

Journalism in the Age of Digital Autocracy: A Comparative ASEAN Perspective

Aim Sinpeng¹ and Youngjoon Koh²

¹Discipline of Government and International Relations,
The University of Sydney, Australia

²Sydney Southeast Asia Centre,
The University of Sydney, Australia

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Abstract

Cyber authoritarianism is on the rise globally. Governments around the world are seeking innovative ways to monitor, surveil, censor and persecute government critics, activists and journalists. Southeast Asia is an especially hostile environment for journalism online: its governments have regularly investigated, arrested and convicted ordinary citizens for their online activities. The region also remains one of the most dangerous places for journalists in the world. This raises the question of if and how news organisations survive and thrive in this increasingly repressive environment. The study draws on original survey and interview datasets of 52 digital news organisations in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand conducted as part of the 2021 Inflection Point International project on digital media entrepreneurship in Latin America, Southeast Asia and Africa. We argue that digital news organisations in Southeast Asia continue to report and investigate politically and socially sensitive issues despite the high risks for state repression. They are motivated by their belief in providing public good and supporting civic engagement. The findings in this study provide concrete empirical evidence that digital authoritarianism does not exert downward pressure on critical journalism.

Keywords: digital news organisation, cyber repression, journalism, authoritarianism, sustainability, press freedom, ASEAN

Introduction

When Maria Ressa, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and CEO of Rappler, was convicted of a cyber libel charge concerning an article about alleged corruption by government officials, few in the Philippines were surprised. Rappler, an independent online news organization, has been subject to state repression, intimidation, and harassment of its journalists since former president Rodrigo Duterte came to power in 2016. The declining press freedom and growing cyber authoritarianism in the Philippines is not unique in the region. Member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have witnessed an overall decline in internet freedom and growing online censorship for the past decade (Shahbaz, Funk, & Vesteinsson, 2022). Journalists in Myanmar and Thailand have been detained and imprisoned for pursuing politically sensitive topics perceived as a threat to their regimes. The Philippines remains one of the deadliest places on earth for journalists for the fifth year in a row (“2021 World Press Freedom”, 2022). Across Southeast Asia, internet crackdowns and arrests were made based on journalistic activities deemed by those in power to harm national security and promote disharmony among the public.

Parallel to this trend of growing online censorship and repression is an explosion of digital media organizations. As internet and social media connectivity rise past 50% penetration rates across ASEAN, news consumption via mobile phones through social media apps and digital news platforms has sharply risen. In the last survey conducted in the Philippines relating to the consumption of news related to the 2022 national election, consuming news online via phone apps became the second most popular method of news consumption after television (“Truth Watch runs intercept”, 2022). Similarly, recent estimates have shown that the vast majority of Southeast Asians – more than 70% – consume news via social media (Statista, 2022). It is not surprising considering Southeast Asia is one of the world’s most social media active populations. Young people in ASEAN reportedly spend an average of 10 hours a day online, 3 hours longer than the global average (Kemp, 2021). There are reasons to be hopeful for digital media news organizations to thrive. ASEAN’s population spends much time online and prefers to consume news via social media or news apps. On the other hand, the region has experienced growing cyber repression, internet censorship, and crackdowns on journalists – all of which raise the costs for digital news organizations to operate.

The research is one of the first in ASEAN to investigate the business sustainability and political viability of digital news organizations in the region. We only consider ‘digital native’ news organizations, which are news establishments that have been online from their inception. Its core questions concern the extent to which digital news organizations survive and thrive in an increasingly repressive online environment. How do digital media organizations respond to growing cyber repression in ASEAN? Since the advent of digital media technologies that encourage information flow, online news companies have vastly expanded. Social media, regardless of the coverage at a global or national level, hold public attention to politically sensitive news. As many countries witnessed the political ripple effect of cyberspace, strict regulations governing breaking news and freedom of expression the

government implement are very much subjective to debate (Sinpeng, 2020; Hill & Sen, 2002). Member States of ASEAN, in which some influential media conglomerates and start-ups are taking baby steps in the direction of a digitized society, particularly have many rules and regulations for press coverage. In existing literature analyzing media coverage worldwide, it is evident that freedom of expression is influential in news operations and journalism in the digital age. A sharp rise in Internet users also attaches great importance to online freedom of expression. Previous studies help us make sense of a digitized map showing freedom of expression, press, and Internet use (Abbott, 2011; OECD, 2019). However, less attention has been paid to examining the cyber repression and the coverage of politically sensitive news.

Given the growing cyber repression and censorship on journalism, we expect the reporting of politically sensitive news to decline and a greater focus on soft news. The question that needs to be addressed is how digital news organizations cope with cyber-authoritarianism. In this context, this article tests the hypothesis that in authoritarian regimes that exercise both physical and digital forms of repression, digital news companies are less likely to pursue politically sensitive topics because of threats of punishment from the state. The research also anticipates that digital news organizations that are financially struggling would refrain from reporting on issues that could elicit government repression. To test these hypotheses, we examine how digital news organizations in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand decide which content to pursue and the financial and political consequences of those decisions. Implications based on the analysis of the study will provide original empirical contributions to the understanding of journalism in ASEAN and, specifically, the extent to which digital news organizations sustain themselves in increasingly challenging economic and political environments.

The research consists of four sections. By examining existing literature on the internet freedom, censorship, and journalism in the countries mentioned, the research looks at digital authoritarianism in member states of ASEAN. The next section will discuss data, methodology, and its findings. Lastly, the research elaborates the implications of the findings and its contribution to the study of journalism and internet politics.

Digital Authoritarianism in ASEAN

There is growing digital authoritarianism worldwide. Some countries or regions, like Southeast Asia, have experienced a marked decline in online freedom. Existing research has shown that a hostile political environment makes it financially and politically challenging for media organizations to operate. It is particularly the case for digital news organizations because restrictions on online press freedom are worst affected by cyber-authoritarianism. Under an authoritarian regime that imposes strict censorship of digital media, political issues, including anti-government slogans or widespread criticism of the present government's handling of national concerns, have hardly received comprehensive coverage in the press. The censorship laws and regulations turn the clock back forty years. Across Southeast Asian countries (Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia), key censorship issues are

'Internet user arrested or imprisoned', 'pro-government commentators', and 'website blocked' (Table 1).

Digital authoritarianism in Southeast Asia, defined as 'pro-government regulations governing digital media coverages', must be set in hostile politics (Masduki, 2022). Since the 2014 military coup, a growing concern has been about how the expansion of censorship could hinder the freedom of expression and press in Thailand. The interim government had employed "the Computer Crime Act and the long-standing lèse majesté under 112 of the Thai Criminal Code" to order a crackdown on opposition to the military regime online (Anansaringkarn & Neo, 2021). 'Charge against individuals after the 2014 coup', quoted in Anansaringkarn & Neo's study (2021), shows that the censorship operates in favor of the military regime¹.

Cyber repression still exists in the contemporary Philippines² and at present it is a threat against rights and freedoms guaranteed by the constitution. Since the enactment of 'Republic Act No. (RA) 10175' and 'the Cybercrime Prevention Act' under the former President Benigno Aquino III provoked an angry response from media freedom advocates (Robie & Abcede, 2015), hostile political environment has raised some doubts about the freedom of expression in the Internet. Because of the high levels of cyber repression (Feidstein, 2021), the former President Rodrigo Duterte's government raised some doubts about their ability to guarantee the freedom of speech online. Although war on crime during his six-year tenure as the President had been visible and dramatic at the first sight, digital repression had been central to growing concerns, ranging from censorships to government intervention in cyberspace³.

Malaysians rarely represents their concerns to the authorities⁴ although cyber repression is evident in the state. Since the mid-1990s, Malaysians have had access to the Internet. In explanations for social media in Malaysia, the governmental decree, known as 'the Sedition Act and Internal Security Act', imposed strict censorship of print media rather than digital coverages (Weiss, 2012). Nonetheless, it should be noted that the government was expecting to gain control of the Internet by using general media and liberal laws (Azizuddin, 2009, cited in Weiss, 2012). In the case of news site 'Malayiakini, there is convincing evidence of a link between digital authoritarianism and the threats to opposition opinions⁵. In this sense, censorships are in place for controlling the press.

It is doubtful whether the freedom of the Internet in Indonesia is possible. On the surface, basic human rights, including freedom of expression have been guaranteed by the existing constitution (Lubis, 2017). As Yilmaz et al. (2022) note, however, "Internet bill mandates online service providers to remove or block content on their platforms when requested by the government".

Data and Methodology

The research is based on data from 'the Inflection Point International' that conducted interviews with the leaders of 52 media organizations in Southeast Asian countries, including

15 in Thailand, 15 in Indonesia, 14 in the Philippines, and 8 in Malaysia⁶. The Inflection Point International follows the selection criteria ‘SembraMedia uses’ to select media organisations for each country. Their partner funders consisting of Luminate, CIMA, and Splice Media (a regional ally) double-checked initial media lists for Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Based on the same interview questionnaire including more than 500 questions, researchers conducted a video or telephone interview with media leaders. They used not only ‘Python’ to process data electronically but also Google Spreadsheets to conduct calculations and general comparisons.

Table 1 Key Censorship Issues

Key internet controls	Thailand				The Philippines				Indonesia				Malaysia			
	‘19	‘20	‘21	‘22	‘19	‘20	‘21	‘22	‘19	‘20	‘21	‘22	‘19	‘20	‘21	‘22
Social media platform blocked									○		○	○				
Website blocked	○	○	○	○					○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Internet shutdown					○	○			○	○	○	○				
Pro-government commentators	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○
New censorship law	○	○				○	○				○				○	
New surveillance law	○						○				○					
Internet user arrested or imprisoned	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Internet user physically assaulted	○	○	○	○			○	○	○		○					
Technical attacks					○	○	○	○		○	○	○				
Status	N/F	N/F	N/F	N/F	P/F	P/F	P/F	P/F	P/F	P/F	P/F	P/F	P/F	P/F	P/F	P/F

*Source: Internet control during Freedom on the Net’s coverage period of June 2018 to May 2019, June 2019 to May 2020, June 2020 to May 2021, and June 2021 to May 2022 (Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2021/key-internet-controls>).

*Note: “to track the different ways in which governments seek to dominate the digital sphere, Freedom House monitors their application of nine key internet controls. The resulting data reveals trends in the expansion and diversification of these constraints on internet freedom”.

○ : Key censorship issue regardless of survey periods.

This article uses interactive graphics to discover the digital media landscape provided by the Inflection Point International’. The key questions that the research concentrates on are: 1) What topic do digital new organizations cover; 2) What revenue sources support high-impact journalism?

The research examines the percentage of responses to the two questions to clarify sensitive issues in each country and digital media’s revenue sources. As the proportion of topics including online news seem to be affected by ‘Business maturity tiers’, the research

looks at whether the financial footing is influential in the coverages. This will help make sense of a variation in the response to digital authoritarianism. The research also uses ‘hot-button issues’⁷ from the perspective of Southeast Asians, voters’ concerns at the national level, and ‘business models’⁸ to examine politically sensitive news topics.

Employing a comparative approach to sensitive issues included in digital news in Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia, the research looks into similarities and differences responding to cyber repressions, and analyses digital authoritarianism’s any real influence over online news organization.

News Operations under Cyber-Authoritarianism

The previous points about digital authoritarianism allows us to raise many questions, which are important to understand how digital media companies respond to hostile political environment. By analysing the Inflection Point International’s database, this section presents and discusses types of topics included in online news. To make sense out of Southeast Asian experiences with media coverages, the section examines digital news organizations in Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

Thailand

Although news topics have long been diverse, there is a tendency among digital news organizations to cover sensitive issues. Surveying 15 digital media companies, ‘human right’ and ‘politics’ are considered core dimensions of online news. Considering these organizations’ annual revenues, the key issues they address have quite different emphases (Table 2). Tier 1 has no difference in topics reported in the digital media. Their editors have offered to lend weight to all issues, including human right’, ‘politics’, ‘gender’, ‘health’, ‘environment’, ‘culture and entertainment’ ‘education’, ‘LBGTQ+’, ‘law’, ‘business and economics’, ‘police or crime’, ‘media’, ‘technology’, and ‘science’. In Tier 4, similarly, digital new organizations captured the attention of matters of great import such as ‘human rights’, ‘politics’, ‘gender’, ‘health’, culture and entertainment’, ‘education’, ‘LBGTQ+’, and ‘media’. In Tier 3, on the contrary, much attention has been paid to ‘human rights’, ‘politics’, and ‘environment’. In Tier 2, digital news organizations stress the importance of ‘environment’.


Two different features are empirically observable. Firstly, digital authoritarianism hardly affects coverages of politically sensitive topics included in hot-button issues. Regardless of profit or non-profit organizations (Appendix 3), these topics are uppermost in editors’ minds. Secondly, the middle-income groups, including Tier 2 and 3, are passive observers of politically sensitive events. In Tier 1 and 4, hot-button issues consisting ‘human rights’, ‘politics’, ‘gender’, ‘health’, and ‘environment’ are the most significant importance to editors. In Tier 3, ‘human right’, ‘politics’, and ‘environment’ are politically sensitive issues. In Tier 2, there is insufficient attention to hot-button issues. All in all, many regulations and

rules caused by cyber authoritarianism rarely restrict media news organisations' capacity to cover hot button issues.

Table 2 Topic Analysis - Thailand

Types of Revenue \ Issues	All tiers	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	No Revenue
Human rights						
Politics						
Gender/Women's Issues						
Health						
Environment						
Culture & Entertainment						
Education						
LGBTQ+						
Law						
Business & Economics						
Police/Crime						
Media						
Technology						
Science						
Sports						
Others						

*Source: The Inflection Point International (2021).

 : The most sensitive issue.

The Philippines

Despite news topics that provoke a storm of demonstration against the government, digital news organizations pay much attention to some issues such as 'human rights', 'politics', 'business and economics', and 'media'. In interviews with leaders of 14 digital media organizations, it should be noted that 'politics' is the most sensitive news topic. Focusing on companies' annual revenues, there are limited resources that explain very much a subject for debate (See Table 3). In Tier 1, digital news organizations decide to focus on 'politics', and 'business and economics' while, in Tier 2, putting more effort into covering 'human rights' and 'media'. Considering Tier 3 and 4, it is hard to imagine that the freedom of the national

press is fully functional in Filipino democracy. Digital media companies may reevaluate coverages of sensitive issues.

Related to a topic analysis, two different features are empirically observable. Firstly, in a political situation where an authoritarian regime replaced a democratic government, digital media hardly report on politically sensitive events mentioned in hot-button issues. In Tier 1, in effect, editors' all interests are centered on 'politics' among five different types of topics. In Tier 2, 'human rights' included in the media coverage is a message sent to Filipinos concerning an authoritarian regime. Secondly, digital authoritarianism directly influences online news operations. Regardless of profit or non-profit organizations (Appendix 3), digital media played a passive role in the coverage of politically sensitive issues.

Table 3 Topic Analysis - Philippines

Types of Revenue \ Issues	All tiers	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	No Revenue
Human rights						
Politics						
Gender/Women's Issues						
Health						
Environment						
Culture & Entertainment						
Education						
LBGTQ+						
Law						
Business & Economics						
Police/Crime						
Media						
Technology						
Science						
Sports						
Others						

*Source: The Inflection Point International (2021).

: The most sensitive issue.

Indonesia

Digital news organizations are characterized by a politicization of practical problems. Even though there is not a shred of evidence that sensitive issues are reported in high-income digital media (Tier 4 in Table 4), cyberspace offers a window of opportunity for turning attention to the most sensitive events. By conducting interviews with leaders of 15 media organizations, the growing interest in 'women's issues' is evident in the most sensitive issue. Considering these companies' annual revenues, there are significant differences in results of

a topic analysis (Table 4). In Tier 1, great emphasis is placed on ‘human rights’, ‘gender or women’s issues’, and ‘LBGTQ+’. In Tier 2, news editors place a high value on the coverage of problems such as ‘politics’, gender or women’s issues’, ‘health’, ‘environment’, ‘culture and entertainment’, and ‘education’. In Tier 3, they add ‘human rights’, ‘law’, ‘business and economics’, ‘media’, ‘science’ to the most sensitive issues.

Two different features are empirically observable. Firstly, regardless of a digital authoritarianism, non-profit organizations are active in reporting on sensitive events. It implies that important changes in media environment would affect digital news operations running for profit. Secondly, nonetheless, as hot-button issues, politically sensitive problems, are reported in digital press, media news are less likely to arise from regulations and rules in a given political situation.

Table 4 Topic Analysis - Indonesia

Types of Revenue \ Issues	All tiers	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	No Revenue
Human rights		■		■		■
Politics			■	■		■
Gender/Women’s Issues	■	■				■
Health			■	■		
Environment			■	■		■
Culture & Entertainment			■	■		
Education			■	■		■
LBGTQ+		■				■
Law				■		■
Business & Economics				■		
Police/Crime						■
Media				■		■
Technology						
Science				■		
Sports						
Others				■		

*Source: The Inflection Point International (2021).

■ : The most sensitive issue.

Malaysia

Digital media organizations in Malaysia have progressively introduced the most sensitive issues although high-income groups play a major role in cyberspace (Tier 3 and Tier 4 in Table 5). In interviews with leaders of 8 digital news companies, ‘environment’ draw much attention from interviewees. Considering these organizations’ annual revenues, the important point in news reports is that, regardless of profit or non-profit companies, they

make an effort to publicize environmental issues. The whole analysis of news operations in digital media is clearly influenced by a given political situation. Without a doubt, cyberspace is now controlled by an authoritarian regime. In Tier 1 and Tier 2, there is nothing in new reports on hot-button issues. In Tier 3 and Tier 4, on the contrary, news editors keep up the coverage of sensitive issues such as ‘human rights’, ‘politics’, ‘gender or women’s issues’, and ‘environment’. As they get to discuss problems that are crucial for Malaysians, these news organizations play a key role in democratic deliberation in times of a digital authoritarianism.

Table 5 Topic Analysis - Malaysia

Types of Revenue \ Issues	All tiers	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	No Revenue
Human rights						
Politics						
Gender/Women’s Issues						
Health						
Environment						
Culture & Entertainment						
Education						
LBGTQ+						
Law						
Business & Economics						
Police/Crime						
Media						
Technology						
Science						
Sports						
Others						

*Source: The Inflection Point International (2021).

 : The most sensitive issue.

Discussion and Conclusions

Findings and analysis have shown that digital news organizations in ASEAN are committed to pursuing politically sensitive topics despite hostile media and economic and political environments. All news organizations interviewed experienced at least one form of government repression – the most common of which was government monitoring and surveillance. Many organizations received many cyber attacks on their websites, particularly following the publication of politically sensitive news. At times the editors were asked not to pursue investigative journalism on topics such as government corruption; otherwise, they would face some form of consequences. These types of government intimidation, both direct and indirect, raised the cost of pursuing critical journalism.

Given the highly competitive and profit-driven market of digital businesses, there were ample reasons for these organizations to stay away from reporting on critical and controversial issues. Analysis and findings drawn from the Inflection Point 2021 study demonstrate the opposite: digital news organizations understand the high cost of covering politically sensitive issues but continue to do. Their primary motivations for such decisions are ideological: they see themselves as changemakers in society and essential vehicles for civic engagement. As such, they reduce the overall 'cost' of publishing politically sensitive issues by increasing their revenue in other areas of business, such as content creation, which allows them to absorb the costs and risks posed by critical journalism.

Journalists in these digital news organizations also pushed the boundaries of censorship. Although editors and journalists alike reported having understood where the "line" was in terms of what was appropriate for reporting, they also took advantage of the vagueness of censorship. Given that much of the press censorship in these countries has often blurry lines, some presses have sought to be bold with borderline politically controversial content. If there was no state response to their borderline reporting, they interpreted this as permission to push further for coverage of more politically sensitive topics.

Another important way politically sensitive issues gain coverage without raising political risks for news organizations is to focus on a non-controversial topic in politically sensitive areas of a country. Echo's series on love in the deep south of Thailand is a case in point. The deep south, which has been a site of insurgencies for decades, is a highly politically sensitive area of the country. However, by discussing the topic of love among young people in the area, Echo could highlight the deep south's population without raising the alarm with the Thai authorities, especially the military. What the consumers have learned is not just about the lives of ordinary people in the deep south (which most Thais do not understand); Echo was able to show that there is a commonality among groups of the population that have conflicted with one another for a long time.

The implications of research analysis are threefold. First, the research provides concrete empirical analysis that rising digital authoritarianism does not necessarily exert downward pressure on critical and investigative journalism among digital news organizations in ASEAN. Despite increasing crackdowns on the press and continued persecution of journalists on politically motivated charges, coverage of politically sensitive news has not declined. The finding contributes empirically and theoretically to research that examines the relationship between journalism and democracy by demonstrating how rising digital authoritarianism does not equate to declining critical journalism.

Second, the findings suggest that digital news organizations see their coverage of sensitive topics as a type of public service; they provide critical and investigative journalism to serve the public interests. They view their journalism as part of a broader movement that drives civic engagement and push towards progressive social and political change. This insight provides the rationale for continued coverage of politically sensitive issues in otherwise repressive regimes; the value of journalism is beyond material base.

Third, to absorb the potential loss of revenue and/or increased cost of investigative journalism, many digital media organizations rely on revenue generating models that draw on incomes from non-governmental sources, such as philanthropic grants, consulting, content creation for third parties and merchandise sales. These strategies have served to shield these organizations from the potential negative consequences of pursuing sensitive news coverage.

About The Authors

Aim Sinpeng is Senior Lecturer in the Discipline of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney. She is currently a Discovery Early Career Research Award Fellow at the Australian Research Council. She is the author of *Opposing Democracy in the Digital Age: The Yellow Shirts in Thailand* (2021) published with the University of Michigan Press, which won the Best Early Career Book Prize from the Asian Studies Association of Australia in 2022.

YoungJoon Koh completed his PhD thesis in the discipline of government and international relations at the University of Sydney with a thesis entitled “Programmatic Populism and Electoral Success in Thailand and the Philippines (2022). He is a research affiliate of the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre at the University of Sydney. His research interests include electoral populism, national elections, digital politics, and democracy with a special focus on Southeast Asia (kyj887766@daum.net).

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Appendix

[Appendix 1] Revenue Sources in Southeast Asian countries (Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia)

Primary revenue source	All tiers	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Grants from private foundations or philanthropy	<u>37%</u>	<u>75%</u>	<u>38%</u>	<u>33%</u>	
National advertising sold by staff	14%		25%		<u>43%</u>
Creation of content of non-media clients	14%		25%	17%	14%
Sponsored content or native advertising	9%			33%	
Local advertising sold by your staff	6%				14%
Other consulting services for clients	6%				
Gants from foreign government	3%		13%		
Grant from any government organizations	3%			17%	
Donations from individuals	3%				
Product sales	3%				
Other consulting services for clients		25%			14%
Subscriptions to news site					14%

*Source: Inflection Point International (2021).

[Appendix 2] Revenue Sources in Southeast Asia (Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia)

Most popular revenue sources	All tiers	Tiers 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Grants from private foundations or philanthropy	<u>40%</u>	<u>75%</u>	<u>38%</u>	33%	14%
Sponsored content or native advertising	26%	25%	25%	<u>50%</u>	<u>29%</u>
Donations from individuals	23%	25%	25%	17%	
Google AdSense	20%	25%	13%	17%	14%
Creation of content for non-media clients	14%	25%	25%		
Local advertising sold by your staff	11%				14%
Training programs for non-journalist clients	11%			17%	
Grants from Google	9%	25%			
Grants from foreign government	9%		38%		
Product sales	9%	25%			14%
Affiliate ads		25%			14%

Grants from a corporation other than Google		25%			
Membership program		25%			
Creation of unique content for other media			13%		
Every sponsorship sales			13%		
Grants from Facebook			13%		
Grants from any government organization...			13%		
National advertising sold by staff				17%	
Training programs for journalists				17%	
Design or technology services for clients					<u>29%</u>
Programmatic advertising networks					14%
Syndication of your content to other media					14%

*Source: Inflection Point International (2021).

[Appendix 3] Profit and Non-Profit Digital News Organisations

Type of organizations	Thailand	The Philippines	Indonesia	Malaysia
For profit	<u>513</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>261</u>	<u>125</u>
Hybrid (for profit and non-profit combination)			106	26
Non-profit/NGO	52	24	12	11
Have not formalized the organization		58	12	4

Notes

- ¹ Based on ‘Charges against individuals after 2014 coup’, politically sensitive issues and censorships were categorized according to causes of accusation (<https://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en/content/charges-against-individuals-after-2014-coup>).
- ² “According to Article 19, an analysis of the state of the media in the Philippines in 2005 indicated that unlike many other countries, there was no cluster of laws in the Philippines that could be described as ‘media laws’” (CMFR, 2006, cited in Robie & Abcede 2015).
- ³ For example, “Duterte and close aides in the executive branch undertake three primary activities: directing information operations, coordinating financing for such activities, and overseeing legal enforcement and persecution. Panelo and his team in the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) oversee messaging and coordinate with outside influencers and editorialists, such as RJ Nieto, Sass Sassot, and Rigoberto Tiglao from the Manila Times....Often Panelo will set a top-line message that influencers and pro-government media will amplify” (Feldstein 2021).
- ⁴ “Relatively little Malaysian internet usages is politically-oriented; entertainment is a bitter pull. Most Malaysian blogs are not political in focus. The most comprehensive survey of Malaysian bloggers to date, with over 1,500 blog readers (over half of them bloggers themselves) as respondents, found that the majority prefer personal journals to sociopolitical blogs; most of those inclined toward more political content were male and older, compared with the largely younger (and generally well-educated, middle- or upper-class) respondents. An even lower proportion of bloggers themselves prefer political blogs, and only 6 percent have such blogs. Instead, the overwhelming majority use their blogs to recount their “personal experiences,” generally in English” (Tan and Zawawi 2008, cited in Weiss 2012).
- ⁵ “Among the most notorious such instances, policies raided prominent news site Malayiakini in 2003, in connection with its publication of a letter deemed seditious; its computers and servers were confiscated, temporarily shutting down of the site” (Brewer 2003, cited in Weiss 2012).
- ⁶ Media organizations include Prachatai.com, The Isaan Record, The Momentum, The Matter, Thai publica, Green news, Echo, The Pattaya news, Thai (enquirer), the people, Thisrupt, Isranews agency, The Standard (stand up for the people), The 101.world, Coconuts in Thailand; Puma Podcast, Vera Files (truth is our business), Bulat Lat, Digicast (negros), Dnx (Digital News Exchange), Davaotoday.com, Panay today, Press.one, ND (northern dispatch), Nowyouknow, Reportingasean (voices and views from within), Manila today, Aghimutad, The Post in the Philippines; Mojok, The conversation, Konde.co, Magd lene, Lipu naratif, Catch me up!, Watch DOC, Betahita, Zona utara, Independen.id, Terakota.id, Serat.id, Balebengong, Kediripedia.com, Idn Times in Indonesia; and Malaysiakini (news and views that matter), New Naratif, Between the lines, Cilsos.my (current issues tambah pedas), Trp, Macaranga, Codebule (health is a human right), Bicara Minggu Ini (by Norman Goh) in Malaysia (<https://data2021.sembramedia.org/about-the-study/>).
- ⁷ “The top five coverage area cited across all regions were: human rights, politics, gender/women’s issues, health, and environment” (SembraMedia, 2021).
- ⁸ “Four distinct tiers of business maturity were based on total revenue, number of page views, team size, and how many years they had been publishing (SembraMedia, 2021). Tier 1: organizations were more than five years old and seemed to have stagnated, unable to grow revenue above \$20,000 per year. Tier 2: team size nearly doubled to a median of 14 with more than three times the traffic, and nearly five times the revenue. With revenues of between \$ 20,000 and \$99,999, most of these media leaders were better able to cover expenses, but they still struggled to show any kind of profit. Tier 3 features media with multiple revenue streams, where larger teams and audiences enable higher advertising rates and audience support, and revenue range from \$100,000 to \$499,999. Media in tier 4 reach millions of people each month, bringing in more than \$500,000 per year (with some generating well over a million dollars annually)” (SembraMedia, 2021).