

A Descriptive Study of Blogging by the Mizo

Lalremruati Khiangte*

R.N. Mishra**

Abstract

The present paper focuses on the Mizo bloggers and their society and on the ways in which Mizo bloggers view the society through blogging. The article briefly analyzes them and their demographic background such as gender, educational qualification, languages used in blogging, the kinds of topics covered in the blogs, participation and impact of communication in Mizoram. The study also summarizes that blogs are significantly utilized by the educated Mizo bloggers to air their voices without fear and to write about issues neglected and forgotten by the mainstream media.

Keywords: Mizo blogs, Mizo bloggers, Participation and communication, Main stream media

Introduction

The advent of digital technology and internet in the twenty-first century witnessed dramatic changes in the societal life and has created a positive impact on the societies. It has made it easy and convenient for the people to create their own content in various forms such as images, words, audio and video which can be in-housed through blog. This is primarily intended to share their own resources, personal things to a specific and identified group of individuals or public in general, those who could be reached on Internet. Mention may be made that, only 10 years before, it was technical people who were capable of creating their own contents and

maintaining their own websites. This however, has been done away with due to proliferation of digital technologies and literacy among the people. The emergence of free blogs service providers, various forms of self-presentations and autobiographical writings have redefined the form of social media among the young groups in the society.

Oreoluwa Somolu (2007) in her article explored how African women have embraced the blogging phenomenon and how blogs can be used to promote women's equality and empowerment. One of the reasons frequently cited for a lack of interest by African women in information and communications

* Lalremruati Khiangte is Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Mizoram University, Aizawl- 796004, Email: gkhiangte@gmail.com

**Prof. R.N. Mishra is Head of Department of Library & Information Science, Mizoram University, Aizawl- 796004, Email: rabinarayan_mishra@rediffmail.com

technologies (ICTs) is the lack of content available that is relevant to their needs. Blogging provides a way for these women to become active creators and disseminators of knowledge, writing about what is important to them. The author stressed the importance of identity in the study of blogs and bloggers. Andreas Kitzmann (2003) viewed that blogs represent the emergence of the “modern individual self,” a claim that is also made with regard to the literary genre of autobiography. This represents the diary as ‘a place or medium in which the self is at the centre of all meaning—the place from which the world is examined, interpreted, and remembered.’ Some bloggers find this very aspect of ‘broadcasting one’s private life’ as ‘powerful.’ There are awards for best writer, best design, and best new journal. This is perhaps the ‘most extreme example’ of wanting to be ‘mediatised.’ Adam Reed (2005) suggested the ability of individuals to produce texts free and easily on their weblog without the permission of an editor or publisher, who may transform journalism and thus, democratise the current mainstream media environment.

Dan Li B.A. (2005) in his thesis explored the patterns of blogging, blogging motivations, and the roles of motivations as well as demographics as predictors for blogging behaviours. He stated that there is a transition of people from being traditional message consumers to message producers. Names of influential bloggers start to show up on news stories and be mentioned by news anchors. He also

observed that bloggers have complete control over content and form and that the only drawbacks are information technology and imagination. The Internet combines the mass communication and interpersonal communication in a single channel—Internet allows users to obtain information and respond to it in the form of feedback. This promotes audience activity to a higher level. This reversal of roles of Internet user as “author” as well as “audience” opens up new avenues of research.

Significance and Scope of the Study

Blogging as social media is extensively used by corporate and business organisation and are gaining momentum in present days. As the popularity of blogging is on the rise, blogs can become a great participatory tool for communication especially in today’s information society. In particular, blogs provide arenas for discussion, dissent, and debate, which precipitate to knowledge, and a feeling of empowerment that is critical for social transformation and development (Susan C. Herring, et al. 2004).

According to a country wide report published in 2012 by Open Society Foundations, the two of the top 10 social media sites in India, as of 13 July 2011, are Blogspot, Wordpress.com and Wordpress.org which are all blog platforms. Blogspot has a total of 31,764,272 users in India. Wordpress.com has 8,743,508 and Wordpress.org has a total of 2,540,195 Internet users (Mapping Digital Media, 2012).

It is widespread and even reaches remote places such as the North East of India and consequently Mizoram where the native people are known as the Mizos. Blogging started becoming popular among the Mizos (mostly Non Resident Mizos) from around 2004. According to a blog directory made by Kima, a Mizo blogger who has more than 60,000 visitors since Dec, 2004, has more than 300 members registered. There is no doubt that there are 50 or more which are not registered in the particular directory with new blogs being created every day. This global phenomenon has also impacted the small state of Mizoram with a population of 10.97 lakhs (2011 Census).

Objectives and Methodology

There is an obvious need to pay closer attention to the trend of blogging and its impact on Mizo society as a whole and particularly on the youth and what it means to the communication process. Mention may be made that, on a worldwide scale, Technorati (2007), the most notable blog Internet search engine, tracks 70 million blogs, and records the creation of 120,000 new blogs internationally every day. The significance of the study lies with the fact that, Mizo bloggers are commendably active, especially in the ICT environment among the youth, in information exchange, sharing of personal data, and literature among others, through blogging.

This study employed the survey method. A structured questionnaire relating to the study was distributed to

target a population of 252 Mizo bloggers which is 75% out of the total number of 336 registered bloggers as on April 16, 2014, in the *Facebook* directory called Mizo Bloggers, residing both within and outside Mizoram, so as to make the study more transparent. A total of 177 bloggers responded to the questionnaire based on which findings have been derived. The main objective of this study is to find out the demographic background of Mizo bloggers and the kinds of topics these blogs deal in.

Results and Discussion

Overview of Media in Mizoram

Mizoram (21,087 sq. km.) is to one of the north eastern states of India. The main form of media includes print (local newspapers and magazines), audio (radio), visual (local cable networks) and the internet. The media language is predominantly Mizo. The internet is the most recent form of media in Mizoram. Its reach is still limited to the urban population. For instance, Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram set up the first cyber café “Sparkle” in November, 2000. Today, there are cyber cafés in almost all the localities in Aizawl. There are 26 community information centres run by the state government in Mizoram. These centres are equipped with internet facilities. BSNL is the main provider of internet, telecom and mobile connection. It has given out approximately 33265 broadband Internet connections till 2012 (Economic Survey Mizoram 2012-2013).

There has been an emerging trend in the state where local newspapers and magazines have started to employ the internet to post their online journals. The reason behind the trend may be to expand the readership to the cognate tribes living outside Mizoram. There are numerous Mizo websites that are registered online from Mizoram. At the same time, there are websites published by non-resident Mizos (NRM). Their purpose may be to keep in touch with the issues concerning with their native place. In this process, blogging started becoming popular among

the Mizo cyber community from around 2004. It is not possible to say who the first Mizo blogger was because there are so many Mizos worldwide whom we do not know about. It is similar to having an email account. It would be virtually impossible to know who the first Mizo person was to open up an email account.

An online structured questionnaire was developed with the help of Google Docs, free Google software for creating online survey. The study finds that there are 119 male bloggers and 58 female bloggers from the total 177 respondents (Table 1.1)

Table 1.1: Mizo Bloggers: Gender

Sl.No.	Gender	Respondents	Percent
1	Male Bloggers	119	67
2	Female Bloggers	58	33
	Total	177	

Source: Primary data

The Mizo bloggers come from diverse socio-economic background ranging from students, teachers, government employees, bureaucrats, research scholars, mothers, fathers, priests, missionaries, freelance writers, journalists and so on. The educational qualifications of the Mizo bloggers are

that 32% of them have college degree, 62% of them, master's/professional degree and 6% of them have Ph.D as well (Table 1.2). We also find that 44% of the bloggers are either working or studying outside Mizoram while 48% of them are based in Mizoram and 8% are from outside India itself (Table 1.3).

Table 1.2: Educational Levels of Bloggers

Sl.No	Occupation	No. of bloggers	Percent
1	Elementary	0	0
2	High school	0	0
3	College	57	32
4	Master/Professional degree	110	62
5	Ph.D	10	6

Source: Primary data

Table 1.3: Location of Bloggers

Sl.No	Location	No. of bloggers	Percent
1	Mizoram	85	48
2	Outside Mizoram, In India	78	44
3	Outside India	14	8

Source: Primary data

The lingua franca plays an important role in deciding the blogs' reach and popularity. The most prominent languages used in Mizoram blogs are English and Mizo. Other Mizo dialects such as Mara, Paite, Lai, and Hmar are also used. According to the information gathered from the bloggers, 34% of the

respondents blog in Mizo, 49% of them blog in English and 14% of them blog both in Mizo and English, and only 3% of them blog in other dialects. Most of them blog in the English language because they feel it reaches wider audiences since their readers come from different parts of the world.

Table 1.4: Languages used by Mizo Bloggers

Sl.No.	Language used	No. of bloggers	Percent
1	Solely Mizo	60	34
2	Solely English	87	49
3	Combination of Mizo and English	25	14
4	Other	5	3

Source: Primary data

Table 1.5 gives a detailed frequency distribution of Mizo bloggers blogging on specific topics. The topics include entertainment, interest/hobbies, family/friends, sports, education/

academics, business, religion/spirituality, politics/politicians, technology/science, arts/culture, humour, creative work, personal experience and other topics.

Table 1.5: Topics of Mizo Blogs

Sl. No.	Frequency of blogging on topics	Percentage of bloggers on each topic									
		Very often	%	Often	%	Sometimes	%	Rarely	%	Never	%
1	Entertainment	4	2	40	23	52	29	50	28	31	18
2	Interest/hobbies	48	27	54	31	35	20	16	9	24	13
3	Family/friends	6	3	27	16	50	28	43	24	51	29
4	Sports	10	6	10	6	27	15	46	26	84	47

5	Education/academics	28	15	30	17	40	23	37	21	42	24
6	Business	-	1	3	2	7	3	72	41	95	53
7	Religion/spirituality	14	9	59	34	44	25	12	8	43	24
8	Politics/politician	-		13	7	24	14	37	21	103	58
9	Technology/science	15	9	22	12	43	24	47	27	50	28
10	Arts/culture	25	13	72	41	39	22	24	14	17	10
11	Humour	30	17	41	23	55	31	30	17	21	12
12	Creative work	63	35	54	31	23	13	18	10	19	11
13	Personal experience	83	47	48	27	35	20	2	1	9	5
14	Other	23	13	50	28	56	31	31	18	17	10

Source: Primary data

Content of Mizo Blogs

Bloggng is a way of self-expression, giving opinions on any issues regarding the culture, tradition or political scams, among others. As far as content is concerned, the Mizo community blogs on various topics ranging from politics to social issues, state news to national news, academic research papers to special articles, personal diaries and anything else under the sun. For instance, aduhiblogspot.com, yourpurplepeopleeater.blogspot.com, apatea.blogspot.com, zothlifim.blogspot.com, nohiddendepths.blogspot.com, butterflyeve.blogspot.com are based on personal diaries, opinion and life experiences. The other blogs such as minhnemtublogspot.com, johnnytlau.blogspot.com and engkim.blogspot.com deal mostly with computer technology and popular music. Misual.com and lawrkhawm.com are blog-based community websites that publish current news contributed by readers. Mizohican.blogspot.com,

azialo.blogspot.com and thangtharculture.blogspot.com are high profile blogs which post current issues on social, political and economic topics. There are also people who blog randomly on any current issues which may include politics, sex, sting operations, jokes, photography, poetry, cooking recipes and so on.

Based on content, we can divide them into people who write Mizo centric posts, general posts, issue-based topics and personal diaries and so on. Kima is a 10,000th *technorati*¹ blogger, which means he is in the top 10,000 websites in the entire world, and is the only Mizo there who is also a Google Page Rank 3 holder. Recently, misual.com too graduated to Google page rank 3. Not many Mizo sites are page ranked 3. Kima or Sandman, as he is known in the blog world, claims that the reason why he has such a high ranking is because he has a worldwide audience. And the reason why he has a large international audience is because he writes different types of posts. He writes Mizo centric posts for his Mizo readers, Indian

centric articles for his non-Mizo friends, global general topics for his International friends and so on. Simply put, he writes based on his audience demography. He adds, “If I had stuck to just one category, there would be no way I would have reached such a rank”. If you carefully go through his past few posts, you will see that a group of people

commenting at a particular post will not be commenting at another post, they will be replaced by a different group. Many of the blogs are personal, “what’s on my mind” type musings. Others are collaborative efforts based on a specific topic or area of mutual interest. Some blogs are for play. Some are for work. Some are both.

Table 1.6: Types of Mizo Blog Readers

Sl.No.	Readers	No. of bloggers	Percentage %
1	Myself	45	25
2	Family	10	6
3	Friends	25	14
4	Colleagues	10	6
5	Internet acquaintance	21	12
6	General Public	66	37
7	Other	0	0

Source: Primary data

From Table 1.6, we can find out that the readers of Mizo blogs come from all hues of people. When asked who their readers are, 37 % of the bloggers responded that their readers are from the general public which means anyone can read and their contents are not necessarily designed for a particular audience. 25% of the bloggers themselves also admit to reading their own content, 14 % of their readers are friends, 6% of them are colleagues, 6% are family and the remaining 12% are the internet acquaintances.

Participation

An attractive feature of blogging is the ability to post comments which are published on the web. This feature

enables direct audience participation. The audience can participate by debating. Lawrkhawm.com is a Mizo community based website which entirely runs on the support of the readers. The readers contribute, vote and publish the news. In this way, the readers do agenda setting and gate keeping. According to the administrator Jimmy, lawrkhawm.com is the first user driven content web site from Mizoram. All the contents on this site are voted by the community (users). Users choose and vote what content or post should be published on the front page. “In short, this site is about democracy” says Jimmy. Comments are what make blogs different from a web site.

The opportunity to interact and converse with the creator of a web site and with other readers is almost unique to blogs. Visitors to a blog can leave a comment on each post. Sometimes, visitors comment in response to what they read; sometimes, the message is a suggestion or question. Because any reader can leave a comment, comments are even left about other comments. Not every blog allows comments. Many popular bloggers find that they're overwhelmed by the sheer volume of responses they get and must turn off comments because they can't keep up with them. For most bloggers, comments are an important way of developing a dialogue with readers. There have always been complaints of misconception, misrepresentation or even lack of representation of Mizo people or Mizoram itself in the mainstream media and the interaction between bloggers and their readers from across the world make it more transparent and clear whatever seems ambiguous. Mizo bloggers telling their own stories in the alternate media space using blogs is a great way of giving more coverage to the Mizo stories that need to be told. One blogger stated, "I have always been disappointed by the lack of coverage of news and stories of the Mizo people, but I've realized that only we ourselves will be able to give a fair coverage of content from this part of the world".

Impact on Communication

Many of the newspapers and magazines in Mizoram depend on blogs as their source for their news and articles. For instance, *Aizawl Post*, one of the leading

newspapers in the state, features news contents from blogs such as *Misual.com* and *Lawrkhawm.com*. There are various other newspapers and magazines which take news and articles from other Mizo blogs. Unfortunately, sometimes there is a problem of giving due credit to the original source.

Blogging helps an individual on his/her writing skills and makes him/her become critical on his/her views. It also helps maintain a healthy debate that may enrich a person's view on certain issues of importance. Often as a response to media bias (across the political spectrum), they will mainly be commenting on the news, giving closer analysis to issues they feel have been misrepresented or glossed over by mainstream news. Further, Mizoblogs help in shaping the perception of Mizo among non-Mizos giving a different perspective from a different lens, perhaps more genuine and honest, which the mainstream media fail to represent in most cases. There is a sense of seriousness and honesty in such blog posts which is highly inviting for readers who are looking for more honest representations of an individual, society or culture.

Conclusions

Blogging is an emerging media and is gaining popularity among the Mizos. In the present scenario, when it comes to the impact, blogs are becoming more and more useful for Mizos outside Mizoram. Blogging acts as one of the cohesive factors binding together all the tribes under the Mizo umbrella, where the Diaspora use it as means to keep in touch with home. It enables people from all over the

globe to participate in Mizo society. It creates a new world and space where people interact, share and discuss on all topics of their interests. Easy accessibility of internet among the non-resident Mizos has provided a new space that also allows a new level of interaction. Most of the content in Mizo blogs is 'Mizo-centric' above any other issues. This clearly shows that most Mizo bloggers want to link to the state of Mizoram through their blogs. It strengthens citizen participation in media as some popular media of Mizoram turn their attention to Mizo bloggers. Finally, many non-resident Mizo bloggers can take part in the developmental process of Mizoram through their blogging. The study also recapitulates that blogs are significantly utilized by the educated Mizo bloggers to air their voices without fear and to write about issues neglected or possibly forgotten by the mainstream media, and it is a true digitised democracy.

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