BLOGGING AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

AMONG MINORITY INDIANS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this research is to examine whether blogs can foster political mobilization among minority populations, using the minority Indians in Malaysia as the context. In particular, this research studies the characteristics of blogs from a non-Western perspective as a network structure, suitable for communication and coordination to organize collective action and political mobilization. Concepts: This study builds a theoretical framework showing the relationship between space for activism and collective actors in pursuit of political mobilization. Concepts relating to the public sphere, civil society, collective identity and resistance identity are explored. Methodology: Research was primarily qualitative and based on two case studies: i) the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) protest rally on November 25, 2007, and ii) the defeat of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) party in the 2008 Malaysian general elections. The analysis based on chronological narratives was multidimensional; data collected were from three broad sources, i) documentation and archival records from blogs, ii) individual and focus group interviews, and iii) direct observations. Analysis: The Hindraf rally occurred in the wake of the systematic political and cultural oppression of minority Indians, resulting in a resistance movement and culminating in the protest. The rally was instrumental in the defeat of the MIC in the 12th general election. Conclusion: The findings show that blogs can foster political mobilization among ethnic minority Indians in Malaysia. Key themes that emerged from examining the case studies in the context of minority politics in Malaysia are the importance of i) context, ii) collective identity, iii) links between traditional and new media, iv) access to the Internet, v) politics of credibility and identification, and vi) politics of representation. Contributions: This research is the first to examine the relationship between blogs, minority population and political mobilization in Malaysia. It also discusses contributions towards conceptual and methodological frameworks for research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ii
ABSTRACT iii
LIST OF TABLES ix
LIST OF FIGURES x

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION
1.1 Context of the Study 12
1.1.1 The Malaysian Indians' Issue 13
1.2 Need and Purpose of Study 14
1.3 Research Questions 15
1.4 Research Methodology 15
1.4.1 Selection of Case Studies 16
1.5 Research Significance 17
1.6 Dissertation Structure 18

CHAPTER 2: THE BLOGOSPHERE AS MEDIUM FOR MOBILIZATION
2.1 Introduction 19
2.2 History of Internet Technology 19
2.2.1 Communication Technology Evolution 21
2.3 History of Blogs 22
2.4 Types of Blogs 24
2.4.1 Filter Blogs 24
2.4.2 Journal Blogs 25
2.5 Characteristics of Blogs 25
2.6 Blogosphere as a Network 27
2.6.1 Contextualized Information 27
2.6.2 Continuity and Materiality 28
2.7 Conclusion 30

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
3.1 Introduction 31
3.2 Literature on Internet Mobilization 31
3.3 Concepts of Space and Actors 32
3.3.1 (Virtual) Space for Activism 33

3.4 Mobilization – Collective Actors....36
3.4.1 Civil Society for Empowerment....36
3.4.2 Blogging Community....38
3.4.3 Blogging and Collective Identity....40
3.5 The Global-Local Connection....42
3.6 Conclusion....43

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY
4.1 Introduction....45
4.2 Quantitative Research: Online Survey....45
4.2.1 Participants....45
4.2.2 Measures....46
4.2.3 Procedure....46
4.3 Qualitative Research: Case Studies....47
4.3.1 Chronological Structures....48
4.3.2 Documentation and Archival Records....48
4.3.2.1Narratives from Blogs....49
4.3.3. Interviews – Individual and Focus Group....52
4.3.4 Direct Observation....52
4.4 Conclusion....53

CHAPTER 5: MALAYSIAN INDIANS: THE PAST AND PRESENT
5.1 Introduction....54
5.2 Overview of Malaysia....54
5.2.1 History & National Identity....54
5.2.2 Ethnic Relations....57
5.2.3 Governance Structure....58
5.3 Malaysian Ethnic Indian Community....59
5.3.1 Malaysian Indians as Migrant Workers....60
5.3.2 Economic Marginalization....61
5.3.3 Political Marginalization....62
5.3.3.1 Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) Party....63
5.3.4 Socio-Religious-Cultural Marginalization....64
5.4 Lack of Space for Activism....67

5.4.1 Civil Society Activism....70
5.5 Conclusion....71

CHAPTER 6: MALAYSIA'S INTERNET DEVELOPMENT
6.1 Introduction....73
6.2 Internet Development in Malaysia....73
6.3 Re-constituting the Opposition Movement Online....76
6.4 The Malaysian Blogosphere....77
6.4.1 History and Development of Blogs in Malaysia....78
6.4.2 Malaysian Indian Blogosphere (MIB)....82
6.4.2.1 Malaysian Indian Blog Readers Characteristics....83
6.4.2.2 Malaysia Indian Bloggers' Characteristics....86
6.5 Conclusion....89

CHAPTER 7: CASE STUDY 1: HINDRAF PROTEST RALLY
7.1 Introduction....91
7.2 The Rise of Hindraf....92
7.3 Phase 1 of Hindraf Activism: January to August 2007....94
7.3.1 Event 1: Peaceful assembly and memo submission, June 2007....94
7.3.2 Global Attention....97
7.3.3.. Event 2: 18-Points Memorandum Submission, August 2007....97
7.4 Phase 2 of Hindraf Activism: September to November 2007....100
7.4.1 Awareness Campaigns and Forums....100
7.4.2 More Temple Demolishment....102
7.4.3 Reconstituting the Opposition Movement....105
7.4.4 Event 3: Appeal letter sent to British Prime Minister....106
7.4.5 Event 4: Hindraf Rally, November 25, 2007....113
7.5 The Aftermath....116
7.6 Analysis and Discussion....118
7.6.1 Communal Resistance identity....118
7.6.2 Blogs as Space and Medium for Mobilization....119
7.6.3 The Power of Links....120
7.6.4 Credibility and Identification....122
7.6.5 Global and Local Connection....123

7.7 Conclusion.....124

CHAPTER 8: CASE STUDY II: THE DEFEAT OF THE MALAYSIAN INDIAN CONGRESS IN THE 2008 ELECTIONS

8.1 Introduction.....125
8.2 The 2008 General Election.....126
8.2.1 The Dominance of UMNO – *Barisan Nasional*.....127
8.2.2 High-Voter Turnout and BN Suffers Setback.....128
8.3 Development Prior to the Election.....130
8.3.1 Malaysian Indians in the 2008 Election.....130
8.4 Phase 3: Post-Hindraf Rally, December to March 2008.....131
8.4.1 "Hindraf 5" Campaign.....132
8.4.2 *Makkal Sakthi (*People Power) Spirit.....139
8.5 The 2008 General Election Results.....143
8.6 Analysis and Discussion.....144
8.6.1 The Importance of Collective Identity.....145
8.6.2 Blogs as Space and Medium for Mobilization.....146
8.6.3 The State's Attitude towards the Internet.....146
8.6.4 Global and Local Connection.....147
8.7 Conclusion.....147

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION: BLOGGING AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

9.1 Introduction.....148
9.2 Research Questions Revisited.....148
9.3 Key Themes and Patterns.....154
9.3.1 Importance of Collective Identity.....154
9.3.2 Importance of Linkages.....154
9.3.3 Importance of Internet Access.....154
9.3.4 The Politics of Credibility and Identification.....155
9.3.5 Importance of Context.....156
9.3.6 Importance of representation.....156
9.4 Implications.....156
9.5 Contributions.....157
9.5.1 Theoretical.....157

9.5.2 Methodological and Analytical Frames..... 158
APPENDIX A 159
APPENDIX B..... 169
APPENDIX C..... 170
APPENDIX D..... 173
APPENDIX E..... 174
REFERENCES.....175

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Communication models.....22

Table 4.1. Number of interviewees.....52

Table 8.1. Seats won by MIC since 1999 elections..... 129

Table 8.2 Hindraf and MIC-related events.....142

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1. Conceptual framework of web 2.0 applications.....20
Figure 2.2. Evolution between web 1.0 and web 2.0.....21
Figure 2.3. The blogosphere as a network.....26
Figure 3.1. Conceptual framework.....32
Figure 3.2. Civil society activism model.....37
Figure 4.1. Malaysian Indian bloggers' logo..... 51
Figure 5.1. The framework for understanding the context.....55
Figure 5.2. Map of Malaysia.....56
Figure 6.1. Posters created during "Rocky and Jeff Ooi campaign".....81
Figure 6.2. Cyber-protest posters of detainees.....82
Figure 6.3. Total respondents of MIB survey.....83
Figure 6.4. Number of blog readers by current location.....83
Figure 6.5. Number of blog readers by age and sex..... 84
Figure 6.6. Number of blog readers by education attainment.....84
Figure 6.7. Number of blog readers by most preferred reading materials.....85
Figure 6.8. Number of blog readers by types of blog mostly visited.....85
Figure 6.9. Number of blog readers by reasons for blogs as source of information....86
Figure 6.10. Number of bloggers by current location.....86
Figure 6.11. Percentage of bloggers by age and sex.....87
Figure 6.12. Number of bloggers by year and month of blogging.....87
Figure 6.13. Number of blogs by types of blogs.....88
Figure 6.14. Number of bloggers by motivation for blogging.....88
Figure 6.15. Number of bloggers by activities relating to blog postings.....89
Figure 7.1. Pictures of temple demolition..... 95
Figure 7.2. Pictures of Padang Jawa temple demolition.....103
Figure 7.3. Roadblocks causing traffic congestion.....110
Figure 7.4. Pictures taken from traffic cameras.....114
Figure 7.5. Pictures by citizen reporters sent to *Bolehland*.....115
Figure 7.6. Pictures of rally posted on the Internet.....116
Figure 7.7. Links and information flow between media and communities.....120
Figure 8.1. Protest poster of the Hindraf 5.....133
Figure 8.2. Pictures of Singaporean Seelan Palay's hunger strike.....134
Figure 8.3. The contest for Sungai Siput parliamentary seat.....136

Figure 8.4. Protest banner against MIC.....137
Figure 8.5. Poster of Hindraf's Roses campaign.....138
Figure 8.6. A stall at *Thaipusam* selling "Makkal Sakti" merchandises.....141
Figure 8.7. Flyer of "Think Before You Vote".....143
Figure 8.8. A *Makkal Sakthi* poster..... 144
Figure 9.1. The network structure of blogs.....149
Figure 9.2. The "cumulative-effect" of factors on mobilization.....153

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context of the Study

The objective of this research is to examine whether blogs can foster political mobilization among minority populations, for example, the ethnic minority Indians in Malaysia. Social media such as blogs have seen exponential growth in readership and referencing (Keren, 1996). Yet, there remains a good deal of controversy about what blogging means for political mobilization in a non-Western setting like Malaysia, governed by a "semi-democracy"[1] state consisting of traditional ethnic-based politics, and state-controlled mainstream media.

Blogs, short for Weblogs are frequently updated online journals where citizens post links and commentary in reverse chronological order. To contribute to a blog is the activity of "blogging" (Blood, 2002). Mobilization, "...is the process by which a collective actor gathers and organizes its resources for the pursuit of a shared objective against the resisting of the groups opposing that objective" (Melucci, 1996, p. 289).

The network structure of the Internet– many-to-many communication mode – have not only transformed the way people produce and consume news, but have become an important tool for contemporary political mobilization (McCaughey & Ayers, 2003; McKinley & Naidoo, 2004; Kellner, 2002; Bennett, 2003; Papacharissi, 2002; Giralt & Gomez, n.d.; Suarez, 2006). The potential (space) opened up by certain technologies for different types of mobilization and protest, are increasingly becoming popular among groups who see a highly subversive component in them (Norris, 2005; Giralt & Gomez, n. d.).

For example, political activism in countries such as Tunisia in 2010, Egypt in 2011, Spain in 2004 (Giralt & Gomez, n.d.; Suarez, 2006), Burma in 1999 (Danitz & Strobel, 1999), Philippines in 2001 (Rheingold, 2002), and Indonesia in 1998 (Lim, 2005) shows the growing tendency for contemporary political activists to make political use of communications technology. In these countries, activists have used the Internet to mobilize large scale collective action such as street demonstrations, protest, electoral fundraising, vote campaigns and lobbying.

[1] Semi-democracy government holds regular elections but systematically violate civil liberties and fairness; elections are inclusive and pluralistic, but not fully competitive and open (Schedler, 2002). Also see Chapter 5.

In this regard, the relationship between technology and mobilization is not new. Throughout history, the forms of collective action have always been associated with the advent and use of certain communication technologies (Suarez, 2006). Previous technologies, however, allowed users to communicate one-to-one (for example, telephone) or few-to-many (for example, print media). In addition, these communications forms have usually been regarded as instruments at the service of pre-established political ends. At present, social media networking sites such as blogs, Facebook, Myspace, Friendster, Orkut, Twitter and Flickr, are ultimately changing the level and nature of discourses online (Sohn, 2008). Online (political) discussions are thought to lead to more political engagement and empowerment of peripheral groups in society (Vergeer & Hermans, 2008). Because people have increased opportunity to voice and publish their political opinions to a potentially large audience to read, the involved level of interactivity can mobilize people who would otherwise not have been in political life.

However, as Lim (2005) argues, one cannot assume that as the Internet becomes more widely available, citizens in semi-democracies will use it successfully for democratic practices including political mobilization. The context in this regard matters – the specific circumstance, condition, history and actions of the various social actors involved in the case of Malaysia. In other words, I argue social media such as blogs can only turn political when the meaning or cause appeals to an individual or group to further pursue collectively, which is highly contextual and time-driven.

1.1.1 The Malaysian Indians'[2] Issue

Malaysia has a population of 28.3 million as of December 2009, separated into four major demographic categories: the *Bumiputeras* (Malays and other indigenous groups)(65 percent), Chinese (25 percent), Indians (7.9 percent) and Others (2 percent). Ethnicity and religion have been prime factors in deciding the fate of a citizen for a number of historical reasons (see Chapter 5 for details). Chief among these is the manner in which the ethno-religious tie is written into the Constitution of Malaysia which provides a blueprint for special rights to be bestowed upon the Malays, who are also followers of Islam (Lim, 1995; Ramasamy, 1983). The consequence of this has been the corresponding practice of categorizing the entire population from Malays to non-Malays.

[2] There is an on-going debate on whether to call an Indians in Malaysia as "Indian Malaysians" or "Malaysian Indians" (see Tate, 2008 for details). The reference also includes "Malaysian Tamils" to refer to the 80 percent of the Indians in Malaysia, who are Hindu by religion and can speak the Tamil language (see chapter 5). The latter group is the focus of this study although I prefer to use the term "Malaysian Indians."

The communal model introduced during the British colonial period in the early 20th century has led to socio-economic disparities between the ethnic groups. In particular, the specific economic functions allocated according to ethnicity (Hirchmann, 1986), meant a cultural and socially marginal role between Malay political hegemony and Chinese economic domination (Ramasamy, 1983; Belle, 2001) for the Indians who were brought by the British to work in the plantation economy. The situation among the Indians did not improve, and as a result has affected their upward mobility.

Briefly, the Malaysian Indians' non-*Bumiputera* status, paltry numbers as a minority group and lack of economic power placed many Indians in a poor position for inter-ethnic bargaining within Malaysian politics. This caused a sense of outrage among the Indian community as there was also no outlet to release their-pent up feelings due to the nature of the Malaysian public sphere. Their frustrations escalated when Hindu temples were demolished, despite protest by devotees and activists (Willford, 2008; discussion in Chapters 5 and 7). Consequently, the largely aggrieved Indians through the representation of the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) advocacy group took to the streets of Kuala Lumpur on November 25, 2007, as their "tactic of resistance" (Wasserman, 2007). This protest rally subsequently, was also instrumental in the defeat of Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) in the 2008 Malaysia's general election.

1.2 Need and Purpose of the Study

There are many examples of activists using the Internet effectively from developed countries. These include the citizen protest against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in 1998, the so-called Battle of Seattle in 1999, World Bank meeting in Prague in 2000, and the Tiananmen Square Democracy Movement in China (Norris, 2002; McCaughey & Ayers, 2003). Considering the success of the developed world, there is a general assumption that the Internet would play equally an important role in the developing world like Malaysia. Although the use of the Internet by the Zapatista rebels in Chiapas, Mexico in 1994 (Castells, 2004) has been extensively documented, this area of research in the developing world has remained largely understudied.

Based on this purpose, using two case studies involving minority Indians in Malaysia, this research covers the following:

1. Examines the unique characteristics of blogs for communication and organizing collective action;

2. Studies the dynamics and interactions involved in the use of blogs to foster political mobilization in a non-Western perspective, particularly that based on historical context;

3. Identifies the factors and process that are instrumental for building resistance-identity – the cumulative effect – that are the impetus for political mobilization.

The findings reveal that blogs can foster political mobilization among minority Indians in Malaysia. However, the effect of blogs on political mobilization involving the minority population must be seen within the wider communications technology environment – use of both traditional and new communications technology. Additionally, the struggles of the minority Indians – online and offline – are important in the creation of resistance-identity, which has implication for political engagement in the real world. In other words, community – both virtual and real – participation in grassroots engagement transcends the virtual world, as linkages and information flow between the traditional and new media, and non-media sources combined to have a mobilizing effect.

1.3 Research Questions

The overarching question of this research is, "Can blogs foster political mobilization amongst minority population, for example, ethnic minority Indians in Malaysia." To address this question, the following sub-questions are examined:

1. What are the distinct characteristics of blogs that offer an alternative venue for communication and organizing collective action?
2. How have the main challenges minority Malaysian Indians faced in the past and present affected their participation in the public sphere?
3. What is most distinctive about the public sphere in Malaysia, particularly the role of the Internet?
4. Does the minority Indian community in Malaysia use blogs to engage in political participation and facilitate collective action? If so, how?

1.4 Research Methodology

This research was primarily qualitative, which was well-suited in examining the relationship between blogging and political mobilization, using two case studies. The research conducted was both exploratory, which focused on the intersection of blogs and

political mobilization, and explanatory in that the dynamics and relationship occurring between the various social actors, individual and communities, and both conventional and new media were analyzed for their impact on mobilization.

Qualitative techniques of investigation were employed to inquire into a phenomenon in-depth (Yin, 2009) besides allowing to take a sociological approach that focuses on the socio-political sequences of action, and contexts of which political mobilization is embedded. The analysis based on chronological structures was multidimensional, considering the methodology difficulties inherent in studying blogs. Since it is hard to apply common research methods to blogs, multiple sources of data were used to provide an in-depth understanding of the narratives by giving contextual meaning (Yin, 2009). The data collected for this research were from three broad sources (see Chapter 4 for details):

i) documentation and archival records from blogs;
ii) individual and focus group interviews, and
iii) direct observation

In addition, an online survey was conducted to study the profile among random bloggers and blog readers of Malaysian Indian descent. Using a software called Surveyshare.com, an online survey of 40 questions (see Appendix A) in total was conducted for a period of one month, from November 10 to December 10, 2009.

1.4.1 Selection of Case Studies

This research focused on two case studies: i) protest rally on November 25, 2007 organized by the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf), and ii) the defeat of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) party in the March 2008 general election in Malaysia. The Hindraf wave and spirit that began in 2006 has since led to unexpected changes in the Indian mindset. The first case study shows how blogs were instrumental in facilitating collective action amongst minority Indians resulting in a massive protest rally in November, 2007. Subsequently, this rally contributed to the shocking defeat of the MIC party, an arm of three-pronged, ethnic-based ruling coalition (*Barisan Nasional*) that has dominated the country since 1957. While case study 1 shows the direct mobilization effect using blogs that led to the Hindraf rally, case study 2 shows the indirect implication and consequences of the rally, which was instrumental in the defeat of MIC in the 2008 Malaysia's general election. Both cases, however, have common elements and themes that are discussed in detail in Chapters 7 and 8.

1.5 Research Significance

A review of the literature revealed that most studies (Hague & Loader, 1999; Negroponte, 1996; Rheingold, 2000) relating to Internet and societal implications were undertaken and conceptualized in developed countries. There have been very few attempts to understand the nature and dynamics of the Internet use in developing countries, particularly in semi-authoritarian states like Malaysia. With the growing literature on blogs and its impact on citizen mobilization, this research hopes to contribute to the literature on the intersection of Internet and society, particularly on blog-mobilization involving minority Indians in Malaysia.

Secondly, recent studies in Malaysia have delved into students' motivations for using the Internet (Musa & Narimah, 2001; Safar & Fatimah, 2000), access and equity issues (NITC, 1996) and bloggers' characteristics (Tan & Zawawi, 2008; Hopkins, 2009). In spite of all the media hype, empirical analysis of Malaysian blogs, however, remains limited. The practice of blogging appears to have boomed in the last three years and the picture is likely to have changed, and continue changing, as the (political) blogosphere matures or recedes. Evidence of such change remains limited. Hence, much broader and deeper empirical analysis of the intentions and practice of political blogging is needed.

Thirdly, due to the novelty of this kind of research, this study contributes to the multidisciplinary fields; sociology, communications, political science and computer studies. Research of the Internet has, for the most part, examined the Internet from a computer science perspective – social network analysis that focuses on the infrastructure of links. This research does not focus on the occurrence or frequency of events or themes that suggest mobilization, but rather the narratives of real events and actions between the various actors in a specific context. In addition, most research studying the impact of the Internet has only been carried out methodologically online with no reference to offline methods or struggles of the citizens. In that regard, this study will be evident of the various theories and methodologies involved in constructing the wider perspective which cannot be confined to a single method nor a single theory. Hence, the use of multiple methods and interpretative frames to better understand the phenomenon.

1.6 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation consists of nine chapters. Chapter 1 contains the background of this dissertation with an introduction to blogging and political mobilization, need and purpose of the study, research questions, research methodology, research significance and dissertation structure.

Chapter 2 focuses on research question number one that examines the unique characteristics of blogs and its components suitable for communication, coordinating and mobilization. It frames the discussion within Web 2.0 applications.

Chapter 3 provides the conceptual framework for this research that utilizes theoretical triangulation – relevant concepts and ideas that apply to the domains on Internet technology-facilitated space and society in the context of Malaysia.

Chapter 4 provides a detail methodology of the qualitative and quantitative study of the unfolding of dynamic social processes and interaction between the online and offline world.

Chapter 5 and 6 provides a background to which the two case studies can be located. Specifically, Chapter 5 provides an overview of Malaysia, focusing on the history, state of Malaysia and its semi-democracy governance structure, and the politics of ethnicity that has resulted in the marginalized status of the Indians in Malaysia.

Chapter 6 discusses the role of the Internet as part of the Malaysian public sphere, and the blogosphere as a potential space for activism.

Chapter 7 provides a narration and analysis of the use of blogs to facilitate the mobilization of thousands of protestors during the November, 2007 Hindraf rally.

Chapter 8 provides an analysis of the use of blogs and its impact on the shocking defeat of the MIC party in the March 2008 general election.

Chapter 9 summarizes the major findings of this research, contributions of this study theoretically and methodologically as well as implications.

CHAPTER 2
THE BLOGOSPHERE AS MEDIUM FOR MOBILIZATION

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the distinct characteristics of blogs that offer an alternative venue for communication and organizing collective action. Recognizing there are limited options for members of the public to communicate among and between each other, especially in Malaysia where the mainstream media is tightly controlled by the government and public spaces are constrained by regulatory frameworks, I will investigate blogs and its features as a viable social media network suitable for coordinating and organizing collective action. I argue that its contextualized and 'networked' characters make blogs a constructive alternative medium for citizen mobilization.

This chapter is divided into three parts. First, it discusses the advent of Web 2.0 applications and comparisons with Web 1.0, followed by the history and characteristics of blogs, and thirdly, the unique features of blogs that make them a potential medium for collective action.

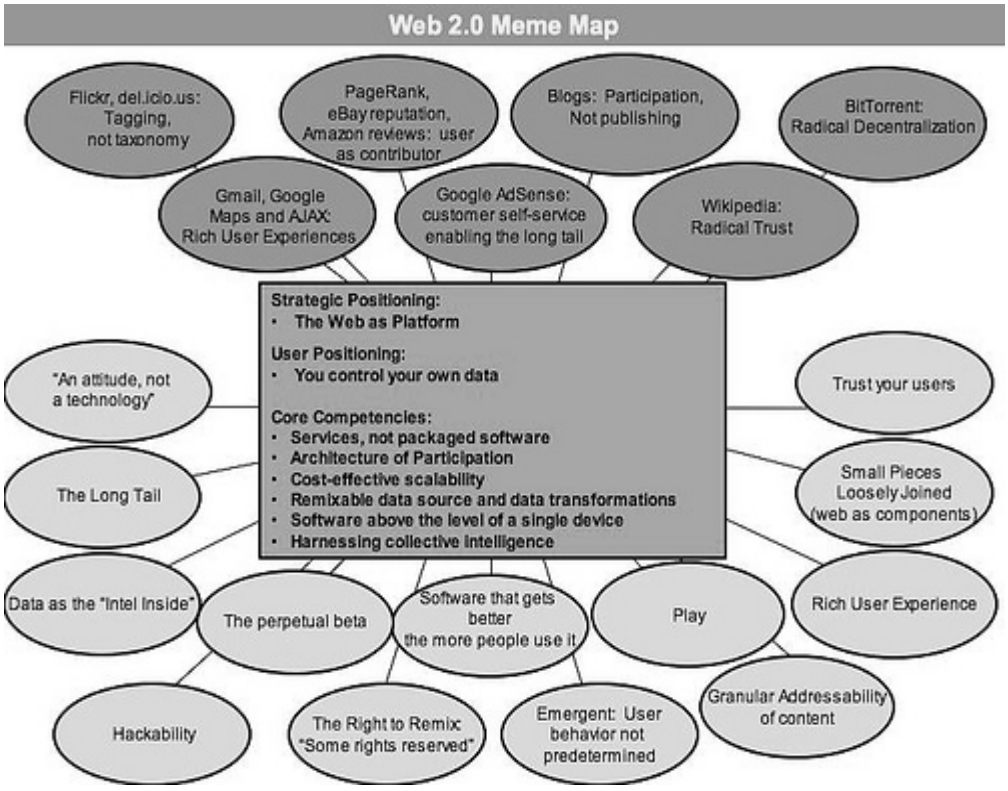
2.2 History of Internet Technology

The late 1960s saw the creation of ARPANET, a telecommunication network that initially linked only four computers of the United States Department of Defense (Ramachandran & Rathina Pandi, 2003). Subsequently, academic and research networks were developed only to be used within specific sectors of the society. It was not until the 1980s that Internet technology was commercially introduced, and arguably, became a significant medium in many aspects.

Internet technology is a network of computer networks (Salter, 2003) comprised of various applications such as Telnet, Bulletin Board Systems (BBS), Usenet, e-mail, and the World Wide Web, also known as Web 1.0 applications. The "bursting" of the "dot-com bubble" in 2001 marked the turning point for the web (see O'Reilly, 2005). By 2005, however, the Internet had recovered from the dot-com crash and was reincarnated as Web 2.0 (Ibid; Lovink, 2008). Blogs, wikis and social networks such as Friendster, MySpace, Orkut, Flickr, Facebook, Twitter and other applications became the next wave of voluntary alliances that users sought online. In this sense, media is "social" with talks on swarms, mobs, and crowds (see Rheingold, 2002; Lovink, 2008) leading to the

phenomenon of virtual or cyber-communities (online communities). These communities are merely social, and interaction and participation is the basis for networking.

According to O'Reilly (2005), while there still exists some disagreement and contestation on conceptual definitions on what Web. 2.0 means, it is viewed as a "platform". This means that Web. 2.0 is not made of a "hard boundary but rather a gravitational core...[constituting] a set of principles and practices that tie together a veritable solar system of sites that demonstrate some or all of those principles, at a varying distance from that core" (O'Reilly, 2005, "The Web as Platform"). The characteristics of the new platform provided by the Web 2.0 applications are shown below.

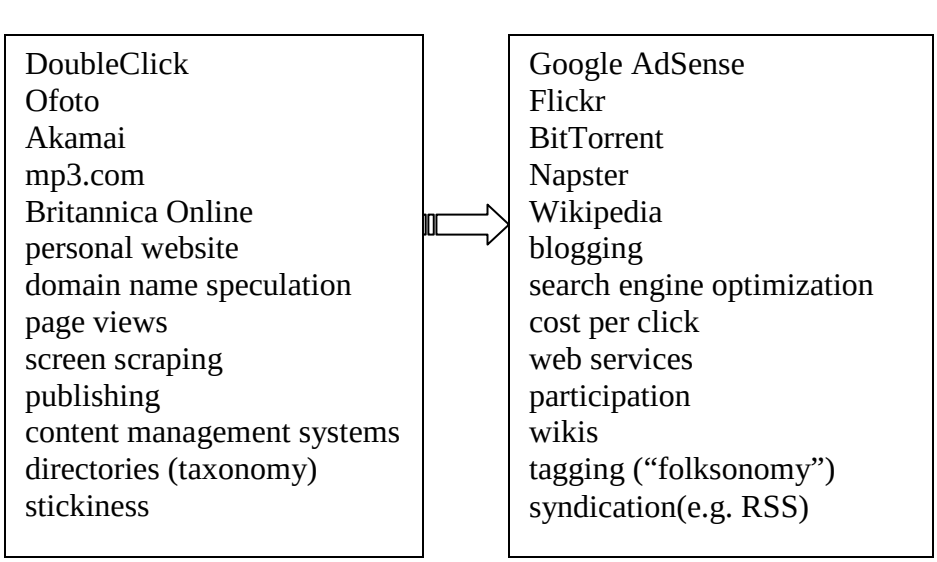


Source: O'Reilly, 2005

Figure 2.1. Conceptual framework of web 2.0 applications

As Figure 2.1 shows, many ideas may or may not apply to Web 1.0, and this warrants attention to the differences between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 applications. The differences of applications for example, as argued by O'Reilly (2005) are shown in Figure 2.2. Some of the elements of differences epitomize the importance of the social dimension of interaction and (now) participation, in particular that relating to the

blogosphere. In order to better gauge the changing media environment, the following section briefly discusses the evolution of media.



Source: O'Reilly, 2005

Figure 2.2. Evolution between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0

2.2.1 Communication Technology Evolution

Hoffman & Novak (1996) had conceptualized the three different forms of communication: one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many (Table 2.1). Their conceptualization of the one-to-one communication model represents a dyadic interaction situation, in which two individual entities communicated with each other either face-to-face or through a medium. The one-to-many model represents a mass communication situation, in which an identified source disseminates messages to many recipients simultaneously. This form of communication is exemplified by the broadcasting media, such as conventional television, radio, or print newspaper. The third form of communication model represents the Internet – the many-to-many nature that is defined as “a dynamic distributed network, potentially global 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 & Novak, 1996, p. 53).

Table 2.1. Communication models

Situation	Forms of communication	Directions	Example
Dyadic Interaction	One-to-one	Face-to-face or 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 consumer of information	Internet – virtual communities, listserv, blogs

Briefly then, two unique characteristics of the Internet are noted (Sohn, 2008). Firstly, the role structures of communicators are not fixed in the many-to-many communication model. As producers and consumers of information, the direction of communication on the Internet is flexible.

Secondly, the Internet integrates one-to-one and one-to-many modes of communication. In this case, not only can an individual communicate with another individual on a peer-to-peer basis, but also broadcast messages to numerous others simultaneously. For example, imagine that a consumer has a cellular phone with a digital camera function. The individual can take pictures of a nice restaurant for example, and share it with friends by sending them directly or uploading them to his or her blog. The information on the blog in turn, is accessible not only to the individual's direct contact, but also to others who have indirect connections with the original information source. Through a nexus of individuals' information exchanges, the information can be diffused widely and quickly, blurring the boundary between online and offline environment, as well as emphasizing the interactivity and participation levels. This is precisely the role that blogs play in networked society – where users add value (O'Reilly, 2005) and participation becomes the ultimate criterion for the Web 2.0 platform.

2.3 History of Blogs

One of the most celebrated features of the Web 2.0 era is the rise of blogs, compared to the personal websites application categorized under Web 1.0. As Blood (2002) states, "Let us use our weblogs to define ourselves individually as we move forward together as a community, joined by our shared commitment to self-expression,

free speech, and the vigorous exchange of ideas" (p. 164). Blogs gained public attention during the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington when they provided first-hand images, and personal testimonials on the traumatic events (Hewitt, 2005; Keren, 2006). Following that, during the Iraq war of March-April 2003, a major story that caught the media's attention was that of a blogger known as Salam Pax, a 29 year old Iraqi living in a Baghdad suburb (Keren, 2006). His two week silence at the end of March 2003, when the Iraqi capital came under heavy American bombing, became a major news story, as did his return to cyberspace. Consequently, many citizens became bloggers themselves in what can be regarded as "do it yourself journalism" providing alternative information and commentary (Keren, 2006).

Keen (2007) argued that while it is difficult to systematically account for the exact number of bloggers worldwide, it does show that there is an extraordinary growth of the medium, as tracked by blog search engines such as Technorati (http://technorati.com/) and Alexa (http://www.alexa.com/). The phenomenon on blogs began in the mid-90s when a company called Pyra introduced a software application that enabled people who were not skilled in Web design to create and manage their own blogs (Keren, 2006). In 1997, Dave Winer created what is generally ascribed as the first Weblog (Lascia), addressing technology and business in what Winer contends is the longest running Weblog currently on the Internet. Prior to 1999, only people with webpage coding skills and knowledge of HTML had the expertise to create and maintain a website. In August 1999, Pyra released Blogger.com, and Groksoup, following the rapid growth of blogs with the introduction to Pitas, the first free build-your-own-weblog tool (Blood, 2002). As of 2003, Blogger.com has been owned by Google.

Blogging has also emerged as an income producing endeavor. Bloggers can join one of the many blogging networks that categorize Weblogs by topics and actually pay contributors who have a following of readers. For example, Blogit offers readers a subscription for $9.95 per month for access to thousands of blogs on their network. Some portion of the subscription fee is passed along to contributing bloggers.

So, how does one set up a blog? Currently, a blog can be created without technical skills. It is free of charge, thus enabling individuals to publish their own work quickly and easily. However, some software is necessary for the creation and maintenance of blogs. Blogger, Livejournal, Wordpress, Blog Easy, Blog spot, and thoughts.com are just some of the services available on the Web that offer free software to create a Weblog

along with free hosting on their server. Currently, there are three simple steps involved in creating a blog on bloggers.com.[3] Firstly, an intended blogger who does not yet have a Google email address will be prompted to create a Google account, comprised of an email address, password and a display name. The next step is to create a title (name) and address followed by choosing a template for the blog. Once an account has been setup, blogger.com adds an entry to the blog, making the content available online and alerting users who have subscribed to that blog's content. The defining feature of blogs is that they are subject to almost no external editing, and therefore provides the blogger with complete control over what and when to post (Drezner & Farell, 2004). Standard blog features include hyperlinks, images or multimedia, archives of previous posts, and a standalone Web page for each post to the blog with a unique URL.

2.4 Types of Blogs

Blog site topics cover wide array of interest and activities, many of which discuss a single genre or topic only, while others bloggers may cover a broad spectrum with their commentaries. Some bloggers faded quickly, while many blogs were faithfully updated and maintained. Some personal editors become celebrities within the blogosphere, while others are maintained by bloggers who enjoy a modest readership.

It should be noted, however, generalizations about blogs on the basis of random sampling, for example, are impossible to make due the ephemeral nature of online diaries or blogs (Keren, 2006). Both Wallsten (2007) and Keren (2006) caution against the tendency to classify blogs by categories or genres type such as "politics," "feminism," "entertainment" as they could be misleading. This is because as Wallsten (2007) argues, although political blogs are used to make opinion statements, far more often than not they are used to mobilize political action, to request feedback from readers, or to pass along information produced by others. Blog use changes significantly in response to key political events. In other words, the use of blogs, either political or non-political, is highly correlated to major political events (also see Tremayne, 2007), as was evident in this research discussed in the following chapters.

2.4.1 Filter Blogs

A blog can serve as news page or filter for those with no time to search the web. Filter blogs, according to Blood (2002, p. 2), generally have an editor, with some

[3] For this research, I created a blog titled "Research on Malaysian lndian Blogs at http://malaysianindian-blog.blogspot.com/

expertise in a topic, who will offer comments on the accuracy and inaccuracy of a published news story, article or another blog site, and will offer additional information on the topic, or add an opinion and alternative perspective to the hyperlinked story. It is now possible to find a blog specific to an interest or particular events in the news. Bloggers often sift and filter for others to find items the readers may have missed or not had time to research themselves. Whether it is a topic on minorities, a politician or government's mandates and policy issues, blogs are used by many to read information not found in the mainstream media, or as a filter to find notable sources and other blogs.

2.4.2 Journal Blogs

Distinct from filter-style blogs, journal-style blogs maintain an inward focus, serving much like a personal journal or diary for the author (Bausch, Haughey & Hourihan, 2002). These blogs offer a frequently updated glimpse, or a wide-open view, of the author's personal life, maybe a sharing of travel highlights, poetry, or rant on some incident in their hometown. Journal-style blogs have been also liken to life-writing blogs which derives theoretical and historical statements from autobiographical works (Keren, 2006). Rainer (as cited in Keren, 2006) has assigned life writing genres into any number of divisions including autobiographies, memoirs, confessions, spiritual quests, meditations, personal essays, travelogs, autobiographical short stories and novels; portraits, complaints, conceptual writings, works of humor, and family history.

2.5 Characteristics of Blogs

The most basic feature of the blog is the chronological organization of content – a difference between blogs and personal websites. The significance of blogs, however, can be attributed to the quality of its features, namely RSS technology and permalinks.

RSS is a format for syndicating news – allowing someone to link not just to a page, but to subscribe to it, with notification every time that page changes (Pilgrim, 2002; O'Reilly, 2005). Once information about each item is in RSS format, an RSS-aware program can check the feed for changes and react to the changes in an appropriate way.

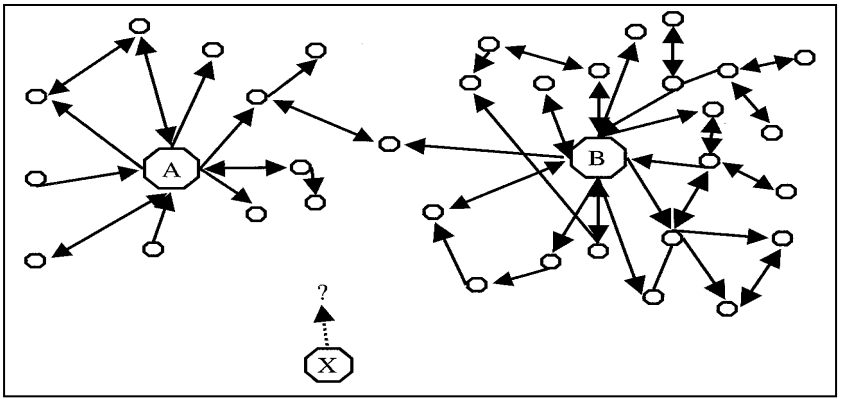
A second and perhaps the most significant feature of a blog is permalink. A link to a weblog is expected to point to a changing page, with "permalinks" for any individual entry, and notification for each change (O'Reilly, 2005). This makes the RSS feed-link

much stronger than a bookmark or a link to a single page. As Coates (as cited in O'Reilly, 2005) remarks:

> It may seem a trivial piece of functionality now, but it was effectively the device that turned weblogs from an ease-of-publishing phenomenon into conversational mess of overlapping communities. For the first time it became relatively easy to gesture directly at a highly specific post on someone else's site and talk about it. Discussion emerged. Chat emerged. And– as a result – friendships emerged or became more entrenched. The permalink was the first- and most successful – attempt to build bridges between weblogs.

The networked phenomenon relies on permalinks or hyperlinks that take on two forms (Drezner & Farell, 2004; Wood & Smith, 2001). First, bloggers maintain what is called a "blogroll" – a list of blogs that they frequently read or have shared interests, with clickable links to the general URLs of those blogs. Second, a blogger may author a post that contains links to other blogs.

The blogs, in this regard, can be viewed as a new, peer-to-peer network equivalent to Usenet and bulletin-boards. The combination of RSS and permalinks allows people not only to subscribe to each others' sites, and easily link to individual comments on a page, but also link back to the original post via a mechanism known as trackback. Trackback notifies bloggers when one of their posts is referenced by another blog, making it possible to respond, either with reciprocal links, or by leaving a comment on the blog or emailing the blogger (O'Reilly, 2005; Drezner & Farell, 2004; Tremayne, 2007). These dynamics have an impact on network formation, illustrated by Figure 2.3 that shows how principles of (a) growth and (b) preferential attachment apply to the blogosphere (see Barabasi, 2002). Together, these principles explain how a small number of nodes in a network become heavily linked while most remain isolated- giving rise to the phenomenon the "winner-takes-all" pattern or the "rich get richer".



Source: Tremayne, 2007

Figure 2.3. The blogosphere as a network

As Tremayne (2007) contends:

> If new blogger X desires a readership, he or she will be most successful if a tie with blogger A or B can be formed. These blogs have the greatest number of links, so (a) they likely have the most readers; and (b) search engines will rank them highly because the number of links will generate even more traffic. Blog X linking to blog A or B does not guarantee that those blogs will reciprocate, but it increases the chances of such an occurrence. Search engines allow bloggers to identify who is linking to them quickly and reciprocal linking [is] developed.... (p.xii)

Through linking, commenting and feedback, ideas spread quickly through the informal networks of blogs (the blogosphere), or even other social networking sites such as Facebook, Myspace, Orkut, etc. In that regard, the blogosphere can often have the characteristics of an echo-chamber (Drezner & Farell, 2004) or amplifying effect as blogs thrive on links, whether the links focus on filtering the news of others (O'Reilly, 2005) or share a personal life (Blood, 2002).

The characteristics of blogs have some vexing issues for the study of politics. Particularly, why do blogs have any influence at all? This answer lies in the elements of the blogosphere, as argued by O'Reilly (2005) that harnesses "collective intelligence". He said," Hyperlinking is the foundation of Web. As users add new content, and new sites, it is bound in to the structures of the web by other users discovering the content and linking to it. Much as synapses from in the brain, with associations becoming stronger through repetition or intensity, the web of connections grows organically as an output of the collective activity of all web users" ("Harnessing Collective Intelligence"). At the heart of this argument is the flexibility of the material which lies in the values of blogs. As Giralt and Gomez (n.d) argue, blogs have the capability to turn relationships between different actors into one in which they constitute a collective that act and think together and, at the same time, these linkages must be fluid and flexible enough to transform these relationships and constantly link up new actors as events unfold. In light of this, the following sections focus on the important aspects of blogging that can contribute to political mobilization.

2.6 Blogosphere as a Network

2.6.1 Contextualized Information

Arguably, the Internet has the capability to supply sources of information beyond what traditional media currently offers. In particular, blogs contain links to background

sources that serve to supplement, contextualize, and provide deep layers of analysis. Through links embedded into online new stories, blog readers are able to access a depth of coverage that is not practically accessible through traditional news media (Blood, 2002).

This argument is illustrated using a Malaysian example, when blogger Jeff Ooi had reported on his blog dated October 1, 2007, about the short-message service (SMS) scam that ripped off millions of ringgit[4] from mobile phone customers by the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC).[5] Along with the text of the story, the blog site included links to background information on Halim Shafie, the Secretary-General of the commission, his biography and job description. Additionally, the article also provided links to information on other members (complete with pictures) of his administration, who were related to the news reports. With a click of the mouse, the blog readers could access a variety of additional resources that enhance this reporting. By providing links to other news reports, background information, and primary sources (such as actual statements showing billing errors found for SMS charges and photographs), blogs provide a "thick text" of news events. Accordingly, blogs have augmented the traditional mainstream's role to inform by providing the means to contextualize any information.

2.6.2 Continuity and Materiality

Blog editors sometimes contextualize an article by juxtaposing it with an article on a related subject; each article, considered in light of others, may take on additional meaning, or even draw the reader to conclusions contrary to the implicit aim of each.

For example, on January 25, 2007, Nila Tanzil, an Indonesian blogger wrote about her disappointment with the Malaysian Tourism Board for their lack of cooperation in helping her write and take pictures of certain landmarks and places in Kuala Lumpur.[6] The Malaysian Minister of Tourism, Tengku Adnan in response to Nila's sentiment, said the following:

> Bloggers are liars. They use all sorts of ways to cheat others. From what I know, out of 10,000 unemployed bloggers, 8,000 are women. Bloggers like to spread rumors, they don't like national unity. Today our country has achievements because we are tolerant and compromising. Otherwise we will have civil war.

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[4] Malaysian currency
[5] The full article can be accessed at http://www.jeffooi.com/2007/10/mcmc_sms_scam_the_oktoberfest.php
[6] Maverick. (2007, January 31). Malaysian Tourism Board, Disappointing. Retrieved April 29, 2009 from: http://maverickid.blogspot.com/2007/01/malaysia-tourism-board-disappointing.html#links on April 29 2009; Also at, http://rockybru.com.my/2007/03/tengku-adnans-dead.html

> Malays will kill Chinese, Chinese will kill Malays, Indians will kill everybody else...[7]

This issue sparked controversy among bloggers in Malaysia; especially the women, who considered it to be "demonizing."[8] The political meaning of the event was defined by the numerous links connecting to post on other blogs discussing women rights and protest actions with different purposes and actors, to newspaper reports and editorials,[9] and comments and experiences posted by "netizens" themselves.[10] One of the posts demanded an apology and clarification of the issue from the Minister.[11] The result of this controversy was the formation of the National Alliance of Bloggers in Malaysia (NAB) also known as All-Blogs in April of 2007.[12] The aim of the alliance was to protect bloggers and promote blogging, besides creating a connection between the public and the government.

So what was the relationship between one post and the other? What was the political meaning of the connection? Giralt and Gomez (n.d.) argue that because blogs contain evaluational and practical components, they can mobilize certain effects. Blog can enable immediate connection to be made between the news that was being reported by the media and people's actions and moods, thereby giving this connection materiality and continuity. As the example above shows, the blog made it possible to materialize, in a dynamic and fast-acting way, a continuity between both events and actions, and among a diversity of actors involved without erasing each one's specificity (Giralt & Gomez, n.d.).

Another aspect is the real-time interactivity of blogs that provides credibility in the news being reported. The most illustrative case can be found in the role played by weblogs such as bmahendran.com,[13] following the November 25, Hindraf protest in Malaysia (see Chapter 5 for detail information). As the bloggers' posts were added and updated, with accompanying photographs, people's affective dispositions gradually

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[7] Jerry. F. (2007, March 9). Tengku Adnan: Bloggers are liars. Retrieved April 8, 2009 from http://jeremiahfoo.com/blog/?p=372, on April 8 2009

[8] Tanzil, N. (2007, March 16). Thanks you for all Blogger. Retrieved April 8, 2009 from: http://nilatanzil.blogspot.com/2007/03/thank-you-for-all-bloggers.html.

[9] A video clip taken by *Malaysiakini* , an online news website covering Tengku Adnan's press conference can be accessed at, http://www.thekualalumpurtraveler.com/malaysiakini-tv-tengku-adnan-is-cornered-on-the-blogger-issue/, on April 29 2009.

[10] Attan, A. (2007, March 10).Tengku Adnan's Dead Part II. Retrieved April 30, 2009 from: http://rockybru.com.my/2007/03/tengku-adnans-dead-part-ll.html.

[11] Wong, E. (2007, March 16). Tengku Adnan – "I love women (choke)." Retrieved April 30, 2009 from: http://elizabethwong.wordpress.com/2007/03/16/i-love-women-tengku-adnan.

[12] Attan, A. (Rockybru)(2007, April 2007). The Making of the all Blogs. Retrieved April 30, 2009 from: http://rockybru.blogspot.com/2007/04/making-of-all-blogs.html, on April 30 2009.

[13] The protest rally on November 25 2007 was updated from time to time, with accompanying pictures at http://bmahendran.wordpress.com/2007/11/page/2/. This website was referenced by *Malaysiakini*, an online news website for updates on the protest.

ceased being fleeting and transient and acquired a certain density and temporal stability. In this way, the effective dimension of the news reports, the connection that made them relevant and made sense in the context of what was happening at that moment, was objectified and was no longer ephemeral. An affective community outrage was materializing across the whole of Malaysia that laid the basis for a particular group of collectivities to act in response to the event.

In this context, blogs have the potential to facilitate collective action, as it allows continuity to be established between different struggles while simultaneously making it possible to articulate them depending on how events unfold, grouping the actors in accordance to issues.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter examined the distinct characteristics of blogs that offer an alternative venue for communication and organizing collective action. While I argue that the impact of blogs on political mobilization can only be viewed in a contextual manner, an examination of its current features as a social media of Web 2.0 platform shows that blogs clearly hold the potential for citizen mobilization. The network structure of blogs (peer-to-peer) provides an environment wherein a broad source of information is available from a variety of perspectives. That is, the structure of hyperlinks is a key form of information exchange in the blogosphere.

In this context, blogs offer contextualized information from a variety of sources enabled by hyperlinks that is not often the case in the mainstream media. The level of interactivity, continuity and flexibility, serve to encourage discussion and participation from citizens who otherwise may not be engaged in the public sphere, for example, minority populations. As an action-oriented communication network, blogs provide a means for mobilization – that is, communication, coordination, and organization of collective action. And with limited institutional constraints, widespread agenda-setting, and regular updated postings, citizens are free to engage with each other in open, flexible, fluid communication environment compared to traditional mainstream media.

To further examine if blogs can foster political mobilization amongst minorities, it is imperative to situate theoretical discussions within temporal realities. The next chapter triangulates a variety of selected theoretical explanations or concepts that show the relationship between blogging and political mobilization.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter showed the distinct characteristics of the blogosphere as a network structure that holds the potential for alternative communication and organizing collective action. The aim of this chapter is to show the relationship between Internet technology (blogs) and mobilization. In this context, blog-mobilization theory is shaped by the relationship between space for activism and collective actors. The following sections discuss existing literature relating to cyber-activism, and concepts describing space for activism and types of collective actors.

3.2 Literature on Internet Mobilization

There is a growing literature showing the relationship between Internet technology and mobilization (see Lim, 2005; McCaughey & Ayers, 2003; Shanti & Kalathil, 2005; Turkle, 1997; Jong, Shaw & Stammers, 2005). The use of the Internet to advance activism in authoritarian regimes has been gaining popularity due to the tight control on the mainstream media and stringent rules and regulations imposed on civil society activism that inhibit participation in the public sphere (see Wasserman, 2007). For example, Internet-based revolutions in countries like Tunisia (2010), Egpyt (2011), Bahrain (2011) and Libya (2011) show the importance of social networks (for example, Facebook, Twitter) for coordinating, mobilizing and organizing collective action. While it should be acknowledged that this is an emerging field, research in this area is salient.

Research on blog-mobilization has been increasing with the rapid growth of blogs. While the vast majority of scholarly attention has focused on the linkage pattern between political blogs (Ackland, 2005; Adamic & Glance, 2005; Drezner & Farell 2004; Park & Jankowski, 2008; Hargitaii, Gallo & Kline, 2007), the impact of blogs on the mainstream media coverage (Drezner & Farell, 2004; Hewitt, 2005; Roth, 2004; Wallsten, 2007), election campaigns (Baumann, 2008), and how political organizations use their blogs (Wallsten, 2007; McKenna & Pole, 2004), there are case studies showing how blogs can be used to coordinate, organize and unleash political mobilizations (Giralt & Gomez, n.d.; Bucar & Fazaeli, 2008).

While these studies do provide an overview of blogs, they (1) are mostly context-driven, and (2) lack in term of research methodology. Previous studies were carried out

simply by doing online research without the accompanying offline methods. According to McPherson (2000), attempting to understand political movements must also focus on explorations of struggles of citizens and activist that go beyond the Internet. Therefore, blogs and its effect can only be studied within a specific (historical) context – as to why and how (minority) citizens in Malaysia use blogs and its capabilities for advancing collective action, which is the focus of this study. But the question also arises whether blogs will play an equally important role in Malaysia, particularly for the minority Indians whose access to Internet technology infrastructure is limited. A brief look at the issues of access to Internet technology within the given context provides the necessary background (see Chapter 6 for details).

3.3 Concepts of Space and Actors

Figure 3.1 shows how Internet-mobilization is shaped by the relationship between space for activism and collective actors. Echoing Van Dijk (2006), I argue that both technology (Internet)-enabled space and society are mutually dependent processes that must exist in pursue of political mobilization. This is because the space created by the media technologies has greater influence on society. In turn, society and groups interact with Internet technology, shaping it and modifying it to suit their needs. These mutually shaping processes create the network society that essentially provides a new mechanism, or a new style in the dynamics and the forms of collective action (Norris, 2001).

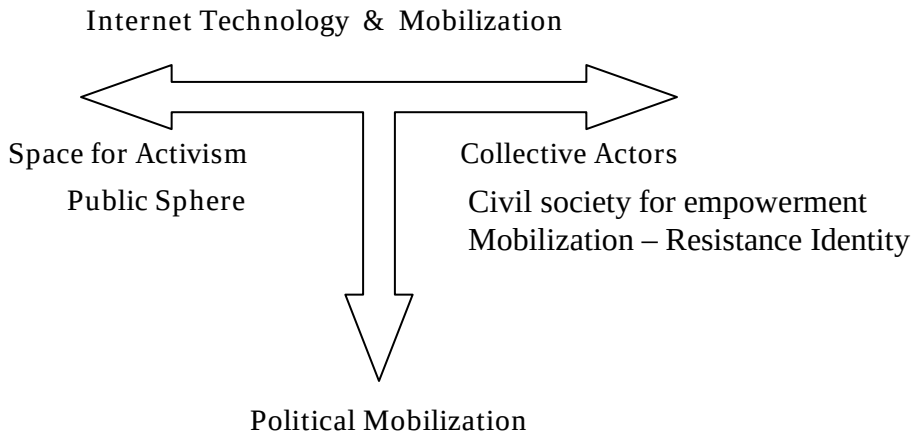


Figure 3.1. Conceptual framework

The dynamics and network suggest a level of interaction and participation from citizens, which in the context of Malaysia is determined by the level of access to Internet technology infrastructure. That is, the potential of the Internet political mobilization is clear (see Chapter 2); however, its reach to populations in developing country, who are divided between the 'have' and 'have-nots' (digital divide) can be a problem. I argue, however, that fewer connections do not necessarily translate into limited political impact if these connections are used effectively and creatively. This echoes Jones' (2003) argument that although the benefits of the Internet should be acknowledged, mythologizing the advent of "virtual democracy" without acknowledging the extent to which "real" social relations are repeated in "virtual" contexts is irresponsible (p. 14).

In the case of Malaysia, the use of the Internet is restricted by a range of infrastructural and socio-cultural factors, among which social inequalities marked by ethnic and gender differences are salient (see NITA, 1996; Ramasamy, 2005; Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion). In that regard, other forms of communication technology that activists use to spread alternative information and organize collective action become essential tools (Almeida & Lichbach, 2003; Wasserman, 2007). The combined use of these media not only accelerates the potential activities of civil society, but increases membership of interested participants of collective action. For example, as discussed in Chapter 2, blogs have the capability to link to other social media in many forms. The contents can be transformed into audio and visual forms (audio-video cassettes, CDs, pamphlets, short-message service (SMS) and loud speakers), and utilized by both the online and offline community.

In sum, mobilization-related activities in countries like Malaysia must be seen within the wider media environment that involves both the traditional and new media. This is because only a small segment of the Malaysian population has access to the Internet. However, effective use of the Internet is more important than access itself - that is, when the focus falls on who and how Internet technology is used within a specific context, which differs from one place to another. The following section describes the space which society needs for social and political engagement.

3.3.1 (Virtual) Space for Activism

This research will not be constrained over scholarships that aim to entangle the characteristics of a physical or non-physical (or geographic) space, because social space is practiced (Lefebvre, 1995). Instead, this section focuses on the understanding of the

space where activism takes place, and is reported on and interpreted by media. The (socio-political) space in the context of Malaysia is created by the technology which otherwise is not available for citizen participation, due to the nature of the Malaysian public sphere. The limitations imposed on physical space or public space coupled with overt regulatory framework inhibits the flourishing of the public sphere in many Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia (see Douglass, Ho & Ooi, 2007). In that regard, the Internet seems to be a viable alternative medium for engagement by the civil society in Malaysia.

The work of Habermas (1974, 1989) has been used as a theoretical backdrop to the claim whether blogs provide citizens with a public sphere. In this sense Habermas' concept of the public sphere is presented not simply as a metaphor but as a quasi-topographical analyses of "past spaces" intended to provide us with ideal cartographies (Dahlgren, 2005). In other words, while the concept of the public sphere remains controversial (see below), it can nevertheless be used as an evaluative tool; as a way of explaining how Internet can contribute to the democratic functioning of society and should operate as a key part of the public sphere.

Habermas's central thesis in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (Structural Transformation) is couched in terms that articulate space to democracy, particularly by constructing the notion of a bourgeois public sphere. Habermas' early formulation states:

> By the 'public sphere' we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. They then behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, not like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions – about matters of general interest. In a large public body this kind of communication requires specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it. Today, newspaper and magazines, radio and television are the media of public sphere. (Habermas, 1974, p. 49-50)

This account grants everyone equal rights of access and participation. The public sphere debates freely without any censorship or fear of reprisals. The concept is centered on the activity of citizens whereby through a process of discussion and exchange, citizens come to hold opinions on public matters. As Rutherford (2000, p. 18) observed, the success of the public sphere depends upon:

i) the extent of access (as close to universal as possible);
ii) the degree of autonomy (citizens must be free of coercion);
iii) the rejection of hierarchy (so that each might participate on an equal footing);
iv) the rule of law (particularly the subordination of the state); and
v) the quality of participation (the common commitment to the ways of logic).

The print media, according to Habermas (1989), were central to the development of this critical-debating public as he located the historical site of the public sphere in actual sites: namely, in English coffeehouses, French salons, and German table societies. This literary public sphere in its infancy was comprised at least in part in physical spaces and bodies. It included specifically people gathered together informally in voluntary associations that according to Habermas, were egalitarian, sociable, and communicative (1989, p. 55).

The ideals of the public sphere, however, have never been fully achieved by most accounts as argued by Habermas' critics (see Rutherford, 2000; Flyvberg, 1999). This is because all spaces are regulated and do not provide the "ideal free speech" situation as he envisioned. Additionally, critics have argued that notions of public sphere tend to ignore pluralism (that is, women, working class, propertyless men, uneducated) power differences, and marginalized voices (see Fraser, 1992). Accordingly, Benhabib (1992) and Fraser (1992) have sought to remedy this failing of by conceptualizing multiple public spheres or counter spheres.

In his subsequent work, *Between Facts and Norm* (1996), Habermas introduces the center (or core)/periphery dichotomy, in an effort to link between the state and public sphere. The center is made up of "complexes of administration," the judicial system, and the parliamentary body. The public sphere according to Habermas is a "social space generated in communication action" that must be protected from the systemic imperatives by separation. Thus, the periphery is grounded in a civil society made up of "those non-governmental and non-economic connections and voluntary associations that anchor the communication structures of the public sphere in the society component of the lifeworld," and enables problems encountered in the private lives to be amplified in the public sphere (Habermas 1996, p. 336-337).

Civil society, according to Habermas, has an egalitarian and open structure that mirrors the "essential features of the kind of communication around which they crystallize"(Ibid) that is around communication oriented to mutual understanding, the inherent telos of human speech. On this account, the periphery public sphere is an

elementary “social phenomenon...[that] cannot be conceived as an institution and certainly not as an organization...[nor] a framework of norms with differentiated competences and roles, membership regulations and so on. Just as little does it represent a system...the public sphere can be best described as a network for communication information and public view” (Habermas, 1996, p. 360).

Translating the conceptual idea of Habermas’ work, as opposed to the eighteenth century bourgeois public sphere, perhaps the Internet may act as a facilitating medium. If Habermas’ requirement of the informal public sphere is that it “has the advantage of a medium of unrestricted communication” whereby it is more adept at perceiving problem situations, widening the discourse community, and allowing the articulation of collective identities and need interpretations (Habermas, 1996, p. 308), it is clear that the blogosphere play a crucial role. The blogosphere can now act not only as an alternative source of information for citizens but also as a key part of the public sphere itself - the space where a diversity of opinion can be expressed and debated. This is especially important in a country like Malaysia, whereby the socio-political use of the physical space is constrained by stringent rules that limit participation in the public sphere (see Chapter 5 for details). Hence, the role played by the blogging community as civil society is particularly important in this context.

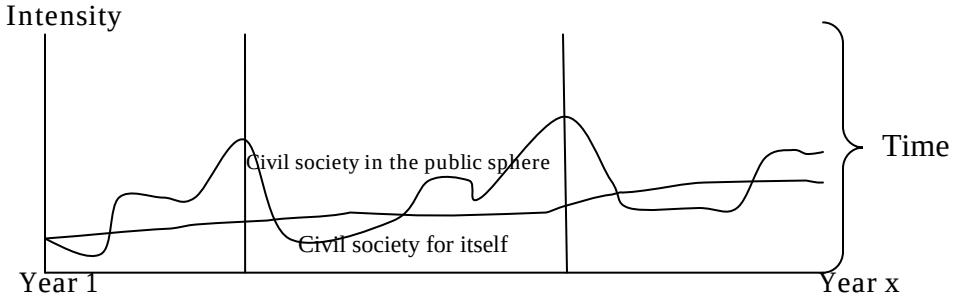
3.4 Mobilization – Collective Actors

3.4.1 Civil Society for Empowerment

The space for activism via blogs is of course just one part of the scene, but it is not without the collective social actors that contribute to collective action. Habermas (1989) recognizes that social movements (women, green, etc) based in the “lifeworld” can reshape the public sphere. The classification of entities as social movement, and not for instance civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or grassroots activists is contentious (Wasserman, 2007), given the extent of overlap in agendas, approaches and personnel (Weiss, 2004). It can be argued that they are synonymous, particularly in the context of Malaysia where Weiss (2004) argues that, “...activist may switch back and forth among civil society, political society and truly apolitical activities or act in multiple arenas simultaneously” (p.263). Chadwick (2005) points out however, that the Internet has blurred the lines between different forms of political organization and political mobilization, so that even “established parties and

interest groups are increasingly borrowing and adapting repertoires of mobilization previously considered to be typical of new social movements" (p. 2).

In this research, social actors are regarded as civil society activists composed of voluntary associations that are significantly autonomous from the state and economy (Douglass, 2007; Weiss, 2004). While Douglass (2007) categorizes civil society as "civil society for itself" and "civil society in the public sphere" (p. 2), in the context of Malaysia not only are both groups the same, but the functioning of these groups are based on the level of community mobilization over a period of time. As pointed out by Douglass (2007), I agree that civil society (both virtual and real) in Malaysia can be regarded as civil society for itself, and when triggered by key events – that require political involvement – these groups become the "civil society in the public sphere". To illustrate this point further, Figure 3.2 below shows the level (intensity) of civil society mobilization via blogs, and over time where groups function for long-term engagement in the public sphere.



*Intensity – Level of community mobilization via blogs
Time – Over a time period

Figure 3.2. Civil society activism model

Many scholars (Alagappa, 2004; Weiss, 2004; Weiss & Hassan, 2003) who have attempted to understand the Malaysian civil society have limited their perspective to the types of group that exists in relation to the state and market forces. But equally important is the issue and time driven perspective that must be acknowledged when discussing civil society in Asia. Particularly, in Malaysia where civil society is segmented along ethnic-communal-religious lines, seeking to provide alternative national narratives or ideologies to counter or supplement those of the state (Weiss, 2004; Alagappa, 2004). When specific conditions are met, the largely non-institutionalized civil society that exists for itself, will collectively act based on specific goal, aim and ideologies. Once the

goal has been achieved, the specific group may disband or regroup after that initial phase. In other words, civil society in Malaysia exists in forms that are ephemeral or sporadic as they come and go according to key events and to meet certain goals. Similarly, the nature and functioning of the blogging community is alike.

3.4.2 Blogging community

Communities seem more likely to be formed or reinforced when action is needed, as when a country goes to war, rather than through discourse alone. Underlying this inquiry is the argument that "identity for resistance" leads to the formation of communities regardless of location. In that context, blogging is not just about writing, but rather an activity which both takes place in and produces community (Crampton, 2003). This community is not "the mass," but rather a set of people constantly changing, however, who pay attention to each other's blogs and link to them. By blogging, online communities are not only able to play intended and multiple roles, but also uphold their identity without interference from the state and the market.

Fernback and Thompson (1995) offer a useful definition for understanding virtual communities as "social relationships forged in cyberspace through repeated contact within a specified boundary or place (for example, a conference or chat line) that is symbolically delineated by topic of interest" (Section III). They understand cyber-communities as issue driven. Yet much of the discussion that seeks to characterize virtual communities focuses on how cyber-communities compare to real communities, questioning to what extent cyberspace can replicate real space or real experience (Schwartz, 1994, as cited in Fernback & Thompson, 1995). Wise (2003) wonders, "whether one can match the intensity of real-life experience in a virtual realm" (p.112). It seems that, for some, the notion of community carries with it the necessity of immediate and personal connections. However, understanding communities as reliant on face-to-face interactions ignores the issue driven character of (political) communities.

Rheingold (1993) coined the term virtual communities as "social aggregations that emerge from the [Internet] when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (p. 5). Inherent in Rheingold's definition is the stipulation that virtual communities emerge through their discussions, that those discussions are public in nature, that the discourse has some enduring, repetitive quality, and that the participants infuse their conversations with some human feeling. While both Rheingold

(1993) and Wise (2003) add a component of affection to their understanding of virtual communities, Fernback and Thompson (1995) point out that the nature of relationships in cyberspace need not be personal in order to meet the definition of a virtual community.

Anderson (2006) in his influential study, *Imagined Communities*, suggested that communities are imagined because "members...will never know most of their fellow members...yet in their minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p. 6). He attributes the practice of print-capitalism as facilitating the imagining of the nation. Print languages created unified fields of communication, which enabled speakers of a diverse variety of languages to become aware of one another via print and paper. These people, consequently, became aware of the existence of the millions who share their nation and language. In short, the shared identity and beliefs of an imagined community based on language and medium of communication is what prompts an individual to imagine the boundaries of a nation, even though such boundaries may not physically exist.

Echoing Anderson's conviction, the Internet as a global network can foster a strong sense of community among members united in a common concern. Virtual communities, particularly those based on ethnicity, can link with real traditional communities when groups with collective identity shares common concerns, a common enemy, and, typically, a common space (Elin, 2003). Online discussions can translate into face-to-face meetings which can promote action, and the Internet can reinforce the 'sense of community' depending on "our vision of the society that shapes their use" (Schwarts, 1994, as cited in Fernback & Thompson, 1995). Therefore, with blogging and its growing importance, contextualizing the use of blogs is even more important.

In sum, the question of whether virtual communities provide a venue for public engagement and discussion does not necessitate replication of real time, real space, or face-to-face interactions. What matters is whether the community promotes and reinforces understanding, action, and human connection regardless of physical location. As discussed in Chapter 5, the common historical consciousness, shared beliefs among online and offline Malaysian Indian community led to communal spirit and apparent social bonding that manifested in real political actions (see Chapter 7 and 8). In this context, the Internet facilitated collective action among like minded activist online and offline. This however, does not mean that the virtual communities will replace the

traditional offline communities. Instead, the Internet will complement the offline communities during peak times, when combined effort is needed for collective action.

For freedom or collective action to be achieved, however, Foucault (as cited in Flyvbjerg, 1999) asserts there needs to be resistance and struggle which are characteristics of mobilization. Additionally, the understanding of resistance and struggles of minority groups are a matter of context and "must be situated historically" (Castell, 2004, p. 11).

3.4.3 Blogging and Collective Identity

Mobilization is the process by which a collective actor gathers and organizes its resources for the pursuit of a shared objective (Melucci, 1996). In that regard, Melucci (1996) argues there must be at least the following factors that exist for mobilization efforts:-

1. a collective identity,
ii. the identification of an adversary,
iii. the definition of a purpose, and
iv. object at stake in the conflict (p. 292).

Collective identity has been used by social movement theorists to explain how a social movement can maintain and build strength over time, and makes for effective political mobilization. Melucci (1996) defines collective identity as "an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) concerning the orientations of their actions and the field of opportunities and constraints in which such action is to takes place" (p. 70). For Melucci and others, collective identity requires both an interactive group and shared definitions (Melucci 1996; Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Shared definitions of reality and of right and wrong help a person link her beliefs to the larger group's same belief, thus attracting the individual to the group. These cognitive definitions must be concerned with the group's actions and the larger society in which the group is situated (Melucci, 1996). Therefore, cognitive definitions reflect a movement's group feelings and directly reflect the action in which the actors participate. When a group has a strong collective identity, the movement can garner support and power because the participants feel that they are working toward common goal, have defined opponents, and have an integrated sense of being that is incorporated into the movement ideologies. In short, collective identity is a concept that explains the link an individual has to the group.

Rather than seeing it as an effect, as a traditional Marxist would, Castells (2004) argues the opposite: identity-building itself is a dynamic motor in forming society. Identity is defined as "the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or related set of cultural attributes, that is/are given priority over other sources of meaning" (2004, p. 6). He formulates a hypothesis that "who[ever] constructs collective identity, and for what, largely determines the symbolic content of this identity, and its meaning for those identifying with it or placing themselves outside of it" (2004, p. 7). Influenced by the French sociologist of social movements, Alain Touraine, Castells (2004, p.8) identifies three types of identity which are related to different social associations:

i) Legitimizing identity: introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination over social actors. Legitimizing identities generate civil societies and their institutions, which reproduce what Max Weber called "rationale *Herrschaft*" (rational power).
ii) Resistance identity: produced by those actors who are in a position/condition of being excluded by the logic of domination. Identity for resistance leads to the formation of communes or communities as a way of coping with otherwise unbearable conditions of oppression.
iii) Project identity: proactive movements which aim at transforming society as a whole, rather than merely establishing the conditions for their own survival in opposition to the dominant actors. Feminism and environmentalism fall under this category (2004, p. 8).

Along with Castells' conception, I contend that resistance identity not only leads to formation of communities, but strengthens the communal spirit and collective beliefs, notably among ethnic-based communities. Castells' assertion, when applied to the Malaysian Indians, who share common histories, experiences of discrimination and marginalization, resistance identity is a reaction to the dominant force, namely the state. While it is too early to say if this identity will succeed in becoming legitimizing identities, as in the case of Malaysia, the importance of resistance identity for collective action is not to be dismissed.

Also, literature (see Anbalakan, 2008 for details) have linked low socio-economic status to the marginalization of Indians in Malaysia. But that alone, I argue it is not sufficient to mobilize the largely aggrieved Malaysian Indians to action. Rather, issues relating to religiosity (for example, Hindu temple destruction) increased communal

resistance that led ultimately to collective action, discussed in detail in the following chapters. This is in line with works of Willford (2008), who argues that while socio-economic factors do play a role in explaining the extent of marginalization and frustrations amongst the Indian community in Malaysia, the analysis has to cover a wider scope – involving stereotyping, the government's over-zealous policy of ethnicity and even the spatial practices of urban development (see Bunnell, Nagarajan & Willford, 2010) that has been committed in the expense of the Malaysian Indians. These factors were instrumental in building trenches of resistance, culminating into the Hindraf protest rally in November 2007, and the subsequent defeat of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) party of the ruling coalition in the 2008 elections.

3.5 The Global-Local Connection

The collective identity of ethnic groups separated by geographical location can be brought into proximity with the advent of the Internet. While recognizing the need for a global impact on local political issues, as in "think local, act global', this chapter acknowledges that the local and global are mutually constitutive, with localities playing an active role in shaping the impact and reception of global processes as well as being shaped by them (Sassen, 1996). There is neither a single underlying 'driver' not a pre-determined direction to globalization. Rather, locally situated actors may not only think globally but act globally, because global processes are manifested in local spaces and can be, at least partially, shaped and redirected there.

The social and media networks created by the Internet have helped to draw together the needs and aspirations of a variety of separated groups and individual actors globally. In addition, the information and communications technology has facilitated the exchange of information among underrepresented and exploited groups in society and has opened alternatives spaces wherein these groups can make their voice heard by the international community. The most widely cited example of the way that the new dynamics of social networks interplay is the Zapatista movement in Mexico, dubbed the 'informational guerilla movement' (Castells, 2004). The Zapatistas became rapidly adept at utilizing counter-information to publicize their cause, assisted by NGOs and social movements with extensive use of the Internet as a tool for global mobilization.

Similarly, blogs can be widely used at the grassroots to promote international discussion and connections that link struggles and often bypass the nation-state. This is in line with Gidden's idea of disembedding and re-embedding of social relations,

bringing previously separated traditions and activities into new proximity (Waterman, 2002b). The key role of large gatherings and protests held in diverse geographical locations indicate that such events provide the space and place for otherwise disparate activists to recognize and construct commonalities around identities and goals, taking them back when they return home. Such commonalities can be reinforced when large gatherings and protest held simultaneously in several locations throughout the world, in designated days of global protest. This echoes Anderson's (2006) idea of "homogeneous, empty time," in which "a sociological organism moving calendrically through [it] is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily through history" (p.26). Two events happening simultaneously, though in separate places, can link the people involved in those events by this precise "simultaneity;" that is, they share a consciousness of a shared temporal dimension (p. 25).

In summary, the global-local connection is necessary to promote mobilization or collective action among local activists. The connections would not be possible if not for the Internet which brings together people, resources and strategies of resistance deployed by activist groups.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the relationship between Internet technology and mobilization. Acknowledging the limitation inherent in a semi-authoritarian country such as Malaysia on freedom to assemble and free speech (see Chapter 5 for more details), the Internet is seen as a potential medium to foster political mobilization particularly involving the minorities. In this context, the blog-mobilization theory is shaped by the relationship between space for activism and collective actors.

Using Habermas (1989) to describe the concept of space, the Internet has not only created the opportunity for participation in the public sphere, but the bounded nature of virtual blogging community formed based on "resistance identity,"(Castells, 2004) and defined by mutual interest (collective identity) can indeed serve as a facilitator allowing the public to advance real action. Although Habermas (1989) did not take sufficient account on mass-mediated communicated, the Internet technology does plays a crucial role not only as a source of information for citizens but also the key part of the public sphere itself - the space available for anyone who has access to Internet to express their opinion and debate. However, it must be stressed that the Internet will not

replace but rather complement the traditional real world community. This is because "real" social relations are repeated in "virtual" context, particularly in Malaysia, where access to Internet technology is restricted by infrastructural and social-cultural factors. In that regard, the importance of global-local connection and links to other (traditional) communications technology should be acknowledged as strategies and tools for mobilization, particularly to be used for minority politics. The following chapter focuses on the methodology of this research which is multi-dimensional.

CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to explain the data gathering and analysis used in this study. Using two case studies, this research was based primarily on qualitative research techniques. In addition, quantitative data was conducted to gauge the level of participation of Malaysian Indian bloggers in the blogosphere. The value of using a combination of methods simultaneously is that a more in-depth and triangulated measurement of political communication can be established (Vergeer & Hermans, 2008). Chapters 6, 7 and 8 are devoted to the findings of both the online survey and qualitative research, which were undertaken concurrently. The research conducted was both exploratory, which focused on the intersection of blogs and political mobilization, and explanatory, in that the dynamics and relationship occurring between the various social actors, individual and communities, and media and non-media sources were analyzed for their impact on mobilization and related activities.

The initial phase of this research focused on extensive perusal of blogs by collecting information and identifying bloggers of Indian descent, taking notes and conducting informal interviews with selected bloggers. Both objective and open-ended questions were asked among seven bloggers. This pilot test showed that blog readers can also have a strong impact on mobilization-related activities. This means not only are bloggers important for mobilization, but the interaction and connectivity between the various social actors, namely between blog readers and bloggers are equally important for collective action. Also, preliminary analysis of blogs revealed that most bloggers characteristics were not available online or could be misinterpreted due to the anonymous nature of the Internet. Hence, I proposed to carry out an online survey to capture the responses of bloggers and blog readers based on self-identification, discussed below.

4.2 Quantitative Research: Online Survey

4.2.1 Participants

Given the lack of previous research on Malaysian Indian bloggers and blog-readers, the online survey was attempted to fill in the gap. The random survey was targeted at bloggers and blog readers who self-identified as Malaysian Indians, currently

residing in Malaysian or overseas. The online survey which was undertaken for a period of one month netted 124 respondents. Of that total of blog readers, 44 were also bloggers who claimed to have their own blogs.

Among those who participated in the self-administered online survey, more than 60 percent were in the age group between 25 to 45 years, followed by 18.6 percent between 46 to 55 years, and 13.7 percent between 19 to 24 years. Males dominated the respondents with 73 percent compared to females 27 at percent. The survey participants were selected through convenient sampling, by which they responded to a series of questions that was approved for "exempt" by the Human Subjects Committee in November 2008. Before the start of the survey, respondents interested in participating in the survey were asked to read the preamble section (see Appendix A) which provided information on the survey including contact information of the researcher. Respondents who agreed to participate after reading this section were then instructed to click on the "green button" to "continue," which was considered as consent to participate in the survey.

4.2.2 Measures

The survey was conducted for a period of one month, from November 10 to December 10, 2009. The survey questions in English were divided into five parts, and had a total of 39 questions as shown in Appendix A: (a) 10 questions on background information, (b) seven questions relating to blog readers, (c) four questions relating to Hindraf activities, (d) six questions relating to the 2008 Malaysia's election, and e) thirteen questions relating to bloggers – those who owned blogs. The time estimated for the survey was ten minutes or less. The questions were mostly multiple choice questions with one open-ended question, and respondents were advised to avoid any question(s) and given the option to discontinue their participation in the study at any time without prejudice.

4.2.3 Procedure

The survey was conducted using an online survey software called Surveyshare (www. surveyshare.com), which could be accessed from the University of Hawaii website. To reach the convenience sample, request for announcements about the survey and a link to the survey URL were sent to a random selection of 300 bloggers of Indian descent, identified by the researcher through blog aggregators such as Sopo Sentral of

Malaysia (http://sopo-sentral.blogspot.com/), MyCen (http://www.mycen.com.my/malaysia/blog.html), Google, Technorati, and other social networking sites such as Facebook. A "snowball" techniques was used that allowed respondents to forward the survey automatically to fellow bloggers and blog readers (Babbie, 2001). This was done through emails and online chats (i.e, Skype, Yahoo messenger). I also created a blog (http://malaysianindian-blog.blogspot.com/) which was used mainly to document the survey including the link to the survey URL. Additionally, the survey was linked from blogs, online bulletins (for example, TheMindBB) and my Facebook account.

Protecting the privacy of respondents was paramount in this survey. The survey information collected on bloggers and blog readers cannot be identified, directly or indirectly through identifiers linked to the participants. The online survey was designed as "unsecured," which means anyone could take it. Participants were not required to enter an e-mail address or any other identifying information in order to partake. The respondents Internet Protocol (IP) addresses (programmed to appear on every completed survey) were used to check for duplicated surveys. Additionally, after a respondent sent the completed survey, a Webpage immediately appeared thanking him or her for participating and verifying that the survey had been sent so that respondents would not re-transmit the survey. The survey data was entered and analyzed using SPSS. The findings of the survey are discussed in Chapter 6.

4.3 Qualitative Research: Case Studies

Political mobilization is a terms that acknowledges actions, events, situations and movements. Hence, methodological tools of qualitative sociology are well-suited in studying the unfolding dynamic social processes and interactive-meaning making that occurred in real-world context. The qualitative techniques include chronological structures (sequences of action) of events that describe the case studies of this research.

Case studies bring a particular phenomenon (or subject) and context to be considered together in understanding a real-life phenomenon in depth (Yin, 2009). According to Yin (2009), case studies can cover multiple cases and then draw a single set of "cross-case" conclusions which is the intention of this study. In that regard, the protest rally of Hindraf in November 2007, and the defeat of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) party in the 2008 general elections (GE) were chosen to reveal the dynamism involved in the use of blogs for political mobilization amongst minority

Indians in Malaysia. These case studies were chosen mainly because they are the only cases that can be significantly tied to the minority Indians in Malaysia since the inception of the Internet in 1992. While causality can be determined between the use of the Internet and the Hindraf protest rally, the same fact does not hold true in the case of the MIC's defeat. In this case, the Hindraf rally played an instrumental role (ripple-effect), subsequently resulting in the Malaysian Indians voting for the opposition and denying MIC its majority win.

4.3.1 Chronological Structures

Both the cases are unique and "time-ordered," meaning that "events" or "actions" are presented in sequential or chronological order (Yin, 2009) in three phases:

i. Phase 1, from January to August 2007,
ii. Phase 2, from September 2007 to November 2007, and
iii. Phase 3, from December 2007 to March 2008.

As opposed to studies involving data collected over a brief period (one week to one month) (Braddley, 1993), the adoption of this sampling period aims to cover a larger time-frame to have a sense of the activities taking place over time. In this study, the analysis included events or actions prior to and after the November 2007 Hindraf's protest rally, and the March 2008 general elections.

The analyses of the case studies in this research was multi-perspective and multi-level, taking into consideration the methodology difficulties inherent in the study of blogs. Multiple sources of data were used not only to provide an in-depth understanding of the narratives by giving contextual meaning (Yin, 2009), but also to meet the methodological needs to validate the processes and bring out details from the viewpoint of the participants. In this context, the sources of data collected for this study were from three broad categories – documentation and archival records, individual and focus group interviews, and direct observation, discussed in detail below.

4.3.2 Documentation and Archival Records

Documentary information is the main source of evidence used in this study. Although Yin (2009) lists documents and archival records as separate categories, this study combines both sources – as documents in this study relates to blog posting, which is also in the archival format available on the Internet. The blog postings as detailed below were used as main documentary evidence – narratives – to the case studies in this

research. Other than blogs, data was also collected from various sources such as government reports, survey reports, published books and articles and secondary data.

4.3.2.1 Narratives from Blogs

Unlike most studies that have focused on coding political messages or themes (see details in Vergeer & Hermans, 2008), this study focused on postings or messages that sequence an event or action under the theme of mobilization. In other words, this study does not involve sampling of discussions or threads, but rather individual messages in the context of the discussion. In this case, the recording unit or unit of analysis is the individual messages or postings on the blogs. Since archival records of blogs have a sequential structure, it makes it easier to follow an event or discussion.

After the initial phase of selecting the blogs, data showing the sequence of events and action was gathered relating to the Hindraf activities and general elections. The purpose was firstly, to observe the dynamics of the relationship amongst bloggers, between bloggers and readers, bloggers and news portals in disseminating information, and secondly, to observe how information was transformed to real actions. Issues, themes, and patterns, audio-visual images (including photos, poster, banner, VCDs, songs) emerging from the narratives were culled out to show the linkages between the different sources of media and activist. Information from selected blogs was sought for the following:

a) Dissemination of information on related-events;
b) Linkages between bloggers, bloggers and readers, bloggers and other media and non-media sources;
c) Postings relating to protest activities including cyber-campaigns, protest, online petitions, gathering at temples and forums;
d) Information flow- postings of events between blogs and other sources, such as the mainstream news paper, i.e. The Star, New Straits Times, alternative online news, for example, *Malaysiakini*; and
e) "Shout-box" activities, which carried vital information such as linkages to other blogs, call for action, clarification or verification on postings and others.

Selection of Blogs

Preliminary investigation showed it is difficult to estimate the number of blogs created by Malaysian Indians due to the fact that new ones continually appear, while old

blogs may disappear or become dormant. A rough estimate of the active blogs created by Malaysians would run in thousands according to Technorati (www.technorati.com) and Alexa (www.alexa.com). Of these, only a handful of blogs are created by Malaysian Indians, indicating that the blogging phenomenon is fairly new.

However due to the nature and context of this study, the contents of three "socio-political blogs" owned by Malaysian Indians were used for analysis. These English-language blogs each had regular, stable and substantial political content during the study phases as mentioned-above, and each appeared to be popular and influential[14] "Malaysian Indian Bloggers" (MIB). The blogs are:

- *Bolehland* (www.bolehland.com), owned by Mahendran
- *Raajarox* (www.raajarox.com), owned by Raaja
- *Poobalan.com* (www.poobalan.com), owned by Poobalan.

These blogs not only represent the voices of the Malaysian Indian community, but are representative models for venues that meet the criteria for citizens' participation online. Mahendran and Raaja are also two of the seven administrators of the sole community blog for Malaysian Indians called the "Malaysian Indian's Blog" (MIB, www.mindsblog.com). MIB (Figure 4.1) was initiated by *Raajarox*, which materialized into a community blog in February, 2008. The main objective of Mindsblogs was to foster interaction among Malaysian Indian bloggers on any topic that was apolitical. This blog still exists today, creating opportunities and interactions that go beyond the Internet. (MIB bloggers, personal interview, November 11, 2008).

All Three Blogs

Mahendran, a Malaysian Indian who hails from the northern region of the Kedah state started blogging (*Bolehland*) in January 2007. His main objective at that time as he claimed was to blog on anything that was apolitical (Personal Interview, November 8, 2008). But since April 2007, recognizing the limitations and lack of coverage on the

[14] All three blogs were also nominated for Manya Awards - an award for deserving bloggers organized by the Malaysian Indian Congress in 2008. The categories of blogs included "best socio-political," "best male blogger" and "best entertainment blog".
(http://www.thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2008/6/5/nation/20080605154600&sec=nation). Also see http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=437; http://poobalan.com/blog/indian/2008/06/06/nominated-for-manya-bloggers-awards-by-mic/; http://raajarox.com/?p=347

Source: *Raajarox*.com

Figure 4.1. Malaysian Indian bloggers' logo

Malaysian Indians, apart from *Malaysiakini,* an independent online news outlet, *Bolehland* turned into a socio-political blog – discussing politics and current events, particularly those relating to Malaysian Indians. Mahendran's blog has been used as reference and became popular due to several reasons. Firstly, *Bolehland* was the only blog that covered the Hindraf rally in real-time despite the fact that his reporting was carried out from his dormitory room. Secondly, his temporary job as a writer for *Malaysiakini* had also boosted his reputation as a credible source that was necessary to build a strong relationship with his readers. Consequently, from August to November 2007, *Bolehland* registered a high readership, measured by the number of postings, comments and personal interview. Thirdly, blogger Mahendran was also involved in the offline mobilization of Hindraf's "Roses Campaign" which took place on February 16, 2008, in which he was arrested by the police and spent half-a-day in the police lock-up (Blogger Mahendran, personal interview, November 11, 2008).

Similarly, *Rajaarox* was created by Raaja in January 2007. He gained popularity when he created the MIB, a community blog in February, 2008. Prior to that, he took the initiative to compile a list of Malaysian Indian bloggers, and the accompanying logo as shown in Figure 4.1. Since then he has been referenced and linked to and from several blog aggregators such as Sopo Sentral (http://sopo-sentral.blogspot.com/).

Poobalan started blogging (*Poobalan*.com) in February 2007. Since then he has blogged extensively on issues and events relating to the Malaysian Indians, particularly on education. His blog acts as a one-stop-center that provides information on educational scholarships and loans available for students intending to further pursue higher education. Apart from that, he also provides advice and counseling through email and offline meetings.

4.3.3 Interviews – Individual and Focus Group

Individual and focus group interviews were conducted with bloggers, citizens, and social activist, through both online (chat) and offline (face-to-face) methods as shown in Table 4.1 below. The purpose of the interviews was to generate information on Hindraf and the general election-related activities, particularly on how individuals and groups organized collectively and transformed their online participation and discussion into real-life actions. Although some of this information could be found on the respective blogs as archival records, bloggers especially provided detailed information on some pieces of the narratives that was 'intentionally' left out from their writings on blogs. This restriction was mainly due to the Malaysian law that inhibited freedom of speech, and as a result, bloggers were compelled into exercising self-censorship (see Chapter 6 for details).

Table 4.1. Number of Interviewees

Interviews	Offline	Online (Skype chat)
Focus- Group	MIB Bloggers (3)	
Individual	Social activist (1) Citizens (3)	Other Bloggers(6)

Interview questions are shown in Appendix B. Most interviews were conducted in English, with a few using dual-languages – English and Tamil. As a speaker of both languages, I was able to transcribe the interviews and cross-checked the responses with the posting on blogs. Online interviews (through chats) were exclusively done in English, and the pages were saved for review later.

4.3.4 Direct Observation

The main direct observation conducted for this study was at Internet cafes in Malaysia. During my fieldtrip in October 2008, I visited two Internet cafes in Ipoh, the capital of Perak. Both cafes were located in an area dominated by ethnic Chinese and Indians. The visits were carried out at different times – during the day and night. These observations were necessary to reveal the kind of activities taking place at the cyber-cafes (see chapter 6 for details). Observations documented included:

- The users of the cafes (young versus old)
- Internet activities engaged by users (for example, chat, email, games etc.)
- Interactions between people

- The rules and regulations that were imposed on users (for example, sign-in sheet)

Multiple sources of data allowed for triangulation of evidence and helped corroborate data collected for various sources. Date collected from blog postings was cross-checked with interviews that assisted in confirming details of the narratives.

My research encountered several issues, particularly those relating to corroborating evidence collected from various sources. Although blogs presented "stories" in an extended format as compared to the mainstream media, I had to rely on indirect evidence such as conversations, interviews, and small-group discussions. Additionally, due to the multiple languages used; I needed to interpret the evidence by becoming immersed in contextual details seen within the larger social structure. Being an Indian helped to contextualize the general problems faced by the Indians in Malaysia; however, I was objective in my reporting and focused on presenting the facts.

Another issue included gaining trust among members of the Government who declined to be interviewed due to the controversies surrounding HIndraf. At the time of the interview undertaken in November 2008, Hindraf was a banned organization, hence matters relating to it were deemed 'sensitive'. As such, interviews were limited to only bloggers and activist interested in the subject-matter, and carried out informally so as not to suggest any 'conspiration' against the government. Limiting the interview to only two groups of people may pose biasness, but the multiple sources of data helped corroborate evidence and information.

Lastly, references to writings of the bloggers were a challenging task. I had to print out and reference immediately after writing because of the ephemeral nature of the blogosphere. As writings appeared and disappeared, the question of validity of argument arised, but I was able to corroborate information collected from various sources.

4.4 Conclusion

Considering the methodology difficulties in studying blogs, this research was primarily qualitative. The analysis of themes relating to blog-mobilization – that is, the dynamics of the network and interaction between various actors and media – was based on sequences of actions and narratives that described the two case studies of this research. Multiple sources of data were used to corroborate evidence, including documentation and archival records of blogs, interviews and direct observations. Additionally, an online survey was conducted to study the nature and profile of the Malaysian Indian bloggers and blog readers.

CHAPTER 5:
MALAYSIAN INDIANS: THE PAST AND PRESENT

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters provided a conceptual framework in understanding the characteristics of blogs that offer a constructive alternative space and medium for communication and mobilization. However, the relationship between Internet technology and mobilization can only be studied in a specific context – when the focus falls on why and how people in Malaysia use the Internet, which is often different from its use in other countries. The understanding of the use of blogs, in this case, is seen within a larger perspective that involves the state, minority groups, civil society, and the opportunity created by the development of the Internet. The dynamics of these relationships and understanding of context serve as the background to the case studies examined in detail in Chapters 7 and 8.

This chapter focuses on: how have the main challenges minority Malaysian Indians faced in the past and present affected their participation in the public sphere? To answer this question, this chapter provides an understanding of the (historical) socio-political-cultural context of Malaysia: the state of Malaysia and its semi-democratic governance structure, ethnic relations, and various legislation that have affected the status of Malaysian Indians as a minority group, and as a result imposed limitations on their participation in the public sphere. These components are summarized in Figure 5.1. that provides the framework for understanding the context of this research.

5.2 Overview of Malaysia

5.2.1 History & National Identity

Malaysia is made up of two distinct parts (Figure 5.2). Peninsular Malaysia consists of 11 states and two federal territories, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya. The second part occupies the northern part of Borneo, comprising the states of Sabah and Sarawak, and the federal territory of Labuan. Malaysia was colonized by the Japanese and Britain in the late 19th and early 20th century. Britain was attracted to the Malay Peninsula by its vast reserves of tin, and later found that the rich soil was also highly productive for growing rubber trees. To meet the labor demand, specific economic functions were allocated according to ethnicity (Hirschmann, 1986). While the Chinese worked in the

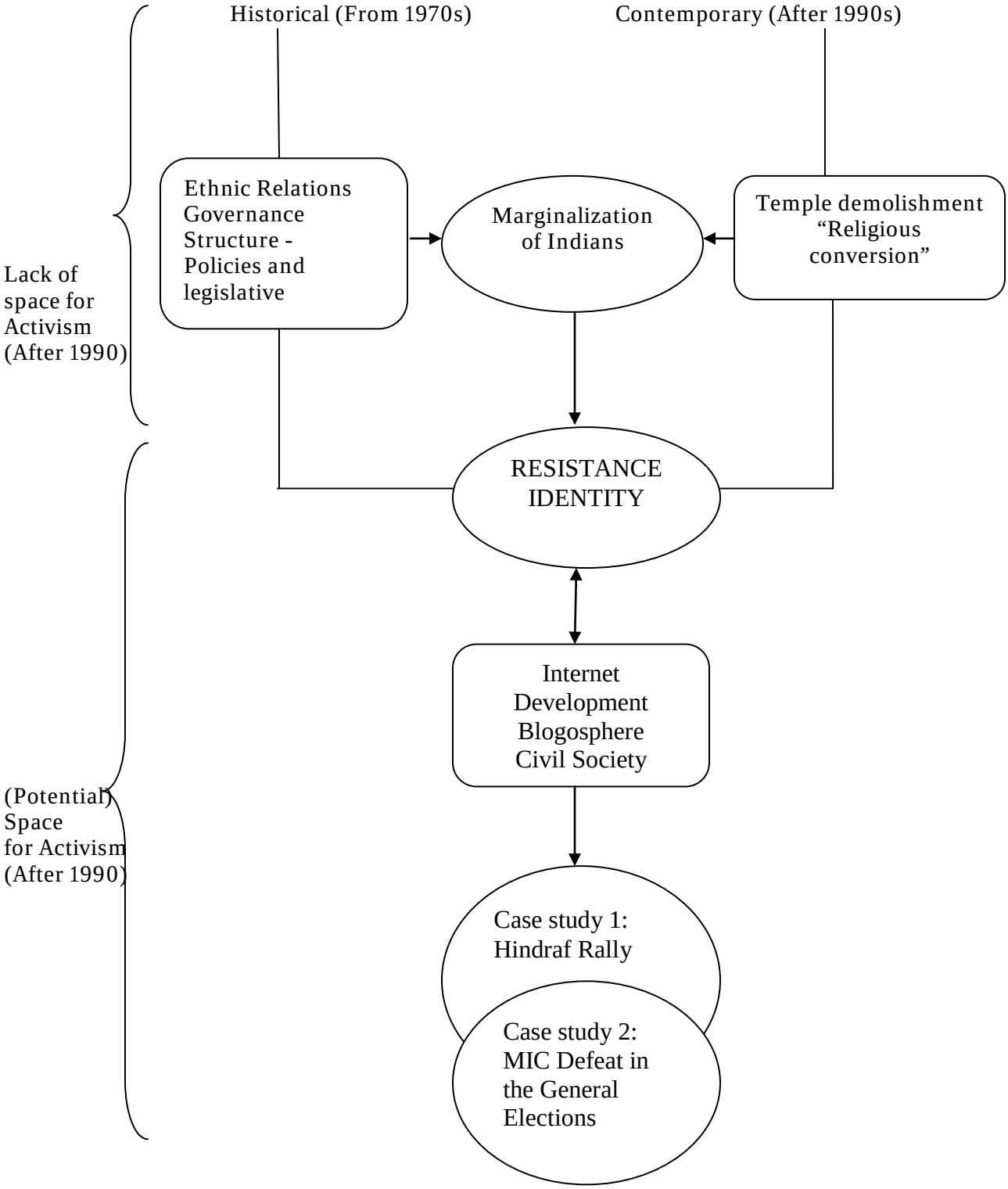


Figure 5.1. The Framework for Understanding the Context

tin-mining industry; Indians worked in the plantation economy. The *bumiputeras* (natives and Malays) were left to cultivate their agricultural land in the *kampongs* (villages).

What was to become East Malaysia had different colonial administrations. The state of Sarawak was governed by a British family, the Brookes (styled as the "White Rajas"), and Sabah was run by the British North Borneo Company. Apart for these states, the cosmopolitan hub of British interests' was Singapore, the central port and center of publishing, commerce, education, and administration (Andaya & Andaya, 1982).

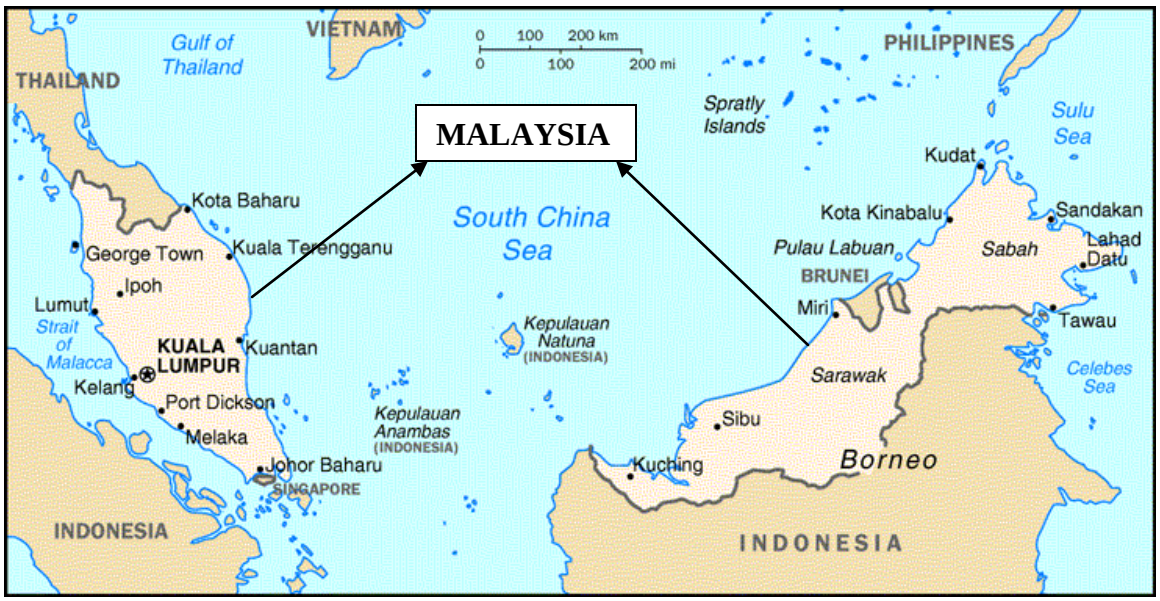


Figure 5.2. Map of Malaysia

The climactic event in forming Malaysia was the Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia from 1942-1945. Japanese rule helped to invigorate a growing anti-colonial movement, which flourished following the British return after the war. When Britain attempted to organize its administration of Malaya into one unit, the Malayan Union, strong Malay protests to what seemed to usurp their historical claim to the territory forced the British to modify the plan (Nagata, 1979). The other crucial event was the largely Chinese communist rebellion in 1948 that remained strong to the mid-1950s. To address Malay criticisms and to promote counter-insurgency, the British undertook a vast range of nation-building efforts (Andaya & Andaya, 1982). Local conservatives and radicals alike developed their own attempts to foster unity among the disparate, formerly known Malayan population. These grew into the Federation of Malaya, which gained

independence in 1957. In 1963, with the addition of Singapore and the north Borneo territories, this federation became Malaysia. Difficulties of integrating the predominately Chinese population of Singapore into Malaysia remained, and under Malaysian directive Singapore became an independent republic in 1965 (Harper, 1999).

Malaysia's population stands at 28.3 million people as of December 2009, comprised primarily of three major ethnic groups: *Bumiputeras,* Chinese and Indians. The *bumiputeras (*literally "the sons' of the soil"*)* are Malays and indigenous groups who form the majority (65 percent) of the population. The Chinese make up 25 percent, Indians less than 8 percent, and "Others" 2 percent of the population. These population figures have an important place in peninsular history, because Malaysia as a country was created with demography in mind. Malay leaders in the 1930s and 1940s organized their community around the issue of curbing immigration (Andaya & Andaya, 1982). After independence, Malaysia was created when the Borneo territories with their substantial indigenous populations were added to Malaya as a means of exceeding the great number of Chinese and Indians in the country (Harper, 1999). Malay became Malaysia's sole national language in 1967, though English is also widely spoken because it was the administrative language of the British colonizers. Along with Malay and English other languages are popular: many Chinese speak some combination of Cantonese, Hokkien, and/or Mandarin; most Indians (80 percent) speak Tamil.

5.2.2 Ethnic Relations

Malaysia's national identity has been a crucial question throughout history: should the national culture be Malay, a hybrid, or separate ethnic entities? The question reflects the tension between the indigenous claims of the Malay population and the cultural and citizenship rights of the immigrant groups. A tentative solution came when the Malay, Chinese, and Indian elites who negotiated independence struck what has been called "the bargain" or "social contract" (Lim, 1995; Nagata, 1979). Their informal deal exchanged Malay political dominance for immigrant citizenship and unfettered economic pursuit. Some provisions of independence were more formal, and the constitution granted Malays "special rights" concerning land, language, the place of the Malay Rulers, and Islam, based on their indigenous status. Including the Borneo territories and Singapore in Malaysia revealed the fragility of "the bargain"(Amarjit, 1998; Lin & Har, 2008).

Despite this provision, many Malays remained poor while some Chinese politicians wanted greater political power. These fractures in Malaysian society prompted Singapore's expulsion and produced the watershed of contemporary Malaysian life, the May 1969 urban unrest (ethnic clashes) in Kuala Lumpur. Violence left hundreds dead; parliament was suspended for two years. As a result of this experience the government placed tight curbs on political debate of national cultural issues and began a comprehensive program of affirmative action for the Malay population (see section "Economic Marginalization" for details). This history hangs over all subsequent attempts to encourage official integration of Malaysian society. In the 1990s a government plan to blend the population into a single group called "*Bangsa Malaysia*" (Malaysian race) and most recently, "One Malaysia" has generated excitement and criticism from different constituencies of the population. Continuing debates demonstrate that Malaysian national identity remains unsettled. This communal politics continues, and is played to the best of effect by UMNO, the leading ethnic Malay-based component party within *Barisan Nasional* (BN).

5.2.3 Governance Structure

Since Independence, the ruling BN (formerly known as Alliance) party has been in power. The BN party is a partnership of three major communal-based parties, the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), and other small parties. The Malaysian political structure has been variously labeled as a "semi-democracy" or "semi-authoritarian" (Case, 2002; Crouch, 1993; Diamond, Linz & Seymour, 1989), a "syncretic state" (Jesudason, 1996) or an "electoral authoritarian regime" (Case, 2002). Such regimes hold regular elections, but systematically violate civil liberties and fairness. Elections are inclusive and pluralistic, but not fully competitive and open (Schedler, 2002). Schedler (2002) describes elections in electoral authoritarian system as multilayered nested games, that is, two-level games where the "game of electoral competition and the meta-game of electoral reform unfurl in a simultaneous as well as interactive fashion" (p. 113). The ruling coalition hold elections as a way to legitimate their rule while the opposition parties set the rules of the game as the strategy to unmask the manipulations of the ruling coalition. In other words, the ruling government of Malaysia controls how the rules are enforced although Malaysia's constitution guarantees basic human rights and elections every five years. Malaysia's government has

many ways to keep itself in power, "...incumbents [that] abuse state resources, restrict the media, manipulate electoral results, and journalist and opposition politicians are frequently subject to surveillance, harassment, and occasionally, arrest" (Levitsy & Way, 2002, p. 4-5).

In sum, Malaysia's ethnic diversity is both a blessing and a source of stress. The diversity presents seemingly intractable problems of social cohesion, and the threat of ethnic violence adds considerable tension to Malaysian politics (see details in "socio-cultural-religious marginalization"). The politics of ethnicity which dominates all facets of Malaysian life, were set in motion by the British colonial administration based on the "divide and rule" policy. The division of labor according to ethnicity, not only reinforced social-cultural differences among ethnic groups, but had significant impact on the livelihood of the poor Indians (details in section 5.3.2). For the Indians, Malaysian independence has meant a cultural and socially marginal role between Malay political hegemony and Chinese economic domination (Ramasamy, 1983; Belle, 2001). The socio-economic situation of the Malaysian Indians increasingly has been weakened, subsequently, leading to feelings of resentment as "neglected" and "victimized" (Nagarajan, 2008; Willford, 2008). The resentment occasionally breaks out in ethnic violence, and the popular media stereotypes the Indians as violent criminals and gangsters. A brief look at the issues surrounding marginalization of the Malaysian Indians within the given context provides the background as to why.

5.3 Malaysian Ethnic Indian Community

The marginalization of Malaysian Indians is not a new issue. Many scholars have highlighted the problems faced by the Indians in both the socio-economic and political sphere (Muzaffar, 1993; Loh, 2003; Nagarajan, 2008, Ramasamy, 2008; Anbalakan, 2008). The Malaysia government's development plans since the 1970s have acknowledged the worsening situation of the displaced Indian poor (Center for Public Policy Studies (CPPS), n. d.).For example, Mahathir's speech presenting The Third Outline Perspective Plan (OPP3), 2001-2010, touched upon issues relating to Indians:

> ...The increase in urban population has resulted in a new phenomenon, that is, the expansion of squatter settlements and the emergence of relative poverty in the urban areas among *Bumiputera* and the Indian community...In ensuring non-*Bumiputera* equity ownership, the share of ownership by the Indian community will be given due consideration.

Despite this awareness, the majority of Indians did not experience much progress, particularly during the 1990s, a period of rapid growth during which the Malays and Chinese generally prospered (Jomo, 1986). In highlighting the problems of marginalization, it must be noted that not all Indians lag behind. The concern here is among the Indian poor compared to the business class.

5.3.1 Malaysian Indians as Migrant Workers

The socio-economic problems of the Indian poor are rooted in the plantation economy. The bulk of Indians were brought into Malaya as indentured and non-laborers, (also referred to as 'literate' group). They were recruited to work in the British plantation economy or within public utilities in the early 20th century.[15] Indentured laborers were predominantly Tamil, from South of India, the non-labor migrants were Ceylonese, from Sri Lanka; and Sikhs, from Northern India (Appudurai & Dass, 2008; Belle, 2001; Tate, 2008). The Malaysian census classification of the Malaysian Indian population as shown in Appendix D (Department of Statistics, as cited in Appudurai & Dass, 2008) shows the diversity not only in language and education, but also religion dominated by issues of caste, class and (superstitious) beliefs.

Arguably, the intra-ethnic differences in socio-economic systems based on ethnic-economic functions (Amplavanar, 1993; see section 5.2.1.) have imposed severe constraints upon the social and economic mobility of the Indians. For several generations, the Indians who have been dependent on the plantation economy for employment and housing have been largely ignored by both their colonial administration and owners of plantation.[16] As a result, the Indians earned low wages and lived in poor living conditions without adequate healthcare and schools (CPPS, n.d.; Ramasamy, 1983). Over time, this situation exacerbated among the Indian poor, leaving them marginal to the process of inter-ethnic struggles. At the same time, however, the country made remarkable progress through the "developmentalism" discourse, undertaken by state (Loh & Khoo, 2002, p. 8). Although this discourse, which valorized sustained economic growth coupled with "cultural liberation" (the Malay identity) came to dominate in the 1990s, the symbol of differences between the ethnic groups were

[15] The Hindraf group filed a four-trillion dollar claim against the British government alleging that the former colonial masters had brought their forefathers in the 1800s to the then Malaya colony as indentured laborers that left them out of Malaysia's prosperity.

[16] The colonial administration, structured on dependency was the basis for the status of the migrant workers. There were denied social and economic mobility. The daily wages scheme and toddy (a type of liquor made from coconut) shops were created by plantation owners to prevent the working class from developing themselves and thereby threatening the supply of labor force for the plantations (Appudurai & Dass, 2008).

crystallized much earlier through the introduction to the National Economic Policy (NEP) in 197o.

5.3.2 Economic Marginalization

Many policies were drawn to promote the socio-economic standing of the Malays vis-à-vis other ethnic groups. After racial riots[17] broke out in 1969, Parliament was suspended and the National Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced which provided a blueprint for a comprehensive affirmative action package for the *bumiputras* from 1970 to 1990. While the NEP has been replaced by the National Development Policy (NDP, 1991-2000), the National Vision Policy (NVP, 2001-2010) and the National Mission (2006-2020), the objectives not only carried the initial objectives of NEP but also continued discrimination against other ethnic groups (Appudurai & Dass, 2008; Lim & Har, 2008).

Briefly, the NEP was constructed on two-pronged goals that included the elimination of identification of race with economic function introduced by the British (section 5.2.1) and reduction of poverty. It was expected that with improved economic standing of the *bumiputera* community, inter-ethnic relations would improve. Specific NEP targets included an increase in *bumiputera* share of the corporate sector from 2.4 percent to 30 percent in 1990 while the non-*bumiputera* share would increase from 34 percent in 1970 to 40 percent in 1990 (Rahim, 2003). In line with increasing the share of the *bumiputeras*, quotas were established in tertiary institutions and private sector jobs.

Following the implementation of NEP, the *bumiputeras* dominant position became stronger in education (through the setting up of specialized institutions, enrollment in overseas universities, granting of scholarships and loans, and preferential allocation of seats), civil service employment and corporate ownership (see details in Thillainathan, 2008; Ramasamy, 1983, 2008; Lim & Har, 2008). Consequently, the Malays mainly held administrative jobs in the government sector, while the Chinese were mostly entrepreneurs and businessmen. Indians continued to work in the plantation estates and railways. This was viewed by the Indians not only as an outright discrimination against them, but the continuation of the "divide and rule" policy incepted during the British colonial times.

[17] Since independence in 1957, the ruling coalition, then called the Alliance (currently called Barisan Nasional) was unsuccessful in winning a two-third majority in the 1969 general elections. As a result, racial riots broke out between the Malays and the Chinese ethnic groups. The root cause of this riot was blamed on economic inequality- where the Malays being the majority were still "backward" as compared to the minority Chinese.

In sum, the preferential policies, programs and actions with regards to NEP were concerned with uplifting the socio-economic position of the Malays vis-à-vis the non-Malays. The Indians suffered the most, being confined to the plantation economy, compared to the Chinese, who had historically been known for their capital accumulation and wealth. The high rate of unemployment, the move from estates to urban areas in search for better job opportunities, and unequal distribution of resources contributed to the worsening condition of the Indians in Malaysia (Ramasamy, 2008; Appudurai & Dass, 2008). Hence, the NEP policies, conceived in purely ethnic terms instead of needs-based terms, failed to contribute to ethnic integration, and were considered the greatest threat to socio-political stability, according to Jomo (1986). The mutual distrust, disharmony and prevalence of poverty and income disparities eventually erupted into an ugly racial confrontation in 1998 and 2001 (see section on "Social-Religious-Cultural Marginalization).

5.3.3 Political Marginalization

Besides economic marginalization, there is a general perception among Indians that that they are becoming increasingly less relevant in the distribution of power and resources (Appudurai & Dass, 2008; Ramasamy, 2008; Nagarajan, 2008). Given the ethnic-based politics that continues to dominate every aspect of the Malaysian landscape, this perspective is a major concern for Indians who make less than eight percent of the population.

The legacy of the British colonial rule in Malaysia is based on a plurality-majority electoral system. Elections are held for the *Dewan Rakyat* (House of Representatives) of the bicameral Parliament at the national level, and for the *Dewan Perundangan Negeri* (State legislative assemblies) of the thirteen states (Moten, 2009). Seats, however, are allocated to Indians by the political party concerned, and the basis for allocation is ethnicity. On behalf of the Indians, the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) has been allocated parliamentary and state assembly seats. For example, in the 2008 elections, out of 222 parliamentary constituencies, Indian voters had some electoral influence in 71 constituencies (32 percent) (Lim, 2007). Additionally, out of 505 state assembly seats, Malaysian Indians had some presence in 206 constituencies. Therefore, it was envisioned that the "capacity to influence electoral politics" is marginal, and this limited influence will diminish over time, according to Appudurai & Dass (2008).

This political marginalization coupled with increasing social problems (see Appudurai & Dass, 2008; Ramasamy, 2008; Thillainathan, 2008) have been related to the shortcomings of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), which the Indians have relied upon since 1946 to represent their interest (Loh, 2003; Ramasamy, 2008).

5.3.3.1 Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) Party

When discussing the politics of representation of the Indians in Malaysia, reference is mainly made to the role and function of the MIC and its leadership under Samy Vellu. The Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) was formed in 1946 to represent the Indian community in Malaysia. In 1955, V.T. Tun Sambanthan, the fourth MIC president, agreed to enter a coalition with United Malay National Organization (UMNO) and the MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association) to form the Alliance, an ethnic-based coalition, which has persisted until today with a different name, *Barisan Nasional* (BN) (Loh, 2003). While UMNO served the majority Malay population, MIC resorted to Tamil-speaking communal appeals to form a mass bass. The Tamil-based party was considered an alien ground for the non-Tamil Indians who were mostly English-speaking middle class and other religions such as the Sikhs (Loh, 2003).

Nonetheless, the position of MIC in the *BN* coalition was considerably stronger from 1951 to 1974 than in the present time (Appudurai & Dass , 2008). This is mainly because the current BN coalition is made up of 14 parties,[18] each claiming its own sub-ethnic niche support, further diluting the MIC's position as the sole representative of Malaysian Indians.

MIC's success and strong support in the early years of its formation can be attributed to several schemes drawn up to help Indians in the private sector. Notably, among its successful interventions included allocation of quotas – three percent equity,[19] and the setting-up of a venture capital corporation called Maika Holdings which yielded profit, besides promoting business opportunities for the Indian businessmen. In the area of education, MIC was able to convince the government to offer more places in the public universities, apart from setting up the Maju Institute of Educational Development (MIED) which provided loans to Indians to further their studies in a higher learning institutions (Loh, 2003). In return, MIED was successful in setting up two technical colleges in the 1990s and a private university in 2001. However, all of these initiatives

[18] Example of parties representing Indians include Indian Progressive Front (IPF), Peoples' Progressive Party (PPP), Kesatuan India Muslim Malaysia (KIMMA).
[19] In view of low level of participation among Indians in the private sector, a 3 percent equity was allocated for the Indians.

were seen as promoting middle-class Indians and failing to address the working class or the majority of the poor Indians. Gomez (1996) (as cited in Loh, 2003) argued that the involvement of BN political parties in business led to factionalism, as politicians competed for access to business interests. In that regard, the MIC was no exception when Maika Holding registered a loss in mid-1990s, and the MIC president then, Samy Vellu was alleged to have been involved in "money politics" (Kuppuswamy, 2009).

Since October 12, 1979, Samy Vellu has been the longest serving president of MIC, and ever since becoming a Minister, he became one the richest Malaysians of Indian origin. His leadership has not been without controversy, allegations of corruption, and perceived as one of the main causes for the marginalization of Indians. Samy Vellu, whose Tamil-speaking parents worked as rubber tappers in a rubber plantation, worked his way up from a public bus conductor and then an office boy later becoming a Minister (Kuppuswamy, 2009). Samy Vellu has been described as arrogant due to problems in his party ranging from "power grab" feuds[20], caste-based politics,[21] and mismanagement by its educational institution, popularly known as the "*Maika* scandal."[22] As allegations increased, the opportunities for Indians in areas of development including investments had worsened, consequently creating discontent among the Indian community who MIC was supposed to represent. As a result, many budding leaders have left the party or have been expelled or have moved over to the opposition parties during Samy Velu's tenure as they saw no future for them in the MIC. Most of these leaders have gone with their own retinue of followers, thereby weakening the party.

5.3.4 Social-Religious-Cultural Marginalization

I) Major Ethnic Clashes Involving Malaysian Indians

The Indian community has shown to be both economically and politically marginalized, unlike their Malays and Chinese counterparts. Arguably, in a weaker position that other major ethnic-based parties in the Malay-dominated BN government,

[20] Subra-Samy Vellu feud has been an ongoing battle for the post of President of MIC, and Subra has been the vice president of MIC for 22 years until the 2006 MIC elections.
[21] The caste politics has been rampant in the MIC party, sidelining other sub-religions compared to Tamils (e.g. Malayalees, Sikhs, Telugu) and "lower caste" as alleges by Vyran who started an organization of people of lower caste called "Nammavar". The Tamils have been dominant ever since inception, as the majority of the Indian community is Tamil (see Kuppuswamy 2008 for details).
[22] The investment arm of the MIC known as Maika Holdings is almost bankrupt and it has become a scandal. It is now under the (mis)management of Samy Vellu's son Vell Paari. Fearing that their investments are sunk, the shareholders, presumably with some backing from the opposition, had demonstrated in front of the MIC headquarters on July 30, 2009, when the police had to be called to break the crowds. With an injunction pending in the court there is a virtual deadlock in the issue.

the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) has limited influence in representing the concerns of the community and in shaping public policies. In that context, it is not surprising that more recent ethnic riots have erupted in neighborhoods populated by working class Indians, Malays and unskilled foreign workers. Due to a significant proportion of Indians in the lower socio-economic strata of Malaysian society with limited prospects for social mobility (see section 5.3.1), Malay-Indian clashes have occurred in the working class villagers of Kampong Rawa, Penang in April 1998 (for details see Loh, 2003) and Kampung Medan, Kuala Lumpur, in March 2001 (see details in Willford, 2008).[23] Opposition politicians and civil society activists claimed that the March 2001 clash, which left six people dead and fifty more injured, was triggered not by hostile ethnic relations but by frustrations over poor living conditions and the uneven development since the 1970s.

II. Resurgence of Islam (Islamic State)

The communal politics of the Malays were extended to the religious and cultural sphere after the introduction of NEP in 1970, which underscored "*Ketuanan* Malaysia" (Malay Supremacy) and Islamic resurgence, which are racists concept that is alien to the true spirit of the Federal Constitutions,[24] and that tries to justify racial discrimination (see Ramasamy, 2008; Nagarajan, 2008; Rahim, 2003; Lim & Har, 2008). As Rahim argues (2003), due to the systematic promotion of Islam by both the Malay-based UMNO under the former Mahathir administration in the 1980s and Parti Se-Islam Malaysia (PAS), religion has become inexorably racialized, assisted by the "constitutional conflation" (the uprise of *syariah*-based law[25]) (see Nagarajan, 2008). This dynamic has not only become a source of empowerment for the Malays but a symbol of difference to non-Muslims. As a result of the highly politicized Islamic environment,[26] non-Muslims understandably feel threatened, alienated and defensive. Consequently, this has invested all non-Muslim religions with increased significance for the expression of ethnic values, as well as vehicles for experimentation and change and has channeled non-Malay ethnic sentiments into religious activities as convenient alternatives for ethnic political expression.

[23] An issue brought up in the Hindraf memo (see Chapter 7).
[24] Article 153 of the Federal Constitutions on the "special position of Malays" was mainly concerned with access to land, admission to public services jobs, issuing of permits or licenses, scholarships and other forms of loans for education purposes. However, the status quo has been on "*Ketuanan Melayu*" which is not enshrined in the Federal constitutions.
[25] The Federal constitution describes Islam as the official religion and Islamic law is applied only to Muslims in personal and family matters.
[26] In September 2001, Mahathir declared Malaysia as an "Islamic state"

III. Freedom of Religion and *Syariah*-based Law

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) claimed that minorities in Malaysia struggle to maintain and practice their religions. The right to religious freedom has been eroding. With *syariah*-based laws reigning over the Federal Constitutions, Malaysian Indians were further angered over religious matters, particularly that relating to "body snatching" and temple demolishment. The Malaysian Constitution denies apostasy, the ability for those born into Islam to convert to another religion. On examples of a case that was widely debated in the blogs and later documented by Tan & Lee (2008) involved Revathi Masoosai, a 29-year old ethnic Indian married woman born to Muslim parents, but raised by a Hindu grandmother. In April 2007, the Malay religious authorities forcibly separated her from her Hindu husband, and gave custodial rights of her 15-month old daughter to Revathi's mother.[27] In a similar vein, in 2005, Moorthy, a celebrated mountaineer, was given final burial rites as a Muslim although his Hindu family disputed it. In May 2006, Lina Joy, a Christian convert, lost a court battle to remove the word "Muslim" from her Malaysian identity card, and was ordered to seek the permission of the *syariah* court to renounce Islam. Other cases of similar ending included Shamala, Subhasini and Suresh (see Nagarajan, 2008; Lim & Har, 2008). These cases were deemed unconstitutional and drew criticism by legal experts, non-Muslim leaders and civil society organizations for the Federal Constitutions guaranteed that "every person has the right to profess and practice his religion."

IV. Temple Demolishment

Resentment among Indians was further aggravated by the continuing demolition of Hindu temples by local councils (more in Chapter 7). Many temples or Hindu places of worship that existed prior to independence have been demolished on the claim that they illegally occupy state-owned land (Lim & Har, 2008). For example, 79 temples were demolished between February 2006 and June 2007.[28] This was considered outright discrimination by the Hindu community, because mosques built on illegal land or during the pre-independence era were relocated to suitable land using government funds (Palaniappan, 2007). The anger and resentment among the Hindu community, peaked when the Sri Maha Mariamman temple in Shah Alam was demolished just a few days

[27] In Malaysia, any person marrying a Muslim must convert to Islam and children bored automatically are Islam.
[28] Kalyanaraman. (2008, January 24). List of Hindu temples demolished in Malaysia in 16 months. Retrieved, December 22, 2009 from http://malayindians.blogspot.com/2008/01/list-of-hindu-temples-demolished-in.html

before the Hindu celebration of Deepavali in November 2007, resulting in the historical protest rally, led by Hindraf on November 25, 2007.

These trends ignoring the religious sentiments and rights of the non-Malays served to further fuel the anger and aggravate already mistrustful relations between the Malays and non-Malays, particularly Indians, because the affected people were the Indian poor, as Nagarajan (2008) pointed out. Additionally, the accumulated anger by Indians over time and issues was also aggravated by the absence of outlets to release their pent-up feelings.

5.4 Lack of Space for Activism

As Habermas (1996) argued, the public sphere can exist only when both the "system" (the state and market economy) and "lifeworld" (milieu of the individual actor) can co-exist equally. But the Malaysian media has been anything but "free of the state." As Gan, the co-founder of Malaysia's alternative online news media, *Malaysiakini* asserts, "Malaysia is a democracy. There is freedom of speech but no freedom after speech. There is freedom of movement, but no freedom of assembly. There is plethora of publications – about a dozen or so newspapers in four different languages [Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English]- but no free press..."(Gan, 2002, p. 65).

Malaysia inherited its political and legal system from the British colonial government. When Malaysia attained its independence in 1957, it adopted the Federal Constitution of Malaya as the supreme law of the land. Although the Constitution has undergone change over time to suit the needs of the ruling government, under Section II, fundamental liberties of the people are guaranteed, such as liberty of the person, freedom from slavery and forced labor, protection against retrospective criminal laws and repeated trials, equality, prohibition of banishment, freedom of movement, freedom of speech, assembly and association,[29] freedom of religion, right in respect of education and rights to property.

However, the Federal Constitution also imposed restrictions on many of these rights and fundamental freedoms,[30] which the ruling party (BN) has effectively exploited to their advantage to crack down on political opposition and dissidents to maintain

[29] Article 10(1) allows a) every citizen has the right to freedom of speech and expressions; b) all citizens have the right to assemble peaceably and without arms; and c) all citizens have the right to form associations.
[30] Article 10(4) of the constitution reads, "In imposing restrictions in the interest of the security of the Federation or any part thereof or public order under Clause (2) (a), Parliament may pass law prohibiting the questioning of any matter, right, status, position, privilege, sovereignty or prerogative established or protected by the provisions of Part III, article 152[National Language], 153[Malay special rights to a quota of public service posts, permits and university enrolments], or 181[saving on Rulers' sovereignty] otherwise than in relation to the implementation thereof as may be specified in such law (Federal Constitution)

power. Mahathir, the former, longest-serving (22 years) Prime Minister of Malaysia was responsible for the rapid eroding of the human rights and fundamental freedoms in Malaysia. In an interview with CNN on September 2, 1997 (as cited in Mohd, 2009) Mahathir justified the restrictions imposed on the media:

> We have a problem in Malaysia, in that racial problem is very serious. If we allow the media to go and provoke and instigate people to fight against each other ...that will disrupt or destabilize our country and our policies. We all need to pay a price and we have to need to control the news. But otherwise we are quite free and if you care to read the vernacular papers in Malaysia...you will find that their criticisms of the government come by the tones almost everyday. They have not missed taking pot shots at the government and we have not done anything to withdraw their license or whatever. (Mahathir, 1997, p. 15)

Furthermore, Malaysia has 13 different laws capable of restricting freedom of speech:

- Internal Security Act (ISA), 1960
- Sedition Act, 1948
- Official Secret Act (OSA), 1972
- Societies Act, 1966
- Police Act, 1967
- Printing Presses and Publications Act, 1984
- Broadcasting Act
- Control of Imported Publication Act
- BERNAMA Act
- FINAS Act
- Communications and Multimedia Act, 1998
- Defamation laws (Wu, 2005; Mohd, 2009)

Amongst these laws; ISA, Societies Acts and the Police Act, are most widely used against the citizens. ISA allows arrest and detention without trial for up to two years, and is used to discipline the actions of individuals and groups seen to be politically threatening or considered a threat to national security. An example of its application is the arrest of Anwar, the former deputy minister and sixteen of his associates who were detained under ISA before being formally charged with corruption and sodomy in 1998, following Mahathir's directive order (Abbot, 2004; Gomez, 2004). Considering that Malaysia's politics is based on the prime minister and his party's hegemony over the state particularly after 1998 (Gomez, 2004), it is no doubt that when necessary the use of

coercion to detain opponents and dissident voices becomes a legitimate act for the Government (Jesudason, 1993).

The Societies Act 1966, requires all groups of seven and more to be registered as a society. Individuals who participate in groups that are not officially registered face the threat of arrest and imprisonment for participating in 'illegal assemblies'. All registered organizations are expressly prohibited from engaging in 'political activity,' defined as any society that issues public statements. Although the narrow definition of a political society was subsequently removed, the legislation continues to restrict the activities of civil society (Weiss, 2003, p. 31-32). The Registrar of Society may refuse to register a new society, impose conditions in registering new societies or de-register a society in the interest of the security and public order. In pursing public order, the Police Act 1967 requires a police permit 14 days before any public assembly is held. An assembly of more than three persons in public places requires a permit from the Police. The Police Act was amended in 1989, to allow police to break up meetings or gatherings on private premises if the police were of the opinion that it was likely to be prejudicial to the security of the country or invoke disturbance of the peace. The police have refused permits to public assemblies organized by the political oppositions and non-governmental organizations, including Hindraf-organized gatherings.

With these provisions on the legislative, and given tensions on ethnic relations, the social use of space not only carries strong political dimensions, but successfully limits the appearance of crowds in public spaces in Malaysia. As a result, most registered societies tend to be professional association or welfare-oriented groups active in the fields of women's rights, the environment and consumer affairs without overtly being "political" which is the characteristics of social movements (Wasserman, 2007). However, these groups continue to face difficulties. For example, the 1971 Sedition Act limits their activities by removing from public discussion on four issues:

- Malay rights,
- citizenship rights for non-Malays,
- the status of the national language and Islamic religion, and
- the rights and privileges of the King and Sultans (Lim, 1995).

The Printing Presses and Publication Act 1984 has also been used to reduce public criticism or reportage on the ruling government, which also owns most news organizations and broadcasting media in Malaysia (see Mohd, 2008 for details). As a result, fear and apprehension which leads to intellectual disengagement and citizens

practicing self-censorship, extends to academia. For instance, the University and University Colleges (Amendments) Act, 1955 prohibits students and academics from making any public statements or public rallies that may be perceived as being political or critical of the government.

In that regard, opportunity for civil society to advance its causes depends in large part on the extent to which their goals are congruent with the state's own ideology and interests (Weiss, 2004). Consequently, moderation, consultation and non-confrontational consensus become the dominant modes of operation by civil society groups as they negotiate the constraints of state-civil society relations. Despite tight control with various laws and restrictions on civil society, however, Malaysia is home to a high number of transnational-oriented NGOs (Weiss, 2004), besides associations likened to civil society (Milner, 1991).

5.4.1 Civil Society Activism

The root of civil society in Malaysia can be traced back to the developmentalism discourse in the 1990s (see Loh & Khoo, 2003), in turn, giving rise to associational life (see Milner, 1991; Weiss, 2004). The associations were oriented around communal progress, religion, minority rights – based on "communalism" that were more dominant especially on the Internet when the avenue to voice opinions was denied by government-controlled media. Consequently, the new public sphere included non-governmental organizations (NGOs), "public intellectuals," mass-based religious movements, trade unions and political parties (functioning as NGOs). The impact of civil society, in particular that based on Islamist principles (*masyarakat madani*) is seen as a powerful and successful alternative group that appears to be aligned with state policies, and other times against the state. The rise of civil society, however, tends to follow the population majority – more of Malays, followed by Chinese and to a lesser extent Indians (see Weiss, 2004).

Based on the model of "consensus" and rooted in ethnic-communalism, the Indian civil society ultimately works in tandem with political parties like the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), and arm of the major ruling party, BN(Ramasamy, 2008). In other words, although Indians' civil society and non-governmental organizations exist as counter-hegemonic representatives, these groups are fundamentally linked to an ideological perspective, that being the perspective of the state. This is because of the limited channels for Indian representative, mainly attributed to their overall status as a

minority and weak position in politics and economic, discussed in the preceding sections. Consequently, Indian civil societies "...are often looked upon as suspect in the eyes of the government." (Ibid, p. 370). Counter-hegemonic forces that do exist for the Indians are made to look irrelevant and hence, not taken seriously by the government.

Even if representation existed, the Indian's political and religious groups have remained brittle, divided and unstable due to factors such as caste, class (Amplavanar, 1993) and the lack of leadership (Muzaffar, 1993). These factors have imposed severe constraints upon the efficacy of all Indian organizations, and have vitiated the effectiveness of the Indian political and religious leadership in the broader Malaysian sphere. Nonetheless, the rise of Hindraf in December 2005 has given new hope for the Indians in Malaysia, detailed in the following chapters.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter had set out to answer the following question: how have the main challenges minority Malaysian Indians faced in the past and present affected their participation in the public sphere? The discriminatory practices related to poor socio-economic condition, deprivation and inequality coupled with the tight control over the space for civil society activism have affected the Indians participation in the public sphere.

Castells' (2004) articulation on the construction of resistance identity on the basis of communal resistance is applicable to the minority status of the Malaysian Indians when considered against their marginalized status experienced since the colonial times. As the preceding sections have showed, the Indians' position in all spheres is limited. As the numerically smallest, and politically and economically weakest of the three major ethnic groups, Indians are not in a position to influence outcomes. There is a concern and fear amongst the Indian community that they have increasingly been left out in the mainstream development, or have no influence on public policy-decision making.

Instead of enjoying economic prosperity, particularly in the 1990s, the Indian community in Malaysia were made victims throughout the national development phases. Indians who were recruited by the British in the early 20th century to work in the plantation economy were poor due to low wages and opportunity for social mobility. The subsequent move to urban areas resulted in poorer living conditions which were

sufficient to drive the urban poor Indians to social ill problems such as suicide and gangsterism (see Kesavapany, Mani & Ramasamy, 2008; Willford, 2006).

Additionally, policy decisions affecting Malaysian Indians are often regarded as 'insensitive' due to the lack of representation from the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) party, claiming to represent the interest of the Malaysian Indians. As the Indian leadership was unable to find a solution, the Indians collectively took it upon themselves to articulate their grievances hoping to find a solution to their marginalized status. The Indian sentiments were inflamed further when Hindu temples were demolished, as a result setting the stage for communal resistance-identity against the state. The resistance generated amongst the Indians was also potentially facilitated by the Internet technology, thus providing space for the minority population to air their grievances. Accordingly, the following chapter discusses the role and opportunities created by the Internet, as part of the Malaysian public sphere.

CHAPTER 6
MALAYSIA'S INTERNET DEVELOPMENT

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on issues relating to marginalization of Indians, which was the result of a host of factors including government policies and ethnic relations. The grievances among the Indian community escalated when their religious freedom was threatened, in turn generating communal resistance identity that eventually led to the Hindraf protest rally and the defeat of the MIC party in the 2008 general elections. The resistance identity produced amongst members of the aggrieved Indian community, I argue was potentially facilitated by the use of the Internet technology – creating space for activism that facilitated collective action.

In that context, this chapter focuses on the most distinctive aspects of the public sphere in Malaysia, particularly the role of the Internet (Research Question 3).

6.2 Internet Development in Malaysia

The depressing picture painted by Gan (2002) in the previous chapter and media clampdowns points to the necessity of finding non-traditional venues where citizens can discuss matters of concern without overt surveillance of the state. The Internet appears to be one such venue, a new sphere of communication which can challenge the Malaysian government's hegemony of limiting public space for activism.

At the end of the 20th century, Malaysia was compelled to shift its development strategy from agricultural and resource-based economy towards a knowledge-based economy. With this shift, much emphasis was put on the growth of Internet technology besides the development of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC).[31] As a result, in 1986, the Malaysian Microelectronic System (MIMOS) was set-up to undertake research in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector. MIMOS then initiated *RangKom* (*Rangkaian Komputer Malaysia*) in 1986, a small computer network that was confined to only the research community, linking some of the public universities. Subsequently, JARING, an extension of *RangKom*, was launched as the first Internet Service Provider (ISP) in 1992 (Ramasamy & Rathina Pandi, 2003).

[31] The MSC project dubbed the "Silicon Vallley of Malaysia" envisaged a high-tech area provided an optical fiber telecommunications infrastructure able to connect to the emerging global broadband network via "direct high-capacity fibre links to Japan, US, Europe and Southeast Asia. The area covering 15km by 40km also envisaged the creation of two 'smart cities', Putrajaya and Cyberjaya. Putrajaya would become a new capital city, self-sustained and Cyberjaya be "an IT nirvana....[of] intelligent buildings wired with the latest technology.

Since then, the number of Internet users had increased exponentially - from half a million users in 1998 to 15.8 million users in 2008, with a penetration rate for dial-up service at 44.9, and broadband service 21.1 per 100 households each (MCMC, 2009). The estimated number of personal computers was 85.1 per 100 persons in 2007. The penetration rate for fixed telephone lines declined from 16.6 in 2005 to 15.8 per 100 inhabitants in 2007 (MCMC). The decrease in the number of fixed lines largely reflected a gradual migration towards mobile phone usage, which showed an increase from 21.8 in 2000 to 106.9 per 100 inhabitants in 2009. The increase was significant, as it showed there were multiple subscriptions in a household.

However, the annual surveys show the lack of data on the use of these technologies by ethnicity. One of the first studies to gauge the level of usage among the Malaysians was the Internet Subscriber Study (ISS) conducted in 2002 by Ramasamy and Rathina Pandi (2003). The survey conducted among 5864 Internet subscribers nationwide showed the Chinese (60.3 percent) ethnic group having higher subscription compared to the Malays (28.5 percent) and Indians (4.2 percent). Although this data may not reflect the current situation, it is significant in showing the lack of equal access to the Internet among the ethnic groups – which serves as a major hindrance to civic engagement.

Nonetheless, the Malaysian government's aspiration to develop the Internet industry was complemented by the formulation of concerted policies, programs and projects, particularly in the late 1990s. In November 1998, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) was formed to promote and foster the development of communications and multimedia industry to achieve universal service nationwide in its Universal Service Provision (USP) program (ITU; Ramasamy & Rathina Pandi, 2003). Apart from MCMC, the National Information Technology Council (NITC) played a major role in promoting the National Information Technology Agenda (NITA) agenda in 1996. The framework aspired for a values-based knowledge society focused on providing Internet access to under-deserved people, namely, the rural-poor, urban-poor, women, senior citizens, youth, the disabled people and small-medium industries. Other efforts included provision of computers to village authorities in 2000 through a program called "*Gerakan Desa Wawasan*". In addition, a computer ownership campaign was launched in 1996 to allow citizens with children over 10 years of age to use their retirement contributions to purchase personal computers. Connectivity to the Internet in rural areas included establishing rural Internet centers as

well as providing training to users. Other collaborations included provision of computers and Internet connectivity by private sector operators financed by the Government, while security and electricity were provided by local post offices (ITU, 2004). Another project carried out by Ministry of Energy, Water and Communications (MEWC) also included provision of computers and Internet connectivity to public institutions in the rural areas.

The Internet was exempted from control and regulations that bounded traditional media under the Printing Presses and Publications Act of 1984. Although concerned with pornographic and dissident voices on the Internet, the former Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad was determined to give a competitive advantage over its neighbor, Singapore, where stringent controls had been imposed on Internet Service Providers (ISPs). This move was also to encourage foreign investment in the MSC project launched in 1996.

However, in the wake of the *Reformasi* (reformation) movement in 1998 (see section 6.3) which marked the beginning of Internet-based mobilization, the Communications and Multimedia Act was enacted. Section 211 of the enactment reads as follows:

> No content application provider, or other person using a content application service, shall provide content which is indecent, obscene, false, menacing, or offensive in character with intent to annoy, abuse, threaten or harass any person. (MCMC, 2009)

This act was an underpinning effort by the Government of Malaysia to restrict freedom of speech even on the Internet, including its use in Internet cafes. During the 1990s, the government encouraged the setting-up of Internet cafes that was dual-functional: to serve refreshments as well as using a computer to browse the Internet. However, unlike countries like Indonesia (Lim, 2005) and to some extent China, the primary use of cyber-cafes in Malaysia is for entertainment only (Personal observation, October 25, 2008; also see Rathore & Alhabshi, 2005). Echoing Alhabshi (2005), I agree that cyber cafes have increasingly taken up a "video arcade image". The gaming and gambling software, more often found in unregistered cafes, attract youngsters as their clientele. This is parallel to Saravanan's claim that more than 90 percent of the Internet cafes in Kuala Lumpur participate in online gambling.[32] Following that, in July 2008, stricter guidelines were re-enforced on Internet cafe operators (The Star, 2008).

[32] Illegitimate gambling of any form is illegal in Malaysia. Licenses' of establishments are revoked when one is found to be involved in gambling; see http://www.onlinecasinoextra.com/casino_news_2526.html

The guidelines include:

a) To shut down operation by midnight daily;
b) To operate only from the ground floor of buildings;
c) Banned from using tinted glass;
d) Banned from co-business activities such as games, gambling, pornography, music and publications with negative elements;
e) Banned from selling or consuming alcohol and cigarettes;
f) To keep a record of entry and departure time of patrons; and
g) Youngsters 12 years and below must be accompanied by parents or guardians and they are only allowed to stay until 10.00pm;
h) To report names of school students found to play truant.

With frequent raids on Internet cafes combined with new legislation and strict punitive actions against operators and users, Internet cafes are clearly not venues for citizen participation. The paradox that exists between the government's aspiration to develop the information technology agenda (see section 6.2), and the overt regulatory framework that in turn leads to self-censorship among users have a negative impact on freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. Nonetheless, the Internet has opened up opportunities for citizen participation, as evident with the *Reformasi* movement discussed below.

6.3 Re-constituting the Opposition Movement Online

One of the first Internet-based mobilizations since the inception of Internet technology in Malaysia could be attributed to the 1998 *Reformasi* (reformation) movement. Mahathir's controversial dismissal of Anwar, who was then the deputy prime minister in September 1998, due to charges of sexual misconduct and corruption led to the emergence of the *Reformasi* movement. Given the controls on mainstream media, the Internet soon became both the principal means of communication and increasingly an alternative source of information and news for Malaysians (Abbott, 2004). The movement was successful in enabling alternative ideological possibilities to be expressed in a number of ways, including the Internet. For the first time in history, issues concerning people's rights, freedom of expression, media responsibility, civil liberties and human rights emerged (Weiss & Hassan, 2003), although the movement which supported the opposition was unsuccessful in winning the 1999 elections.

In many respects, the *Reformasi* movement was a threat to the government's political foundation, as was evident with the proliferation of civil society groups and activism online (Abbott, 2004). Pro-*reformasi* websites besides online discussion groups, forums and alternative newsgroups such as *Malaysiakini*, *Aliran* and *Harakah* (Abbott, 2004) emerged during this period making it possible to find an alternative venue to voice one's opinion. In 1998, due to the Internet being at its infancy stage, the government's strategy to encourage users was complemented with a no-censorship policy (see section 6.2). Ironically, the government's agenda indirectly promoted the *Reformasi* movement, particularly online activism.

Although the Internet was exempted from censorship, the government did become more sophisticated in its attempt to minimize the impact of the Internet through filtering state-owned ISPs (Abbott, 2004; Mohd, 2009). This is parallel to Bentham's (1785) concept of panopticon[33] - where the Internet in Malaysia allows for a panopticon form of surveillance and monitoring, despite a no-censorship policy. ISPs are able to track users' activities online and as a result, users are forced to practice self-censorship or face draconian laws (see section 5.4). Other attempts ranged from closing down ISPs temporarily to 'unofficially' sanctioned attacks on discussion groups and reform sites with virus or denial of service attacks (DOS). The Sedition Act, Internal Security Act (ISA) and Official Secrets Act (OSA) were repeatedly used against reform activists. Consequently, the ruling coalition of Malaysia considered the Internet as an oppositional medium, appearing as a "thorn-in-flesh". Nonetheless, the Internet increasingly became not only a source of information and news, but as a potential medium for mobilization by civil society, non-governmental organizations and opposition parties in Malaysia. This realization, made possible by the Internet through the *Reformasi*-movement, consequently, paved the way for the emergence of the blogosphere phenomenon in 2002.

6.4 The Malaysian Blogosphere

Public debates have often repeated the notion that blogs expand the diversity of viewpoints that are heard, and allow ordinary citizens to reach a larger audience. In that regard, who does what, when and how matters, as every situation is different – not universal or procedural as envisioned by Habermas (1989). In this regard, any activity on

[33] Benthams' original idea for the panopticon, a prison layout where the central glass tower surrounded by the cells would be able to watch the inmates at all times. The idea was to deny privacy away from inmates and to centralize authority in the "omnipotent" glass tower which Foucault (1977) had expounded upon in his book Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison.

the Internet must be seen within a specific context. Past studies that seek to show causality in civic engagement, based solely upon access to technology are highly misleading (see Chapter 3 for details). That is, fewer connections do not necessarily translate into limited political impact if these connections are used effectively and creatively. Given this context, the following section describes the rise of blogging in Malaysia, and a brief overview of Malaysian Indian bloggers and blog readers.

6.4.1 History and Development of Blogs in Malaysia

There was a mere handful of blog sites in 2001, but thousands of sites by Malaysians exist today, including blog aggregators such as Mycen Blog Directory (http://www.mycen.com.my/malaysia/blog.html), Project Petaling Street (http://petalingstreet.org/), Sopo Sentral of Malaysia (http://sopo-sentral.blogspot.com/), and Malaysian Chinese Bloggers Directory (http://malaysian-blogger.blogspot.com/) to name a few.

An article by *Utusan Malaysi*a, a leading newspaper in the country, reported more than 500,000 active bloggers in Malaysia, ranking the country among the highest in the world following Indonesia and the European Union (The Star, 2008). According to Universiti Malaya's media department lecturer, Hasbullah, blogs have become powerful "...in influencing the thinking of the people, especially on politics... research shows that 70% of the election results were influenced by information in the blogs" (Ibid). The numbers of bloggers in the country could be exaggerated, however, due to the absence of systematic research done on blogs. Nonetheless, many researchers have embarked on studies pertaining to bloggers and blog readers in Malaysia (see Tan & Zawawi, 2008; Hopkins, 2009.

The winner-take-all pattern (see Chapter 2) certainly exists in the Malaysian blogosphere as attempts to profile bloggers were first initiated by Syed (2006) and Gaman (2007), which documented the "70 most popular blogs" and "50 most influential blogs" respectively, in Malaysia. These studies were done using ranking provided by blog search engines - Technorati.com and Alexa.com. These search engines are used to track the most popular URLs cited by all blogs. As Syed continued to conduct this survey annually (2007, 2008), others attempted to study the Malaysian bloggers and blog readers based on surveys conducted online (Universal McCann, 2006; Tan & Zawawi, 2008, Hopkins, 2009).

According to Tan & Zawawi's (2008) study of 1537 blog readers randomly sampled through an online questionnaire, more than 50 percent (852) have themselves created a blog. Their study showed that most bloggers and blog readers in English are likely to be Chinese in the age group between 19-28 years, have at least a bachelor's degree or diploma, and currently hold a "middle-income" job. Also, 46 percent of the respondents claim to read blogs at least 14 hours a week (more than 2 hours a day); nearly as many (41.3 percent) read personal diaries and 29.3 percent read political blogs. Although 87 percent of the respondents identified blogs as their main source of news and commentary, it was mostly older males who were interested in socio-political issues as reported by Tan and Zawawi (2008). Similarly, Hopkins' (2009) reported that an average blogger is likely to be a young Chinese female, who has had a blog, in English, for more than two years, and updates it at least once a week.

While both these studies showed that blogging and blog reading remained confined to a subset of the online community, the limited representation of the Malaysian Indians is highlighted in the studies mentioned above. Recognizing this limitation, an online survey was conducted among the Malaysian Indian bloggers and blog readers as detailed in the following section. Notwithstanding these inequalities in terms of representation, the findings of the studies show an extraordinary growth for a medium that is fairly new. Blogs are becoming an important source of information and news, in addition to engaging many Malaysians with its agenda-setting role, besides occasionally appearing as 'thorn in the flesh' of the state.

There is space for dissidents on the blogs but the legal infrastructure is in place to crack down if criticisms go out of hand or considered "extreme" by the government of Malaysia. For example, in January 2007, Jeff Ooi,[34] dubbed "Malaysia's Most Influential Blog" by *Malaysiakini*, and Ahiruddin Attan, a former journalist and an influential blogger who writes Rocky's Bru (http://rockybru.com.my/) were sued over allegedly defamatory postings on their websites,[35] the first such lawsuits in the country since the

[34] Ooi was a pioneer of socio-political blogging in 2003 when he initiated Screenshots (www. http://jeffooi.blogspot.com/). In June 2005, his blog (www.jeffooi.com) was voted by Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) as the Freedom Blog of Asia. Currently, serving as a member of Parliament he blogs at www. jeffooi.com. Some of his success in increasing readership of his blog was during the time of SARS and Islam Hadhari controversy (Wu, 2005).

[35] Ooi and Rocky's Bru revealed that a column in the NST dated October 30 2006 under group editor Brendan Pereira's by-line bore a strong resemblance in style and structure to a column by Mitch Albom, an American journalist with Detroit Free Press of September 10, 2006 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-p acific/6108666.stm, Accessed June 14 2007) .The NSTP later announced that Pereira will end his term of service as group editor of NST on Dec 31 and rejected the allegations of plagiarism.(Also see Bloggers Sued for Defamation at http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/62257, Accessed on June 14 2007); http://sloone.wordpress.com/bloggers-united/; Screenshots at http://us.asiancorrespondent.com/jeff-ooi-blog/2007/01/bloggers_sued_in_malaysia.php; Koshy and Cheah (2007) at http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2007/1/19/nation/16618939&sec=nation; Lim (2007) at http://www.dapmalaysia.org/english/2007/jan07/lks/lks4161.htm; Tan & Zawawi, 2008.

inception of Internet services in 1992. Not only did this defamation suit launched by Malaysia's leading English newspaper, New Straits Times Press (NSTP) trigger criticism worldwide , particularly by Reporters without Borders over press freedom,[36] but it collectively created an awareness among the local bloggers of the need to protect themselves from the state's hegemony. The former Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi defended the legal action by NSTP against the bloggers by asserting that the Internet was not exempted from defamation and sedition laws and just like newspaper journalists, bloggers must be responsible for their postings or risk facing legal action. He said there was no "freedom without responsibility...they cannot hide or take advantage of a situation and do something against the law" (NST, January 24, 2007, as cited in ISIS, 2007).[37]

Following this lawsuit, an awareness campaign was launched that crystallized the formation of the National Alliance of Bloggers (NAB) also known as All-Blogs, [38] to "protect bloggers and promote blogging", as the new group's president, Ahirudin Attan, wrote on his popular blog "Rocky's Bru."[39] The awareness among bloggers was fueled by a local blogger named Sheikh who writes Kickdafella[40] and is famous for his "film poster" or cyber-protest posters carrying messages in protest of the government and NSTP (see Figure 6.1). The posters have since been distributed widely in the Malaysian blogosphere. At the time of writing this paper, the suit against the bloggers is ongoing although many human rights institutions and civil society groups have criticized the Government and requested that the suit be dropped.

[36] Reporters without Borders at http://www.rsf.org/spip.php?page=article&id_article=20489; Also see http://sloone.wordpress.com/bloggers-united/
[37] http://www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-in-the-press/press-coverage-2007/january-2007/pm-asks-world-to-stop-forces-of-extremism/
[38] Rocky and Jeff Ooi Campaign at http://sloone.wordpress.com/bloggers-united/
[39] The Making of the All Blogs at http://rockybru.blogspot.com/2007/04/making-of-all-blogs.html, Accessed June 14 2007; also see http://sloone.wordpress.com/bloggers-united/ for international coverage on All-Blogs.
[40] Sheikh had his share of legal action when on 17th September 2008, the Malaysian Police used the Sedition Act 1948 Section 4(1) to arrest Sheikh in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. Sheikh was alleged to be instigating other bloggers and blog readers to fly the National Flag upside down as a mark of a 'Nation in Distress' (see http://kickdefella.wordpress.com/about/ for details).

Source: http://kickdefella.wordpress.com/2007/01/13/in-honour-of-the-heroes/

Figure 6.1. Posters created during "Rocky and Jeff Ooi Campaign"

Likewise, over the years many bloggers have been detained for their postings, such as blogger Tan,[41] who writes at http://jelas.info/, and the prominent anti-government blogger, Raja Petra Kamaruddin also known as RPK who published an article entitled "Let's Send the Altantuya Murderers to Hell"[42]on his blog- Malaysia Today (http://malaysia-today.net/). RPK, who currently lives in the United Kingdom on a self-imposed exile, has been known for discussing scandals, corruptions and any other injustices committed by both the government and the opposition parties. His current blog hosted in Singapore, does not stop the government-controlled Internet service providers (ISPs) in Malaysia from trying to cripple the site when there is an alleged posting exposing the Malaysian government of its wrongdoing (for more details see http://mt.m2day.org/2008/content/view/27311/84/).

[41] Tan was detained under Section 8 of the Official Secrets Act for the "possession of 'secret' documents published on the internet, which alleged that deputy Minister for Internal Security, Johari Bahrum, was involved in the 'fee-for freedom' scandal" (cited at http://elizabethwong.wordpress.com/2007/07/14/nat-tans-lawyer-an-act-of-oppression/#more-536. Accessed on November 26 2009).

[42] In the article dated April 25 2008, RPK implicated the current Prime Minister, Najib and his aides in the murder of the Mongolian translator (http://mt.m2day.org/2008/content/view/6604/84/). In August 27 2008, the Malaysia Today blog(www.malaysia-today.net), was blocked by the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission followed by his arrest under the Internal Security Act in September 2008(http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/88683). He was detained for eight weeks and released in October 2008. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7653957.stm (Accessed on November 26, 2008).

The bloggers, detained by the law are widely reported and supported on a case-by-case basis by blogs in Malaysia through various cyber-protest forms such as text, pictures, posters, logos or wallpapers. For example, in the case of Tan and RPK, the following posters depict the cyber-protest that was carried out by bloggers in the country.

Source: http://elizabethwong.wordpress.com/2007/07/14/nat-tans-lawyer-an-act-of-oppression/#more-536

Figure 6.2. Cyber-protest posters of detainees

While bloggers continue to disseminate information and at times hold public officials accountable to the general public, the government's intimidation tactics and strategies to instill fear in the bloggers continue (Lim & Har, 2008). Hence, there is space for dissident voices but these hopes are crushed when the law takes effect to crack down on opposing voices. Despite the suppression and intimidation tactics imposed by the government, the Malaysian Indian bloggers and blog readers, played a major role in the Hindraf rally, and the 2008 general elections. The resistance identity of the Malaysian Indians, as a result of a host of factors relating to their marginalized status was crucial, in turn leading to mobilization activities. The following section sheds some light as to who the Malaysian Indian bloggers and blog readers are.

6.4.2 Malaysian Indian Blogosphere (MIB)

The survey on Malaysian Indian Blogs (herein known as "MIB Survey") was targeted among two groups – bloggers and blog readers – who identified themselves as Malaysian Indians, living in Malaysia or abroad. The objective of MIB was to study the profile of the Malaysian Indian blogosphere, besides their reading and blogging patterns.

The online survey conducted for a period of one month – November 10 to December 10, 2009 (see Chapter 4 for details), and had a total of 124 participants.

Assuming bloggers are also blog-readers, the results section is divided into two sections: blog readers (124 participants) and bloggers (44 participants).

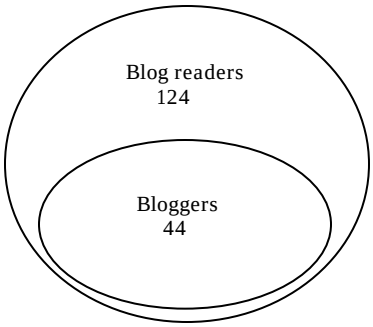


Figure 6.3. Total respondents of MIB survey

6.4.2.1 Malaysian Indian Blog Readers Characteristics

I. Current Location

According to survey results shown in Figure 6.4, most blog readers were from the Peninsular Malaysia - Selangor (43 respondents), followed by Kuala Lumpur (31 respondents), and Perak (18 respondents). There were no respondents from East Malaysia states – Sabah and Sarawak and Labuan, in which the general national population of Indians is fairly low. The overall distribution of blog readers in this study nonetheless conforms to past study undertaken by Tan & Zawawi (2008).

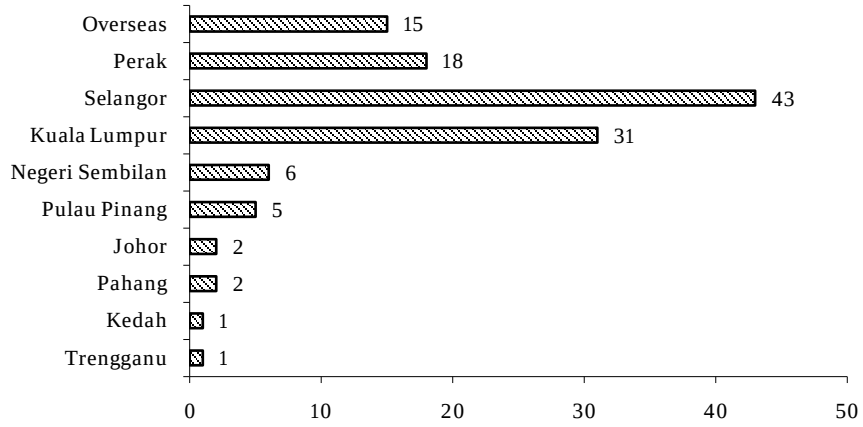


Figure 6.4. Number of blog readers by current location

II. Age and Gender

Analysis also showed that the number of blog readers were highest among the middle age group of 25 to 45 years, a notable difference with past studies that showed a younger population (Tan & Zawawi, 2008, Hopkins, 2009). There were no respondents

from the younger (less than 18 years) or older categories (more than 66 years). Similarly, an overwhelming 73 percent (90 respondents) of the blog readers were male compared to 27 percent (34 respondents) female.

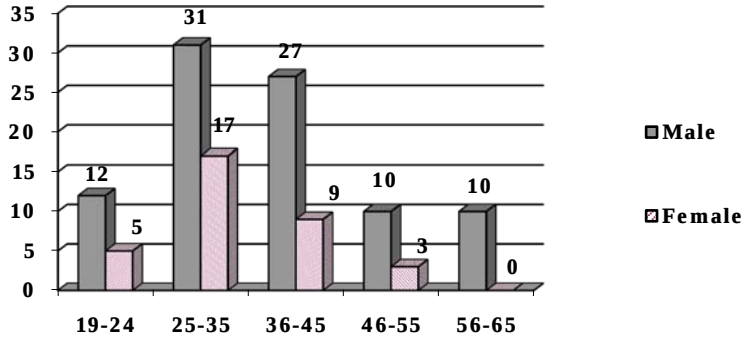


Figure 6.5. Number of blog readers by age and sex

III. Education Level and Occupation Status

By education level, 68 percent (83 respondents) of the blog readers have tertiary education (bachelor's and post-graduate), followed by 23 percent (29 respondents) diploma holders, indicating a highly skewed educational distribution.

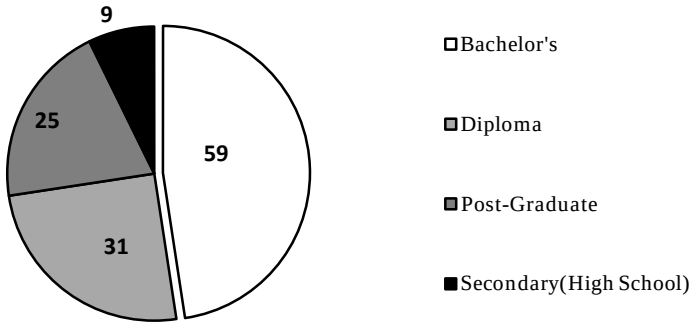


Figure 6.6. Number of blog readers by education attainment

Considering that most respondents were in the middle-age group (25-45 years), the majority of (68.5 percent or 85 respondents) respondents were employed full-time followed by 12.1 percent (15 respondents) self-employed, and 10 percent (12 respondents) students.

IV. Reading Habits

The survey also probed on reading characteristics of blog readers. When asked on their most preferred source of reading materials, it is not surprising that 65 respondents of the total blog readers chose online alternative news website such as *Malaysiakini*,

followed by online daily news (44 respondents), for example, The Star, and blogs (43 respondents). *Malaysiakini*, which has been in existence since the R*eformasi* period in 1998, is well-known not only for its popularity, but also as a main source of information for bloggers (see details in Chapter 7 and 8) that enables links and information flow between various communications technologies.

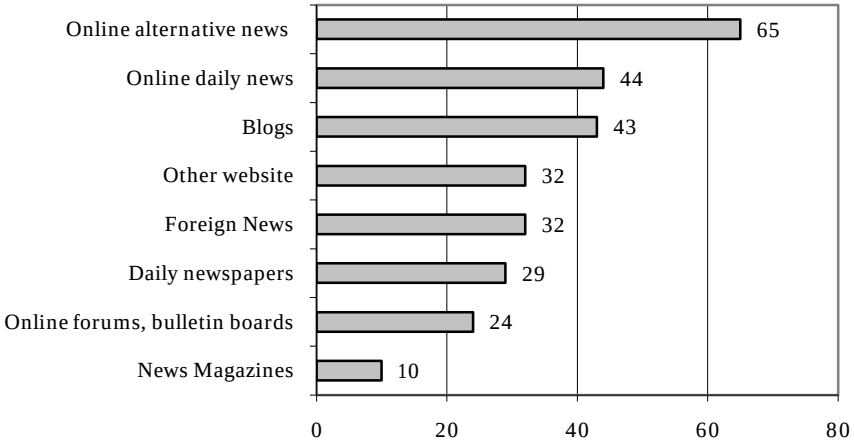


Figure 6.7. Number of blog readers by most preferred reading materials

In addition, blogs with socio-political content were reported as the most visited blogs by blog readers (92 respondents) as shown in Figure 6.8 below. This result shows a significant difference from Tan & Zawawi's study (2008) which showed personal diaries as the most preferred choice of blogs.

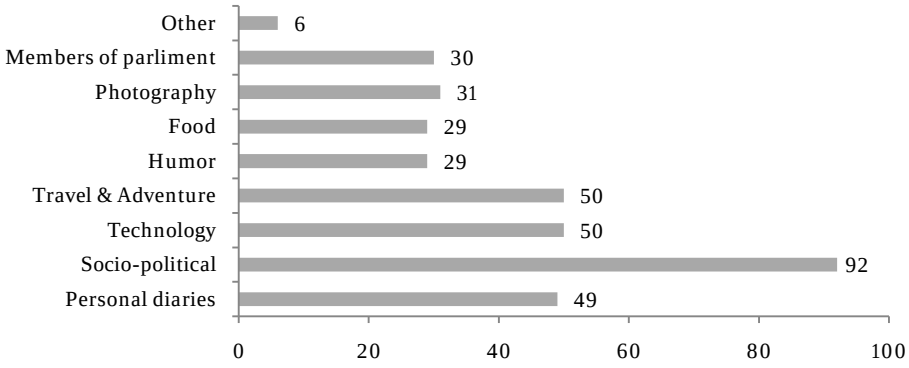


Figure 6.8. Number of blog readers by types of blog mostly visited

The major reason for readers to choose blogs as their source of information are inadequate information from mainstream newspapers (79 respondents or 64 percent), followed by unavailability of information offline (77 respondents or 62 percent). These responses are not surprising, particularly in Malaysia where the mainstream media is

controlled by the government, thereby making the Internet as a source for alternative news and information.

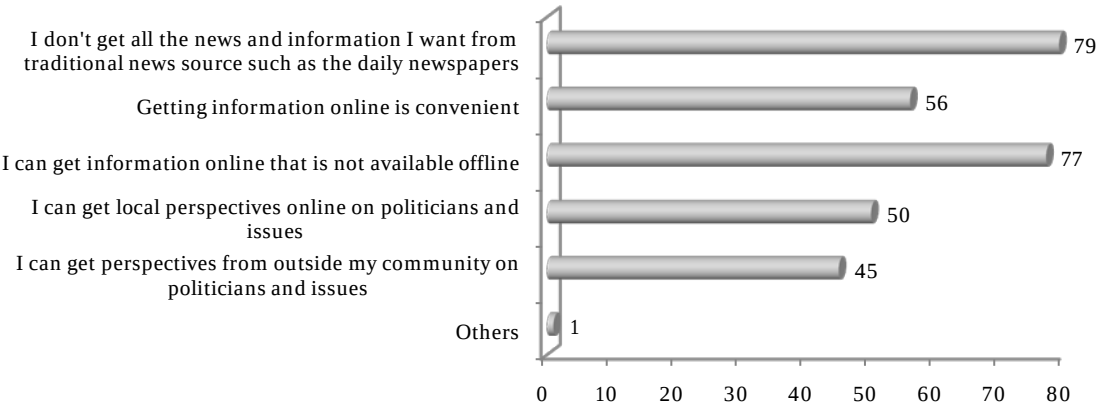


Figure 6.9. Number of readers by reasons for blog as source of information

6.4.2.2 *Malaysian Indian Bloggers' Characteristics*

As shown in Figure 6.3 above, out of 124 blog readers, 44 of them had their own blogs. Similar to blog readers, most of the bloggers were currently staying in major cities like Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Perak.

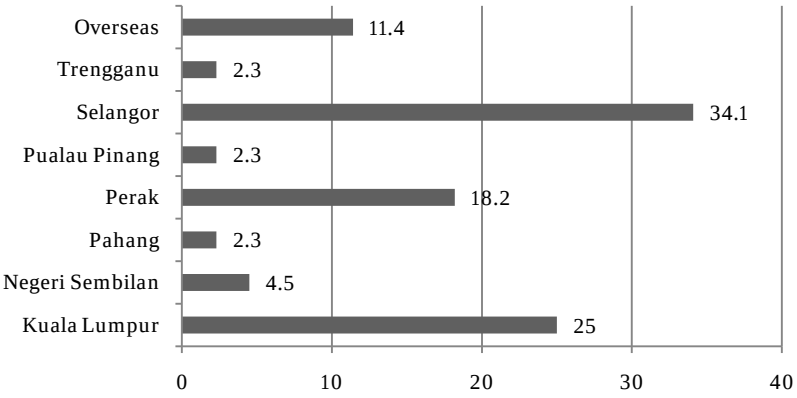


Figure 6.10. Percentage of bloggers by current location

As for age and gender of bloggers, males (36 respondents) in the middle-age group between 19 to 45 (75%) registered a higher number of respondents compared to females overall. It is important to note that the actual representation of bloggers by gender overall may be different compared to this study. As for socio-economic status, similar to blog readers, analysis showed that at least half the bloggers (22 respondents)

have a bachelor's degree, while 27 out of the 44 respondents were employed full-time. The representation of students was relatively low (9 respondents).

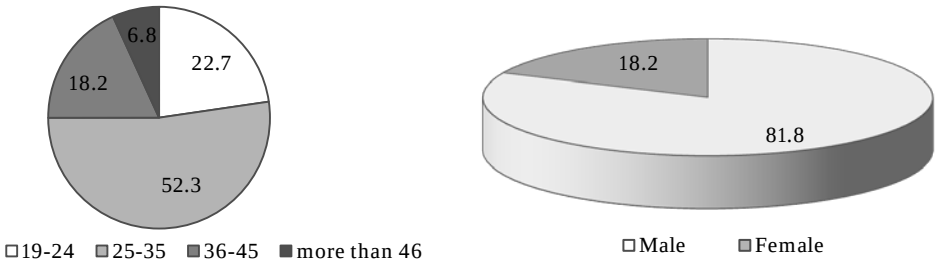


Figure 6.11. Percentage of bloggers by age and sex

I. Blogging Habits

As shown in Figure 6.12, out of the 44 bloggers, 31 bloggers began blogging in 2007, which is not surprising considering the major developments that took place in the same year, for example, Hindraf activities (see chapters 7 and 8). English was the most common language used for blogging (38 respondents), and the remainder used Tamil language. About 66 percent (26 respondents) of the bloggers used their real names, compared to 34 percent who used nicknames in their blogs. This is an interesting finding due to the fact that most socio-political bloggers in Malaysia are known to use their real names compared to nicknames, and provide contact information which has an impact on credibility and anonymity issues. Almost 15 percent of the bloggers (18 respondents) updated their blogs at least 1-2 days a week followed by seldom (8 respondents), 3-5 days a week (6 respondents), once a month (6 respondents), and several times a day (3 respondents).

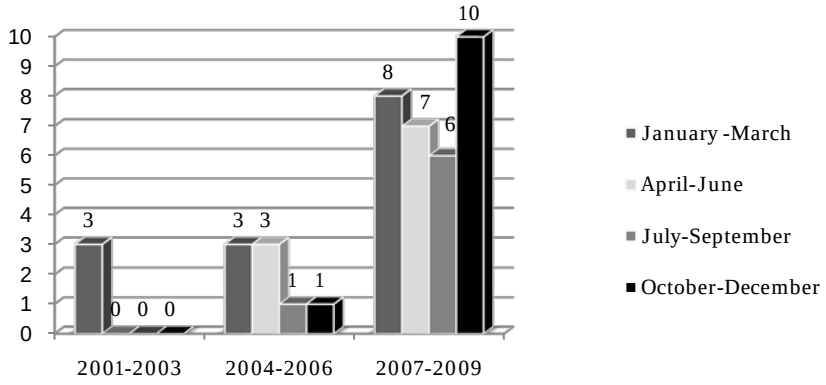


Figure 6.12. Number of bloggers by year and month of blogging

Out of the 44 bloggers, 17 bloggers claimed their blogs as personal diaries, followed closely by 14 socio-political types. The "other" category comprised of blogs of mix types, spiritual or religious-based and music. The differences between these genres is too small to make any generalization, however, based on blog readers preference for types of blogs mostly visited (see Figure 6.8), this result corresponds to that findings.

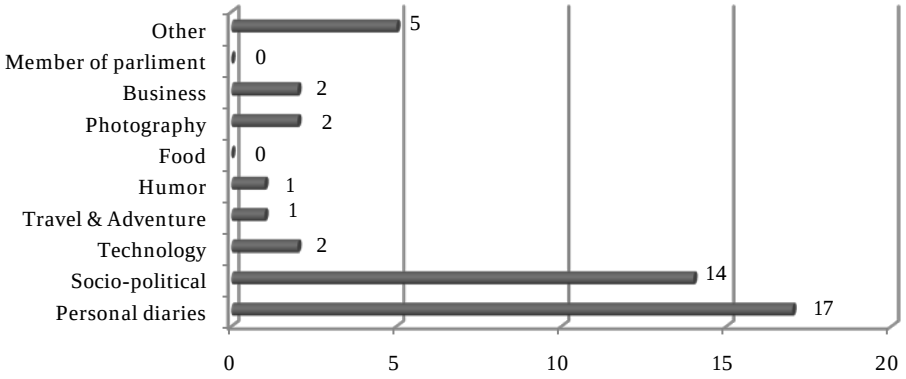


Figure 6.13. Number of bloggers by types of blogs

Most bloggers (37 respondents) claimed that their motivation to blog was to be able to voice out their opinion and thoughts, while 35 of them blogged to share information and knowledge, as shown in Figure 6.14. As personal diaries were popular genres among blog readers, about 18 of the bloggers claimed to be motivated to document their life experiences through blogging.

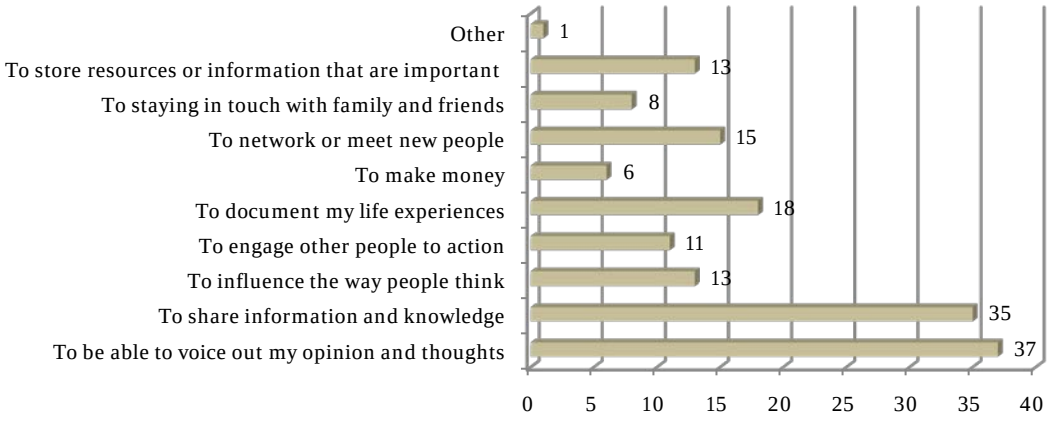


Figure 6.14. Number of bloggers by motivation for blogging

The common activities carried out by blogger relating to their postings are "respond to post or comments from blog-readers"(26 respondents), "spend extra time verifying facts before posting" (22 respondents) and "include links to original source of material used" (22 respondents). These activities are important considering that bloggers

are continuously monitored and warned against publishing rumors or unverified sources which could lead to unhealthy consequences or lawsuits being filed against these bloggers. In other words, "responsible blogging" is practiced by these bloggers to avoid defamation suits and sedition charges which has nonetheless kept the Malaysian blogosphere "alive" in the past years (see section on "history and development of blogs" and Chapter 2).

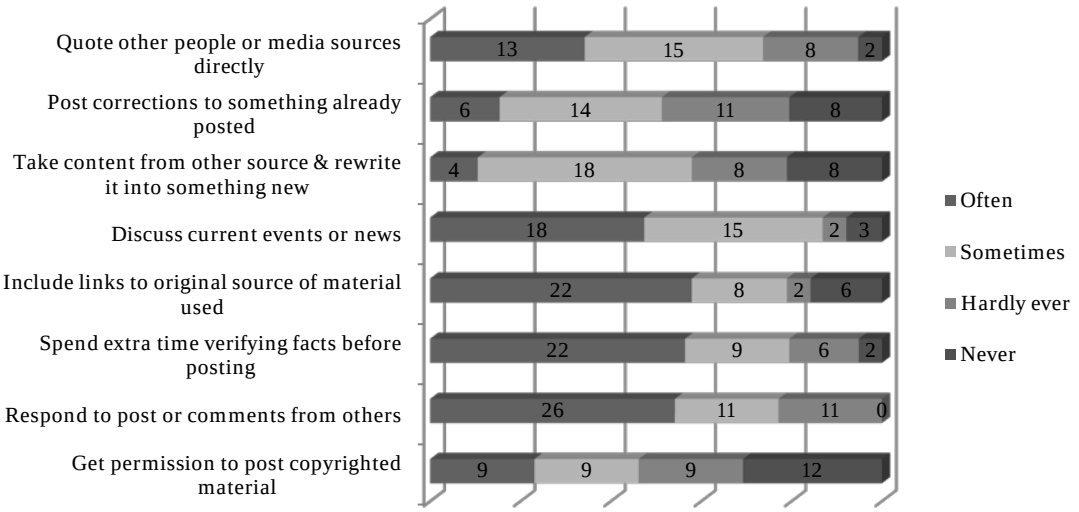


Figure 6.15. Number of bloggers by activities relating to blog postings

6.5 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter is to locate the distinctive role played by the Internet technology within the Malaysian public sphere. As the preceding chapter showed, due to the absence of outlets to air grievances by civil society including minority population, the Internet has since emerged as a potential space for disenfranchised voices. The assumption is that the while the Indians' problem was never properly articulated; now the Internet creates the opportunity for minority politics based on their resistance identity.

The Internet technology in Malaysia was introduced in 1992, and has become an important medium for citizen mobilization. Since the *Reformasi* in 1998, the Internet has provided opportunities for Malaysians to organize coordinate and unleash political mobilization, especially counter-hegemonic narratives of the state. This does not mean that the Internet in Malaysia is free from government surveillance and harassments (through laws). Interestingly, activists *route* around the law to advance political mobilization – increasingly through the network of blogs that have the capability to

connect various actors and media, online and offline. This is especially important recognizing the issue of access to Internet technology which highly correlates to one's socio-economic status. The low subscription and use of the Internet by Malaysian Indians have been documented, so the use of a combination of traditional and communication technology does play an important role. The following chapter shows empirical evidence pertaining to the dynamics, links and themes of mobilization that involved the various media and social actors.

CHAPTER 7
CASE STUDY 1: HINDRAF PROTEST RALLY

7.1 Introduction

As the numerically smallest, politically and economically weakest of the three major ethnic groups, Malaysian Indians have remained marginalized to the process of inter-ethnic bargaining endemic within Malaysian politics. This was discussed in preceding chapters. Hence the question: how did a loose coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), subsumed under the banner of the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) mobilize about 30,000 protestors in the heart of Kuala Lumpur on November 25, 2007, to present a memorandum to the British High Commission[43] in Malaysia?

Habermas' (1989) notion of public sphere presents us with an understanding of the "intended space" needed for equal participation. According to Rheingold (2003), new media technologies can "...shift the locus of the public sphere from a small number of powerful media owners to entire populations" (p. 3). Unfortunately, the "ideals" (Habermas, 1989) of the public sphere has never been achieved by most accounts, particularly, in Malaysia where the mainstream media is government-controlled, and the existing draconian laws take effect when conversation goes "over the limit". In addition, considering the highly unequal distribution of access to Internet technology, particularly among the major ethnic groups in Malaysia (see Chapter 6), the view that "entire populations" (Rheingold, 2003) may participate in this sphere is too optimistic. However, by creating new opportunities for the interactive exchange of information, not only in the local context but also internationally, social media technologies like blogs can contribute a new dimension to the concept of the public sphere in the context of Malaysia. The potential function of especially the Internet to extend the range of the public sphere by broadening the scope and reach of local struggles is seen as more realistic benefit posed by these technologies. The Internet serves as viable alternative to traditional venues for political mobilization, enabling an "opportunist space" for social activist and civil society actors to effect any political change. The impact of the Internet on politics however, depends on "...what people choose to do with it" (Ferdinand, 2001, p. 2).

[43] The Hindraf group filed a four-trillion dollar claim against the British government alleging that the former colonial masters had brought their forefathers in the 1800s to the then Malaya colony as indentured laborers that left them out of Malaysia's prosperity.

An examination of the structure of blogs reveals that its networked character make blogs a constructive alternative for political mobilization. It has particularly attracted individuals looking for space to release their pent-up feeling. This was clearly evident in the Malaysian Indian Bloggers survey conducted among the Indians bloggers, who claimed that their main motivation to blog was to be able to voice their opinions and concerns. Further, the options for participants to engage in anonymous discourse tends to defuse social power structures, and to focus attention on issues of concern instead on status of bloggers.

As discussed in Chapter 6, the Malaysian blogosphere has seen an increasing number of blogs over the last three years due to its potential of holding public officials accountable, and as a source of alternative news that was otherwise not available in the mainstream media. This motivation had also inspired many civil society groups and grassroots organizations to create their own blogs and reach to their audiences. Given this context, I argue that blogs have the potential to create a social network even among the minority population, comprising of people and spaces, virtual and real communities, collectively united based on mutual concerns.

The case study of Hindraf discussed in detail in this chapter, shows how blogs played a facilitating role in fostering collective action amongst the minority Indians in Malaysia. In examining the role played by blog postings in the historic Hindraf protest rally on November 25, 2007 and the preceding months, the discussion is divided into three phases: Phase 1 of the activism starting from January to August 2007, Phase 2 from September 2007 to November 2007, and Phase 3 from December 2007 to March 2008 (this phase is discussed at length in Chapter 8). These phases (see Chapter 4 for details), which are presented as a chronology of events based on narratives, not only are important for setting the context, but also situate the role of blogs and its interactions and linkages with other media and non-media sources. The structure of this chapter is as follows: narratives of Hindraf protest rally followed by analysis and discussion section.

7.2 The Rise of Hindraf

The emergence of Hindraf has been closely connected with the struggle to protect the rights of the Malaysian Indians, particularly related to legal conflict in religious "conversion" cases, alleged police abuse against suspected criminals of Indian

ethnicity,[44] escalating problem of poverty, and demolition of so-called illegal Hindu temples by the government.

In December 2005, the Malaysian High Court ruled that it had no jurisdiction in the case of *Projek* Malaysia Everest, 1997 mountaineer and ex-soldier, M. Moorthy's burial. The court's decision that it was unable to override the *syariah*-based law (Islamic law) in matters of religious conversion meant that Moorthy, who was born as Hindu, was buried according to Muslim rites due to claims that he had converted to Islam before death (Lim & Har, 2008; Leong, 2009). The court's ruling was not only a defining moment for the Indian community that were already anguished by issues relating to marginalization and Hindu temple demolitions (see below and Chapter 5), but also the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) advocacy group.

Hindraf's activism can be traced back to *Parti Reformasi Insan* Malaysia (PRIM), which was an unregistered Indian-based party formed out of the *Reformasi (Reformation)* movement in 1998 by Uthayakumar,[45] the current leader and human rights lawyer of Hindraf.[46] PRIM was later named Hindraf, constituting a coalition of 48 Indian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) formed in December 2005,[47] committed to the preservation of Hindu community rights and heritage in a multiracial Malaysia. The unregistered organization[48] had many coordinators, with most prominent names being brothers Waythamoorthy and Uthayakumar, Ganabathirau, Manoharan, Vasanthakumar and Gengadharan. Amongst these leaders, Waythamoorty, Uthayakumar, Ganabathirau and Manoharan are lawyers by profession. They mainly reached out to people through their website at http://www.policewatchmalaysia.com (PWM).

The PWM's initial objective was to monitor and report any misconduct by the police, particularly the treatment of Malaysian Indian detainees in police custody. However, as time went on PWM expanded their monitoring services to include other areas of discrimination suffered by the Indians in Malaysia. With the expansion, PWM

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[44] In April 2004, the Malaysian police claimed that Francis Udayappan, an Indian, had escaped from police custody after he was detained in connection with a theft case. After a month, however, his body was found in a river, leading to a protracted tussle over the identity of the body. Two years later, the coroner's court established that the remains were indeed those of Udayappan, and foul-play was ruled out in connection to his death. This incident was reported and debated widely among the Malaysians, and left a negative impact on the part of the government, judicial courts and law enforcement.

[45] Uthyakumar became a popular lawyer when he represented several cases of temple demolition and religious conversion relating to Indians. He publicized these issues on the PWM website.

[46] Mohamad, Marzuki, (2008, April 15). The Hindraf Saga: Politics in a "Constrained" State. Retrieved December 27, 2009 from http://marzukimohamad.blogspot.com/2008/04/hindraf-saga-politics-in-constrained.html;

[47] The Star (2009, July 26). Hindraf seeks a fresh start. Retrieved, January 13, 2010 from http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2009/7/26/focus/4390474&sec=focus

[48] The Registrar of Societies in Malaysia denied license to operate (see Chapter 5 for details on law).

gained popularity becoming a statistical reference for national and even international news reporting (Blogger Mahendran, personal interview, November 11, 2008), until it was banned by the government in December, 2007. After the ban of PWM, sites such as http://www.hindraf.org, http://www.humanrightspartymalaysia.com, http://hindraf4you.blogspot.com, http://www.makkal.org and http://www.hindraf.co.uk were spawned to maintain awareness of Hindraf activities. Subsequently, the Hindraf organization was deemed "illegal" and banned by the Malaysian government on October 16, 2008. However, Hindraf's influence has since grown global and now has following in countries such as United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and the United States of America.

7.3 Phase 1 of Hindraf Activism: January to August 2007

7.3.1 Event 1: Peaceful assembly and memo submission, June 2007

The Malaysian Constitution states every Malaysian citizen is equal, and no one shall be discriminated against. Although Islam is, "the religion of the Federation", it is also written in the constitution that "other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation."[49] However, a series of temple destructions caused sufficient concern for Hindraf who claimed that on average, "one temple is demolished every week."[50] The Hindu community was enraged when the Sri Kaliaman Hindu temple in Midland Estate, Shah Alam was demolished in June 2007. Painted as a breach of constitutional rights, Hindraf organized a peaceful assembly to submit a memorandum to the Attorney General (AG) of Malaysia.[51] The small assembly was organized to protest against the government's failure to act on numerous letters, memorandums, and police reports that Hindraf claimed to have filed over the "illegal, unlawful and unconstitutional" demolition of 79 Hindu temples from February 2006 to June 2007.[52]

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[49] See Constitution of Malaysia: Part 1- The States, Religion and Law of the Federation, 1957.
[50] Hindraf (2007, June 29).Open letter to AG: Uphold constitution and the law, prosecute Hindu temple demolishment criminals who are demolishing Hindu temples with impunity and stop Hindu temple demolishment in Malaysia. Retrieved, November 30, 2009 from, http://www.bangkit.net/2007/06/29/open-letter-to-ag-uphold-constitution-and-the-law-prosecute-hindu-temple-demolishment-criminals-who-are-demolishing-hindu-temples-with-impunity-and-stop-hindu-temple-demolishments-in-malaysia/
[51] Hindraf. (2007, June 26). Hindu rights action force questions attorney general on Hindu temple demolitions. Retrieved November 30, 2007 from http://www.bangkit.net/2007/06/26/hindu-rights-action-force-questions-attorney-general-on-hindu-temple-demolitions/
[52]Shawnmorgan (2007, December 25) List of Hindu temples demolished, February 2006 to June 2007. Retrieved November 30, 2009 from http://malayindians.blogspot.com/search?updated-min=2007-01-; 01T00%3A00%3A00-08%3A00&updated-max=2008-01-01T00%3A00%3A00-08%3A00&max-results=50

This assembly, in many ways, was considered a revelation to the mainstream news media[53] and the blogosphere,[54] subsequently, bloggers began covering Hindraf-related news. Prior to this event, minority Indian politics had received less attention and coverage in the mainstream media. The Internet, however, became a significant alternative medium for Hindraf to coordinate and organize activities through their then PWM website. Blog postings were driven not only by text, but also pictures and audio-visuals which carried the weight of the message. For example, in June 2006, during the demolition exercise of a 110-year old temple in Shah Alam,[55] Uthyakumar, Hindraf's leader, was assaulted trying to resist arrest by law enforcement officers. Additionally, three Hindu statues were smashed to pieces and destroyed with sledge hammers right before the devotee's eyes. The pictures shown in Figure 7.1 were posted on several blogs which blogger Mahendran said, "angered most Hindus" (Personal interview, November 11, 2008).

Source:http://www.hinduhumanrights.org/Malaysia/MalaysiaPhotos.html

Figure 7.1. Pictures of temple demolition

[53] The Star. (2007, June 30). Group seeks action over the demolition of 79 Hindu temples. Retrieved November 30, 2009 from http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=2007/6/30/nation/18177436&sec=nation;
[54] Hindu Human Rights (2007). Destruction of Hindu temples in Malaysia. Retrieved November 30, 2009 from http://www.hinduhumanrights.org/Malaysia/MalaysiaPhotos.html; Poobalan (2009, June 30).
[55] Asian Human Rights Commission. (2006, June 15). MALAYSIA. State orchestrated destruction of Hindu temples. Retrieved December 1, 2009 from http://www.ahrchk.net/ua/mainfile.php/2006/1781/

Prior to this incident, in April 2007, *Raajarox* posted pictures of another temple destruction.[56] In the post dated April 4, 2007, a blog reader asked:

> "Aiyo...Raaja, where did [you] get the pictures frm.[from] da ??
> Raaja replied, "I snap th[e] pictures frm. a VCD.... The VCD is about Temple Demolition in Malaysia".

Another response in the same posting reads:

> "Indians are being treated in that way becoz we indians are not fighting back the government!! Indians..stand for ur [your] rights!!!!
> Another comment, "nanti when election comes, remind me to repost this: p hahaha..savadi comparison"

According to Ong, who writes for *Malaysiakini*, an online independent news outlet, 50,000 video compact discs (VCD) documenting Hindu temple demolition were produced and distributed by Hindraf to temple goers during *Thaipusam*[57] celebration in February 2007.[58] This same footage was subsequently divided into eight parts and uploaded on the Internet.[59] Recognizing the inequitable access to the Internet, particularly amongst the minorities, Hindraf skillfully employed both the new and traditional media in a "two-step flow process of communication" (Wasserman, 2007, p.123) to reach out to Indians.

Hindraf's initiative was supported by Shufiyan's (a senior producer of Malaysiakini.TV) confession that the Indian community would be better served by video than text, which led to the creation of Malaysiakini.TV. When asked the about the philosophy behind the videos, Shufiyan said, "The orders are just shoot the video, we don't care what it sounds like, we don't care how it looks, whether it is shaky, whether it is blurry, whether its audio stinks – it doesn't matter, just bring in the visuals" (as cited in Steele, 2009). Some of Malaysiakini.TV's most influential videos have been the destruction of Indian temples and immigrant squatter communities (Ibid). Recalling the major reason for the Hindraf's protest on November 25, 2007, blogger Mahendran attested the use of video-CDs when he said:

> The mindset change started in the estates. It didn't come out very well in the urban areas...it was people in the village that started the revolution [...].The villagers had possession of these VCDs that changed their mindset and led to wider awareness. (MIB, personal interview, November 11, 2008)

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[56] Raajarox. (2007, April 17). Only when election comes. Retrieved December 1, 2009 from http://raajarox.com/?p=91
[57] Thaipusam which falls in the month of Thai (January-February), is widely celebrated by Hindus all over the world.
[58] Ong, A. (2007, February 1). Temple demolition VCD out. Retrieved November 30, 2009 fromhttp://sharanyamanivannan.blogspot.com/2007/02/vcd-on-temple-demolitions-is-out.html
[59] Paccaitamilan. (2007, December 26). Hindu temple demolition, Part 1-8. Retrieved December 1, 2009 from http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=CDF2F59A595624BA

7.3.2 Global Attention

As awareness grew among the Malaysian Indians on temple destructions and deprivation and/or violation of religious freedoms, Hindraf was gaining more recognition (and legitimacy) from international bodies worldwide. The global support for Hindraf's activities increasingly became well-known with the involvement of the Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), London-based Commonwealth Lawyers Association (CLA), British Parliamentarians, the Indian national government, and the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) (Leong, 2009). HAF in their survey of human rights conducted in 2006, recommended that the United States, United Nations, human rights groups continue to pressure the Malaysian government to protect Hindu temples from desecration and destruction.[60]

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) called for support by criticizing the government efforts in temple destruction in a letter entitled, **"**MALAYSIA: State orchestrated destruction of Hindu temples," which was sent to the Malaysia's Attorney General, Prime Minister, Inspector General of Police, Chairperson of Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) and UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion OHCHR-UNOG.[61] At the same time, various authority figures and members of the ruling government in Malaysia also chided Hindraf for appealing to foreigners on domestic affairs (Leong, 2009). Ignoring the calls to discontinue their actions, Hindraf continued to build momentum as international support began flowing steadily.

7.3.3 Event 2: 18-Points memorandum submission, August 2007

Another peaceful demonstration on Indian minority rights was held during the submission of the 18-points memorandum by Hindraf to the former Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi on August 12, 2007 (see Appendix C), despite police intimidation, fear-instilling rhetoric (Lim & Har, 2008) and media 'propaganda'. The crux of the memorandum which was compiled following a forum in July 2007, demanded the following:[62]

i) End 50 years of violation of the Malaysian Federal Constitution;

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[60] Poobalan. (2007, July 17). Extracts from Hindu human rights report 2006 by Hindu American Foundation . Retrieved from http://poobalan.com/blog/borninmalaysia/2007/07/17/extracts-from-hindu-human-rights-report-2006-by-hindu-american-foundation/

[61] AHRC. (2006, June 15). State orchestrated destruction of Hindu temples. Retrieved December 1, 2009 from http://www.ahrchk.net/ua/mainfile.php/2006/1781/.

[62] Palaniappan, Y. (2007, June 30). 18 demands for Indian M'sian rights Retrieved December 1, 2009 from http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/70544

ii) End racism, Islamic extremism and Malay privileges on the 50th year golden jubilee mega Independence celebrations of Malaysia on 31 August, 2007;

iii) Call for affirmative action plans for all poor Malaysians, especially ethnic minority Indians.

Testimonials of attendees of the peaceful assembly of 1,500-2,000[63] people, together with pictures and videos[64] of the gathering were recorded and circulated on blogs[65] and online news outlets such as *Malaysiakini*[66]. Blogger Poobalan who attended the rally claimed that the memorandum listing the 18 points was sold at RM5.00[67] per copy.

This memorandum not only marked the peak of Hindraf activism, but controversies and criticisms on Hindraf activities, demands and speculation on creating disharmony among ethnic groups began gaining media attention.[68] Controversy surrounding this memorandum within the mainstream media first sparked when the Malay-language Utusan Malaysian newspaper editor, Awang Selamat wrote an article titled, *Bisik-bisik Awang Selamat* on August 20, 2007.[69] The translated version of the article is presented as below:

> Awang is shocked with HINDRAF's demands, an Indian based non-governmental organization who wants an end to the Malay privileges and allegations that the Indians in Malaysia are sidelined by BN[Barisan Nasional]. Awang feels the NGO has gone overboard.
> Don't they realize the Indians in Malaysia have better livelihoods than elsewhere including India itself?
> Awang challenges Hindraf to migrate elsewhere if they think it would be better.
> Hindraf's action will only create more anger among the Bumiputera's who had been very tolerant with the minorities in the country under the name of social contract.
> Does the Hindraf realize there are majority of Malays and Bumiputeras living in poverty particularly in the rural areas? The poor Malays living in rural areas have been very supportive towards the government since independence. In fact they should be the ones demanding for more rights.

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[63] This actual number of attendees varies according to sources. HIndraf claims 3000 people attended the gathering; Also see Palaniappan, Y. (August 12 2007). Group demands equality for Indian M'sians. Retrieved December 2, 2009 from http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/71079.

[64] See Malaysiakini. (2007, August 12). Malaysian Indians Putrajaya Demonstration . Retrieved Decmber 2, 2009 from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ufxw98M0SB4

[65] Poobalan. (2007, August 13). Indians gathering at Putrajaya to hand memorandum. Retrieved December 2, 2009 from, http://poobalan.com/blog/indian/2007/08/13/indians-gathering-at-putrajaya-to-hand-memorandum/

[66] Palaniappan, Y. (2007, August 12). Group demands equality for Indian M'sians. Retrieved December 2, 2009, from http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/71079

[67] Malaysia's currency is known as Ringgit Malaysia (RM). For example, USD$1 is equivalent to RM3.30.

[68] Multimid. (2007, August 17). Samy Vellu hits back at Hindraf's 18-points memo. Retrieved December 2, 2009 from, http://powerpresent.blogspot.com/2007/08/samy-vellu-hits-back-at-hindraf-18.html

[69] See Mahendran. (2007, August 21). Awang who? Utusan comments. Retrieved December 2, 2009 from, http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=141; Also see Raajarox. (2007, August 21). "Mahu apa lagi" – Awang (Utusan Malaysia Editor). Retrieved December 2 2009, from, http://raajarox.com/?p=130

> Awang warns that the Malays may lose their patience which may lead to bigger problems for the various parties.
> Hindraf's allegation regarding temple issues is also totally wrong. Already there are so many temples in the country as if the Indians are the main ethnic group in Malaysia. What more do you want?
> Awang- Sweltering in silence. (Awang Selamat, Utusan Malaysia, 20 August, 2007)

A follow up to the article was written on August 21, 2007 by Awang.[70] The contents include:

> The issue related to temples. The non-governmental organization [HINDRAF] allegedly claimed that many temple were demolished. But Hindraf didn't mention that the temples were built illegally. (Awang Selamat, Utusan Malaysia, 21 August 2007)

Both articles appeared on several blogs, namely *Raajarox*[71] and *Bolehland*.[72] Interestingly, both blogs registered a high number of responses from blog readers, compared to previous months and postings. In short, the responses were: awareness of minority issues, hatred towards the UMNO-controlled government and Malays, lack of unity and leadership among the Indians, and increasing concern over the status of Indians in Malaysia, among others. Some selected responses by both bloggers and blog-readers at *Bolehland* are given below:

> Hmmm...we have racially provoking statements made in the national type mainstream papers and yet no one reacts... This is my country and who the hell gave you the right to chase my sexy ass out?..Everyone has the right to voice out...I am born in Malaysia, and so are my parents. I am a product of Malaysia... Ini Negara [country] democracy ke [or] iron-fist authoritarian state? Kalau tak salah[if not mistaken] my Constitution says this is democracy. And even if we folllow demokrasi-ala-timur[east], perbezaan pendapat ialah [difference in opinion is] normal... You are instigating people. You and your UMNO boss are the same...
>
> UGUTAN![Threat] One plain shit filled ugutan. Can someone please make police report on this? I feel threatened. Just because I voice out my opinion I am getting wacked? Shit! Sedition Act, ISA, use la ape2...this guy is instigating and cuba menimbulkan perasaan tidak puas hati di kalangan rakyat [trying to create discontentment among society].

On the temple issue:

> Yes, memang betul[that's right]. Tapi Awang pon lupa untuk menyebut[But you, Awang forgot to say] how those temples got the illegal status. Those temples were built 50-70 years ago. That was before Merdeka[independence] and before the current law of the land came to force. As such it can't be said to be illegal. It was

[70]Selamat, A. (2007, August, 21). Bisik-bisik Awang Selamat. Retrived December 2, 2009 from: http://utusan.com.my/utusan/info.asp?y=2007&dt=0821&pub=Utusan_Malaysia&sec=Rencana&pg=re_04.htm
[71] Raajarox. (2007, August 21). "Mahu apa lagi"- Awang (Utusan Malaysia Editor). Retrieved December 2, 2009, from http://raajarox.com/?p=130. Number of responses on posting was 43
[72] Mahendran. (2007,August 21). Awang who? Utusan comments. Retrieved December 2, 2009 from, http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=141. Number of responses on posting was 21

> built long ago, and no license and permits were given to them, and in some wild cases, attempts to get proper permits were chased out, rejected...

Comments by selected blog readers at *Raajarox* and *Bolehland*:

> Puvanan: Why should we go out of Malaysia? We are citizens of this country and we deserve the basic rights as a citizen....
> Saravanan: it is indeed tragic that such a seditious comment has made its way onto the mainstream media...
> Peter: You are 2[too] racism.
> Alex: If all Indian people unite and work as a team like the Chinese Community.... no other races will take opportunity to dominate us or disrespect us in anyways or take advantage of us... If we don't back up very soon and all of us better migrate back to india or some other country to survive.

The relationship between Hindraf leaders and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) continued to strain[73] on several issues[74] relating to Hindu temples, poor living conditions of the Indians in the urban areas, birth certificates, religious freedom and *syariah*-based law imposed on Indians, allocation of seats in public university for Indian students, and Tamil schools, as the Malaysian Indians were confronted and forced to face the reality as a marginalized group through awareness campaigns (see below). The MIC was under tremendous pressure to act on behalf of the Indians in resolving some of the problems listed above, while defending the government's position against Hindraf's. The wave of support for the MIC, however, continued to diminish, while Hindraf gained strength to mobilize thousands of supporters in demand for their equal rights as citizens of Malaysia.

7.4 Phase 2 of Hindraf's Activism: September to November 2007

7.4.1 Awareness Campaigns and Forums

The support for Hindraf, both locally and internationally, culminated into a series of awareness campaigns and forums highlighting the plight of the Malaysian Indians. The objective of these forums was to motivate and engage the Indians in Malaysia to act collectively in demanding their rights as citizens. Hindrafs' intervention included materials prepared and distributed in the form of text, visual, audio and print (pamphlets of the 18 point memo). For example, the former Hindraf's website (PWM)

[73] See Poobalan (2008, August 17). Samy hits bask at Hindraf on memorandum. Retrieved December 1, 2009 from http://poobalan.com/blog/indian/2007/08/17/samy-hits-back-at-hindraf-on-memorandum/;
[74]See details on birth certificates at http://poobalan.com/blog/indian/2007/08/27/mic-youth-says-at-least-20000-indians-without-birth-certificate/; Also at http://poobalan.com/blog/borninmalaysia/2007/08/27/stories-of-those-without-birth-certificates/; http://poobalan.com/blog/borninmalaysia/2007/09/12/70000-indians-no-birth-certificates/;Hindu temples at http://poobalan.com/blog/indian/2007/08/24/biggest-asset-for-indians-are-temples-says-datuk-subra/; Religious freedom at http://poobalan.com/blog/borninmalaysia/2007/08/14/couple-dissolves-marriage-after-wife-embraces-islam/; Tamil schools at http://poobalan.com/blog/2007/08/page/8/; Also http://www.bangkit.net/2007/09/11/budget-2008-no-allocation-for-tamil-schools-and-the-70-indian-poor-and-hardcore-poor/

was used particularly to disseminate information on upcoming forums including a civil lawsuit brought upon the British government on August 30, 2007.[75]The lawsuit filed by Waythamoorthy, Hindraf chairman and lawyer based in London, sought compensation on the amount of USD$14 Trillion (including RM7 Million per Malaysian Indian) for "...alleged atrocities suffered by Indians whose forefathers were brought as indentured laborers to Malaysian during colonial rule. The colossal suit reflects the years of pain, suffering, humiliation, discrimination and continuous colonialisation under the current Malaysian government."[76] Also, Hindraf's chairman requested the British government to declare the Malaysian constitution null and void.

Following the suit filed in London, as many as 18 forums were held nationwide between September to November 24, 2007.[77] Bloggers played their role as agenda-setters by creating the next level of awareness following Hindraf leaders, by linking to Hindraf's website, and disseminating news and information relating to the forums. The blogs particularly, were used to disseminate forum details, besides encouraging readers to snowball the information through other Web applications.[78] For example, the posting below appeared on *Raajarox*'s blog on November 14, 2007.[79]

> 1. PENANG
> Date: 18.11.2007 (Sunday)
> Time: 9.00a.m
> Venue:Penang Chinese Town Hall, Jalan Mesjid Kapitan Keling,(Little India)Penang Island.
> Contact: Vasantha 012-4628353
> 2. BUTTERWORTH
> Date: 18.11.2007 (Sunday)
> Time: 2.30p.m
> Venue: Dewan Sri Mariamman, Jalan Mengkuang, Butterworth.
> Contact : M.Anbalagan 012-4071867
> 3. KULIM
> Date: 18.11.2007 (Sunday)
> Time: 6.30p.m
> Venue :Chinese Recreational Club (CRC) Hall, Kulim (behind Hotel Seri

[75] See details at Poobalan. (2007, September 10) Malaysian files RM http://poobalan.com/blog/indian/2007/09/10/malaysian-files-rm14-trillion-suit-against-britain/; Also see Bangkit.net. (2007, October 19). Forum on USD$4 trillion including rm7 million per Malaysian Indian civil suit against the British government filed on 30.8.2007 and 50 years of marginalization of the Malaysian Indians by the Umno. Retrieved December 1, 2009 from http://www.bangkit.net/2007/10/19/forum-on-usd-4-trillion-including-rm7-million-per-malaysian-indian-civil-suit-against-the-british-government-filed-on-3082007-and-50-years-of-marginalization-of-the-malaysian-indians-by-the-umno-c/

[76] Sun2Surf. (2007, November 10). M'sian files RM14 trillion suit against Britain. Retrieved December 10, 2009 from http://www.sun2surf.com/article.cfm?id=19282

[77] See Ong. A. (2007, November 24). Lets hand petition and go home. Retrieved December 2, 2009 from http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/75243

[78] Also see http://www.bangkit.net/2007/09/29/hindraf-public-forum-srjk-c-kampung-baru-semenyih-selangor/; http://www.bangkit.net/2007/10/18/public-forum-in-teluk-intan-neo-colonialist-umno-marginalizing-indians-ghandi-hall-teluk-intan-perak/

[79] Raajarox. (2007, November 14). Hindraf-Nationwide Forums (16th, 17th, & 18 of Nov' 07). Retrieved December 2, 2009 from http://raajarox.com/?p=148

Malaysia)
Contact: Selva 012-4810258
4. SEREMBAN
Date: 17.11.2007 (Saturday)
Time: 6.30p.m
Venue: SRJK (C) Pei Hua, Jalan Tun Dr.Ismail,(Jalan Templer) Seremban, N.S
Contact: Haridass 012-3323490
5. KUALA SELANGOR
Date: 16.11.2007 (Friday)
Time: 6.30p.m
Venue: Yun He, Restaurant, Lot 293, Sg Rampai, Jalan Batang Berjuntai, Kuala Selangor
Contact: David 012-9241881
6. KUALA LUMPUR
Date: 18.11.2007 (Sunday)
Time: 6.30p.m
Venue: Girl Guides Hall, Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad, Brickfields, K.L (near YMCA)
Contact: Raj 012-3330900

Share This - appeared as a hyperlink to other social webpages such as del.icio.us, yahoo! My web, windows live, google bookmarks, dig, technorati and others including email)

7.4.2 More temple demolishment

As forums were filling in disenfranchised Indians, the Selangor State Government and Majlis Bandaraya Shah Alam (MBSA) proceeded further to demolish another "illegal" Hindu temple, the MariammanTemple in Padang Jawa on October 30, 2007. [80] The fact that the temples were demolished about a week before and after Deepavali[81] exacerbated the situation. Even the intervention of Samy Vellu, President of MIC, failed to extend the limited time given for the temples to move, much less to prevent their demolition.[82]

Consequently, violent clashes[83] erupted with many devotees getting injured, including four of the Hindraf's lawyers who were detained and later released. Pictures of demolition, arrest and law enforcement throwing stones at the devotees were widely circulated on the Internet. In addition, eye-witness accounts found its way to the blogs.

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[80] http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=190; http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/74180; http://poobalan.com/blog/borninmalaysia/2007/10/31/shah-alam-temple-demolished-and-media-blackout/. However, there were many conflicting accounts on the actual date of the temple demolishment(see http://poobalan.com/blog/borninmalaysia/2007/12/09/khir-toyo-meets-padang-jawa-folks/).
[81] Deepavali is widely celebrated by Hindus all over the world.
[82] The Star. (2007, November 1). Samy: Give new sites for temples. Retrieved December 4, 2009 from http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2007/11/1/nation/19340549&sec=nation;
[83] Pictures and video of assaults can be found at http://raajarox.com/?p=137; http://raajarox.com/?p=138;

For example, a posting on Mahendran's[84] blog read, "I saw an enforcement officer pulling out a knife and waving it around threateningly**,**" Kumaravel, member of Jaringan Rakyat Tertindas (JERIT).

Source: Veluyu's Photostream, 2007[85]

Figure 7.2. Pictures of Padang Jawa temple demolition

Many people, including bloggers Mahendran, Amutha, Puvanan[86] and Malaysian Hindu Sangam President, Vaithilingam believed this incident to be the catalyst for the mobilization of thousand of Malaysian Indians during the Hindraf rally. As Vaithilingam wrote, "The unprecedented pictures of local authority enforcement officers throwing stones at devotees and at the temple caused an uproar amongst the Indian community."[87] In addition, blogs facilitated in amplifying the issue by attempting to verify[88] and clarify the issue through emails and eyewitness accounts as shown below.[89]

[84] Mahendran. (2007, November 1). The Kg. Rimba Jawa incident. Retrieved December 4, 2009 from, http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=190
[85] Veluyu's Photostream (2007, November 6).[Pictures]. Hindu Temple Demolition in Malaysia. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from Flickr: http://www.flickr.com/photos/23713080@N00/1888984932/
[86] Bloggers Mahendran, Amutha, Puvanan, personal Interview, November 11, 2008
[87] As cited in Hindu Press International. (2007, November 27). Malaysian Hindu Sangam Ask Government to Heed

> Poobalan says: Another email regarding the Padang Jawa temple demolition by MBSA by a reader sent to a forum. I'm unable to contact the author again, so if he/she is able to read this, do get back to me.
> Delivered-To: mpoobalan@XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
> From: arthi arthi
> Sender: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
> Date: Tue, 30 Oct 2007 23:18:16 -0700 (PDT)
> Subject: Re: shah alam temple demolished and media blackout...

Another email of the incident sent to Poobalan on October 31, 2007 is given below: [90]

> Thanish Rama thanish@....
> Delivered-To: mpoobalan@******
> Tue, 30 Oct 2007 19:48:23 -0700 (PDT)
> From: Thanish Rama Date: Wed, 31 Oct 2007 02:22:07 +0000...
> Subject: [www.umic.org.my] Temple Demolished in Padang Jawa Klang

Besides online activism, the news on Padang Jawa temple demolition was also spread through word-of-mouth by other race as claimed by blogger Mahendran:

> The [news] started getting around that pictures were posted on the Internet but since Internet [uptake] is low amongst Indians...the Chinese got to know and passed it[the news] to the Indians back. That's how the Indians came to know about Internet...[91]

The confrontations between Khir Toyo, the *Menteri Besar* (Chief Head) of Selangor, over the demolition of the temples incidents made Samy Velu, the MIC president so indignant that the MIC initially announced that it was cancelling its Deepavali open houses[92] as a mark of respect to all Hindus. However, the announcement was retracted shortly after,[93] resulting in a plan to hold a national-level Deepavali gathering on November 8, 2007. These developments found its way to blogs when *Raajarox* claimed that there was a short-message-service (SMS) via mobile phone making its rounds as below:[94]

Protestors' Concerns. Retrieved December 10, 2009 from http://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/xpress/2007/11/;
[88] The date of the demolishment was refuted by Murugesan who responded to Malaysiakini's report on April 28 2008, that Khir Toyo stated that the temple was demolished after Deeapavali November 15. However, Murugesan was present during the demolishment of the temple in October 30 2007.
(for details see http://poobalan.com/blog/religion/2008/04/30/murugesan-tells-his-version-of-padang-jawa-temple-demolition/
[89] Poobalan. (2007, November 14). Eye witness comment on Padang Jawa demolition. Retrieved December 1, 2009 from http://poobalan.com/blog/borninmalaysia/2007/11/14/eye-witness-comment-on-padang-jawa-temple-demolition/
[90] Poobalan. (2007, October 31). Shah Alam temple demolishment details. Retrieved December 1, 2009 from http://poobalan.com/blog/borninmalaysia/2007/10/31/shah-alam-temple-demolishment-details/
[91] Blogger Mahendran, personal interview, November 9, 2008
[92] Being a multiracial country with different religions and festivals - Hari Raya (Eid) for the Muslims, Chinese New Year for the Chinese, Deepavali for Hindus and Christmas for the Christians, government officials of a particular faith will hold gatherings based on an open-house concept- where anyone can attend these functions without being invited.
[93] Mahendran. (2007, November 5). Boycott Deepavali open house. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=193
[94] Raajarox. (2007, November 5). MIC to boycott Deepavali open house. Retrieved December 14, 2009 from http://raajarox.com/?p=143

> Lot of SMS being circulated asking to boycott all deepavali celebrations organized by gov as a sign of protest...
>
> **Bloody hell!**
>
> First you demolish temples. To add insult to injury you employ mainly non-Hindus to enter and destroy sacrosanct Hindu areas. Now you want us to close our eyes, develop temporary amnesia and pretend that semuanya [everything]OK and eat ur[your] Thosai and Vadai [Indian delicacies]????

7.4.3 Reconstituting the Opposition Movement

As discussed briefly in Chapter 5, after the unexpected acquittal of Anwar Ibrahim in September 2004, the opposition awakened. The *Reformasi* movement then was revived through political parties and protest movements organized by civil society that employed the use of Internet technology. During the weeks ahead of the Hindraf rally, there were two other events that catalyzed the emergence of a broad opposition movement.

On September 26, 2007, at least two thousand lawyers participated in the "Walk for Justice" demonstration as a result of the "Lingam Tape" scandal that occurred in 2002.[95] The tape depicting how high ranking jobs in the judiciary are filled informally was presented by the ousted former deputy prime minister Anwar at a public press conference in September 2007. In response, the government was forced to set up a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the V.K. Lingam Video Clip.

Less than two months later, at another protest on November 10, 2007, at least 40,000 people participated in the largest demonstration in Kuala Lumpur since the *Reformasi*.[96] The protest demanding electoral reform was organized by BERSIH, the "Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections" comprising of 70 political parties and civil society organization (http://bersih.org/?page_id=352). Anwar led a delegation that successfully delivered a memorandum to the King's[97] secretary. The demands were: use of indelible ink to prevent multiple voting, abolition of postal votes, revision of the electoral roll and fair access to state-owned media.[98] This demonstration, deemed illegal by the government, was met with violence – when police used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowd,[99] and at least 24 people were arrested and released later.

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[95] Malaysiakini. (2007, September 24). Special report: The Lingam Tape. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/72772

[96] Malaysiakini. (2007, November 12). Special report: Bersih's Nov. 10 mass rally. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/74652

[97] The leader of the Malaysia following the British rule.

[98] BERSIH. (2007, November 10). Memorandum to His Majesty Yang DiPertuan Agong. Retrieved Decmber 12, 2009 from http://bersih.org/?page_id=517

[99] Jalil. Hamid. (2007, November 10). Malaysian police use water cannon at Anwar rally. Retrieved December 12, 2009 at Reuters - http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSSP165982

Nonetheless, both the rallies played an important role in creating awareness on human rights issues; hence, a wake-up call for the discontented Indians whose problems were never properly articulated.

7.4.4 Event 3: Appeal letter sent to British Prime Minister, November 2007

On November 15, 2007, Hindraf issued an appeal letter to Gordon Brown, British Prime Minister, allegedly claiming that the Malaysian government is practicing "ethnic cleansing of Indians" and seek to refer the matter to the World Court and the International Criminal Court. The letter (see Appendix B) with the subject, "Commonwealth Ethnic Indian Peace Loving Subjects In Malaysia Persecuted By Government Backed Islamic Extremist Violent Armed Terrorist Who Launched A Pre Dawn Violent Armed Attack And Destroyed The Kg Jawa Mariaman Hindu Temple At 4.00 A.M This Morning (15.11.2007)..." makes reference to the following:

a) The Kampung Medan "mini genocide" that left at least six killed and over hundred injured (see details in Chapter 5, section 5.3.4);
b) A "shoot-to-kill" policy in which, "Every week one person at average is killed...and in every 2 weeks one person is killed in police custody"
c) "In every three weeks one Hindu temple is demolished in Malaysia"
d) "State sponsored direct discrimination against the Indians in public university intakes, Indian (Tamil) Schools, skills training institutes, civil service and private sector job opportunities, business and license opportunities and in almost all other aspects of daily life."

Together with this letter, Hindraf also issued a nationwide call to fellow Indians to join the planned rally on November 25, 2007, to protest the continual economic, educational, social, and cultural marginalization of the Indian community in Malaysia. According to Uthayakumar, Hindraf's legal advisor, the allegations about "genocide" and "ethnic cleansing" written in the appeal letter (see Appendix C) garnered international attention at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Kampala, Uganda.[100] Since then the British and the Indian government have been pressuring the Malaysian government to heed the protestor's concerns and protect the rights of minority Indians from further discrimination. The Malaysian government reacted by detaining and charging the Hindraf lawyers under the Sedition Act, as a result of the wide media publicity and escalating pressure from various parties. The arrest was made on

[100] Malaysiakini Interview. (2007, December 5). Uthayakumar. I'm no racist. Retrieved December 13, 2009 from Indian Malaysian Online - http://www.indianmalaysian.com/sound/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=860

November 23, 2007, but both Uthyakumar and Waythamoorthy, offices' were raided by law enforcement officers on November 19, 2007. This post appeared on *Bolehland* on November 19, 2007:[101]

> news alert.
> Just called lawyer Uthayakumar, his office in Bangsar was raided by police team, confiscating documents, and posters of HINDRAF. 25,000 copies of such posters were taken away, no further action was taken. Same police raid was carried out in N.Sembilan in Waytha Moorthy's office.
>
> Uthayakumar expects himself and his brother to be taken into custody, as a way to stop the planned gathering this 25th November.
>
> Last Saturday, Bukit Aman police started their intelligence gathering of the planned gathering, which is organised by HINDRAF, trying to get 10,000 Malaysian Indians to submit memorandum to the British Embassy in Jalan Ampang. The memo calls for a representative from the Queen's Council to represent HINDRAF in its action class suit against the British government.
>
> MIC leaders on the other hand, is trying to counter back the wide-spread SMSes that is going around, calling each and everyone NOT to attend the said gathering on 25th. Malaysiakini reported that MIC Youth leader, YB Yigneswaran saying that the rally would cause unrest.
>
> Tens of busses carrying protesters are already planned in states of Kedah, Perak and Selangor. HINDRAF failed to get any permit for the memo submission, and admits that while the said memo submission is vital, it can only be done on Sunday, which is a public holiday. Embassy officials previously said that they are well aware of the planned rally, and is still not sure who would be able to receive the memo since it will be closed on Sunday...

Raajarox informed his readers about the raid and included a video of a Hindraf speech taken in Penang.[102] The blog readers from his page who were "inspired by the speech", "called for unity among Indians" and "called for gathering on November 25, 2007". *Poobalan* on the other hand, posted a "Hindraf signature form"[103] or petition obtained from www.policewatchmalaysia.com (Hindraf's former website) which read as follows:

> I the undersigned support the Civil Action No. HQ07X02977 filed on my behalf at the Royal Courts of Justice, London on 30th. Aug. 2007 and appeal to Her Royal Highness, The Queen of England, to appoint Her Queens Counsel to represent the poor, oppressed, suppressed and permanently colonized Malaysian Indians in the above suit.
> Please attend and show your support at the British High Commission, No. 185, Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur on 25th. Aug. 2007 to formally present the Petition to Her Majesty the Queen. (see Appendix E)

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[101] Bolehland. (2007, November 19). Police raided Hindraf. Retrieved December 10 2009, from http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=200
[102] Raajarox. (2007, November 19). Hindraf latest updates. Retrieved December 10, 2009 from http://raajarox.com/?p=151
[103] Poobalan. (2007, November 12). Hindraf signature form. Retrieved December 10, 2009 from http://poobalan.com/blog/indian/2007/11/14/hindraf-signature-form/

The aim of this petition was to acquire 100,000 signatures from Malaysia Indians in support of the statement mentioned above, to be submitted along the memorandum to the British High Commission on November 25, 2007. This petition, together with HINDRAF's letter to the British High Commission to inform them about the planned rally, and requesting for someone from the embassy to accept the petition, was posted on *Raajarox*'s[104] blog with a link to the originator, Poobalan.com.

Meanwhile Poobalan posted an entry titled, "Hindraf meeting a journey of facts"[105](sent through email) in which Kannan describes a Hindraf forum he attended on November 18, 2007. The email also makes reference to Hindraf gathering planned for November 25, 2007. The contents are as follows:

> ...The other request made in the speech were,
> 1. The signature support by Malaysian Indian on the suit against UK
> a. Each Indian to get at least 10 signatures and make 10 copies of the form
> 2. The peaceful gathering to support the memo submission to the UK counsel on coming 25th Nov 2007 at 9am in front of British Council, Jln Ampang KL.
> a. Request made if possible to be in "orange" to assemble peace and sacred gathering. (Amathiyum Thuimaiyum)
> b. Be in peace and total calm during the gathering as it resembles the Indians in Msia[Malaysia] to pledge the HRH Queen of England to appoint
> Her Queen's Counsel to represent us.
> c. The international media will be present at the gathering to record this peace wave.
> d. It will be a legal peace gathering with police permit.
> e. Be there early to avoid traffic jam and possible to take public transport like LRT[Light Rail Transit – train) Star to Ampang Park Stn which is only 50m walk to
> the council.
> 3. Do daily prayers and light up a "agal villaku"(earthen lamp) in front of every Indians house daily from 7pm – 8 pm to shown support on the suit against UK.
> The gathering came close to end at 10.30 pm with standing recognition to the brave hearts that fought their life to save the recent Kg Jawa Amman Temple followed highly motivated song and the IKRAR reading.
> It was a stunning and high vibrate gathering that I ever been.
> We need more Malaysian Indian to support this team that is fighting for the rights of all of us whom are poor, oppressed, suppressed and permanently colonized.
> As your simple contribution, pls pass this info to all the Indian that u knew.
> Pls. seek for the form and pen down your signature of support.

[104] Raajarox. (2007, November 16) HIndraf 100,000 assembly British High Commissioner letter. Retrieved December 10, 2009 from http://raajarox.com/?p=149
[105] Poobalan. (2007, November 20). Hindraf meeting a journey of facts. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://poobalan.com/blog/borninmalaysia/2007/11/20/hindraf-meeting-a-journey-of-facts/

> Be there in all the meeting to get to the root of the truth.
> "KAMI MAHU HAK KAMI"[translated: We want our rights]
> "KAMI MAHU HAK KAMI"
> "KAMI MAHU HAK KAMI"
> Thanks for reading and seek for support - Kannan Ramasamy -

Similarly, *Bolehland* posted a testimonial[106] of a forum attendee who described the event and praised Hindraf's effort in protecting the rights of the Indians in Malaysia. At this time, more and more efforts were being made to keep each other informed about the planned rally. For example, blogger Mahendran took the initiative to encourage discussion and participant among his readers by writing the following on his page that reads, "Anyone with more opinion letters, send them to email@bmahendran.com..."

While Indians were gearing up to attend the planned rally, there were more assaults.[107] However, by this time the Indians who were inspired and energized by recent developments retaliated by protesting against their assailants. They found strength through forums, and were ready to meet their challengers collectively as a group. News of Hindraf's lawyers, P. Uthayakumar, P Waythamoorthy and V Ganapathy Rao detained under the Sedition Act[108] was widely circulated on the Internet. All three blogs- Poobalan.com, *Bolehland* and *Raajarox* carried the stories and follow-ups as shown below:

> *Bolehland* said: [109]
> HINDRAF leaders whisked off at night. The picture was sent in by Vicky, thank you! Anyone with more pictures, just email them to email@bmahendran.com or those who knows me, MMS me straight away! Reports are sketchy, but police are checking for Handphones SMS inbox for any HINDRAF related messages. To be on the safe side, delete all. Supporters have gathered in front of IPK Shah Alam , waiting for the release of HINDRAF leaders. No further news as of now.

Raajarox's posting including videos and critic by Malaysia's human rights organization Suaram as shown below:[110]

> Allow rally to proceed Suaram strongly condemns the arrests of P. Uthayakumar, P Waythamoorthy and V Ganapathy Rao of the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) under the Sedition Act ahead of their rally on Sunday. The ground and

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[106] Bolehland. (2007, November 24). Letters: In support of Hindraf. Retrived December 12, 2009 from http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=215
[107] See details at http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=202; http://poobalan.com/blog/indian/2007/11/20/200-protest-assault-by-giant-security-guards/
[108] Citing sensitive words such as "ethnic cleansing" and "genocide" used in their memo (dated November 15, 2007), Hindraf's lawyers were arrested under Sedition Act. In an interview with Malaysiakini on December 3, 2007, Uthayakumar explains on his choice of words use in the memo (see, "Uthayakumar: I'm no racist" at http://www.indianmalaysian.com/sound/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=860)
[109] Bolehland. (2007, November 23). 23Nov Updates. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=212
[110] Raajarox. (2007, November 23). Lawyer Uthayakumar arrested at 10am and freed on bail at 6 pm. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://raajarox.com/?p=157

> the timing of the arrests testify to the bad faith on the part of the police. It is none other than another attempt by the police to intimidate and to prevent the organizers and the supporters of Hindraf from exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly and the right to freedom of expression.
> Suaram reiterates our strongest condemnation on the police's scare tactics by sending out stern warnings of harsh action that will be taken against those who attended demonstrations. The police have also been setting up roadblocks in several major roads, reportedly to stop the upcoming Hindraf rally...

In an effort to hinder the planned rally on November 25, 2007, the Malaysian police denied Hindraf a permit[111] to assemble peacefully, besides setting up roadblocks around the capital causing massive traffic congestion as shown in Figure 6.3. [112]

Source: http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/75125

Figure 7.3. Roadblocks causing traffic congestion

The politics of rumors takes on an intense stage where short-message-service(SMS) and multimedia-message service (MMS) continued to play an important role in disseminating information and rumors relating to the planned Hindraf rally. These rumors sent primarily through mobile phones, however, linked bloggers and alternative news outlet, such as *Malaysiakini*. The source of information is then verified by both bloggers and *Malaysiakini* for accuracy, as shown by a posting below: [113]

> Quick updates
> Do not believe in all SMSes. Unless it comes from HINDRAF.
> SMS saying HINDRAF has got police permit today morning at 11.30AM is NOT TRUE as of 4PM.[114]

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[111] The Malaysian constitution states that an assembly of more than three persons in public places requires a permit from the District Police.
[112] Poobalan. (2007, November 22). Roadblocks put up to deter Hindraf rally and volunteer arrested. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://poobalan.com/blog/indian/2007/11/22/roadblocks-put-up-to-deter-hindraf-rally-and-volunteer-arrested/; also see Malaysiakini http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/75125
[113] Malaysiakini. (2007, November 22). Police roadblocks jam road, again. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/75125; Also see http://poobalan.com/blog/indian/2007/11/22/roadblocks-put-up-to-deter-hindraf-rally-and-volunteer-arrested/
[114] Bolehland. (2007, November 22). Hindraf Updates. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=211

> This and other rumors are spreading via the short messaging service (SMS) on mobile phones, either to encourage or discourage people from attending a mass rally being organized by the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf).[115] The gathering has sparked rumors via the short messaging service on mobile phones that Queen Elizabeth II will make an appearance at the British High Commission in Kuala Lumpur on Sunday, but this has been dispelled by Hindraf. Other rumors are that that Uthayakumar has been beaten up and the lawyers in Hindraf have been arrested. These have also been clarified as false.

As blogs continued to post updates on the status of Hindraf's leaders and volunteers arrested and later released due to insufficient evidence presented by the prosecuting team, the Malaysian government was criticized for its paranoia and fear tactic strategy used on volunteers, protestors and leaders of Hindraf whose planned rally was now considered "illegal". International organizations and opposition parties pressured the government to allow the rally to take its course.

In the meantime, bloggers continued disseminating information on the traffic situation utilizing traffic cameras situated in the city center of Kuala Lumpur. In turn, blog readers responded by giving eye witness account of traffic conditions on highways and roadblocks.[116] Buses hired to carry protestors from other states were reported to have problems due to roadblocks and high surveillance from traffic police.[117] *Raajarox* posted the following message on his blog:

*****Please check the traffic before you move.*****
Main Places in Malaysia
http://www.llmtrafik.gov.my/traffic.htm
Kuala Lumpur
http://www.jpbdbkl.gov.my/
Penang
http://www.penangbridge.com.my/bridgecam.php

As the days drew closer, the postings on the blogs were related to guidelines (including map of the British High Commission where the memo is to be handed over) and rights' of people attending the gathering. The bloggers took the initiative to post and link to each other as shown below, besides encouraging blog readers to add information pertinent to the guidelines:

[115] Malaysiakini. (2007, November 21)Rumors rife, Hindraf not assumed. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/75077
[116] Raajarox. (2007, November 24). Life traffic updates –KL, Penang, Johor, North-South Highway. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://raajarox.com/?p=159
[117] See details at http://poobalan.com/blog/indian/2007/11/23/

> *Bolehland*'s posting reads: [118] "Guideline: 25/11... More to do list (Thanks to Poobalan for the below list"
> Poobalan.com [119] says: "...i suppose many people will be going there. Mahendran[*Bolehland*] has an entry that provides list of do's and don'ts which may be useful, read it at http://www.bmahendran.com/blog/?p=208".
> *Raajarox*[120] **-** **More Details and Related post by: Mahen [*Bolehland*] (MIB)..

Besides guidelines, *Bolehland* announced his motives on covering the rally:

> Again, before being questioned or labeled, let me put this straight forward. Bolehland is all about freedom of expression. And sad to say, apart from MalaysiaKini, there is no other blogs/media doing any coverage for this rally like for the BERSIH, so I am just allowing this site to be used to disseminate news updates of the rally, because most probably it will just be reported in NST[New Straits Times daily] as "road block caused traffic" incident.[121]
> Bolehland will be bringing live updates on HINDRAF's rally this 25th Nov. For those who can't attend the rally, check out BMahendran.com. For faster news alert, type ON MANDELISM and send SMS to 22700**.** Rm0.25cents only. [122]

In the meantime, *Raajarox* sent out press invitations to international media informing them about the rally, and also encouraged his readers to pass the message along:

> I have send a copy of press invitation for all main news media around the world. Here is my press invitation to them**... ****Dear Friends, please send a copy of press invitation to all of them from your mail, this is to avoid any violence by police.[123]

Raajarox[124] also encouraged his readers to join him at the rally by posting the statement as below with a cautionary note:

> For those who wish to join me in KL, kindly meet up at KL Sentral at 7.30am tomorrow**.** Reminder: This is at your own risk and on a voluntary basis. Please bring along your cameras**.** Delete all your SMS (inbox and outbox)**.** See you all there.... Im[I'm] moving now...

Bolehland updated his page with MMS and encouraged readers to send him anything that related to the rally. He said, "Busses from Kedah and Penang, refueling at

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[118] Bolehland. (2007, November 22). Guidelines: 25/11 rally. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=208
[119] Poobalan. (2007, November 22). Tips on attending hindraf assembly. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://poobalan.com/blog/indian/2007/11/22/tips-on-attending-hindraf-assembly/
[120] Raajarox. (2007, November 21). Advice for Hindraf meeting on 25/11/07. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://raajarox.com/?p=155
[121] Bolehland. (2007, November 22). Guidelines: 25/11 rally. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=208
[122] Bolehland. (2007, November 21). Live updates. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=207
[123]Raajarox. (2007, November 23). Press Invitation to all main media. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://raajarox.com/?p=156
[124] Raajarox. (2007, November 24). Hindraf gathering – wanna join me? Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://raajarox.com/?p=161

Slim River, MMS by bsvanan. Send all to email@bmahendran.com[125].With that, *Bolehland* made his first posting in the morning of November 25, 2007 which reads as follows:

> Recent updates will be published here.
>
> 25Nov 00:57: A lot of police around British Embassy. Around 300 personnel. But no road blocks yet.
>
> 25Nov 00:30:As for now, the crowd in Batu Caves is around 300. They are asking those who can't go into KL to gather there, will walk to embassy early morning.
>
> *Bolehland* also adds, "I am not from HINDRAF and got nothing to do with HINDRAF. I am just a normal guy who prefers in expressing his thoughts and opinion, and firmly believes in freedom of speech and freedom of media. For that sake, that I am giving a chance to cover the rally today.....

7.4.5 Event 4: Hindraf Rally, November 25, 2007

The main objective of the rally was to hand over the memo (see Appendix C) to the British High Commission in Malaysia. Hindraf was prepared to lead the "illegal" peaceful assembly on November 25, 2007, notwithstanding the police intimidation, media propaganda instilling fear, and a very rare court order injunction denying permit to assemble. On the day of the rally, besides *Malaysiakini*, the alternative online news site, *Bolehland* was the only blog to provide real-time updates and information on the rally. Other bloggers led their readers to *Bolehland* for coverage on the rally as shown by the sample posting below: [126]

> Stay in touch with online medias and weblogs for updates. *Bolehland* will be providing minute to minute update of the rally based on the happenings at ground zero and any official statements from Hindraf can be obtained from policewatchmalaysia. Stay tuned.

Bolehland (Mahendran) utilized the traffic cameras situated at strategic points in Kuala Lumpur city center to cover his reporting of the protest rally (see Figure 7.4). In addition, his updates were supported by "citizen reporters"- eye-witness accounts (text), audio-visuals - videos, SMS, MMS, pictures (Figure 7.5) and international new reports (see details at http://bmahendran.wordpress.com/page/2/). Hence, a combination of media and non-media were used to cover the historic rally.

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[125] Bolehland.(November, 25 2009). I am sorry. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=221
[126] The Blank Page. (2007, November 23). Hindraf rally: Are you ready? Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://puvanan.blogspot.com/2007/11/hindraf-rally-are-you-ready.html

Source: http://bmahendran.wordpress.com/page/2/

Figure 7.4. Pictures taken from traffic cameras

Mahendran's update was hourly starting from 6.00am on November 25, 2007. Some of the selected postings from *Bolehland* are as below:

> 6-7 AM :
> Unconfirmed : Tear gasses used at certain small group of people at KLCC area
> 7-8 Busses are being escorted to the police beat at Setapak. All passengers are still inside.
> Certain busses are now being escorted to Police stations.
> All busses were either redirected or stopped.
> Busses from the northern region arrived without much hassle.
> All busses were either redirected or stopped...
> THOSE WITH PICTURE, please send to email@bmahendran.com
> 8-9 AM :
> The main group in Jalan[Street] Ampang were sprayed with Chemical laced water...[see Figure 6.5]
> 8.50 AM
> Police just fire tear gasses, water canon with chemical laced liquid and everything they got. its chaos, but the people are very adamant, still standing strong.
> Children were hurt as well. Pic.[picture] later.
> 10 AM : Some leaders are giving speech. They are singing devotional song right now, to seek blessing. The whole crowd is maintaining their discipline.
> This is a peaceful rally and is being aimed at by the police.
> Listen live report (Tamil):
> Audio 1 : http://www.navins.biz/mahen/a.wav

Audio 2 : http://www.navins.biz/mahen/b.wav
10:28AM: Ground Reporter's Update
Audio 1 and Audio 2
11AM Updates: ..
Third update from ground reporter here.
Videos thanks to bsvanan.
BMahendran.com would like to thank the ground reporters who send us MMS, videos, live updates and etc. We have set a record in such coverage over the internet!

Source: http://bmahendran.wordpress.com/page/2/

Figure 7.5. Pictures by citizen reporters sent to *Bolehland*

Bolehland's hourly reporting of the entire rally ended at 4.32pm. Since his main blog, www.bmahendran.con was slow due to overload - as hundreds of blog readers were refreshing their pages all at the same time and surveillance by the government, he created a mirror site at http://bmahendran.wordpress.com and novinthen.com/blog**.** These mirror sites were continuously covering news and updates of the rally on the original site. He said:[127]

> "BMahendran.com/blog is currently under non-stop attack...I don't know more than 500 users refreshing at the same time. For now we will shift the server pointing to other domain. Do not spam here and please, reload once a while only till we work out the problem.
> This site (www.bmahendran.com) was only accessible after 11.10 AM , and a security expert emailed me saying its due to a bandwidth choker software used by our BigBrothers [government] hmm. Anyway, power of Internet spoke well today of itself today. If not for NavinS, my 4-5 sources who updated me on the go, Ammu, Indranx (who updated the flickr), my shoutbox shouters, one Mr Krishna

[127] Bolehland. (2007, November 25). Aftermath. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=236

and Mr Murugan from Italy, and you all. Thank you for helping me in keeping the information disseminated and spread all over the world...

7.5 The Aftermath

Amidst reports of civil disobedience carried by the national media, all manner of video, photographs and blog entries were circulated on the Internet. News coverage by Al Jazeera and Singapore-based Channel News Asia were uploaded on the Internet as freely accessible videos to a global audience, together with a myriad amateur materials produced by citizen journalist and activist present at the rally.[128] For example, dramatic still shots and video footage of Gandhi-like, passive resistant protestors sitting cross-legged as riot police aimed water cannons and tear gas at them, were juxtaposed against images of defiant groups grasping the Malaysian flag as shown below.

Source: In Pictures: Malaysia protest [Image]. (2007). Retrieved December, 12, 2009 from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_pictures/7111707.stm

Figure 7.6. Pictures of rally posted on the Internet

Despite the end of the "peaceful" assembly, SMS continued making its rounds as claimed by blogger Mahendran, when he said:

> SO I BEG YOU GUYS ALL**...** please please stop the dubious SMSes**.** I don't know how all the Indians in this country knows each other's number, its like they have all the list of 2million Indian Malaysians handphone number[s]. Everyone will receive the same message, more than once! Please. The fact remains:
>
> - For now, the memo was not handed over. HINDRAF plans to send a 10-member delegation to London straight.
> - It was 20-30 thousand people, not 200 thousand!

[128] see detail at http://raajarox.com/?p=163

- No one died, at least what we know now. So stop saying and spreading that some people passed away bla bla bla.
- UPDATE: There was a bus burned slightly. Damn too much Tamil movies influence lah you! :p

> Argh, i would just stop short with that. Plenty more SMSes flying around and let me tell you this, DO NOT trust it bulat-bulat[entirely]. Take initiative to check if its true or not. Try MalaysiaKini, a good place to get non-rumor news item. It will give the whole community a bad name if we continue to regard every SMSes received as true. Even if it comes from me, in this page, take your time be calm and wait for official news if its true or not.[129]

Similarly, in another posting entitled, "I'm blogging from hell, dated November 30, 2007, blogger Mahendran said:

> See. The SMSes again. It just will never stop. One SMS after another. Hey was so fun forwarding all those SMSes that the content's geniunity is secondary, almost to none. One of my favourite is the one that says Queen Elizabeth herself would come and receive the memo. Funny rite? Yet people started to pass the message around.
> Another damn damn damning favourite SMS of all time is this.
> Police shot dead HINDRAF's B.Mahendran at 1.30pm in Jln P Ramlee, KL
> See. I am still here writing, after this another SMS gonna come saying B.Mahendran blogged from hell...[130]

The aftermath of the rally witnessed more arrests. But the one issue that made headlines was the lockdown at the *Batu Caves* temple on the day of the rally. Not surprisingly, while the mainstream media regarded the rally as violent, blogs verified their news with picture evidence. There were reports that tear gas and chemical-laced water were fired at 4:00am to disperse people at the temple who were sleeping.[131] Although the government refuted the reports, the credibility of news was confirmed by Jeff Ooi, a blogger-turned-parliamentarian.[132] He posted 23 pictures on his website that showed the violence committed by police. As sign of protest against the Malaysian government and police enforcement, these pictures were circulated widely on the Internet as claimed by the MIB bloggers (Personal interview, November 11, 2008).

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[129] Bolehland. (2007, November, 25). Can we stop the rumors? Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=237
[130] Bolehland. (2007, November 30). I'm blogging from hell. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=252
[131] Malaysiakini. (2007, November 25). Tear gas fired at defiant protestors. Retrieved December 13, 2009 from http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/75246
[132] Ooi, Jeff. (2007, November 26). Hindraf rally...(Ethnic) Minority Report (3). Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://us.asiancorrespondent.com/jeff-ooi-blog/2007/11/hindraf_rally_ethnic_minority_1.php

7.6 Analysis and Discussion

This chapter set out to examine the impact that the blogs had on the Hindraf's protest rally on November, 25 2007 that emerged following claims of discrimination on Indians in Malaysia. The discrimination of Indians had a noticeable impact on both the online and offline communities, and the growth of alternative voices online. The impact of blogs on Hindraf saga showed that it had a catalytic effect on voices of the marginalized Indians in Malaysia. While the Internet itself cannot effect regime change in the context of Malaysia, it can create and accelerate mini public spheres (Dahlgren, 2005) or virtual public sphere as articulated by Rheingold (2003). It should, however, be emphasized, as Bimber (1998) does in his conclusion, that despite its shortcomings, the blogs do have an impact on mobilization, an impact evidence in the case of Hindraf's protest rally. The following section illustrates some pertinent points relating to the use of blogs that bring about interactive, peer-to-peer communication that provides opportunities for mobilization.

7.6.1 Communal Resistance Identity

The success of Hindraf in mobilizing a crowd of 30,000 despite police intimidation and media-propaganda indicated a sense of readiness for participation and dissent on the part of a largely acquiescent people, besides a strong sense of community bonding. However, the success of the protest rally cannot be solely attributed to the strengths of the media alone. This is not to say that the Internet had no discernible impact on Malaysian politics, since it clearly has. Instead, as this case shows, using Castells (2004) idea that creating shared identities is a source of motivation for using the Internet, I argue that the poor and marginalized status of Indians were used as a backdrop to build resistance-identity, subsequently, leading to "project identity" (Hindraf protest rally). But these dynamics must be seen as a process, whereby in the case of Malaysia relates to historical and contemporary issues involving the minority Indians (see Figure 5.1).

As Chapter 5 showed, the problems faced by poor Malaysian Indians were never properly articulated even though various promises were made by development authorities through policies and development plans, including the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), which is an arm of the ruling Government, *Barisan Nasional* (BN). Combined with their non-*Bumiputera* status, and lack of economic power place many Indians in a weak position for the inter-ethnic bargaining endemic with the Malaysian

politics. However, when push comes to shove, as when the Hindu temples were demolished, and Indians were threatened by issues relating to "religious conversions, they became more anguished, eventually setting the stage for communal resistance identity. In other words, the issue surrounding religion was the prime mover for resistance identity (collective identity), culminating into collective action (Hindraf protest rally) facilitated by the use of the Internet.

7.6.2 Blogs as Space and Medium for Mobilization

The fact that Malaysian civil society perceive the media as antagonistic or ignorant coincides with views held by scholars that mainstream media rarely represent dissident or radical voices (Wasserman, 2007). This is because the mainstream media is largely owned and controlled by the state, which is critical to "anti-government" reportage. Thus, leaves little room for alternative voices to reach the public. But blogs afforded the proliferation and dissemination of non- mainstream political views, whereby the bloggers were able to voice their opinion, and encourage blog readers to action. The direct communication between blogger and readers is one of the unique characteristic of Web 2.0 application which is user-oriented instead of conversations dominated by professional communicators or mediators.

Also relevant in this discussion is the fact that Hindraf's activism was Internet-based, in which they mainly operated through their website, Policewatchmalaysia (PWM). This gave Hindraf the opportunity to engage with like-minded people locally and abroad, who shared mutual beliefs and concerns relating to the Malaysian Indians. Notwithstanding the fact that the space for activism provided by blogs was available to only the "elite" segment of the population, it nonetheless gained allegiance by wider online and offline communities (through linkages) which conforms to Anderson's (2006) concept of an "imagined community" which is driven by shared beliefs and consciousness. Anderson (2006) suggests that communities are imagined because "members...will never know most of their fellow members...yet in their minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p. 6). He attributed the practice of print-capitalism as facilitating the imagining of the nation. Similarly, in this case, the Internet as a global network fosters a strong sense of community among members based on common issues.

At the same time, the state's "ambiguous" attitude towards the Internet, particularly blogs, provides an opportunity for civil society and other interest groups to dominate the virtual world, and engage in political activism (see Chapter 6 for details).

Malaysian government's attitude towards new media, and attempts to counter the use of the Internet by opposition was unsuccessful during the *Reformasi* period. Instead, having realized the potential use of the Internet to reach out to their audiences, the opposition emerged as pioneers in the use of the Internet - which proved to be a one of success factors in the case of the Hindraf rally.

7.6.3 The Power of Links

Blogs were used not only as space for mobilization activities, but also created a dynamic relationship between various actors, media and non-media as narrated by the chronology of events discussed in this chapter. While Malaysian Indians make up only less than eight percent the population with only a small percentage having access to the Internet, the potential for blogs to foster political mobilization on its own is limited. Furthermore, given the stark inequalities that exist in terms of ethnicity, age, education, occupation, and blogger Mahendran's own account of the urban mindset (see section 7.3.1), it can be argued that the use of the Internet in Malaysia is predominantly an urban phenomenon, if not an elite past time. But this must not be seen as a negative force for political mobilization, since the type of civil society that exists in Malaysia is issue and time-driven (see Chapter 3).

As this case study showed, the linkages and information flow between blogs and other media dubbed the informational networks (social networks) was significant for political mobilization of like-minded people who shared mutual belief and concerns relating to the Malaysian Indians. For example, the linkages and information flow between the various networks are summarized below.

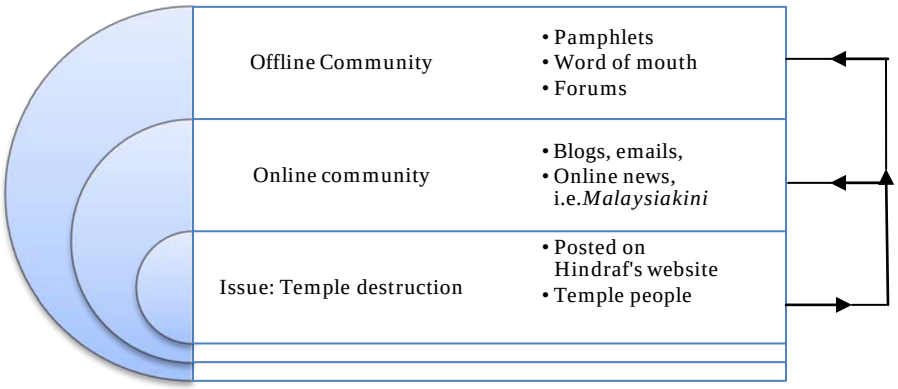

Figure 7.7: Links and information flow between media and communities

Figure 7.7 shows the linkages and interactions between the traditional and new media, print and non-print media, in addition to the amplification effect which thrives on links. In this example of a temple destruction (see section 7.4.2), the information flow and links were as below:

- Temple destruction witnessed by Hindraf and people on the ground;
- Pictures posted on Hindraf's website;
- Bloggers linked to Hindraf's website ; others such as *Malaysiakini* widely circulated this news;
- Spread of awareness through pamphlets, forums, online

As this example showed, issues can be increased in magnitude by implicitly and explicitly linking and interacting with other media and non-media sources such as printed pamphlets, posters, word-of-mouth, SMS, emails, video-CDs, etc. In this case, the were used to complement more traditional means of mobilization through the process of "amplification" (Agre, 2002) or "technology-amplified" collective action. This account on the amplification was confirmed by the MIB bloggers when they said:

> Office email was one of the major catalysts....that's when I'm changed my focus. We started playing the role as agent of change, to create awareness.
> Social awareness like news- giant hypermarket.....Mahen reported, then Malaysiakini picked up from there...We were a small team...but when everyone wrote the reports or news together it becomes a major news, then picked up by others....(Personal interview, November 11, 2008)

In the Hindraf's case, traditional media technologies provided an avenue of access to members of the "have-nots" who would otherwise not be reached through the more contemporary mobilization campaigns. By employing the "two-step flow" (Wasserman, 2007) process of communication through formal and informal channels, Hindraf was able to mobilize thousands of protestors for the peaceful rally.

Consequently, this dynamic relationship between the offline and online community is a two-way process, and as a result both the virtual and real communities are not imaginaries in the Malaysian context. In that regard, not only are the blogs potential for facilitating virtual connectivity and interactivity, but are also effective as a real world space. As Fernback and Thompson (1995) points out the nature of the relationship is based around topics of discussion thus, their existence relies on issues of concern rather than physical location. This conviction can be tied to Anderson's "imagined community," in that both the virtual and real community can co-exist based

on “shared beliefs”. In the case of Malaysia’s Indians, the discrimination (in all spheres) against them was their motivation and shared beliefs that led to collective identity.

7.6.4 Credibility and Identification

While blogs boast to offer fluid, flexible and contextualized information (see Chapter 2), the issues of credibility and identification of bloggers remain an issue, particularly in the context of Malaysia, where the state’s ambiguous attitude towards new media exist. In this case study, however, the credibility of news and information of blog postings are significantly tied to the reputation of bloggers and the combined use of media and non-media sources. The mere fact that the blogs, *Raajarox*, *Bolehland*, and Pooobalan.com were venues for readers to get information and news on Hindraf’s activism meant the bloggers were popularly known for their in-depth and contextualized news and information which was exemplified by eye-witness counts, videos, pictures, email and online news outlets and mainstream media. In some cases, postings were verified by a combination of sources, for which the ideas or postings were left to be judged on their own merit. In addition, when a string of SMS were circulating on the Internet relating to Hindraf’s protest rally, bloggers cautioned readers to verify their sources of information, either from Hindraf’s website (see “Event 4” for details) or *Malaysiakini* (see section 7.5).

While the identification markers such as gender, ethnicity, profession, geographic location, age, or political ideology are no longer relevant for online-based activism, the reputation of bloggers, however, is significantly important. From the case study, it can be deduced that blogs by Mahendran and *Raajarox* had high readership due to their reputation as the Malaysian Indian bloggers (see Chapter 4 for details) which manifested into credible characters. These characters were established by promoting online-offline meetings through activities, subsequently paving the way for credibility and trust to dominate the relationships, as claimed by the MIB bloggers:

> We are not strong....we visit each-others blog but it’s a blog... as a person, if you want to do something in real, we must actually get to know the person in real as well...We try to promote offline meetings through activities like photo-shoots and etc[...]usually the same people will attend..we are gaining the trust[...]For example, when we have a photo-shoot, bloggers and readers with the same interest will come...that’s the attitude...hence, when you do something else not photo-related stuff then they[readers] would think: oh the same guys are doing it, ok I’ll join this one....(MIB bloggers, personal interview, November 8, 2008)

This analysis shows that although the Internet is an important facilitator of communication and mobilization, it will not replace the offline personal contacts which are important for like-minded activities. In that sense, the Internet should be viewed as a supplement to the traditional media.

7.6.5 Global and Local Connection

The advent of the Internet has also created opportunities for activist of grassroots organizations to cross borders and form networks of support beyond national borders as posited by Keck and Sikkink (1998). This point is applicable to Hindraf's case study where there was a continuous flow of support by international advocacy groups. The global and local connections were strong to yield simultaneous protest rallies in countries such as UK, Canada and USA (also see Chapter 8), demanding for the rights of the Malaysian Indians to be restored. It was this precise "simultaneity" (Anderson, 2006), that set off Hindraf's activism to greater magnitude facilitated by the various media networks.

This case showed the importance of global linkages as when Uthayakumar claimed that the Indians' issue of marginalization and discrimination was first recognized by the British Prime Minister during a meeting held in Kampala, Uganda (see section on "Event 3" for details). The blogosphere and other media facilitated in maintaining the activism spirit among Hindraf's supporters. In addition, this spirit would not have been achieved if the Hindraf's leaders did not canvass support from the international community. Indeed, this was possible due to the fact that Hindraf's chairman was based in London, and the opportunities created by networks facilitated the exchange of information between global and local connection. The social and media networks created by the use of the Internet have helped to draw together the needs and aspirations of individual actors globally, and Hindraf coordinators.

Another example of the local-global connection concerns Hindraf's trillion-dollar claim for repatriation from the Britain (see section 7.4.1). Although this is a dramatic exaggeration, the attempt to present the petition has succeeded in carving out a position of some strength from which its constituents can participate in the international and national conversation. This conversation, whether online or offline, is the result of the alliance's effort to publicizing its endeavors, by which local activist groups were able to develop transnational links and mobilize around international support. This opportunity

would not have materialized if not for the blogosphere that created an amplification effect of Hindraf's cause.

7.7 Conclusion

While analyst may differ whether the influence blogs exerts on citizens is malignant, benign or otherwise, few deny its power to sway (Leong, 2009). As the case study showed, it is possible to read the wide-ranging, international media attention the continuing Hindraf saga has earned as proof that blogs, though not entirely on its own, has changed the nature of socio-political landscape in Malaysia. Since Hindraf dominated the Internet from the beginning, the Malaysian authorities were not able to control the activities or even information from spreading despite the various laws put in place to curb anyone who go against the state. Consequently, it was relatively easy for Hindraf and the young who mainly dominated the blogosphere to exchange information using both the traditional and new media, as the narratives showed. In this regard the blogs played a facilitating role in amplifying issues of mutual concern – that relating to constitutional rights, freedoms, post-colonialism, diaspora and transnationalism –and bringing the "real" and virtual communities together. From being an ethnic minority with limited resources, Hindraf have, through their deployment of skilful media pastiches, politicized and aired their grievances collectively, winning over sectors of both the national and international community to their cause. This impact, was instrumental in the defeat of the MIC party in the 2008 Malaysian general elections, discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 8
CASE STUDY II:
THE DEFEAT OF THE MALAYSIAN INDIAN CONGRESS PARTY IN THE 2008 ELECTION

8.1 Introduction

Thus far, this dissertation has discussed the potential blogs have to foster political mobilization in Malaysia. In the case of Hindraf rally, blogs gave a new meaning to politics involving minority Indians in Malaysia. From the start, those who have argued that the Internet will transform politics have done so largely because its infrastructure is different from that of previous communications models (for example, one-to-one or one-to-many). As the previous chapter showed, blogs have created a new form and dynamics through its link structure which is a key part of its infrastructure, and it has powerfully influenced and highlighted the voices of the marginalized to be heard.

In particular, there is strong evidence that Internet applications and social network sites are extensively sought-after to mobilize citizens during elections. This chapter illustrates how blogs were used to distribute political information, and their impact on political mobilization and participation during the March 8, 2008 general election in Malaysia.

No shortage of ink has been spilled documenting the opposition parties' innovative use of the Internet which unexpectedly denied the ruling coalition (BN) of its two-thirds majority, and to assume government power in five of the 13 states in Malaysia. For all that was novel in the oppositions' use of online resources, however, this chapter argues that the defeat of MIC, as a result of the Hindraf protest rally, is best seen as a continuing evolution in how the new media can be used by like-minded activists and individuals who seek political change. In that regard, I argue that to successfully assess the implications of blogs is to take into account the specific circumstances, conditions, histories and actions of the various actors involved.

Accordingly, the following section focused on the factors that led to the defeat of MIC, particularly the ripple effect of Hindraf protest rally on the elections outcome. In this regard, the aftermath of the Hindraf saga is discussed as the Phase 3: December 2007 to March 2008, development. The structure of this chapter is (i) narratives on how the Internet was used to defeat MIC, followed by (ii) analysis and discussion.

8.2 The 2008 General Election

The 12th general election was held on March 8, 2008 at two levels: the *Dewan Rakyat* (House of Representatives) and *Dewan Perundangan Negeri* (State legislative assemblies). Rumored to be held at the end of 2007, the then-Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi dissolved the parliament on February 13, 2008–less than a year before the constitutionally[133] required deadline for general elections (Moten, 2009). The Elections Commission scheduled for nominations to be held on February 24, 2008, and the general polling to take place on March 8, giving a campaign period of 13. The date of the election was regarded as an act of sabotage, as it meant that Anwar, the former ousted Deputy Prime Minister, could only serve as an "advisor" to the *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (PKR), because he was not permitted to assume any official position until mid-April 2008 (see Moten, 2009 for details).[134]

The general election involved 222 parliamentary seats and 576 state assembly seats. The Election Commission (EC) introduced several changes for the election, notably the use of indelible ink to prevent multiple voting. However, four days before the polls, the EC reversed its decision, arguing that "the security of this method of preventing multiple voting has been breached,"[135] due to police reports that similar inks have been smuggled into the country. The opposition parties condemned EC for this decision, further accusing them of being in league with the government (Moten, 2009) although the government did support the use of the ink as reported by the mainstream media.

The 13-day campaign consisted of house-to-house campaigns by the candidates and *ceramah* (public rallies). The opposition parties highlighted numerous examples of government problems, particularly the prevalent corruption, the high crime rate, and the government's refusal to reform the police force based on the advice of the Royal Commission. The opposition parties supported free and fair elections, and demanded for the termination of pro-*Bumiputera* policies and draconian laws such as the Internal Security Act (ISA) (see Chapter 5 for details). In addition, they focused on religious and minority rights, besides demanding more accountability on the part of supervisory authorities such as the Human Rights Commission and the Anti-Corruption Agency. This move was to establish full transparency of public officials and government offices' and to finally dismantle the *Barisan Nasional* (BN, National Front) patronage machine. During

[133] The constitution states that elections are to be held every five years, with the previous one held in 2004.
[134] Anwar eventually was elected to parliament after he won the by-election in Permatang Pauh on August 26, 2008.
[135] http://thestar.com.my/election/story.asp?file=/2008/3/4/election2008/20080304175316&sec=Election2008

the campaigns, representatives from the opposition parties (DAP, PKR, PAS),[136] frequently appeared together at public gatherings.

8.2.1 The Dominance of UMNO – *Barisan Nasional*

BN is a multi-ethnic alliance of 14 political parties, but also constitutes a party in its own right (Horowitz, 1985). It has its own constitution; in elections it behaves like a single party by putting forward a common team of candidates contesting under a single banner. Given the plural nature of Malaysian politics, political leaders of various ethnic groups had opted for politics based on "consensus" through the formation of BN (Moten, 2009; also see Chapter 5). United Malays National Organization (UMNO) is the dominant party, followed by the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), Malaysian People's Movement Party (Gerakan) and other small parties. The major components of BN in Sabah and Sarawak, located in East of Malaysia are *Parti Bersatu Sabah* (PBS) and *Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu* (PBB).

BN has won every election in Malaysia since national independence in 1957. Electoral planning and implementation are overseen by EC, which is largely controlled by the ruling coalition. Constituencies are delineated in favor of BN through gerrymandering and faulty electoral rolls (Ufen, 2008). In addition, the state owned-media – newspapers, television stations and radio stations cover almost exclusively the BN election campaigns. For example, in the 2008 election, BN bought approximately 1,100 pages of full-page color advertisement spaces in newspapers according to Moten (2008). Among the opposition, PAS offered information services via short-message-service (SMS) for 50 cents (US$0.16) per message. The SMS served as a bulletin board – disseminating notices about time and venue of *ceramahs* (public rallies) and provided a synopsis of their daily, *Harakah's* top stories and headlines news.

Campaigns debates shown on television were rare, however, confrontations within the opposition were highlighted. Opposition parties' publications were subjected to numerous restrictions and in some instances, a temporary restriction were placed if opposition parties were deemed to have "gone beyond their limit" (Moten, 2009). Moreover, organizational freedom, freedom of assembly and the right to protest or demonstrate were restricted (see Chapter 5). Such regulations, while not exclusively limited to the media, nonetheless often resulted in a form of self-censorship as journalists and "citizen journalists" steer clear of stories or coverage that might result in

[136] Democratic Action Party (DAP), Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), Parti Islam Semalaysia (PAS)

their prosecution. With these mechanisms in place, the opposition undoubtedly used the Internet apart from their own bi-monthly and monthly magazines to reach out to their audiences.

8.2.2 High Voter Turnout and BN Suffers Setbacks

Before the March 2008 election, most political analysts expected BN to lose a few seats, but not its two-thirds majority.[137] Post-election analysis of voting behavior suggested that there was a high voter turnout in the 2008 elections (Kiat, 2008), an increase of 6.2 percent from the previous election in, 2004. The overall voter turnout was 76 percent of the 10.7 million eligible voters. Out of the 8.2 million voters, 4.1 million (51.4 percent) votes went to the ruling party (BN) (Election Commission, 2008). The votes suggested a decrease of 13 percent compared to 2004, when BN was able to achieve one of its greatest victories in more than five decades (Ufen, 2008).

This result proved to be a political milestone, also often characterized as a political "tsunami" (Lim, 2008) for two reasons. Firstly, it was the first election since Malaysia gained independence where the dominant coalition, BN, failed to return to a two-thirds majority in parliament despite the high voter turnout. As a result, the opposition was able to assume power in five of the 13 states. Secondly, it was the first election where the impact of media on public opinion was publicly rued by the then Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Najib Tun Razak (Moten, 2009). On March 25, 2008, speaking in an investors' conference, the former Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi admitted that his coalition,

> ...certainly lost the Internet war, the cyber war....It was a serious misjudgment. We made the biggest mistake in thinking that it was not important. We thought that the newspapers, the print media, the television was supposed to be important, but the young were looking at SMS [short-message service] and blogs. (as cited in Steele, 2009)

Based on this admission, journalist, commentators, parliamentarians have credited or blamed the Internet[138] to have altered the nature of politics in Malaysia. In many respects, 1999 and 2004 elections were an important transitional year in using the

[137] According to Weiss (2008), anything less than a two-thirds majority is considered a disaster, "not least since it complicates amending the constitution, as has been done over 40 times since 1957" (p. 1).

[138] See The Economist. (2008). The Internet and Malaysian Politics. Retrieved October 29, 2009, from http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?Story_ID=E1_TDRVQRNN; CNET Asia. (2008). Malaysia's digital revolution--the death knell for The Star, and the rise of the e-news portal? Retrieved October 29, 2009, from http://asia.cnet.com/blogs/teteatech/post.htm?id=63002611; Zapboom. (2008). Alternative Media Critical to Malaysian Election. Retrieved October 29, 2009, from http://zapboom.bligoo.com/content/view/155667/Alternative-Media-Critical-to-Malaysian-Election.html; Seneviratne. K. MEDIA-MALAYSIA: Bloggers On Opposition Benches (2008). Retrieved October 29, 2009, from http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=41576

Internet to reach the voters. Given the controls on the mainstream media and the subsequent arrest of Anwar in 1998 that led to the *reformasi* movement (see Chapter 6 "Internet development in Malaysia"), the Internet became both the principal means of communication for the opposition and increasingly a source of alternative news for Malaysians (Abbott, 2004).

Some of the 2008 candidates of the ruling coalition, however, dismissed the importance of the Internet and refused to invest any energy in online activities. BN's campaign site at http://bn2008.org.my was created just two weeks prior to the elections, presenting only the government's achievements and progress. Evidently, the votes that produced the upset victory for the ruling coalition, the BN party, came from voters and opposition parties who were mobilized by events of the preceding months. Of particular importance is the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), a component of BN, which lost six of the nine parliamentary, and 13 of the 19 state assembly seats as shown in Table 8.1 below. In other words, 19 out the 28 candidates lost the 2008 elections. Samy Velu, the MIC president, was not the only one defeated after 34 years (see chapter 5, section 5.3.3.1); his deputy, G.Palanivel and the vice-presidents, S. Sothinathan and S. Veeerasingam, also the leaders of the youth and women's organizations, respectively, all lost their seats.

Table 8.1. Seats won by MIC since 1999 elections

MIC Seats	1999	2004	2008
Parliamentary seats	7	9	3
State Seats	15	19	6

Source: Election Commission of Malaysia and Malaysiakini- Undi.Info (http://www.undi.info/resources.html)

However, I argue the astounding election results cannot be attributed solely to the strength of the media alone. Rather, what occurred was a cumulative effect of the tensions inherent with the status of the marginalized Indians, which led to a collective resistance-identity coupled with the state's ambiguous attitude towards the use of the Internet. The statement by Abdullah Badawi speaks directly to the view, that online activism played a key role in shaping electoral outcomes. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 7, Hindraf's activism to protect the rights and identity of the Malaysian Indians from further discrimination was facilitated by the dynamics of the new and traditional media that led to collective action, as seen by the Hindraf protest rally. This saga was also one

of the contributing factors for the defeat of the MIC in the 2008 general elections. Accordingly, the following section investigates the extent of this argument, and situates the discussion within the specific context.

8.3 Development Prior to the Election

8.3.1 Malaysian Indians in the 2008 Election

Arguably, Indian-origin voters' form significant numbers in a number of constituencies (see Chapter 5, "Political Marginalization"). Although the Indians were numerically small compared to other ethnic groups, they seemed to have impacted the election's outcome by denying their vote for the ruling government, BN. This, despite a telephone survey undertaken in June, 2007 by the *Merdeka* Center among 1022 citizens which showed that 71 percent of Indians were in support of the Prime Minister in June, 2007.[139] This claim is supported by Blogger Poobalan in his posting when he wrote:

> When my relative was asked who she'll vote for, being govt[government] servant, she said "for BN". Obviously I asked why? she said because the govt. can trace who we vote...nanti[then] "hilang kerja la[will loose job]" or "no promotion"...[140]

Conceived as purely subjugation or loyalty towards the governments, Poobalan's account showed the Indians' support for the government, notwithstanding the government's attitude and handling on the issues faced by the Malaysian Indians. In March 2008, however, the Indian support had drastically fallen to an estimated 47 percent, according to Weiss (2008). Clearly, the Hindraf protest rally (see Chapter 7 and the following section for details) has played an important role in engaging in voters' decisions. As research has shown, personal appeals also have a strong impact on voter mobilization, although not on voter preference (Green & Gerber, 2004). Therefore, I argue that the personal appeals of Hindraf leaders coupled with bloggers' activism were the contributing factors to the defeat of the MIC in the 2008 elections. The following sections focus on the post-Hindraf rally which is a continuation from Chapter 7.

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[139] Poobalan.com. (2007, December 8). Poll by Merdeka Center say 71 percent Indians support PM. Retrieved December 15, 2009 from http://poobalan.com/blog/borninmalaysia/2007/08/12/poll-by-merdeka-centre-say-71-percent-indians-support-pm/

[140] Poobalan.com. (2008, November 30). I vote for my master. Retrieved December 12, 2009 from http://poobalan.com/blog/borninmalaysia/2007/11/30/i-vote-for-my-master/

8.4 Phase 3: Post-Hindraf Rally, December to March 2008

In the wake of the November 25, 2007 protest rally, the law was severely imposed on those who attended the rally. The aftermath witnessed arrests and more intimidation and fear tactics being used against the citizens, particularly on Hindraf coordinators. Allegations were advanced by Malaysia's Inspector-General of Police (IGP) that Hindraf was an organization with terrorist connections,[141] with intentions to incite ethnic unrest (Charles & Sagayam, 2007). The hatred towards Hindraf grew more among the Malay community who feared that their Malay supremacy was being jeopardized and questioned (see Chapter 5). In the meantime, posting of blogs were dominated by the combined coverage of news and information from international and local media together with citizen-reporters – comprised of eye witness accounts, short-message-service (SMS), pictures and videos of the historical rally. As more forums and awareness campaign witnessed the growing influence of Hindraf, the highlight was the December 13, 2007 arrest of five Hindraf leaders under the draconian law, the Internal Security Act (ISA) which allows detentions without trial for up to two years.[142] Five of the leaders, P. Uthayakumar, M. Manoharan, R. Kenghadharan, V. Ganabatirau and T. Vasanthakumar were arrested and charged under Section 8(1) for allegedly posting a letter dated November 15, 2007 (see Appendix C for details) on their former website, www.policewtachmalaysia.com. The letter addressed to Gordon Brown, Prime Minister of UK, had the following subject line:

> Commonwealth Ethnic Indians Peace Loving Subjects In Malaysia Persecuted By Government-Backed Islamic Extremist Violent Armed Terrorist Who Launched A Pre Dawn Violent Armed Attack and Destroyed The Kg Jawa Mariaman Hindu Temple At 4.00am This Morning (15.11.2007). Appeal For UK To Move Emergency UN Resolution Condemning "Ethnic Cleansing" In Malaysia, and Appeal To Refer Malaysia To The World Court and International Criminal Court For Crimes Against Its Own Ethnic Minority Indians....[143]

In addition, about 31 people (also known as "Hindraf 31") who participated in the Hindraf rally at the *Batu Caves* temple (see Chapter 6, "Post-Hindraf rally") were arrested and charged for "attempted murder for allegedly injuring a policeman during

[141] Poobalan.com. (2007, December 8). Hindraf linked with LTTE and RSS. Retrieved December 15, 2009 from http://poobalan.com/blog/indian/2007/12/08/hindraf-linked-with-ltte-and-rss/
[142] Raajarox.(2007, December 13). Five Hindraf Leaders were arrested under Section 8(1) of the Internal Security Act (ISA) today. Retrieved December 15, 2009 from http://raajarox.com/?p=185; Also see Malaysiakini. (2007, December 13). ISA Crackdown: 5 Hindraf leaders detained. Retrieved December 15, 2009 from http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/75999
[143] Bolehland. (2007, December 11). Lawyer P.Uthayakumar re-arrested. Retrieved December 15, 2009 from http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=259

the rally."[144] Following the arrest, candlelight vigils and prayers were held at temples nationwide to honor the detainees. This episode as recalled by the MIB bloggers was the triggering point for the Malaysian Indians to vote for the opposition when they said:

> The Indians were so aware of their surroundings [...]to the extent that even an Indian lorry driver knew his rights under the Constitution, especially that of Article 8 which provided the rights to assemble without the use of weapons. This was entirely the role played by blogs. The opposition took the advantage of the Internet to continue the spirits of "Makkal Sakthi [people power]" as their campaign slogan...The older generation, those in the late 40s and 50s were supportive of the opposition, and strongly opposed Barisan[BN, the ruling coalition]...people didn't care who the opposition was...all they knew was not to vote for Barisan in the coming elections (MIB Bloggers, personal interview, November 11, 2008).

As more name-calling and accusations against Hindraf began to dominate the mainstream media and blogs,[145] the MIC was being criticized and condemned for not acknowledging the Hindraf rally nor the plight of the Malaysian Indians. At this point, the Indians were convinced that MIC was no longer relevant to them, thereby weakening the support for MIC in the general election. On the other hand, Hindraf's initial objective to protect the rights of the Malaysian Indians became more of a specific claim – notably, fighting for the release of the five Hindraf leaders in the aftermath of the Hindraf rally. Their pursue for justice took on another stage of activism known as the Hindraf 5 campaign.

8.4.1 The "Hindraf 5" Campaign

Following the detention of Hindraf leaders, known as the Hindraf 5, campaigns to release the detainees held under ISA assumed eight major forms: poster/cyberposter wars, small group discussions (*ceramah*), petitions, temple prayers,[146] hunger strikes, and electronic means, including the use of blogs, SMS, multimedia-message services (MMS). In particular, "*Makkal Sakthi Valga*"(Long-live People Power) slogan became a rallying point for support from members of the Indian community. As a sign of protest, posters (cyber), banners and leaflets to free Hindraf 5 and "ban ISA" (Figure 8.1) appeared on blogs, offline gatherings and forums.

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[144] Bolehland. (2007, November 26). Cop hurt trying to control crowd. Retrieved December 15, 2009 from http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=242

[145] Bolehland. (2007, December, 19). Liar! Liars! Liars! Retrieved December, 20 2009 from http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=265

[146] Prayers at Kamunting temple http://raajarox.com/?p=190; http://poobalan.com/blog/indian/2007/12/31/prayer-for-hindraf-detainees-in-klang/

Source: http://orangewaves.blogspot.com/2008/03/free-5-campaign.html

Figure 8.1. Protest poster of the Hindraf 5

Besides posters, online petitions were also created and distributed widely on blogs as read below:

> Sign petition at http://www.petition online.com/ 31081957/ petition. html to support the release of the TOP five HINDRAF Lawyers and 31 peaceful assemblers/ worshippers, which [were] detained on 06 December 2007...Share this.[147]

Videos on the arrest of the leaders also found its way to the blogs, particularly that distributed by *Malaysiakini*[148], and international news outlet such as Al-Jazeera. Consequently, the international support for Hindraf escalated,[149] giving rise to a new meaning to the Malaysian Indians' problem. As pressure was mounting to release the detainees, the Attorney General of Malaysia decided to drop the attempted murder charges on Hindraf 31.[150] However, other charge pertaining to participation in the so-called illegal rally remained. The Malaysian government continued to label Hindraf as violent, and at the same time, they sought the assistance of Interpol to monitor Hindraf's activities.[151]

When the year 2007 came to an end, social networks played an important role of "keeping the story alive" – in particular stories relating to the challenges faced by Hindraf, and the Malaysian Indians in the preceding months. *Rajaarox* posted a video

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[147] See details of the petition at http://www.petitiononline.com/31081957/petition. Cited at Rajaarox. (2007, December 13), Petition online. Retrieved December 15, 2009 from http://raajarox.com/?p=186
[148] http://raajarox.com/?p=187
[149]http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Indians_Abroad/US_demands_due_process_for_arrested_ethnic_Indians/articleshow/2621408.cms; http://raajarox.com/?p=194; http://raajarox.com/?p=199; http://raajarox.com/?p=203
[150] Raajarox. (2007, December 17). Attempted murder charges dropped against Hindraf 31. Retrieved December 16, 2009 from http://raajarox.com/?p=191
[151] http://raajarox.com/?p=192

entitled, “Clip for Malaysian Indians,” in which the content included pictures and music (Chariots of Fire).[152] The text that appeared in the video reads as follows:

> Hindraf 25th November:
> Dedicated to all Malaysian Indians,
> We came...we suffered...we survived...now...this is the place we belong, our home, our country, our mother nature, nothing can pay our contributions...& many more...
> We are crying today for our future, we will pray in calm and peace, we will believe we can do, this is the time we are one,
> One voice, one team...Malaysian Indians!!!Vaalzgha [Long-live]!!!Thank you!

Internet activism was at its peak when all three blogs – *Raajarox*, Poobalan.com and *Bolehland* – continued to revive controversial discussions and accompanying pictures on temple demolishment, in particular relating to the *Batu Caves* temple incident,[153] a Singaporean hunger strike to release Hindraf 5 (Figure 8.2)[154] and the fate of Subhasini’s appeal against her Muslim-convert spouse and religious freedom[155] (see Chapter 5 for details). Blogger Mahendran posted a video clip of Samy Velu, MIC president being publicly ridiculed, and humiliated by a crowd of between 2,000-3,000 people at the “Attam 100 Vagai” [100 types of dance] cultural show where he was invited to speak.[156] This showed the palpable anger of the Indian community on their long-standing marginalization, raising the question whether this political awakening could become a political tsunami by the Malaysian Indian voters in the March 2008 elections.

Source: http://raajarox.com/?p=221

Figure 8.2. Pictures of Singaporean Seelan Palay’s hunger strike

[152] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XerYhI4YCDg&feature=player_embedded; http://raajarox.com/?p=212
[153] http://poobalan.com/blog/religion/2007/12/31/temple-chairmen-to-meet-khir-toyo/; http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=278, http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=279
[154] http://raajarox.com/?p=220; http://poobalan.com/blog/indian/2007/12/31/singaporean-hunger-strike-to-support-hindraf-5/
[155] http://raajarox.com/?p=204; http://poobalan.com/blog/2007/12/page/4/
[156] http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=275

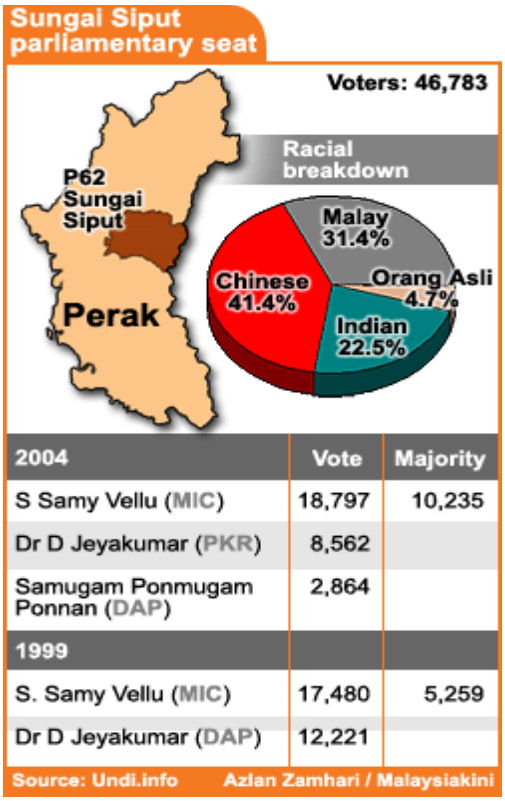
The Hindraf rally was a "political awakening" for MIC as they were forced to organize a nationwide campaign with the objective of overseeing the problems faced by the Indian community in Malaysia.[157] As part of their effort, MIC tried re-negotiating and renewing some of its development plans with the government, besides proposing new plans for uplifting the status of the poor Malaysian Indians. Their concerns, however, did not resonate with the Indians.

Beginning the year of 2008 with the much rumored elections to be held on March 8, 2008, bloggers began doing their own analysis and online campaigns. The Indian bloggers were mainly set on the *Sungai Siput*, the parliamentary seat which was occupied by Samy Vellu, the MIC president, including other seats held by Indian cabinet Ministers. For example, blogger Mahendran started an analysis of MIC against other parties as shown in Figure 8.3, in which he acknowledged that the contest this time depended on many issues plaguing the Indian community as well as with the recent developments pertaining to Hindraf. In this case, Mahendran's analysis not only served as a source of information to readers; but it can be regarded as engaging in voters' preference for the fact that his blog has now gained reputation and credibility due to the Hindraf saga.

Similarly, other blogs engaged in influencing voters' decisions, and at the same time demanded the release of the Hindraf 5. The quest for regime change due to the Hindraf saga and the marginalized status of the Indians, were used as main rallying points by the opposition parties[158] in their election campaigns. MIB bloggers confirmed the use of "*Makkal Sakthi*" as campaign taglines when they said:

> They[opposition] knew it was going to carry a lot of weight, they used the words. During a campaign rally, *Barisan* guys were standing on one side and PAS[159] on the other...they were saying "*Makkal Sakthi Valgha*"[long-live people power]...The PAS was very much delighted because this was the best time to get voters of non-muslims...In fact they[PAS] for the first time nominated an Indian woman to stand for a Kota Tinggi seat....although she lost....(Personal interview, November 11, 2008)

[157] http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/75495; http://poobalan.com/blog/2007/11/
[158] See Lim, Kit Siang. (2007, December 22). Political tsunami by Malaysian voters in next general elections. Retrieved December 15, 200 from http://blog.limkitsiang.com/2007/12/22/political-tsunami-by-malaysian-indian-voters-in-next-general-election/
[159] PAS is an Islamic organization with mainly Muslim supporters.



Source: http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=286

Figure 8.3. The contest for *Sungai Siput* parliamentary seat

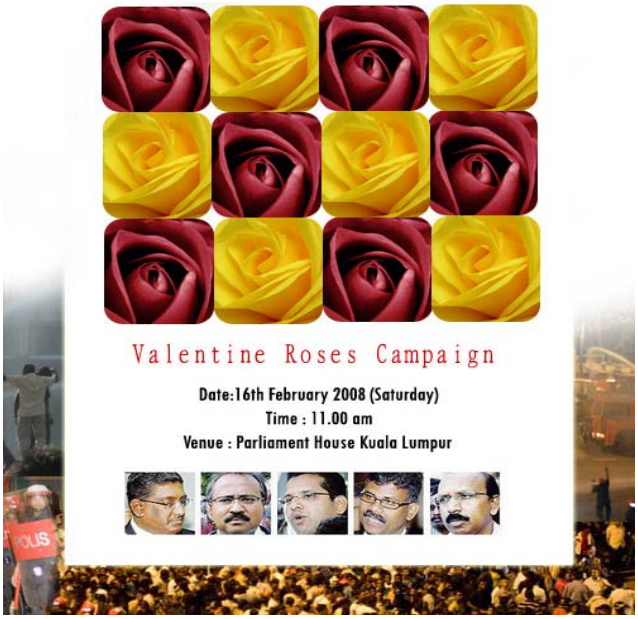
With developments on Hindraf's part escalating, MIC together with the BN government were pressured to meet the demands of the Indian community and international pressure-groups, in return for the victory of the ruling coalition in the March election. MIC candidates continued to make their pleas to vote for BN, but they were met with criticism. For example, Figure 8.4 shows a protest banner which the Lunas (a town in the northern region of the Kedah state) protestors claimed is another "empty promise" by MIC for not building a Tamil school as promised in the previous elections. Similar kinds of protest-banners adorned streets and blogs, indirectly engaging in voters' preference.

Source: http://raajarox.com/?p=236)
*(Translated: Sekolah Tamil Paya Besar, Lunas [Paya Besar Tamil school, Lunas] Janji Kosong MIC-BN[Empty-promises MIC-BN], Dulu Sudah Janji [You promised before]

Figure 8.4. Protest banner against MIC

In the days ahead, the Indian community continued to hold special prayers at temples[160] for the release of the Hindraf 5, where they also invited speakers to discuss problems faced by the Indians, and its impact in the elections outcome. While the political parties continued campaigning for the elections, Hindraf coordinators planned another campaign, called the Roses Campaign to hand-over red and yellow roses to Abdullah Badawi, the Malaysian Prime Minister on February 14, 2007. The aim of the peaceful campaign was to highlight the injustices and ignorance of the government against the Indians and demand for their rights as citizens to be reinstated. The poster information including pictures of Hindraf detainees were widely distributed on the blogs as shown in Figure 8.5.

[160] http://raajarox.com/?p=223



Source: http://raajarox.com/?p=241

Figure 8.5. Poster of Hindraf's "Roses campaign"

Following the announcement, more hunger strikes[161] and protest activities were planned in Canada and London at the same time as observed by their counterparts in Malaysia on February 14, 2008.[162] These activities were planned simultaneously to bring the world's attention to the plight of the Malaysian Indians, as well as to pressure the government to implement plans for the betterment of the Indian community. The posting on blogs accompanying the announcement about the Roses campaign also included a six part re-surfaced copy of the VCD showing the status of Malaysian Indians and temple demolition prepared by Hindraf in April, 2007 (see Chapter 6, Event 1).

This time, however, the VCDs were copied and distributed. The MIB bloggers commented, "We the youngsters knew how to burn VCDs... and most of them were from the YouTube. So we burned...and passed it to everyone..." (MIB bloggers, personal interview, November 11, 2008). The use of a combination of traditional and contemporary form of communication technology is especially important considering the inequality in access to the Internet among the minority Indians in Malaysia. Hence, a connection was forged between the online and offline communities, while the issue (s) were amplified through various means.

[161] Hunger strike by Hindraf 5. http://raajarox.com/?p=250
[162] http://raajarox.com/?p=248a

8.4.2 *Makkal Sakti* (People Power) Spirit

In order to ensure the continued support by the Indians for the ruling coalition (BN) in the upcoming election, the government declared Thaipusam[163] as a public holiday. This move was considered "a post-Hindraf effect" and a success for MIC who claimed to have been involved in the negotiation process with the government. While some welcomed the holiday, others were not fooled by the government's strategy, as a blogger's reaction reads below:

> Are Malaysian Indians satisfied? ... Do you think the Indians are worried about this. Is this an offer to show they (BN government) care**...** The rakyat [people], especially the Indians could not be hoodwink anymore. The momentum has already begun by Hindraf and the Indian community expect their rights to be given as an equal partner in Malaysia and they are not going to give in to these small gimmicks. Various events are planned in Malaysia and abroad and if the government does not address the Indian plight and release these innocent 5 Hindraf leaders, Malaysia is going to be embarrassed in the International world and it may affect certain services which will indirectly affect Malaysian daily lives. Its all up to the BN government, whether they still want to remain in power. The majority Chinese are also discontented with the government but have yet to express and the coming polls will indicate their stand while majority Malays are still in poverty even after the NEP is suppose to have uplifted their lives. It seems only UMNO leaders are benefiting from them and not the grassroot or non-UMNO Malay members.
> The rakyat [people] need to show them by VOTING AGAINST the BN and only then will they in future be caring, effective, efficient and be corrupt-free.
> Its NOW up to the rakyat to show their stand!!!!! [164]

As election day drew closer, MIC planned a large gathering on January 20, 2008. *Raajarox* disseminated this information via his blog and posted information on upcoming prayer meetings at Hindu temples nationwide for the release of the Hindraf 5. Unlike previous forums held at public venues, this time activists took the opportunity to hold gatherings at Hindu temples instead, which did not require a police permit. The blogs continued disseminating information, as shown below.

> ******EVENT UPDATE:
> Special prayers for our 5 brothers in Sri Murugan Kovil[temple], Butterworth
> Venue - Sri Murugan Kovil, Kampung baru, Mak Mandin, Butterworth,Penang.
> Date - 19th Jan 2008 (Today)
> Time - 7.30 ~ 9.00pm.

[163] Thaipusam which falls in the month of Thai (between mid January to mid February) is widely celebrated by Hindus all over the world. Prior to 2008, only certain states such as Selangor, Perak, Pulau Pinang declared Thaipusam as a public holiday. http://raajarox.com/?p=254
[164] http://raajarox.com/?p=257

> vegetarian food will be provided and there will be talk by Thanentiran [Hindraf coordinator]. [165]

However, on the day of *Thaipusam*, thousands of devotees who used to flock to *Batu Caves* temple in the previous years for the celebration boycotted the temple based on the controversies surrounding the Hindraf incident [166](see Chapter 6, "Post-Hindraf rally). Short message services (SMS) and emails were circulated advising people not to fulfill their vows in *Batu Caves* following the temple committees' role in allowing the police to violently disperse a gathered crowd in the early hours of November 25, 2007 (Hindraf rally). Furthermore, the temple management was closely linked to the MIC. As a sign of protest, for example, one of the SMS was as follows:

> As mark of respect for all fellow brothers and sisters who were part of the Nov 25 rally, we will fulfill all our spiritual vows at other temples in Malaysia except Batu Caves during *Thaipusam*.[167]

This strategy proved to be successful whereby the crowd at the temple was believed to have been smaller than the previous years. A reader's comment was as follows:

> ...Therefore, this year Batu Cave just looks like PASAR MALAM [night market] EVENT. Semi Velooo [Samy Vellu] you are counting your days
> VALGA MAKKAL SAKTHI [long-live people's power]!!!! [168]

This view speaks directly to the success of the SMS in mobilizing the Indians who were affected by the developments in the preceding months. As the MIB bloggers clarified:

> It was not carried by any blogs to boycott the temple...but we carried the SMS that was going around asking people to boycott...but Jeff Ooi's blog had carried pictures of the news of the Batu Caves incident...since he had many readers, people got to know of the [incident]...(Personal interview, November 11, 2008)

What should have been a celebration during *Thaipusam* turned out to be an unhappy day among the devotees who participated in candlelight vigils and hunger strikes. People were mostly clad in orange-colored clothes which are considered sacred according to the Hindu religion. The group as pictured below was also selling *Makkal Sakthi* merchandise such as t-shirts and CDs, and distributing free drinks to devotees.

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[165] http://raajarox.com/?p=252
[166] Also see http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=291
[167] http://sactyr.blogspot.com/2008/01/should-we-boycott-thaipusam.html; http://indianmalaysian-vivek.blogspot.com/2008/01/boycotting-batu-caves-for-thaipusam.html; http://poobalan.com/blog/religion/2008/01/24/thaipusam-batu-caves-boycott-success/
[168] http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=291

Source: http://raajarox.com/?p=258

Figure 8.6. A stall at *Thaipusam* selling "Makkal Sakti" merchandise

Meanwhile, information on the planned hunger strike was posted on blogs as shown below. Blogger Mahendran reported that the rock temple in Ipoh was splattered with words such as "Mansuhkan ISA [Abolish ISA]" and "Makkal Sakthi [People Power]". *Bolehland* said, "...there is a hunger strike going on by the supporters of HINDRAF and other civil rights groups, like ACID of Perak."[169] *Raajarox* confirms with the post as below.[170]

> Name: P.Sugumaran
> Email: ilakkiyantamil@yahoo.co.in
> Subject: Hunger Strike for 6 Days - Abolish Isa
> Message: Dear Sir,
> I'm writing to you in my capacity as Program Committee Member for the HUNGER STRIKE of the Makkal Iyakkam, to be held in Sri Subramaniar Aalayam (Gunung Cheroh - Open Space) from January 20, 2008 at 07.00 am till January 25, 2008. The theme of the Hunger Strike will be "ABOLISH ISA" and at the same time we would like to inform your good self that
> on January 23,2008 at 10.00am we are having official launching of the "ABOLISH ISA" batch with the NGO's group.
> Thanks.
> Your truly,
> R.Sugumaran (Program Treasurer)
> 017xxx xxxx

Many analysts, including bloggers and blog readers, were determined that MIC's fight to retain its power in the March election would be a difficult one based on recent development relating to Hindraf and Batu Caves's incidents. The month of February

[169] http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=292.
[170] http://raajarox.com/?p=256

witnessed more simultaneous events relating to pre-election coverage – news, campaigns and manifestos on the elections relating to MIC, and Hindraf-related activities. The chronology of events covered in the blogs, particularly *Rajaarox*[171] and *Bolehland*[172] are shown in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2. Hindraf and MIC-related events

a) February 2, 2008: Silent protest in London for Hindraf 5 and against Indians' discrimination in Malaysia	a) February 3, 2008: BN convention on February 3 2008 – MIC nominates and introduces new candidates, and new promises to uplift status of Indians in Malaysia. Samy Vellu is pressured to resign as president of MIC
b) February 8, 2008: Dissemination of news on Rose campaigns simultaneously taking place in Malaysia, London, Los Angles and New York, USA	b) February 10, 2008: MIC's website hacked
c) February 10, 2008: Videos of Malaysian police brutality are posted	c) February 13, 2008: Official announcement of parliament dissolved
d) February 11-12, 2008: Rose campaign preparations- Map and guidelines to protect against tear gas and water canon are posted	d) February 18, 2008: Samy Vellu campaigns in Penang and is mocked by an angry crowd, and prevented from leaving a gathering.
e) February 12, 2008: Hindraf protest in Komtar, Penang – a state in the northern region of Malaysia	e) February 20, 2008: MIC candidates for the March 2008 are posted online. The seats - nine for parliamentary, and 19 for state assembly.
f) February 14, 2008: Press invitation on "Roses campaign" sent to local and international media	f) February 24, 2008: More news on candidates and nominations, besides amounting pressure on Samy Vellu to step down as MIC President.
g) February 16, 2008: Rose campaigns in Malaysia, London, New York. Also posted are photos and video in four parts.	g) February 28, 2008: A "Mystery" Tamil CD containing songs and speeches depicting the plight of the Indians in Malaysia were distributed in political rallies. The songs implicitly encouraged the Indians to vote for the opposition parties.
h) February 19, 2008: "Think before you vote" flyer (Figure 8.7) distributed during the Roses campaign was posted online together with "ethnic cleansing" video.	h) February 29, 2008: MIC poster campaign that reads, "If you don't vote for MIC, then be prepared to pay the price" is circulated widely online and offline
i) February 21, 2008: "Makkal Sakthi" videos of the November 25 rally re-surfaces – Entitled, "Hindraf 25.11.07" special documentary, Part 1-3, and "Makkal Sakti GE [general election] 2008"	i) March 5, 2008: P. Waythamoorty, Hindraf Chairman based in London, requested "Indians to vote for opposition" through a video message posted on YouTube. The request also seeks for the "18 points demands" (Appendix C) to be acknowledged by the government.
j) February 25 2008: Announcement made that M. Manoharan, HINDRAF leader, then detained under the Internal Security Act would contest the Kota Alam Shah state seat under the Democratic Action Party (DAP).	j) March 6, 2008: Mahathir, the former prime of Malaysia gives an interview to *Malaysiakini*, - requesting Samy Velu, the MIC leader to step down which ultimately, would help to resolve some of the Indians' issues and problems.
	k) March 7, 2008: A political rally held by DAP, an opposition party, in Penang drew over 60,000 people. This was the first sign of winning for the opposition in Penang.

[171] For details see http://raajarox.com/?m=200802&paged=10

[172] The events covered by Raajarox for the entire month of February 2008 can be found at http://raajarox.com/?m=200802. For events covered by Bolehland can be found at http://www.bmahendran.com/?m=200802

Source: http://raajarox.com/?p=281[173]

Figure 8.7. Flyer of "Think Before You Vote"

Now that blogs were a major a source of information on news and activities relating to the elections, this opportunity was seized by opposition parties- DAP, PAS, PKR to engage in voters' decisions. The *Makkal Sakthi* slogan was used widely by people regardless of ethnicity, to plead for support and votes. *Bolehland* confirmed this in his posting:

> I saw PAS members [an Islamic-based party] shouting one word that has moved and united the Malaysian Indians;"Makkal Sakthi". Imagine the crowd in green and white moon flags, suddenly shouting "Makkal Sakthi Valghe [long-live People Power]". It was a stunning moment. [174]

8.5 The 2008 General Election Results

Briefly described in the beginning of this chapter, BN won but failed to secure a two-thirds majority. The opposition parties won five states – Kelantan, Kedah, Perak, Pulau Pinang and Selangor. Additionally, five avid bloggers also became parliamentarians, giving rise to the phenomenon of politicians-turning-into-bloggers after the 2008 elections.

[173] The pictures on the flyer show police brutality during temple demolition.
[174]Bolehland. (2008, February 27). Perpaduan.. Retrieved December 16, 2009 from http://www.bmahendran.com/?p=326

The results on many accounts set a historical precedent, particularly for Malaysian Indians who were considered irrelevant due to their small numbers. About 20 Indians from the opposition parties were selected as members of parliament as a result of the elections, compared to only two in the previous years.[175] This was considered a victory for Makkal Sakhti, the force unleashed by Hindraf on November 25, 2007, which ballooned into a formidable Indian movement that influenced many Malaysian Indians and ensured the defeat of MIC leaders. In addition, it showed the courage and maturity of the ethnic Indians that was bonded by unity to achieve the impossible, indicating the potential of the Internet to foster political mobilization among minority population. Following the elections, the Makkal Sakhti (Figure 8.8) slogan has now become a household name in Malaysia, used by all regardless of ethnicity.

Source: *raajarox*.com

Figure 8.8. A *Makkal Sakthi* poster

8.6 Analysis and Discussion

This aim of this chapter was to examine the impact of blogs on the fall of MIC in the 2008 general elections in Malaysia. The force unleashed by the vibrant Hindraf group in early 2007 in protecting the rights of the minority Indians in Malaysia has not only led to global recognition of their claims, but widening of the term "Malaysian Indian" as a community. The long standing grievances of Malaysian Indians against institutionalized discrimination were never properly articulated. But when the Indians

[175] http://raajarox.com/?p=305

were further challenged of religious freedom, it served to build trenches of resistance against the state, ultimately leading to the Hindraf protest rally, and subsequent defeat of the MIC in the March 2008 general elections. The results of the elections not only showed the impact of the offline and online activism, but also inherent tensions in the makeup of the society which resulted in the opposition winning five out the 13 states in Malaysia's 12th elections.

Arguably, the impact of blogs alone is limited, particularly amongst the Indians who have low Internet penetration rate compared to other ethnic groups. Therefore, the election result was the cumulative effect of various tensions that led to the defeat of MIC. In this context, the Internet played a major role in mobilizing the Indians to vote for the opposition that resulted in BN losing its two-thirds majority. The following section highlights a few significant points pertaining to blog mobilization and Hindraf's activism in the 2008 general elections.

8.6.1 The Importance of Collective Identity

The use of the Internet, particularly, blog mobilization in the 2008 general elections cannot be understated, as have been discussed in the preceding sections. Unlike the previous Malaysian elections where the three Ms – media, money and machinery – determined the electoral outcomes, the 2008 elections I argue were merely fought and won on the basis of issues. The BN, and to a large extent the MIC, had severely underestimated the extent and depth of the discontent, particularly among the Indians that led to a series of street demonstrations. "Walk for Justice", BERSIH and Hindraf demonstrations, a few months prior to elections, seriously dented the popularity of the BN administration (see Chapter 7, section 7.4.3). In particular, the MIC's defeat can be solely attributed to the growing discontent among minority Indians who felt that the party under the administration of BN were unable to protect their rights.

As Castells (2004) argued, in the global network society, meaning is organized around a primary identity that frames the others. In that regard, the mobilization of Hindraf and its impact on the defeat of MIC would not have been achieved, if the Indian community did not share the same beliefs or shared definitions (Melucci, 1996) that were required to build resistance identity. In this case study, the sense of solidarity that manifested out of the "*Makkal Sakthi*" (People Power) spirit and discontentment, was significant for mass-based voters appeal, subsequently leading to the astounding results.

8.6.2 Blogs as Space and Medium for Mobilization

The "technology-amplified" collective mobilization was also the focus of Hindraf in engaging in voters' decisions as noted in this case study. The blogosphere was used as medium for mobilization activities which was evident through its use to disseminate information (through networks) and organize mobilization campaigns which had an impact on the Indian voters, who subsequently voted for the opposition parties. However, it should be noted that the blogosphere was not the sole medium of the mobilization efforts. Instead, the blogs were used to complement more traditional means of mobilization through the process of "amplification" (Agre, 2002). For example, the use of SMS[176] as mass appeal to "boycott *Thaipusam*" (see section 8.4.2), and the opposition parties' skillful call for support through various media and non-media sources such as such as YouTube videos, VCDs, posters (Think Before you Vote) and so on. Other examples include the use of blogs to disseminate information on upcoming prayer meetings and gatherings organized by activists. In sum, the mobilization efforts must be seen within the wider media environment, encompassing the traditional and new communication technology.

8.6.3 The State's Attitude towards the Internet

The failure of the state to engage people via the Internet was a contributing factor to the election losses of the ruling coalition, as shown in this chapter. Unlike the mainstream media, the Internet was not controlled by the state, paving the way for non-state actors to dominate the relatively new medium. For example, Hindraf mainly coordinated their activities through their website, PoliceWatchMalaysia. This gave them the added advantage of dominating the discourse on the Internet with matters relating to the Indians' marginalized status. Through linkages with other bloggers, Hindraf was able to communicate, coordinate and organize mobilization-related activities, eventually affecting the election's outcome. On a related point, the state's control of the mainstream media led the opposition parties to depend on the Internet as their political tool. As this case study showed, the opposition was successful in mobilizing voters, while the ruling coalition (BN) was slow to recognize the potential of the social media such as blogs (see section 8.2.2).

[176] Although it cannot be confirmed that all SMS were election-related, Maxis and Celcom, mobile phone operators attested to the increase in SMS traffic during the election period (see Azizudin 2008, p.161-162 for details).

8.6.4 Global and Local Connection

In this case, the sense of "we" was created by the blogs through worldwide networks of solidarity. The simultaneity of Hindraf-related events (see Figure 8.1) in international locations helped to produce an international pressure group that was important in the Malaysian context – appearing as a thorn in the government's side that successfully led to more grievances among the citizens, namely the Malaysian Indians. The protest rallies that took place in countries such as Canada, UK and USA at the same was played a contributing role in the defeat of MIC which was seen as a government machinery unable to protest the rights of the Indians. Clearly then, the link between the global and local would not have come about if not for the Internet which was the major commenting medium.

8.7 Conclusion

This chapter set out to show how the Hindraf saga and the blogs were instrumental in the defeat of MIC in the 2008 Malaysia's general elections. The astounding results were not achieved on the strength of the media and the state's attitude towards the Internet alone, but the climate of dissent and defiance fostered, in part by the Hindraf rally.

Although Indians were numerically the smallest among all ethnic groups, their vote for the opposition denied MIC's long-standing dominance since 1946. This impact would not have been achieved if not for the growing discontent among the Malaysian Indians over their marginalized status. Hindraf successfully used the collective communal resistance as their backdrop to engage and mobilize voters' decision through both the traditional media (posters, VCDs, and etc.) and blogs, detailed in the preceding sections. The string of local and global events that took place between November 2007 and March 2008, was vital to the loss of MIC. It is important to note, however, the events and their corresponding impact could only have taken place in the Malaysia of that period. This is because the resources for mobilization – the specific conditions and actors – formed a coalition, albeit temporary.

CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSION:
BLOGGING AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION IN MALAYSIA

9.1 Introduction

The objective of this research was to examine whether blogs can foster political mobilization among minority populations, using the minority Indians in Malaysia as the context. It set out to establish whether the success obtained by similar constituents in international settings could potentially be replicated in a Malaysian context. Past studies, relating to blog mobilization, however, is limited compared to those examining the Internet in general. In other words, although the limited studies do provide a general overview on the use of blog, they still lack in situating the argument within a non-Western nation like Malaysia.

This research explored two case studies – the Hindraf protest rally, and the defeat of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) party in the 2008 Malaysian general elections – to gain an understanding of blog mobilization amongst minority Indians in Malaysia. Although the study was limited to two case studies involving the minority and therefore may not claim to be representative of the broad and varied minority politics or civil society landscape in the country, it did bring some information that may serve as points of departure for future research.

The following section summarizes the key findings of the foregoing chapters by revisiting the research questions, followed by the key themes or patterns that have emerged from the analysis relating to blogging and political mobilization in Malaysia. Additionally, various contributions and implication of this study are presented at the end of this chapter.

9.2 Research Questions Revisited

Question 1:

What are the distinct characteristics of blogs that offer an *alternative venue for communication and organizing collective action?*

First of all, there is a need for a sense of place, whether it is bounded territorially or in a "placeless" realm of the cyberspace (Fernback & Thompson,1995). The space for activism, as posited by Habermas (1989), must be free of coercion where the public can participate on equal status.

In Malaysia, where society and polity is already entrenched in deeply scored ethno-communal-religious lines, the social use of physical space not only carries a strong political dimension, but limits civil society activism. As a result, there is no outlet to air the grievances of the minority population. Within the given context, the Internet has since emerged as a potential space providing an alternative to dominant discourse and information not readily found in the mainstream media.

In particular, the unique characteristics of the blogosphere as a peer-to-peer network structure not only creates new alliances with agents of change, but space has also been created for hitherto marginalized voices and oppositional groups, as evident in the case studies of this research.

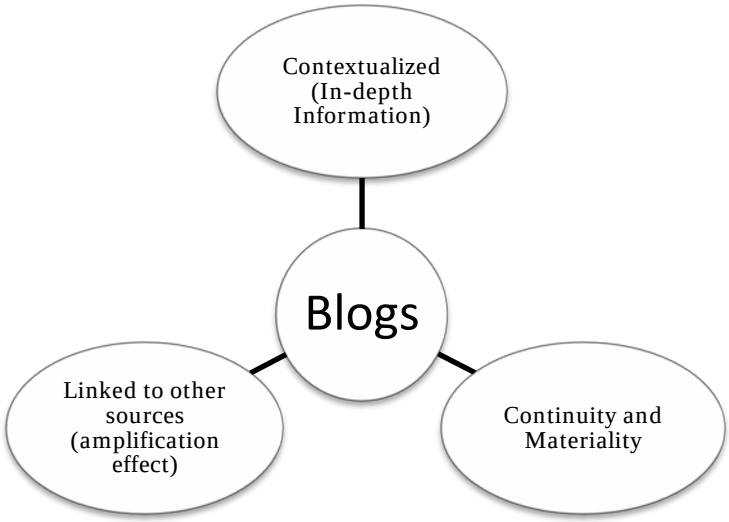


Figure 9.1. The network structure of blogs

As conceptually and empirically shown in Chapters 2, 3, 7 and 8, blogs of political nature provided contextualized, in-depth coverage about issues and events – through its flexible hyperlinks – ultimately turning relationships between different actors into one in which they constitute a collective that acts and thinks together, and at the same time constantly linking up new actors as events unfolded. In the case of Hindraf, the *PoliceWatchMalaysia* (PWM) website was extensively used to provide contextualized news and information relating to events. This in turn, provided "events" continuity and materiality (Giralt & Gomez, n. d.) that was needed for collective action.

Furthermore, although narratives showed the potential dominance of the politics of rumors or gossip, the linkages between blogs and other media provided the necessary clarifications and verifications as needed, in turn making an event no longer ephemeral or episodic. In this regard, the success for mobilization is need and context-driven, and

not necessarily affected by the level of discussion as Wilhelm's (1998) work suggested that online discussions were "neither inclusive nor deliberative." When suitable conditions and aspirations exist together with the actors, the chances for mobilization-related activities to succeed are high, although it may be temporary coalitions or ephemeral in nature. In other words, while the space created by blogs is available, the opportunity and need for wanting to make a change must come from within the agents of change or social actors. I argue that this can only exist when there are shared beliefs and a collective identity among the actors – both online and offline communities.

However, given the vast inequalities regarding access to the Internet in Malaysia, blogs cannot function as the only or primary means for communication and collective action. Within the Malaysian communicative environment, and especially among the minority population, blogs must be seen as an extension of existing means of mobilization. As the case of Hindraf protest rally and MIC's defeat in the 2008 elections showed, a combination of methods (new and traditional media) were used innovatively and creatively to maximize success in disseminating information, creating a virtual public sphere and mobilizing for protest action. Blogs should be seen as a medium for amplifying certain effects, for example, resistance against the Malaysian state and to organize, coordinate, and unleash political mobilization.

***Question 2**:*

How have the main challenges minority Indians faced in the past and present affected their participation in the public sphere?

This research has sustained much of the argument that discriminatory practices related to poor socio-economic condition, deprivation and inequality, coupled with various legislation decisions, have affected the status of the Malaysian Indians as a minority, and as a result, imposed limitations on their participation in the public sphere. Viewed within the larger context, Malaysia's history, governance structure and ethnic relations have, in fact alienated the Indians, subsequently denying equal status.

Malaysia has a population of 28.3 million, separated into four major demographic categories: the *Bumiputeras* (Malays and other indigenous groups) (65 percent); Chinese (25 percent); Indians (8 percent); and Others (2 percent). Ethnicity and religion has been the prime factors in deciding the fate of a citizen for a number of historical reasons. Chief among these is the manner in which the ethno-religious tie is written into the Constitution of Malaysia which provides a blueprint for special rights to

be bestowed upon Malays, who are followers of Islam. The consequence of this has been the corresponding practice of categorizing the entire population from Malays to non-Malays (see chapter 5 for details).

The politics of ethnicity which dominates all facets of Malaysian life was set in motion by the British colonial administration based on the "divide and rule" policy. Specific economic functions were allocated according to ethnicity (Hirschmann, 1986). While the Chinese worked in the tin-mining industry, Indians worked in the plantation economy. The *bumiputeras* were left to cultivate their agricultural land in the *kampongs* (villages). This policy of division of labor along ethnic lines, not only reinforced social-cultural differences, but these differences affected the overall status of the Indians in Malaysia (see details in section 5.3.2).

Malaysian Indians do not enjoy a high economic status compared to other ethnic groups, *Bumiputeras* and Chinese. For example, only 1.5 percent of the nation's shares are owned by Malaysian Indians, yet Malaysian Chinese hold a 40 percent share and *Bumiputeras* slightly above 18 percent (Leong, 2009). Hence, their lack of economic power, non-*Bumiputera* status and paltry numbers have placed many Indians in a poor position for inter-ethnic bargaining within Malaysian politics. Additionally, the various legislation relating to freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and civil society activism has affected the Malaysian Indians as a minority, and as a result imposed limitations on their participation in the public sphere.

Question 3:

What is most distinctive about the public sphere in Malaysia, particularly the role of the Internet?

The Internet in Malaysia has played a major role in creating a "virtual public sphere" in the absence of physical space or civic space where society can meet without the interference of the state and repressive laws (for example, the Internal Security Act). With Malaysia's classification as a semi-democratic nation and the dominance of UMNO as the ruling coalition government since independence in 1957, the remainder of Malaysia's public sphere is represented by opposition parties, non-governmental organizations, communal-religious-based movements and apolitical groups in civil society (Weiss, 2004).

In the 1990s, however, the emergence of Internet technology has opened up new opportunities for civil society activism in Malaysia. The *Reformasi* movement in 1998

was the beginning of Internet-based activism that took many to the streets – staging demonstrations or other sorts of protest such as online petition. This advantage is especially relevant for groups allied with opposition parties and thus unlikely to gain favorable coverage in the state-controlled media. In that regard, it is fair to say that the inconsistencies of the regulatory frameworks within which Internet technologies and mainstream media have governed is partly responsible for the space created by the Internet. Specifically, though the state and its proxies exert considerable control over the content of mainstream media (Mohd, 2009; Abbott, 2004), the Internet is rendered somewhat exempt due to the promise to leave the Internet in Malaysia free of censorship (see details in Chapter 5, section 5.6). Briefly, due to the developments of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) policy, a censorship-free Internet was enacted as "Cyberlaw" in Malaysia. Although this does not mean that the new media practitioners have license to do as they will in Malaysia, it has nevertheless opened up opportunities for political expression compared to its the neighboring country, Singapore (Leong, 2007). Through the efforts of independent news outlets like *Malaysiakini.com* and the rising influence and popularity of bloggers like Raja Petra Kamaruddin and blogger-turned-politician, Jeff Ooi, the Internet has gained prominence within the Malaysian public sphere. In particular, the blogosphere is seen by as a potential space for activism for its state-of-the art network structure; that is, peer-to-peer, and its capability to connect the local and global, offline and online communities besides providing alternative information rarely found in the mainstream media

Question 4:

Does the minority Indian community in Malaysia use blogs to engage in political participation and facilitate collective action? If so, how?

The case studies of this research showed a correlation between the use of blogs by Malaysian Indians and engaging in political participation and collective action. This question, however, if viewed in a different context than this research, may yield a different result. This is because civil society activism in Malaysia is context-specific (see Figure 3.2. in Chapter 3 for details). As the case studies showed, Hindraf's success in mobilizing the crowd during the protest rally, and its impact on the 2008 general elections showed the effective and innovative use of blogs despite the small number of bloggers and issues relating to Internet access. This is precisely the focus of this research

that shows how blog-mobilization can only be studied in a specific context, where temporary coalitions coalesce dynamically around specific issues.

But the question that remains is: how did Hindraf use the Internet for collective action? Hindraf's success in mobilizing a crowd of about 30,000 people during the protest rally, and the defeat of the MIC in the 2008 general elections, cannot be attributed to the strength of the Internet alone. Rather, what occurred was a cumulative effect of the tensions amongst the poor Malaysian Indians due to their marginalized status (Chapter 5), the state's attitude (Chapter 6) towards the Internet and the largely state-controlled mainstream media. Hindraf's website at Policewatchmalaysia.com played an important role in creating awareness on the dire situation of the Indians in Malaysia and the need for mobilization. In this sense, Hindraf coordinators were the first agents of change followed by the bloggers. This method of information flow parallels the network structure of blogs (peer-to-peer) or the two-step-flow" (Wasserman, 2007) process of communication. While I agree with Lim (2005) that the dynamics in the network society do not form a linear pathway, there are factors that can be accounted for in the process of mobilization as summarized below.

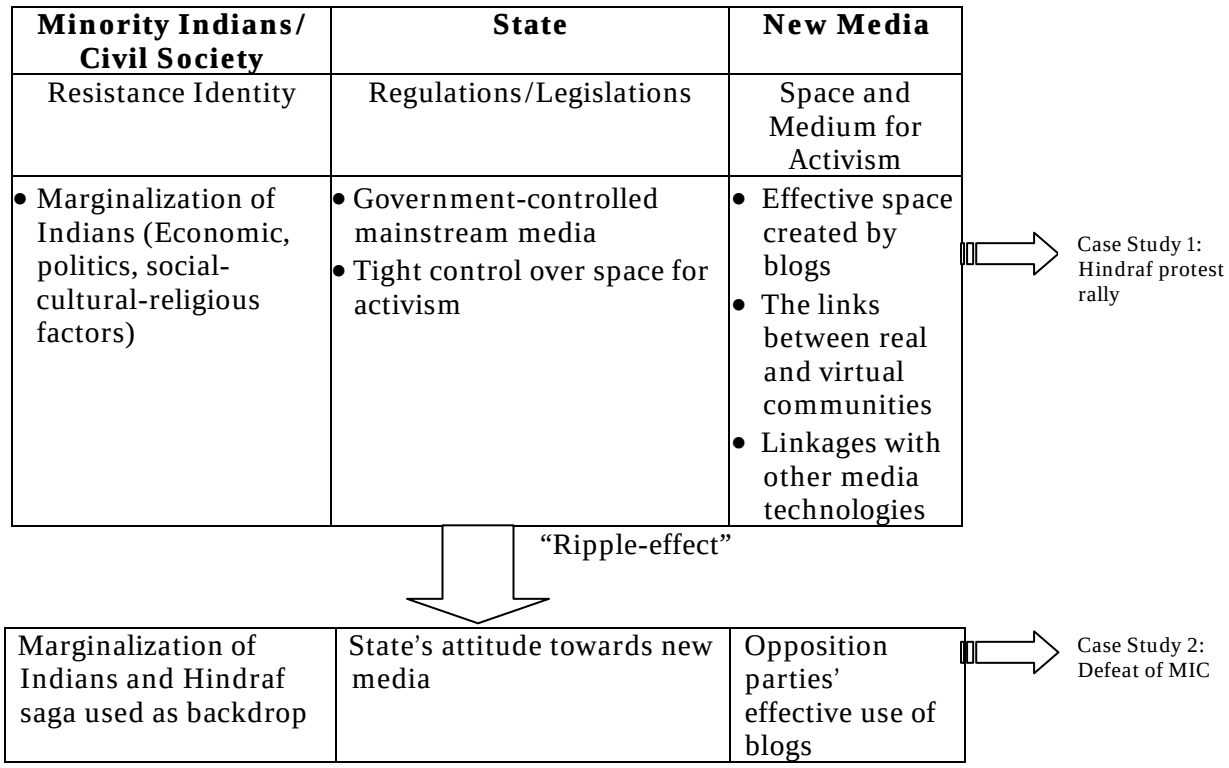


Figure 9.2. The "cumulative-effect" of factors on mobilization

Figure 9.2 shows the factors relating to minority Indians, the state and the technology that had a combined effect on the Hindraf protest rally and the subsequent defeat of the MIC party in the 2008 Malaysia's general elections. The following section focuses on the key themes and patterns that have since emerged from examining the case studies in the context of minority politics in Malaysia.

9.3 Key Themes and Patterns

9.3.1 Importance of Collective Identity

The importance of collective identity among the minority Indian communities (online and offline) cannot be understated for this research. In other words, blogs facilitated in creating communal resistance based on a common belief that lead to collective action (Castells, 2004; Melucci, 1996). The shared beliefs or collective identity ultimately became a common cause – "the modern, internet-equivalent of the ancient signal fires that would pass word from hilltop to hilltop of the approach of the enemy" (Hewitt, 2005, p.45) that infused "project identity" via communication networks that succeeded in becoming significant, and had a major impact on the reality citizens sought to affect.

9.3.2 Importance of Linkages

Although blogs are believed to be a powerful communication medium, that alone is not strong enough to foster political mobilization. For the Indians who make up less than eight percent of the population, with only a small percentage having access to the Internet, the impact blogs can exert on mobilization is minimal. In this case, the power of blogs to foster political mobilization should be seen within the wider communications technology environment – the linkages and information flow between blogs and other media and non-media sources. The assumption is that a small group of people who are connected to the Internet will link to the wider society through extensive and coordinated use of various media.

9.3.3 Important of Internet Access

Another pertinent point has to do with the digital divide phenomenon and discussion on material inequalities. As Chapter 6 showed, the Indians uptake of the Internet compared to other groups is relatively low. It was clear from the case studies

that Hindraf was successful in its mission simply because it had employed both the traditional and contemporary media to play a role in informing, engaging and mobilizing the citizenry. This only proved that digital inequalities are just one part of the equation. Beyond the material conditions like lack of access to new media are other inequalities such as social-political-cultural capital that citizens need recourse to in order to make sense of the sometimes overload of information. Without adequate resources, physical or otherwise, to respond with, citizens are no better off with more information than less. This does not, however, mean a sophisticated polity is a necessary precondition for collective action to succeed (Wassserman, 2007). As this research showed, there is no greater or lesser guarantee that information garnered from blogs is any more truthful or correct. For example, the SMS making its rounds in the blogosphere, about Queen Elizabeth appearing in person at the British High Commission to receive the memo from Hindraf was just a rumor to gain wide support on Hindraf's cause. In sum, the blogs should be regarded as an alternative venue providing alternative views and opinions, and facilitating collective action due to its capability in amplifying certain effects such as communal resistance.

9.3.4 The Politics of Credibility and Identification

According to Poster (1995), what is distinctive about the Internet is the possibility of anonymity that serves to diffuse power relationship that often frames political discussion. But blogs as compared to listserv or other online groups (many-to-many) are a more individualized form of communication. Accordingly, the anonymity online lends itself to judging positions through the credibility of a posting - evaluation by blog readers (Blood, 2002). Hence, ideas put forth by anonymous bloggers are left to be judged on their own merit.

In the context of Malaysia, however, identification markers are key to engaging and mobilizing support as the case studies showed. The blogger's reputation, both as a blogger and a person was somewhat important in the influence exerted on the readers. For example, during the *Batu Caves* temple incident, many people, including bloggers, visited or linked to Jeff Ooi's blog for pictures and stories on what actually took place during the Hindraf rally. In this case, although Jeff Ooi is Chinese, his blog was used as reference simply because he is an influential and credible blogger. Likewise, the bloggers chosen for this study were able to mobilize support during Hindraf's protest rally and the 2008 elections activities because they were popular and credible characters, besides the

stability of their blogs in disseminating minority-related news. In sum, identification markers vis-à-vis anonymity do play an important role in the Malaysian minority politics.

9.3.5 Importance of Context

The case studies chosen to reveal the dynamism and socio-political processes that are embedded under the theme of mobilization have, in fact situated the analysis within a particular context, taking into consideration the specific circumstances, conditions, histories and actions of various social actors involved. This is in line with Miller & Slater's (2000,) claim that "the Internet is only ever a meaningful phenomenon" in reference to a specific context (p. 1).

9.3.6 Importance of Representation

In many respects, this research evidently showed the potential for blogs to broaden the public sphere by including the voices otherwise marginalized by the mainstream media. I argue that although the representation of minority group is typified by a top-down structure which is far from the characteristics of a public sphere envisioned by Habermas (1989), the importance is not to be dismissed. In the context of minority Indians in Malaysia, the public must be represented by civil society to advance political mobilization.

9.4 Implications

The case studies of this research have empirically showed the impact of social media in the Malaysian political landscape, in particular on minority politics. While blogs are not without their own problems, they offer a rich and energetic conversational arena for citizen participation and mobilization.

The blogosphere has clearly become part of the minority voices – a medium which allows for discussion of issues that matter in our public lives. McLuhan (1963) argues that societies have always been shaped more by the nature of media by which we communicate than by the content of the communication. While I argue that both the medium and the message shape our culture, McLuhan's assertion offers a fitting insight for this inquiry. Malaysians, particularly minorities, are adapting to civic discourse online in increasing numbers after the 2008 Malaysia's general election.

Some conclusions can be drawn as to the challenges and opportunities that the blogosphere holds for the engagement of minority voices. The implications of the blogosphere for political mobilization, hence empowerment of the minority population are these: first, blogs, although ephemeral in nature, plays a significant role in fostering political mobilization by creating space for citizen discussion where participants can inform and engage each other, working through solutions to shared problems; secondly, discussion that take place online extend and enliven citizen participation through links that has implications for real-world political landscape; finally, virtual space created by blogs are in large part the jurisdiction of everyday citizens, hence empowering oneself. The recognition that online communication transcends the cyber world into the real world political landscape gives hope for minority politics.

9.5 Contributions

9.5.1 Theoretical

While this dissertation is significant in many ways, it was not intended to create new theories in explaining the dynamism involved in the relationship between blogs and political mobilization amongst minority population in Malaysia. Instead, this research uses various concepts from various disciplines to explain the phenomenon. The result of this is the context in which the concepts are used.

For example, I extended the explanation of Douglass' (2007) work on civil society activism in Asia to include the time-intensity dimension that provides an explanation as to how civil society operates in Malaysia during key political events. It is fair to say that the rise and fall of civil society in Malaysia, depends largely on meaning and purpose that calls for action. This is not to say there is no civil society in Malaysia, but "civil society in the public sphere" (Douglass, 2007) is highly contextual, purpose, and time-driven.

The concept of the public sphere, as set forth by Habermas (1989) may not be applicable to a semi-authoritarian state like Malaysia. While the concept remains controversial, I make the point that it can nevertheless be used as an evaluative tool; as a way of explaining how the Internet could contribute to the democratic functioning of society and should operate as a key part of the public sphere. For a country like Malaysia that has tight rules and regulations on the public space and freedom of speech, the Internet plays a vital role as the virtual public sphere. However, the reinterpretation by Dahlgren (2005), Keane (1996), and Fraser (1992), of the public sphere as consisting of

various “mini-sphere”, alternative sphere and/or subaltern sphere seems to fit the discourse on minority politics. But this argument must be further evaluated.

9.5.2 Methodological and Analytical Frames

In many respects, this research is new because of the combination of methods used in order to establish a more in-depth and triangulated measurement of political events and social processes. Using quantitative and qualitative techniques and based on a time-series or chronological structure, two case studies were analyzed relating to whether blogs have the potential to foster political mobilization. The multiple sources of data produced a more valid measurement and therefore a better understanding of the complex, multidimensional (political) content of blogs supported by individual and focus group interviews and direct observation. It must be acknowledged that although the methods are not new – interviews and narratives – are the standard fare of qualitative research – this study used the data generated by these methods in ways that expand the study of political mobilization in two directions.

First, they illuminated the multi-faceted, ambiguous dimensions of the phenomenon itself: ethnic-based mobilization may be regarded a tactic that assumes meaning only in a broader political and historical context (Steinhoff & Zwerman, 2008). This simply means the evaluation of mobilization therefore, cannot be separated from analysis of the legitimizing forces or dominant forces and the tools of power – from weapons words to visual images – that are deployed in each environment.

Second, the research findings were achieved through an innovative array of analytic frames. Just as political mobilization does not constitute a single strategic form, no single analytical perspective can encompass all facets of the study of political mobilization using blogs. Fresh perspectives lead to new discoveries. In that regard, although this research was well-suited to be studied using social movement theories relating to political opportunity and resource mobilization, this work goes further, integrating conceptual frameworks in the field of sociology, political science, communication, and globalization. This research topic involved multiple perspectives, hence the usage of multiple methods and interpretative frames to better understand the phenomenon.

Appendix A

Questionnaire Survey

Malaysian Indian Bloggers and Blog readers' survey

Preamble

I am a Malaysian Indian, currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. This survey is part of my dissertation looking at ethnic mobilization using blogs. This survey is intended ONLY for Malaysian Indian bloggers and blog readers. Participation is voluntary and your responses are completely anonymous. If at any time you wish to discontinue participation, please close your browser. You can contact me, Asha Rathina Pandi, at asha5115@gmail.com if you have any questions.

This survey has five parts:(I) Background Information, (II) For blog readers, (III) HINDRAF-related, (IV) 2008 General elections, and (V) For bloggers only (Respondents without a blog can skip Part V). By clicking "continue" you are agreeing to participate in this survey.

PART 1: Background Information

1)Current Location [location]

-- Select Here --

2) If you are living overseas, how long have you been there? [overseas]

- 0-1 years
- 2-3 years
- 4-5 years
- >6 years
- Not applicable

3) Age? [age]

-- Select Here --

4) Gender: [Gender]

- Male
- Female
- Other

5) Highest level of education completed? [educ]

- No formal education
- Primary school (Standard 1-6)
- Secondary school (Form 1-6)
- Diploma
- Bachelor's Degree
- Graduate Level (Master's, Ph.D.)
- Other:

6) Marital Status? [MaritalS]

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Divorcee

7) Employment status? [occupation]

- ☐ Employed full-time
- ☐ Employed part-time
- ☐ Own work
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Retiree
- ☐ Housewife/Unemployed
- ☐ Other: _____

8) Total household income per year(RM)? [income]

-- Select Here --

9) Please rank your preference for the following reading materials [Choiceofread]

	Most preferred	Somewhat	Neutral	Less preferred	Not at all
Daily newspapers (e,g. NST)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Online daily news (e.g. The Star Online)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Online alternative news (e.g. Malaysiakini)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Foreign news (e.g. BBC, CNN)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
New magazines (e.g. The Economist)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Blogs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Online forums, bulletin boards	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other websites	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

10) Are you currently involved in any political or civil society organization? (e.g. NGOs) [politicorg]

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Part II: Blog readers

11) What type of blog do you mostly visit?(Check all that apply) [br_type]

- ☐ Personal diaries
- ☐ Socio-political

- [ ] Technology
- [ ] Travel & Adventure
- [ ] Humor
- [ ] Food
- [ ] Photography
- [ ] Members of parliment
- [ ] Other:

12) Whose blog do you read? [br_read]

- [ ] Blogs of people I know
- [ ] Blogs of people I don't know
- [ ] Both

13) Have you ever posted material or written on another person's blog? [br_post]

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

14) How often do you read blogs? [br_reoft]

- [ ] Daily
- [ ] 2-3 times a week
- [ ] Once a week
- [ ] Once in two weeks
- [ ] Once a month
- [ ] Other:

15) How important is each of the following as a source of information on politics? [br_source]

Family & Friends	--Select--
Daily Papers (e.g. NST)	--Select--
Online alternative news (e.g. Malaysiakini)	--Select--
Online daily news (e.g. The Star Online)	--Select--
Foreign news/publications	--Select--
Television	--Select--
Radio	--Select--
Blogs	--Select--
Online forums, bulletin boards	--Select--
Text messaging (SMS)	--Select--

Other networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Myspace) --Select--

16) If you prefer blogs as your source of information, what is the major reason?(Not more than 3 responses) [br_prefer]

- I can get information online that is not available offline
- Getting information online is convenient
- I don't get all the news and information I want from traditional news source such as the daily newspapers
- I can get local perspectives online on politicians and issues
- I can get perspectives from outside my community on politicians and issues
- Other:

17) Blogs are often regarded as an 'elite' media. With issues on lack of access to the Internet(e.g. digital divide), are you hopeful that blogs can be a facilitator to political activism? Please explain. [br_bloghope]

Part III: HINDRAF-related

18) Where did you get your information about HINDRAF activities between November 2007 to March 2008? (Check all that apply) [hind_info]

- Online daily newspapers (i.e. The Star Online)
- Online alternative news (i.e. Malaysiakini)
- Daily newspapers (i.e. The Star, NST)
- International news organization (print and online)
- Blogs
- Test messaging (SMS)
- Online news group (Yahoo, google)
- Email listservs
- Online forums, bulletin boards or chatrooms
- Word of mouth (Family & friends)
- Other websites
- Other:

19) Have you ever posted comments, queries, or information about HINDRAF? [hind_post]

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

20) Have you participated in any of following HINDRAF-related activities? (Check all that apply) [hind_activities]

- [ ] Temple gatherings
- [ ] Ceramah/Talks/Political forums
- [ ] Rally - November 25, 2007
- [ ] Rose campaign - February 2008
- [ ] Free Hindraf 5 campaigns
- [ ] Fund collection (online & offline)
- [ ] Signed petition online
- [ ] Distributed printed materials (e.g. pamplets, fliers)
- [ ] Distributed video, pictures, CDs
- [ ] Not interested
- [ ] Other:

21) What is your opinion on the HINDRAF rally that took place on November 25 2007?Check all that apply) [hind_opinion]

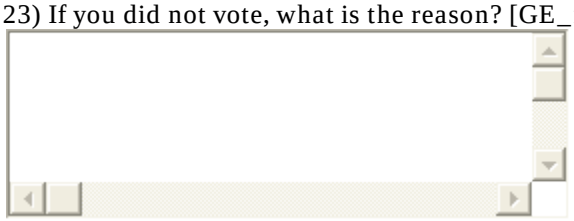
- [ ] Successful in putting pressure on the government
- [ ] Opened up more channels for ethnic disintegration
- [ ] The rally merely created a chaos, disharmony among the various ethnic groups
- [ ] Gave minority Indians some hope on issues pertaining to marginalization
- [ ] Created awareness of injustice among minorities in Malaysia
- [ ] Should not have focused on the plight of Hindus alone but all minorities
- [ ] Created an awareness on the problems faced by Indians that MIC failed to address
- [ ] No opinion
- [ ] Other:

Part IV: General Elections March 2008

22) Did you vote in the 2008 general elections? [GE_vote]

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

23) If you did not vote, what is the reason? [GE_reasonvote]



24) Where did you get your information about the 2008 general elections?(Check all that apply) [GE_info]

- ☐ Online daily news (i.e. The Star Online)
- ☐ Online alternative news (i.e. Malaysiakini)
- ☐ Daily newspapers (i.e. The Star, NST)
- ☐ International news organization (both print and online)
- ☐ Websites set up by the politicians themselves
- ☐ Websites of state or local governments
- ☐ Blogs
- ☐ Test messaging (SMS)
- ☐ Online news group (Yahoo, google)
- ☐ Email listservs
- ☐ Online forums, bulletin boards or chatrooms
- ☐ Other websites
- ☐ Other:

25) Have you participated in any of following activities leading up to the 2008 elections?(Check all that apply) [GE_activities]

- ☐ Attended ceramah/political speech
- ☐ Free Hindraf 5 campaigns
- ☐ Fund collection
- ☐ Distributed printed materials (e.g. pamplets, fliers, pictures)
- ☐ Distributed media (e.g. video, cds,MMS)
- ☐ Worked or volunteered for a political party/politician
- ☐ Participated in BERSIH rally
- ☐ Look for information online about a politician
- ☐ Use the internet to check for accuracy of claims on a candidate
- ☐ Forward or post someone else's political commentary

☐ Forward or post someone else's political audio or video recordings

☐ Other: _____

26) Check the box that most closely resembles your opinion about the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC)? [GE_MIC]

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
There is still hope in MIC representing the interest of the Indians	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I will support MIC if the leadership changes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
MIC is still relevant in providing educational loans (e.g. MIED)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
MIC is no longer relevant to the Indians	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
MIC lost the confidence and trust of the Indians	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I support the opposition because their policies and strategies are appropriate in the present time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I support the opposition due to MIC leadership	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
MIC lost its reputation for being involved in money politics (e.g. Maika scandal)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
MIC failed to reach out to the Indians	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
MIC must continue to exist for the benefit of the Indian students (e.g. AIMST University, Tafe College)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

27) Do you own a blog? [ownblog]

☐ Yes (continue Part V)

☐ No [end of survey)

Part V: For Bloggers Only

28) Which month did you start blogging? [blogmonth]

Month --Select--

29) Which year did you start blogging? [blogyear]

Year --Select--

30) Which language do you mostly use in your blog? [bloglanguage]

☐ English

☐ Malay

☐ Tamil

☐ Other: _____

31) How do you identify yourself in your blog? [blogidentity]

- Use of realname
- Use of nickname

32) What is your MAIN motivation for blogging?(Check all that apply) [blogmotivate]

- To be able to voice out my opinion and thoughts
- To share information and knowledge
- To influence the way people think
- To engage other people to action
- To document my life experiences
- To make money
- To network or meet new people
- To staying in touch with family and friends
- To store resources or information that are important to me
- Other:

33) Which of the following BEST decribes your blog? [blogtype]

- Personal diaries
- Socio-political
- Technology
- Travel & Adventure
- Humor
- Food
- Photography
- Business
- Member of parliament
- Other:

34) How often do you update the content on your blog? [blogupdate]

-- Select Here --

35) Have you ever written in your blog about a political or social issue? [blogpol]

- Yes
- No

36) Has your blog ever received attention from or been mentioned by any of the following?(Check all that apply) [blogatten]

- [ ] Public officials, politicians, or political campaigns
- [ ] News media
- [ ] Other bloggers
- [ ] Local community members
- [ ] Colleagues, co-workers
- [ ] Other:

37) How often do you do each of the following things on your blog? [blogoften]

Quote other people or media sources directly	--Select--
Post corrections to something you have written	--Select--
Take content from other sources and re-write it into something new	--Select--
Discuss current events or news	--Select--
Include links to orginal source material you have cited or used in some way	--Select--
Spend extra time verifying facts you want to include in your post	--Select--
Respond to post or comments from others	--Select--
Get permission to post copyrighted material	--Select--

38) Have you use your blog for the following activities related to HINDRAF activities between November 2007 to March 2008?(Check all that apply) [blogactivities]

- [ ] Disseminate information/news
- [ ] Host discussions
- [ ] Protest online (i.e. through posters, banners)
- [ ] Post links
- [ ] Post pictures, videos
- [ ] Host petition
- [ ] Make appointment to meet offline/face-to-face
- [ ] Organize protest activities
- [ ] Other:

39) Have you use your blog for the following activities related to the 2008 elections?(Check all that apply) [blogactivities]

- [ ] Disseminate information/news
- [ ] Host discussions
- [ ] Protest online (i.e. through posters, banners)
- [ ] Post links
- [ ] Post comments

- [ ] Host petition
- [ ] Make appointment to meet offline/face-to-face
- [ ] Engaged in voter decision
- [ ] Fund collection
- [ ] Other:

Thank you for participating in my survey.

Appendix B

Interview Guide for Bloggers

A. General questions on blogging

1. What is your motivation for blogging?
2. To what extent do you believe that blogging is able to bypass the government stronghold on media?
3. Do you think that blogging is an effective avenue to voice opinions, and more importantly, to be heard?
4. Do you think of blogging as a platform for political participation/ civil society movements? (civil society movements – activities of citizens for the betterment of society)
5. What do you think are the criteria for a blog to be a good, reliable source of information?
6. How would you encourage discussion on your blog?
7. How do you encourage participation on your blog?
8. Do you meet other bloggers and blog readers offline? If yes, how often? What is your purpose of the meeting?
9. What is the future outlook of Malaysian blogs as an alternative media?

B. Questions on Hindraf Demonstration and General Elections 2008?

1. Is there any issue that you blogged about that made a significant difference?
2. Have you had any confrontation with authorities?
3. How was your blog involved in Hindraf and the general elections 2008 activities involving the Indian community?
4. How did you participate in either/both the activities? For example, dissemination of information, cyber-protest, poster, distribution of fliers, host petitions?
5. How did you gather your blogs readers to support you in your actions relating to the events?

Appendix C

Letter sent to Prime Minister Gordon Brown

HINDRAF
Hindu Rights Action Force
No. 135-3-A, Jalan Toman 7,
Kemayan Square,
70200 Seremban, Negeri Sembilan
Malaysia. Tel : 06-7672995/6
Fax: 06-7672997 Email waytha@hotmail. com

15.11.2007
The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown
Prime Minister of the United Kindom
10 Downing Street, Fax: +442079250918
London, URGENT
SW1A 2AA

Dear Sirs,

RE: 1. COMMONWEALTH ETHNIC INDIAN PEACE LOVING SUBJECTS IN MALAYSIA PERSECUTED BY GOVERNMENT BACKED ISLAMIC EXTREMIST VIOLENT ARMED TERRORIST WHO LAUNCHED A PRE DAWN VIOLENT ARMED ATTACK AND DESTROYED THE KG JAWA MARIAMAN HINDU TEMPLE AT 4.00 A.M THIS MORNING (15.11.2007) .

2. APPEAL FOR U.K TO MOVE EMERGENCY U.N RESOLUTION CONDEMNING "ETHNIC CLEANSING" IN MALAYSIA.

3. APPEAL TO REFER MALAYSIA TO THE WORLD COURT AND INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT FOR CRIMES AGAINST IT'S OWN ETHNIC MINORITY INDIANS.

We refer to the above critical matters in Malaysia but which generally gets the least attention locally even by the Opposition parties, NGO's, the Malaysian Human Rights Commission and the media for this community is generally regarded as politically insignificant, do not draw local or international funding and are deemed not pressworthy. To the contrary the Malaysian government has successfully projected itself to the world as a modern Islamic thinking country which is not true.

The ethnic minority Indians in Malaysia were brought in to Malaysia by the British some 200 over years ago. Since independence in 1957 the Malaysian Indians have been permanently colonialised by the Islamic fundamentalist and Malay chauvinists UMNO led Malaysian government.

Among the recent atrocities committed by this government are as follows:-

1.100 over Indians were slashed and killed by the UMNO controlled Malaysian government in the Kampung Medan mini genocide. Despite numerous appeals, the Malaysian Human Rights Commission has refused to hold a Public Inquiry. The UMNO controlled Malaysian courts struck off a victim's public interest civil suit for a Public

Inquiry to be held without even the said UMNO controlled government having to file in their defence. The UMNO controlled Attorney General and the Inspector General of Police refused to investigate and / or initiate an inquest into the death of at least six Indians in this tragedy despite.

2. Every week one person at average is killed in a shot to kill policy and in every 2 weeks one person is killed in police custody. About 60% of these victims are Indians though they form only 8% of the Malaysian population.

3. In every three weeks one Hindu temple is demolished in Malaysia.

The latest being the demolishment of the Mariaman temple in Padang Jawa, Shah Alam, Selangor early this morning (15.11.2007) and the next being the (Mutaiya) Hindu temple in Sungai Petani scheduled for the 29.11.2007.

A violent armed pre down attack at 4.00a.m this morning was launched by the UMNO controlled Malaysian government backed by about 600 police, riot police, Islamic extremist and armed terrorists which completely destroyed this temple.

In an attack two weeks ago, uniformed police, riot police and city Council officers hurled rocks and attacked unarmed Hindu devotees with knives, sticks and iron rods.

At least 20 Hindu devotees were seriously injured and 19 arrested including 4 of their United Kingdom trained lawyers in direct violation of Article 5 (Right to life) Article 8 (Equality) Article 11 (Freedom of Religion) Section 295 (defiling a place of worship), Section 296 (disturbing a religious assembly), 298A(causing racial disharmony) and Section 441(criminal trespass) of the Malaysian Penal Code.

These authorities are plagued by an above the law mindset and in fact liberally take the law into their own hands. These atrocities however does not happen to almost all Islamic places of worship. Please visit www.policewatchmala ysia.com for further and better particulars.

4. State sponsored direct discrimination against the Indians in Public University intakes, Indian (Tamil) Schools, skills training institutes, civil service and private sector job opportunities, business and license opportunities and in almost all other aspects of daily life.

Despite our hundreds of letters, appeals and pleas to the Malaysian King and Sultans, the Prime Minister, Attorney General, Inspector General of Police, Ministers, Chief Ministers and the latest being our letters to the Prime Minister dated 29.10.2007 and 30.10.2007 and to the Attorney General dated 1.11.2007 the Malaysian authorities are only proceeding with greater ferocity and with impunity with very little regard for the Federal Constitution and laws of Malaysia. So please help us.

CONCLUSION

We fear that this peace loving Indian community of Tamil origin having been pushed to the corner and the persecution getting worse by the day may be forced to into terrorism in a matter of time as what has happened to the Sri Lankan Tamils.

APPEAL

On our part we are committed to a peaceful and lawful struggle and pray and appeal that the Government of the United Kingdom:-

1. Moves an emergency United Nations resolution condemning these state sponsored atrocities and persecutions of Malaysian Indians in Malaysia.

2. Refers Malaysia to the World Court and the International Criminal Court for Crimes against it's own ethnic minority Indians

Thank You,

Yours Faithfully

P.Uthayakumar
Legal Adviser

Source:
Nooryahaya. (December, 2007). Hindraf letter to Gordon Brown. Retrieved November 18, 2009 from http://nooryahaya.blogspot.com/2007/12/hindraf-letter-to-gordon-brown-british.html.

Appendix D

Number and Percentage Distribution of Malaysian Indians
by sub-groups and religion, 2000

Group	Indian Tamil	1,396,480 [87.6]
	Malayali	35,809 [2.25]
	Telegu	38,993 [2.45]
	Sri Lankan Tamil	8,735[0.55]
	Sikhs	33,231[2.09]
	Other Punjabi	23,147[1.45]
	Sinhalese	1,641[0.10]
	Other Indian	41,477[2.60]
	Pakistani	11,313[0.71]
	Bangladesh	2,951[0.19]
Religion	Hinduism	1,412,686[84.10]
	Christianity	130,408[7.70]
	Islam	69,043[4.10]
	Buddhism	20,144[1.20]
	Confucian/Taoist	1,244[1.20]
	Tribal/Folk	35,632[2.10]
	Others	100,053[0.59]
	Unknown/No Religion	10,053 [0.59]

Source: Department of Statistic, 2000 (cited in Appudurai & Dass, 2008)

Appendix E

Online Petition

HINDU RIGHTS ACTION FORCE (HINDRAF)

Suite 8-9-7(A) Menara Mutiara Bangsar, Jalan Liku, Off Jalan Riong, Bangsar, 59199. Kuala Lumpur. Tel: 03-22825241. Fax: 03-22825616

I the undersigned support the Civil Action No. HQ07X02977 filed on my behalf at the Royal Courts of Justice, London on 30th. Aug. 2007 and appeal to Her Royal Highness, The Queen of England, to appoint Her Queens Counsel to represent the poor, oppressed, suppressed and permanently colonized Malaysian

Indians in the above suit. No	Full Name	NRIC No.	Address	Tel. No.	Signature
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					

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