

FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The **Trends in Southeast Asia** series acts as a platform for serious analyses by selected authors who are experts in their fields. It is aimed at encouraging policymakers and scholars to contemplate the diversity and dynamism of this exciting region.

THE EDITORS

Series Chairman:

Choi Shing Kwok

Series Editor:

Ooi Kee Beng

Editorial Committee:

Su-Ann Oh

Daljit Singh

Francis E. Hutchinson

Benjamin Loh

Deepening the Understanding of Social Media's Impact in Southeast Asia

By Ross Tapsell

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Southeast Asia's Internet users are far more diverse than usually reported. They range from the urban youth with laptops and high-speed Wi-Fi, to the older generation semi-rural and rural users with affordable mobile phones for Facebook and WhatsApp.
- Southeast Asians generally trust social media platforms more than in Western societies. This trust in social media reflects a lack of trust in local mainstream media and official sources of information.
- What campaign information (and disinformation) is being spread and which ones are most successful are essential for understanding how voters in Southeast Asia use and trust social media.
- Social media platforms and Southeast Asia's "app industry" need clearer and enforced regulation on their use of data and the extent to which they can sell data to advertisers. These advertisers include, but are not limited to, politicians and political parties.
- Since the future of social media usage will likely lie in closed groups, the role of big data analyses that have dominated research on social media over the past ten years, is likely to regress. Instead, ethnographic scholars who can access these groups and engage with their particular interests and identities are more likely to be useful in understanding the digital sphere in the future.

