

## WHY WE BLOG? THE MALAYSIAN TRAVEL BLOGGER AND TOURIST PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** *Travel blogs as research data have been widely used in the tourism context. Acknowledging the growth of travel blogs and blogs application in tourism, there is a need to understand the blogging motivation, which in also could shed some light of blogosphere behaviour. This study therefore, aims to investigate the travel bloggers behaviour and motivation that influence their engagement with travel blogs. Through in-depth interviews with 19 Malaysian travel bloggers this study shows that tourists bloggers had four main motivation that influence their motivation for creating and keeping travel blogs. This study accesses the demographic of travel blogs creators, blogging behaviour and the motivation for creating and keeping travel blogs. This study uncovers four main motivations namely altruistic, personal, hedonic and social motivation. Superficially, this study highlights that travel blogs are more than just a means of gathering information and sharing the tourist experience. Travel bloggers engage with travel blogs for entertainment and to communicate with the readers, to express their self-identity and also for social networking. Implications for future research is suggested.*

**Keywords:** *Travel Blog, Motivation, Blogging Behaviour, Uses and Gratification, Malaysian Bloggers*

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### Introduction

Blogging, an activity where a person creates online content about any issue, is one of the most increasingly popular forms of social media. It allows readers to instantly give their views on any issues raised by the original blogger (Thevenot, 2007). Blogs, like other online Word of Mouth (WoM), share the same traits as traditional WoM communication. Blogs are also usually considered to be unbiased and reliable (Mack, Blose & Pan; Mauri & Minazzi, 2013). Blogs, therefore, are widely acknowledged as an alternative medium to other traditional communication media and have gained popularity among internet users. In addition, blogs are

increasingly becoming an accepted information source; according to a 2013 Technorati Media Digital Influence Report, blogs are the third most prominent digital resource in terms of overall purchase decisions, after retail websites and brand websites. Also, the report revealed that blogs rank among the top five 'most trustworthy' sources, and are more influential in shaping purchase decisions than Twitter and Facebook (Technorati, 2013).

A common understanding among researchers is that a blogger engages within the blogosphere to gratify their information needs – their need to gather and disseminate information (Liu, Liao & Zhen, 2007). Researchers noted blogging is a multi-motivational activity (Bosangit, 2012; Nardi et al., 2004). Huang et al. (2007) proposed a research model that demonstrates that blogging behaviour and motivation are related to each other. The model identifies two blogging behaviours: interaction-oriented and information-oriented. Interaction-oriented behaviour is associated with self-expression, life-documenting and providing comments on other blogs, whereas information-oriented behaviour is related to commenting on other blogs, information searching and forum participation.

Despite the increased research interest in the blogging phenomena within the travel and tourism context, there are some critical gaps in the way the phenomenon has been approached to date. First, there are abundant of studies that focussed on motivation of engagement of the other types of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and personal blog (Chen, 2011; Johnson & Young, 2009; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). Also, although there are many previous studies done in blog context, most of them merely focussed on personal blogs and little work has been done on travel blogs. Acknowledging the growth of travel blogs and blogs application in tourism, there is a need to understand the blogging motivation, which in also could shed some light of blogosphere behaviour. Second, to date, past studies on blogging motivation are done in the western context. Little work has been carried out beyond the western culture. Instead of conducting a cross-population study, this research only focuses on the Malaysian population. The reason why it is important to focus on a single population is that the blogging behaviour and travel blog engagement varies largely from culture to culture. Hence, it is more logical to understand the blogging behaviour and motivations within a single population. The primary reason for exploring Malaysian travel bloggers is due to the recent growth of population in terms of internet and social media usage. Malaysians are considered to be one of the most tech-savvy nations in Asia, as their internet penetration is particularly high compared to other Asian markets (just behind China, Korea and Japan) (Internetworldstats, 2013). In addition, a survey report published by the Nielsen Company in 2009 on Malaysian media consumption stated that Malaysia was in the top ten in the world for media consumption (Nielsen, 2009). The survey reveals that Malaysians are sophisticated users of the internet and consume a broad range of technologies, including entertainment, music, video games, and other digital media. Furthermore, the Malaysian blogosphere has emerged steadily in parallel with these technological advancements, as Malaysia ranked 14th in the world in terms of numbers of bloggers, representing 1.7% of all bloggers (Sysomos Inc, 2010). Therefore, acknowledging the blogging phenomena, this paper aims to investigate the motivations for creating travel blogs, and further shed some light of their reason for maintaining blogs and understand their blogging behaviour.

## Literature Review

### *Blogging Motivation (Uses and Gratification Perspectives)*

Since the introduction of the uses and gratification (hereafter U&G) framework to communication research, nearly all media, including traditional and internet-based media, have been studied under this lens. Understanding the functions and gratifications provided by media helps to clarify the interaction between media and the audience. The U&G approach is a paradigm which is used in mass communications research to guide the exploration of people's motivations for media usage (Blumler & Katz, 1974). Rubin (1993) further highlights that the audience's activities are central to U&G research and discovering communication motives. The main objective of a U&G investigation is to clarify how people use certain media to fulfil their needs. Its aim is to understand the motive for media engagement and to identify the consequences of the needs, motives and behaviours (Katz et al. 1974).

Prior to the rise of internet and communication technology research in academia, the U&G approach had been used to understand the motivation of traditional media use, such as television (Conway & Rubin, 1991; Palmgreen, Wenner & Rayburn, 1980; Rubin, 1979), radio (Herzog, 1940), and newspapers (Elliott & Rosenberg, 1987). Rubin (1983) classified television consumption motives into instrumental and ritualised motives, which are broadly used in existing U&G research. Instrumental motive is used to fulfil informational needs which are goal-directed, while ritualised motive is used to gratify diversionary needs which are more or less routine media use. Also, audiences with instrumental motives are characterised as more selective audiences.

With the growth of new technology, research has been extended to include numerous other new media, including social media. Ruggiero (2000) proposed U&G as a progressive approach to research the future direction of mass communication, including new media that is related to internet technologies. The U&G perspective has been suggested as an appropriate framework that can be used to understand social media and the internet as it not only addresses the consequences of media consumption, but also the engagement motivation (Shao, 2009). This approach has been used to understand perceived motivations through content analysis and actual motivations through survey and interviews (Kaye & Johnson; 2000; Papacharissi, 2000, 2004; Tremmell, 2004; Whitting & Williams, 2013). Hence, the U&G approach has been widely employed in research on the internet (Newhagen & Rafaeli, 1996; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Stafford, Stafford & Schkade, 2004). It has also been applied to social networking sites, such as Facebook (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009), Twitter (Chen, 2011; Johnson & Young, 2009) and blogging (Chung & Kim, 2008; Hollenbaugh, 2010; Kaye, 2005).

With regard to internet use, the U&G approach has been employed in research which has examined user motivations. Research has explored why people connect to the internet and concluded the following: to fulfil entertainment needs and seek out enjoyment, fun and pleasure; to fulfil information seeking needs, where they seek out information or self-educate; to fulfil social interaction needs, where they connect, communicate and meet people with similar interests; or to pass the time, where the internet is used to occupy themselves and relieve boredom (Kaye, 1998; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Stafford et al., 2004).

Park et al. (2009) conducted research into social networking sites and found that engagement with Facebook was found to be motivated by the need to socialise and establish self-status, and to seek out entertainment and information. Using college students as participants, their study found that Facebook was used to fulfil socialising needs by meeting and talking with others, and also to gain support within the same interest group of users. Entertainment gratification refers to engagement to satisfy amusement and leisure purposes, in which the participants perceived the engagement as fun and exciting. The students were also likely to engage with Facebook for reasons associated with seeking and preserving their personal status within the online environment, for example looking cool by engaging with Facebook. Finally, as for information needs, the students engaged in Facebook to learn and gain information about specific issues.

Acknowledging Twitter as a medium for communication, Chen (2011) conducted a study to investigate how Twitter is used to gratify the social connection needs. An online survey targeting people who actively use the internet and Twitter at the same time reveals that the longer a person spends on Twitter, the more they gratify their social connection needs. Chen (2011) further explains that spending time posting and replying to others on Twitter is also an important way for people to gratify the social connection needs. Additionally, Chen (2011) further explains that spending time posting and replying to others mediates the relationship between Twitter usage and gratifying such needs. Further, using the U&G approach, Stock, Rohrmeier, and Hess (2007), investigate the motivation of blog engagement by comparing two different blog users: webbloggers and videobloggers. The findings from the survey and interviews with the bloggers indicates that videobloggers and webbloggers differ in their motivation for producing content; videobloggers are motivated by fun and passing the time, while webbloggers' motivations are associated with information dissemination. Based on the above review, therefore, the U&G approach is considered an appropriate framework for studying blogs, because it asks what active audiences do with media, rather than what media does for/to audiences (Swanson, 1979).

Although U&G theory is prolific in communication studies and has been applied to different types of social media, including blogs, to date, little research has specifically examined the motivation of travel blogs through the U&G perspective. Previous studies into blogging motivation using the U&G lens have merely focused on the other types of blogs, such as personal blogs. For example, Li (2005) investigated blogging motivation by conducting a survey on American personal bloggers. Seven motivations emerged: self-documentation, improving writing, self-expression, medium appeal, information, passing time and socialisation. Bloggers are motivated to write blogs to keep track of and to document their life. The study also found that blogging is used to improve writing – it provides users a site to refine and practice their writing. Bloggers are also likely to express themselves, as they want to show their personality to others. Furthermore, bloggers blog to express themselves, and they feel comfortable doing so in a blog, as compared to other mediums. Medium appeal refers to bloggers who are motivated to engage more with blogs as compared to other mediums, due to the convenience and cost effectiveness of publishing an opinion. Bloggers are also motivated to write blogs to provide and share interesting information with others. Furthermore, bloggers blog to fulfil entertainment needs, for fun and to simply do what they love. Bloggers are also motivated to do so simply to pass the time, as they have nothing better to do. Finally, through blogging, users fulfil their need to socialise, connect with family and friends, and meet new people.

Results of a survey of readers of political blogs conducted by Kaye (2005) identified six motivations for accessing political blogs, namely: information seeking and media checking, convenience, personal fulfilment, political surveillance, social surveillance, and expression and affiliation. These blogs' readers were actively searching for information and at the same time comparing this information with the traditional media. Readers access blogs because of convenience; readers are able to access information more quickly using different technologies and read it at a time that suits them. Personal fulfilment refers to gathering information to use to discuss with others, and to fulfil certain needs such as entertainment and relaxation. Readers also read blogs for political surveillance, and for the purpose of keeping up-to-date about the political environment. Social surveillance refers to readers' interest in learning others' opinion on various issues, and finally, they are motivated to express personal viewpoints and interact with people who hold the same interests and beliefs.

## **Research Method**

### ***Research Design and Data Collection***

A qualitative research approach enables a richer understanding of the underlying components of a tourist's expectations and experiences and the meanings assigned to their travel experiences (Banyai, 2009, 2012; Jeurig & Peters, 2013; Volo, 2010), much more than a quantitative approach could. In the social media field, particularly in the travel blog context, tourism researchers recognise that qualitative research has been shown to be more effective than quantitative research in understanding a specific phenomenon (Carson et al., 2001; Chandralal, Rindfleish, & Valenzuela, 2014; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2008; Tse & Zhang, 2013; Volo, 2010). As such, the qualitative approach is a more appropriate method for understanding the motivation of creating and keeping blogs, thus shed some lights of their blogging behaviour.

The article is part of a broader study investigating the tourist experience construction in travel blogs context. The data came from 19 travel bloggers which are the creators of travel blogs. The travel blogs selected for the research were found through blog-specific search engines such as [www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com), Google blog search, and IceRocket, using the following search keywords: 'Malaysia', 'travel' and 'blog'. The use of search engines is an acknowledged technique in travel blog research (Banyai, 2009; Bosangit et al., 2009; Carson, 2008; Pan et al., 2007). The travel blogs found from these search engines were screened based on the following selection criteria: (1) the travel blogs were owned by Malaysian bloggers who were residing in Malaysia, (2) the travel blogs were solely about travel (not a mix of personal and travel), (3) the travel blogs were owned by the bloggers and not related to any tourism or marketing companies, (4) the language used was either English or Bahasa Melayu or a mixture of both. These four selection criteria were important as they represent the main features of blogging to be examined to answer the research questions. Travel blogs had to be free from any tourism companies' influence as that type has already been widely used as a sample in understanding the tourist experience in the travel blog context (see, for example, Bosangit et al., 2009; Bosangit 2012; Pan et al. 2007; Wenger, 2008). Only Malaysian travel blogs written in *Bahasa Melayu* and English were chosen, due to the researcher's familiarity with those languages. The selection of travel blogs written in a language familiar to the researcher has also been a criterion of past studies (see, for example, Bosangit, 2012; Mura, 2014; Volo, 2010).

Based on the selection criteria, 332 travel blogs were identified and the authors (travel bloggers) contacted. Out of 332 travel bloggers, 71 indicated their willingness to participate in this research. They were then screened further to fulfil these two criteria: (1) They had to have travelled and blogged within the last 12 months. This 12 month timeframe has been used in a number of studies (Fotis et al., 2011; Gretzel et al., 2011; Jani & Hwang, 2011) as it is thought that tourists still have a strong memory and attachment to that destination. Hence, the number of eligible travel bloggers was reduced to 41. (2) Their blogs had to contain multimedia (i.e. texts, photos and videos), or at least a combination of texts and photographs. This criterion brought down the sample to 32 travel bloggers.

The recruitment of participants ended when the theoretical saturation had been achieved. In order to confirm that saturation had been reached, the researcher employed a constant comparative method, in which data were collected and analysed contemporarily (Morrow, 2005). The researcher selects the first sample, analyses the data and then selects a following sample to cultivate the emerging categories. This process is reiterated until it reaches a point where no new insights would be gained from increasing the sample further (Ritchie, Lewis & Glam, 2003). For this reason, 19 participants were deemed suitable for this study.

### ***Data Analysis***

In the context of this research, interviews afforded the opportunity to capture the participant's behaviour, motivation to engage with travel blogs. Prior researchers have proposed various structures as the framework for qualitative data analysis. However, the majority of qualitative researchers agree on the categorising framework (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005), which involves taking steps to categorise the data into codes and themes to emerge a pattern. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The analysis was supported by the use of ATLAS.ti software. First, the interview transcript was carefully read to arrive at the initial understanding of the content. Second, relevant parts of the interview were highlighted and were given a code name. Third, codes were compared, revised or deleted and codes were grouped based on the thematic similarities. Forth, csodes were linked to create the themes. Finally, emergent themes were categorised and named. The utilisation of software in a qualitative data analysis is widely accepted (Forman & Damschroder, 2008) as it allows the researcher to observe links between the various data sources, i.e. the interview transcript, photo and audio files with memos, quotations and the literature. Qualitative software is considered to be a beneficial tool for data storage and retrieval (Esterberg, 2002).

### **Findings and Discussions**

Table 1 summarises travel blog usage, including the years of blogging, travel frequency in a year, frequency of blog usage, average number of posts and number of followers.

**Table 1: Participants' Usage of Blog**

No	Name of Participant	Years of blogging	Number of followers	Travel frequency in a year (trips)	Frequency of blog usage	Average number of posts per year
1	Adam	2	891	1-4	2-3 hours a day (mostly at work)	61-70
2	Amin	3	682	1-4	Everyday	21-30
3	Daniel	5	1,021	4-8	9 hours a day (mostly at work)	21-30
4	Mimi	3	617	4-8	Everyday	81-90
5	Farah	6	311	1-4	Everyday	21-30

<b>6</b>	Johan	3	603	4-8	Everyday	21-30
<b>7</b>	Mariah	8	216	1-4	Once in a while	Less than 10
<b>8</b>	Faris	6	2,461	4-8	2-3 hours a day (after work)	Less than 10
<b>9</b>	Ani	8	1,105	4-8	Everyday	31-40
<b>10</b>	Sarah	4	415	1-4	Everyday	21-30
<b>11</b>	Haries	6	926	4-8	All the time	31-40
<b>12</b>	Ramli	6	2,318	4-8	Everyday	31-40
<b>13</b>	Fasha	4	582	1-4	8 hours a day (mostly at work)	61-70
<b>14</b>	Fatimah	3	1,180	1-4	2-3 hours a day (after work)	61-70
<b>15</b>	Laili	4	741	4-8	Everyday	81-90
<b>16</b>	Maryam	2	300	4-8	2-3 hours a day (mostly at work)	31-40
<b>17</b>	Hazel	3	510	1-4	1-2 hours a day (mostly after work)	11-20
<b>18</b>	Kamal	6	338	1-4	1-2 hours a day (mostly at work)	31-40
<b>19</b>	Khairy	3	3,205	4-8	Everyday	81-90

Participants were asked to indicate their blogging experience. Eight participants reported that they had 5 to 10 years of blogging experience and three had 3 to 5 years of blogging experience. The remaining participants had a 1 to 3 years blogging experience. All participants except Mariah would read or interact with others' travel blogs on a daily basis, especially at work. Some of them would bookmark interesting blogs on their computers or mobile phones so that they could easily surf when they had the time. To them, travel blogs functioned in a similar way as travelling. It is about escaping, and reading blogs helps them to escape from the reality of their work life for a while. It was interesting to discover that those who spent more times on blogs were not essentially active creators of content. They might just merely browse others' blogs instead of posting their own content.

The number of followers for each participant ranged from 217 to 3,105. Mariah, who rarely posted own contents and interacted with others' blogs but maintained her own, had the least number of followers. Most of the participants expressed that they made an effort to increase the number of followers. Most of them promoted their blog by linking it through their personal social media account, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Blog have functions that enable bloggers to link easily with other types of social media. In addition, the participants joined the Malaysian blogging community in order to make their blogs well known and noticeable within the community.

The blogs selected for this study were specifically about travel; none of the participants blogged about personal matters. All of them blogged about their travel stories except for Daniel and Fasha. Other than blog about his travel stories, Daniel also blogged about current tourism promotions or campaigns, such as travel fare campaign and tourist festivals, such as Hot Air Balloon Fiesta. Fasha was the same as Daniel in that on top of blogging about travel, she also reviewed specific services, such as airlines, hotels and restaurants. Most of the posts were paid because they were specifically invited by the provider to experience and review their services. It is noted that this study excluded these kinds of posts as they are classified as biased because the bloggers are paid and directed by the service providers. In terms of travel frequency per year, 10 participants travelled between 4 and 8 times per year, which included

domestic and international travel. The rest of them travelled up to 4 times a year. This shows that the participants play a dual role – as active travellers and also travel bloggers.

The average number of posts per year was varied. Six of them posted more than 50 posts per year. This indicates that they are active travel bloggers. It was interesting to discover that the frequency of travel within a year did not influence the number of posts. For example, even though Faris travelled more frequently (4 to 8 trips per year), he posted fewer blogs than others who had travelled the same amount. This indicated that he was a frequent tourist but did not frequently post his travel stories. This is possibly because he also actively posts on the other social media, such as Instagram and Facebook. Blogging for him is not a major social media outlet to share his travel stories. Most of the participants posted on average between 20 and 30 posts per year. Fasha for example, travelled only 1 to 4 times per year, but she had a greater numbers of posts compared to participants who had travelled more than her, such as Haris and Ramli. This is due to the fact that she also does hotel, restaurant and food reviews. It was also found that participants who travelled more had a lower number of posts compared to those who travelled less, for example Daniel, Johan, Maryam and Haris. Adam, Fasha and Fatimah, posted more than 60 times even though they travelled less compared to others. This is because for each trip they travelled to a few different cities and usually took longer trips. Thus, they had a lot more stories to tell. Therefore, it can be concluded that the number of travels the participant undertook per year did not influence the number of posts they created.

Participants were found to follow each other on blogs. This can be seen through the published list of blogs on their site. Also, they form a travel community and more than half of the participants were members of the community. Many of the members within that community meet in the real world through organised trips. Most of the participants also “know each other”. Many of them have met each other personally and some “are virtual friends”. Most of them had met at the bloggers and tourism events organised by many organisations, such as NGOs and travel and tourism agents. In terms of interaction within the blogosphere, they interacted through open communication, for example via the comments sections.

## **Motivations for Creating and Keeping Travel Blogs**

### ***Altruistic Motivations***

The first theme that emerged from the data was motivation related to altruism behaviours. These altruistic behaviours included their intention to educate, inspire and help others. Prior research indicates that individuals participate in blogs because they are driven to give knowledge and enjoy helping each other (Hsu & Lin, 2008).

### ***Educate Others***

Participants created blogs as a platform to educate others. For this reason, some participants specifically created blogs focussing on certain issues and some of them even highlighted their travel style in their blog’s tagline. To some bloggers, their personal information on blogs also reflected their travel preferences, which what they wanted to point out to the readers. Also, they used blogs to help their readers to learn about travel by sharing specific travel information and encouraging the readers to develop an interest in travel and extend their travel experience. Haries, who started blogging six years ago, specifically used his blog to educate people about how to travel with a limited budget. As he was able to travel around the world regardless of his limited budget, he had a desire to convince, educate and influence



other people to also travel frugally. Therefore, he specifically revealed his ways and secrets to travelling despite financial constraints:

I personally do not have much money to travel. I want to tell people that not only high income people can travel around the world. So, I show them how to travel in a minimal ways, how to save cost during the travel and many more. So everyone can travel and enjoy life to the fullest. (Haries)

His desire to influence and educate people to travel despite financial constraints is expressed in the following statement. The intention to educate people is highlighted through mentioning what he usually shares with people. This indicates what's important to him and the main reason for him to blog. For him, blogging is an important medium to educate people as it portrays what happens in reality:

I share tips how to get free accommodation for example. How to get a free ride, many people afraid to do this in foreign countries, but I want to show people, travel is possible to everyone, as long as you have courage.. ..but you must know the tricks as well. See me first and then you will confident later (laugh) (Haries)

Participants also wrote blogs to provide examples and encourage readers to travel and extend their travel experience. Ani, who is a travel journalist, mentioned that her intention to blog was due to the fact that she wanted to educate people about the benefit and beauty of travelling. By sharing her experience through blogging, she was able educate people about the benefits gained, which included personal development and concern about each other's well-being:

I want people to realise that it is important to explore the world and learn different culture. From there we can appreciate each other and live in a more harmony without any prejudice. I never blog for money. Some do, but not for me. Satisfaction gained when people open their eyes of how travel can change you, change the way you see things, and appreciate things. (Ani)

She even made a point of saying that money is not her motivation to blog. This suggests that although she realised that she could generate income through blogging, she chose not to. Her statement suggests that it is common for bloggers to earn money and indicates that it could be the main blogging motivation for other travel bloggers that she knows. Her motivation was purely to educate and change people's attitudes through travel.

### ***Inspire Others***

Some participants expressed profound personal reasons for travel blogging, including the desire to inspire others to travel. For some, being an inspiration to others lead to a travel achievement and satisfaction. Thus, a travel blog became a place where they could fulfil their desire to inspire others. For example, Laili's considered her discovery and experience of a foreign country as an important achievement in her life. Through her blog, she wanted to show her travel achievement, and becoming an inspiration for others was an important desire for her to continue blogging:

I wish I can inspire others to travel. I want to show how blessed and fortune myself to travel to many places. Showing them the beauty of foreign culture, the uniqueness of amazing architecture, delicious authentic food and faces of friendly local regardless of

their colours and religion. I feel good when people can take something from my journey, and become an inspirational to others. (Laili)

Maryam, who travelled solo to many western countries, suggested how travelling as a passion led her to inspire others. Based on Maryam's statement, travel blogs have become reciprocal motivator. For the readers, reading and knowing there is a solo-female tourist who safely travels around the world can persuade them to follow and begin living their dreams. For Maryam as the travel blogger herself, the desire to inspire others is what motivates her to keep travelling and blogging. Also, in Maryam's case, she had specific ideas about who she wanted to dedicate her inspiration towards. The specific goal shows a countless wish and determination to motivate readers to travel:

You know, I am a single women traveller. By showing how a small women be so independent and travel to so many places I think, I inspired others...people said...waaa...your blog is really interesting, or you are such an inspiration really encourage me to travel more and continue to blog. (Maryam)

### ***Help Others***

Other than to educate and inspire others, participants also mentioned that the main reason for creating a blog was to help others. 'Help others' can be understand in two ways. Firstly, they wanted to give back what they had gained from blogging. In this sense, they specifically had target readers:

Generally, I want to serve the society, and specifically I want to give back what I gained from blogs. I want to share things that little people know, add existing knowledge and benefit others. (Ramli)

Secondly, they feel responsible for helping others who might need first-hand information, and helping others to avoid possible negative experience. Bloggers share their experiences to warn and help others (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). If they had faced challenging or negative experiences, through the blog they could help others avoid the same negative experience. Mimi's statement supports such a claim:

It is more to share my experience to people who might need them. I want to serve others, help people who seek for unbiased travel information. I write real and honest stories, so people can avoid bad things from happened to them. (Mimi)

### ***Personal Motivations***

Participants were also motivated to create and keep blogs for personal reasons, including to document their travels and to polish certain skills, such as writing and photography.

### ***Travel Documentation***

Almost all the participants mentioned that they blogged to document their travel. This motivation is the most mentioned in existing studies (Bosangit, 2012; Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Nardi et.al, 2004). Participants used blogs in the same way they would a travel diary, where they recorded all their travel experiences. The chronological order of blogs also allowed their travel experience to be organised. Mariah's statement below indicates that the main motivation for her to start blogging was to document her travel. Travel blogs therefore play an important part of her travel, where it provides a place for her to record and refer back to her travels.

I started to blog due to my passion in travel. For me, travel blogs is like my travel diary. I share everything...very details, from date, time, cost and pictures. Almost everything. I can look back and track my travel. (Mariah)

### ***To Polish Skills***

Enlightening certain skills and knowledge was repeatedly mentioned by participants as what motivated them to start blogging. Blogs were considered an open source where they could share their innovative ideas, including writing and photography. By putting this work on their blog, it could be accessed and judged by many people, which included the people they knew and other readers.

I love writing. Put my creative ideas into writing, and let people see what I have got (Sarah).

Also, their blog was a place where participants showed and shared with others their skills, as mentioned by Faris. Faris, who loves photography, used blogs to share his photography skills. This was also observed in his blog, where he posted more photos than text. For this reason, whilst travelling, Faris purposely seeks out unique moments and monuments to be captured. This indicates that he is enthusiastic about sharing his skill, and through blogging, he was able to both record his travel stories and at the same time share his creative ideas through photography:

Travel blog is like a place where I show my skills...I think I am good at photography skills. So when I travel, I spend time to capture good photo, unique moment. In addition to share travel stories, I put those pictures. I know many people like it (Faris)

For some participants, their travel blog was perceived as a place where they could focus on their interests. They simply stated that, through blogging, they could pursue their hobby of writing and travelling, as mentioned by one of the participants, Farah. Here, it is suggested that she was not concerned about her readers' perception. What she cared about most of all was fulfilling her hobbies and interests:

I am not sure, if there are many people out there read my blog, but since I love writing and at the same time I do travel a lot, I start blog and continue to blog until now (Farah).

### ***Hedonic Motivations***

The third motivation is hedonic where participants perceived the travel blog as a place that could provide entertainment to themselves and others.

### ***To Entertain Others and Oneself***

For some, travel blogging was part of their life in which they met and socialised with the followers and readers. The network environment of travel blogs gives people the opportunity to meet others and provides entertainment, where people can have fun through gaining and providing information. Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) suggest that people engage with travel blogs to seek enjoyment, entertainment and fun. To some extent, communication with the readers was an important source of entertainment to the participants, as mentioned by Khairy in the statement below. Sharing travel stories with others provided him with excitement and enjoyment, which indicates his main motivation for creating travel blogs:

I have fun when I share my travel stories with others. In fact, I see blogging is part of my life. Here, I can talk to people around the world, and it is an enjoyable thing to do. (Khairy)

Hedonic motivation also drove him to seriously engage with the readers, on top of merely sharing his travel stories. This suggests that travel blogs are an important part of his real life, where he can enjoy meeting and talking to his followers and readers.

You know, when you do things that you like, you will do it whole-heartedly. I always entertain my readers, my followers like real friends. Maybe people think I did it for traffic, but, honestly, I really enjoy myself in blog. It is like my home, welcome all the guests and serve them. (Khairy)

Similarly, Ani who among the participants had a high number of followers, noted that the process of sharing travel stories on the blogs gave her significant enjoyment. More than that, other activities she undertook in the blogosphere, including interaction with the readers, gave her excitement.

The process of writing my travel stories is enjoyable. To communicate with people around the globe is a pleasure (Ani).

### ***Social Motivations***

The fourth theme which emerged from the data was social motivation, which is the desire to stay connected to and retain relationship with people who share the same interests. They also maintained a blog because they wanted to connect with the public and maintain a relationship with their readers.

#### ***To connect with people who share the same interest***

Another important motivation which drove individuals to start blogging was to meet and mingle with people who shared the same interests. Amin, who used blog on a daily basis, mentioned that it was rather important for him to connect and know fellow travel bloggers because that drove him to actively travel and blog. In this regard, being connected to other bloggers allowed him to keep track with what was new in the travel environment. Also, by having a relationship with fellow bloggers, it created a notion of competition among them. By personally knowing other bloggers who had recently travelled to certain destinations, Amin felt more devoted to travel and in the end wanted to share it with everyone. Thus, the connection with other bloggers encouraged him to continue blogging:

It is nice where you participate in certain group where you can meet people, exchange knowledge. You know, sometimes, it becomes a healthy competition within the community. We tried our best to share interesting stories and put effort to travel (Amin).

Similarly, Fasha noted how important it was for her to create a blog in order to keep in touch with people that she followed. For her, social involvement with people with the same interests gave her an advantage. In this sense, she gained encouragement and motivation to travel more and come back with interesting stories to be shared:

I started blogging because to know some of the famous Malaysian and international bloggers. Before this, I only follow them but then, if I not mistaken, in 2009, I started to write and then people start knowing me. I love to involve with people who share the same interest. Seeing and knowing these people make me feel more enthusiast to travel

and blog. Sometimes...I feel envy with people who travel more, have more stories to be told....but what to do, I have my full time job. (Fasha)

### ***To Maintain Relationship with Others***

They are some participants who continued to blog due to their relationship with the readers. In this sense, they had created a commitment with the readers and it seemed compulsory for them to share their travel stories to satisfy their readers. Connection with the readers made the participants feel obligated to continue to contribute to the blogosphere, as highlighted by Johan in the statement below:

Blogs connect me with people who know more than I do. Discussion, events and communication with the readers is what keep me going. It is like encouragement for me to keep on travelling and writing...some give me very kind words, some ask for more.. they are very supportive. So every time I travelled, I remembered them, I always want to “bring” something that is new, fresh and interesting for them. (Johan)

For Johan, travel blogging was a part of travel. The commitment to his readers and followers made him committed to his blog. This connection to his readers made him realise the need to improve his blog in order to maintain that relationship. Based on the four motivations which emerged from the data, it can be observed that participants were concerned with the mutual benefits gained for themselves, as well as their followers and readers. For the travel bloggers as the content creators, the motivation to create a blog was related to what they would gain, including hedonic aspects of travel, such as the fun of sharing travel stories with others, the satisfaction of helping others, and the use of the blog to educate and inspire others. Followers and expected readers also played an important role contributing to their motivations. Bloggers were concerned for others and used their blog to benefit others, through educating, inspiring and helping. They also wanted to connect with people, and evaluate and polish their skills and, in return, gain a benefit for themselves. Participants also actively blogged and engaged with their readers because they wanted to provide fun and entertainment to the readers who participated in and supported their blogs.

By examining the participants' blogging motivations, it was revealed that their followers and readers played an important role in motivating them to create and continue to blog. To some extent, they relied on the readers in order to 'survive'. This indicates that they apply 'a follower pleasing' strategy as an initial step to blog and continue to be relevant in the blogosphere. They listened to their 'readers' voices' and appreciated their engagement with their blogs. This is obvious in relation to hedonic and social motivation, where readers and followers have their role in influencing the participants' contribution to the blogosphere.

Also, it was discovered that, some of the participants were more self-centred in blogging which can be seen in personal motivations. They created blogs to satisfy their self-interests which were related to their passions and hobbies. Also, they wanted to identify themselves with the established blogging community. By connecting themselves with established bloggers, they could pursue their interest in travel. Sharing their travel stories allowed them to 'be friends' with people they were inspired by. It can be seen that blogging allowed them to gain recognition. Dwyer (2007) argues that members in virtual communities gain recognition and prestige when posting content that can lead others to engage with their contents. Participants here perceived that they would gain a good reputation through sharing knowledge and information. Reputation is enhanced through knowledge sharing through travel blog participation (Hsu & Lin, 2008). In the travel blog context, by sharing their travel stories and

personal experiences in their blogs, they felt proud of themselves and their potential to influence others to take action.

For some, blogging made them travel more. This is due to the notion of ‘competition’ mentioned by some of the participants. They felt they were challenged to travel more and come home with interesting travel stories. Based on the motivations discovered, participants did not seem concerned about potential monetary incentives gained through blogging. Lenhart and Fox (2006) state that people create and keep blogs to share experiences rather than to generate income. This study found that although they realised blogging could generate income through advertising, traffic and paid reviews, they were more concerned about other issues, including their personal and social status, and their potential readers. For some participants, travel blogging was considered to be a leisure activity. This leisure activity or hobby provided them with enjoyment and was one way in which to socialise through community participation.

### **Conclusions and Implication for Future Research**

The objective of this study was to understand the blogging behaviour and the motivation for creating and keeping travel blogs. Based on the above mentioned motivations, it was understood that travel blogging was considered as part of the participants’ leisure activities in addition to travel. Also, it is noted that for some, travel made them start to write, and for some, their interest with these two aspects, travel and writing, influenced them to start blogging. It was discovered that their engagement with travel blogs was influenced by their position in the blogosphere, including their relationship with other bloggers and readers. Their altruism motivation included the desire to help others, to educate people and to give inspiration to others, and this also influenced what they shared on their blogs. Participants were concerned about their readers, which suggests that they wanted to attract more readers and satisfy their followers.

This study highlights that travel blog behaviour, in association with a set of motivations. Through the identified behaviours and motivations, this study highlights that travel blogs are more than just a means of gathering information and sharing the tourist experience. Travel bloggers engage with travel blogs for entertainment and to communicate with the readers, to express their self-identity and also for social networking (Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017). These aspects can be considered as important and complex functions of travel blogs, rather than simply a means of searching for and sharing tourist experiences. Future studies could consider these other travel blog functions to further understand the holistic picture of the travel blogging phenomenon in relation to the tourist experience.

In terms of the methodology perspective, future studies might consider adopting a more time effective methodology, such as netnography (ethnography applied to the internet). Netnography is less time consuming compared to the other qualitative methods, such as ethnography and in-depth observation and interviews (Kozinets, 2002). Adopting a longitudinal approach through the netnography method, which also included the comments from the readers, may provide a better understanding of the relationship blogging behaviour and motivations. Netnography offers great potential for a deeper understanding of the travel blogging phenomenon by give researchers the opportunity to obtain emic interpretive data of the meanings lived by tourists while at the on-site and post-visit stage of the tourist experience (Woodside et al., 2007; Woodside, 2009).

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