Panel Proposal Euroseas 2022
Propaganda and Public Opinion Manipulation in Southeast Asia's Cybersphere
Double panel

Conveners: Ward Berenschot (KITLV) and Yatun Sastramidjaya (University of Amsterdam)
berenschot@kitlv.nl

Objectives

Social media are increasingly being used to hamper public debate and influence election outcomes. Yet while the media regularly reports on targeted ads and fake news, much less is known about an equally threatening, emerging phenomenon: the usage of automated bots and secretive teams of hired social media influencers – called 'cyber troops' made up of 'buzzers' (Indonesia), 'keyboard warriors' (Philippines), or 'trolls' (Thailand) – to spread political disinformation and propaganda. Since ruling elites are also increasingly using these tools to cement their grip on power, this kind of 'digital authoritarianism' has likely contributed to democratic backsliding. This threat is particularly pronounced in Southeast Asia: it is becoming increasingly clear that political and economic elites regularly set up such 'cyber troops' to manipulate public opinion, sell particular policies, and win elections. This panel aims to develop an understanding of this nascent and as yet ill-understood threat to democracy. By bringing together a range of studies on the production and consumption of propaganda from across Southeast Asia, this panel aims to foster comparative analysis of its character, its organisation and funding as well as its capacity to weaken public debate and undermine democracy. This panel will serve to prepare a special issue on the same topic.

Papers:

Confirmed:
Yatun Sastramidjaya (University of Amsterdam): "Social Media Propaganda and Public Opinion Manipulation Across Southeast Asia: A Comparative Analysis".

Ward Berenschot (UvA/KITLV), Wijayanto (Universitas Diponegoro) and Ismael Fahmi (Drone Emprit: "Cyber troops and Oligarchy: A Study of the Organisation and Funding of Social Media Propaganda in Indonesia"

Jason Vincent Cabañes, Fernando A. Santiago, and Hannah Saab (De La Salle University): "Weaponising Social Narratives of Progress: On the Imaginative Dimension of Historically Distortionist Disinformation in the Philippines"

Dien Nguyen An Luong (ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute): "How The Vietnamese State Uses Cyber Troops to Shape Online Discourse"

Janjira Sombatpoonsiri (Chulalangkorn University/GIGA Hamburg): "Leveraging Information Chaos: How Thailand's Institutionalised Information Operations Undermine Democracy".

With room for three more papers.