**Panel Abstract**

**Disinformation Dynamics in Southeast Asia: Unravelling Ripple Effects, Fragmentation Challenges, and Safeguarding Vulnerable Communities**

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In an era dominated by massive information flow and where a few countries experienced democracy setbacks, disinformation has evolved into a pervasive force, shaping narratives and affecting communities globally. Recent examples of disinformation campaigns aimed at undermining democracy and social cohesion in Southeast Asian countries like the Philippines, Myanmar, and Indonesia highlight the urgent need to address this issue in the region. This panel welcomes comparative perspectives and contributions from across Southeast Asia as we delve into the multifaceted challenges of disinformation, particularly within the region, where diverse political and economic interests, cultures, languages, and socioeconomic landscapes create an intricate tapestry of vulnerabilities.

A poignant aspect of this discussion centers on vulnerable groups. We define vulnerabilities in this context as susceptibility to manipulation from disinformation, with examples including ethnic and religious minorities, marginalized communities, women, and groups targeted based on political affiliation. Vulnerable groups are likely to have limited access to technology, education, economic resources, or political influence, making them more prone to the divisive consequences of misleading narratives. This panel critically assesses the impact of misleading narratives on these vulnerable groups, shedding light on the potential for social harm and the urgency of implementing safeguards to protect those most at risk.

The first facet of this exploration revolves around the ripple effects of disinformation. Disseminated through various channels, misleading narratives have the potential to fracture societal cohesion, amplify existing divisions, and even create or exacerbate existing conflict. This panel also seeks to unravel the complexities of disinformation's impact, tracing its intricate pathways as it navigates through the region's rich tapestry of cultures and societies. Analysis of intersectional actors, motivation, strategies, narratives, and donors of the politicization of disinformation is part of the observation. Understanding the dynamics of this ripple effect is also crucial for developing effective strategies to counteract its divisive influence and impact.

Fragmentation emerges as a central theme in this discourse. The diverse array of languages, ethnicities, and socio-political landscapes across Southeast Asia provides fertile ground for the cultivation of disinformation. As communities become isolated within echo chambers of misleading information, fostering a shared understanding becomes increasingly daunting. This panel will also examine the mechanisms through which disinformation contributes to fragmentation and explore potential interventions to mitigate its divisive consequences.

Navigating through this landscape of disinformation requires a nuanced and region-specific approach. By contextualizing the challenges within the unique dynamics of Southeast Asia, this panel aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities at play. It calls for collaborative efforts between policymakers, media, and civil society to develop tailored strategies that address disinformation's immediate threats and foster community resilience.