

Disinformation, Hate speech and Incitement in Southeast Asia

Hate speech across the region is still apparent, with anti-LGBTQI hate speech, as an example, an “everyday reality for LGBTI individuals in Southeast Asia while navigating online spaces. This disturbing state of affairs is especially entrenched in legally repressive landscapes that discriminate against LGBTI individuals.”¹ Yet there have been positive responses to these human rights infringements by civil society, corporation, and government alike.

Hate speech is being countered using legislation, public advocacy, and creative measures developed by software companies such as Facebook. For example, in India, Google has developed Factshala, a “news and information literacy programme launched by the international media development non-profit Internews in collaboration with the India-based digital media and information initiative DataLEADS and with support from Google.org, Google’s charitable arm, and Google News Initiative.”² It hopes to counter bigotry and racism using these new initiatives.

There are a growing number of education programmes available across region, language, and demographics, including the UN’s ongoing commitment to tackling hate speech via education, alongside many other smaller organisations that are working to counter this problem. While digital literacy is becoming a key policy driver in some Southeast Asian countries, research has found smaller scale courses are gaining traction and having some effect on hate speech and disinformation.³ These are aimed at the region’s less educated and are connecting via small clips and memes, or via workshops offered at community level.

Dubbed by some as “‘information disorder’, a term including misinformation, disinformation, mal-information and hate speech,”⁴ the region continues to grapple with all forms of this problem, yet positive steps, as signalled above, are slowly countering the problem, showing the influence of both sustained advocacy and education programmes.

Recommendations

Governments in the region should:

1. Realise the importance of direct fake news, hate speech and danger speech legislation, and implement this legislation in its civil and penal codes.
2. Work with the private sector, including social media sites and internet companies more broadly, to implement a range of generic policy measures across the region, rather than on a state-by-state basis.
3. Work with CSOs and NGOs at large-scale educational programmes for all ages and all users.

Learn from and work with the European Union and its partners to implement measures to curb hate speech and danger speech

¹ Daron Tan, “Avoiding Overreach: Shaping State Responses to Anti-LGBTI Online Hate Speech in Southeast Asia,” *OpinioJuris*, June 18, 2022, <https://opiniojuris.org/2022/06/18/avoiding-overreach-shaping-state-responses-to-anti-lgbti-online-hate-speech-in-southeast-asia/>

² Riyaz Wani, “Across South Asia, Online Hate Speech is Increasingly Leading to Real-world Harm,” *Equal Times*, July 13, 2022, <https://www.equaltimes.org/across-south-asia-online-hate?lang=en#.Yvm6L3ZByUk>

³ Helani Galpaya and Ramathi Bandaranayake, “Tackling the Information Disorder in Asia,” *East Asia Forum*, July 2, 2022, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2022/07/02/tackling-the-information-disorder-in-asia/>

⁴ Ibid.