

The Development of Effective Public Communications in ASEAN: Data Analytics and Behavioural Insights

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Trend Report
No. 22 (2026)

ASCC Research & Development Platform on Media, Culture, and Arts



one vision
one identity
one community



ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Trend Report

ASCC Research and Development Platforms Programme

The ASEAN Secretariat
Jakarta

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The ASEAN Secretariat is based in Jakarta, Indonesia.

For inquiries, contact:

The ASEAN Secretariat

Community Relations Division (CRD)

70A Jalan Sisingamangaraja

Jakarta 12110 Indonesia

Phone: (6221) 724-3372, 726-2991

Fax: (6221) 739-8234, 724-3504

Email: public@asean.org

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The ASCC R&D Platform on Media, Culture, and Arts aims to develop a robust body of research outputs and identify and develop a pool of experts more aware of the ASEAN context. Its primary objective is to incorporate external perspectives to foster an increased awareness of blind spots, identify gaps and trends, and facilitate policy and advocacy engagement on cross-sectoral issues. The ASCC R&D Platform on Media, Culture, and Art received support from the Government of People's Republic of China Through the ASEAN-China Cooperation Fund (ACCF).

This report, as part of the ASCC Research and Development (R&D) Platform on Media, Culture, and Arts, aims to provide a strategic space for dialogue on emerging and cross-cutting issues in ASEAN. In particular, it highlights key challenges and trends that are likely to shape the post-2025 landscape; these include, among others, digital transformation for media industry, preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, ASEAN Creative Economy, and ASEAN Identity.

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We invite readers to engage with the findings and analysis presented in this publication. We believe this research offers valuable insights for business, educators, individuals, policymakers, and practitioners alike, as we collectively navigate media, culture, and arts in ASEAN.

Developing Effective Public Communications in ASEAN: Data Analytics and Behavioural Insights

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Trend Report No. 22 (2026)

ASCC Research and Development Platform on Media, Culture, and Arts

Dr. Teh Lip Li

Executive Summary

This report investigates the rapidly evolving field of public communications for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), focusing on the application of data analytics and behavioural insights to enhance the strategies. It addresses the basis, current trends, actions taken by various ministries across ASEAN, case studies of successful implementation, challenges faced, and outlook for this rapidly changing field. The report is intended primarily for ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, although it will be relevant to media industry representatives, and stakeholders of ASEAN.

The report presents several key findings. Firstly, there has been a significant shift towards data-driven and behavioural insight-based communication strategies across ASEAN countries, with notable innovations in Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things, and blockchain technologies. This shift is evident across various sectors, including government communications, health, education, economic and trade bodies, environmental organizations, and disaster response.

ASEAN member states have increasingly embraced data insights and behavioural analytics to enhance public communications at the national level, while regional initiatives remain less developed. The adoption and implementation of these strategies vary among different sectors and member states, with some countries leading in specific areas. For instance, Singapore has shown advanced use of data analytics and behavioural insights in its COVID-19 communications, while Vietnam has made significant strides in e-government services. Thailand has applied data-driven strategies in its tourism revival efforts, and Indonesia has implemented innovative approaches in environmental monitoring and disaster preparedness.

Despite these advancements, persistent challenges remain. These include issues related to data privacy, digital literacy, technological infrastructure, and the digital divide. These challenges require careful navigation and policy interventions to ensure that the benefits of advanced communication strategies are equitably distributed across the diverse region.

The report emphasises the need to balance the benefits of advanced communication strategies with ethical considerations, cultural sensitivities, and inclusivity. This is particularly important given the rich political, cultural and linguistic diversity of the ASEAN region, which may necessitate localised approaches in communication strategies.

Emerging opportunities have been identified for cross-sector collaboration, regional standardisation of best practices, and the development of ASEAN-wide frameworks for data governance and digital communications. The ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN bodies and centres, such as the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) are playing significant roles in facilitating various regional efforts.

The potential for these strategies to significantly enhance public service delivery, crisis management, and citizen engagement is demonstrated by several successful case studies across the region. From Singapore's multi-channel COVID-19 communication strategy to Indonesia's gamified disaster preparedness app, these examples highlight the transformative potential of data-driven and behavioural insight-driven approaches.

The report concludes by emphasising the importance of continued investment in data analytics and behavioural science capabilities, the need for robust evaluation frameworks, and the value of learning from both regional experiences and global best practices. As ASEAN countries continue to develop and refine their data-driven communication strategies, addressing the identified challenges and leveraging the opportunities will be crucial while mitigating potential risks.

Section 1: Introduction

With a population of over 650 million people and a rapidly growing digital economy, ASEAN requires sophisticated communication strategies. Insight-driven strategies are becoming a powerful tool for engaging effectively with audiences. This report explores the relevance of insight-driven communication strategies for ASEAN sectoral bodies. It examines the foundations of these strategies, their practical applications and implications for society.

Insight-driven communications draw on psychology, sociology, anthropology, and data science to discover 'hidden truths' and provide a nuanced understanding of an audience. They leverage data, research, and a deep understanding of human behaviour to craft messages and interventions that resonate with target audiences. Such strategies transcend traditional demographic-based targeting by focusing on psychographic factors, behavioural patterns, and contextual elements that influence how individuals receive and interpret information (Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

This report explores how AMS and ASEAN sectoral bodies use insight-driven approaches to enhance public communication efforts in support of regional efforts. The report examines current conditions, identifies trends, analyses actions taken by various stakeholders. In addition, it identifies the challenges and issues faced in implementing advanced communication strategies to improve policy-making, cross-sector collaboration and public engagement.

1.1 Objectives, Methodology, and Scope

Objectives

This report analyses the current state and future trends of data-driven and behavioural insight-driven communication strategies in ASEAN. Its primary objectives are to offer insights on trends in data analytics and behavioural insights pertaining to public communications in the region. Additionally, the report seeks to understand the actions taken, challenges faced, and issues that AMS may encounter in implementing these communication strategies across sectors. It identifies best practices and lessons learned from relevant case studies. Finally, the report explores the ethical implications and potential societal impacts of advanced communication strategies in the ASEAN context.

Methodology

The report applies a mixed-method approach. It reviewed academic literature, industry reports, government publications, and media articles to develop the approach and identify current trends. It drew insights from informal interviews with communications experts, government officials, and representatives from technology platforms operating in ASEAN to study the implementation of these communication strategies.

The report relied on publicly available reports from state agencies, international organisations, and relevant industry bodies to identify trends in the adoption and impact of behavioural analytics and data-driven communication strategies. Case studies were selected based on their relevance, impact, and potential for replication across ASEAN. The case studies also offer examples of successes and challenges in applying behavioural insights and data-driven communication strategies. They compare approaches across ASEAN and other regions to provide a global context.

Scope

The report focuses on the ASEAN region. It studies various sectors including government communications, health, education, economic and trade bodies, and environmental organisations based on data from 2018 to 2023. The report covers a range of data analytics and behavioural insight technologies relevant to public communications, including AI, machine learning, IoT, blockchain, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR). The report explores the ethical implications and potential societal impacts of these technologies on ASEAN's communication strategies.

By combining insights with practical examples and perspectives, the report offers guidance for ASEAN policymakers. It may also be relevant to professionals, and researchers interested in regional public communications.

1.2 Data Analytics and Behavioural Insights

Data analytics in public communications refers to the systematic computational analysis of data or statistics to uncover meaningful patterns, correlations, and insights. It encompasses descriptive analytics (what happened), diagnostic analytics (why it happened), predictive analytics (what might happen), and prescriptive analytics (what should be done) (Delen & Ram, 2018; Watson, 2014).

Data analytics involves examining vast and diverse datasets to understand citizen behaviours, preferences, and needs. The practice enables governments and organisations to make evidence-based decisions on their communication strategies. In the ASEAN context, this may involve analysing social media trends, online behaviour patterns, demographic data, and responses to previous communication campaigns. For example, a government agency may use data analytics to understand which communication channels have been most effective for reaching different age groups or to identify topics that generate the most engagement amongst citizens.

The insights from data analytics can inform the development of targeted and effective communication strategies. For instance, if data shows that young adults in urban areas are more likely to engage with video content on social media, a public health campaign might prioritise short, informative videos on platforms like TikTok or Instagram to reach this demographic.

Defining Behavioural Insights

Behavioural insights involve the application of psychological, cognitive, and emotional factors to understand and influence decision-making processes, draws on various disciplines, including economics, neuroscience, and psychology, to understanding how people think, act, and make choices.

In public communications, behavioural insights have been used to design messages and interventions that guide citizens toward desired behaviours. The approach recognises that human decision-making is not always rational and can be influenced by cognitive biases, social norms, and environmental factors. By understanding these influences, communicators can craft more effective messages.

For example, a public health campaign in an AMS might use behavioural insights to frame more effective messages about vaccine uptake. Understanding that people are often more motivated by immediate benefits, the campaign might emphasise the immediate peace of mind that vaccination brings, rather than focusing on long-term health benefits.

Considerations and Limitations

The application of data analytics and behavioural insights in public communications across Southeast Asia must consider several factors, such as access to data, potential biases, privacy and surveillance, ethics and cultural adaptation.

A primary consideration is the issue of data access and influence. The ability to access and influence data when they collect, analyse, and interpret data is not equally distributed across Southeast Asia. Disparities in access can reinforce existing power structures and exclude certain groups from the benefits of data-driven communication strategies (Goh, 2019), limiting their representativeness.

Representation and potential biases in datasets are crucial considerations. Data used for analytics may not fully capture the diverse populations across Southeast Asia. Certain groups might be underrepresented or misrepresented, which could lead to skewed insights and policy decisions. This is pertinent across the region given its cultural and linguistic diversity, where a universal approach to data collection may miss crucial nuances. Awareness of this limitation can drive efforts to develop more inclusive data collection efforts.

The use of algorithms that drive data analytics raises concerns about fairness and equality. Algorithms are not neutral tools, and can reflect and perpetuate existing societal biases (Yeung, 2018), negatively influencing how public communications are targeted and delivered across diverse communities. Algorithms must be designed and continuously monitored to ensure fairness.

Privacy and surveillance are other significant concerns. The extensive use of personal data for data analytics raises questions on individual privacy rights and could lead to increased state surveillance (Rodan, 2020). The tensions between data utilisation and personal rights is especially relevant in the diverse political landscapes across Southeast Asia. Balancing these concerns with the benefits of data-driven communications is a key consideration.

In the field of behavioural insights, cultural adaptation is a key consideration. Many behavioural models developed in a Western context may not be directly applied to the unique social or cultural contexts of ethnic and cultural groups across Southeast Asia (Vu and Lim, 2021). Opportunities exist to develop culturally-specific behavioural insights that recognise local contexts.

The issue of ethics and government influence is another concern. There is a fine line between guidance and manipulation (Tan, 2020). Determining where this line should be drawn is complex across Southeast Asia, where views on the role of government can vary widely. This underscores the need for transparency and public dialogue in the application of behavioural insights.

Further, as governments leverage data analytics and behavioural insights, the traditional relationship between states and citizens will evolve. Although more personalised and targeted communications might enhance government service delivery, there is also a chance for excessive government involvement in personal decision-making (Jones, 2022). Opportunities exist to improve public services and challenges in maintaining appropriate boundaries.

Another significant consideration is the impact on existing inequalities within and between countries across Southeast Asia. Those with limited digital access or literacy may be left behind or be subject to less nuanced communication strategies (Hasan, 2021). While the digital divide presents a limitation, it should drive initiatives to improve digital infrastructure and literacy across the region.

Section 2: State of Public Communications in ASEAN

The field of public communications in ASEAN is experiencing rapid digital transformation, varying levels of technological adoption, and the complex interaction of cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic factors.

While digital penetration in ASEAN topped 75% in 2023 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023), penetration rates are not uniform. Singapore leads, at 88%, while Lao PDR lags with 43%, highlighting the digital divide. The region has embraced a mobile-first approach to internet access: over 90% of internet users in ASEAN access the web via mobile devices. This has substantial implications for communication strategies, requiring the development of mobile-optimised content and platforms to effectively reach audiences.

Social media has emerged as the dominant medium in ASEAN communications. Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, have become the region's primary channels for public communications, while Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) also play significant roles in certain countries, reflecting the diverse social media preferences across the region.

Further, e-government initiatives have been adopted by every AMS, demonstrating their commitment to digitally transforming the public sector. However, the success and public adoption of these initiatives is varied, reflecting a need for digital literacy and infrastructure development initiatives.

Despite the rapid growth of digital platforms, traditional media, including television, radio, and print, continue to play an important role in the ASEAN communication ecosystem, especially in reaching rural populations and older demographics. This trend underscores the importance of communication strategies that integrate digital and traditional media to reach diverse populations.

Section 3: Trends in the Implementation of Data Analytics and Behavioural Insights

This section explores how data analytics and behavioural insight tools have been used in ASEAN, highlighting their mechanisms and applications.

3.1 Big Data and AI

The integration of AI and big data has transformed public communications across ASEAN. The technologies have enabled the processing of vast amounts of unstructured data from diverse sources, including social media, online interactions, and public records.

Predictive analytics, a key application of big data and AI, uses historical data to forecast future trends and behaviours. It employs machine learning algorithms that identify patterns in past data to predict likely outcomes. In public communications, predictive analytics can anticipate public reactions to policy announcements, allowing governments to proactively refine their messaging. For instance, the governments of Singapore and Malaysia implement such systems to gauge potential public responses to new initiatives (GovTech Singapore, 2023).

Natural Language Processing (NLP), another AI-powered tool, enables computers to understand, interpret, and generate human language. In the context of public communications, NLP can analyse text data from various sources, including social media posts, public comments, and feedback forms, to discern public sentiment and key topics of concern. This is particularly valuable in the linguistically diverse ASEAN region, as NLP can process multiple languages simultaneously.

AI chatbots and virtual assistants are another significant trend. These tools use machine learning and NLP to interact with users in natural language, providing information and services on demand. The tools can handle a wide range of queries, from simple information requests to more complex interactions, enhancing citizen engagement while reducing the work of human staff. Thailand's 'Aunt Boi' chatbot exemplifies implementation of this technology in the region, and handled over 60 million conversations in its first year (Digital Government Development Agency, Thailand, 2023).

3.2 Psychographic Profiling and Microtargeting

Psychographic profiling and microtargeting, techniques originally developed for commercial marketing, are now being adapted for public communications. These approaches go beyond demographic segmentation to consider psychological characteristics, values, attitudes, and lifestyle factors.

Behavioural segmentation, a key aspect of this trend, involves dividing a population into groups based on behavioural patterns. This is typically done by analysing data points, including online activities, service usage patterns, and responses to previous communications. By identifying distinct behavioural segments, communicators can tailor messages to address the specific needs, concerns, and motivations of a specific group. Countries like Indonesia and the Philippines have applied this approach in public health communications to enhance messaging effectiveness (WHO Southeast Asia, 2023).

Personalised e-government services are another application of these techniques. By analysing citizen life stages, past interactions with government services, and other relevant data points, systems can provide tailored information and services. This approach aims to enhance the relevance and accessibility of government services, ultimately improving citizen satisfaction and engagement. Singapore's 'Moments of Life' initiative is an example of this trend.

However, the use of these techniques has also raised ethical concerns. They include ongoing debates about the privacy implications and the ethical considerations of government influence through personalised communications. These discussions highlight the need for ethical frameworks and transparency in the use of psychographic profiling and microtargeting in public communications.

3.3 Social Listening and Sentiment Analysis

Social listening and sentiment analysis have become integral to public communications strategies in ASEAN. These technologies allow organisations real-time monitoring and analysis of online conversations and public opinion.

Social listening tools obtain data from various online platforms, including social media, forums, and news sites, which are then processed using NLP and machine learning algorithms to identify trending topics, track mention volumes, and gauge overall sentiment. Real-time analysis allows for quick responses to emerging issues.

Sentiment analysis, often a component of social listening, uses NLP techniques to classify the emotional tone behind online messages as positive, negative, or neutral, providing a quantitative measure of public sentiment. This can be particularly useful in crisis management situations, as demonstrated by Viet Nam and Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ministry of Health, Malaysia, 2022).

These tools have also been applied to secure policy feedback. By continuously monitoring public reactions to new policies or initiatives, governments can gain valuable insights into citizen concerns and adjust approaches accordingly. For example, Indonesia has implemented a social listening program for policy feedback (Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, Indonesia, 2023).

3.4 Cross-Platform Integration

As ASEAN's digital ecosystem becomes more complex, integrated, cross-platform communication strategies will be necessary, to provide seamless and consistent user experiences across various digital points of contact, and interactions between individuals, organisations or brands throughout their relationship.

Omnichannel strategies involve coordinating messaging and user experiences across multiple platforms, including websites, mobile apps, social media, and physical service points. This requires sophisticated data management systems that can track user interactions across various channels and provide a unified view of

the interactions. These strategies aim to ensure consistent messaging across various platforms, providing a seamless user experience regardless of the channel through which citizens engage.

Data synchronisation is crucial for cross-platform integration. It involves creating centralised data repositories and establishing protocols for real-time data sharing between different agencies and platforms. This improves the user experience while enhancing the efficiency of government operations. ASEAN governments are working to synchronise data across different agencies and platforms to provide a more coherent user experience (E-Government Agency, Viet Nam, 2023).

Cross-border collaboration initiatives, such as the ASEAN Smart Cities Network, are facilitating the sharing of best practices in digital communications across the member states. These collaborations are accelerating adoption of advanced, integrated communication strategies across the region, contributing to connectivity and digitalisation (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023).

By implementing these tools and strategies, ASEAN countries are developing more effective, responsive, and citizen-centric public communications. However, as highlighted in the next section, the use of these advanced technologies also raise considerations on privacy, equity, and ethical governance.

Section 4: Challenges and Considerations

This section investigates the challenges posed when data analytics and behavioural insights interact with social structures, raising questions about power dynamics, and ethical concerns.

4.1 Data Privacy and Security

Many ASEAN member states are still developing comprehensive data protection laws. This regulatory vacuum potentially exposes the citizens to potential data exploitation. This is exacerbated by the rapid adoption digital technologies outpacing the development of regulatory frameworks. Public trust can be strained by concerns over government surveillance and the use of their personal data for behavioural profiling (Rodan, 2020). The challenge of cross-border data flows adds further complexity. It underscores the contradictions between national sovereignty, regional integration efforts, and the global nature of data economies (Goh, 2019).

4.2 Digital Divide and Accessibility

Infrastructure gaps between urban and rural areas create a two-tiered system of citizen engagement in terms of access, and the quality and affordability of, internet services. Variations in digital literacy intersect with existing educational and socio-economic inequalities, raising critical questions about who truly benefits from these advanced communication strategies (Hasan, 2021). Language barriers create the potential for linguistic discrimination in digital communications, potentially resulting in misguided communication strategies aimed at linguistic minority groups (SEAMEO, 2023). These inequalities can reinforce and exacerbate existing social disparities across the region.

4.3 Misinformation and Disinformation

The viral spread of false information, as noted during the pandemic, show digital platforms can amplify societal anxieties (WHO Southeast Asia, 2023). The emergence of deepfakes and AI-generated content presents a significant challenge to data-driven communication strategies. These developments highlight a paradox in behavioural insight-driven strategies that could reinforce existing beliefs and behaviours (Yeung, 2018). This could lead to increased political polarisation and an erosion of trust in public institutions.

4.4 Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

ASEAN's cultural and linguistic diversity present unique challenges when implementing data-driven and behavioural insight-driven communication strategies. What motivates behaviour in one cultural context may not apply in another, and careful adaptation is required (Vu & Lim, 2021). Data-driven insights and behavioural models, often based on Western research, may fail to capture the nuances of ASEAN's diverse contexts. Multilingual challenges raise questions about linguistic justice in behavioural insight-driven communications. The overreliance on WEIRD (western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic) samples in behavioural research can skew insights when applied to ASEAN (Henrich et al. (2010).

4.5 Regulatory Frameworks and Governance

The rapid evolution of data-driven and behavioural insight-driven communication strategies has often outpaced the development of regulatory frameworks, creating governance challenges (Jones, 2022). This regulatory lag is particularly pronounced across the ASEAN emerging economies. The challenges of cross-border coordination reflect the complex interaction between national sovereignty and the borderless nature of digital communications. The need for ethical guidelines underscores the moral complexities of using behavioural insights in public communications. The use of ‘nudge’ techniques in public policy also raises questions about democratic legitimacy and individual autonomy.

4.6 Funding for ASEAN Public Communications

Funding for the ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN sectoral bodies and the ASEAN Centres for Public Communications at the regional level is limited. Increasingly, ASEAN’s Dialogue Partners have funded communications through the ASEAN Secretariat and Foundation (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023). The government of China has increased funding for digital infrastructure and media, while Australia and South Korea focus on digital communications and e-governance capacity-building (Tan, 2022; Lee & Park, 2021). Over-reliance on external funding can compromise ASEAN’s narrative influence and autonomy, and lead to messaging inconsistency. A dependency on external funding could compromise ASEAN’s principle of centrality in regional affairs, particularly in shaping public discourse on key regional issues.

Section 5: Case Studies

5.1 Sectoral Implementation in ASEAN

Government Communications

- Singapore established 'Digital Service Squads' to enhance digital communications, addressing challenges related to the digital divide and cultural diversity, although it faced challenges in ensuring inclusivity for less tech-savvy citizens (Smart Nation Singapore, 2023).
- Thailand's open data portal facilitated data-driven decision-making and addressed data privacy and regulatory framework challenges, yet struggled with data quality and completeness issues (Digital Government Development Agency, Thailand, 2023).
- Malaysia's AI-powered VICS system improved citizen engagement but raised privacy concerns, highlighting the tensions between technological advancement and data protection (MAMPU, Malaysia, 2023).
- Viet Nam's E-government Portal personalised user experiences, addressing the digital divide and accessibility, while encountering difficulties in rural area implementation (Ministry of Information and Communications, Viet Nam, 2023).

Health

- Singapore and Viet Nam developed contact tracing apps during the pandemic which were effective but faced adoption resistance due to privacy concerns, illustrating the challenges of data privacy and misinformation (Ministry of Health, Singapore, 2023; Ministry of Information and Communications, Viet Nam, 2023).
- Indonesia's telemedicine platform improved healthcare access but struggled with uneven internet connectivity, highlighting the nation's digital divide (Ministry of Health, Indonesia, 2023).
- The Philippines implemented behavioural prompts and cues in health campaigns and addressed cultural diversity challenges, although measuring long-term impact proved challenging (Department of Health, Philippines, 2023).

Education

- Malaysia and Thailand have introduced adaptive learning platforms, but face difficulties in ensuring equitable access across socioeconomic groups due to the digital divide and cultural diversity challenges (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2023; Office of the Basic Education Commission, Thailand, 2023).
- Singapore's parent engagement app increased involvement, but raised concerns about data usage, highlighting the ongoing tension between data utilisation and privacy (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2023).
- Indonesia's dropout prediction program showed promise, but grappled with the ethics of profiling students, inadequate regulatory frameworks, and the digital divide (Ministry of Education and Culture, Indonesia, 2023).

Economy

- Thailand's AI-powered investment platform improved matching, but faced challenges in data accuracy, ensuring data privacy, and regulatory framework issues (Board of Investment, Thailand, 2023).

- Malaysia's SME chatbot provided support, but struggled with complex queries, highlighting challenges related to the digital divide and linguistic diversity (SME Corp Malaysia, 2023).

Environment Initiatives

- Singapore's carbon footprint app raised awareness but faced user privacy concerns, illustrating the ongoing challenge of balancing data utilisation with privacy protection (National Environment Agency, Singapore, 2023).
- Indonesia's forest monitoring system improved reporting, but struggled with consistent internet connectivity in remote areas, underscoring the persistent digital divide (Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Indonesia, 2023).

Disaster and Humanitarian Response

ASEAN countries have leveraged data analytics for public communications in disaster response, addressing challenges related to the digital divide and misinformation. However, challenges persist in reaching vulnerable populations and ensuring timely information dissemination (AHA Centre, 2023).

5.2 Other Regions

The European Union's (EU) communication strategy for implementation of general data protection regulations (GDPR) offers valuable insights for ASEAN. The EU used data analytics to reach key stakeholders and develop interactive online tools to address challenges related to data privacy and regulatory frameworks (European Commission, 2018). This approach aligns with the need for comprehensive data governance across ASEAN, as highlighted in the ASEAN Framework on Digital Data Governance (ASEAN, 2021). While the EU campaign achieved high awareness levels, it faced challenges in ensuring uniform understanding across diverse EU members (Kuner et al., 2020). ASEAN may encounter such difficulties in implementing region-wide data protection measures as it is culturally and linguistically diverse.

New Zealand's COVID-19 campaign demonstrates the effective use of behavioural insights in crisis communication, a strategy that could inform ASEAN's approach to regional health emergencies. The campaign employed clear, consistent messaging and data-driven decision-making, which contributed to successful pandemic management (New Zealand Government, 2020). This approach resembles ASEAN's efforts to enhance regional health security, as outlined in the ASEAN Post-2015 Health Development Agenda (ASEAN, 2018). However, New Zealand faced challenges in maintaining long-term public compliance and addressing pandemic fatigue (Wilson, 2021), highlighting issues related to misinformation and cultural diversity that are relevant to ASEAN's multicultural context.

Both case studies underscore the importance of tailoring communication strategies to diverse populations while highlighting the potential of data-driven approaches in addressing regional challenges. This aligns with ASEAN's interest in leveraging data-driven methodologies, as outlined in the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025 (ASEAN, 2021). However, these examples also caution against a one-size-fits-all approach, emphasising the need for ASEAN to develop flexible, culturally sensitive strategies that can be adapted to the unique contexts of each member state while maintaining regional coherence.

Section 6: Emerging Trends, Recommendations and Proposals for Future Research



Several key trends and recommendations emerge as ASEAN continues to evolve its approach to public communications.

6.1 Emerging Trends

Artificial Intelligence and machine learning will play an increasingly important role in predictive analytics for public communications. The use of AI for content creation and curation and predictive analytics to anticipate public reactions will increase (Wirtz et al., 2019). AI-driven personalisation of public services and communications will likely become more sophisticated and widespread, as outlined in the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025 (ASEAN, 2021).

Augmented and Virtual Reality technologies will transform public education campaigns and citizen engagement when integrated in immersive public education campaigns, virtual town halls, public consultations. These technologies will enhance public signage and information displays, providing real-time, context-aware information.

Blockchain technology is emerging as a potential tool to ensure transparency and verify the veracity of communications in the fight against misinformation. Additionally, decentralised platforms for citizen engagement and voting, have the potential to enhance democratic processes.

Finally, voice-activated services are expected to expand, making government services and information retrieval more accessible. Developing multilingual voice assistants for public service access could help bridge linguistic divides and improve access for diverse populations. Conversational AI is expected to play a crucial role in delivering government services in the future.

6.2 Recommendations

ASEAN can enhance data-driven and behavioural insight-driven communication strategies as follows:

Data Governance Frameworks

Developing a regional framework for data protection and privacy will be crucial to ensure the effective and ethical use of data in public communications. These frameworks can establish regional standards for data standards and privacy across the member states, for example on sectoral issues, ASEAN could also create guidelines for the ethical use of AI and behavioural insights in public communications, to address concerns about manipulation or privacy infringement. Additionally, these frameworks could promote cross-border data

sharing while ensuring data sovereignty, striking a balance between regional collaboration and national interests.

Digital Infrastructure and Literacy

AMS can accelerate the expansion of broadband internet access across the AMS to ensure increased online participation. AMS should be encouraged to create comprehensive digital literacy programs targeting all age groups to empower citizens to engage effectively with digital communications. To bridge linguistic divides, multilingual digital tools and platforms should be developed to ensure that communications are accessible. Investing in digital infrastructure and literacy will be fundamental to the success of advanced communication strategies.

Inclusivity and Accessibility

Prioritising inclusivity and accessibility in digital communication strategies is necessary to reach diverse populations. Digital communications strategies should consider the needs of differently-abled individuals, ensuring that information is accessible to all. Offline alternatives should be developed for areas with limited internet connectivity to minimise exclusion. Content should be created in multiple languages and dialects to reach diverse populations effectively, reflecting ASEAN's linguistic diversity.

Misinformation and Disinformation

Regional fact-checking networks and tools should be developed to quickly identify and counter false information. Media literacy programs should be developed in school curricula to equip future generations with critical thinking skills. ASEAN should also pursue collaborations with social media platforms to develop ASEAN-specific content moderation policies that respect local contexts and values.

Transparency and Open Government

To enhance public trust and engagement, open data initiatives should be expanded across all government sectors to give citizens access to public information. Regular public consultations on data-driven policy decisions can be implemented to ensure citizen input in governance. User-friendly dashboards for key public sector performance indicators should be developed to enhance accountability and public understanding of government activities.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Implementing robust monitoring and evaluation systems will help ensure the effectiveness and ethical compliance of communication strategies. Different metrics should be developed to assess the effectiveness of public communication strategies, allowing for meaningful comparisons and improvements. Regular audits of data-driven communication initiatives will be needed to ensure ethical compliance and identify areas for improvement. Feedback mechanisms should be established to improve communication strategies based on public input, ensuring that strategies remain responsive to citizen needs and preferences.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)

PPPs can enhance innovation in public communications. ASEAN governments can collaborate with technology companies to access cutting-edge communication technologies, while ensuring that public sector communications keep pace with technological advancements. Partnerships with local startups should also be encouraged to develop innovative and culturally-appropriate communication solutions to address specific regional needs. Engagement with academia should be prioritised to create evidence-based approaches to public communications.

Regional Collaboration

Enhancing regional collaboration is key to sharing best practices and addressing common challenges. An ASEAN network or centre of excellence for Public Communications may be established to promote knowledge sharing and capacity building, share best practices, and address common challenges in the region. Joint crisis communication protocols for regional issues (such as pandemics and natural disasters) could be developed to ensure coordinated and effective responses. ASEAN should also evaluate developing a regional platform to share anonymised data insights to support data-driven decision-making in AMS.

Sustainability and Funding Independence

ASEAN must balance external financial support with control over the content of its communications to ensure their sustainability and independence. To mitigate over-reliance on external governments, ASEAN could diversify its funding sources, strengthen internal capabilities, and establish clear guidelines for external partnerships, especially in sensitive areas, such as data analytics (Koh, 2023).

6.3 Proposals for Future Research

To improve understanding and improve the application of data analytics and behavioural insights to public communication strategies, the report recommends research on the following areas:

The influence of global technology platforms on local public discourse in ASEAN warrants investigation to understand how these platforms have shaped regional conversations and information flows. Measuring the long-term impact of public communication campaigns in ASEAN countries would provide valuable data on the effectiveness of different strategies over time. A comparative analysis of crisis communication strategies across ASEAN during the pandemic could yield important lessons for future crisis response.

Studying the impact of AI and machine learning on public opinion formation in ASEAN could contribute to understanding on how these technologies shape public discourse. Research on cross-cultural communication effectiveness in ASEAN's diverse linguistic landscape could provide valuable insights for developing more effective regional communication strategies. The development of ethical frameworks for data-driven public communications in ASEAN is necessary to guide responsible practices as these technologies become more prevalent.

The evolution of communication in the member states is another area for research, potentially offering insights into how different political and social contexts shape communication strategies. Investigating public communications as a tool to address misinformation and disinformation in ASEAN could inform more effective strategies for maintaining information integrity.

Finally, exploring the potential of blockchain technology in enhancing transparency in public communications could open new avenues for building trust between governments and citizens. These research areas reflect the complex and evolving nature of public communications in ASEAN and highlight the need for continued attention to this field.

Section 7: Conclusion

This report analysed the development of effective public communications in ASEAN, incorporating insights from different socio-cultural perspectives and highlighting key trends, challenges, and opportunities in the region.

Public communications in ASEAN are undergoing a transformation driven by rapid technological advancements and changing citizen expectations. The adoption of data analytics and behavioural insights has opened new avenues for more effective, personalised, and responsive public communications.

However, this transformation presents numerous challenges. ASEAN must navigate issues of privacy, a persistent digital divide, misinformation, and cultural sensitivity. ASEAN's diverse nature requires approaches that are both technologically sophisticated and culturally relevant.

The case studies presented demonstrate the potential of data-driven communication strategies to enhance public service delivery, manage crises, and build trust between governments and citizens.

The studies also highlight the importance of continuous learning and adaptation in the face of rapidly evolving digital landscapes.

The future of public communications in ASEAN will likely be characterised by increased AI integration, immersive technologies, and a growing emphasis on data ethics and governance. To realise the potential of these advances, ASEAN member states must prioritise regional collaboration, inclusive and transparent governance, and investment in digital infrastructure and literacy.

As ASEAN continues to develop into a leading digital community, effective public communications will play a crucial role in ensuring that technological progress is translated into tangible benefits for all its peoples. Data-driven strategies relevant to the region's rich cultural heritage present ASEAN with the opportunity to create innovative, responsible, and effective public communications.

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The ASEAN Secretariat
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Department
Jalan Sisingamangaraja 70A
Jakarta 12110, Indonesia

www.asean.org



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