LEAPING TO VIRTUAL COMMUNITY: MOTIVATIONAL BEHAVIOURS FOR BLOGGERS

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ABSTRACT

People nowadays roam in the new realm as we know it today as cyberspace. The intersection of humanity and technology has created a new world known as virtual community. Most of us today exist using platforms without meeting face to face and yet able to exchange words and ideas. Blog is one type of virtual community which is growing in its popularity day by day. People who roam in the realm of blogs known as bloggers express or share their feelings, emotions, experience and information. The catalysts that drive this community to grow rapidly are based on two types of motivations which are intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. The intrinsic motivation is the process of performing interesting activities and experience that bloggers find enjoyable and satisfying. Whereas, extrinsic motivation for bloggers focuses on the external rewards whereby the readers and external bodies of social media give recognition to the successfulness of each blog existed in the cyberspace. In the context of Malaysia's blogging culture, people started taking notice of the impact of blogs during the 2008 general election when youth voters were being said to be influenced largely by the views and opinions posted in the political blogs. The blogging trend later transcends into other genre such as entertainment, fashion, business and charity. The existence of these various genres is explained through The Users and Gratification Theory which proposed that individual needs and motivations are the driving force behind people's interaction with media. Hence, this conceptual paper explores the ever changing social media landscape, phenomenon and possibilities that could shape virtual communities and bloggers motivation behaviours.

Keywords: Bloggers, behaviour, motivation, virtual community

INTRODUCTION

Cyberspace is a platform of total interconnectedness of human beings through any medium electronic such as computers or any telecommunications medium without regard to their geographical places. That's why most people today love to travel virtually using the cyberspace with bunches of group that shared common interest together. This virtual community phenomenon allows people to share a common interest through ideas or feeling via the Internet. This online platform gathers people in an online space to communicate, connect and get to know each other better over the time. According Rheingold (2009), virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Internet when enough people carry on public discussions long enough and with sufficient human feeling to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace.

People in the virtual community use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot idle talk (Rheingold, 1994). De Souza and Preece then (2004) offer a broader definition of virtual community which defines a group of people who come together for a purpose online and who are governed by norms and polices.

The key elements of virtual community or online community by De Souza and Preece (2004) included social factors that is sociability and usability of software used. Preece (2000) verify that virtual community represent by four elements (Figure 1). First, are *people*, who interact to satisfy needs or to perform roles such as leaders or moderator (somebody who oversees an online community). Second, these individuals have shared the same *purpose* that tends them to interact such as exchange of information, needs, interests or a services. Third, the *policies* are a standard regulation form to guide the interaction in the virtual community such as rules, protocols, laws, rituals and tacit assumptions or norms. Fourth, the computer system through *software* mediates interaction and allows a feeling of togetherness. This software includes synchronous (a real time applications, such as chat rooms) and asynchronous (a delayed applications, such as email and bulletin board).
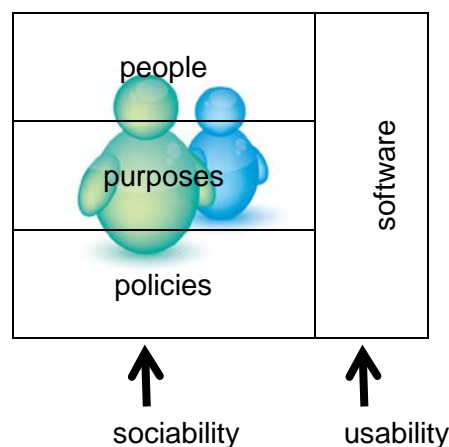

Figure 1: Key elements of virtual community (Adapted from de Souza & Preece, 2004)

The metaphor of communities existed on bulletin board services. Then it moved on to in any coffee house or something similar to helps users visualize the community. The idea then expands by Marshall McLuhan (1964) when he explained the notion of cyberspace known as 'global village'. The concept of globally communities' accessibility will able the users to share and discuss any topics by or with other members anywhere and anytime in the nation or in the world with the help of modern communication. Meanwhile, Porter (2004) defines five Ps of virtual communities categories (Figure 2).
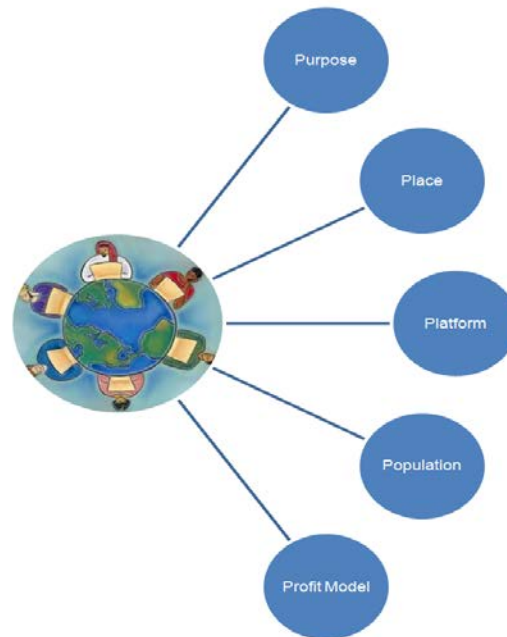

Figure 2: Virtual community categories

The purpose of virtual communities create content of interaction which describes the specific focus of discourse, or focal content of communication among community members. While the *p*lace are the extent of technology mediation of interaction which defines the location of interaction, where interaction occurs either completely virtually or only partially virtually. The use of platform refers to the technical design of interaction in the virtual community, where design enable synchronous communication, ansynchronous communication or both. Then the population refers to the pattern of interaction among community members as described by group structure and type of social ties. For group structure, it can be a virtual community forum group or network group either it big or a small group. Meanwhile for social ties, the members in the population may have a strong or weak bonding within the members in the community. The last Ps, profit model as a return on interaction refers to whether a community creates tangible economic value where value is defined as revenue-generation.

BLOG AS VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

Blogging started as an online journal in the 1990's where people shared their interests, hobbies and thought online (Bullas, 2012). According to Blanchard (n.d), blogs or weblogs are interactive webpages in which the blog owner or author (known as bloggers) posts regular

updates. Blog can be about particular topic, current events, or personal thoughts and expression much like a personal journal.

According to Wei (n.d) blogs are often determined as virtual community because of the similar interest. Each of these blog communities has its own practices and behaviors, which are shaped by explicit community guidelines. The blogging communities developed their own norms, unique to the medium and the culture of each group informed by the blog format. The blog format allows for highly individualistic expression. These individualistic blog will often join in communities of similar views ior interests linked to each other in their sidebar navigation menus (Blood, 2002). Empirical research has also indentified common practices among blogs in general.

The term 'blogging' existed from the root word 'blog' which defined as an online diary, or to be specific, "frequently updated websites where content (text, pictures, sound files, etc) is posed on a regular basis and displayed in a reverse chronological" (Xiaohui & Li, 2010). Millions of people have started blogs and millions more reading them. The existing of free and easy use software programs, created this blogging phenomenon. Blogging is one of the most recently developed techniques to enable ordinary people to promote a message to the world (Holloway, 2006). Blogging became accessible because it's low entry barrier. A basic blog is easy to establish and update, requiring no special technical skills (Lang, 2005). Blogs are often updated daily or weekly and frequently take form of a personal diary (Herring, Scheidt, Wright & Bonus, 2004). The most widely cited definition of blog is frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence (Herring et al, 2005).

People who are open to new experiences and those who are highly sensitive are likely to be bloggers (Guadagno, Okdie,& Eno, 2008). Therefore, individuals known as bloggers provide commentary on their lives, values and attitudes that often contain pictures and video (Woodside et al, 2008). Blogging enables the bloggers to participate in giving opinion based on the related experience. Blogging experiences might evoke a state of mind that affects experiential outcomes among them (Mathwick and Rigdon, 2004). The successful of blogging are relatively because it was easy to create and maintain without any technical web knowledge from the users.

BLOGGING MOTIVATION BEHAVIOR

One most important component of behavior thought to play a vital role in influencing people's action is motivation. Motivation refers to an activated state within a person consisting of drive urges, wishes, and desires that lead to goal-directed behavior (Caro & García, 2007; Mowen & Minor, 1998). Motivation is the major antecedent leading to actual behavior that has attracted many research efforts in psychology. Past several years, scholars have taken many approaches to study this phenomenon regarding bloggers and readers motivation. Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, and Swartz (2004), have discovered five major motivations for blogging: to document life experiences, to provide commentary and opinions, to express deeply felt emotions, to articulate ideas through writing, and to form and maintain community forums. They examined blogging as one form of personal communication.

Kaye (2005) established six motivations for reading blogs: desire to seek information on current issues and check media coverage, having greater convenience in accessing particular content, desire to gather information to fulfill discussion preparation needs, surveillance of the political landscape, surveillance of social issues, and desire to express views with like-minded

people. Kaye also finds that blog readers have higher levels of self-efficacy, interest in politics and current issues, and, interestingly, trust in the government.

The phenomenon of blogging motivation began to integrate on social psychology theories or frameworks by having deep investigating incentives underlying bloggers' behavior based on the earlier descriptions of motivations. The psychologists supports that blogging can hardly be characterized as a border behaviours for bloggers. Later Brady (2006) then proposed a positive feedback system framework bridging reading and posting behavior together in analyzing blogging and found that positive feedback from readers was a fundamental motivation promoting bloggers to stick to blog. Huang, Shen, Lin and Chang (2007) agreed through their model on blogging behavior referring to bloggers and readers through interaction-oriented behavior and information-oriented behavior.

Cognitive psychologists assert that an individual's behavior is influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Calder and Staw, 1975). However, Lu and Hsiao (2007) indicated that personal outcome expectations of social cognitive theory directly impacted intention to share information on blogs. These sharing norms affect the intention to update the weblogs than personal outcome expectations or self-expression.

According to Ekdale, Namkoong, Fung and Perlmutter (2010) intrinsic motivations are those cause an individual to engage in an activity because the process of performing interesting, enjoyable and satisfying activity. In other hand, extrinsic motivations lead to an individual engage in an activity because of the pressures or rewards in achieving outcomes that come from outside individual. While among the researches in Asian Countries, Liu, Liao and Zeng (2007) similarly found that there were two greatest motivational factors for bloggers, the intrinsic motivation of expressing feelings and the extrinsic motivation of connecting with other people.

Intrinsic motivation normally leads to attachment in an activity for its own sake for instance doing something because of satisfaction or it is interesting whereas the reinforcement of a reward or the potential value of the outcomes is related to the extrinsic motivations (Li, Lin, & Yat-Sen, 2012). Bloggers describe their lives, provide commentary and opinions, express their emotions, present ideas, and maintain community forums (Nardi, Shiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004). Bloggers engage in multiple experiences relating to various type of information-seeking behaviour (Park, Ahn and Kim, 2010). This experience will meet the interest especially for the readers that interested to the information. Moreover, according to Mooney and Rollins (2008), by creating, sharing and influencing information, they (the bloggers) became as an active creators and owners in a way to manage their content.

BLOGGER MOTIVATION BEHAVIOR

The creation of blog related to the motivational behavior participation among bloggers. For bloggers, it drives their online experience to create a virtual space strategically construct their desired identities (Jung, Vorderer & Song, 2007). Blogs as a medium of interaction are also powerful tools of influence (Drezner & Farrell, 2004) and the issue is whether the online interaction influences the design behavior of blogs. Kaye (2005, 2007), Kim and Johnson (2005) and Seltzer and Mitrook (2006) stated bloggers are motivated to blog in order to satisfy their distinct needs and wants. Nelson (2006) suggests that bloggers create different types of blogs that serve distinctive purpose. Besides that, Viegas (2005) reveals that bloggers are motivated with a desire to express themselves, communicate ideas and connect with other for non-

financial reasons. Huang et al. (2007) agreed with Figueredo (2005) that the purpose of creating blog is to share heterogeneous motivations.

As all blogging activities involve blogger-reader participation though two behavioral orientations of blogging: information search and social interaction (Huang et al., 2007). He also founded that, bloggers are likely to act like independent agents who utilize every design of their blogs to obtain content. Similarly to Stigler (1961) and Nelson (1970), they assumed that bloggers are rational, adaptive, and calculating agents who maximize their utilities by searching for information. Sherry's (1990) added that rather than information search, blogging behavior also relates to social embedded in the sense of creation and consumption of content in blog.

VIRTUAL COMMUNITY: USES AND GRATIFICATIONS PERSPECTIVE

In the early years, the Uses and Gratification perspective was to identify and profile audience motivations for the use of radio and early television media. This theory proposes that individual needs and motivations are the driving force behind people's interaction with media (Blumler, 1979; Katz, Blumler et al., 1974; Levy & Windhal, 1984). This theory modifies the previous communication theory which emphasizes media effects, but focuses on an audience's attitudes and psychological conditions.

It later progressed through advertising and marketing. Now, with the emergence of new media, researchers are using the basic understanding of this theory and apply it to medium such as telephone which is now known as an emerging multimedia device (Leung & Wei, 2000). Basically this theory has provided a basis from which it considers the "how and why" approach to understanding media use motivations (Herzog, 1944). Rubin (2002) summarized and proposed five assumptions intrinsic in uses-and-gratifications paradigm: (a) people's communication behavior is functional and goal-directed which implies individual and social consequences; (b) people select and use specific communication vehicles variously in purpose of satisfying their unique needs or desires; (c) expectations about the media and media content are shaped by individual's such social and psychological factors as personalities, social environment, interpersonal interactions, and communication channel availability; (d) availability of competing communication channels renders audiences freedom to choose the most appropriate media for gratifications.

Existing research on Uses and Gratification propose people use media either for the content carried by a medium to seek information or entertainment, or to experience the media usage process for example playing with the technology. According to Stafford &Stafford (1996) these two broad dimensions are characterized as content gratifications and process gratifications. Internet users may be motivated by enjoyment of the usage processes of random browsing and site navigation (Hoffman & Novak, 1996), while users of specific Internet sites might be motivated by the desire for specific site-related informational content, such as product or store information (Stafford & Stafford, 1998).

Shao (2009) stated that user generated medium such as facebook, twitter or blogs are used for different purposes for each individual. It varies from seeking for information and entertainment, social interaction and community development, self expression and self actualization and interdependence of consuming, participating and producing.

Information and entertainment.

According to McQuail (2000), traditional and new media has revealed two typical motives for media consumption, namely, information seeking and entertainment. Media has been long known to fulfill entertainment ends as escaping from problems, relaxing, getting aesthetic enjoyment, filling time, seeking emotional release and sexual arousal.

The use of new media for gratification diverse from each category of users. Teenagers such as college students have different motivations in seeking for information sources. However, when students were asked about information sources, students who reported high use of the Internet as an information source reported lower usage of television as an information source. In the context of social network services, there is a growing importance of the Internet as a source of information and as a job-seeking tool. There is a growing importance of job search on the Internet. College audiences appear to have embraced the technology in their job searching strategies (Parker et al., 2000).

Another reason for seeking information in new media specifically in blogs is to get hold of the latest updates on news. The September 11 atack has transformed the internet sub-culture into a primetime media phenomenon. People were looking for other news sources, and the unique relationship between the reader and the blogger is a personal connection that gives comfort for people in times of stress (Phillips, 2002).

This phenomenon spreads all over Asia with China, South Korea and Malaysia taking the lead in online content creation and socializing. Media agency Universal McCann published the striking results of a survey of 9,460 online users worldwide. There are 170 million blog creators and 340 million blog readers worldwide. Globally, almost 60 percent of respondents agree that blogging is a positive form of expression, 34 percent agree that they can trust bloggers' opinions (Ooi, 2007).

However, the trustworthiness of informations in blogs are subjective. Malaysia's Tourism Minister, Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Mansor, was quoted as saying, "All bloggers are liars. They cheat people using all kinds of methods." His remarks came after an Indonesian broadcast journalist blogged about Malaysian bureaucracy while she was filming in the country (Ooi, 2007). While political news and information fared poorly across the region with only 14% interested in reading their blogs, Malaysians are more keen in reading this type of blogs with 20% listing of this type of blog as being of interest (PRNewsWire Asia, 2006).

Entertainment is a huge part of attraction that leads users to surf the internet. Certainly, all manner of online games, music, and other pure entertainment content exist on the Internet, but the content gratification developed here seems to highlight informational content for special consideration as a desired outcome of consumer Internet access (Stafford et.al,. 2004). A blog-user for instance should be able to relate to the experience of enjoying an interesting blog site or network so much that one loses awareness of time passing. When this occurs, the blog-user achieves a state of flow, which signifies extremely high-emotional involvement in which he/she is engrossed in the blogging activity (Park et.al,. 2010).

It is also observed that people increasingly make use of MySpace, Facebook, and blogs to learn how to make sense of things from their peers on just about any subject (Bowman and Willis, 2003). Thus, stressed individuals can go there for relaxing clips while bored individuals

can visit for excitatory materials, and through this method individuals can bring their physiological arousal and affect back to optimal, comfortable levels.

Social interaction.

Individuals serve their social interactions needs by participating with the content as well as other users of the new media. This social interactions take place when people rate the content, save to their favorites, share with others, post comments, etc. User-to-user interaction occurs when people interact with each other through e-mail, instant message, chat room, message boards and etc. (Chan, 2006).Virtual communities form when people carry on public discussions long enough with sufficient human feeling to form personal relationships (Rheingold, 2000).

In virtual communities, individuals can easily find others who share similar interests and goals and are able to voice opinions and concerns in a supportive environment (Tossberg, 2000). Moreover, by joining a group, people may get a sense of communion, such as a feeling of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together (McMillan and Chavis, 1986).

Trammell (2005) noted that the many uses of a specific Internet tool for example blogging, are driven by different motivations such as users' self-expression, their social interaction in commenting on others' sites, and information needed in linking to others' content on their own blogs. Several scholars concluded that so-called "ordinary bloggers" were motivated by social interaction and the desire to document their lives.

More interestingly, there are few expectations offered by existing theory as to what connection might exist between web site interaction behavior and social gratifications for Internet use. If Internet sites serve as focal points for online communities, or even if they are the interface for consumer-corporation relationships, there are likely to be important social implications to the scenarios in future to come (Stafford, 2004).

Producing for self-expression.

The ability to produce and publish our own content such as videos, pictures, blogs, and personal home pages are one of the gratifications that people get from indulging themselves in virtual community (Shao, 2009).

The factors for such indulgance is to inform and entertain others (Bowman and Willis, 2003), or to trigger others' responses and participations. Self-expression refers to the expression of one's own identity, especially one's individuality. It is assumed that people have a need to present their "true" or inner self to the outside world, and to have others know them as they know themselves (McKenna and Bargh, 1999). These needs can be fulfilled through blogging, video casting, and other self-presentation activities, which allow the significance of who one is and what one does to show himself/herself.

These self expression has gone nearly half, 46% in Asia's blogosphere with those online actively blogging, according to research released by Microsoft's MSN and Windows Live Online Services Business. The research showed that blogging is a social phenomenon with Asians

primarily blogging as a means to maintain and build their social connections and to express themselves (PRNewsWire Asia, 2006).

The region's bloggers are primarily driven by the need to express themselves and share their lives with family and friends. According to a reasearch, the highest number of respondents (53%) indicated that they chose to start a blog to share a diary or photo album with loved ones. User created content and community based online services are really popular. Blogging now has moved into the mainstream and become a popular way for people to stay in touch with family and friends. Instead of sending out mass emails or holiday letters, people are using their blogs to express themselves (PRNewsWire Asia, 2006).

Blogging also gives the opportunity for individuals to provide commentary on their lived experiences, values, and attitudes that often contain pictures and video (Woodside *et al.* , 2008). Blog-users engage in multiple consumption experiences relating to various types of information-seeking behavior. By creating, sharing, and influencing information they are active creators, owners, and managers of symbols and signs of consumption (Mooney and Rollins, 2008).

Interdependence of consuming, participating, and producing.

The content is also produced for attracting the attention of a larger number of consumers ranging from consumer products, entertainment and information. Posting comments can help consumers understanding of certain content; "rating" can help people easily find the most popular videos, music, or blogs; and "sharing with others" directly brings certain contents to someone for his/her consumption. On the other hand, consumers may become participants, thus helping enlarge the participating population and develop virtual communities (Shao, 2009).

In Malaysia for instance, personal bloggers have thrived in the online environment and have created lively communities, even attracting businesses to engage with them. The most successful business-related blogs emphasize personal interests. Often, the blogger has a strong personal connection with his or her blog community. A blogger, Kenny Sia has created a blog that is made up of satire, crude humor, observations on everyday life, personal experiences, descriptions of travels, product reviews and politics was approached by businesses that want to advertise and offer promotions on his site. Businesses have seen the potential of online engagement and are using it to build business relationships. In Malaysia, it seems that so long as the people steer clear of politics, race and religion, they could thrive in the virtual world (Ooi, 2007).

As for the marketers' perspective, they need to understand the consumer motivations to access the Internet which is critical for the success of e-commerce. Uses and gratifications theory is useful in the development of theoretical dimensions representative of consumer motivations for media use. Recognition of consumers' internet uses and sought gratifications for Internet use is vital so that marketers would be more responsive to consumer needs hence lead to greater degrees of consumer value for the Internet as a medium (Stafford et.al,. 2004). By using social media as an advertising platform, marketers have the opportunity to engage with their consumers on a more sentimental level. Advertisers and marketers are increasingly becoming more aware of the significance of social media and the value it brings to their communication mix (Chong, 2009).

As for marketing in blogs concern, India stood out showing a strong interest in business blogs, ranking them as the most interesting, versus the rest of the region where just over a

quarter were interested in blogs written by business leaders. Korea also showed high interest in this area (PRNewsWire Asia, 2006) . In Malaysia, AirAsia has been a very strong performer in social media. Malaysian companies are now thinking of which social media to choose to reach their potential clients. Social media has proved to allow businesses to improve customer service, reduce costs and increase sales (Mior, 2009).

CONCLUSION

The popularity of blogs as a modern medium of communication allowed users to express or debate critically in the online groups and create the virtual communities. The aim of this paper was to identify the purpose that motivated bloggers to create blog in the virtual communities. It includes the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation behaviour which influenced the bloggers. These motivations drive the bloggers to connect more frequent and different genres of content with the members in the communities. This paper also explains the motivational behaviours of virtual community which focuses on bloggers from a uses and gratifications perspective. First, people consume new media contents in order to fulfil their information and entertainment needs. Social interaction is the second factor that pulls people to participate in the virtual world. The sense of belonging and acceptance from the virtual community give the acknowledgement that most people crave for. Third, new media is used for producing self-expression. Forming a self identity within the virtual community and the need to present their "true" or inner self to the outside world becomes a necessity for those using this new media. Finally, interdependence of consuming, participating, and producing focusses on e-commerce or bussiness developments through the internet from the marketer to the end users. With all these perspectives taken into account, blogging as a virtual community is taken a whole new level permeating across business and social world.

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