Title
THE ONLINE DISCOURSE OF ASEAN REGIONALISM: A USER AND CONTENT ANALYSIS OF INDONESIAN, ENGLISH AND JAPANESE TWEETS

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Thesis:
The Online Discourse of ASEAN Regionalism: A User and Content Analysis of Indonesian, English and Japanese Tweets

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Examinining committee:
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Structure of the thesis

The structure of the thesis is as follows.

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1.2 Research on ASEAN Awareness: A New Approach
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Summary of the thesis

This thesis analyzes the exchange of information about ASEAN on Twitter in Indonesian, English and Japanese. The background for this study is the passing of a decade since ASEAN’s proclamation in 2007 of its objective to create an integrated community consisting of three pillars: the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) and the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC).

Chapter 1 introduces the research questions, which are as follows:

1. How far has ASEAN integration shifted from an elite-centered project to a project owned by actors from all levels of society in the region?

2. To what extent are actors of ASEAN member states interested in the socio-cultural and political-security pillars of the integration project, in addition to the economic pillar?

3. In the context of wider regional integration, how do actors of ASEAN member states view Japan, China, and other partner countries, and which aspects of integration are these countries being associated with?

4. How is ASEAN as an entity viewed by the populations of its partner countries, and which aspects of the integration project attract their interest?

Chapter 2 summarizes previous research on the foundation of ASEAN, and
describes the organization’s attempts in recent years to increase public engagement in the integration project. It outlines Indonesian and Japanese policies towards ASEAN since the organization’s establishment, and shows how South-East Asian regional integration has been viewed by academic scholars working on regionalism.

Chapter 3 turns its attention to social media, summarizing previous research on the potential of social media to allow hitherto unheard voices and political opinions to be more widely shared. It presents the findings of research on online political dialogue in both Indonesian and Japan, and also notes what previous investigations have shown about the role of opinion leaders in online communication. Finally, based on previous research it presents four hypotheses regarding online communication about ASEAN.

Chapter 4 describes how the data for this study were collected: in a nutshell, Tweets containing the word “ASEAN” were obtained from Twitter’s Streaming API. The chapter also defines influential users for the purposes of this study, and then presents a categorization schema for these users based partly on the content of the ASEAN integration project and partly on a reflexive analysis of the data. It also explains the dictionary method used to categorize the tweets into three categories reflecting the three pillars of ASEAN integration (economic, political-security and social-cultural). Finally, it presents a description of the data collected, showing that Indonesian, Japanese and English respectively were the languages most used in Tweets about ASEAN, and that Twitter traffic on ASEAN-related topics peaked around large ASEAN events such as summit meetings.

Chapter 5 presents the results of the analysis of the 250 most influential (as previously defined) users tweeting about ASEAN in each of the three languages. It found considerable differences between the three languages. In Indonesian, community and individual users played a prominent role, whereas government institutions and political leaders dominated communication in English; communication about ASEAN in Japanese, by contrast, was marked by the presence of highly opinionated individuals.
Furthermore, while individuals outside the traditional elite are playing a central role in communication about ASEAN in both Indonesia and Japan, they do tend to be highly educated, which suggests that the democratizing potential of social media is only being realized to a limited extent.

Chapter 6 switches away from the quantitative Twitter analysis in order to present the findings of interviews with four of the influential Indonesian users identified in the previous chapter. Two of the users were community accounts and two were accounts run by departments of the Indonesian government. The chapter describes in detail the motivations behind the establishment of the accounts, their aims, and their content production process. The consistent efforts of the teams running the two community accounts led to their being consulted by government institutions and included in government-run public events.

Chapter 7 presents the results of the content analysis for each of the three languages. Both Indonesian and Japanese tweets focused respectively on the two country’s roles within and relations with ASEAN, and in both cases competition with other states was a common theme; in Indonesian tweets the competition was with other ASEAN states, while in Japanese tweets it was competition with China and South Korea. Meanwhile English tweets, as might be expected, lacked a national standpoint.

Chapter 8 summarizes the main findings of the thesis and discusses limitations and topics for future research.
Evaluation of the thesis

This thesis makes the following contributions to scholarship:

1. This thesis represents the first survey of ASEAN-related online communication, and as such is of value to researchers working on ASEAN policies and South-East Asian politics, as well as scholars of communications. Studies using Twitter to investigate information exchange on political and social issues abound, but most focus on the US or Western Europe, and very few use data from Asia, especially considered in proportion to the huge number of Twitter users in countries such as Indonesia and Japan. From the perspectives both of ASEAN’s stated policy of becoming more “people-centered” and of criticisms of ASEAN’s “democratic deficit”, the results obtained from analyzing this original dataset are somewhat disappointing in that they reveal online dialogue about ASEAN to be dominated by state agendas, political leaders and summit meetings. It is possible that this picture might be misleading in the sense that state-centered, summit-driven stories which capture a large amount of attention and retweets in short bursts, might be obscuring a less intense but more consistent exchange of information regarding different aspects of ASEAN. Further analysis of the dataset could make it clear whether such communication is occurring in the three languages.

2. Methodologically, this study is valuable for its combination of large-scale quantitative user and content analysis with in-depth interviews of a small number of people responsible for community and government Twitter accounts in Indonesia. The quantitative analysis serves as a basis for selecting the interviewees and provides a set of questions that can be addressed in the interviews; and the interviews provide insights about issues such as production processes and editorial decisions that help to explain the content. Very few studies have done this, perhaps because it is difficult to fit both into a single journal article, and it is to be hoped that Ms. Pratidina will extend her study in this direction.
3. The thesis shows in detail how activists in Indonesia who make persistent use of social media can gain access to policy networks. The interviews with individuals responsible for the @GNFI and @ASEANCom2015 accounts show the immense organizational effort required to send out between 10 and 50 tweets every day over a period of years. On the other hand, given that in both cases presented here the activist communities generally avoided criticizing government policies, such access may not be available to activist communities taking a more oppositional stance. The interviews with officials responsible for Indonesian government Twitter accounts, meanwhile, show the government at first improvising and then systematizing its social media operations.

Despite these contributions, this thesis has the following issues:

1. The content and context of Japanese tweets about ASEAN—a large number of which focus on Japan’s relations with China or South Korea, or on domestic aspects of Japan-ASEAN summits—makes it difficult to use them to shed light on South East Asian regionalism. In addition, the very different contexts within which users of the three languages tweet about ASEAN makes the comparisons between the user and content analysis results less valuable than it would have been comparing e.g. Indonesian, Tagalog and Vietnamese. The thesis might therefore have benefitted from a tighter focus on Indonesia, which would have allowed Ms. Pratidina to extend both her quantitative and qualitative analyses to cover a larger number of users and to investigate content in greater depth.

2. While the case studies of Indonesian community users becoming engaged in Indonesia’s ASEAN policy networks are valuable, the categories used in the user analysis (Chapter 5) could have been better defined in order to answer more clearly the question of whether non-elite actors have become opinion leaders on ASEAN issues through their activities on social media. In particular, the “individual” category contains “celebrities, sports personalities and members of the general public”, but excludes “journalists, scholars, writers and others who have published materials or have appeared in mainstream media”, who are instead put into the “intellectual” category. This distinction seems rather arbitrary, particularly as celebrities or sports personalities can be
expected to use Twitter with different aims from members of the general public. Furthermore, the thesis does not make it clear whether or how the ten user categories can be split into elite and non-elite, however the latter is defined.

3. While economic and socio-cultural integration in ASEAN are relatively uncontroversial, political-security integration is a much thornier topic due to the established ASEAN practice of mutual non-interference on political matters. Therefore, providing a more detailed analysis of tweets on political-security topics might have shown how issues such as the Rohingya people are being discussed by various kinds of social media users.

Ms. Pratidina herself is aware of these issues, as evidenced during her thesis interview where she discussed the further possible development of her thesis. We concluded that these issues do not detract from the value of her contributions to research on policy-related communication in South-East Asia and that the thesis contains much potential for further development of online communication studies within the global-local context.
Summary of Examiners’ Conclusions

On 7 September 2017 we examined Ms. Indah Santi Pratidina regarding her PhD thesis “The Online Discourse of ASEAN Regionalism: A User and Content Analysis of Indonesian, English and Japanese Tweets.” Ms. Pratidina satisfactorily answered all our questions regarding her thesis.

We therefore conclude that Ms. Pratidina has achieved the requisite level of academic achievement and ability to be awarded the degree of PhD in Social Sciences from this University.

11 October 2017
Examining committee:
Jonathan Lewis
Jun Akamine
Yoshiko Ashiwa
Mitsuhisa Fukutomi

学位請求論文最終試験の結果の要旨

2017年9月7日、学位請求論文提出者インダ・サンティ・プラティディナ氏についての最終試験を行った。本試験において、審査委員が提出論文『オンライン・ディスコースにおけるASEAN地域主義―インドネシア語、英語および日本語ツイートのユーザーとコンテンツ分析―』について、逐一疑問点について説明を求めたのに対し、プラティディナ氏はいずれも十分な説明を与えた。

以上により、審査委員一同はインダ・サンティ・プラティディナ氏が一橋大学博士（社会学）の学位を授与されるのに必要な研究業績および学力を有するものと認定した。

2017年10月11日
審査委員：
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