Techno-promotional Dimensions of Mizo Blogs

Lalremruati Khiangte[*] & R.N. Mishra[**]

───────────● **Abstract** ●───────────

The present paper focuses on the Mizo blogs and the technical aspects of their blogs. The first part of the article looks at the meaning of blogs. The second part of this article briefly analyzes the different kinds of software platform and the templates used by the Mizo bloggers. The study also highlights the ways in which Mizo bloggers promote their newly updated blogs. The kind of software and templates used would indicate the level of technical skills of the Mizo bloggers when it comes to blogging.

Keywords*: Mizo blogs, Mizo bloggers, software, templates and promotion.*

* Department of Mass Communication, Mizoram University, Tanhril.
Email: gkhiangte@gmail.com.

** Department of Library & Information Science, Mizoram University Tanhril.
Corresponding email: rabinarayan_mishra@rediffmail.com.

Introduction

The advent of digital technology and internet in the 21st century witnessed dramatic changes in the societal life and has created a positive impact on the societies. It made 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 blogs. This is primarily intended to share their own resources, personal things to a specific and identified group of individuals or public in general those could be transmitted on Internet. It may be mentioned that before 10 years, only the technical people were capable of creating their own contents and maintain their own websites which however, has done away with due to proliferation of digital technologies and literacy among the societies especially among the young groups in the society. They could further advance in the digital scenario to share with the recent emergence of free blogs service providers, various forms of self presentations and autobiographical writings have redefined the form of social media.

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 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. 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 center 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, best new journal etc. 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.

I

Definition of blog

Jorn Barger coined the term "Weblog" on 17 December, 1997 and Peter Merholz started popularizing the word 'blog' when he broke the term 'Weblog' into 'we blog' on his blog sidebar in 1999. People started using the word blog both as a noun and as a verb since then.

Blog has been defined in many ways and Wikipedia defines it as a website which is usually maintained by an individual or an institution with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. Presently, it is used both as a noun and a verb, where the former refers to the content notes and the latter refers to the act of writing or editing weblogs. It got into the Webster dictionary in 2001. Blogger.com defines blog as a personal diary, daily pulpit, collaborative space, political soapbox, breaking-news outlet, collection of links and share private thoughts.

Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) have defined 'Blog' as merely a nomenclature for a technology that allows people to communicate their ideas and experiences. A blog in its simplest form is a personal space on the internet. It is a collection of every day entries about the individual's life and his or her opinions on various issues. It is an interactive medium where people leave comments on the posts. Thus, blog happens to be a platform primarily to provide information service, express thought and opinion, legitimize the expertise, and stay active in the knowledge domain.

The activity of updating a blog is "blogging" and someone who keeps a blog is a "blogger" (Enzer, 2004). Blogging is a relatively new phenomenon in cyberspace and it is one the fastest growing among the users of Internet. Blogging has become one of the most significant facets of social media. A person can now become both a producer and consumer of media. It enables every

individual's information to be globally accessible. It is probably the personal touch of the author on various issues which makes them immensely popular. The very act of ownership gives a creative freedom to the author.

Significance and Scope of the study

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 (Radloff 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: India, 2012)

The blogging phenomenon is widespread and even reaches remote places such as the North East of India and consequently among 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, more than 300 members have 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 rising phenomenon has hit the small state of Mizoram with a population of 10.97 lakhs (2011 Census). We may mention 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. 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.

Objectives & Methodology

This study employed Survey and Interview methods, a quantitative and qualitative research methods respectively. Triangulation is a powerful technique that facilitates validation of data through cross verification from two or more sources. In particular, it refers to the application and combination of several research methods in the study of the same phenomenon. Altrichter et al. (2008) contend that triangulation "gives a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation." According to Denzin (1978), there are four types of triangulation and this Methodological triangulation involves using more than one method to gather data, such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents.

A structured questionnaire relating to the study has been distributed to target population of 252 Mizo bloggers which is 75% out of the total number of 336 registered bloggers as on 16th April 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 have responded the questionnaire based on which findings have been derived. Then follow up questions which need more explanation were asked in the form of an interview with 20 bloggers selected by convenience. The main objective for this particular study is to find out the different kinds of software platform used by the bloggers. The study also highlights the ways in which Mizo bloggers promote their newly updated blogs.

II

Overview of Media in Mizoram

Mizoram (21,087 sq. Km.) belongs to one of the north eastern states of India and has the population of 10.97 lakhs according to the population census of 2011. The main form of media includes print (local newspapers and magazines), audio (radio), visual (local cable networks) and the internet. The media language is dominantly Mizo. The internet media 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 started incorporating the internet to post their online journals. There is a question as to why this trend has started in recent years. The reason 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.

This particular study focused on the technical aspects of blogging activity by the Mizo bloggers. It is imperative to find out the different kinds of software platform used by the bloggers and the ways in which Mizo bloggers promote their newly updated blogs. For this study, an online structured questionnaire was developed with the help of Google Docs, free Google software for creating an online survey. The study finds that there are 119 male bloggers and 58 female bloggers from the total 177 respondents.
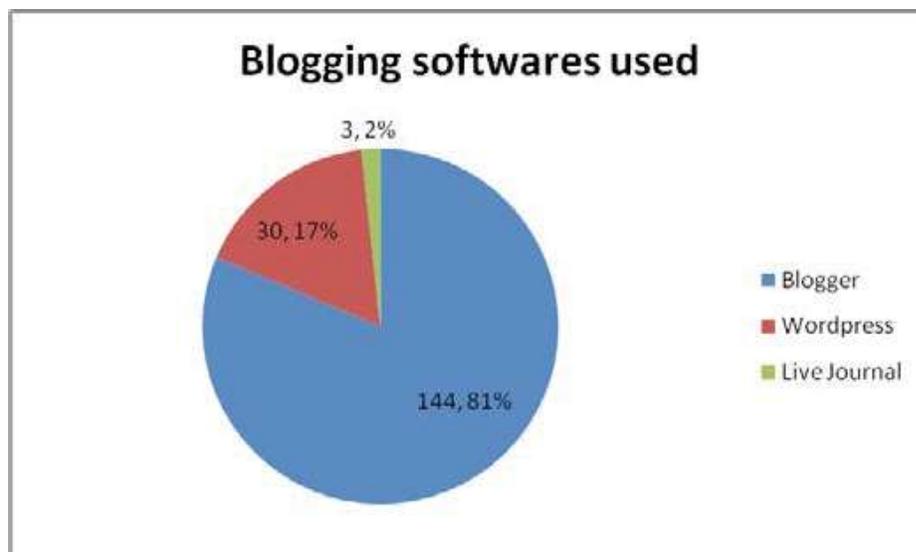
1.   Blog software used

Table 1.1 mentions the types of blogging platform used by the Mizo bloggers. These mentioned blogging platforms are all free of cost. There are six options given for the respondents to choose. The blogging softwares mentioned are Blogger, Wordpress, Live Journal, Typepad and Movable Type. The respondent also

has the option of mentioning any other blogging software used which may not be in the given options. These software platforms are generally easy to use but every blogger has his or her own preferences depending on technical knowhow and ease of use.

Table 1.1: Blog software used

Sl. No	Name of Blogging software	No. of bloggers	Percentage %
1	Blogger	144	81 %
2	Wordpress	30	17 %
3	Live Journal	3	2 %
4	Typepad	0	0 %
5	Movable Type	0	0 %
6	Other	0	0 %
		177	**100**

Graph 1.1. Blogging softwares used

Analysis

On analysis of Table 1.1 we get to find out that majority of the bloggers use the free software Blogger to post their blogs. Out of 177 respondents, 144 (81%) of them use blogger.com, 30 (17%) of them use free software called Wordpress.com and 3 (2%) of them use Live Journal as their blogging software. All three of the mentioned softwares are quite popular all over the world. Most of the Mizo bloggers said that they use Blogger. com also known as BlogSpot because there are less technical hassles and is an easy tool to learn for beginners. Then there are those who love WordPress because of its increased power and features. WordPress gives users complete control over your blog, and one can technically customize it to one's needs. Users can host their own files, can design it however they like, and can use it for any purpose (personal or professional). It may sound technical, but WordPress community gives great support with the help of tutorials, so anyone can learn it easily in no time. Most of the Mizo bloggers use Wordpress with the mindset of making it popular and making money from it.

2.   Blog Template/Interface currently used by Mizo bloggers

Table 2.1 indicates the different kinds of templates used by the Mizo bloggers. The kind of templates used signifies the level of technical knowledge of the bloggers. The respondents were given five options to choose from namely, the default template offered by the blogging software, the template designed by other bloggers or designers, the template the blogger modified,

the template designed from scratch by the blogger and any other not mentioned in the list.

Table 2.1: Blog Templates currently used by Mizo bloggers

Sl. No	Templates used	No. of bloggers	Percentage %
1	Default template offered by the blogging software	92	52 %
2	The template designed by other bloggers or designers	19	11 %
3	The Template I modified	62	35 %
4	Template designed from scratch by blogger	4	2 %
5	Other	0	0 %
		177	**100 %**
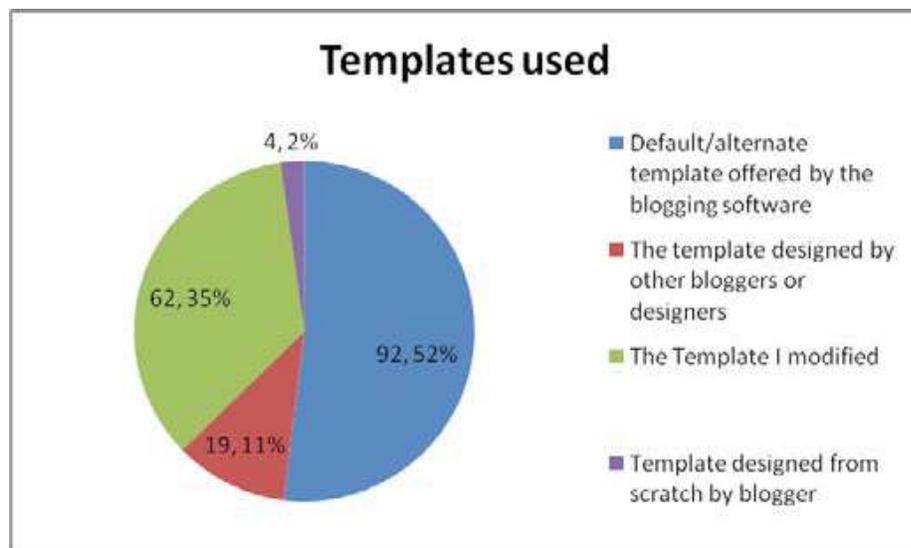
**Graph 2.1: Templates/Interface used by Mizo Bloggers**

Analysis

On analysis of Table 2.1, we found out that out of the 177 bloggers responding to the questionnaire, 92 (52%) of the bloggers use the templates provided by the blogging software. It is not surprising to see that majority of them i.e. 52% of the total respondents use the default templates provided by the blogging software. This is due to two factors, the first one being that there are enough templates already provided by the software that the bloggers feel they have enough options. Secondly, most of them do not have the technical skills to design or modify the templates. Those who are technically savvy tend to use their own designed template than those who are not technically savvy. 19 (10%) of them use templates designed by other bloggers or designers. These bloggers have other people design their templates. 62 (35%) of them use templates they modified themselves. 4 (3%) of them use template designed from scratch by the bloggers themselves. Those who modify or design their own templates say that their template is an extension of who they are as a person, and therefore they need a special kind of template. They also have high level technical skills to carry out the job.

3. Ways of promoting blogs

Table 3.1 indicates the different ways the Mizo bloggers promote their blogs. Promoting blogs is very important since every blogger needs readers and for readers to find out about the latest blog post, certain promotional actions need to happen.

Table 3.1: Ways of promoting blogs

Sl. No	Ways of promoting blogs	No. of bloggers	Percentage %
1	Directly tell people	44	25 %
2	Have blog listed in search engines/ directories	21	12 %
3	Join blogrings/communities	31	18 %
4	Leave blog address while commenting on others' blogs	6	3 %
5	Print blog address on business card	0	0 %
6	Exchange links with other blogs	6	3 %
7	Include blog in signature of email account	3	2 %
8	Using commercial advertising services	0	0 %
9	None	54	30 %
10	Other social networking sites	12	7 %
		177	**100%**
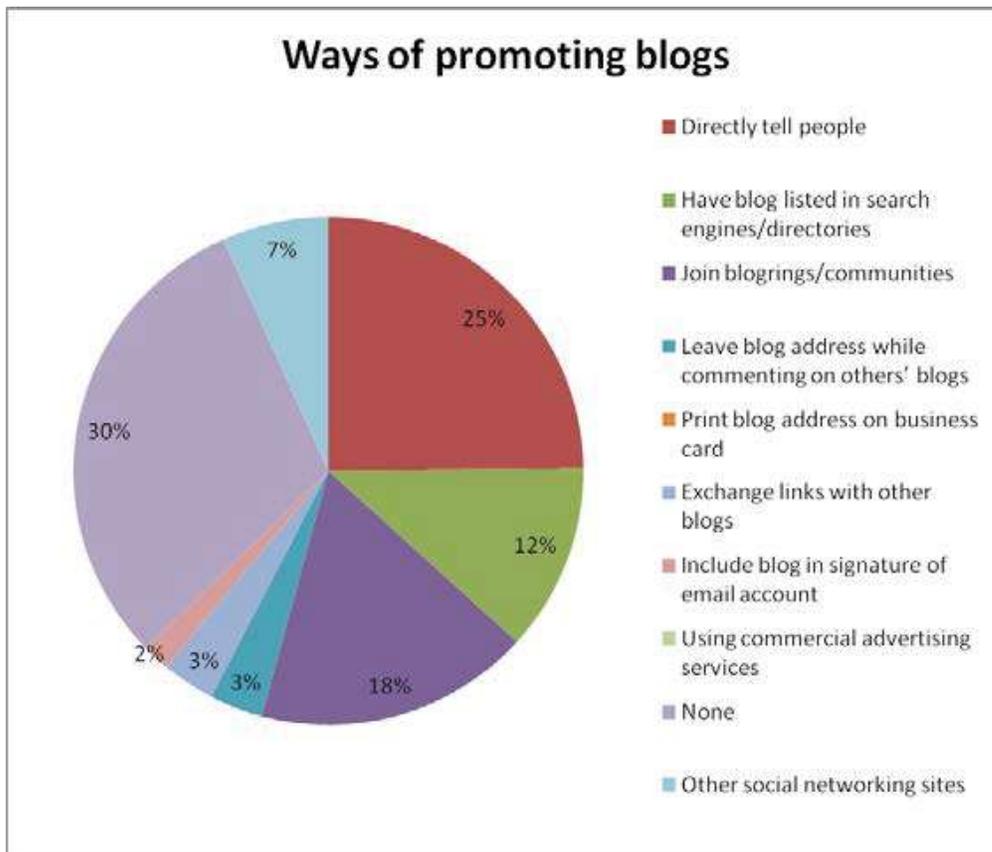
Graph 3.1: Ways of promoting blogs

Analysis

On analysis of Table 3.1, we find out that 44 (25%) of the bloggers directly tell people when they update their blogs. They tell people directly by calling or texting them and letting them know. They also tell others through other media platforms such as whatsapp group or the Facebook Mizo bloggers group. 21 (12%) of them have blog listed in search engines/directories. 31 (18%) of them join blogrings/communities. 6 (3%) of them leave blog address while commenting on others' blogs. 6 (3%)

of them exchange links with other blogs. 3 (2%) of them include blog in signature of email account. 54 (30%) of them say they do not promote their blogs while 12 (7%) of them share their posts on other social media platforms. The blogging software has the option of sharing the blog link on other social media platforms. None of the respondents use commercial advertising services. None of the respondents print blog address on business card. This may be due to the fact that there are still very less Mizo blogs which make money out of their blogs.

Conclusion

Blogging is an emerging media and is gaining popularity among the Mizos. Blogging acts as one of the consistent factor in binding together all the tribes under the Mizo umbrella, where 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 provided a new space that also allows a new level of interaction. Most of the content in Mizo blogs is 'Mizo-centric' than 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.

The ultimate goal for any user is to be able to utilize the existing communication technology productively. It is important to learn about the technical aspects of blogs and blogging software that the Mizo bloggers use so as to determine that they are in sync with the rest of the world in the blogging game. Most Mizo bloggers are second to none when it comes to the technical skills that blogging requires. This exact technical knowhow is definitely a significant driving and motivating factor for most Mizo bloggers to start blogging and let their voices be heard through their writings. A lot of times, new bloggers feel quite overwhelmed navigating the blogosphere. However, they have a community of Mizo bloggers who help them navigate through the technical aspects of running a blog. An interesting finding about the Mizo blogs when it comes to promotion is the fact that none of the respondents use advertising services or print their blog address on business cards which would imply that the blogs are mostly personal and not run by companies for business. Another interesting finding is that sharing of the blog links on various social media such as Twitter and Facebook generated more readers for the blogs. Blogging is also about building community, so more readers and regular feedback is essential to keep it growing. For this reason, the Mizo bloggers try their best in commenting other bloggers' posts to keep the conversation going. The significance of the study lies with the

fact that Mizo bloggers are commendable especially in the ICT environment among the youth in information exchange, sharing of personal data, literature etc. through blogging thereby, leading to transformation and sustainable development in the society.

References

A Report by Planning & Programme Implementation Department, Government of Mizoram. (2012-2013). Retrieved November 25, 2013, from Economic Survey Mizoram : http://www. mizoram.gov.in/documents/19.

Altrichter, H. F. (2008). *Teachers investigate their work: An introduction to action research across the professions(2nd ed.). .* New York: Routledge.

B.A, D. L. (2005). Why do you blog: A uses-and-gratifications inquiry into bloggers' motivations.

Denzin, N. K. ((1978)). *Sociological methods.* New York: McGraw – Hill.

Herring, S. E. (2004). A longitudinal content analysis of weblogs: 2003-2004. In M. Tremayne (Ed.), *Blogging, Citizenship and the Future of Media.* London: Routledge.

India, G. O. (2012-2013). *A Report by Planning & Programme Implementation Department.* Retrieved November 25, 2013, from Economic Survey Mizoram : http://www.mizoram.gov. in/documents/19.

Kitzmann, A. (2003). That different place: Documenting the self within online environments. *Biography 26.1* .

Mapping Digital Media: India. A report by the Open Society Foundations. (2012, December 15). Retrieved August 20, 2013, from http://www.mappingdigitalmedia.org.

Matisse, E. (2004). *Glossary of Internet terms.* Retrieved August 18, 2013, from http://www.matisse.net/sites/glossary.html.

Reed, A. (2005). My blog is me: Texts and persons in UK online journal culture and anthropology. *Ethnos 70.2* , 220-242.

Somolu, O. (2007). Telling our own stories: African women blogging for social change. *gender and development , 15* (3), 477-489.

The State of the Live Web. (2007, April). Retrieved February 12, 2014, from Technorati: http://www.sifry.com/alerts/archives/000493.html.

Trammell, D. K. (2005). Examing the new influencers: A self preentation study of a-list blogs. *J&MC Quarterly. 82, 4 , 82* (4), 968-982.

Weblog. (n.d.). Retrieved October 15, 2017, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/blog#types.