

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**THE UTILISATION OF ONLINE
ALTERNATIVE MEDIA AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS TOWARDS
PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY:
A MALAYSIAN CASE**

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Thesis submitted in fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

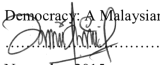
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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the results of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledge as referenced work. This thesis has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any degree or qualification.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the utilisation of online alternative media and its implications towards participatory democracy. Since the enactment of the Communication and Multimedia Act 1999, online alternative media such as *Malaysiakini*, *Malaysia Today*, and *the Malaysian Insider* have played a pivotal role in many political events including the post-Mahathir-Anwar political crisis, the 2008 financial crisis, election campaign, Anwar's sodomy case, and Dr. Hasan Ali's disclosure of PAS weaknesses. Online alternative media assist in spearheading some other relevant issues that reflect the undercurrent of discontentment or otherwise the participation of peoples' voices towards democracy. Dissident voices become aloud without fear to voice out their opinions and dissatisfaction on political issues via online alternative media. Indirectly, it forms a force for a shift of democratic paradigm. Among others this study has explored the role of online alternative media and answered the enquiry of how Malaysians have utilised it for participatory democracy. This study employed the qualitative research method by means of doing semi-structured interviews and qualitative content analysis as data analysis techniques. Within this research approach, examples of the democratic phenomenon were analysed to gain a sense of its general essence. The findings imply that participatory democratic stance via the alternative media is less significant. There were instances where the people voices through online alternative media have gained attention from the policy and decision-makers, and in some other instances it has worked hand in hand with the traditional media.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Online media is a special kind of medium, differing from earlier forms in the variety of its applications and impact. As well as being a realm of social integration, it has important steering functions in both material production and administrative practices which should not be neglected in examining its role as a medium. The existence of online alternative media, concurrently, opens up more space for the public voice. It is an arena of citizen activity (Sassi, 2001).

Also, the public needs a high level of engagement with daily news that invites public discussions and debates. Hence, the utilisation of online alternative media has the potential to contribute toward democratic participation. In addition, online media represents a revolutionary change in space-time relations. In seeming to extinguish space with time, cyber-technology allows communication through online media to appear instantaneously upon demands at multiple points in an ever-shifting network of connectivity.

Meanwhile, the term “public journalism” has been coined. It means journalism has a purpose to improve the quality of lives by fostering participation and debates (McQuail, 2010, p.182). The revolutionary online media technology contains the potential for users to avoid refinement and resist attempts by the state to be in charge of its uses. The potentially massive use of online media increases in information, points of connectivity, and the spatial scope of communication, which adds to the difficulty in faced by many governments or regulatory bodies that want to monitor and control all content (Bakardjieva, 2005). Thus, online alternative news caters to the function of online conversation.

Moreover, online alternative media has high contribution toward the development of a new form of participatory democracy. It considers the quantity of political discussion