

**Young People and New Media in Asia and Europe –
Continents Apart, Concerns Converged**
20 – 21 June 2010

The National University of Singapore played host this June to a workshop involving top and emerging scholars from Asia and Europe researching in the area of young people and new media. Entitled “Young People and New Media in Asia and Europe – Continents Apart, Concerns Converged”, this workshop was funded by the Asia Europe Foundation and the European Alliance for Asian Studies and was part of the Asia-Europe Workshop Series 2010. It was jointly organised by Dr Sun Sun Lim of the Communications and New Media Programme, National University of Singapore and Dr Jochen Peter of the Amsterdam School for Communication Research, University of Amsterdam. The workshop brought together ten academics from the two continents, five from Asia and five from Europe.



Professor Milagros Rivera, Head of Communications and New Media Programme, National University of Singapore welcoming the participants to the workshop

Asia and Europe are both innovation powerhouses with regard to new media such as the Internet and mobile phone. Home to several of the world’s leading technology companies, with governments that are equally enthusiastic about informatization, the two continents share considerable interest in promoting the diffusion of new media and technology. In both Asia and Europe, young people are the most avid adopters of new media, while also the ones most affected by them. On the one hand, young people may find enormous learning opportunities in this new media environment with unprecedented access to information, new methods of socializing and new platforms for expressing their identities. On the other hand, young people may be confronted with unreliable or age-inappropriate information; may make unsavoury contacts online; and may engage in, or become victims

of, antisocial behaviour. In light of these trends, the workshop discussed three salient and pressing themes relating to young people's media use: (i) interaction and relationship with peers and family, (ii) risks and opportunities of online contact and content, and (iii) media addiction, cyberbullying and youth crime.



Workshop organisers Dr Sun Sun Lim and Dr Jochen Peter sharing with workshop attendees the genesis and aims of the workshop

The workshop got off to a great start with a discussion of the first theme. Professor Liane Peña Alampay of Ateneo de Manila University in The Philippines presented her paper entitled "Social Interactions of Filipino Youth in the Internet: Implications for Relationships With Family and Peers". She presented the results of a survey administered to Filipino male and female adolescents in Metro Manila. She observed that in general, use of the Internet for social interactions is associated with higher peer intimacy, family cohesion, and good parental communication. The development of a greater sense of autonomy and independence from parents was also found to be correlated with specific ways that these Internet technologies are used. This was followed by a presentation by Dr Julian Lin of the National University of Singapore entitled "Tempering Instant Messaging Use: The Interaction Effects of Peer and Social Influence" where he examined the relationship between peer and parental influences on the use of instant messaging. His paper took the field beyond its current approach of generic media usage by focusing squarely on the relationship between peer and social influences on the usage of a very specific application, i.e. instant messaging. The last paper on this theme was by Dr Thilo von Pape of Universität Hohenheim in Germany. In his paper "A new kind of digital divide? The mobile telephone as a mediator of social segmentation among high school students", he queried whether the social ubiquity of digital media can exacerbate existing inequalities and whether restrictions in mobile phone use lead to a new kind of "mobile digital divide" at the heart of teenagers' peer networks.

The discussion on the risks and opportunities of online contact and content began with an investigation by Dr Duan Peng of the Communication University of China into the challenges of imparting traditional values to young Chinese people in today's new media environment. Dr Jochen Peter then discussed the influence of sexually explicit internet material on the sexual development of adolescents. He presented wide-ranging findings of two large longitudinal studies among Dutch teenagers on the issue and discussed how the use of sexually explicit material among adolescents affects sexual attitudes and sexual behaviour. Shifting the focus away from risks to opportunities, Dr Alexander Schouten of VU University Amsterdam argued that the relative anonymity and controllability of online interactions positively influence self-disclosure and that the control over the cues conveyed to others online allow adolescents great freedom over how they structure their self-presentations.

The final theme brought together a comparative discussion on Internet addiction through the papers by Lukas Blinka of Masaryk University in the Czech Republic, and Dr Byungho Park of the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology. After presenting data collected in the Czech Republic, Chile and Sweden, Lukas Blinka compared some factors of addictive behaviour through an international perspective and concluded that the concept of Internet addiction was problematic and needed to be fine-tuned for greater applicability. In presenting the Asian perspective on Internet addiction, Dr Park first introduced the social issues which Korean society has been dealing with vis-à-vis online gaming and addiction. He then explained concepts which may be useful for understand individuals' inclination towards addiction including sensation seeking, dual system theory and motivation measures. Dr Sun Sun Lim of the National University of Singapore then steered the discussion towards a different kind of risky Internet use with her paper entitled "Media and youth crime – findings from expert interviews", where she highlighted emerging trends in the use of new media in the enactment of youth crime. Expert interviews reveal that at-risk youths are being recruited for criminal activities through social networking sites such as Facebook and that the orchestration of criminal acts often involve the use of cellular phones for mobilisation and coordination. She concluded that these trends are being exacerbated in quantity and severity by the growing proliferation of smartphones. The last paper of the workshop by Dr Michel Walrave of the University of Antwerp touched on the worrisome issue of cyberbullying. He raised several key questions surrounding cyberbullying research including whether cyberbullying is merely an old problem in a new guise, how to distinguish different types of electronic bullying and its impact on young people's lives.

Each paper presenter was mindful of considering the applicability and implications of their research in different cultural settings and this set the tone for a critical discussion on the challenges of cross-cultural research which concluded the entire workshop. The attendees agreed that the workshop had helped to raise awareness about the issues which are salient in particular geographical regions, and the different socio-cultural factors that manifest their influence on young people's use of new media. The attendees also discussed how many issues are viewed and researched through different lenses and that some degree of cross-cultural comparison and exchange can help to further academic investigation. Overall it was a fruitful and productive workshop which apprised academics in Asia and Europe of the potential promises and pitfalls of cross-cultural research into young people's use of new media.