Summary Report
Multistakeholder Roundtable

Enhancing Information Integrity
and Protecting Vulnerable Groups
in the Asia Pacific region:
Intersections between Advertising
and Business and Human Rights

16 September 2025
Bangkok, Thailand

UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

C·A·N

From
the People of Japan

On 16 September 2025, UN Human Rights and the Conscious Advertising Network (CAN) co-convened a multistakeholder roundtable 'Enhancing Information Integrity and Protecting Vulnerable Groups in the Asia Pacific region: Intersections between Advertising and Business and Human Rights' in Bangkok, Thailand. The regional roundtable was held under the Chatham House Rule, bringing together 40 participants from businesses, media, academia, civil society, government, and UN agencies. The meeting, aimed to advance shared understanding of the interlinkages between advertising and human rights and to reinforce multistakeholder collaborations, resulted in the adoption of a Multistakeholder Action Plan and the creation of a Community of Practice to collectively enhance information integrity and tackle hate speech, misinformation and disinformation in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

The Roundtable was made possible with support from the Government of Japan.

Background

Information integrity in the Asia-Pacific region is increasingly at risk, with harmful online and offline consequences for societies. These include undermined trust in democratic institutions, elections,[1] climate science,[2] national security risks, and economic costs to governments and businesses. The harms disproportionately affect people in vulnerable situations, including migrants, minorities, Indigenous Peoples and other marginalised groups, with a pronounced gendered and intersectional impact.

The region has seen a sharp escalation of digital harms with severe real-world consequences. In South-East Asia, for example, hundreds of thousands of people are suffering serious human rights abuses and violations in cyber scam operations.[3] Traffickers are taking advantage of weak information ecosystems, using social media platforms and other online communication tools to fraudulently recruit and exploit migrants and others in vulnerable situations. Across the region, hate speech and mis/disinformation are being used to justify discriminatory treatment against migrants, minorities and other marginalised groups.

The link between advertising and potential harms in the digital (and offline) sphere has increasingly been recognised, including in the Asia-Pacific region where malicious actors continue to seek profit or influence through the proliferation of harmful content, and the risk of advertisers unknowingly funding such content or activities. In fact, advertising is a multi-billion-dollar industry, with USD 790 billion spent globally on digital advertising in 2024, projected to exceed 80% of total ad spending by 2030.[4] Asia-Pacific ranks second worldwide in digital ad spending after North America.[5] It includes several of the world's largest digital advertising markets, such as China, Japan, Australia, and the Republic of Korea. South-East Asia is the fastest-growing digital advertising market, projected to expand five times in size over the next ten years.[6] Through this spending power, businesses, including advertisers and tech companies, can play a crucial role in tackling mis/disinformation and hate speech. At the same time, the attention-driven dynamic of digital advertising raises human rights concerns, in the collection and use of personal data, and the monetisation of content that proliferates mis/disinformation and hate speech.

Under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, businesses have a responsibility to prevent, mitigate, and remedy human rights abuses which they cause or contribute to. In June 2024, the UN Secretary General launched the UN Global Principles for Information Integrity: Recommendations for Multi-stakeholder Action which outline five major principles — Societal Trust and Resilience, Healthy Incentives, Public Empowerment, Independent, Free and Pluralistic Media, and Transparency and Research, and provide concrete guidance for key actors, including advertisers, to promote a healthier information ecosystem. In addition, an explicit commitment is also made in the Global Digital Compact to foster an inclusive, open, safe and secure digital space that respects, protects and promotes human rights.

UN Human Rights and CAN have sought to enhance understanding of the intersections between advertising and human rights and strengthen collaboration in Asia and the Pacific and beyond, directly contributing to the implementation of the UN Global Principles for Information Integrity. Multistakeholder sessions have been held at the Asia-Pacific Regional Responsible Business and Human Rights Forum in 2021 and 2022 in Bangkok, the 2022 International Migration Review Forum in New York, and the 2023 Business and Human Rights Forum in Geneva. At the national level, in 2024, UN Human Rights organized a private sector roundtable in India on the role of advertising in human rights, in partnership with Dentsu India, which was joined by leading companies and organizations in the country's advertising sector. As information ecosystems continue to change rapidly and risks to information integrity escalate, increasing calls from all sectors for action underscore the urgency and need for cross-sectoral collaboration.

---

[1] Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and opinion (2025), Freedom of expression and elections in the digital age, A/HRC/59/50
[2] Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change (2024), Access to information on climate change and human rights, A/79/176
[3] OHCHR (2023), Online Scam Operations and Trafficking into Forced Criminality in Southeast Asia: Recommendations for a Human Rights Response.
[4] https://www.statista.com/outlook/amo/advertising/worldwide#analyst-opinion
[5] https://www.statista.com/topics/9672/digital-advertising-in-the-asia-pacific-region/#topicOverview
[6] https://www.statista.com/topics/9672/digital-advertising-in-the-asia-pacific-region/#topicOverview

Objectives

Against this backdrop, and in line with commitments in the UN Global Principles for Information Integrity, the regional roundtable sought to build a standing multistakeholder coalition on upholding human rights at the intersection of advertising and information integrity. This multistakeholder roundtable aimed to examine challenges and opportunities, with a focus on the human rights impacts on migrants and other marginalised groups and explore cross-sector collaboration to protect human rights and guarantee information integrity. The regional meeting also aimed to agree on concrete outcomes, including a collective action plan outlining steps for relevant stakeholders—individually and jointly—across the short, medium, and long term. Lastly, it also sought to raise awareness of human rights risks related to trafficking for forced criminality and to strengthen the capacities of key stakeholders to address these risks. This informal summary provides insight into the key outcomes of the discussions and agreed next steps by way of a Multistakeholder Action Plan.

Summary and key highlights

Challenges to Information Ecosystems in the Digital Era in the Asia-Pacific region

Participants shared the view that the digital era has profoundly transformed information ecosystems in the region and beyond, bringing both opportunities and significant risks. It was highlighted that rapid technological advances, dominance and power of major platforms, and the rapid growth of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools with limited regulation have eroded the integrity of information spaces.

Platform Dominance and the Erosion of User Choice

Participants repeatedly pointed out that a small number of corporations control much of the online advertising space, collecting personal data even from non-users for that purpose. They found that large technology companies hold significant power in information ecosystems and constrain competition, limiting both user and advertiser choice. This concentration of power distorts information ecosystems and normalises business models that prioritise engagement and revenue over information integrity.

Attention-Driven Business Model, Opaque Supply Chains and the Monetisation of Harmful Content

There was a widely shared view that the attention-focused business model employs algorithms to maximise engagement, driving traffic towards potentially harmful content. Consequently, brands may inadvertently fund hate speech or disinformation including self-harm content, as advertisers know little about where their ads appear or which media/creators they fund. Data shared suggested that over USD 100 billion of digital ad spend was disappearing in this so-called "unknown delta".

The opaque and unregulated algorithms and ad-tech supply chains were identified as an enabler for revenue to finance and drive disinformation, polarisation, climate denial, and threats to pluralistic media, minority voices and democracy.

Participants repeatedly raised concerns that content spreading misinformation against marginalised communities continues to be monetised through major ad-tech systems, noting that an estimated USD 2.6 billion per year of advertising funds go to mis/disinformation websites. Regional research shared showed false content receiving substantial ad spend during crises such as extreme weather events.

Trafficking for Forced Criminality through Digital Advertising

Participants raised the concern that targeted ads on social media have become a tool exploited by organized criminal networks to lure hundreds of thousands of individuals into trafficking for forced criminality. It was also emphasized that these networks sustain their operations through monetised online content, revealing a crucial intersection between criminal economies and advertising. The cross-border nature of these operations was highlighted as a factor that makes them extremely difficult to dismantle, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated responses.

Limited Transparency and Accountability

Participants highlighted a lack of robust accountability measures and algorithmic transparency in relation to ad-tech supply chains. Measures, such as keyword blocking or inclusion lists were described as limited and somewhat blunt tools, which risked over-blocking and misinterpreting content and independent media to the detriment of freedom of expression and access to information. Where transparency requirements exist, they remain limited in scope, and their databases, commonly called "advertising libraries", often exclude key financial information needed to trace where money flows.

Rapid Growth of AI Technologies and Inadequate Regulations

While participants agreed that AI technology offers potential benefits, many shared the concern that it also amplifies disinformation through deepfakes, manipulated images, and targeted content that is monetised without transparency. It was also noted that the lack of global rules for mandating watermarking or disclosure allows such content to spread unchecked, undermining societal trust in information while harming individuals. Some participants reported that in some countries in the region, generated visuals depicting minorities as threats and deepfakes targeting journalists and human rights defenders are increasingly being used to suppress their voices, harass and discredit them and polarise society.

Threat to Independent Media through the Zero-Click Internet

A widely shared concern was that generative AI-driven features now scrape journalism and creative content without payment, diverting traffic and ad revenue from publishers and leading to a "zero-click internet" environment, in which users no longer click links to visit webpages to access information. These trends were highlighted as not only affecting independent media, small niche websites, and quality journalism, contributing to a structural decline in revenue for independent news, but also narrowing the digital public sphere, devaluing the role of the media and replacing pluralism with AI-curated summaries optimised for engagement rather than accuracy or credible information.

Growing Disconnect between Global Platforms and Local Realities

Participants pointed out that existing approaches often fail to reflect regional realities. It was noted that power imbalances and legal and other infrastructures in the region mean that simply copying regulatory models from other regions may create inadvertent risks and limit effective digital governance. It was stressed during the discussion that meaningful regulation must be human rights-based and adapted to local realities, supported by multistakeholder participation.

It was also agreed that the region's linguistic diversity, which hosts more than 3,000 languages, poses serious challenges for content moderation and AI model training. The lack of cultural and linguistic nuance results in uneven enforcement and exacerbates misinformation against marginalised communities. Some participants underscored that ensuring Indigenous data and language sovereignty is crucial to protecting cultural identity and sustaining information diversity.

Opportunities to Advance Rights-Based Advertising and Guarantee Information Integrity

Participants strongly agreed that ensuring transparency, accountability, and human rights compliance is essential to uphold information integrity, individual rights and protect public trust. To this end, the regional roundtable focused on exploring opportunities for next steps, and the role of cross-sector efforts in building on promising practices and identifying strategic recommendations to safeguard information integrity, build trust, and advance ethical innovation in the digital age while ensuring measures do not undermine freedom of expression and other human rights.

The roundtable referenced several promising practices from various jurisdictions, such as legislation with benchmarks for comprehensive digital regulation and transparency reporting; the establishment of a multi-stakeholder Study Group on Addressing Issues related to Information Distribution in the Digital Space to promote rights-based transparency, accountability and monetisation; Guidance for Advertisers encouraging stronger oversight, technical verification and monitoring of ad placements; the use of competition law and data protection to litigate for fair markets and human rights protection; placing advertising through contextual AI models, which helps protect privacy and data protection rights and enhance brand safety and transparency; community and niche journalism models of independent media outlets which promotes local engagement and transparency; inclusion of media literacy in national education curriculum; and a self-regulatory model which improves public trust and visibility of fact-checked content.

Participants proposed a series of measures to embed and advance Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) in advertising supply chains.

Mandate Financial Traceability

Establish binding requirements for platforms and advertisers to ensure complete financial traceability of advertising flows, revealing who pays for and profits from online content distribution.

Expand Public Advertiser Libraries

Create and maintain comprehensive, public databases detailing the entities and political actors that fund, distribute, and profit from online content.

Mandate Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD)

Introduce mandatory HRDD legislation requiring corporations to identify, prevent, and mitigate human rights risks (including privacy, data protection, discrimination and freedom of expression impacts) across their entire digital value chains, from data sourcing and algorithm design to ad targeting and content delivery.

Embed Ethical Clauses

Integrate robust ethical advertising and human rights clauses directly into corporate governance, procurement policies, and contractual agreements with vendors and platforms.

Curb Surveillance Models

Strengthen or adopt privacy and data-protection laws and institute privacy-by-design to actively restrict the collection and use of personal data, thereby dismantling business models reliant on ubiquitous surveillance and personalised profiling.

Enforce Competition Law

Utilize competition and antitrust frameworks to proactively break up monopolistic control, ensure fair market access, and enhance market diversity, which in turn safeguards democratic discourse and consumer rights.

In addition, participants collectively proposed concrete steps to advance multi-stakeholder collaboration for improving information integrity.

Utilize Data-Driven Cooperation Models

Implement frameworks like the ABCDE framework (Actor, Behavior, Content, Degree, Effect) to enable multi-sector evidence collection and analysis for tracking disinformation and online harm networks.

Develop Joint Reporting Platforms

Create shared data repositories where governments, regulators, and civil society organizations share verified data on online harms, advertising revenue and content moderation outcomes.

Promote Cross-Regional Learning and Capacity Building

Support civil society assessments of platform reports and establish programs for sharing best practices.

Ensure Youth Participation in Digital Futures

Ensure youth participation in shaping policy making on AI, advertising and digital rights, recognising young people as both one of the most affected and leading actors for ethical innovation.

Foster Inclusive Language and AI Technologies

Develop AI technologies that respect data ownership and reflect regional specificities such as linguistic and cultural diversity.

Finally, the participants put forward proposals for bolstering independent media and journalism.

Scale Media and Information Literacy

Expand education on media and information literacy through school curricula, public campaigns, and multilateral partnerships.

Mobilise Cultural Narratives

Engage cultural and creative sectors as rights-based narrative shapers, leveraging popular media and storytelling to promote public awareness and counter harmful narratives.
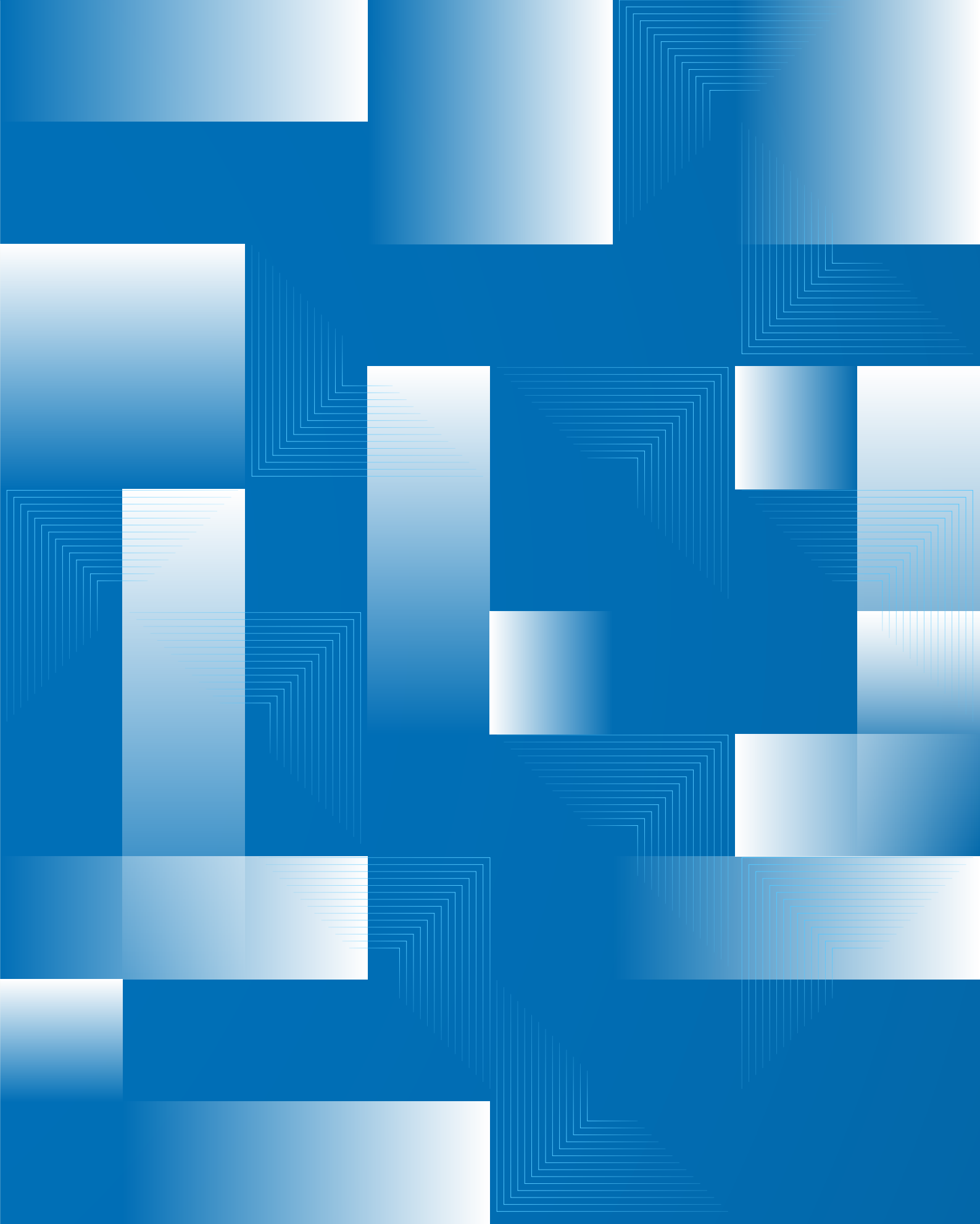
Create Positive Funding Incentives

Establish incentives, such as tax credits or recognition schemes, for brands funding quality journalism and public-interest media.

Outcome and Next Steps

Participants agreed to commit to, adopt, and actively promote the UN Global Principles for Information Integrity. They recommended that UN Human Rights and CAN "keep the circle alive" and requested "more such forums and follow-ups", as well as opportunities for "possible collaborations between participants." There was also an emphasis on the need for enhanced awareness raising on this issue, including based on a shared understanding of the problem and practical solutions to strengthen the various sectors' ability to pursue accountability.

A 'Multistakeholder Action Plan for Information Integrity and Human Rights in the Asia Pacific Region' at the Roundtable was adopted to build a "big tent" that brings together allies across sectors, with a set of concrete actions that emerged from the discussions and the community of practice agreed to move forward.

ANNEX: Multistakeholder Action Plan for Information Integrity and Human Rights in the Asia Pacific Region