


Why are Asian Academic Regulatory Bodies wary of blogging?

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2019/10/08/why-are-asian-academic-regulatory-bodies-wary-of-blogging/

October 8, 2019

*Blogs and blogging are an important medium for communication. In the Anglophone world they have taken on a particular significance within the academic community as a medium for discussing cross cutting issues that affect the universities sector. In this post **Santosh C. Hulagabali** argues that in Asia and India in particular, the dearth of institutional blogs has limited public discussion of higher education and research policy at both the national and international scale.*



Blogging is one of the finest mediums for alternative journalism and public outreach. When done well, it can provide an essential platform for critical and constructive public debate. Blogging is also a mature communication medium, forming a key part of many organisations' communication strategies, and is accessible, anyone can launch a blog in just twenty minutes. However, in Asia, the adoption and use of blogs, especially amongst academic regulatory bodies (ARBs), is severely limited. Whereas, western higher education systems have developed a rich culture of blogging, amongst Asian academic institutions and regulatory bodies blogging is more limited and the ARBs that follow democratic principles to seek public opinion on their policies mainly use more conventional communication channels.

The Asian academic blogosphere

The blog presence of ARBs among the Asian countries is minimal. Be it China's Ministry of Education or India's Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), neither have official blogs. Many of their affiliated institutions do not have them either. Whilst, India's MyGov has facilitated open discussion by inviting comments on certain government initiatives, it lacks feature articles and comments can't be posted after the close of the consultation period.

In India there has been growing encouragement and academic recognition for researchers to engage in open digital communication, such as through the promotion of MOOCs on the SWAYAM portal. However, little importance is placed on blogging, with the notable exception of professional institutes (IIMs and IITs), which have developed their own institutional and multi-author blogs

This contrasts the situation in the Anglophone, where blogging is firmly established. In the UK, research shows academic blogs fulfil a variety of functions and provide a platform for academics to discuss a range of research topics and issues in higher education. When it comes to ARBs, the UK government has a number of official blogs, including many focused on education and research policy. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Education has an official blog and posts regularly on forty plus subjects/categories. Many of its

statutory bodies also have official blogs. Even domain specific organizations such as [APA](#), [ALA](#), [IFLA](#), have blogs, but in Asia such initiatives and the public discussions they support are rare.



An untapped public sphere

A key feature of academic blogging is the way they enable different stakeholders to actively participate in live discussions on a range of subjects. This extends beyond blogposts themselves and into below the line comments and discussions, which can have immense value in outlining and explaining different perspectives on a particular issue.

These potential benefits are highlighted by a recent World Bank study, which shows how blogging about academic research can develop an informed and engaged readership. If ARBs were to facilitate blogging platforms on their sites, there would likely be an improved understanding about their policies, reforms, drawbacks and blindspots. Creating a policy-literate public that could contribute to the policymaking process.

An example of this latent capacity and interest for public debate occurred recently, when the Indian Government sought public opinion over its [Draft National Educational Policy, 2019](#). The consultation received staggering two lakh (200,000) suggestions from all over the country. However, these suggestions were shared individually with the MHRD and hence negated the possibility for public debate, as only the MHRD would come to know what others have suggested.

Building a community

Blogs therefore offer an opportunity for Asian ARBs to meaningfully engage with the research community and to improve their policymaking processes by widening the number of views and inputs available to policymakers. However, to do this ARBs need to overcome the perception that such a debate would be a self-invited reputational risk. This could be achieved by developing strong codes of practice and the careful moderation of

content. However, it also has the potential to lead to tighter regulations on what academics can and can't say on the internet, as has been the case in some [Australian universities](#).

Academic Regulatory Bodies stand to gain much from facilitating an engaged blogging public focused on their activities. However, although Asian ARBs have to date been good at promoting tech-based educational services, they need to fully explore the potential for open sharing that these services and blogging provide. This under-utilization is perhaps related to wariness that engagement and open discussion could undermine their authority. However, as apex institutions in higher education, they have an immense power to lead other academic organisations and set the tone of public debate on these issues.

Perhaps the most compelling case for the utility of blogging is the potential it has to showcase the work that is taking place in Asian higher education systems to the world. This could pave the way to developing more equitable international dialogues, collaboration and discussion around global issues in higher education, for instance the current global debate taking place around Plan S and open access to research.

Hopefully, the ARBs and their affiliated academic institutes can collectively work towards this goal for the benefit of both the education sector and society.

Note: This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [comments policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

Featured Image Credit, [Nina Z](#) via Unsplash.
