

IN FOCUS:

SEADS FEATURE



Monash University Malaysia Unveils SEADS

By Preevena Devi

With the increasing challenges of online safety, data privacy, and digital inclusion, SEADS is dedicated to researching, advocating, and shaping policies that make digital spaces safer and more equitable for everyone.

We were honoured to have YB Hannah Yeoh, Minister of Youth and Sports, officiate our launch event, reinforcing the importance of creating a safer online environment for young Malaysians.

SEADS will be driving research, workshops, and policy discussions to shape a safer digital future. The initiative welcomes collaboration from students, academics, industry experts, and policymakers.

● Key Takeaways

- The need for stronger regulations and policies to protect online users
- Greater collaboration between government agencies for better data-sharing and decision-making
- Encouraging ethical digital interactions aligned with values of respect and integrity



Social Media & Politics in Southeast Asia with Merlyna Lim

Author Merlyna Lims join Khairil Yusof of the Sinar Project and Nalini Elumanai of Article 19 to discuss her latest publication: *Social Media & Politics in Southeast Asia*.

The discussion will center around elements found in the book such as nuanced political implications, social media's alignment with communicative capitalism, and the rise of algorithmic politics.

Join this timely discussion on how social media platforms shape politics within the region and interact with the author first hand, in SEADS' physical event.

This event is held in collaboration with the University of Nottingham.



Merlyna Lim is a scholar specializing in digital media, technology, and politics, with a focus on Southeast Asia and the Middle East. She is a Professor and Canada Research Chair in Digital Media and Global Network Society at Carleton University. Her research explores how digital platforms shape political movements, activism, misinformation, and civic engagement. Lim has published extensively on social media's role in political uprisings, online public spheres, and the intersection of technology and democracy. Her work provides critical insights into the socio-political impacts of digital networks in the Global South.

You're Invited! SEADS Future Event

Social Media
and Politics in
Southeast Asia
Merlyna Lim

Date: 22nd April 2025

Time: 6pm to 9pm

Venue: Monash University Malaysia

Entrance is free by registration
& dinner will be provided.

*To register your interest in attending,
Please email sheril.bustaman@monash.edu.*

Reflections from a Tech Bootcamp

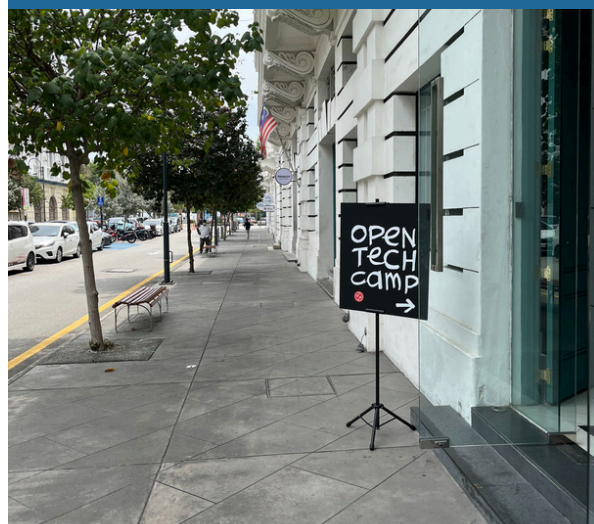
By Monish Khetrimayum

The Open Tech Camp, a two-day unconference at Penang, organized by Engage Media this year, brought together a diverse set of researchers and practitioners from organizations (and a few institutions) based across different locations in Asia, to engage with the tools and strategies for digital rights advocacy in the context of Asia.

While this article can't do justice to two full days of discussion, it attempts to summarize relevant debates under two broad themes, in order to give a sense of the overall concerns and possibilities of thinking about rights and agency in this contemporary digital age.

Firstly, tensions – What does open tech mean? What did it mean when it started? And what does it mean today? These questions at a session on the history of the Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) movement for development (the right to use, modify and distribute software without copyright/copyright infringement) gave a background and framework to think about how the initial question and ideas of rights, agency and the 'creative commons' were framed in the digital tech industry.

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The session however, also reflected on how this peer-to-peer movement focusing on 'openness', has over the years been absorbed by various forms of commercial interests and investments (Big Tech or otherwise) as well as government institutions.

But the widening digital divide and literacy gap, the large-scale use of commercial and accessible AI and LLMs, and Big Tech investments along with competing government interest and regulations, as well as the exponential growth of social media gives us a moment to rethink the question of openness and rights in the contemporary digital media landscape.

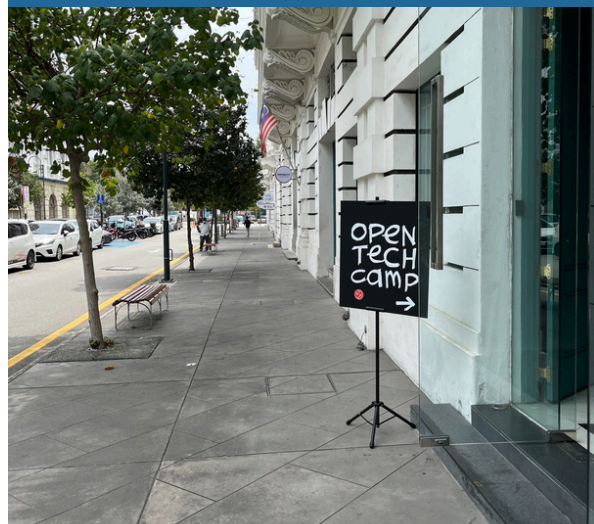
A relevant session discussed the burgeoning markets for digital infrastructures, especially from China, and the rise of various forms of market monopolies throughout Southeast Asia. The wide-scale commercial use of Chinese hardware and software solutions, as well as devices (including several governments throughout Southeast Asia), raises important questions around surveillance, security and regulation (or the lack thereof).

Another session on an ongoing disinformation research put the question of rights and regulation into perspective by discussing the various forms of motivations and ways in which disinformation actors (political, social and financial) engage with targeted audiences, in order to persuade certain kinds of ideologies or positionalities.

The session therefore highlighted the ongoing strategies such as platform regulation, fact-checking, investigative reports and media campaigns as crucial strategies to address some tensions in the digital tech industry and issues of data rights and agency.

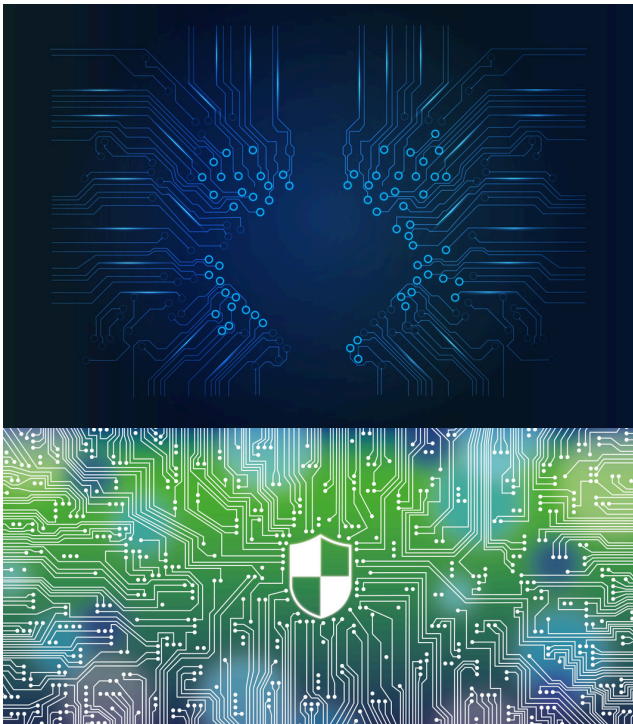
Our session on data privacy was therefore an invitation to rethink the notions of privacy in the context of various communities in Southeast Asia.

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The session attempted to reframe the question of data rights through personal and community-based reflections and conceptualisation of what privacy meant (both in an individual as well as a local context); and in doing so, we asked if there are possibilities of reimagining and redesigning the frameworks of data protection rights and privacy differently in the Asian context.

Secondly, tools – Rights and privacy require critical safeguards, especially under specific forms of state-led digital suppression. A session, using a drill as an experiment, provided a space for human rights defenders and activists to engage and discuss alternate tools to use during internet shutdowns or online censorship, and to talk about what actually works and what can fail during real life situations.



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The session provided crucial insights as to the limitations, risks and the other forms of conflicting interests (technical or contextual) that might not be conducive for the effective use of such tools, and the need to constantly rethink communication for such scenarios. Another form of engagement looked at the concept and the role of community-based open learning, and the need for alternate pedagogical strategies and tools (including building such platforms and devices), especially in conflict zones, to mitigate the risks of digital divide among marginalised and affected sections and communities.

What the two days of discussion clearly illustrated once more is the highly ambiguous role of digital technologies in the region: Infrastructures that often perpetuate oppression, surveillance, and control; but can just as much provide the tools and strategies for organising and mobilising networks of collective action and digital solidarities in Asia.

(The sessions have been anonymized and only general summarizations are provided in this article, so as to avoid privacy and copyright violations. Views expressed are the personal opinions of the authors).

Deepfake Voice Scams

By Preevena Devi

Imagine answering a call from a loved one in distress, only to realise later that it wasn't them at all!

Deepfake voice scams are on the rise, using AI-generated voice cloning to impersonate individuals and manipulate victims. These scams have been used for financial fraud, misinformation, and even emotional exploitation!

So, is it a thing?

Yes, and it's becoming increasingly sophisticated.

As AI advances, the ability to replicate voices with minimal audio samples makes it harder to distinguish real from fake. This raises serious concerns about trust, security, and digital ethics.

Well, how can we protect ourselves?

Experts recommend verifying unusual requests, being cautious with voice-based authentication, and staying informed about emerging digital threats.

● Get In Touch With Us

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Myth or Reality?



Announcement

SEADS post-doctorate fellow Monish Khetrinayum has been awarded the Visiting Fellowship for Scholars from the Global South at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH), University of Cambridge.

His research project is entitled *Designing for Democracy: A Comparative Analysis of Digital ID Systems and its Challenges in South / Southeast Asia.*



Congratulations, Monish!