

**NEW MEDIA IN MALAYSIA IN PROJECTING
COLLECTIVE ACTION**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

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COLLECTIVE ACTION**

by

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ABBREVIATIONS

BN	Barisan Nasional (National Front)
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
PPP	People's Progressive Party
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
DAP	Democratic Action Party
Gerakan	Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (People's Movement Party Malaysia)
PR	Pakatan Rakyat (People's Coalition, an opposition coalition)
PAS	Parti Islam SeMalaysia (Islamic Party of Malaysia)
PKR	Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People's Justice Party, formerly Parti Keadilan Nasional -National Justice Party that became PKR after a merger with Parti Rakyat Malaysia or Malaysian Peoples Party, formerly Parti Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia or Malaysian People's Socialist Party)
PRM	Parti Sosialis Malaysia (Party Socialist of Malaysia, formerly Parti Rakyat Malaysia or Malaysian People's Party)
ISA	Internal Security Act
SUARAM	Suara Rakyat Malaysia
NAB	National Alliance of Bloggers
Aliran	Aliran Kesedaran Negara
MCLM	Malaysian Civil Liberties Movement
ABU	Asalkan Bukan UMNO (Anything But UMNO)
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CSA	Civil Society Agents
ADA	Argumentative Discourse Analysis

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: SAMPLE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE.....296

PEMAPARAN TINDAKAN KOLEKTIF MELALUI MEDIA BARU DI MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK:

Media baru telah memainkan peranan yang signifikan dalam mengurangkan kos penerbitan melangkaui pesempadanan geografi, ruang dan waktu. Dengan lonjakan pembangunan alam teknologi, media baru mula menjadi penting dalam lingkaran masyarakat dan memulakan persaingan dengan media tradisional. Tesis ini mengaplikasi kerangka ‘Argumentative Discourse Analysis (ADA)’ untuk mengenalpasti perhubungan di antara penggunaan media baru dalam kehidupan manusia dengan bersandarkan kepada teknologi ‘Web 2.0’ serta struktur sistemnya di Malaysia yang mempunyai sejarah panjang dalam menangani isu akhbar dan kebebasan bersuara. Di peringkat awal sewaktu penyenaiaan data blogger dan aktivis atastalian dan bersemuka, penyelidikan ini telah menggunakan pendekatan ‘Web Crawling’ dan ‘Snowball Blog-Seeding’ serta temubual separa-berstruktur di samping analisis kandungan dan kaedah sekunder. Hasil penyelidikan menunjukkan bahawa di Malaysia, wujud peningkatan kelas pertengahan ‘baru’ yang mengamalkan tindakan kolektif melalui media baru yang telah membawa kepada kelahiran Pergerakan Sosial Baru seperti Bersih dan aktivisme online (Hactivism). Lebih daripada itu, dalam konteks Malaysia, pihak pembangkang dengan kerjasama modal gabungan seperti CSO dan CSA dalam agenda setting menggunakan media baru (portal berita bebas, blog ‘cybertroopers’) untuk mempamer persaingan dalam konteks politik (menghindar kolonialisme melalui sistem), strategi dan taktik penghindaran melalui tindakan kolektif seperti NSM dan ‘hactivism’ yang telah membawa kepada pelbagai implikasi ke atas dasar kerajaan Malaysia.

NEW MEDIA IN MALAYSIA IN PROJECTING COLLECTIVE ACTION

ABSTRACT:

New media has significantly lowered the cost of publication, transcending geographical boundaries making spatial and temporal impediments redundant. Due to technological advancements, new media has also become more pervasive in society and it has started to compete with traditional media. This thesis explores the relationship between the use of new media by the Lifeworld (society) and its accompanying Web 2.0 technologies, and the System (structure) in Malaysia, with a long history of regulating the press and free speech, using the Argumentative Discourse Analysis (ADA) framework. The study adopted the 'Web Crawling' and snowball blog-seeding method of gathering an initial list of bloggers and online activists for online and offline semi-structured interviews added with the content analysis (blogs) and secondary method for the purpose of this study. Results show that with the rise of a 'New' middle class, collective action through new media activists have given birth to New Social Movements such as Bersih and online activism (Hactivism) in Malaysia. Most importantly, through new media (independent newportals, blogs cybertroopers) the opposition with the assistance of coalitional capital of CSOs and CSAs in their agenda setting have employed discursive formations that have led to resistance or contentious politics (resistance of Colonisation by the System) in the context of Malaysia. These strategies and tactics of resistance politics through collective actions such as NSMs and hactivism have resulted in different policy implications by the Malaysian government.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Academics in Malaysia like the rest of the world are struggling with understanding new media and its impact on reshaping the social, economical and political paradigms of nation states globally. Web space users are increasing rapidly as technology matures alongside newer and faster devices to access new media and this has a direct impact on society at large. For instance, a widely cited study by Carnegie Mellon psychologists on Internet users and behaviours found that there were incidences of decline in face-to-face communication among new media users' households and social circles, and related higher tendencies in their depression and loneliness (Kraut, R., Patterson, M., Lundmark, V., Kiesler, S., Mukopadhyay, T. & Scherlis, M., 1998). Scholars and experts are trying to understand new media but because of its speed in evolving, theories on methodology itself summons for further theoretical developments (see for an example Light & McGrath, 2010). This study is among the few that attempts to understand the impact of new media on the Malaysian socio-political landscape.

It is important for any study to narrow the scope of the study before embarking on such a project. 'Understanding the effect of the Internet on democracy involves two distinct inquiries. The first asks how the Internet affects democratic practice: participation, deliberation, mobilization, and collective action aimed at political outcomes. The second addresses the degree to which technology shapes knowledge production in a society' (Shaw & Benkler, 2012). Previous studies has been done on describing blogosphere (Tan Jun E & Zawawi, 2008), new media being a political space promulgated by the arrest of former Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim (Tan, 2010), technology as a knowledge production in society (Lim, 2009)

and its effects on democratic practice (Asha, 2011). This thesis attempts to answer both questions on a wider context affecting the Malaysian society. Social actors play an important role in the shaping of new ideas and collective action. With the proliferation of blogs, building trust to increase the currency of viewership is important and as Castells (2010) contends;

Although the shaping of organizational forms by cultural attributes is sometimes too interderminate an argument, because of its lack of specificity, it would seem that the commonality of networks forms East Asia can be related to these common cultural trends. If the economic transaction is not the individual, property rights take second place to family rights. And if the hierarchy of obligations is structured along mutual trust, stable networks have to be established on the basis of social trust, while agents external to these networks will not be treated equally in the marketplace' (p. 195-196).

Assuming that the Malaysian appetite for news corresponds with the lack of trust on the mainstream newspapers as proven in Tan Jun E et. al. (2008) then new media is impetus in the dissemination of news and shaping of new ideas. As Castells (2010) aptly describes that in East Asian countries networking in (business and communication) is strongly associated with trust, thus strategies and tactics for collective identity and collective action begs for further exploration. The study of new media is an important area of study as it has played an important role during the mass mobilizations in Iran, Egypt, Algeria and other places mainly contributory to the development of Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs and micro-blogging sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Volodymyr et. al. 2011). The domino effects of these colour revolutions have summoned further academic and non-academic inquiries on the field of new media and its political possibilities. This study attempts to analyse the role of new media in shaping new ideas and in projecting collective action in the context of Malaysia.

1.2 Contemporary Malaysian Media in a Brief

Though it is commonly agreed that Malaysia's consociationalist democratic model is flawed (Ufen, 2009; Crouch, 1996), it is also important to note that 'some observers believe that in pure statistical terms, there have been more ethnic clashes in Britain, Germany, and France in the last five years than in the last 45 years of Malaysian post-war history' (Shamsul, 2005, p.5). Interestingly, this puts the Malaysian model at the forefront of maintaining peace while at the same time preoccupying itself with its developmental ideals. The media played an important harmonizing role in this explosively multiracial state amongst its other apparatuses adopted by the state in maintaining its rather harmonious streak. Recent technological developments otherwise, begs further understanding of how the Malaysian regime reacts to its offered plausibility, and in tangent how new media promoted the creation of new collective identities and collective action.

The Freedom House Report 2011 claims that media freedom in Malaysia is 'partly free' ranking the country 141 out of 196 countries in the world under its survey of media freedom (Puddinton, 2011). Unlike its previous standings on new media, the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) having hegemonic rule in Barisan National (BN) has been urged by the current Prime Minister, Najib Tun Razak, to embrace new media when he said '[i]f Umno does not understand the new realities of the national political landscape, how could Umno and BN succeed? Whether we like it or not, Umno must embrace the new media, because at this moment, it can determine victory or defeat (in the election)' (Bernama, 2011). These reactionaries were mainly contributory by the after effects of the General Elections 2008 (GE 2008) in Malaysia. The GE 2008 saw five socio-political bloggers making inroads into mainstream politics (Steele, 2008; Surin, 2010). The bloggers were

namely seasoned blogger Jeff Ooi (DAP-Jelutong); first time bloggers Tony Pua (DAP-PJ Utara), Elizabeth Wong (Bukit-Bukit Lanjan) and Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad (PKR-Seri Setia) and Johari Abdul (PKR-Sungai Petani) (Surin, 2010).

1.3 Malaysian Contemporary Population

Malaysia is a multi-cultured society that consists of two regions separated by the South China Sea known as the Western Peninsular and the Malaysian Eastern Borneo. Due to its multi-ethnic composition, ethnicity and religion has been a thorny and highly debated issue in Malaysia. Ambiga Sreenevasan¹ lamenting on the ongoing ethnocentric discussions, once said '[t]he factor that determines the rights and duties of the people of this country is their citizenship and not the size of the community they belong to' (Kathaiah, 2011). It is important to highlight that according to recent census taken in Malaysia, the *Bumiputeras*² are the largest majority or 67.4 percent of the Malaysian population.

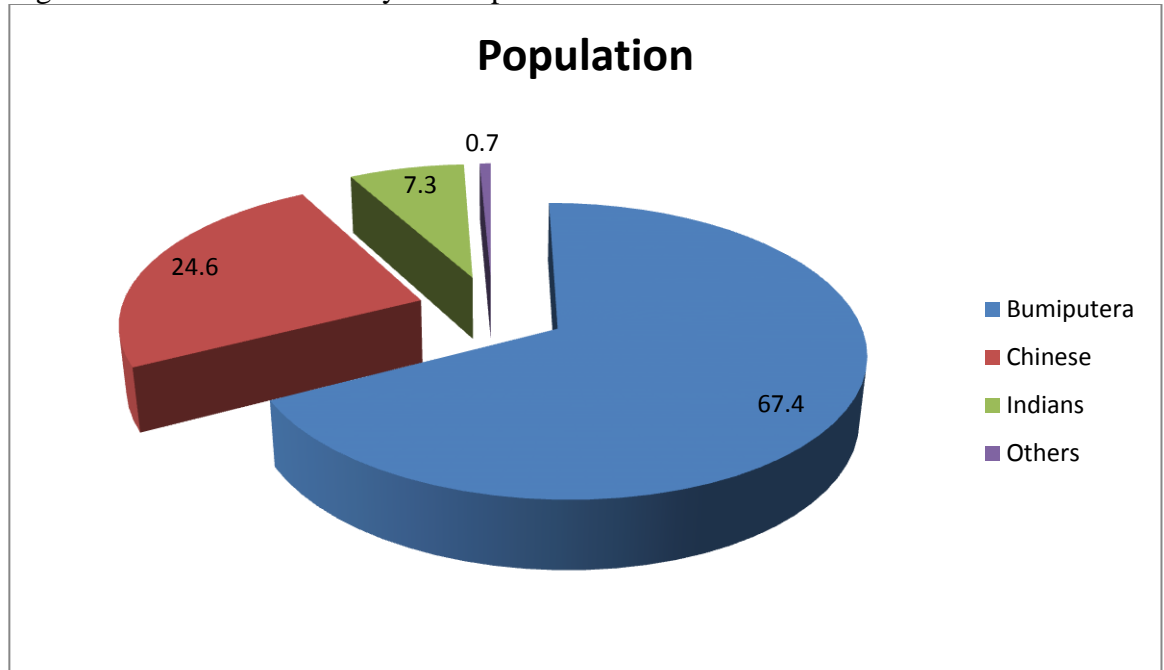
The Sabah and Sarawak states of East Malaysia have larger proportions of non-Malays (at least according to the constitutionally defined term) but are defined as *bumiputeras* and are lumped together to form a larger majority according to the census. The current population as of 2010 is as depicted below³.

¹ Ambiga Sreenevasan was the Bar Council President between the years 2007 - 2009. She was also the Bersih 2 co-chairperson that mobilized nearly 20,000 people demanding for free and fair elections.

² A term used to describe *jus soli* in Malaysia

³ It is important to highlight that the 'loose' term *bumiputeras* does not describe a particular race such as the Chinese or Indian category. [A]lthough Article 8(2) guarantees the equality of opportunity of every citizen, Article 153, in contrast, justifies the creation of quotas for Malays due to their indigenous position (Lee, 2001).

Figure 1.1: Statistics of Malaysian Population In 2010

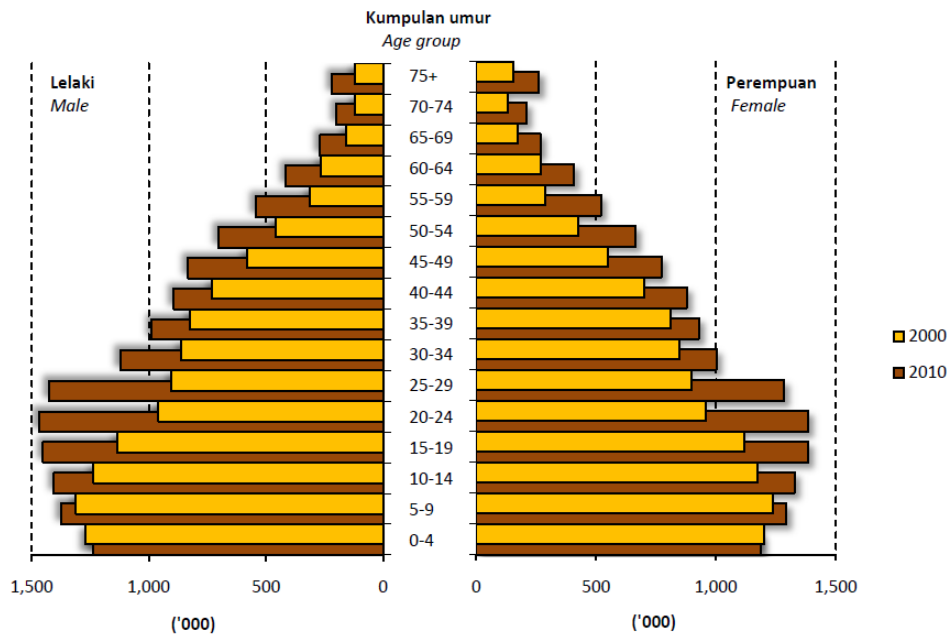


Source: Malaysian Department of Statistics 2010

The population statistics also describes that the second largest ethnic grouping in Malaysia are the Malaysian Chinese (Chinese) followed by Malaysian Indians (Indians). Minority groupings such as Eurasians that do not fit these general groupings are considered 'Others'⁴.

⁴ There were incidences where the state was challenged. Kuek S. K.K. (2011). Hanna Yeoh (an opposition state assemblywoman) made headlines by trying to register her daughter as 'Anak Malaysia' in 2011 but was forced to choose a race for documentation purpose (Kuek, 2011). It has to be also highlighted that 'Census' taking was introduced by the British to pursue its divide and rule policy (Kroff, 2001).

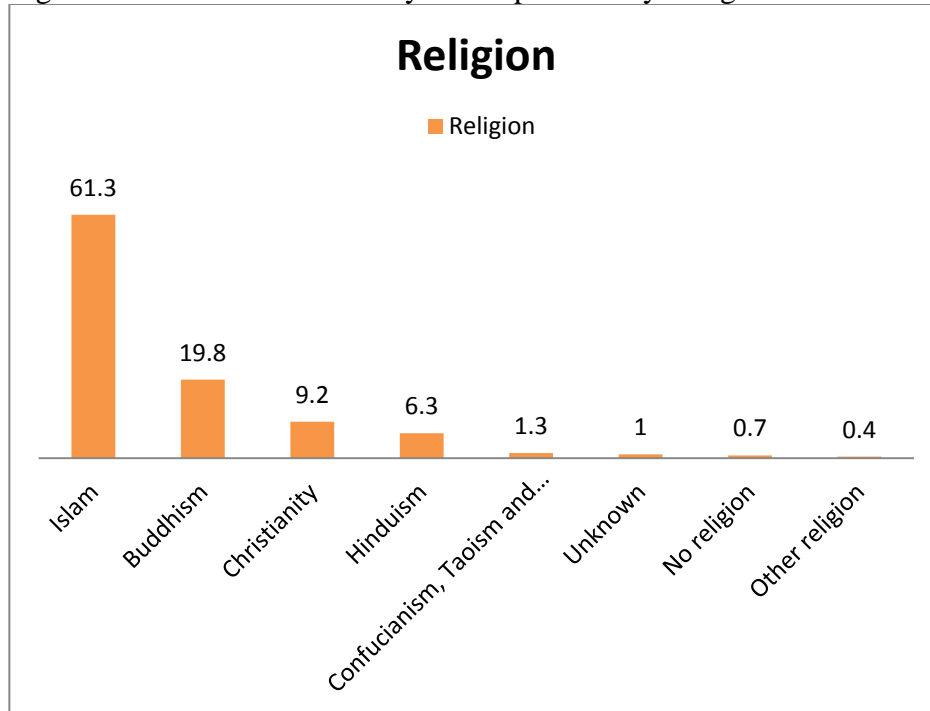
Figure: 1.2 Number of Population by Sex and Age Group, Malaysia, 2000 and 2010



Source: Malaysian Department of Statistics 2010

According to the census depicted above, the number of people under the ages of thirty makes up for the majority of the Malaysian population. In the next decade or so, these young voters will be the deciders of the future Malaysian government.

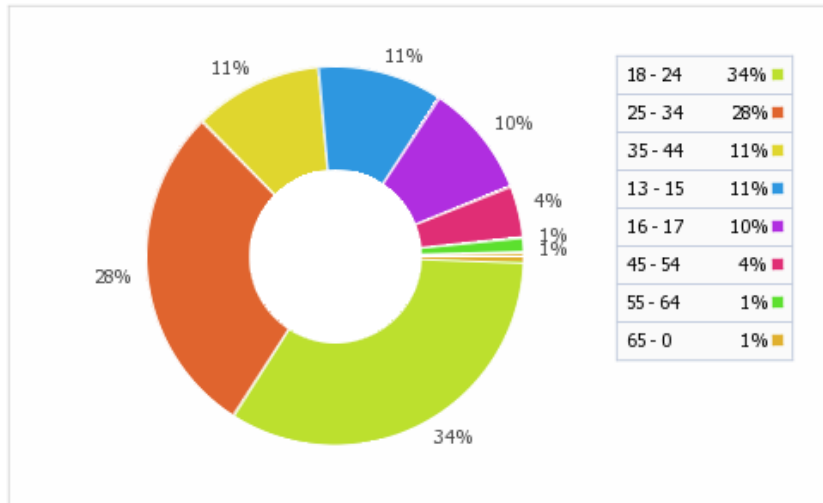
Figure 1.3 Breakdown of Malaysian Population by Religion



Source: Malaysian Department of Statistics 2010

In terms of religious divide as depicted above, the Muslims have the highest population, followed by the Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and others. The World Bank reports that the Malaysian Internet penetration is at 15.8237 million internet users (World Bank, 2009). According to Social Bakers ‘[o]ur social networking statistics show that Facebook penetration in Malaysia is 46.10% compared to the country's population and 71.35% in relation to number of Internet users. The total number of Facebook users in Malaysia is reaching 12,060, 340 and grew by more than 757300 in the last 6 months’ (Social Bakers, 2011).

Figure 1.4 User Age Distribution on Facebook in Malaysia



Source: Social Bakers, 2011

Drawing from the data above, youths between the ages 18-34 are the top users of Facebook. Though substantial conclusions cannot be drawn from the data above, it does provide a description of the number of Netizens and its demographics for Malaysia in particular. Social Bakers (2011) also reports that there are 47 percent female Facebook users in Malaysia, suggesting that gender biasness in terms of internet access is not a criterion in Malaysia⁵. The growing number of internet users in Malaysia has been detailed as follows.

Table 1.1 Malaysian Internet Population

Year	Users	Population	% Pen.
2000	3,700,000	24,645,600	15.0 %
2005	10,040,000	26,500,699	37.9 %
2006	11,016,000	28,294,120	38.9 %
2007	13,528,200	28,294,120	47.8 %
2008	15,868,000	25,274,133	62.8 %
2009	16,902,600	25,715,819	65.7 %
2010	16,902,600	26,160,256	64.6 %

Source: Internet World Stats (2011)⁶ retrieved from <http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia/my.htm>

⁵ Gender biasness can be a problem if we consider access to internet cafes where it is highly occupied by males compared to females which could plausibly hinder females from accessing these pay-to-use outlets. Additionally, in rural areas where the internet cafes maybe too far to be accessed, females might face greater risks of not being able to access the internet.

⁶ The population of internet users against the total number population of 28,709,616 as of the most recent census held 2010 exhibits that the data on population is not as accurate. Nevertheless, it does provide an indication of the number of internet users in Malaysia and its growth.

Thus, based on the data above it can be succinctly described that new media is an important area of study due to its penetration levels, gender insensitivity, popularity among youths⁷ and its importance in shaping/influencing minds, building perceptions to influence the Malaysian suffrage and projecting collective action such as the Bersih or the Occupy Wall Street movement⁸. Though political parties in Malaysia have had a presence in the web-world, the contestation for influencing perceptions has evolved with technological advances which beg further understanding.

Table 1.2 Political Parties Official Website

Political party	Year established	Website	URL
Ruling Coalition (BN)			
UMNO	2001		http://umno-online.com
MCA	1997		http://www.mca.org.my
MIC	2000		http://www.mic.org.my
Gerakan	2000		http://www.gerakan.org.my
Sabah United Party (PBS)	1997		http://www.pbs-sabah.org
Opposition Coalition (PR)			
PAS	1999		http://www.pas.org.my
DAP	1996		http://www.dapmalaysia.org
PKR	2004		http://www.keadilanrakyat.com

Source: Gomez, J & Rosyidah M. (2011). *New Media and Electoral Democracy: Online Opposition in Malaysia and Singapore*

1.4 Literature Review

This section will include a full literature review of new media as a political space. It will also provide some key literature on the Malaysian political landscape. It will also discuss provide some explanations on how new media has promoted

⁷ According to the 2010 census, youths are the thrust of contemporary Malaysian populous.

⁸ ‘Occupy Wall Street is a people-powered movement that began on September 17, 2011 in Liberty Square in Manhattan’s Financial District, and has spread to over 100 cities in the United States and actions in over 1,500 cities globally. #ows is fighting back against the corrosive power of major banks and multinational corporations over the democratic process, and the role of Wall Street in creating an economic collapse that has caused the greatest recession in generations. The movement is inspired by popular uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, and aims to fight back against the richest 1% of people that are writing the rules of an unfair global economy that is foreclosing on our future’ (see <http://occupywallst.org/about/>)

collective identity and collective action in Malaysia through the shaping of new ideas.

1.4.1 New Media as a Political Space

The internet has been distinguished as a unique political space due to its limited economic resources to disseminate information and

(i) its ability to mobilize users, particularly “outsiders” including those who have not been easily included in political systems using conventional means; (ii) its ability to quickly provide large quantities of information of uncertain or unregulated quality; and (iii) its ability to shrink distances between users, in some sense rendering conventional physical geography irrelevant. (Manjikan, 2010, p. 381)

Additionally new media allows people to play multiple roles such as a publisher, creator and distributor of content (Bowman and Willis, 2003). Blogs and new media are growing in popularity due its ease of use, low barriers of entry and maintenance, ease of interaction and most importantly in reaching a wide audience, transcending geographical space (Reese et al., 2007).

Fuchs (2008) states that cyberprotests is the mutual appreciation of self-organization processes produced through the Internet and societies protest system of self-organization. He argues that ‘the two systems interlock; their self- organization processes produce each other mutually and affect each other’ (Fuchs, 2008, p. 278).

Its ability to provide large quantities of information and to transcend physical geographical hindrances could be seen in many instances even in highly restrictive circumstances. Chowdhury (2008) in his study of the Burmese Safron Revolution concludes that the Internet played an important in gaining international attention toward the predicaments of the Burmese protestors. Chowdhury (2008) states that though the Internet can be suppressed in highly authoritarian governments because the Internet is highly dependent on national telecommunication, dissident Burmese

activists were able to gain international attention by operating in neighbouring countries such as India and Thailand when the government decided a total shutdown of the Internet at the height of the Safron Revolution.

Most importantly if Social Networking Sites was used for

classic identity markers of emerging adulthood, such as religion, political ideology, and work, young adults also used media preferences to express their identity' then new media is an important element of information dissemination for creating new collective identities and for collective agency purposes (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009, p. 227).

Most importantly, if students spent a minimum of 30 minutes a week on SNS sites, this is definitely proven to a pervasive tool of growing popularity among the younger generation (Pempek et al., 2009).

In Malaysia the Internet, blogs particularly played an important role in the dissemination of information, information on ceramahs and oppositional agenda during the GE 2008 (Tan et. al., 2008). Importantly, five bloggers contended and won during the GE 2008 (Surin, 2010). This trend corresponds with the empirical studies done on Malaysians trusted source of information (Tan et al. 2008; Welsh, 2007).

Welsh (2007) in her study for the Asian Barometer found that Malaysian respondents for her survey on trust on media institutions had highest levels of trust on television (69 percent), NGOs (64 percent), and the printed newspapers (61.8 percent), whilst exhibiting wariness of the Internet (34 percent).

Ironically, Tan Jun- E and Zawawi Ibrahim (2008) publishing their accounts a year later found that in suggesting which media Malaysians 'strongly trust'(ed), foreign news was the most trusted followed by alternative media and mainstream media, whilst blogs fell far behind. Nevertheless, those that suggested which media

they 'trust'(ed); blogs, foreign mainstream media and alternative media were disparately in closer proximity comparative to the relatively lower numbers scored by the local mainstream media. Similar symptoms were exhibited in occurrences of respondents answering 'distrust' and 'strongly distrust', local mainstream media was posited to be the least trustworthy. Further analysis suggests that most respondents had exhibited higher levels of 'neutrality' towards 'alternative media' and blogs.

As such, it is acknowledged that increasingly Malaysian new media can be construed as a formidable political space (Brown, 2005; Case, 2010; Steele, 2009; Abdul, 2009; Tan & Zawawi, 2008) however, its ability to make this change requires further exploration.

1.4.2 Liberation Technology – Scandals Galore

Web 2.0 is 'a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion' and '[s]ocial Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological applications of Web 2.0, that allow creation and exchange of User Generated Content' (Kaplan, et al. 2010, p. 61). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) were influenced by theories of media research, social presence, media richness) and social processes (self-representation, self disclosure in their attempt to provide a definition of user generated content.

Table 1.3: Classification of Social Media by social presence/media richness and self-representation/self-disclosure

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self- presentation/ Self- disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Source: Kaplan, A. M. & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*. 53(1): 59–68

For bloggers and other Web 2.0 to prevail over others, it has to be aligned with a specific ideology for a networked society or virtual imagined community to exist as studies have proven that such virtual imagined communities exist (Lim, 2012). If it is an accepted hypothesis that politicians have to constantly manoeuvre the ‘symbolic power’ to persuade, confront, influence actions and beliefs, then new media posits different challenges for these politicians because it has the kind of resources and symbolic capital that allows politicians to build trust among other politicians and of course the public (Thompson, 2000). Politicians thrive on this resource and are open to be scrutinized over scandals, thus, the characteristics of the internet provide politicians with an avenue for ‘the struggles of one’s name, denials, appeals to higher values, open confession or downplaying the importance of the scandal’ (Sanders, 2006, p. 455). Strongly influenced by hermeneutics, Thompson (2000) and others that followed his footsteps have singled out the most common scandals can be categorized under three main categories: sexual scandals, financial scandals and power scandals (see Thompson, 2000; Sanders & Canel, 2006; Tumber, 2004).

The politics of perception is very much important in nation states across the globe. Crouch (1996) also contends that weeks before the 1990 GE, after the defection of Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) it was clear that Semangat 46 might sideline

UMNO Baru⁹ of its two thirds majority, maybe even gain power of the Malaysian political system. Crouch (1996) contends that there were two main reasons why Semangat 46 subtly lost its legitimacy between the years 1989 and 1990.

One of the main contentions was of course largesse or access to patronage amongst all sectors including

business people who were dependent on government licences, credit, or contracts; politicians with big personal loans from banks; school teachers who did not want to be transferred to an outlying district or another state; and villagers who were applying for land all felt that they had no choice but to return to UMNO (Crouch, 1996, p. 127).

Additionally,

‘[o]n a visit to Sabah, Tengku Razaleigh was photographed wearing a traditional Kadazan headdress decorated with what looked like a cross! That photograph appeared throughout the mass media, and the opposition believed that it swayed many Malay voters at the last moment’ (Crouch, 1996, p. 127).

During this epoch, mainstream media was the largest influence in Malaysia. Johnson (1995) contends among other things that the Watergate incidence promulgated ‘investigative journalism’ in the United States (US). The coming of the internet could be seen as ‘liberation technology’ or the ‘Watergate’ of Malaysia in that sense with the introduction of Malaysiakini¹⁰ and other blogs that were able to circumvent the punitive laws and measures in the country. Others also do suggest that the *reformasi* period of cyber activism in Malaysia was on decline after the 1999 GE (Abbott, 2004 & Brown, 2005). Nevertheless, as suggested that the regulation and control of mainstream media added with suppression of the opposition in Malaysia caused a decline of *cyber reformasi* in Malaysia (Brown, 2005).

⁹ UMNO Baru and Semangat 46 were groups of UMNO in 1987. Chapter 3 will discuss in length events leading to the split within UMNO and its after affects.

¹⁰ Malaysiakini is an ‘independent’ online newspaper in Malaysia. It has been observed to be inclined to the opposition (Steele, 2007).

Echoing Crouch (1996) contention, economic redistribution and patronage also played a role in the UMNO factionalism, causing disgruntlement and disclosures channelled through dissident websites such Malaysiakini and other websites. Protest votes were contributory due to this phenomenon within UMNO (Weiss, 2010).

Though the internet has been lauded as

‘[...]“liberation technology¹¹”—to empower individuals, facilitate independent communication and mobilization, and strengthen an emergent civil society,’ most importantly it ‘[...] enables citizens to report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilize protest, monitor elections, scrutinize government, deepen participation, and expand the horizons of freedom’ (Diamond, 2010, p. 21).

‘But authoritarian states such as China, Belarus, and Iran have acquired (and shared) impressive technical capabilities to filter and control the Internet, and to identify and punish dissenters’ (Diamond, 2010, p. 21). Liberation technology allows free flow of information for the viewership of audiences without restriction, allowing it to become a voice for opposition views where the media is controlled.

Along the same lines, Malaysian bloggers are also vulnerable DDOS (Distributed-Denial-of Service) attacks and capitalistic strains in attaining revenue from advertising for survival such as Malaysiakini (Brown, 2005; Abbott, 2004). Others contend that ‘[l]iberation technology is also “accountability technology,” in that it provides efficient and powerful tools for transparency and monitoring’ (Diamond, 2010, p. 76).

Realizing that the Internet is a platform that needs to be adopted by the ruling regime, it also attempted to ‘counter’ opposition led websites by forming sites such as Malaysiavotes¹² that quickly went into oblivion after the GE 2008 suggesting that the ruling did make attempts to engage the internet as a means to counter the

¹¹ Diamond (2010) defines liberation technology as ‘any form of information and communication technology (ICT) that can expand political, social, and economic freedom’ (p 21).

¹² Malaysiavotes.com was a website that appeared before the 12GE and quickly perished after the GE.

opposition's usage of the internet. Such claims do not go unfounded, as observers have observed a rather lopsided coverage by websites such as Malaysiavotes.com (Helen, 2008)¹³.

An assumption that Diamond (2010) makes that new media is 'liberation technology' does require further analysis. First, funding for internet is a hindrance that cannot be sidelined. Jacqueline Ann Surin¹⁴ (2010), founder of the website Malaysiavotes attempts to provide an explanation in a scholarly journal that her rather extensive and constructive coverage of Khairy Jamalludin was 'unintentional'. She does however conclude in her paper that funding was a hindrance for her to continue the diversity in investigative journalism that the website provides.

Secondly, the existence of such patronage system would inevitably influence writing styles and the 'agenda-setting' formulation of these 'independent news portals' journalists. Thirdly, since political parties are made of individuals, the self-serving politicians would tend to want these 'independent news portals' to serve their individual needs rather than party solidarity needs. In this sense, Diamonds's (2010) overarching idealist claims of the internet being 'liberation technology' is rather contentious due to the limitations mentioned above.

1.4.3 The Blogosphere – Still an Elitist Affair

In understanding the blogosphere, distinctions between different forms of media summons some explanations. Blogs as a powerful communicative tool is vastly a contribution by the lower the costs of production that requires fewer audiences, leading the producer to reach to a niche audience, altering the disseminater to become more differentiated (Baum, 2003). Hotelling (1929)

¹³ For further information please read the Aliran website at <http://aliran.com/499.html>. Sharifuddin (2008) similarly contends that Malaysiavotes.com tends to be bias when reporting events that be accessed at <http://www.malaysiakini.com/letters/81235>.

¹⁴ Jacqueline used to manage a website called The NutGraph.com.

originally developed a model that all consumers are distributed according to some distribution function that are considered as their ideal point of distribution, hence, producers need to position their products in the right segments to maximize profits..

It is contended that ‘when only producers enter the market they place themselves in a position where they are able to reach a lot of consumers, typically toward the centre of the distribution’ and ‘as costs decrease, fewer consumers are needed to recover the costs of production, so the market can support more producers’, hence, ‘lower production costs lead to saturation’ (Nie et al., 2010, p. 430). Nie (2010) further contends that ‘when costs are low, produces need fewer consumers to be viable, so more producers need fewer consumers to be viable, so more producers will enter the market and, between them, cover a greater range of locations in the market space’ (Nie et al. 2010, p. 430). The producer-customer relationship (real-world) could be observed akin the producer-audience relationship (virtual-world), as both are contending for the attention of the masses for different reasons, one for the purpose of profit-seeking and the other for viewership.

The blogosphere is also considered subcultural grassroots expression. ‘The term “blog” is short for Weblog, a new form of personal and subcultural grassroots expression involving summarizing and linking to other sites. In effect, blogging is a form of grassroots convergence’ (Jenkins, 2006, p. 215).

Table 1.4: Communication tools

Situation	Forms of communication	Directions	Example
Dyadic Interaction	One-to-one	Face-to-face Mediated through medium	Interactive advertising
Mass Communication	One-to-many	Uni-directional	Television, radio, newspaper
Dynamic networks	Many-to-many Peer-to-peer	Flexible Both producers and consumers of information	Internet – virtual communities, listserv, blogs

Source: Hoffman D.L. & Novak, T.P. (1996). Marketing in hypermedia computer-mediated environments: Conceptual foundations. *Journal of Marketing*. 60:50-68

Hoffman et al. (1996) conceptualizes communication tools into three broad segments as depicted above. The dyadic interaction is a situation where people either interact either face-to-face or mediated through a medium such as the case of interactive advertising. Mass communication on the other-hand is unidirectional and is translated as communication between an entity or entities to its intended audience but in a simultaneous afford. The final form of communication, the internet is defined as ‘a dynamic distributed network, potentially globe in scope, together with associated hardware and software to access the network, which enables consumers and producers to (1) provide and interactively access hypermedia content (‘machine interactivity’) and, (2) communicate through the medium (‘person interactivity’)’ (Hoffman et al., 1996, p 53).

With the rise of technology, our physical visibilities is freed of

‘[...] spatial and temporal properties of the circumstances in which we find ourselves: we cannot see beyond a certain distance (unless aided by a technical device of some kind), we cannot see in the absence of a certain amount of light (unless aided, again, by a technical device) and we cannot see into the future or the past’ but at the same time the [...] social and technical considerations (such as camera angles, editing processes and organizational interests and priorities) and by the new

types of interaction that these media make possible’
(Thompson, 2005, p. 35-36)¹⁵.

Thompson (2005) refers to the ‘de-spatialized simultaneity’, where people could view politicians on mediated communication technologies, as though it was occurring at the very moment through mediums like television and radio where people felt like it was a face to face conversation in a monologue form. Thompson (2005) contends that the internet has spurred

‘[...] the flow of audio-visual content into the networks of communication and enabled a much wider range of individuals to create and disseminate this content’ and most importantly ‘it is much more difficult to control the flow of symbolic content within it, and hence much more difficult for those in power to ensure that the images made available to individuals are those they would wish to see circulated’ (p 37-38).

In understanding where Thompson left us on technology, greater exploration of new media theorists is important.

New media optimists such as Diamond (2010) contends that the internet emancipates the power and dominance structure of the media, but Hindman’s (2009) study of the political blogosphere suggests that the ones that are most popular attain most traffic and comments, and others just get almost no attention. Similarly the polarization blog readership and hostile media theory does shed less optimism on the new media. Nevertheless, cascades of information provides the ability of a blogger to gain currency of viewership by posting information from other blogs, thus elevating the blogger to become an influential blogger bypassing the power structure or elitist domination of the blogosphere.

¹⁵ ‘With the help of their PR consultants and communications personnel, they seek to create and sustain a basis of support for their power and policies by carefully managing their visibility and self-presentation within the mediated arena of modern politics’ (Thompson, 2005, p. 42). He states that these techniques are employed to evade possibilities of the gaffe, the leak, the outburst and the scandal. For more information on his theory read Thompson, J.B. (1995). *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*. Stanford University Press

Figure 1.5: Network model of influential's



Source: Watts & Dodds (2007). *Influentials, Networks, and Public Opinion Formation*: p. 444

Watts et al. (2007) contends that most blogs have readership, though some may not be as widely read as others it still has the ability to influence people by sharing of ideas. Since some ideas might be picked up by the elitist blogs, then these blogs might independently be as influential and be treated as ‘opinion leaders’ in the blogosphere. If ‘it is generally the case that most social change is driven not by the influentials but by easily influenced individuals influencing other easily influenced individuals,’ then analysing blog strategies is definitely an important endeavour (Watts et al., 2007).

The internet has proliferated as communication tool due to two main arguments. First is the selective exposure which was first introduced by Festinger (1957) in his empirical study based on psychological theory of cognitive dissonance that people tend to prefer self-reinforcing messages instead conflicting opinions which could lead people to only read self-reinforcing made available through new media due to its technological capabilities such as hyperlinks or blogrolls.

Similarly, deliberative theorists lament that the polarization of American politics has strengthened and thickened opinions, leading to the decrement of tolerance and the inability to reach consensus (Ackerman & Fishkin, 2004), whilst others believe that partisan organizations can achieve beneficial deliberative outcomes (Cohen, 1989). In concordance, the ‘hostile media affect’ or ‘hostile media phenomenon’ is a well established phenomenon that has attracted scholarly discussion (Christen et al. 2002; Giner- Sorolla & Chaiken 1993; Vallone et al. 1985). It refers to the tendencies of people to view the news as biased against their own views and it asserts that at least with people who are highly involved in political controversies tend to produce negative evaluations of the specific source or even possibly the press as an institution. Burt (2000) contends that

Information can be expected to spread across the people in a market, but it will circulate within groups before it circulates between groups. A generic research finding is that information circulates more within than between groups—within a work group more than between groups, within a division more than between divisions, within an industry more than between industries (p 5).

Hence, groups are built on platforms with shared beliefs and thoughts. The functionality of the blogosphere such as blogrolls and linkages that could be linked through Social Networking Sites (SNS), strengthens these groups and their advocates by gravitating themselves together. These platforms then allow mobilization efforts to be more easily manoeuvred. Another aspect of the internet is its low barrier costs attached to forming such groups of dissent.

1.4.4 Identity in Malaysia

In considering the central question of collective identity in Malaysia, we need to understand the difference between identity and ethnicity for further elaboration on these two distinct concepts. In defining ethnicity, Korff (2001) contends that ‘[t]he

individual has to identify with and be attuned to a collectivity that the individual regards himself or herself a member of and, in turn, is regarded as belonging by others' (p 273). Crouch (1996) contents that primordial attachment due to 'shared values and cultures and ways of life' can cause conflict between distinctive groups when they come into contact with each other (p. 9). He also states that contention may not be limited to material gains, but also 'symbols of status, particularly those that enhance "group worth" and self-esteem by the group with the state' (Crouch, 1996, p9). Most importantly he states that '[w]hatever its origins, ethnic conflict can also be aggravated by the political struggle for power' and elites can '[...] find it convenient to turn to ethnic issues in order to mobilize popular support' (p 9). Kroff (2001) posits a comprehensive definition of ethnicity by stating that

'[e]thnicity is, then, both a strategy for improving or gaining access to scarce resources, and a means for reciprocal support or solidarity. To maintain a shared cultural identity requires internal cohesion through specific cultural values and behaviour patterns, which are enforced through means of social control (p. 272).

Both Kroff (2001) and Crouch (1996) agree that ethnicity is a form of collective identity in competition for economic and symbolic resources. The two also agree that primordial identity and the role of religion particularly Islam, run parallel in Malaysian. In a plural society like Malaysia, the predominant collectivises to which persons belong, or to which they are defined as belonging, are ethnic groups, namely Chinese, Malay and Indian' (Korff 2001, p. 273). Malays, generally the majority inhabitants in the country also happen to be Muslims¹⁶.

Constitutionally Malays are people that are people of the Muslim faith, practice Malay customs and speak the Malay language. According to Collins (1996) '[i]dentity is the lifeblood of a society; remove a society's identity and it will cease to

¹⁶ The east Malaysian 'bumiputeras' are an exception because some are Christians while others are of other religions and belief.

exist [...]’ and ‘[t]hreats to a society’s identity can range from territorial conquest to deportation or killing of community members to suppression of society’s expression of its own identity and interference with its ability to reproduce it- self’ than each of these civil society movements have an important role to play’ (p. 299). Collins (2006) provides his analysis of identity from the perspective of CSOs, and his case study was the Chinese identity in Malaysia, particularly Deng Jiao Xong.

Arguably the birth of ethnicization stemmed from Malaysia’s colonial fathers, in particular the British through census taking. Kroff (2001) aptly describes that the British census categorization was rather overarching as ‘[t]he Baba and Nonya Chinese, who had lived in Melaka for centuries, or the Cantonese, Hakka, Hokkien or Teochew Chinese did not see themselves as one ethnic group or as belonging together’ and similarly

[t]here were clear differences between the Malays in Kelantan and Kedah in the northeast (who were closely linked to Aceh and Pattani), the Buginese in Perak, the Minangkabau in Negri Sembilan, and the Malays in Johor or Riau. What different Malay groups had in common was their orientation towards Islam’. (p. 274)

This elucidates that the ethnicization process was a British legacy, but the Malaysian ruling regime has never really departed from it. Contentiously, this was part of its legitimization of the ruling regimes authority in promising that there will not be any domestic civil wars and rift between the different ethnicities.

Opposition parties were also toeing the ethnic lines in legitimizing itself as defenders of a certain ethnicity. For an instance the Democratics Action Party (DAP), ‘which is related to the Singapore PAP [People’s Action Party] and has a Chinese following, regard themselves as non-communal’ (Kroff, 2001, p. 275). The DAP struggles to be seen as an inclusive party. ‘More than its allies in Pakatan Rakyat, the DAP has invested resources in targeting two groups of voters - Malays

and the youth' (Susan, 2012a). PAS is fully Muslim, while PKR is predominantly Malay.

Studying the Malaysian regime and its socio-political landscape cannot be separated from its multi-ethnic configurations, as its pursued ideologies have been sensitive to this factor. Ethnicities demands have been protected through a consociationalist type of government, where '[p]ower-sharing could be negotiated among the major contending ethnic or regional groups, power might devolve to the regional level in the name of "autonomy"' and 'Malaysia arguably provides a good positive model, though it should be remembered that this system has institutionalized Malay dominance over the political system , contributed to extensive patronage to "indigenous" Malays [...]' (Haggard et al., 1995, p. 357 – 358).

The 'social contract' established before independence was agreed upon that Indians and Chinese would be given citizenship on the basis that the special rights of the Malays would be protected added with the Malays control over the political realm, while the Chinese was assured of their continuity over the economical hegemony (Crouch 1996, Jomo, 1990). It was after the 1969 General Elections (herein GE) and the subsequent racial riots that followed, this social contract that gave birth to the Malayan nation state was revisited and the NEP (New Economic Plan) was introduced. The 'institutionalized' preferential treatment placed, was indeed important to assist the Malays to gain equilibrium with the other ethnicities, particularly the Chinese and Indians as it was seen as Malaysia's remedy for survival (Chopra, 1974). In essence, the initial institutionalization of the NEP was in concordance with redistributive measures in view to eradicate poverty irrespective of race and ethnicity while simultaneously it attempted to assist the majority Malays to gain entry larger proportions of the economic pie in the nation (Chopra, 1974; Jomo,