

Introducing Blogs in Food Writing

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ABSTRACT— *With the recent advancement of technology, classes are shifting from the traditional teaching to interactive teaching and learning environment. One of the popular way teachers opt for is by blogging. Blog enables students and teachers to post and share their ideas, comments and thoughts. In this research, blogging is introduced to a group of UiTM Culinary degree students in their Food Writing class with the aim to investigate their perceptions towards blogging and how their perceptions are associated with their engagement in blogging. Students from the culinary program use blog to write their food review and food critique in their food writing class. Drawing data from gathered interviews and questionnaires, the research reveals the success of blogging depends on the participation and motivational aspects from the students, social networks and teachers are the main contributing factors to provide continuous blogging.*

Keywords--- Blogging, Food Writing, Perceptions, participation, motivational

1. INTRODUCTION

The internet offers a wide range of communication sources. One emerging trend is blogging (Chan and Rigway, 2008) in (Schellens and Valcke, 2006). Blogging can be defined as a special kind of website which is updated frequently with new postings and published in reverse chronological order where the most recent posting is on top of the page. Blogging is similar to online journal where a blogger will post his or her recent activities to be shared with other netizens. Interestingly, the readers of the blog are allowed to view and comment on the postings, which allow blogging to be interactive.

Many researchers claimed that educational blogging is no longer new in tertiary education (Song & Yuen 2008), however blogging about food in educational setting is new. Food Blog requires students to write expressively to give readers' a sense of invitation towards the taste of the food, ambiance, setting and all sorts of character in the culinary setting, by having to write on food, bloggers usually need to have a good writing skill to express their likings and disliking towards food. It is hope that, food blogs in food writing per say, would hope to be a 'transformational technology for teaching and learning' (Williams & Jacobs 2004) in the culinary setting.

As such Bishop and Hoggett's (1986) illustrate food bloggers as, 'essentially food enthusiasts, as they engage with food and cooking at a level beyond that of other people, and devote large amounts of time to blog about it'. In blogging about food, they are engaging in what could be described as "serious leisure" (Stebbins, 1992). As with any organized and established community, members of the food blogging community both food bloggers and food blog readers take on various, and sometimes multiple, roles: they may be community leaders, organisers, and record keepers, they may take on less active roles as 'rank and file' community members and they may be lurkers. Their level of professionalism varies from amateurs or hobbyists, through to Pro-Ams (Leadbeater & Miller 2004) and professionals. Their reasons for blogging about food also vary across a spectrum of motivations, from intrinsic to extrinsic. These motivations can be related with their ambitions or aspirations for blogging. Food bloggers may wish to become professional food writers or community leaders, or they may blog as a means to share recipes with friends and family in their personal networks (Lofgren, 2013). They may also blog mainly for a sense of self-satisfaction and to document their cooking practices. Or, if they have specific interests or food ideologies, they may use their blog as a forum to share essential food related information.

2. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this paper is to gather undergraduates' perception towards blogs as a learning tool. The objectives are:

1. To give instructions to set up blogs as part of their assignments
2. To discuss the blogger's experiences as a learning tool in the Food Writing Class
3. To present the perceptions of undergraduate towards food blogging.

3. METHODOLOGY

Blog is introduced to a group of fourth semester undergraduates who took the HTC 550 or Food Writing course from the Culinary Degree Program in University Technology MARA. They are required to submit their postings of food review in a blog manner instead of written assignments. It carries a weightage of 15% in their course. As this is a pilot study, only 39 students are selected to participate in this survey. Students are guided by the instructor to create the blog. Three steps are needed in order to create a blog, which are;

- a. Having an account where email address, name and password are required
- b. Choosing a name to the blog that can easily be identified by the readers
- c. Selecting the template for the blog

Once the blog is created, the students are asked to create postings based on their experiences of food dining which they have participated in a field trip conducted by the University. Comments from their friends or even readers in the internet are welcome. The blogger are encouraged to comment their friend's post or entries, thus, creating an interactive communication. The students are then given questionnaires to respond via facebook.

4. FINDINGS

An online cross- sectional descriptive survey was developed to gage the students' perceptions. The survey has four sections where students were asked to rate the Likert scaling of Agree, Strongly Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree to the survey. 39 students, which consist of 12 males and 27 females, were asked to participate in the survey. Students were asked to create 5 blogs assignments which were a food critique, a food review, a food commentary, a food blurb and finally a restaurant review in their blogs. Students were encouraged to post on pictures, videos, music in their blogs with a minimum of 4 paragraphs entries in their blogs. By the end of the semester, the questionnaires were given to the students. A background question was developed to gauge students' familiarity of using internet and blogs (table 1.0 and 1.1). Most students have at least more than 5 years of exposure in internet and blogging.

Table 1.0 Students familiarity of using the internet for learning

How long have you used Internet for learning?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
more than 5 years	54.1%	20
3 to 4 years	18.9%	7
1 to 3 years	10.8%	4
less than 1 year	16.2%	6
answered question		37
skipped question		0

Table 1.1 Students familiarity of blogs

Have you heard about blogs or did you have your own blogs before you were asked to set up your blogs for class?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes I heard about it but I had no idea what it was.	17.6%	6
Yes, I had heard about it and also had a rough idea what it was.	23.5%	8
No, I hadn't heard about it.	8.8%	3
Yes, I had had my own blogs.	50.0%	17
answered question		34
skipped question		0

Most of the respondent strongly agrees that using blogs have made to express better due to the help of pictures, music and smileys. From the findings, student reflection can be seen clearly. The percentage of students who highlighted the benefits of blogs is high, as it is shown in their reflection towards blogging. Nearly 80% of students responded that writing blog in weekly basis journals assist them to understand food blogging that was taught in class. This shows positive evidence that blog can contribute to students' writing skills and thus, motivate them to write. The process of writing requires student reflection. A new trend that can be highlighted in blogs was culture. Most students agree that culture play an important role when it comes into writing about food. In Malaysia setting, Malay, Chinese and Indian culture are closely related to food. This can be seen in Gallegos (2005) research where food blogs like cookbooks can be seen to both reflect and shape culture.

Table 2.0 Questionnaire pertaining food writing

Please tick your answer . In pertaining to food writing,						
Answer Options	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Rating Average	Response Count
A blog is a useful tool for you to share your writing / ideas with others in the cyberspace/world	19	15	0	0	1.44	34
I have invited my friends or classmates to read my blogs.	7	18	7	1	2.06	33
Posting my articles on my blogs is a good idea	8	23	2	0	1.82	33
I agree it is a good idea to use blogs for writing in an English class	9	22	3	0	1.82	34
I learn to write better when writing on blogs.	9	23	2	0	1.79	34
I check my work carefully before posting it online.	12	21	1	0	1.68	34
I don't check my work carefully when I write on paper.	0	8	20	6	2.94	34
I like to write on my blog because I can write freely to express myself	8	21	4	0	1.88	33
I check my grammar carefully before posting it.	4	25	5	0	2.03	34
I am not shy to share my work in cyberspace/world	4	23	7	0	2.09	34
I feel that I my writing is better when writing on my blogs than writing on paper in class.	2	20	12	0	2.29	34
I can express my idea better when writing on my blogs than on paper	7	20	7	0	2.00	34
I can be more creative when writing on my blogs than on paper	5	22	7	0	2.06	34
I feel more confident with my writing ability when writing on my blogs than on paper	3	19	11	0	2.24	33
I feel that I can write longer when writing on my blog than on paper	4	23	7	0	2.09	34
I feel no pressure when writing on my blog because I have more time to write	7	23	3	0	1.88	33
I like to read the comments from friends and teachers on my blogs because they are useful for me in improving my writing	10	22	2	0	1.76	34
Overall, I feel that I have improved my writing in English in the areas of grammar, structure, and vocabulary.	3	26	4	0	2.03	33
Blogging should be used as part of writing activities in class because of its benefits.	7	25	1	1	1.88	34
I have improve my writing skills since I began blogging	2	24	8	0	2.18	34
I can express my ideas better in my blogs than in oral communication (speaking)	7	23	4	0	1.91	34
I can participate in the group discussion better when I have discussed the issue previously in blogs	3	27	4	0	2.03	34
I like to read my friends' ideas on my blog	10	21	3	0	1.79	34
When I participated in discussions in my blogs, I was free to express myself	4	28	2	0	1.94	34
When I participated in discussions on my blog I could take my time	3	27	4	0	2.03	34
When I participated in discussions on my blog I was able to make links to other interesting sites for my friends to read	6	23	5	0	1.97	34
I will continue blogging outside the class	7	22	5	0	1.94	34
I am not ashamed to express my thoughts on my blog	5	25	4	0	1.97	34
Blogging should be a part of the writing activities in classes	6	23	5	0	1.97	34
I like my friends to read my writing on my blog	7	20	7	0	2.00	34
I write effectively when blogging	4	24	6	0	2.06	34
I think effectively when discussing my ideas on the blogs	3	25	6	0	2.09	34
I responded effectively during discussion on the blogs	4	22	8	0	2.12	34
I can write effectively although my English is limited	6	24	4	0	1.94	34
I believe that blogging is good writing practice	11	21	2	0	1.74	34
I believe I can improve my written English if I participate actively in the discussion	5	27	2	0	1.91	34
I can increase my knowledge on the topic discussed when I read my friends' opinions	11	22	1	0	1.71	34
I feel that writing on my blog is fun	8	25	1	0	1.79	34
I feel that I am more organised when blogging	6	24	4	0	1.94	34
I am more careful with my writing when blogging	10	18	6	0	1.88	34
I always check my sentences before I post my writing on the blogs	10	21	3	0	1.79	34
I have more freedom in writing when blogging	5	25	4	0	1.97	34
I can express myself easily when blogging	6	28	0	0	1.82	34
I use simple conversational expressions when blogging	7	23	4	0	1.91	34
answered question						34
skipped question						0

It can be seen that the frequency of students' evaluating their peers' journals and their expectation of receiving feedback from peers is quite encouraging. Student view of the use of blogs as a tool for communication among students is seen as vital to them. One might query whether students' high expectation of receiving feedback from peer is a direct result of the course requirement that students provide a certain amount of feedback to other students. Analysis of blog entries shows that it is not the case. Evidence of affirmation and encouragement are apparent in students' feedback in the blogging tool.

Table 2.1 Questionnaire pertaining to blogs

Please tick your answer. Pertaining to blogs,						
Answer Options	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Rating Average	Response Count
Using blogs gave me more freedom and control of my own learning.	8	23	3	0	1.85	34
I often developed a plan and found the best way for me to complete blog tasks.	4	26	4	0	2.00	34
I was able to monitor my own progress by revisiting my own blog and made changes based on the	10	19	5	0	1.85	34
Blogging allowed me to actively engage in the process of reflection on my writing about cross-cultural	6	23	4	0	1.94	33
By regularly writing reflective blogs, I was able to understand, generate and analyze cross-cultural issues.	6	25	3	0	1.91	34
(Chinese, Indian, Malay and other culture)	5	27	2	0	1.91	34
Reading others' postings helped me gain diverse cultural perspectives and reflect further about my own	8	25	1	0	1.79	34
Social networking via blogs was an effective way to share knowledge and exchange ideas with others.	10	23	1	0	1.74	34
I found peer comments interesting and informative.	6	28	0	0	1.82	34
I gained intercultural knowledge and communication skills through working with my peers	7	26	1	0	1.82	34
I found blog assignments stimulating and meaningful.	6	25	3	0	1.91	34
I felt comfortable sharing my ideas and interacting with my peers and native speaker partners via blogging.	8	24	2	0	1.82	34
Using blogs was a motivational tool for me to learn about the culture and people	10	22	1	0	1.73	33
answered question						34
skipped question						0

5. CONCLUSION

It is clearly seen that through the food-dining experience, the students managed to share the taste, the smell, the ambiance and the feeling in their blog. The thoughts are not only kept to one self but it is shared with the other students that ate the same food but with different experience. Blog is not only a tool where the students can express and share their thoughts but as a motivational tool for the students to communicate through writing which could help in enhancing the students writing skill. Through blogging, there is a clear evidence that the students can understand the lesson better as they went through the experience and practice writing it. The exposure to the authentic setting makes the students to have a better connection to the real situation and could relate it better when writing their assignments.

Therefore, the students' perception on using blog as a learning tool in the Food Writing class has clearly shown a positive feedback. Implementing technology in the teaching and learning process is not a one-man show but the students, the classmates and the teacher have to work hand-in-hand to make sure academic blogging is highly successful and beneficial.

Since this is a pilot study, generalization could not be made. A larger scale study can be conducted to get a better result and feedback. Implementing the use of academic blog could also be done in other subject or field where it is relevant as we should keep our teaching and learning aligned with the advancement of technology.

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