THE CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN ASEAN COMMUNITY

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Abstract

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will be transformed into a community called ASEAN Community by 31 December 2015. This is considered as a quantum leap for ASEAN when it lets people to take part in the process of decision making in any ASEAN policy even though the resistant still exists from some governments of ASEAN ten member states. However, this people-centric approach, instead of state-centric, will be strengthened with the accessibility of online social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube especially by the younger generation in ASEAN. This paper briefly traces the forming of ASEAN until the establishment of the ASEAN Community agenda. This paper also discusses about the importance of social media for political change and how it becomes a tool influencing the people to free expression and the government to easily engage the people. However, there are restrictions imposed to the practice of free expression on social media in ASEAN countries. In overall, social media will be an essential medium for ASEAN in the future especially in giving awareness about peace and security and encouraging more interactions between people in the spirit of a community.

Keywords: ASEAN Community, social media, free expression, freedom of the Internet

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INTRODUCTION

On 31 December 2015 will see a transformation of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to become a regional community. ASEAN was born from the Bangkok Declaration on 8 August 1967. There were five nations forming ASEAN namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand and agreed to sign the ASEAN Declaration in Bangkok. Now ASEAN has ten member states when Brunei joined the group in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997 and Cambodia in 1999. ASEAN is not, however the first attempt to achieve regionalism in Southeast Asia. Prior to ASEAN, ASA (Association of Southeast Asia) and MAPHILINDO (for Malaya, the Philippines and Indonesia) were created in 1961 and 1963 respectively (Phanit, 1980). ASEAN evolved to provide familiarity and accommodation between the indigenous political elite and also significantly enhanced regime legitimacy for nation-building and developmental purposes (Ganesan, 2004). The evolution of an 'ASEAN Way' that is non-intrusive in the domestic political affairs of member states and the joint agreement to renounce aggression in the resolution of inter-state disputes.

As a regional community, ASEAN's two main goals basically are economic development (growth, cultural development and social progress) and regional peace and stability (Kivimaki, 2008). Thanat Khoman coined a term 'collective political defence' to describe one of ASEAN's goals (Acharya, 2000). Besides, in order to maintain the sovereignty of all member states, ASEAN embrace the concept of the 'ASEAN Way' that upholds non-intervention or non-interference principle.

For making a successful ASEAN Community, ASEAN needs to promote the idea to the population and what changes they are intended to do. Therefore, ASEAN needs media to assist them in promoting this in particular social media which is trendy nowadays to the young generation. This paper will explain the identity of ASEAN and concept of ASIAN Community. Then, this paper will study the infrastructure of Internet in ASEAN and how social media is available to the people especially for political,

economy, social and cultural purposes. Finally, this paper will also highlight the concerns in ASEAN with regard to the issue of freedom of the Internet and social media is abused to spread hatred among the population. Thus, this paper will enlighten us about the situation of ASEAN and how social media is becoming a medium for people which are very influential to the successful of ASEAN and bring common good to the ASEAN citizens.

THE ASEAN COMMUNITY AND ASEAN IDENTITY

Regional cooperation to build stable relations in Southeast Asia has become known as the 'ASEAN Way'. This concept was at first introduced in response to the not only the ideological conflict between the Western Liberalism and Eastern Communism during the Cold War but also to maintain and protect ASEAN identity. Later, this concept was accepted and imbedded in the ASEAN principle in guiding the relations between the ASEAN states. A collaborative approach emphasises three fundamental standards:

1. Non-interference or non-intervention in other member states' domestic affairs, as underscored in the United Nations Charter, Article 2(7);

2. Consensus building and cooperative programs rather than legally binding treaties (but in an exceptional situation, a binding agreement may be possible);

3. Preference for national implementation of programs rather than reliance on a strong region-wide bureaucracy.

The emphasis on consensus is also reflected in ASEAN methods for dispute resolution. In the Pacific region, due to the influence of the British Commonwealth, most disagreements are settled with formal judicial methods (Cameron & Ramsay, 1996). Disagreements between the nations of ASEAN, on the other hand, are generally

settled through conciliation and consultation, which is seen as a way to minimise tensions and avoid unnecessary conflicts (Narine, 1999).

By adopting both the 'Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II)' and the 'Cebu Declaration on the Acceleration of the Establishment of an ASEAN Community by 2015' by ASEAN Heads of States indicate that the member states acknowledge that an integrated, stable, knowledgeable and caring community will help ASEAN nations to strengthen their economic competitiveness and attractiveness to investors, in particular during economic downturn. The three pillars of the ASEAN Community, namely the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), are the most crucial areas deemed necessary for the progress and evolution of ASEAN and its peoples. The ASEAN charter is *One Vision, One Identity, One Community* (Chiam, 2009).

ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) draws towards a rules-based Community of shared values and norms; a cohesive, peaceful, stable and resilient region with shared responsibility for comprehensive security including a dynamic and outward-looking region in an increasingly integrated and interdependent world (Chiam, 2009). It seeks to mainly achieve an enhancement in political stability, democracy and good governance through creating a just, democratic and harmonious environment. This is clear that the ASEAN Community will always protect or stress on shared values and norms and prioritise responsibilities/duties over rights. This is because ASEAN leaders still believe that the 'ASEAN Way' concept should be maintained and the non-interference principle should always be applied in inter-state relations within the ASEAN Community.

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint is 'a region of equitable economic development' includes human resource development, information and communication technologies, capacity building, poverty reduction and improvement in quality of life (Chiam, 2009). It was previously claimed that economic rights can be

more important than political rights, and that it is necessary to focus on economic development. At the current level of development in Southeast Asia, it is maintained that people's economic well-being must assume primary importance and this justifies the 'economics first' argument. Some ASEAN leaders still claim that political stability is of primary importance to economic development, and a strong government is best able to assure the required stability. One argument is that economic progress can be best achieved by a government that needs not deal with political opposition. To be sure, multinational corporations are more likely to invest in Southeast Asia if it is viewed as being able to provide a stable and secure environment. What is obvious in the agenda of ASEAN Community is that the principle of 'Economics First' will also be a priority for all member states.

However, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) is adopted to realise a people-oriented, socially responsible ASEAN community with the view of achieving solidarity, unity and a common identity as well as building a sharing and caring society (Chiam, 2009). The characteristics envisaged in the ASCC Blueprint are human development; social welfare and protection; social justice and rights; ensuring environmental sustainability; building the ASEAN identity; and narrowing the development gap. In here, we can see that there is transformation from a more state-centric ASEAN to a more people-centric.

Under this blueprint, the ASEAN Human Rights Body is established and provided for in Article 14 of the ASEAN Charter. Article 14 (1) states : '*In conformity with the purposes and principles of the ASEAN Charter relating to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, ASEAN shall establish an ASEAN human rights body*.' The mandate of the AHRB shall, therefore, include both promotion and protection of not only human rights but also fundamental freedoms. For ASEAN to pass the test of democracy building through the process of the establishment of an ASEAN Human Rights Body will require: (a) effective participation of civil society in the process of establishing the body and in its functioning; (b) the

process of its establishment and its functioning to be transparent and inclusive; and (c) the body to be independent and impartial, in order for it to be able to hold the government accountable. It should also be equipped with monitoring powers. In sum, the legitimacy of ASEAN and of an ASEAN Human Rights Body needs to be assessed against normative democratic principles. As Eriksen and Fossum (2007) put it, 'democratic legitimacy requires public justification of the results to those who are affected by them'. Justification demands participation, accountability and responsibility (Petcharamesree, 2009).

The human right body later named the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) has the potential to issue statements and findings that may prove to be important catalysts for reform. While the dialogue-based, evolutionary approach adopted in the terms of reference (TOR) will likely limit the role of the AICHR to having only persuasive (rather than binding) authority on ASEAN governments, it has the potential to trigger further discussion on human rights issues, as well as open avenues for further action. The key will be to ensure that the AICHR does not obfuscate or diminish the positions of reform-minded individuals but, rather, strengthens them. To take an example, ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan made statements on behalf of the association in July 2009 criticising the Burmese government's actions against pro-democracy freedom fighter Aung San Suu Kyii. At the time, Daw Suu Kyii faced trial for allegedly violating the terms of her house arrest by allowing an American to stay in her house after he swam across a lake to her home. Pitsuwan's stance was unusually strong for ASEAN, and he has since been criticised in some circles for his remarks. The question then becomes this: would statements like Surin's be permissible if an AICHR representative from the government being criticised was given overall authority to coordinate ASEAN's approach to human rights issues? (Kelsall, 2009:6).

Although many critics concern about the role played by the ASCC, Chiam Heng Keng (2009: 5-6) explains that a major human right element in the ASCC

Blueprint is the enhancement of 'the well-being and livelihood of the peoples of ASEAN by providing them with equitable access to human development opportunities by promoting and investing in education and lifelong learning, human resource training and capacity building…' (Page 2 of the ASEAN Socio-cultural Community Blueprint). This equitable access to human development is in accordance to the Declaration of the Right to Development adopted by the UN General Assembly on 4 December 1986 while the right to education is enunciated in several human rights declarations and instruments including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26), the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 13), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 28) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Article 10). Chiam said that there are three strategic objectives have been identified to achieve this characteristic of the ASCC Blueprint, namely advancing and prioritising education, investing in human resource development and promotion of decent work. As regard to social welfare and protection, the ASCC Blueprint envisions to address fully socioeconomic disparities and poverty by alleviating poverty and eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. This Blueprint also calls for access to primary healthcare of the vulnerable groups/ people at risk. This Blueprint specifically emphasises the promotion and protection of the rights and welfare of disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginalised groups such as women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and migrant workers. The implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers is set forth as a strategic objective of the ASCC Blueprint to achieve this particular goal. Promoting corporate social responsibility to ensure sustainable socio-economic development in ASEAN member states and fostering sustainability of water resources to ensure equitable accessibility and sufficiency of acceptable quality of water are also aspects of human rights incorporated in the Blueprint. Moreover, there is definitely encouragement by ASEAN states to engage the civil society in ASEAN decision-making. Human rights are now becoming an important agenda for ASEAN states to practice. Therefore, ASCC can be

a starting point to transform the 'ASEAN Way' and ASEAN Community as a whole in acceptance people participation.

To run and to realise an ASEAN Community by 2015, many things have been done intensively to implement the rules and regulations of the ASEAN Charter, which was ratified by all ASEAN member states in December 2008. Since the ASEAN Charter comprises only basic provisions, in 13 chapters and 55 articles, it is necessary to develop those basic provisions into rules and policies to be implemented. Here, there are battles of ideas among all parties concerned over the interpretation of the Charter's basic provisions and its delivery to the people (Utomo, 2011).

In term of economy, speaking at the ASEAN Business Forum 2015 on 12 March 2015, Mustapa Mohamed, Malaysia's Minister of International Trade and Industry (MITI), said that by implementing ASEAN Economic Community, the ASEAN growth in trade will be two to three percent higher than the global growth in trade. Currently, the level of global trade growth was at 5.9 percent in 2014. He also mentioned that the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in ASEAN will also increase to 11 to 12 percent, unlike currently at 10 percent. In 2013, ASEAN managed to bring about Ringgit Malaysia (RM) 452 billion in FDI and RM78 billion of them were the FDI among the members of ASEAN (Sinar Harian, 2015).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has forecast GDP growth for the combined ASEAN community to be approximately six percent per year from 2011 to 2016. What is more important than the economic rate of growth, however, is understanding how this growth is dispersed and the knock-on effects it may generate (Nielsen, 2014). Nielsen (2014) estimates that 'as of 2012 there were over 190 million people in Southeast Asia who could be defined as middle class, in that they have the financial means to make purchase decisions based on their level of disposable income. In spending terms this relates to US$16 and US$100 per day. Due mostly to the economic growth of the region, Nielsen projects the wealth distribution that is currently observed will continue and by 2020 the middle class

population in Southeast Asia will more than double to 400 million'. With the growth of the middle class population, this gives the indication about the growth of social media in ASEAN countries because the middle class population were the main customers for online media particularly social media.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL CHANGE

The term social media or 'Web 2.0' refers to a new 'wave' of Internet based applications. These internet applications enable greater interaction between user and application through user generated content (Komito & Bates). This content is varied, and includes photographs, video, text comments, forming a media rich mosaic. Sites such as Bebo, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook have developed, where individuals cannot only post a variety of different types of information on their own web sites, but can also link their web sites to those of their friends, thus the description of them as 'social networking' applications. Basically, social media can take many forms such as Internet forums, news portals, weblogs, social blogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures, video et cetera. Social media technologies include blogs, picture sharing, vlogs, wall postings, email, instant messaging among many others. All these categories have functions that allow them to be democratically interactive in ways unlike radio, television, or the highly edited letters pages of newspapers and magazines. In a way social media supports the democratisation of knowledge and information, transforming people from content consumers into content producers. Social media are distinct from traditional media, such as newspapers, television, and film. While social media are relatively inexpensive and accessible tools that enable anyone (even ordinary individuals) to publish or access information, traditional media generally require certain skills and resources to publish information. One feature shared by both social media and traditional media is the capability to reach small or large audiences. Social media is obviously got a huge potential for democratisation. No wonder, Jurgen Habermas (2006) argued that the Internet can have a subversive

effect on intellectual life in authoritarian regimes, and threaten to bring down the regime itself.

Table 1:

Types of Social Media

Social Networks	Facebook, Google+, MySpace, LinkedIn, IRC
Mediaproducts community	YouTube, Flickr, Slideshare
Blog services	Wordpress, Blogger, Twitter, Posterous
Information creation community	Wikipedia, Wikispaces
Link sharing services	Digg, Diigo
Virtual community	Habbo Hotel, Second Life

Source: (Suomen Toivo, 2012)

Social media's most essential transformation to the way people communicate is user-produced content and the fast and flexible sharing of content as shown in Table 1. Content creators must decide carefully which social media websites or 'tools' are best to create an effective social influence because each tool has its own particular features and operating culture and user communities (Suomen Toivo, 2012).

It is therefore unsurprising that a burgeoning new breed of 'citizen journalists'

populating blogs and open publishing sites are shifting assumptions about authority and influence in news media culture. Other thinkers see in this the flowering of a new form of democracy, an 'emergent democracy' that changes the flow of power in the media landscape, and therefore in society (Beers, 2006). The driving dynamic, they argue, is the shift away from expert journalists speaking as 'one to many.' Instead, citizen journalists share information 'many to many' within the horizontal, interlinked world of the Internet. Ito and others claim the power of emergent democracy was evidenced by the toppling of U.S. Senate Majority Leader Speaker Trent Lott when his racist comments and anti-civil rights record, largely ignored by corporate media, received harsh scrutiny in the blogosphere (Beers, 2006).

According to C. Shirky (2011), 'what do demonstrations on city streets in the Philippines in 2001, the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States in 2008, revocation of the results of the fraudulent elections in Moldavia in 2009, the M-15 movement with their camps and demonstrations in Spain in 2011, the so-called 'Arab Spring' in the Middle East in early 2011, and the 'Occupy Wall Street' movement that started in New York, also in 2011, all have one in common?' Shirky (2011) said that 'they have all used social media to help organise such protests and mobilise their responsible agents. Yet these were much more than just about arranging a party. They all greatly exploited social media to establish communication networks and move towards their objectives' (Suomen Toivo, 2012).

SOCIAL MEDIA IN ASEAN

The Ministers Responsible for Information of the ASEAN Member States on the occasion of the 12th Conference of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information (AMRI) held on 12 June 2014 in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar agreed to establish and adopt the *Nay Pyi Taw Declaration on Realisation of ASEAN Community by 2015* (2014), and together with the *Bandar Seri Begawan Declaration on the ASEAN Community's Post-2015 Vision* (2013) as vision statements by ASEAN Leaders to move forward in

accomplishment of ASEAN's common objective of creating a peaceful, people-oriented, people-centred, dynamic and outward looking Community. In the Nay Pyi Taw Declaration, ASEAN will commit to further catalyse on the advantages on new and social media in dissemination of information and educating people on ASEAN, and encouraging them to contribute to consolidate ASEAN solidarity and unity in the ASEAN community building process.

Malaysia's Information Communication and Culture Minister, Rais Yatim said that ASEAN recognises social media as an effective channel for information dissemination and critical for people-to-people connectivity and the promotion of awareness about ASEAN and integration (The Borneo Post, 2012). He further reiterates that social media, which was emerging as the fastest growing medium of communication in ASEAN today, should be enhanced to the point that the younger generation should play a bigger role in the ASEAN awareness and ASEAN cohesion towards making ASEAN Community a reality (The Borneo Post, 2012).

ASEAN countries have to identify appropriate programmes and activities using social media positively to inculcate cultural values, understanding and solidarity among ASEAN peoples and communities. The ASEAN Culture and Information Portal (ACIP) and ASEAN Media Portal (AMP) would be consolidated by incorporating the relevant social and new media to develop into a 'first-stop', rather than 'one-stop' portal. Rais further said that social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter would be incorporated in the portal, saying that 'These will be combined to give ASEAN a bigger boost among the peoples around the region and for them to understand that ASEAN actually stands also for information dissemination plus the outspread usefulness of culture as a binding factor for the peoples of ASEAN' (The Borneo Post, 2012). ASEAN also keens to cooperate with partners from China, Japan and South Korea in the areas of training and human capital development, news and cultural exchanges.

However, Kavi Chongkittavorn (2013) argued that 'media landscapes including social media in Southeast Asia are diverse and uneven. That helps explain why it is extremely difficult to offer a general image of the regional media. That has been the main attribute hampering discussions and closer collaboration throughout these years in media-related activities, especially in setting common norms and standards of media practice. Although the charter, and the region's political-and-security and social-and-cultural blueprints, specifically mention the need to promote the free flow of and access to information - as well as the role of media in promoting ASEAN identity and awareness in community-building and integration efforts - ASEAN leaders have yet to make serious efforts to push forward this platform' (Chongkittavorn, 2013). Chongkittavorn (2013) explained that 'media and its social networks must help to articulate the benefits of regional integration and cooperation. The National Press Council of Thailand and the Indonesian Press Council are currently working on a common plan to establish the ASEAN Press Council, which will be the first time in the region for such an undertaking. Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines have independent media self-regulatory bodies. Myanmar set up an interim press council last year'.

Sonny Coloma, Secretary of the Philippine Presidential Communications Operations Office, said that for ASEAN 'The strategies shall include the full utilisation of traditional and new media, exploring new collaborative networks, and strengthen linkages with government ministers and civil society organisations in helping build the ASEAN Community' (Investvine.com, 2012). Coloma continued to argue that 'Beyond the well-known channels of traditional and mainstream media, we can now look at an exciting world of new opportunities offered by the new social media such as Facebook and Twitter. The concept of one ASEAN Community can also be mainstreamed in the school curriculum, classroom and extra-curricular activities' (Investvine.com, 2012). Therefore, according to Kamal Mamat, representative from the ASEAN Secretariat, 'ASEAN needs to evolve from a community of governments to a community of people' (Investvine.com, 2012).

One of the most important things that ASEAN needs urgently to improve is the infrastructure of new media. According to Netindex.com in 2014, the average speed for the Internet in ASEAN was 12.4 megabits per-second (Mbps). So far seven of the ASEAN countries were below the average of 12.4 Mbps, except for Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The global average speed was 17.5 Mbps. Singapore was the highest among ASEAN countries with 61 Mbps, even higher than the United States (US) with 22.3 Mbps. The lowest average speed among ASEAN countries was the Philippine with 3.6 Mbps (Maningat, 2014). If there is improvement in the Internet speed, this can affect to progress of new media in Malaysia and will affect as well the foreign direct investment (FDI) into ASEAN countries which requires better Internet speed.

Meanwhile, Simon Kemp (2015) in the Digital, Social & Mobile in 2015 (@wearesocialsg) explained that the Internet users in Southeast Asia reached about 208 million users with the level of 33 percent Internet penetration rate. Furthermore, there were 199 million social media accounts in Southeast Asia, which is about 32 percent of total population of Southeast Asia. In fact, there were 170 million mobile social accounts, which about 27 percent of total population. There is still potential to increase the level of Internet penetration and access the social media networks.

Table 2:

Use of Social Media by Government Agencies (Y- Yes, N- No)

	Twitter	Facebook	YouTube	Censors
Brunei	n	n	n	y
Cambodia	n	y	y	n
Indonesia	y	n	n	y
Laos	n	n	n	n
Malaysia	y	y	n	n
Myanmar	n	n	n	y
Philippines	y	y	y	n
Singapore	y	y	y	n
Thailand	n	y	n	y
Vietnam	n	n	n	y

Source: Kuzma (2010),

Regarding the use of social media by government agencies in ASEAN countries, there are a lot of improvements that need to be done. For instance, in Table 2 shows that Brunei, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam still censor the social media. In fact, the government agencies in Brunei, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam have never utilised Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, except for Singapore and the Philippine that utilise fully all these websites. However, the main issue concerning the social media in ASEAN is still about freedom of expression and freedom of the Internet. There are many restrictions imposed to the online media which limit the people participation in Southeast Asia. Next section will thoroughly address this issue of freedom of the Internet.

FREEDOM OF THE INTERNET

Many surveys show that freedom of the Internet in ASEAN countries are getting worse for years 2014 and 2015. According to Reporters without Borders' (RWB) 2015 World Press Freedom Index, media freedom across Southeast Asia

continues to decline, despite the region's economic vibrancy (RWB, 2015). Southeast Asian states deteriorate in the lower half of the 180-country survey. The rankings drop for half of the ASEAN countries, except for three countries that were slightly improved. Indonesia saw the highest decline in the RWB report by falling 6 spots to 138. However, RWB strangely rated Brunei the 'freest' media in Southeast Asia even though it fell by 4 places to 121. Singapore also decline by 3 spots to 153 in RWB's report due to cases like in a libel case brought by the prime minister where a Singaporean court ordered a blogger to pay US$28,000 in legal fees. The Singapore government has never lost in any defamation case

Moreover, Thailand down by four places to 134 after the May 2014 coup following by the military leaders intensified a media crackdown. So far since the May 2014 coup in Thailand, the authorities have tried over 30 people for lèse-majesté violations. The Ministry of Information and Communications has also shut down 1,200 Thai websites deemed to violate the lèse-majesté statutes, while arresting anti-coup activists for their social media postings (Abuza, 2015). Laos's ranking on the other hand remained unchanged at 171, despite passing a highly restrictive Internet law based on laws practised in Myanmar and Vietnam in September 2014. According to RWB (2015), the law was vaguely written and criminalised undefined anti-government and party content. Besides, all print and broadcast media in Laos is state-owned and heavily censored. Meanwhile, Cambodia is on the 139th spot. In Cambodia, there were political information and political debates circulated online that contributed to the hotly contested elections allowing the opposition parties make significant gains (Meyn, 2014).

Vietnam ranked 175 and has the most restricted media in the region. The restriction on the media increased ahead of the quadrennial party congress in early 2016. RWB (2015) condemned Vietnam because it has currently put under arrest to 19 journalists and bloggers, making it the fifth leading jailer of journalists in the world. For instance in a one month period between November and December 2014, Vietnam

arrested three bloggers and charged them for violating vague national security provisions and 'abusing democratic freedoms.' Although it recently released prominent two bloggers on bail, both are still being investigated. In fact, 35 bloggers in Vietnam are currently serving prison sentences on trumped-up charges including attempting to overthrow the government (Abuza, 2015). The Vietnamese government has taken an aggressive approach against any online dissent. But bloggers continue to fight by investigating the inner workings of the communist party. Oren Murphy, the Asia regional director for Internews, a US-based independent media development organisation, argued that 'In the region generally, broadcasting is heavily state dominated. With the Internet, I think governments haven't fully gotten their heads around it – initially because internet penetration was so low they didn't care so much. But now that connectivity is expanding and people are being much more vocal online, (governments) are starting to care' (Meyn, 2014).

The Philippines rose by 8 places to 141 making it the most improved ASEAN country (RWB, 2015). The Philippines has the freest Internet and a very free and vibrant media in Southeast Asia. However, the Philippines is not the best place to work as journalist because since the Maguindanao massacre in 2009 that killed 34 Filipino journalists, 21 more journalists have been killed (Abuza, 2015). According to Luis Teodoro, a journalism professor in the Philippines and deputy director of the Centre for Media Freedom and Responsibility, despite 'freedom of the press being enshrined in the constitution, endemic violence against journalists, and impunity for their attackers, the Philippines has had a chilling effect on investigative reporting in the country' (Meyn, 2014).

Likewise, Myanmar also improved by 1 spot to 144, but the situation is still very fragile after the surge in sectarian violence, the targeted killing of a journalist in 2014, and the stalling of reforms (RWB, 2015). Sann Oo, editor of The Myanmar Times, an independent weekly newspaper published in Yangon, said that 'In the previous (military) system, we needed to submit all our articles to the censor boards and we

could publish it only with their approval. Now we are free to publish whatever we want and whatever we write. But the government still has control over radio and TV. All the TV channels in Myanmar are joint ventures between government and private and most of the programs are entertainment. The main TV channel, MRTV, is being broadcast by the Ministry of Information and it is full of propaganda' (Meyn, 2014). Oo further argues that both the government and the press are struggling to keep up with changes to the media environment since the end of totalitarian rule, saying that 'As the government dominated the media for more than 50 years, we are facing difficulties in getting information. Some of the ministries don't want to deal with media and some don't even want to talk to us. People are still afraid to talk to journalists, too. And in the meantime, most of our journalists are still young and they don't have proper training' (Meyn, 2014).

In Myanmar, the sectarian violence is getting worse and social media is used to spread hatred against certain particular ethnic groups. For instance, the hate campaign against the Muslim Rohingya could also be observed online via social media such as Facebook. A Facebook page by Ashin Wirathu, a leader of the chauvinist anti-Muslim '969' movement, claimed that 'all terrorists are Muslim … they kill innocent men and women so peace and Islam are not related.' The post was shared 136 times. Facebook has gained immense traction in Myanmar because it just requires low bandwidth to load, is easy to use for non-English speakers and handles Myanmar fonts well compared to other social media like Twitter (Holland, 2014). The United Nations (UN) recognises the Rohingya Muslims living in Myanmar's Rakhine State as one of the world's most persecuted communities. Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar have faced torture, neglect, and repression since the country's independence in 1948. The Myanmar government has been repeatedly criticised by human rights groups for failing to protect the Rohingya Muslims. On 7 May 2014, the House of Representatives passed a Resolution urging the Myanmarese government to end the persecution of ethnic minority Rohingya Muslims. This was made possible in part by our tremendous activists and supporters who contacted their Representatives

in Congress and told them that the US will not condone the discrimination and violence inflicted on the Rohingya people (US Campaign For Myanmar, 2014). House Resolution 418 implores the Myanmarese government to respect internationally recognized human rights for all ethnic and religious minority groups within Myanmar. The Resolution sends a clear message to the Myanmarese government that blatant racism will not be tolerated by the United States. The U.S. government is taking notice of the gross human rights violations happening in Myanmar (US Campaign For Myanmar, 2014). What happened in Myanmar was clearly an ethnic cleansing or genocide. Therefore, there is a need to study the ethnic hatred in Myanmar especially involving the Rohingya in order to understand the true reality of the human crisis.

Finally, Malaysia's ranking also remained unchanged at 147, three spots below Myanmar (RWB, 2015). This happens according to RWB (2015) due to Prime Minister Najib Razak broke a promise to rescind the colonial era Sedition Act and there are increased in politically motivated prosecutions. More than 10 sedition cases have been filed against prominent opposition politicians, youth activists, and a law professor (Abuza, 2015). However, social media is still very popular in Malaysia. Online news portal, the Malaysiakini, for example has an increasing appetite for impartial coverage of current events allowed his website to build an audience of more than 300,000 subscription readers. Its co-founder and editor, Steven Gan said that. 'In general, we do a lot of things the mainstream media cannot do: reporting on corruption, reporting on police brutality, reporting on major demonstrations in the streets of Kuala Lumpur. People want to know what is happening and they want the media to be a check on the government' (Meyn, 2014). Malaysian government has so far come true to its promise in keeping the Internet free for attracting big investment from global tech giants. However, online journalists are not immune from intimidation. Gan argued that 'Instead of using repressive laws against independent media, you see a lot of tycoons and politicians suing independent media and bloggers' (Meyn, 2014).

In overall, there is a lot to be done to improve the practice of freedom of the Internet in Southeast Asia. With the introduction of ASEAN Community, it gives a hope optimistically that the infrastructure of the Internet will be improved. With the popularity of social media among young people, without doubt, social media will become more important as medium for people to engage the government and also ASEAN leaderships.

CONCLUSION

In sum, ASEAN Community will transform the ASEAN population into a single community. And this community will need the infrastructure and freedom of the Internet in order for ASEAN to perform its duty and responsibility to all ten member states. It is clear that it is not easy to establish an ASEAN Community because ASEAN still wants to maintain some of its identity and roles such as the 'ASEAN Way' in term of the policy of non-intervention between one member states to the others. ASEAN also prefers to maintain its role to promote trade and commerce through the 'Economic First' agenda. However, ASEAN is now willing to allow more participation from the people and civil society in its decision making process.

Social media is the best medium for the people to engage the ASEAN's governments and leaderships. More and more infrastructures of online media have been built that will definitely increase people participation. However, the governments still impose many restrictions that can hamper the process of people participation. ASEAN countries cannot afford to stop social media. Although ASEAN Community can only be realised by the eve of year 2016, it needs social media to promote peace and harmony among ASEAN member states and encourage more interactions and engagement between ASEAN citizens from different countries. This can potentially materialise the agenda of ASEAN Community.

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