83	6.3%	23.2%
Marina Mahathir	25	1.9%	7.0%
Susan Loone	83	6.3%	23.2%
Syed Azidi Syed Aziz/ Kickdefella	55	4.2%	15.4%
Aisehman	45	3.4%	12.6%
Raja Petra Kamaruddin	145	10.9%	40.6%
Sivin Kit	39	2.9%	10.9%
Hannah Yeoh	91	6.9%	25.5%
Nathaniel Tan	73	5.5%	20.4%
Patrick Teoh	19	1.4%	5.3%
Teresa Kok	58	4.4%	16.2%
Tony Pua	16	1.2%	4.5%
Nurul Izzah	10	.8%	2.8%
Total	1325	100.0%	371.1%

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

**Table 4.32 Candidates' Blog Read**

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Teresa Kok	59	8.3%	16.5%
Hannah Yeoh	89	12.5%	24.9%
Tony Pua	17	2.4%	4.8%
Nurul Izzah	14	2.0%	3.9%
Anwar Ibrahim	116	16.3%	32.5%
Jeff Ooi	283	39.8%	79.3%
Khairy Jamaluddin	42	5.9%	11.8%
Lim Kit Siang	91	12.8%	25.5%
Total	711	100.0%	199.2%

a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

## APPENDIX B

**Table 4.33 Most Read Blog**

Most read candidate blog	Anwar Ibrahim	68
	Jeff Ooi	133
	Khairy Jamaluddin	1
	Lim Kit Siang	37
	Teresa Kok	49
	Hannah Yeoh	57
	Tony Pua	4
	Nurul Izzah	8

**Table 4.34 Time Spent on Most Read Candidate's Blog**

		Time spent on that blog						Don't know/ Refused
		< 30 mins	31 - 59 mins	1 hr to less than 2 hrs	2 hrs to less than 3 hrs	3 hrs to less than 5 hrs	5 hrs or more	
Most read candidate blog	Anwar Ibrahim	39	26	3	0	0	0	0
	Jeff Ooi	55	70	8	0	0	0	0
	Khairy Jamaluddin	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Lim Kit Siang	16	17	4	0	0	0	0
	Teresa Kok	11	25	13	0	0	0	0
	Hannah yeoh	24	29	4	0	0	0	0
	Tony Pua	1	3	0	0	0	0	0
	Nurul Izzah	6	2	0	0	0	0	0

**Table 4.35 Party Voted in the 12th General Election**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BN	14	3.9	3.9	3.9
	DAP	77	21.6	21.6	25.5
	PKR	142	39.8	39.8	65.3
	PAS	20	5.6	5.6	70.9
	No response	104	29.1	29.1	100.0
	Total	357	100.0	100.0	

## APPENDIX B

**Table 4.36 Correlations of enjoyment and voter's decision**

		Enjoyable	Influence voter's decision
Enjoyable	Pearson Correlation	1	.211(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	357	357
Influence voter's decision	Pearson Correlation	.211(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	357	357

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 4.37 Correlations of credibility and voter's decision**

		Credible news source	Influence voter's decision
Credible news source	Pearson Correlation	1	.073
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.167
	N	357	357
Influence voter's decision	Pearson Correlation	.073	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.167	
	N	357	357

## APPENDIX C

### Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Reason turning to blog	1.87	.342	357
Extension of political bias in news	1.58	.923	357

### Correlations

		Reason turning to blog	Extension of political bias in news
Pearson Correlation	Reason turning to blog	1.000	.248
	Extension of political bias in news	.248	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Reason turning to blog	.	.000
	Extension of political bias in news	.000	.
N	Reason turning to blog	357	357
	Extension of political bias in news	357	357



## APPENDIX C

### Model Summary(b)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.248(a)	.062	.059	.331	.062	23.279	1	355	.000

a Predictors: (Constant), Extension of political bias in news

b Dependent Variable: Reason turning to blog

### ANOVA(b)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.557	1	2.557	23.279	.000(a)
	Residual	38.990	355	.110		
	Total	41.546	356			

a Predictors: (Constant), Extension of political bias in news

b Dependent Variable: Reason turning to blog

### Coefficients(a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1.720	.035		49.409	.000		
	Extension of political bias in news	.092	.019	.248	4.825	.000	1.000	1.000

a Dependent Variable: Reason turning to blog

## APPENDIX D

### Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	357	100.0
	Excluded( a)	0	.0
	Total	357	100.0

a Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

### Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.833	.841	2

### Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	Media bias	Extension of political bias in news
Media bias	1.000	.725
Extension of political bias in news	.725	1.000

## APPENDIX D

### Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N of Items
Inter-Item Correlations	.725	.725	.725	.000	1.000	.000	2

### Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Media bias	1.58	.851	.725	.526	.(a)
Extension of political bias in news	1.57	1.218	.725	.526	.(a)

a The value is negative due to a negative average covariance among items. This violates reliability model assumptions. You may want to check item codings.

### Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
3.15	3.546	1.883	2

## APPENDIX E

### Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	357	100.0
	Excluded( a)	0	.0
	Total	357	100.0

a Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

### Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.705	.665	18

### Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N of Items
Inter-Item Correlations	.099	-.413	.725	1.139	-1.754	.034	18

### Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
39.3754	35.595	5.96613	18

## APPENDIX E

### Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Highest education	35.7759	33.820	.216	.394	.700
Obtain similar news on Internet	37.9440	34.547	.137	.274	.705
Time spent on Internet	35.7955	31.888	.251	.456	.698
Media bias	37.8095	30.554	.313	.617	.692
Extension of political bias in news	37.7955	29.534	.520	.667	.666
Reason turning to blog	37.5098	34.824	.162	.434	.704
Time spent on blogs	37.2969	35.412	.035	.424	.708
Uses	38.0840	34.701	.055	.348	.713
Motivation	37.2801	34.511	.079	.265	.711
Gratification	37.7479	33.161	.195	.521	.702
Action	37.8403	35.129	.008	.322	.716
PerceptionOnBlog	36.7227	26.937	.604	.618	.647
ImpactOnSocioPolitics	37.7003	32.188	.263	.374	.696
InfluenceVoterDecision	37.1737	34.076	.210	.426	.700
Perceive impact of blog changing governance	37.5378	28.637	.622	.484	.653
Perception fomation (Opposition)	36.5294	29.368	.531	.504	.664
Final decision	36.0308	30.889	.239	.442	.705
Perception fomation (Ruling party)	36.8067	31.218	.459	.472	.677

