

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter describes the conceptual framework, data collection procedures and the analytical approach used in this study. The study combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to triangulate findings. To undertake this study, a blog was created by the researcher and it was open to participants who took part in the blog forums by responding to blog issues. The responses retrieved as data for the present study are analyzed using Herring's (2004) computer-mediated discourse analysis or CMDA approach.

This study takes into account the views of various studies that online communication is independent of users' gender and ethnicity (Chester, 2004; Herring & Paolillo, 2006; Herring, 2001; Jaffe et al., 1999; Raymond, 2003; Witmer & Katzman, 1997) and guidelines of internet-based research that researchers need to authenticate who internet users claim to be (Kinkus, 2002). As a result, in order to answer the research questions this study necessitates the researcher to identify the gender and ethnicity of the participants.

#### **4.1 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study combines the speech act theory and social presence theory as a basis for analyzing the interactive practices in the blog forums. Speech act theory recognises the expression of content and what blog participants intend to achieve with that

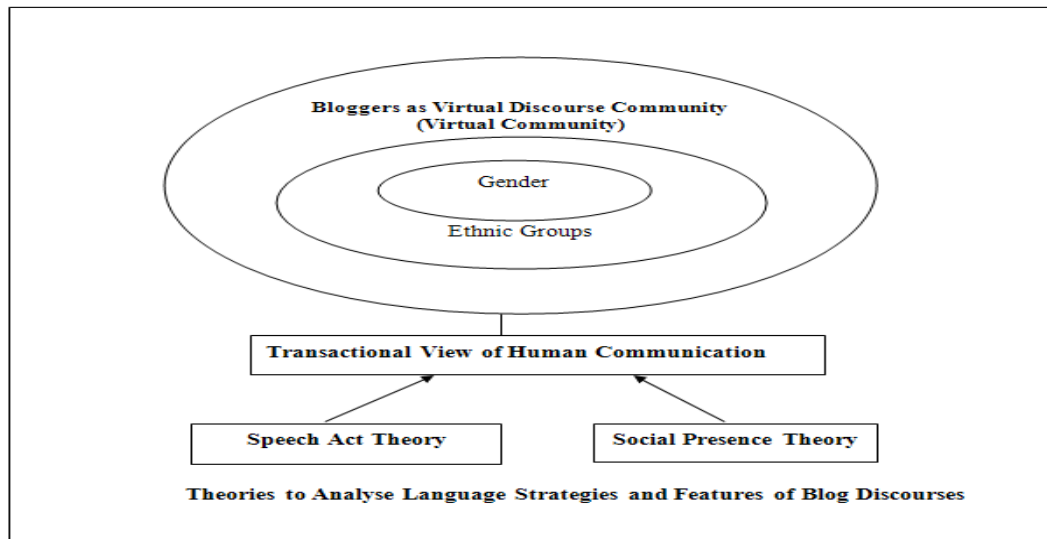
expression. Therefore, the social networking practices in blog forums can be analysed according to the forms and functions of the grammatical structures used by the participants in blog forums.

Social presence theory suggests that the manner in which blog participants interact is dependent on the degree blog participants perceived the presence of others in online communication (Short et al. 1976). In this study, the influence of social presence in blog forums will be gauged from the responses given by the participants in the questionnaire and the interview.

#### **4.2. The Conceptual Framework**

According to Ranjit (1997) the conceptual framework stems from the theoretical framework and concentrates on aspects of the theories used in a study. Hence, in this study, speech act theory and social presence theory form the basis for the analysis of language in the researcher's blog. In this study, bloggers are viewed as a virtual discourse community which is comprised of people from different ethnic groups and genders and it is formed in cyberspace. Bloggers get connected with one another when they social network and the social networking strategies in the discourse community is examined from the transactional view of communication that claims communication messages are affected by the communicators' perception and background knowledge, in addition to their experience, attitudes and beliefs of a particular subject. In addition, the transactional view also claims that culture, gender and the context in which communication occurs, affect communication and the message produced. In this study, speech acts theory and social presence theory assist in the analysis of the social

networking strategies and features of language used in blog communication messages. The conceptual framework used in this study is represented in Figure 4.1.



**Figure 4.1: The Conceptual Framework**

#### **4.2.1 Bloggers as Members of Virtual Discourse Community**

The study begins with the premise that a discourse community is a conglomeration of individuals who conform to ‘the appropriacy of topics, the forms, function and positioning of discursal elements and the role texts play in the operation’ (Swales, 1990: p. 16) of the virtual community. In this study, the virtual discourse virtual community is the creation materialized by the collective practices of blog members from an intercultural context that consist of different ethnic groups and genders. In a discourse community, the participants are expected to comply with the conventions of interaction in an intercultural context. When some of the expectations of a discourse community are not met, existing blog participants may serve as gatekeepers as implicit norms are set and agreed upon by members of the discourse community.

As members of the virtual discourse community, the participants remain anonymous and as such, do not disclose information about their identity such as race and gender. However, information about their identity could be discerned from their viewpoints, choice of dictions and nicknames used. For example, the nickname *playgurlz* seems to be more relevant to a female participant than a male participant. In addition, aspects of ethnicity may also be revealed when participants used certain lexemes such as ‘*as a Malay I feel that...*’ in blog forums.

As members of the virtual discourse community, participants contribute towards the growth of the community. They observe Lakoff’s (1975) ‘Rules of Rapport’ and use camaraderie features in their interactive tactics. The system of distance, deference and camaraderie as suggested by Lakoff (1975) applies to the choice of words and social networking strategies used by the participants in blog forums. Additionally, Brown and Levinson’s (1978) politeness theory and Grice’s (1975) conversational maxims guide the analysis on the choice of words and social networking strategies used in blog forums. For example, the ‘lah’ and ‘bah’ particles as used in the local context, could be use as hedging devices in blog forums and when participants used them, they can be associated with politeness theory.

#### **4.2.2 The Transactional View of Blog Interaction**

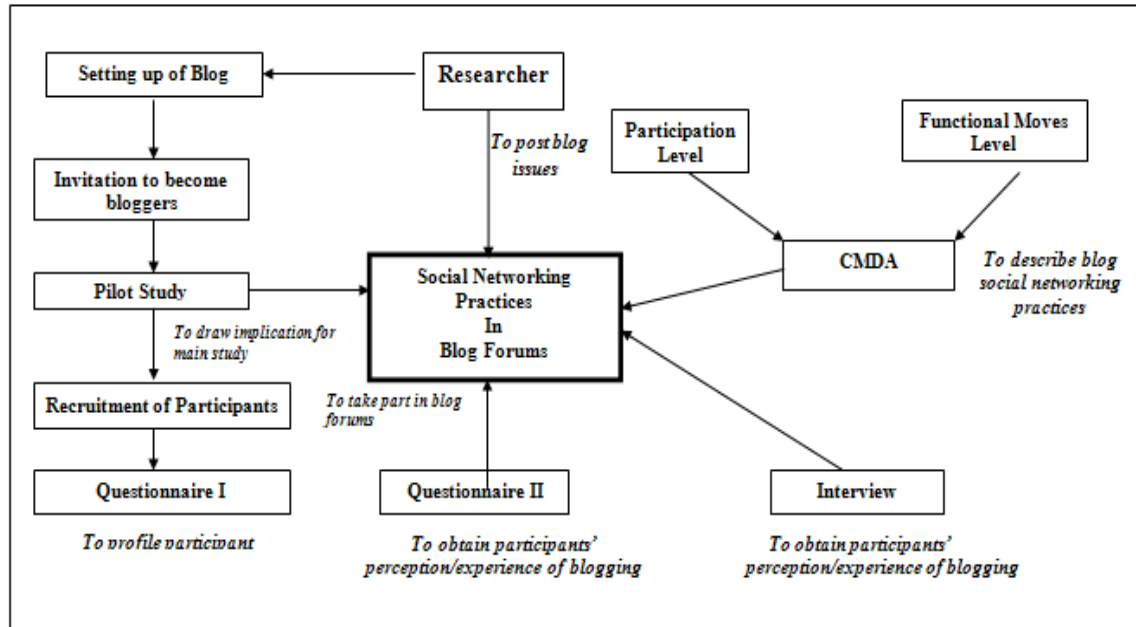
In this study, interaction among blog members is investigated within the transactional view of human communication. Therefore, the context of blog forums may influence the social networking strategies used in blog forums. For example, in an intercultural context, the participants may violate Grice’s (1975) cooperative principles due to their cultural norms or

external factors to be polite when in fact they could have behaved otherwise. In addition, the participants' perception and gender may influence what they say in blog forums.

### **4.3 Research Design - Mixed Methods Approach**

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004:17) defined mixed methods research as 'the class of research where the research mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study'. The nature of the current study required a mixed methods approach by collecting qualitative and quantitative data at specific points of the study.

The reason for adopting the mixed methods approach, in this study, is in consideration that research question determines the kind of research method to be undertaken (Creswell, 2003). This view concurs well with Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) who assert that the nature of the research question determines the type of research methods that offer the best possibility of obtaining meaningful answers. Therefore, the mixed methods used in this study is deemed best to answer the research questions as it allows the researcher to look at both the micro and macro levels of blog social networking practices. The mixed methods design used in this study is based on the works of Tan (2006) and is represented in Figure 4.2.



**Figure 4.2: The Approach Used in the Study**

Figure 4.2 shows the procedures employed in this study such as the data collection and analytical procedures, the researcher's role and the overall structure guiding this study. The mixed method consists of the collection of qualitative and quantitative data from blog forums, interviews and Questionnaire II. CMDA provides description of blog social networking practices. Questionnaire I is used to collect the demographic details of the participants. The figurative representation of the research approach used by Tan (2006) can be found in Appendix A.

#### **4.4 Data Collection**

This section presents the data collection procedures in terms of the initial setting up of a blog, participants profile, researcher's role and the instruments used.

#### **4.4.1 The Setting Up of a Dedicated Blog for the Main Study**

In the initial stage of the study, the researcher observed that bloggers could disguise themselves and take part in blog forums by assuming the role of different genders and ethnicities (Chester, 2004; Raymond, 2003; Crystal, 2001). In addition, as blog entries were independent of authors' gender (Herring and Paolillo, 2006) much difficulty is involved to verify the gender and ethnicity of online participants. Since these variables are crucial for the purpose to answer Research Question 3 and Research Question 4 in this study, the researcher developed a blog and obtained volunteers to take part as participants. The data collection procedure in this study follows those of Davis and Brewer (1997), and Tan (2006) who studied online interaction and reflective practices in blogs respectively.

#### **4.4.2 Recruitment of Participants for the Main Study**

Once the researcher's blog was registered, it was open to all students at two public universities in Sabah on condition that they agreed to register as participants on voluntary basis in the blog and they remained anonymous in the blog itself. The recruitment of participants for the main study was not difficult because by Semester II of the 2005 academic year, students knew about the researcher's blog by word of mouth from the students who took part in the pilot study. Students signed up as volunteers by approaching the researcher, once they registered as bloggers with the blog service provider at [www.blogspot.com](http://www.blogspot.com), they submitted their nicknames as a form of registration as participants.

At the start of the study, the participants were either in semester II or III of the 2005/2006 academic year. The selection of students from semester II and III of the academic year ensured that the participants remained as students on campus until the study was completed so that they could be reached to answer the research questionnaires or take part in the research interviews.

A total number of 53 participants volunteered to take part in the main study. Of the 53 participants, 22 of them were from those 33 students who had already participated in the pilot study. As 22 of the 33 students had blogging experience, the researcher ensured that none of the blog issues posted in the researcher's blog in the pilot study was repeated in the main study. Table 4.1 shows the demographic factors of the participants in the study.

**Table 4.1: The Demographic Factors of the Participants**

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Race</i>	Malay	Chinese	Kadazan-Dusun	Bajau	Total
Male		5	6	10	7	28
Female		8	7	5	5	25
Total		13	13	15	12	53

As is seen in Table 4.1, the participants in this study consisted of 13 Malays, 13 Chinese, 15 Kadazan-Dusun and 12 Bajau. Less than 2 Indians volunteered and hence they were not included in the study. Participants of the study were given copies of the Plain Language Statement (Appendix B) that provided information on the aim of the present study and the background information of the researcher. A copy of the Plain Language Statement was also posted in the blog at [www.johnathan2001.blogspot.com](http://www.johnathan2001.blogspot.com) so that participants knew that



the blog activity constituted data for a study. Apart from the Plain Language Statement, the researcher obtained the consent and willingness of the participants to take part in the study by requiring them to sign Consent Forms. In addition, they gave permission to use their responses to the blog issues for research purposes. A copy of the Consent Form is attached in Appendix C with the following stated clearly.

- (a) All personal details are kept confidential.
- (b) Participants can withdraw from the research at any time they wished.
- (c) Involvement in the study entails interacting in the blog created for the study.
- (d) Research data collected during the study may be published.
- (e) A report of the study will be made available for them upon request.

The participants were profiled based on information obtained from Questionnaire I administered at the beginning of the research period. The information was used for the purpose of:

- (a) Categorizing the participants according to the ethnic groups;
- (b) Gauging their English proficiency levels; and
- (c) Determining their online experiences.

Participants were required to have the minimum English proficiency level of Band 3 in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) or Grade C in the university's English proficiency courses as it was deemed crucial they be able to respond to the blog issues in English and other participants would be able to comprehend what was written. This was to

ease comprehension of the comments posted by them in the blog. In addition, Questionnaire I elicited information on the participants' online experiences.

Table 4.2 shows the frequency count for online experience of the participants on a scale ranging from no experience to extensive experience in online domain computer mediated communication (CMC).

**Table 4.2: Online CMC Experience of the Participants**

Reported CMC Experience	Number of Participants and On-line CMC Domains					
	Chat Room	Email	On-line Forum	Message Board	Blog	On-line Course
No experience	2	2	19	10	18	50
Little experience	8	8	8	17	13	1
Moderate experience	6	9	12	9	8	1
Well experience	15	17	9	6	8	1
Extensive experience	22	17	5	11	6	0
Total (N=53)	53	53	53	53	53	53

As it is seen in Table 4.2, the participants of the study were most experienced in the use of chat rooms and emails as forms of CMC (Chat Rooms: 22 extensive experience; 15 well experience, Emails: 17 extensive experience; 17 well experience). The participants were least experienced in on-line courses, with 50 out of the 53 participants indicating no experience. The participants have varied experience in the use of on-line forums, message boards and blogs as forms of CMC. As 18 participants indicated no experience in using blogs, the researcher gave out copies of step-by-step instructions on how they could register as bloggers and post their comments and views in the researcher's blog. In addition, the

participants were encouraged to contact the researcher if they needed assistance at the initial part of the blog activity. Please refer to Appendix D for a copy of Questionnaire I.

#### **4.4.3 General Rules for Blog Participants**

The participants of the study were requested to adhere to certain rules to ensure they were within the etiquette of participating in the study when they posted their comments on the blog issues at the researcher's website. Participants were required to respond to the blog issues with the minimum number of 60 words twice a week for a period of about 12 months. To facilitate the natural process of data collection, the following social networking practices were adhered to in this study.

- (i) Participants were free to use language in a manner they wished and they were **not** told to refrain from using any foul language. This was to encourage the natural use of language by the participants.
- (ii) In the course of posting their comments in the blog, participants were free to post any views and they were **not** told to refrain from bringing up sensitive issues.
- (iii) To encourage natural communication, participants were free to use any language they felt comfortable with although English was the study's main language. Therefore, when participants use a language other than English it may serve some social networking purpose.

#### **4.4.4 The Researcher's Role**

The researcher's role in the collection of data was as follows:

- (i) The researcher checks his blog for responses once a week. The responses given by the participants were saved in a document file of Microsoft Office Word format throughout the data collection period. The responses were not adulterated or tempered with by the

researcher. This included spelling, grammatical and language structural errors.

- (ii) The blog is updated with new blog issues once a week. The blog issues were varied and current in nature at the time the research was conducted. The topics ranged from issues pertaining to mobile phones, gender equality and other issues that concerned the Malaysian society. This was to encourage blog interaction and sustain the interest of the participants visiting the blog.
- (iii) To the best of his ability, the selection of blog issues was not intended to touch on sensitive issues like politics, race or religion. However, if participants touched on the issues as mentioned, the researcher did not, in anyway, interfere or use any exercise to control participants or remove parts of the postings.
- (iv) During the course of the study, none of the blog issues or blog's content were discussed in class meetings. The researcher did not make any personal contact with the participants to discuss their blog social networking practices. The only contact that the researcher had with the participants was when they were required to answer the questionnaires and take part in the interview.
- (v) Participants were allowed to blog freely and in any manner they wished. No social etiquette norms were imposed. This was to ensure that the study reflected the inner minds of the participants when they were engaged in the blog.
- (vi) Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants in the study were also ensured. The nickname *Johnathan* was used by the researcher so that participants did not feel intimidated when they saw their teacher's name on the blog site.

#### **4.5 The Data**

All blog comments posted at <http://johnathan2001.blogspot.com> formed the main source of data for the present study. The blog site was registered on 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 2005 and the participants had free on-line access via the local area networks (LAN) provided by the computer laboratories of the university or through the wireless internet access.

The blog postings were collected for a period of 13 months from December 2005 to December 2006. An arrangement was made with the computer technicians to enable participants to use the computers in the computer laboratory during office hours from 8.00 am – 5.00 pm and after office hours from 5.00 pm – 10.00 pm.

Participants could also access the blog at cyber cafes as an alternative way to blog, if preferred. All blog issues were made available at the researcher’s blog throughout the period of the study. This was to ensure that participants who could not comment on any of the blog issues would do so at a time convenient to them. All blog issues with a minimum number of 4 blog postings were taken as data for the main study. This is because during the pilot study it was observed that interactivity among participants can be prevalent in blog forums that consisted of at least 4 blog postings. Table 4.3 shows the topics and criteria for classifying blog topics in the study.

**Table 4.3: Topics and Criteria for Classifying Blog Issues**

<b>Topics</b>	<b>Criteria for Classifying Blog Issues</b>	<b>Blog Issue Type</b>
National	Issues pertaining to national interest and identity etc. Such interests include ‘Bangsa Malaysia’, and ‘Sex Education’.	Current & Musing
Social	Social topics are matters that affect individuals in a society such as community problems. Social topics in this study include issues on gay marriage, illegal immigrant problems and others.	Current & Musing
Gender	Gender topics concern the baffling differences among the genders such as the equal sharing of power between men and women in economy. Gender topics, in this study, contain high socio-emotional content as they revolved around interpersonal relationship between men and women and gender equality among others.	Current & Musing

The three categories of blog topics were further classified as current or musing blog issue type. Current blog issues were ‘hot topics’ during the time of this study and appeared in the local media such as newspapers. Musing blog issues are those relevant to day-to-day living and are linked to participants’ thoughts and reflection on problems that plagued society. Table 4.4 shows the title of the blog issues for each of the topics listed in the main study. The blog issue is numbered according to the order by which they were posted in the researchers’ blog.

**Table 4.4: Blog Issues and Topics**

No.	Blog Issue No.	Blog Topics	Blog Issue Type	Blog Issue Title
1	Blog 1	National	Current	Equal Rights for All
2	Blog 9	National	Current	What is Happening to Malaysia?
3	Blog 11	National	Current	Bangsa Malaysia [Malaysian Race]
4	Blog 14	National	Musing	English a Malaysian Language
5	Blog 22	National	Current	Give Peace a Chance
6	Blog 23	National	Musing	Malaysian Identity
7	Blog 27	National	Current	Nuclear Power
8	Blog 30	National	Current	Sex Education
9	Blog 33	National	Musing	The Spirit of Merdeka [Independence]
10	Blog 2	Social	Current	Gay Marriage
11	Blog 3	Social	Musing	The “Hantu” [Ghostly] Affair
12	Blog 5	Social	Current	What Feeling is This?
13	Blog 6	Social	Current	Ban Mobile Phones in Schools
14	Blog 10	Social	Current	Black Metal
15	Blog 12	Social	Current	Cats and Dogs are all PETs!!!
16	Blog 15	Social	Musing	Is it not Hypocrisy?
17	Blog 16	Social	Musing	Are Chatrooms and SMS Bane or Boon?
18	Blog 20	Social	Musing	Dirty Habits
19	Blog 24	Social	Current	Kid Violence
20	Blog 25	Social	Current	Mat Rempit [Illegal Bikers]
21	Blog 28	Social	Musing	Respect Aging Parents!
22	Blog 29	Social	Musing	Selfish
23	Blog 35	Social	Musing	What are the Kids Up to?
24	Blog 36	Social	Musing	What is Happening to Our Moral Values?
25	Blog 4	Gender	Musing	Beautiful People
26	Blog 7	Gender	Musing	To Be or Not to be
27	Blog 8	Gender	Musing	Men Handbags
28	Blog 13	Gender	Musing	Gender Equality
29	Blog 17	Gender	Musing	Anybody for a House Husband!!!
30	Blog 18	Gender	Musing	Battle of the Sexes
31	Blog 19	Gender	Musing	Who should Pay on the First Date?
32	Blog 21	Gender	Musing	Girls should Make the First Move
33	Blog 26	Gender	Current	Metro-Sexual Guys
34	Blog 31	Gender	Current	Should Housewives be Paid a Salary?
35	Blog 32	Gender	Current	The Beginning and the Ending
36	Blog 34	Gender	Current	Think Before You Wed

As is seen in Table 4.4, 36 blog issues were created to collect data. None of the titles used in the pilot study was repeated in the main study. All the blog issues posted by the researcher in the main study are attached in Appendix E.

## **4.6 Instrumentation**

The instruments used in this study consisted of Questionnaire I, Questionnaire II and interview. This will be presented under the following subsections.

- Questionnaires
- Interviews

### **4.6.1 Questionnaires**

Two sets of questionnaires were used in the main study, namely, Questionnaire I and Questionnaire II. Questionnaire I served to elicit the profile of the participants and this was administered in December 2005. Participants were required to fill in their background information such as their gender and ethnicity, English language proficiency level and online experiences.

Questionnaire II was administered after approximately 13 months of blogging. The questionnaire elicited feedback from the blog participants on their blogging experiences and practices from the beginning to the end of the research period. The questions were determined after observing the blog social networking practices during the pilot study and

the main study. The scholarly works of Rourke et al. (2001), Nilsson (2003), O’Dowd (2001) and Brown and Yule (1983) were adapted in the designing of the questions.

Questionnaire II consisted of 66 questions in the form of Likert-like scale questions, semi-structured questions and open ended questions. The Likert-like scale questions required participants to respond by circling an option (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Not Sure, Agree, Strongly Agree) that best described their blogging experience. The semi-structured questions required participants to tick the relevant boxes that described their blogging experiences. The open-ended questions required participants to give reasons other than those stated in the questionnaire. Table 4.5 shows the questions and the aspects of responses that were elicited from the participants. A copy of Questionnaire II is attached in Appendix F.

**Table 4.5: Outline of Questionnaire II**

<b>Question Nos.</b>	<b>Purpose of Questions</b>
Questions 1 – 10	Participants’ reflection on their blogging experience in this study
Questions 11 - 21	Participants’ reflection on the use of spoken language features and their interactive involvement in the blog.
Questions 22 - 31	Participants’ perception of interactive styles such as the manner they commented in blog forums.
Questions 32 - 39	Participants’ input on their awareness of the presence of other bloggers
Questions 40 - 66	Participants’ perception on the sense of community and intercultural interactive practices

### **Questions 1 – 10: Participants’ Reflection of Blog Interaction**

Questions 1 – 10 of the questionnaire retrieved information on participants’ reflection on their experiences or their feelings when they were engaged in the blog activity such as their interest and enjoyment when they participated in the blog activity. Among other questions, the



participants were asked if the blog stimulated their desire to interact with people and if they enjoyed sharing their views with the people in the blog.

### **Questions 11 – 21: Participants’ Perception of their Interactive Involvement in Blogs**

Questions 11 – 21 retrieved information on the participants’ perception of the use of spoken and written discourse features when they posted their comments in blog forums. For example, in Questions 11- 16 the participants were asked if they felt like speaking to someone rather than writing in the course of discussing the blog issues. Questions 17 – 21 of the questionnaire retrieved information on the participants’ interactive experience. For example, the participants were asked if they were able to post their comment on the blog issues at any point of interaction in the blog and whether they were able to give their opinions without any restraint or reservation on the topics that were discussed.

### **Questions 22 – 31: Participants’ Perception on the Interactive Style**

Questions 22-31 elicited information on how blog participants perceived the manner they posted their comments in blog forums. For example, the participants were asked if they had the tendency to choose their words carefully when they posted their comments. Questions 22, 23, and 28 were Yes/No questions. The participants were required to give a Yes/No response to the questions besides giving their personal views to the questions. Question 31 required the participants to indicate their interactive practices if other blog participants disagreed with their comment to the blog issues.

### **Questions 32 – 39: Participants’ Awareness of the Presence of Bloggers**

Questions 32 – 39 retrieved information on the participants’ awareness of the presence of other participants in blog forums. Participants were asked of their awareness of the presence of other bloggers when they posted their comments on the blog issues. The questions in this section consist of likert-like scale questions.

### **Questions 40 – 66: Participants’ Perception on the sense of Community and Intercultural Interactive Practices**

Questions 40-66 retrieved information on the participants’ perception of the blog community and the nature of intercultural interactive practices in blog forums such as the communal feeling in blog forums and how it influenced their comments on blog issues. For example, the participants were asked if they thought a crisis could occur if bloggers were not sensitive to the culture of other participants. The questions in this section consisted of likert-like scale questions, Yes/No questions, semi-structured questions and open ended questions.

#### **4.6.2 Interviews**

The purpose of the interview was to capture the inner ‘minds’ of the participants in order to understand their ‘implicit’ interactive practices. The interview sought to elicit the participants’ perception of their blogging experience. Therefore, the data obtained from the interview served as links between the qualitative data from the blog responses and the quantitative data from the questionnaires. In addition, it was used to support the analysis of the qualitative data obtained from the blog responses.

As part of the research, 13 participants (6 males and 7 females) who had posted 30 or more blog postings were selected for the interview. The interview was conducted after 13 months of blog activity, in the month of February 2007. It was conducted informally in the researcher's office over a period of two weeks. The interviews were structured and consisted of two main parts. The first part of the interview consisted of 'getting started questions' that elicited general information from the participants to make them feel at ease during the interview.

The second part of the interview retrieved information on the participants' online experience and their interactive behaviors when they responded to the comments on the blog issues. Some of these questions were objective in nature. Each participant was interviewed for about 30 minutes. All the participants were asked similar questions. An arrangement on the time of the interview was made with the participants prior to the interview. The interview was recorded using the Mp3 and later saved into the *real player* of the computer. A copy of the interview questions is in Appendix G.

#### **4.7 The Pilot Study**

Two pilot studies were conducted prior to undertaking the main study, to ascertain the language features of blog forums, blog issues that could trigger discussion and to ascertain the internal consistency of the items in Questionnaire II. This section will be discussed under the following sub-headings:

- (i) Pilot study on blog forums
- (ii) Pilot study on Questionnaire II

#### 4.7.1 Pilot Study on Blog Forums

A pilot study on blog forums commenced during the third week of July 2005. The blog was registered at [www.blogspot.com](http://www.blogspot.com) on May 22, 2005. The choice to register the blog at [www.blogspot.com](http://www.blogspot.com) was based on the popularity of the service provider for giving free blog services. The pilot study lasted 14 weeks (one semester). The responses collected from the 33 students during the pilot study did not constitute data for the study.

Table 4.6 shows the blog issues and the number of blog postings received for each blog issue during the pilot study.

**Table 4.6: Blog Issues and the Number of Postings in Pilot Study**

<b>Blog Issue No.</b>	<b>Blog Issues</b>	<b>Blog Issue Topics</b>	<b>No. of Postings</b>
Blog 1	Rich and Poor Malaysian	Social	15
Blog 2	Juvenile Delinquency	Social	42
Blog 11	What is Getting on our Youth?	Social	22
Blog 6	Care for the Environment	Environment	4
Blog 4	Are We Becoming Debtors?	Economy	4
Blog 7	Being Prudent	Economy	7
Blog 3	Malaysians Today	History	6
Blog 8	Our Forefathers	History	4
Blog 9	A True Malaysian Society	National	16
Blog 10	Stateless Children in Sabah	National	23
Blog 5	National Service	National	19

As is seen in Table 4.6, a total of 11 blog issues related to the topic of the economy, history, nation, society, and environment were posted at the blogsite. The pilot study revealed that national and social blog topics drew more blog comments from the participants as compared to blog issues on the environment, economy and history. One possible reason

could be that blog issues on the latter topics required some reading and background knowledge before participants could comment on them compared to national and social topics where participants could comment on them based on their reasoning.

The data obtained in the pilot study was examined for the main social networking practices used and relevant language features. This served as the initial guide for the analysis and the categorization of the findings in the main study. The pilot study revealed that the analytical procedures of CMDA were relevant and could be applied for the main study.

#### **4.7.2 Pilot Study on Questionnaire II**

The pilot test on Questionnaire II was conducted on 10 voluntary participants from the pilot study of on blog forum to ascertain the internal consistency of the items in Questionnaire II. The responses of the participants were checked for clarity of the rubrics and clarity of questions. During the pilot test the students reported some typing errors and confusion about the choice of words that were used to construct the questions. These were rectified by the researcher for the final version of the questionnaire. The descriptive statistics obtained from the questionnaire supported and substantiated any claims made or observed in the qualitative design.

#### **4.8 Data Analysis: Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) of Social Networking Strategies in Blogs**

This study focuses on the social networking strategies employed in blogs. Table 4.7 shows the focus of each chapter of analysis and the selection of blog topics for Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

**Table 4.7: Chapter Focus and Selection of Blog Topics for Chapters 5, 6 and 7**

<b>Chapters of Analysis</b>	<b>Focus of Chapter</b>	<b>Topics</b>
Chapter Five	Interactive Features Of Blogging Among Tertiary Students	National, Social & Gender topics (36 blog issues)
Chapter Six	Intercultural Networking Strategies And Tactics In A Malaysian Setting	National and Social topics (24 blog issues)
Chapter Seven	Networking Strategies According To Gender	Gender topics (12 blog issues)

As is seen in Table 4.7, the analysis of data consists of comments posted by the participants on 36 blog issues on the national, social and gender topics. Therefore, Chapter Five reports on the overall language features of social networking used by the participants when they blogged. Chapter Six reports on the analysis of the comments posted by the participants on 24 blog issues from national and social topics. Chapter Seven reports on the analysis of the comments on 12 blog issues from gender topics; however, the analysis for quantitative aspects is based on selected blog issues from the national, social and gender topics. Blogs Nos. 10, 20 and 30 (chosen at random) are attached in Appendix H.

As each chapter of analysis, in this dissertation, focuses on different social networking strategies and sets of data, overlaps in the categorization and interpretation of interactive practices is reduced in view that language is usually multi-layered in meaning (Herring, 2004; Job-Sluder & Barab, 2009; Rourke, et al. 2001). The main approach taken for analyzing the qualitative data in blog postings is Herring's (2004) computer-mediated

discourse analysis or CMDA. The approach is used to analyze blog postings at three levels as shown in Table 4.8.

**Table 4.8: Stages of Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis**

STAGE	DESCRIPTION
<b>Level I Analysis: Participation</b>	This involves describing the participants' involvement and the background information on the context that may influence participants interaction in blog forums.
<b>Level II Analysis: Functional Moves</b>	This involves identifying, discussing and classifying blog postings into the various categories according to their form and meaning. Functional moves analysis aided the construction of a coding scheme which is used in Level III.
<b>Level III Analysis: Quantifying the Categories of Functional Moves</b>	Level III analysis involves quantifying the categories of the functional moves in all blog postings. In the analysis each blog post will be considered a unit of analysis. In order to be objective, the categories of the functional moves in each blog post will be counted as one.

As seen in Table 4.8, this study involves three levels of data analysis. This will be seen in Chapter Five, Chapter Six and Chapter Seven. The chapters will begin at the participation Level I of data analysis then followed by functional moves Level II and Level III of data analysis. The following section details the three levels of analysis.

#### **4.8.1 CMDA at Level I: Participation**

According to Herring (2004) and Job-Sluder and Barab (2009), CMDA analytical procedure used at the participation level of analysis gives the background impression of participation. In this study, participation analysis includes participants' perception of blogging and their engagement in blog forums.

Perception, in this study, refers to the social networking practices and social presence in blog interactive practices. Participants' perception is based on what they informed about themselves in the interviews and Questionnaire II.

The participants' engagement in blog forums is determined by the frequencies of blog postings and the number of words which are categorized according to gender and ethnicity of the participants. The frequencies of blog postings made are manually counted and word count is applied with the aid of Microsoft Office Word. The blog postings are not 'cleaned' for any unconventional orthography, symbols or emoticons (e.g. eaykysssss!!!!!!.. heheh...hahahaaha, :-), ^\_^ ) because these can be considered aspects of speech and meaning intended by the participants manifested simultaneously as blogs fall on the continuum of speech and writing (see Nilsson, 2003). The word count generated in the Microsoft Office Word includes all forms of orthography, conventional or unconventional.

#### **4.8.2 CMDA at Level II: Functional Moves**

To determine blog interactive practices at the meaning or functional moves level involves the analysis of speech acts (Herring, 2004; Tan, 2006). As texts are structured and organized in form, content and structure (Georgakopoulou & Goutsos, 2004), it would be possible to categorize text according to functional moves or purpose served by a particular segment of the conversational discourse (Arcidiacono, 2007). In this study, the functional moves analysis entails classifying blog interactive practices into categories according to various types of meaning. This requires the researcher to interpret what blog participants appear to say in the blog postings.



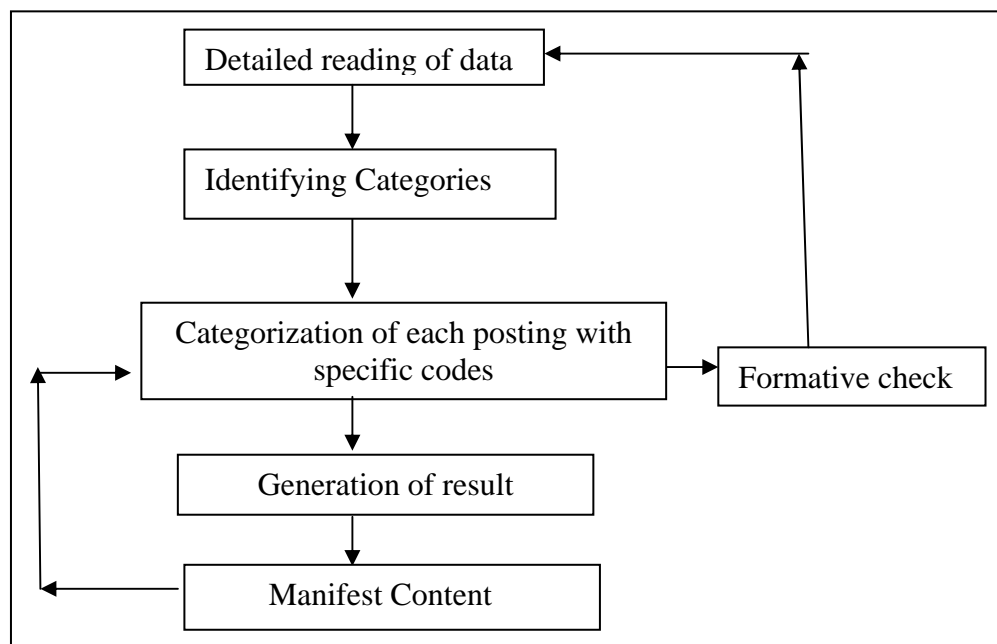
Functional moves like agreeing, eliciting opinions from others, and suggesting act to point to an environment created by the participants (Arcidiacono, 2007) and they can be identified in a segment of a text (Herring, 1993; Herring, 2004). Chapelle (1998) posits that moves can be used to describe the functional and linguistic choices online participants make to construct a text in computer mediated communication.

In the present study, functional moves were considered because they were clearly revealed in the data. The identification of functional moves requires the researcher to interpret the semantic meaning of the segments according to the functions they seem to perform (Tan, 2006; Hering, 2004; Job-Sluder & Barab, 2009). Level II of analysis aided the construction of a coding scheme which is revised and reviewed at Level III.

#### **4.8.3 CMDA at Level III: Quantifying the Categories of Functional Moves**

Georgakopoulou & Goutsos (2004) defined text as a unit of analysis that offered meaningful interpretation. Hara, Bonk and Angeli (1998) state that a unit of analysis can be seen in terms of paragraphs that offer complete and meaningful interpretation. In this study, each blog posting is considered a unit of analysis because it contains the complete idea and intended meaning of the participants as perceived by the researcher. Level III analysis involves the coding and quantifying of all blog postings according to the categories of functional moves identified in each blog posting. The process involves the building of a descriptive case characterization (Herring, 2004; Tan, 2006; Job-Sluder & Barab, 2009). Figure 4.3 (in the following page) shows the analytical procedure used to quantify the categories of functional moves in blog postings.

The analytical process starts the reading of the data. Each blog postings will be tagged only once for the categories of social networking strategies identified in the data with specific codes (*e.g. MAS to denote Malay Avoidance Strategy*). This enabled the researcher to be objective in identifying and tagging the categories of social networking strategies in the data. Within a feedback loop the categories are revised and checked. Later with the aid of Microsoft Office Word all the codes are counted manually for the frequencies of each of the categories. The apparent content is manifested in the result obtained from the Microsoft word which will be tabulated according to ethnicity and gender. The list of codes used in the coding of data is in Appendix I.



**Figure 4.3: Level III Analytical Procedure**

#### 4.9 Summary

This chapter gives a description of the research design, methods, tools and the procedures used in the collection and the analysis of the data for the present study. The initial phases

of blog interaction allowed the researcher to build an understanding of blog interactive practices. A total of 36 blog issues were used to collect data. The focus of analysis for the present study is worked from the comments obtained from the 36 blog issues for Chapter Five, moving downwards to the comments obtained from 24 blog issues for Chapter Six and the comments obtained from 12 blog issues for Chapter Seven. The study uses Herring's (2004) CMDA to ascertain the blog interaction phenomena. The responses obtained from the interview and the questionnaire will substantiate findings from blog forums.