

Youth Internet Governance Camp 2011

Brief Report

Organised by the Singapore Internet Research Centre, Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technology University, the Youth Internet Governance Forum Camp 2011 was held on 16-18 June 2011 at NTU. It attracted participants living in Singapore, with facilitation from NetMission Ambassadors mainly from Hong Kong who had participated in the 2010 youth internet governance forum camp. This brief report highlights the activities, experiences and benefits from the camp, of the participants. It indicates that there were enriching activities before, during and after the camp, and that participation is both a challenge to the youth to think critically about governing the internet in our age as well as learn to work together as different stakeholders in managing contemporary techno-scientific resources.

Activities

Reading: Participants were expected to submit a two-page essay on internet governance. This necessitated reading, thinking and reflecting on internet governance from the perspective of each applicant. Basing on these essays those who were selected were also expected to read further about internet governance as they prepared for the camp, and to make presentations to their peers as well as panellists on the final day.

In-group (internal) and inter-group (external) *Discussions and Debates:* the camp leadership divided participants into stakeholder groups, and were randomly allocated them to these stakeholder groups. Within these groups, they were tasked to engage internet governance from respective stakeholder angles. The stakeholder groups included Business and NGOs Sector; Government Sector; and Community (Parents, Students and Youth). There were in-group discussions, whereby participants held in-depth exchanges among themselves about the three ingredients of internet governance: Digital Divide; Cyber/internet Addiction; and internet/cyber Privacy. In-group discussions were then synthesised into a group working framework by which other stakeholders were then engaged. This was followed by inter-group/inter-stakeholder discussions.

In inter-stakeholder discussions the participants now had discussions representing the three sectors along the three strands of internet governance. Each stakeholder group advanced its argument, then received concerns, critiques and suggestions from other stakeholder groups in a typical negotiation dynamic. This also fed into the component of self- and peer-evaluation. By undertaking these discussions, participants assumed stakeholders' interests: were you in government, a business company, a parent or student, how would you view digital divide, cyber addiction, and internet privacy? This assumption of responsibilities led participants to 'enter the minds' of these stakeholders in an interesting and creative fashion.

Self- and group/peer-evaluation: This had two components: each participant presenting in one's stakeholder group and externally to other stakeholder groups; and developing a presentation ready for submission at any point. In the process each participant was expected to see where one has difficulties and then seek colleagues' and NetMission ambassadors'

guidance. This increased teamwork. As it may have been observed on the day of presentation to panellists each participant had some ideas to put across as most had been part of the presentations that were made on behalf of each stakeholder group. At the end of the forum camp all submitted to the AP-IGF a report and power-point presentation – making thinking, writing and reporting a critical component of the camp if one judged it right from the time of application-accompanying essays, during-camp presentations and write-ups, presentations to panellist, and exchanges of information that were going on among them.

Youth games: it was not only table-thinking. There was also a game-play in the morning of the second day. Mr Nathan Kung (NetMission Ambassador) had developed interesting but challenging games. These involved walking through dangerous terrains (hypothetically land-mined fields) as though in a conflict-laden geopolitical terrain; and competing to settle a joint task one by one at such a speed and with such accuracy as possible. The games were challenging and educative, as they brought afore the three critical messages of sensitivity to detail; teamwork and human interdependence; and time management. Were they to be examined, these games would have created a challenging test as a ‘side-dish’ to the three component issues of internet governance.

Presentations and debate before panel of adjudicators: in addition to presentations to colleagues in the camp, participants prepared for presentations to a panel that critiqued and guided them on several issues. This is not to forget that participants had attended the opening of the Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum 2011, and had had a slight feel of what goes on in such fora, and had been encouraged to attend the following post-camp ICANN meetings (which several did). During the forum camp presentations debate gave clue to what transpires when internet governance (and indeed other governance) issues are being debated and negotiated. By allowing participants a feel of what goes on during real-world governance debates, the camp was like a grooming session. More sources of relevant literature were also suggested to participants.

Experiences

Individual creativity was perhaps the most important experience: participants had to create and think of most pressing issues about internet governance before participation in the camp, and were intensely made to engage the three issues. Quickly they got on track and as though they had been previously involved in internet governance, the youth were able to productively raise pertinent observations that one may never take lightly when dealing with real internet governance in a practical world.

The *vitality* of the *hitherto negligible internet governance*: it is no longer as simple a communication instrument as it possibly was perceived; internet is now a critical governance issue whose access, usage, and response to such usage are important. It is a global concern as much as it is no longer limited to the field of ICT – having transcended into policy, business, community and welfare realms internet is now an important component of global governance.

The youth know: it is also interesting to see that the youth know the challenges and intricacies involved in internet governance from different stakeholder groups, and the difficulties of harmonising different positions. It is, however, generally acceptable that universal internet access is the greatest concern as the internet becomes a critical

component of contemporary socio-economic transformation and emancipation of marginalised and poor communities.

Stakeholder representation and interest pursuits: the ability of the youth to “put on shoes” of different stakeholders and attempt to fit in them shows both their creativity but also their ability to understand that different stakeholders pursue divergent interests, and that in these pursuits there is need to strike a balance – such as private-public partnership – by which areas of harmony are encouraged and worked upon and disagreements subjected to negotiation.

Whose interests matter? This question remains a challenge and is possibly not fully explored. Today the internet is not limited to access/in-access; addiction/no-addiction; or privacy/no-privacy. The other issue is: access by whom and for what? The internet has ‘graduated’ from the aid to communication to an instrument of socio-cultural, politico-security and lego-criminal mobilisation and conscientisation; it has aided the transnationalisation of sometimes unwanted groups and aided unacceptable networks and spaces – herein called “the Dark Side of the Internet”. This aspect was not explored, and remains negligible in global internet governance circles. But it is important for our understanding of the metamorphic development of the internet to an instrument beyond what contemporary regulatory and other governance measures may be able to handle. Thus the current preoccupation with digital divide needs not black-out genuine concerns over who access internet and for what. Will the internet get out of hand? The future of the internet: what are the issues? This question remains unanswered.

Benefits

The importance of *research in governance engagements:* one of the panellists challenged participants to value information as a critical weapon of negotiation and governance. What is the basis of a stakeholder’s claim? What is the basis of one’s demand that other stakeholders do certain things, give up certain positions, recognise one’s interests? The importance of information is that it expands one’s bargaining ground. This is one of the important benefits the participants realised.

Sobriety and composure in challenging environs: participants learnt that while stakeholders may need to realise certain objectives it is not that easy where other stakeholders’ interests may sometimes be contradictory to one’s. One needs to be composed and emotionally stable to engage others who may be irritating in the way they present their cases and dismiss one’s.

Youth networks, connections, friendships: the participants have since become part of a wider network of young men and women involved in debating internet governance issues, in addition to becoming friends and acquaintances. There have also developed good and encouraging relations with senior governance actors who have remained in touch with these youth in a productive manner – especially Ms Salanieta Tamanikaiwaimaro. Trans-nationalised youth networks may lead to significant future benefits for the participants that are presently not foreseeable.

New knowledge and skills: these include knowledge on internet governance, and skills in debate/presentations. The fact that it was a fully-engaging and participatory exercise ensured that each participant acquired some skills in presentation, learnt new things, and

more new things may come our way as more and more information along the lines of internet governance continues to trickle in. Hardly did many of us know the extent of each of the three internet governance concerns and their respective global, regional, national and socioeconomic, gender, generational and demographic dimensions. This important knowledge was acquired.

Continuity of the 2010 YIGF forum: those who organised and attended the 2010 youth internet governance forum - the Asia Pacific Regional Youth Internet Governance Forum (APrIGF-YIGF) - have witnessed continuity in their work and brought on board new members and participants. This implies a growing exercise whose consequences are not easy to predict at present but encouragingly breeds new approaches to global internet governance. Traditionally governance was exclusively a realm of established professionals and policy actors but the involvement of the youth is another achievement of modern times that taps future governance actors still fresh.

Nairobi IGF: finally, four participants selected to attend the forthcoming Internet Governance Forum in Nairobi, Kenya, have benefited from the forum camp. There, they are expected to actively participate – through representations, consultations, internationalisation and networking. They will receive more information from their APrIGF-YIGF 2011 colleagues and other sources to expand their knowledge base, while at the same time all YIGF 2011 participants have been encouraged to participate (including through online). This participation now trans-continentalises youth internet governance engagements as they interact with more from other continents; and the YIGF 2011 participants have benefited a lot by being part of this process.

Conclusion

The youth who participated in the 2011 YIGF were involved in enriching activities that challenged their ongoing engagements with and thinking about internet. They are now able to think critically about governing the internet. They also realised some immediate benefits and long term ones are yet to come afore. Importantly, they now appreciate the importance of working together as different stakeholders in managing contemporary techno-scientific resources; teamwork in face of difficult tasks; working with scarce resources to realise huge benefits; development of international networks among the youth around issues previously unbeknown to them as important; and continuous learning (about other areas and stakeholder concerns). There is more about internet governance that can be explored, and the challenge of future internet governance youth actors should be to explore and debate these areas.

The report is contributed by Sabastiano RWENGABO, *Asia-Pacific Youth Internet Governance Forum Camp Report*, July 2011