Leveraging on Business, Art/Culture, Technology, and Networking in Building ASEAN's Young Generation in an Integrated ASEAN

C asean

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Overview

In this chapter we aim to demonstrate how business, culture, technology, and networking influence the views of the young generation – their mindsets and attitudes towards Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) integration. The main objectives are as follows:

- To identify key trends and impacts regarding ASEAN's young generation by examining business, art and culture, technology, and networking;
- To identify what has changed in the young generation's mindsets and attitudes towards ASEAN integration;
- To identify the character and the skill set required for future ASEAN generation;
- To provide recommendations on how to aid integration throughout the region.

The research utilised primary data (electronic surveys distributed to the young generation and students throughout the 10 member countries), secondary data (previous studies, related literature pieces, the internet), and phenomenon data (obtained through interviews, focus groups, and events).

A Bird's-Eye View of 50 Years of ASEAN

'One Vision, One Identity, One Community' is the ASEAN vision. This vision represents 10 countries, populated by over 120 ethnic groups, who have been taught to communicate in many different languages and have been driven by a wide range of cultural values. But ASEAN, home to over 600 million people, is anything but one. Many economists, scholars, and ASEAN Member States, believe that this misperception of diversity and cross-cultural management are liabilities. Many believe that the disparity, not only in economic terms, is too great for successful collaboration between countries such as Myanmar and Singapore. For instance, examining the political systems in each country, one observes great diversity. In ASEAN, there are three constitutional monarchies, one absolute monarchy, two socialist republics, and four democracies.

In the 1960s, ASEAN was at war due to diplomatic tension being on the rise as conflicts between different factions were spreading throughout the region. During that time of instability, an attempt to create unity made a lot of sense. According to an essay by William James (1906) the first psychologist who investigated war at a social level, a war brings a sense of cohesion and communal goals. It also inspires individual civilians to seek the service of a greater good. Another way of saying this is that a war is a process of shaping conformity and getting rid of differences.

Once the Viet Nam war was over, it was time to think about the economy and move forward. ASEAN was then introduced to the new meaning of 'ONE': 'ONE' single market and production base; 'ONE' competitive economic region; 'ONE' equitable economic development; and finally, 'ONE' mindset integrated with the global economy.

Fast-forwarding to the year 2016, ASEAN is doing very well. The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) has achieved implementation of two-thirds of the agreements for a unified economic community. The ASEAN Political–Security Community, APSC, will be a united, inclusive, and resilient community that assists in the region's development towards prosperity. The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) will be one that engages and ascertains the cultural awareness of the people, as well as respecting sustainable ideas, shows resilience, and is dynamic in form.

Given the odds of diversity, what is the best way to move forward? Is conformity the essential key, or is diversity the key to ASEAN harmony? Also, who should ASEAN people trust to lead them towards a better future for the region? Will the young ASEAN people of today be the leaders of ASEAN tomorrow?

Key Movements in and Social Impacts of Business–Art/Culture–Technology–Networking

This section focuses on the current key movements and impacts that are shaping the future. These trends are articulated in each independent variable and the implications we found for ASEAN are presented.

Business: As more and more businesses and investors have a 'shift east' ideology built within their company, and as new and innovative products and methods emerge, ASEAN is the central hub for international trade, development, and economic activity.

■ **The Millennial Workforce is changing the way businesses view them: as a workforce, but also a target market.** Millennials are reaching the spending age, which means they will contribute a large share of consumer spending and gross domestic product (GDP). With economic and technological advancements in place, Millennials are given the opportunity to shift away from the 'normal work week' and put into practice innovative business ideas, and change the way day-to-day business transactions are conducted. On average, a millennial stays in a job for 4.4 years, which represents a big shift in the job market (Singh, 2015).

■ **Entrepreneurship, rise of start-ups, incubator programmes, and the spread of e-commerce are all formulating an ecosystem for smaller companies and ideas to grow and flourish.** Government economic stimulus plans in Southeast Asia, such as 'Thailand 4.0', are springing into action because of the spread of entrepreneurial driven businesses. Start-ups, as a whole, throughout ASEAN have a cumulative valuation exceeding US$1 billion. Low taxes, entrepreneurial clubs and fora, committees, and co-working spaces allow and aid in the development of start-ups throughout the region.

■ **Young social entrepreneurs – new hope for the region.** The concept of social enterprise has attracted much attention across the ASEAN countries and this can be a tool for ASEAN integration. The idea of social enterprise is described as the 'people sector' established to respond to the rising problems without waiting for government support, which can be very slow and very limited. The social enterprise model provides a community-based alternative to a state-based social sector by allowing civil society to independently pursue social innovation and address problems in new ways. Many governments have realised that social enterprise will be the key force to help solve social problems such as education, poverty, and inequality. And at the same time, the ASEAN young generation has grown the positive mindset of 'making money with meaning'.

- **Productivity is at the forefront of millennial thinking; therefore, a shared economy is completely transforming the way day-to-day routines occur.** With the ability to work remotely, and anywhere, due to technological advancements, business employees can foster collaboration with one another on an array of products while sharing space and materials. For instance, with urbanisation allowing more workers to flock to cities, the sharing economy is expecting businesses to plan accordingly for the future. Sharing cars to and from work will become the normal daily activity. Fewer and fewer Millennials own cars, believing them to be expensive and unnecessary for city life. Sharing a car with someone, however, will allow for a price structure that benefits both parties and gets more cars off of the road. A reduction in traffic will allow for an increase in productivity in the years to come.

Culture: With roughly 600 million citizens living in ASEAN, culture is of the utmost importance when observing the region. Each country is very different from its neighbours and each ethnic group in a particular country is also very unique. Therefore, to achieve the diversification harmony, we need to start by accepting and respecting each other's culture.

- **Cross-cultural management allows employees and managers to implement and acknowledge techniques to create a functioning and diverse workplace.** As the movement of skilled labour and visa-free travel comes into play, more and more ASEAN citizens will move to other ASEAN countries and become expatriates. With this opportunity comes the daunting task of getting employees at companies to understand and respect other employees' cultures. Managers are expected to incorporate cross-cultural leadership techniques into their everyday business practices. The more diverse a workplace or learning environment, the greater the opportunity to adopt foreign and global ways of thinking.

87% think technology can connect their community with other ASEAN communities effectively

- **As the young generation is introduced to international customs, foreign movies, and different cultures, their fundamental ideas shift with regards to how they express themselves.** With this change come more diverse opinions and more individualistic ideas. The exposure to global contents – in the forms of talks, movies, or performances – has shaped the young generation to be more vocal and more expressive of their thoughts in many different areas, such as local politics, the schooling system, social issues, etc. Educated students feel a responsibility to play active roles in their communities. Voicing their opinion is one of many ways of showing others that they are intellectually stimulated and not afraid to stand by their opinions on or disagreements with foreign or different ideas.

- **International ASEAN students studying abroad are changing the classroom structure and system.** ASEAN has 10 countries that are completely different in terms of customs, public systems, languages, demographic factors, health ideas, living situations, and standards. Diversity learning is shifting how students perceive the world. For instance, a Burmese student being taught by an American teacher at a university in Thailand shapes that particular student's views, making him/her think differently and acquire more global ambitions. This ideological change will help to develop international citizens. Embracing diversity and having young generation students buy into the system will allow innovative ideas to blossom and an entrepreneurial mindset to develop.

Technology: Technology is changing the way people communicate, work, study, and live. From country to country, technological advances show a plethora of differences and discrepancies with regards to development. ASEAN is in the midst of reaping the benefits and opportunities of worldwide technological improvements and innovation.

- **A change in lifestyle and a sense of 'borderless source of knowledge' are both notions that foster the sharing of knowledge across the globe quickly, efficiently, and for free.** Today, in Southeast Asia, social media is shifting the way people interact, work, study, buy things online, and in hindsight, live. The Internet of Things and social media are changing everyday life and lifestyles in Southeast Asia. This shift is also occurring globally as the world becomes more accustomed to international learning and discussion through the web. Connectivity is key within ASEAN; therefore, the Internet of Things will establish a physical as well as an intangible connection between countries. This web of inter-connectivity throughout ASEAN exemplifies the ideology of a well connected ecosystem for everyone involved (McKinsey & Company, 2010).
- **Big Data has helped companies, governments, and worldwide organisations dissect numbers and information to improve the citizens and businesses they serve.** Big Data will only advance as other means of technological awareness and products reach maturity and become available. From a human resource's point of view, Big Data could result in a better understanding of how the future employees (the young generation) think, behave, and take decisions. Eventually this information will benefit the organisation in terms of their strategic moves.
- **Coined by the World Economic Forum, The Fourth Industrial Revolution discusses the shift from electronics, information technology, and automated production to cyber-physical systems with the aim of increasing productivity.** This revolution will completely change how supply chains are managed, how people interact and live, and how connected the global business ecosystem is. This revolution will also impact many lives in Southeast Asia as companies invest in

the region and change the way they operate. The young generation is required to be flexible to change. This interconnectedness, or the borderless connection between ASEAN and the world, will challenge the old ASEAN schools of thought and trigger resistance, but it will eventually be forced to adapt for change.

Networking: For people to connect with businesses, and businesses to connect with governments, a supportive system that shares information and services amongst individuals and groups with a common interest is imperative. Networking allows joint thinking and working together to take place across the globe to raise productivity, increase connectivity, and improve personal relationships.

■ **Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat are successful because they allow people to communicate, share their**

91% believe social media allows them to network around ASEAN more efficiently

lifestyles with others, experience ecommerce and online shopping, and see their favourite celebrities' and friends' pictures. All of these examples are ways of social networking. Social media enables people to meet other people abroad, to connect on message boards and to in-group discussions, and help spread ideas and knowledge from one culture to another. With innovative upgrades to services such as mobile payments, entrepreneurs and small to medium enterprises are utilising social media as free advertising for their company, and are networking their pages to others throughout the ASEAN region. Networking and social media are currently and will continue to be megatrends in the years to come.

■ **Shared economy and co-working spaces are becoming more prevalent as millennials believe they need to own less.** Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand are the region's leaders when it comes to setting up economic stimulus plans for start-ups, hosting events, and getting students and the young generation excited about and confident to develop a company. These pioneers are establishing tax benefits along with special economic zones aimed at gaining entrepreneurs' confidence to establish a

93% of the respondents enjoy making new friends with foreign ASEAN citizens

business. As a result, such co-working spaces are now prominent features of many cities in Southeast Asia. Co-working spaces are designed for entrepreneurs to meet, socialise, share ideas, and network in the expectation that ideas and knowledge will be exchanged amongst many people. These spaces are great opportunities for ASEAN's young generation of entrepreneurs to utilise and capitalise on cheap

working stations, vibrant atmospheres, and professional coaching to improve their products. Incubators go hand-in-hand with such places and add value to new companies, providing them with a better strategic fit in the economy.

■ **The official language of ASEAN is English; those who can communicate well, therefore, will integrate faster.** Getting countries to improve their education standards while using the English language is a challenging yet rewarding task. The young generation needs to be well equipped to use English as a medium of exchange between neighbouring countries. Students have many ways to improve their English language skills through technology and learning in school. However, with regards to networking, as ASEAN becomes more and more integrated, it is crucial for students to continually work on their English skills to be confident in speaking in English to other students from international schools. Only less than one third of our target population surveyed, 31.76%, said that they 'agree' that they are comfortable networking with other ASEAN citizens in English. This shows that English is being adopted, but the teaching methods need to be reformed.

Young ASEAN Mindset

In this section we provide a synopsis of what and how Millennials think about overcoming stereotypes, who will run the world in 2025, and the power and persona of ASEAN youth.
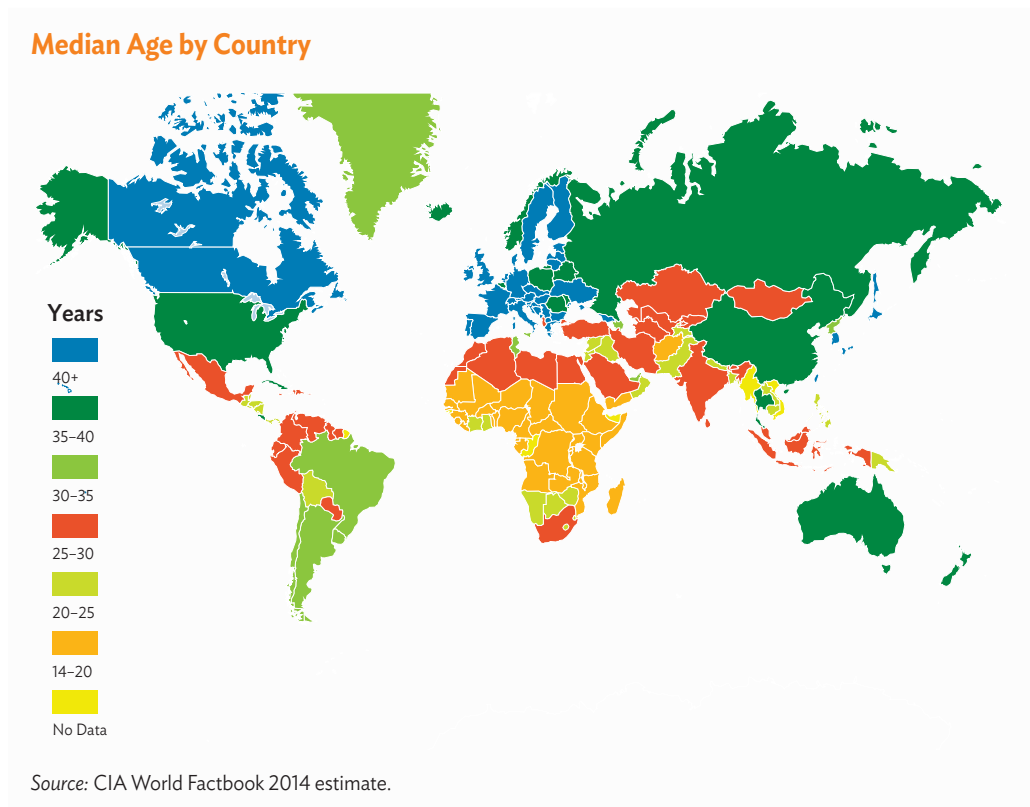
The Faces of Young ASEAN

People in their 20s and early 30s in 2016 are affectionately called 'Millennials' or 'Gen Y' and the last generation of the 'Gen X'. However, ignoring the fact that people are individuals, this young generation is perceived by the public as spoiled and entitled, lazy, and notable for their poor work ethic. They are also easily distracted by electronic gadgets, therefore antisocial and self-centred – their characteristics by default. Moreover, they have little respect for authority, switch jobs constantly, and have a minimal commitment to work.

Of course, this young generation have completely the opposite perception of themselves. Their priorities have seen a paradigm shift – instead of saving for a stable income and security for the future, they are more interested in social currencies and life experiences. Rather than being timid and shy, they are more expressive and assertive about what they want.

Who Will Run the World in 2025?

According to the definition of working age population from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the employment ages are generally between 15 and 64. Moreover, according to a study performed by the Harvard Business Review of 17,000 leaders worldwide participating in a training programme, the average age of a first-time manager is 30 years while the average age of those in leadership training is 42. That means people in their early 20s and 30s in the year 2016 will be running the world in 2025. The age range is around the average age of the Southeast Asian Population.

To emphasise the importance of ASEAN and demonstrate the growth of its young population, note the comparison with the world population pyramid in 2016 and 2025. The potential future managers, aged 30–44 in 2025, make up around 21.3% of the forecast population, and were the same people aged 20–34 in 2016 that made up 23.8% of the world population. The global data of median age, listed by country, confirm ASEAN's position as a promising land for the future generation of leaders.

Median Age by Country

Years

- 40+
- 35–40
- 30–35
- 25–30
- 20–25
- 14–20
- No Data

Source: CIA World Factbook 2014 estimate.

Perspectives of ASEAN Youth and Interpretation of ASEAN Motto

At this point, it is more interesting to hear what the young generation of ASEAN has got to say. And because of the new surroundings, our findings have confirmed that not only have the traditional values amongst these young citizens changed, they are also depending on various new channels to get their messages across.

The survey on attitudes and awareness towards ASEAN in 2008 indicated that 75% agreed with the statement 'I feel I am a citizen of ASEAN' (Thompson and Thianthai, 2008). This proportion has increased to more than 90% today, showing the positive direction of ASEAN awareness.

Through our survey research, we found a few keywords that aptly represent what the ASEAN Motto 'One Vision, One Identity, One Community' means for ASEAN youth and how the motto can be put into practice in their lives.

Meet Myanmar ASEAN Nations Positive Goal Kindness Business Promote Live Idea Culture Words Community Progress ASEAN Countries Open Minded Motto Language ASEAN Citizen Southeast Asia Understand Meaning Respect Status Able Nice Look

Obviously, there are optimists, pessimists, and those in between. But, on average, these young people are positive about new business opportunities, curious about the cultural differences, comfortable with technology, open to the world outside their communities, and most importantly, looking forward to deepening ASEAN integration.

87% strongly agree with the quote: 'because I am an ASEAN citizen, I have a strong chance of doing future business with other ASEAN citizens'

For the optimists, the motto gives them an incredible sense of possibility because of ASEAN integration. More than half of our respondents feel proud to be ASEAN; they believe that all the differences can be overcome by the willingness to understand one another.

> 'This motto is really meaningful. By integrating ASEAN nations, we will be more united, and the support from one another will strengthen our power. ASEAN should help each other in whatever way possible and plausible. It should start from learning and understanding the culture of others.'
> *Quote from an optimistic respondent.*

On the contrary, there were a few more negative comments that triggered the researchers' curiosity – 19% of the respondents thought ASEAN integration will never happen

87% want foreign ASEAN citizens to feel welcome in their home country

because the differences in economic background, each country's way of life, and core beliefs and values, are far too great to overcome.

However, they did not completely dismiss the importance of ASEAN integration as a way to increase the competitiveness of the region. These young people accept that ASEAN is in fact a land of diversity and they would rather find a way for the very different people of the region to coexist.

> 'ASEAN should be recognised as a land of diversity; I would rather have these amazing differences coexist than have ASEAN called One Identity.'
> *Quote from a pessimistic respondent.*

> 'The implementation of this motto should be expanded to the wider range of people, not consistently emphasised among the government offices, and policymakers.' *Quote from an 'in-between-opinion' respondent.*

Finally, for the 28% of respondents whose opinions were in between, they were requesting to see the motto in action. Their suggestions revolved around welcoming, learning from, and networking with other ASEAN people to fully understand and accept ASEAN's differences.

Key Findings and Recommendations

This section outlines the key findings, recommendations, and implications for further research.

Key Findings and Implications

The purpose of this research was to articulate the differences in the young generation's views of business, art/culture, technology, and networking with regards to ASEAN integration. We have examined the correlation and impacts of those factors on ASEAN integration in the future and found that the target population believes networking has the strongest impact on integration (see Appendix VII), culture comes second, technology third, and business and economic aspects are ranked last in terms of correlation with integration.

The findings presented in this chapter may be used as a benchmark and foundation for understanding the young generation.

The implications are that the future generation believes the most important factor for 'successful' integration amongst ASEAN member states is networking. The young generation has a different mindset from previous generations with regards to integration within ASEAN. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to work on personal skills and people-to-people interaction so that networking may prosper. Students who gain networking, cultural awareness, as well as technological savviness will in turn integrate better than those who do not. Business interactions and success are a reaction to the development of the first three because the young generation has not had business experience so far. Therefore, business will be developed later on, which is why it ranked last in terms of correlation with integration.

Recommendations

Provided below are three recommendations based on the researchers' key findings from their quantitative, qualitative, and phenomena research.

(1) **Reform the way students learn about ASEAN.** It is clear that the future generation wants to know more about the history, cultural aspects, livelihoods, and, in general, the way other ASEAN people live. Given that networking and culture rank highest in terms of correlation with integration, universities need to take this into account in their teaching. Educating students about ASEAN and introducing to them the neighbours of their country will help build a future

environment more conducive to collaboration between the 10 member countries. Highlighting the fact that there are many differences is key. Differences and diversity are major assets of a region that can offer the world its unique ideologies, mindsets, and ways of thinking.

(2) **Focus more on ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, ASCC.** It is important for students to think of diversity as an asset. The young generation needs to learn more about ethnic groups in their home countries, learn about ASEAN's rich history, and explore the diverse cultures that each country of the region has to offer. By focusing more on the ASCC sector, the AEC and APSC will flourish. As indicated above, we found that networking and culture are both at the forefront of integration and development of people throughout the region.

(3) **Push ASEAN integration by means of spreading people's awareness.** We observed through qualitative measures that most students did not understand how ASEAN collaboration impacts their daily lives or why they should really care about it. Generally, the speed of government in terms of recognising and acting on business opportunities and collaboration is slower than in the private sector. However, in terms of the social aspect of ASEAN, the return on investment in socio-culture, although substantial in the long run, is quite intangible in the short run; therefore, governments need to take initiatives aimed at increasing people's awareness through cultural understanding and press on with implementation. Showing the younger generation how ASEAN connectedness can benefit their personal lives is of the utmost importance when discussing possible opportunities. Studying in other ASEAN countries should be made a priority given the new visa regulations. Pushing ASEAN integration through increasing people's awareness is key to the future success of the region's abundant and talented young generation.

(4) **Learning English.** Our findings have shown an interesting relation between English proficiency and the perception of ASEAN integration across business, culture, technology, and networking. English-speaking ASEAN young people tend to have lower levels of self-defence mechanism against the unknown, so they tend to feel more comfortable about networking with other ASEAN people. English proficiency development should be given high priority until the point is reached where English-speaking ASEANs are the norm.

Further Research

Understanding the limitations of our study points to areas for further research. The main constraints were limitations of the English language capabilities of the target population, a less than complete understanding of the data, and insufficient time to conduct research and analyse the results. Further research may remove these hindrances with a view to moving on to the next phase of research.

The findings of this research have demonstrated the opinions of the young generation toward ASEAN integration. This could be the foundation for the next research to understand how to shape a stronger mindset of the ASEAN citizen and how to make ASEANs more open to integration of the region.

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