Book Review by	:	Norsham Firdaus
Title	:	Online Journalism on Malaysian Socio-Political Landscapes
Author	:	Rahmat Ghazali
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Rahmat Ghazali's work on the topic of online journalism in Malaysia is certainly an addition to the increasing interests on the literature of news and information disseminated through the new media. Beginning with the inclusion of social and political dimension against Malaysian backdrops, this book offers some discussions and scholastic views concerning online journalism and its effect on the country's socio-political landscapes.

After a brief discussion on historical, social and mass media setting, the author moves on to a more varied topics about Malaysia's multiethnic composition population and national integration. To comprehend the present, the book examines the past that includes arguments concerning the Malays and their political supremacy, as well as the effects of colonialism on multiracial composition of Malaysian population. It also discusses the relationships between the major races and efforts made towards national integration. Equally important to the main argument of the book as suggested by its title, the author has included a chapter describing the Malaysian democratic system. Although concise, this part has provided a synoptic discussion on the country's democratic system and its challenges.

It would not be sufficient to comprehend the nature and effects of online journalism in Malaysia without reviewing the country's mass media setting in general. Hence, the author has provided a discussion on media ownership and the related laws that affect it. Reading the literature provided in the early part of this discussion suggests that mass media in the country is inclined towards ethnic nationalism and ethnic-based political parties, a scenario that would not accommodate the philosophy of national integration of the country's diverse ethnic groups. While providing several sources of the related laws affecting the mass media, the author has also included a brief background and main provision of the Communication and Multimedia Act (CMA) 1998. This law is seen as having significant impact on the freedom of expression especially through online journalism.

Moving on to the next chapter, the book examines the nature of online journalism and its emergence within the environment of mass media in Malaysia. The author begins with the explanation of online journalism, technological distinctiveness and its utilization. This part also includes a brief definition of journalism and purported meaning of 'online'. To understand the development of online journalism in Malaysia, this book traces back the government's consistent commitment

in accommodating information and communication technology as top priority through its national development policy. This includes the establishment of the Ministry of Energy, Communications and Multimedia, as well as several prominent infrastructures of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) where the Internet is seen as central to the development of online journalism in the country. Nevertheless, the establishment of the Internet infrastructure alone in the early years did not immediately stimulate online journalism in Malaysia. The author explained that journalism through this new media had only gained greater attention in response to the 1998 political crisis with public protest against the unbalanced reporting of the mainstream mass media. The remaining part of this chapter discusses the three major categories of online journalism, namely the mainstream online journalism, the independent online journalism, and the 'shared and discussion' sites that include weblogs and bloggers commentaries. Readers will have a clearer picture of the various media organisations and individuals traced under the three categories as the author has provided their backgrounds. The author also discussed the freedom of expression and assurance of 'no censorship' from the authority through the CMA 1998 for non-mainstream online journalism. To illustrate this Rahmat included the following statements:

Generally, these non-mainstream online journalisms claim that they are independent from any political organization that includes government affiliates. They are more critical in their news, features, and opinion pieces. Much more, as some of them illustrate, their

columns of 'letter to editor' portray more criticism against social and political issues, which normally would not be published in the mainstream print media (p. 82).

To highlight the different standpoint of online journalism in relation to the traditional mass media, this book compares the pattern of coverage and the priority given on some public-concern issues between online newspaper and the mainstream print media. To this, the author concluded that, "...online journalism has opened up more space for the people to inform, particularly the government, and be informed, on matters that concern their rights for safety, security, and most importantly their democratic participation" (p. 119).

In the next chapter, this book discusses the contradictions of online journalism that had contributed to social tension. The author asserts that the other side of online journalism also promotes undercurrents of discontentment within the society. The causes to this social tension are speculative, defamatory, libelous, negative criticism and irresponsible discourses. Nevertheless, online journalism does provide more democratic space and some of the socio-political issues discussed within it have been responded by the government.

As it stands, the book offers a scholastic analysis of online journalism in Malaysia, addressing topics ranging from general historical and social backdrop to mass media and online journalism setting. A well-written one, this book is an invaluable source of reference to students and lecturers who wish to analyse the emergence of online journalism and its socio-political impact in Malaysia.