

Cambodian Communication Review 2015

**Department of Media and Communication
Cambodia Communication Institute
Royal University of Phnom Penh**

Say SOK, PhD

Editor

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FOREWORD

The publication of the *Cambodian Communication Review 2015* is yet another testimony of the commitment from the Department of Media and Communication and Cambodia Communication Institute and the Royal University of Phnom Penh, more broadly, to strengthening research in media and communication, to providing a platform for the academic and experts to express their thoughts, and to enhancing academic debates in the fields. Throughout my careers, I always trust that research and innovation is key to development, and hence my commitment to strengthening research and innovation has never been swayed. It is worth highlighting that the publication of the *Review* series was revived in late 2013 after two years in hiatus.

My very sincere thanks go to the people and institutions that make this publication possible. I am very thankful to Dr. Say Sok, the editorial team leader of the publication, who contributes significantly to reviving the *Review* series and makes the publication of this issue possible. I am thankful to Ms. Sokhuong Song and the other two outgoing coordinators, Ms. Manika Pin and Mr. Sovannara Chan, for their coordination. Mr. Chanpolydet Mer is acknowledged for his help with the layout and design and all the DMC and CCI staff who give their helping hands with administrative support. I wish to thank Dr. Chivoine Peou, who initiated the publication of the *Review* series and acted as the editor of the two former issues before his departure for further study in Australia.

I would love to express my heartfelt thanks to the contributors for their articles and anonymous reviewers who spent their valuable time and energy to comment on previous drafts of the articles. Without their support, these papers would not be what they are. Finally, my gratitude goes to the DMC-CCI partners for the financial support, without which the publication of the *Cambodian Communication Review 2015* would not be possible.

Finally, I present this work to you. I hope that this work will be of use to you and your career.

Ratana SOM
Head

PREFACE

The publication of the *Cambodian Communication Review 2015* reflects the commitment of the Department of Media and Communication and Cambodia Communication Institute of the Royal University of Phnom Penh to continue to nurture the culture of academic research at higher education institutions. This publication is meant to contribute to better understanding of the status of media and communication in Cambodia and to provide a platform for the academic and practitioners to express their thoughts and opinions on media and communication.

The *Cambodian Communication Review 2015* features a section on media indicators, two research articles, and two critical commentaries on media and communication. These papers went through an internal editorial review and a thorough single-blinded external review. The writing touches a range of issues namely, determinants of newsworthiness in foreign news coverage and limited reportage of the genocide committed by the Democratic Kampuchea; new media as a platform and space for participatory democracy; challenges in environmental communication, and current practices of online journalism in Cambodia. The authors provide thought-provoking arguments, highlight critical issues the media and communication sector the country is facing, and vividly discuss them at a theoretical and conceptual level.

At the heart of the publication are the contributors. We sincerely thank them for publishing with us and for the excellent quality in their works. Some of them took the patience to revise their works multiple times to accommodate comments from the anonymous reviewers and editorial team to improve the quality of their writing. There were articles that were submitted and were not accepted for publication given the scope of our publication, and we would like to thank these potential contributors as well, and we wish to publish their future works with us.

We are more than happy to hear constructive criticisms on this publication from our supporters and readers to improve the quality of our future publication. We now present the *Cambodian Communication Review 2015* to you and hope it can be of benefit to your study, research and/or careers.

Say SOK, PhD
Editor

INTRODUCTION

Say SOK

The *Cambodian Communication Review 2015* is made up of three sections: the Cambodian media snapshot, research articles, and critical commentaries. The media snapshot provides readers with important data on the latest economic, political, and demographic indicators and more importantly media and communication indicators for Cambodia. This is followed by two research articles: one on the ‘unnewsworthiness’ of the genocide committed by the Democratic Kampuchea regime, and the other on the roles of social media in promoting political participation, looking into particularly the pattern of and underlying motivations for social media consumptions in Cambodia. Two critical commentaries follow suit. The first examines challenges mainstream media face in reporting environmental issues, and the second looks at how online journalism is invented in actual practice by news agencies.

In the first article: “Cambodian Unnewsworthy Genocide”, Jan Taylor discusses why the genocide committed by the Democratic Kampuchea between 1975-1979 was not covered by Western media at the time, despite the magnitude of the killings and level of cruelty. Taylor started off by examining the analytical and theoretical discussion over newsworthiness, looking into particular determinants of foreign news coverage. She discusses three analytical frameworks and principles in details: the news net – whether the media are there to report an event; the role of elite sources – whether the elites, especially political ones, speak up on an issue, and key elements of newsworthiness, focusing on the twelve factors of newsworthiness such as superlativeness, recency, relevance, and continuity advanced by Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge in 1965. The factors of newsworthiness form the major ‘analytical principles and frameworks’ and are discussed most extensively in her study both at the theoretical level and its application to understanding the limited media coverage of the genocide.

The article argues that one reason for the limited coverage is the absence of the ‘news net’, i.e. the event happened in a place where media sources were not there to pick it up. That is, after the United States of America lost the Vietnam War, the Western/American media to report on mainland Southeast Asia had been virtually absent. The event thus did not catch the attention of the American or Western media, more broadly. Second, a ‘wall of silence’ from Western elite sources is not conducive for journalists to report on the issue. The US illegal carpet bombing of Cambodia (and Vietnam) and the broader geo-political contexts during the Cold War, when Cambodia was not seen as a Western/American ally (in the eye of the American administration), fueled the ‘wall of silence about Cambodia’ from the Western political elites and hence unnewsworthiness of the atrocities in Cambodia.

The significant gap in many factors of newsworthiness such as unambiguity, consonance, unexpectedness, eliteness of nations and people involved and personification also explains the unnewsworthiness of the genocide. That is, despite the scale of the atrocity inflicted by the Khmer Rouge, the event ‘missed out completely’ in many factors of newsworthiness and thus the limited media coverage in the West.

Taylor continues to compare why the Somali crisis in the 1990s was more newsworthy, especially at the onset – again investigating the issue from the lenses of news net, elite sources and factors of newsworthiness. She argues that unlike the Cambodian genocide, the ‘news net’ already existed, especially given the country’s strategic importance to the USA and the then Soviet Union. Western elites contributed to promoting media coverage of events happening inside Somalia. They included the then Director of US Agency for International Development and outgoing President. Judged against the factors of newsworthiness, the crisis in Somalia was relatively more newsworthy on many counts, including recency, relevancy, consonance, continuity, eliteness of nations and people involved and personification. The author concluded by highlighting the implications from this study and lessons international and local journalists and media can learn from the ‘unnewsworthiness’ of the Cambodian genocide.

In the second article entitled “New Media and Political Participation: Cambodian Citizens’ Use of the Internet for Participatory Democracy,” Sovannara Chan discusses two main queries, i.e. how and why Cambodian new media netizens use new media for political engagement. His study is quantitative and is based on an online survey with 401 social media users conducted in 2015. Chan presents a number of interesting findings and interpretations from his research. According to the paper, users rely on Facebook and news websites administered by international broadcasters and NGOs for information and news update. Yet, interestingly when it comes to trustworthiness of what is posted, users have more trust on international news websites and to a lesser extent websites of ‘NGOs or other institutions’ and have less trust on social media, including Facebook. Users agree that the new media via the Internet are a good platform for political engagement, including to express their ideas and to contact politicians and government officials, yet in practice, they can be said to be basic users and thus have restricted their participation to mere social media users and have yet to embrace ‘critical analyses’ and content provision in their use of new media for political engagement. In this regard, such activities as blogging, commenting on posts on social media or websites, and contributing their own writing on various new media platforms are a rare instance.

Based on the use and gratification theory, the author attempts to explore users’ motivations in using social media for political engagement. He finds that seeking for information is the most common motive factor, and seeking for entertainment through political engagement the least common factor. Seeking for self-expression and seeking for social interaction are in-between. Chan concludes the study by discussing the rationales behind the quite limited activism on social media, citing both the local contexts and global trends and practices. His arguments for the limited online activism includes the relatively restricted status of freedom of expression,

the lack of trust amongst users in the virtual world, and relatively low media and computer literacy in Cambodia.

Vathna Monny Ket examines how mainstream media report on environmental issues and why environmental reporting is scarce, if not even misleading. Besides arguing why environmental communication is important, he discusses the broader relationship between environmental communication, politics, foreign aid and investment, and environmental project implementing agencies and academic institutions. Ket argues that politics, and foreign aid and investment impact on how environment is reported by the mainstream media and that the missing link between environmental NGOs/IOs and academic institutions and the media has curtailed media institutions' ability to properly report on the subject matter. The core focus of his paper is on the more immediate factors that hinder reporters/journalists from enhancing environmental communication. His main arguments about the limitation in environmental communication in the mainstream media include: the non-environmental angle of the reporting and reporters' limited understanding of the environmental issues. The scarce coverage of environmental issues is also resulted from the small reservoir of technical lexicons on the environment in the Khmer language and the readers' interest and knowledge in the environment, the author further argues.

Through "A Reflection on Multimedia and Online Journalism in Cambodia," Bun Y Ung reflects upon practices of online journalism in Cambodia. Ung discusses opportunities online journalism offers and challenges online news agencies face in becoming professional online news providers. While online journalism offers wider readership, broader multi-directional interaction with news consumers, and a big source of revenues, many challenges lie ahead for news agencies. They include institutional and individual capacity to produce quality online news; limited knowledge in multi- and online media; ensuring that the websites are multi-media and properly managed as such, and limited ability to handle users' comments and feedback. The author further examines the ignorance of news institutions in distinguishing between news and information and transforming information to news. Many of the 'news' items posted online are not news and lack news values, and news agencies usually place the importance on revenue generation over upholding news values and professionalism. The status quo and lack of professionalism of online journalism in Cambodia are arguably partly resulted from the audience's preference in news consumption and thus the online media institutions to feed their desire. It is observed that 'the majority of Cambodian Internet users tend to prefer entertaining and less serious news sites to the more professional ones which provide better quality news,' Ung argues. In a sense, the 'limited media literacy' on the part of news consumers feeds off the current trend and does not push the online news companies to be more professional. Throughout the commentary, the author provides his suggestions and thoughts to bring online journalism in Cambodia to the next level of professionalism.

We now present to you in order: the Cambodian media indicators, the research articles and critical commentaries.

Cambodian Media Snapshot 2015



Sokhuong SONG & Say SOK

This section provides a number of indicators for grasping an overall picture of the state of media in Cambodia by assembling the currently scattered information related to Cambodian media. Existing data are both limited in quantity and challenging in currency and accuracy. What is offered here is a brief snapshot by way of presenting existing indicators from a number of sources. These indicators are collated from different points in time, and they are every now and again at odds. Therefore, the sources are acknowledged here for every indicator, so that the readers can further access the sources and evaluate their currency and accuracy.

We first present a set of contextual indicators for Cambodia, from demographic to economic and socio-political, so as to allow the readers to draw a contextual sketch of the country to which the subsequent media indicators are related. Following the media-related contextual country indicators,

we present accessible indicators, in order, for Cambodian newspaper, magazine, radio, television, cinema and audio-visual production, the Internet, social media and the telephone.

Thanks go to the following year two students of 2014-2015 academic year who persistently approached a number of institutions and individuals to collect some of the figures presented above: Aun Chhengpor, Chan Chiva, Chhun Vouchleang, Gove Kimheng, Horm Sreynich, Huot Chanpav, Khun Pisith, Leng Sreynich, Mao Mongkolrangsey, Mech Sereyrath, Men Sonita, Ngy Sovanratany, Ouch Nida, Oum Sonita, Pang Chamnan, Ream Chamroeun, Ros Puthineat, Sem Sreymeas, Seng Maneth, Seng Thy, Seng Vannak, Sokha Mengly, Som Panha, Sar Pisey, Sou Pisen, Sun Sokhen, Suon Sokunpidor, and Thai Sokcheng.

1. CONTEXTUAL COUNTRY INDICATORS

INDICATOR	FIGURE	SOURCE
Economic & Socio-Political		
GDP per capita, 2014	US\$ 1,136 (low middle income)	National Institute of Statistics (2015)
Human Development Index (HDI) 2015 ranking	143 of 188	Human Development Report (2015)
Higher educational institutions (countrywide), 2015	118	Ministry of Education, Youth & Sport (MoEYS) (2015)
Private higher educational institutions, 2015	72	MoEYS (2015)
People living on less than US\$2/day (PPP), 2011	41.3%	World Bank (2015)
Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines, 2012	17.7%	World Bank (2015)
Income share held by highest 20%, 2011	41.2%	World Bank (2015)
Income share held by lowest 20%, 2011	9.0%	World Bank (2015)
Global Competitiveness Index 2014-2015	95 of 144	World Economic Forum
Legatum Prosperity Index 2014 ranking	112 of 142 (lower middle rank)	The Legatum Institute
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2014 ranking	105 of 129	Bertelsmann Foundation
Network Readiness Index 2014 ranking	108 of 148	World Economic Forum
Freedom of the Press 2015 ranking	154 of 199 (Not Free)	Freedom House
Press Freedom Index 2015 ranking	139 of 180	Reporters Without Borders
Demographic		
Total population, July 2015 estimate	15,708,756	CIA World Factbook (July 2015)
Urban population, 2013	3,146,212 (21.4%)	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Phnom Penh population, 2014	1.684 million	CIA World Factbook (July 2014)
Population growth rate, 2015 estimate	1.58%	CIA World Factbook (July 2015)
Youth (15-19) population, 2013	10.62%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Urban youth (15-19) population, 2008	9.71%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Life expectancy at birth, 2015 estimate (M : F)	61.69 : 66.70	CIA World Factbook (July 2015)

Number of households (average size), 2013	3,163,226 (4.6)	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Number of urban households, 2013	658,000	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Adult literacy rate (countrywide), 2013	79.7%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Adult literacy rate (urban), 2013	90.3%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Adult English literacy rate, 2008	3.25%	Population Census 2008
Tertiary enrollment, 2011, % gross	16%	World Bank (2014)

2. NEWSPAPER

INDICATOR	FIGURE	SOURCE
Registered Khmer-language newspapers in Phnom Penh, 2013	242	Ministry of Information (2014)
Registered foreign-language newspapers in Phnom Penh, 2013	35	Ministry of Information (2014)
Imported press institutions	14	Ministry of Information (2014)
Local press-broadcast related associations in Phnom Penh, 2013	37	Ministry of Information (2014)
Foreign press-broadcast service representatives in Phnom Penh, 2013	14	Ministry of Information (2014)
Printing houses and publishing institutions in Phnom Penh, 2013	108	Ministry of Information (2014)

3. MAGAZINE

INDICATOR	FIGURE	SOURCE
Registered Khmer-language magazines in Phnom Penh, 2013	237	Ministry of Information (2014)
Registered foreign-language magazines in Phnom Penh, 2013	35	Ministry of Information (2014)

4. RADIO

INDICATOR	FIGURE	SOURCE
Radio stations countrywide, 2013	132	Ministry of Information (2014)
Radio stations in Phnom Penh, 2013	68 (3 relay stations)	Ministry of Information (2014)
Radio stations by provinces, 2013	64 (49 relay stations)	Ministry of Information (2014)
FM frequencies countrywide, 2013	186	Ministry of Information (2013)
AM frequencies countrywide, 2013	2	Ministry of Information (2013)
Foreign services in Khmer language, 2014	3	Ministry of Information (2015)
International broadcasters (in foreign languages) received in Cambodia, 2014	2	Ministry of Information (2015)
Percentage of households owning at least a radio set, 2013	31.8%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Percentage of urban households owning at least a radio set, 2013	35.7%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Percentage of rural households owning at least a radio set, 2013	30.8%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Percentage of households owning two radio sets or more, 2013	1%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Percentage of urban households owning two radio sets or more, 2013	2.8%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Percentage of rural households owning two radio sets or more, 2013	0.5%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013

5. TELEVISION

INDICATOR	FIGURE	SOURCE
National broadcast channels in Phnom Penh, 2013	13	Ministry of Information (2014)
Relay stations by foreign broadcasters in Phnom Penh, 2013	2	Ministry of Information (2014)
State broadcaster, 2014	1	Ministry of Information (2014)
Relay stations by local broadcasters in provinces, 2013	69	Ministry of Information (2014)
Cable TV providers in Phnom Penh, 2013	2	Ministry of Information (2014)
Number of channels by cable TV providers, 2013	98	Ministry of Information (2014)
Percentage of households owning at least a TV set, 2013	60.1%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Percentage of urban households owning at least a TV set, 2013	69.5%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013

Percentage of rural households owning at least a TV set, 2013	57.6%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Percentage of households owning two TV sets or more, 2013	5.5%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Percentage of urban households owning two TV sets or more, 2013	20.7%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Percentage of rural households owning two TV sets or more, 2013	1.4%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013

6. CINEMA & AUDIO-VISUAL PRODUCTION

INDICATOR	FIGURE	SOURCE
Registered production companies, 2014	39	Department of Film and Cultural Dissemination (2015)
Number of films and TV dramas licensed for production, 2013	22	Department of Film and Cultural Dissemination (2013)
Number of films and documentaries licensed for production (foreign production), 2014	29	Department of Film and Cultural Dissemination (2015)
Number of films and TV dramas licensed for showing, 2014	195	Department of Film and Cultural Dissemination (2015)
Number of karaoke video volumes licensed for production, 2015	109	Department of Film and Cultural Dissemination (2015)
Number of karaoke video volumes licensed for showing, 2014	116	Department of Film and Cultural Dissemination (2015)
Commercial cinema houses in Phnom Penh, 2014	5	Department of Film and Cultural Dissemination (2015)
Cinema houses in provinces, 2014	9	Department of Film and Cultural Dissemination (2015)

7. INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA

INDICATOR	FIGURE	SOURCE
Internet users in Cambodia, by June 2015	5,000,000	www.internetworldstats.com (accessed October 2015)
Internet users per 100 inhabitants, by June 2015	31.8	www.internetworldstats.com (accessed October 2015)
Internet subscriptions in Cambodia, by February 2015	5,074,601	Ministry of Post and Telecommunication (MPTC), 2015
Fixed (wired) Internet subscriptions, by February 2015	66,071	MPTC (2015)
Fixed (wired) Internet subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, 2011	0.32	ITU (2011)

Mobile Internet subscriptions, by February 2015	5,008,530	MPTC (2015)
Fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, 2013	0.2	ITU (2013)
Internet Service Providers (ISP) licensed, by February 2015	20	MPTC (2015)
Total domain names, by July 2014	3,625	webhosting.info (accessed July 2014)
Ranking for domain names, by July 2014	103	webhosting.info (accessed July 2014)
Total com.kh domain names, by January 2015	1,889	MPTC (2015)
Number of Internet cafés, by February 2015	1,004	MPTC (2015)
Personal computer per 100 people, 2008	0.4	WB – ICT At-a-Glance (2010)
Percentage of households owning a personal computer, 2008	3.65%	Population Census 2008
Percentage of urban households owning a personal computer, 2008	15.76%	Population Census 2008
Percentage of rural households owning a personal computer, 2008	1.00%	Population Census 2008
Percentage of urban households owning two personal computers or more, 2008	2.60%	Population Census 2008
Number of Facebook users in 2015	3,300,000	internetworkworldstats.com
Number of LinkedIn users in 2015	156,211	angkor.co

8. TELEPHONE

	FIGURE	SOURCE
Fixed telephone lines, 2015	345,284	MPTC (2015)
Fixed telephone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, 2013	2.8	ITU (2013)
Mobile subscriptions, 2015	20,536,204	MPTC (2015)
Mobile-cellular subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, 2013	133.9	ITU (2013)
Ratio of mobile subscriptions to fixed lines, 2012	33 : 1	ITU (2012)
Mobile operators, 2015	12	MPTC (2015)
Fixed line operators, 2015	10	MPTC (2015)
Number of mobile phones in households, 2015 (Ages range from 15-65)	10,214,830	Mobile Phones and Internet in Cambodia 2015
Percentage of households owning telephone, 2013	12.6%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013

Percentage of urban households owning telephone, 2013	18.2%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Percentage of rural households owning telephone, 2013	11.1%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Percentage of households owning at least a mobile phone, 2013	81.4%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Percentage of urban households owning at least a mobile phone, 2013	94.5%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Percentage of rural households owning at least a mobile phone, 2013	77.9%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Percentage of households owning two mobile phones or more, 2013	36.5%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Percentage of urban households owning two mobile phones or more, 2013	71.6%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013
Percentage of rural households owning two mobile phones or more, 2013	27.4%	Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013

Cambodia's 'Unnewsworthy' Genocide

Jan TAYLOR

ABSTRACT

The brutal Khmer Rouge regime of 1975 to 1979 is estimated to have caused the deaths of 1 to 3 million Cambodians. The death toll and the sheer horror of this genocide would seem to have warranted international news coverage on a massive scale: on the surface at least, it appears to have easily met the usual criteria for 'newsworthiness'. Yet during this four-year period, stories about this event were largely absent from the western media. Using a selection of analytical principles and frameworks relating to journalistic practice and news selection, this paper aims to explain the silence surrounding this tragedy. With a particular focus on the factors of newsworthiness as first defined by Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge in 1965, the paper uses the (initially) well-reported conflict in Somalia as a comparison to demonstrate the rationale governing the choices journalists and their editors make about which international conflicts they report in their news media. The paper concludes that despite the extent of the slaughter, Cambodia's genocide lacked factors that would have encouraged western news media to cover the story. It was also a victim of Cold War prejudices and particularly of US sensitivity following that country's defeat in the Vietnam War. The paper finally debates the lessons learned from this 'silence' and considers whether the advent of the Internet and social media would result in a different outcome should such a tragedy happen again.

Key words: journalistic practice; sources; newsworthiness; foreign news

INTRODUCTION

From 1975 to 1979, from 1 to 3 million Cambodians – over one quarter of the total population – perished as a result of the Khmer Rouge regime. As Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis suggest (2004, 3), the exact death toll is unlikely to ever be properly confirmed: incomplete or destroyed records, the displacement of many Cambodians, and the general fragmentation of the country make reaching an accurate figure almost impossible. Even those Cambodians who did survive suffered great cruelty – starvation, disease, torture, forced marriage and many other abuses. By usual measures, these four years of relentless slaughter and depravity should have been an international news focus. But coverage in the western media was scant. A few sketchy reports appeared in British newspapers such as the *Guardian* (undated report accessed online 2015), while in the US, William Adams and Michael Joblove

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(1982) report a similar absence of detail. They have calculated that throughout the four-year regime, the three major US TV stations at the time devoted a total of 60 minutes on their week-night news bulletins specifically to the abuses in Cambodia, that is an average of 15 minutes *per year*, or less than 30 seconds *per month, per network*.

In the UK, it was not until 1979, after the Khmer Rouge had been largely ousted by the Vietnamese, that audiences in the UK were given a full picture of this horror. Through articles in the UK's *Daily Mirror*¹ tabloid newspaper (Mirror, 2015), which was at that stage boasted the largest readership figures in that country, and the distressing documentary *Year Zero: the Silent Death of Cambodia*, released in 1979, the British-Australian journalist John Pilger² and the photographer Eric Piper finally relayed in shocking detail the fate that had befallen the Cambodian people. Pilger's reports, full of subjective anger and eschewing all pretence of journalistic 'objectivity', dismayed the British public: the special issue of the *Daily Mirror*, in which Pilger's report appeared, sold out, and the situation Pilger termed as 'beyond the imagination of mankind' attracted a flood of donations from British people amounting to more than £20 million (about \$30 million), a staggering amount at the time (Mirror 2009).

When they did finally learn the details, the British people were clearly interested in, and concerned about, Cambodia. But they were also baffled as to why, until Pilger's reports, there had been so little coverage of the event.

Using a selection of analytical principles and frameworks relating to journalistic practice and news selection, this paper aims to explain the absence of news coverage in the west. With a particular focus on the factors of newsworthiness as first defined by Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge in 1965, the paper uses the (initially) well-reported conflict in Somalia as a comparison to further support its arguments and to demonstrate the rationale governing the choices journalists and their editors make about which international conflicts they report in their news media.

THE DETERMINANTS OF FOREIGN NEWS COVERAGE

The dramatic example of Cambodia presents a meaningful illustration of the limitations of foreign news coverage specifically in the UK and US media, but quite possibly throughout the world. As Virgil Hawkins (2011, 55) has calculated, at any one time, there will be between 20 and 30 'crises' taking place across the globe. But only a handful will be covered in the media of other countries. This is not least because, as Philip Taylor (1997, 71) and Nicholas Hopkinson (1993, 11) have argued, the public appetite for foreign news is limited: they are much more interested in what happens in their own country. Even so, slaughter on the Khmer Rouge scale could be expected to warrant concentrated media attention across the world. The purpose of this paper is therefore to identify the reasons for the silence. Although each crisis is unique, there are governing factors that can explain – or even predict – whether or not a country's troubles will be internationally reported. The factors are manifold and

1. This newspaper has since changed its name to 'Mirror'.

2. Throughout his career, Pilger has been regularly criticised, particularly by right-wing analysts, for his attacks on 'western' countries, including the UK, US and Australia, for what he has identified as human rights abuses or brutal self-interest on the part of those countries. For instance, Johann Hari (2006) describes him as 'the most polarising journalist in Britain' for the ferociousness of his attacks on those countries' rulers. However, there have been no serious disputes about his descriptions of what he actually discovered in Cambodia in 1979.

complex, but it can be argued that they respond to journalistic and wider media practices and mindsets that are universal. It is worth outlining these first, before relating them, first to the situation in Cambodia between 1975 and 1979 (and into the 1980s), and then, as a comparison, to the 'crisis' in Somalia that took place during the 1990s and that did receive extensive coverage in the western media.

The 'news net'

To look first at more practical aspects, to become 'news' an event has first to be caught in what Gaye Tuchman termed the 'news net' (1978, 22). In other words, it must happen in a place where media sources are in place to pick it up. In these days of extensive social media such as Facebook and Twitter international communication is multi-directional and has become much more difficult to control. The implications of this free flow of information became particularly evident during the Arab Spring when social media were used to announce gatherings and to relay information nationally and internationally (Zhuo, Wellman and Yu, 2011). Here in Cambodia, the role of the social media, particularly in information sharing, political campaigns and discussion, has been extensively discussed by Manika Pin and Say Sok (2014, 61-65), and its potential to offer a new political and civic space for young Cambodians by Chivoine Peou (2011, 56-53). However, in the late 1970s, these media did not exist and international communication was consequently far more restricted: without foreign correspondents or official stringers to supply news, there was at that stage little for the foreign media to go on. As can be seen from the *Guardian* reports of the time (accessed in 2015), the information reaching the outside world came from vague sources – for instance, 'a bank worker', 'refugees' on the border - or from Thailand and China, which were removed from the location of the then alleged brutality. At the same time, even if foreigners (including journalists) could enter Cambodia, they were unlikely to make it out again alive.³ This lack of a reliable 'news net' was partly to blame for the fact that, as *Guardian* reporter Martin Woollacott wrote in September 1977, 'journalists were sceptical of initial fears of a bloodbath in Cambodia'. Even so, the consistency of reports from informal sources, or from neighbouring or nearby countries, should have been sufficient to prompt serious investigation by the media and this in itself does not fully explain the 'silence'. As William Adams and Michael Joblove maintain (1982, 222) reports from refugees alone should have sparked media interest.

Thus, the absence of a 'news net' was a factor, but does not fully explain lack of coverage.

The role of elite sources

But the fact that sources mentioned above were 'informal' was without doubt an inhibiting factor. Indeed, sources are of fundamental importance in determining whether or not an 'event' will become 'news'. All journalists rely heavily on sources to provide them with news stories, comment and background information, and these people are generally officials who are sufficiently high ranking to acquire the information journalists need, or are recognised experts who can give authoritative comment. Analyses show that, in the formal news media, journalists rarely quote or feature people who do not fall into these categories unless they are directly involved in the event (Raboy, 1992, 141): it is considered that the use of such

3. Elizabeth Becker, who was allowed rare access for a bizarre interview with Pol Pot in 1978, was the only western journalist who had permission to enter and leave the country to report her experiences at the time. She later gave a testimony about this event at the War Crimes Tribunal (Wright, 2015).

sources adds credibility and ‘weight’ to a story justifying its inclusion in the relevant news media. Sources can be official – a nominated spokesman, for instance – or unofficial, and may appear in the story named or unnamed. However, the practice of using high-placed sources for story leads and comment can be seen as both a blessing and a curse. On the plus side, they enable journalists to gain relatively easy and inexpensive access to information that can then be passed on to the audience. But as a definite minus, journalists hear only what the source wants them to hear (Tumber 2002; Vujnovic 2011, 30 and 32; Sigal 1986). As the FAIR report indicates, during the Iraq crisis, 76% of all sources were current or former officials leaving little room for ‘independent or grassroots views’. The same bias towards government, or other ‘official’ sources was revealed in the 2013 study by Chivoine Peou, Manika Pin and Say Sok. Their content analysis of the major news outlets in Cambodia revealed that while, on average, 53% of sources were government representatives, only 11% were ‘citizens’: in all the media, national, provincial and local government tended – overwhelmingly in the first two cases – to be portrayed in a positive light. Similarly – and highly relevant to this study – the importance placed on these elite sources and the frequent reluctance of journalists to cover an ‘event’ in the absence of any endorsement or encouragement from those in authoritative positions, particularly from any high ranking government or military source, is significant. Especially when a potential story focuses on a conflict in a foreign country, and lacks any other form of ‘news net’, the reporter is likely to struggle to find concrete ‘facts’ without the help of an elite source: the confusion generally inherent in conflict rarely presents a black-and-white picture of events, and the context, progression of the conflict, and what form each side wishes the conclusion to take, are generally blurred. As an example, commentators have recently identified a lack of clarity among the public at large – journalists and their audience – about the aims and objectives of the on-going conflict in Afghanistan: the end-game is unclear, and a tailing off of reports about this blurry conflict has been the result. As David Betz (2011, 615) so aptly summarises it:

The most strategically debilitating aspect of the Afghan campaign has always been the incoherence of the mission’s purpose. There is nothing unusual about mutable war aims, but the question “why are we in Afghanistan?” has never really been settled in public consciousness. As an American officer described it, “We entered Afghanistan after September 11 for one limited reason – to get Bin Laden and punish those who attacked us and those who sheltered them. And then we just...stayed...”.

Even elite sources, and, in the UK, the regular conscription of the Royal Family to support the military cause, are currently failing to maintain the interest in that conflict of either the British media or the public. It has become far too *ambiguous* and, as Betz argues, this failure to be able to present a ‘saleable product’ – to come up with a communications strategy and associated ‘script’ that all can adhere to – has resulted in a communications breakdown between those running this war, and the people whose tax money, and votes, are required to support it. As will be shown, the absence of elite sources, along with ignorance about the Cambodian context at the time, did not help Cambodia in achieving international coverage particularly during the late seventies.

Furthermore, whether sources are named or unnamed, official or unofficial, they are highly significant in ‘framing’ events (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). As Robert Entman (2008, 92) specifically explains US Presidents – as the ultimate in elite sources – have the dominant ability to set the frame in which an event, country or person will be seen and the

US media will adopt this frame (as cited in Bloch and Lehman-Witzig, 2002). In addition, as Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1990, 73) argue, powerful sources are able to set and manipulate a country's news agenda, thus determining, for instance, which countries are covered and thus which ones the public know, and form an opinion about. As will later be argued, in the case of Cambodia, the role of elite sources was fundamental not least in suggesting, through their 'wall of silence', that there was no story to be told, and by framing events in Cambodia as irrelevant to countries in the west.

Assessing 'newsworthiness'

Moving from practical issues to matters that fall into the realm of editorial judgement, assuming an event has been caught in the 'news net', it must then be assessed for newsworthiness. In a general sense, this demands that, in all their editorial choices, reporters first determine who their readers are, and then assess what they will *want* to read about. As generally commercial undertakings, media organisations need audience figures that are sufficiently high to attract advertisers, or to supply profits from cover charges or through fees for access to TV channels. Their news coverage therefore needs to be sufficiently entertaining or interesting to target audiences. This is the hurdle at which reports of many events in foreign countries fall. For, much as many observers, including Noam Chomsky (1989, 17) might wish that the 'slothful masses' should hunger for the information that would turn them into informed, responsible world citizens, people cannot be forced to read stories that do not appeal to them. As Entman (1989, 23) has pointed out, what audiences *ought* to know is not necessarily what they *want* to know. So, although ideally people would read about conflict and natural disaster in other countries as a prelude to doing something to help, in reality they tend either to be more interested in events that have a direct effect on their well-being, that pique their specific interest, or, as Stijn Joye argues (2009), that happen to people 'like them'. Indeed, as Joye (58) maintains:

Our interpretation supports the claim that Western news media discursively reproduce a certain kind of world order, mainly a Euro-American-centred one. News coverage of international crises not only reflects current global divides and power structures but also constructs and maintains the sociocultural difference between 'us' and 'them' as well as a division of the world in zones of poverty and prosperity, danger and safety.

Adding to this, Virgil Hawkins (2011, 61) points out that the scale of a conflict (i.e. the death toll) is not necessarily a factor in the media's determination of an event's degree of newsworthiness. As he argues, a much more decisive factor is whether or not the country concerned (in his case the US) is involved in the conflict and therefore has a stake in the outcome.

Whether they do so consciously or not, journalists automatically strive to understand and respond to their audiences' 'maps of meaning' (Hall *et al.*, 1973). In other words, journalists act as mediators, collecting information about – and then ideally explaining – the context behind, and reasons for, news events in terms their audience can understand. Ideally, readers or viewers must be able to relate events to their own lives or experiences so that their interest is sparked, or they can fully empathise with the actors involved. When events take place in distant countries, for complex reasons, and affect people who are 'not like us', journalists inevitably struggle to make them 'interesting'.

As Michael Gurevitch, Mark Levy and Itzhak Roeh (1991, 206) summarise: "...television news simultaneously maintains both global and culturally specific orientations...first by casting far-away events in frameworks that render these events comprehensible, appealing and 'relevant' to domestic audiences; and second, by constructing the meanings of those events in ways that are compatible with the culture and 'dominant ideology' of the societies they serve".

It can be argued that this factor, too, is likely to have affected the response of the media to the, albeit meagre, reports of atrocities in Cambodia. Indeed, this need for 'relevance' leads logically on to a more specific discussion of what 'news' is.

As has already been demonstrated, only a fraction of 'events' can be reported in the news media. Indeed, rather than being a mirror of reality, as one of the initial press commentators and analysts Walter Lippmann (in Tumber, 1999), posited almost a century ago, the media act more like flashlights, briefly highlighting a few solitary events that have 'obtruded', often detaching them from context and background that would properly explain them. Deciding which events have the greatest amount of 'news value' is one of journalists' and their editors' major professional tasks and although many have attempted short, catchy definitions of what constitutes a 'good news story', only a detailed description can fully capture the full essence. Indeed, many reporters talk about having a 'gut instinct' for a good story (Altschull, 131), or more specifically, Alistair Hetherington (1985, 21) provided more practical criteria in suggesting that each event should be considered for its political, social, economic and human importance, and also for its interest, excitement and entertainment value.

These are just a couple of the wealth of definitions that have emerged in attempts to encapsulate the concept of 'newsworthiness' and most have run into difficulties (Staab, 1990, 423). However, perhaps the most significant was the work of the Norwegian researchers Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge in their seminal study *The Structure of Foreign News*, which was published in the *Journal of Peace Research* in 1965. They identified 12 major factors that made events newsworthy (factors often taken into account unconsciously, or instinctively, by journalists), demonstrating that the more of these an 'event' offers, the more likely it is to be taken up by the news media. Although subsequent researchers have reviewed, attempted to adjust, and add to these factors, they remain largely unchallenged and are thus valuable in providing a framework for this paper's analysis. The essence of the 12 factors is:

Recency

To be news, an event ideally has only just taken place: it should not be 'history'.

Superlativeness

The event ideally has to be extreme in some aspect – the biggest, worst, oldest and so on.

Unambiguity

The story should be clear-cut – vagueness of detail and sources count against its inclusion.

Relevance

As discussed at length above, the event should have a relevance to the lives or interests of its audience. They need to be able to see how it relates to their lives.

Consonance

This also closely relates to 'mindsets' in that a story should conform to preconceptions the audience has about the people concerned. The events should follow a pattern with which people are familiar.

Unexpectedness

Despite the need for 'consonance' an event should ideally present something new or out of the ordinary to pique people's interest.

Continuity/co-option

Once an event has been featured in the media, it will tend to stay there: in other words, related events will stand a better chance of being covered than those that are unrelated. By the same token, if an event can be moulded to match a running event, this will support its inclusion.

Eliteness of nations involved

Unfair though it is, nations in the western world, particularly the US, are deemed 'elite' and thus more newsworthy than other countries, particularly those in the developing world.

Eliteness of people involved

Similarly, 'elite' people – particularly leaders such as the US Presidents, Prime Ministers and chief politicians of western countries – can expect to be a news focus.

Personalisation

People relate to other people. Therefore, if a story involves individual people, to whom readers can relate, this strengthens its chance of coverage.

Negativity

Bad news is good news. Injury, death, disasters, wars and so on tend to be more 'attractive' than good news.

Composition

This final factor relates more to the composition of the end news vehicle: if, for instance, there are already some strong foreign news stories in the news medium, the editors will tend to balance this by favouring a domestic one, and vice versa.

Of the remaining factors Allan Bell (1991, 159) points to, 'competition' - if an event is covered in one news vehicle, it is likely that the others will follow suit. This can also be said to have a relevance to the reporting of foreign news.

This paper will next assess the 'newsworthiness' of the Cambodian experience under the Khmer Rouge, using the analytical principles and frameworks - particularly 'news net', elite sources and Galtung and Ruge's factors of newsworthiness - relating to journalistic practice and news selection discussed above.

THE 'NEWSWORTHINESS' OF THE CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE FROM 1975 TO 1979

The absence of the 'news net'

By 1975, when the Khmer Rouge atrocities began, the Vietnam War (or, more specifically, the US involvement in the fighting) was over, and the Americans had gone back home in defeat: their attempts to prevent the North Vietnamese communists from taking over South Vietnam had failed. The conflict needs to be understood in the context of the Cold War – waged primarily between the US and its support for capitalism, and the USSR, its communist opponent. The Vietnam War was the result of American fears that communism was threatening to expand across Southeast Asia. The eventual defeat and withdrawal of the Americans was of fundamental significance to Cambodia for, not only did the news crews decamp, leaving nobody behind to report the later atrocities, but it also provided the conditions through which the Khmer Rouge were able to thrive (e.g. Clymer 2007, 96).

But of particular relevance to this paper was the perceived role of the US media in the defeat of America in the Vietnam War, and also of that country's determination to exact revenge on Vietnam. It was the gross misfortune of Cambodia to have been linked with its communist neighbour and therefore to have been considered expendable in support of (western) Cold War objectives. As David Chandler commented (1993, 193):

The Cold War tensions that were being played out in Vietnam, at such enormous human cost, had little relevance in Cambodia, but this did not stop Cambodia from becoming engulfed in the conflict. In a sense, Cambodian history between 1965 and 1980, if not beyond, was orchestrated from the east, and from such faraway cities as Hanoi, Washington and Beijing.

To look first at the perceived role of the media in the Vietnam War, the defeat of the US – the first it had ever suffered - was a severe blow to its ego and self-confidence, and many attributed this outcome to negative media reporting. This, they maintained, had turned the public against the war, demoralising the troops and ultimately forcing a withdrawal. Labelled the 'uncensored war' (Taylor, 1997, 108) because the media were given largely unfettered access to the warzone and were thus able to report and televise the horrors of conflict in a way that had not been possible before, the Vietnam experience was to affect the relationship particularly between the US military and the media for decades to come: as David Ryan and David Fitzgerald explain (2009, 637):

...the common belief – especially in Vietnam revisionist literature - is that in large part the media were to blame. If the media revealed the costs of war and the strategic imperative was to bury this information, then the media had to be tied down, pooled into controllable units, and embedded into the armed forces. The freedoms afforded the media in Vietnam would not be repeated in future conflicts.

Thus, there is arguably always conflict between the media's wish to expose reality in an uncensored fashion, and the official (in this case military) wish to keep the bloody reality of war out of the sight of ordinary citizens. The openness of reporting in terms of the Vietnam War meant that Americans and the inhabitants of other western countries could, for the first time (thanks to the advent of television), see war played out on their televisions, in their

living-rooms while they ate dinner. Whether or not the media 'lost' the Vietnam War is still hotly debated, but what it did lead to was much tighter control of the media in conflict zones in general, and in particular an immense sensitivity about news coverage of the whole of Southeast Asia. At the very time when Cambodians needed the world to recognise, and respond to, their suffering, this sensitivity did not help.

A 'wall of silence' from elite sources

At the same time, although Cambodia was neutral in international law, it had long been caught up in conflict surrounding the Cold War. Indeed, US bombing raids on Cambodia started as early as 1966: according to Kenton Clymer (2007, 96): "As late as April 1973 administration officials testifying before congressional committees denied that there had been any bombing of Cambodia prior to May 1970. But in fact from 18 March 1969 through 26 May 1970, B-52s flew 3,875 sorties and dropped 108,823 tons of bombs on Cambodia."

This constant bombing was thus denied by the US, who employed a variety of evasions and untruths to hide their illegal actions – for instance, claiming that areas bombed were 'unpopulated', that they were actually Vietnamese territory, or that this bombing was vital for 'self-defence'.⁴ Even worse, as Pilger and Barnett report (1982, 65), back as far as 1970, the Kissinger-Nixon view was that Cambodia could be broken to demonstrate to Vietnam the power of the US, and that Cambodians were simply expendable. It was a shameful period of clandestine activity by the US against a neutral country. As will be discussed later, British lies and evasion were just as reprehensible. But at this point, it can be seen that it was not in the interests of at least the US elites to have light shed on Cambodia. No journalists would therefore have had any support from an elite source in addressing the reports of distressed refugees or anyone else.

When Cambodia was eventually 'freed' from the Khmer Rouge, the fact that it was the old American enemy – Vietnam – that proved to be its saviour in some ways compounded Cambodia's troubles in terms of media coverage. Despite Pilger's news reports in bringing the Cambodian genocide to the attention of a compassionate British public, the British political and military elite (in cahoots with their American counterparts) retained their Cold War stances, again punishing Cambodia as if the country were on the 'other' side. As examples, the British continued to support the Khmer Rouge – and, through the Special Air Service (SAS), gave them training in, for instance, mine technology – and prevented desperately needed aid from getting through lest it should fall into (communist) Vietnamese hands (Pilger and Barnett 1982, 69; Pilger 1990). Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, like the Americans before her, lied to questions in the UK Parliament, denying this support (Fawthrop and Jarvis 2004, 68).

Given this political context, especially in the hysteria surrounding the Cold War, it is hardly surprising that journalists (and lower ranking politicians who posed questions in, for instance, the British Parliament) met with a wall of silence about Cambodia (Pilger, 2000 and 2013). The Americans did not want their illegal bombings to come to light, while the British – following the US lead – did not want journalists to shed too much light on their support for the Khmer

4. William Shawcross (1979) also provides evidence throughout his book of American lies about the bombing of Cambodia.

Rouge, or on the restrictions they were placing on the distribution of British aid to those Cambodians who were in desperate need (Pliger, 1990). The failure of the elite sources to give the subject of Cambodia any attention also tended to ‘frame’ the event as not worthy of attention: it was unimportant and therefore unnewsworthy.

To maintain the media silence still further, an anaemic UN banned the use of the word ‘genocide’ to describe what the Khmer Rouge were committing in Cambodia (e.g. Fawthrop and Jarvis, 2004, 36) as, under international law, this would have compelled the super powers to take action to stop it: such action would have inevitably featured in the media.

Significant ‘gaps’ in the factors of newsworthiness

The missing ‘news net’ and the absence of support from elite sources were, however, not the only reasons why Cambodia’s suffering was absent from western media reports. In terms of Galtung and Ruge’s factors of newsworthiness it scored highly in some categories, but missed out completely on others. Looked at one by one:

Recency

In this category, it could be argued that Cambodia scored highly over a prolonged period. The start of the ‘illegal’ US bombing was arguable, in itself, ‘newsworthy’ and that started at least as early as 1969. It could further be posited that, way into the 1980s, when Cambodia continued to suffer hardships, and up to the imposition by the United Nations Transitional Authority of the elections in 1992-1993, there should have been a regular flow of current news stories. Theoretically, Cambodia should have remained a regular feature of the international news for almost 30 years.

Superlativeness

Pilger and Barnett (1982, 70) refer to the Khmer Rouge as ‘the most thorough mass murderers since Hitler’, and it would be difficult to name many events that could match its example of man’s inhumanity to man. It therefore also scores highly in terms of ‘superlativeness’.

Unambiguity

It is perhaps in the category of ‘unambiguity’ that the situation in Cambodia starts to become less ‘newsworthy’. This is not least because the complexities of what was happening in Cambodia, and why they were taking place, could not be easily summarised. In fact, even now, many people are unclear about what exactly the Khmer Rouge thought they would achieve with all the bloodshed. The Cold War context, the Vietnam War, the on-going relationships with China, Vietnam and even Thailand, were all intertwined in a way that would have hindered reporters in presenting a quick and easy explanation of the reasons for the Khmer Rouge and what it was aiming to achieve. Making news of foreign affairs interesting to the media audience is frequently difficult. As the American journalist Mort Rosenblum (1993, 10) puts it:

Where space is tight, news from far away loses on points. South Chicago conjures an image in American minds, and if a riot erupts, people know some of the reasons. Bosnia-Herzegovina is a lot of new syllables at the end of a hard day, and you could fill a fat book explaining why the conflict there is so important.... This is a basic flaw in the system. If a story is important, it is complex. But if it gets too complicated, it invites the spike.

Relevance

The need for journalists to mould news events in ways that respond to their audience's 'maps of meaning', or to which they can relate was discussed in a previous section. In terms of Cambodia during 1975 to 1979 this would have proved challenging. At that stage, it was a country few in the west had heard much about. It was not a holiday destination, nor did it boast anyone who was an international star. Furthermore, the Khmer language was largely incomprehensible to westerners; Cambodians were Buddhists and thus 'different' on a cultural and religious basis, and Cambodia had never been a British or US colony. In terms of newsworthiness, they could thus be termed 'irrelevant' to people in the west.

This was exacerbated by the fact that there were no trade links and no commercial ties at the time for either the British or the Americans. In his paper *Where in the World is Africa? Predicting Coverage of Africa by US Television Networks*, Guy Golan (2008) makes an interesting comparison in identifying the reasons why African countries are largely ignored by the US media, even in the wake of disasters or conflicts that result in substantial death tolls. In this, he found a significant correlation between the degree of coverage and the level of trade the relevant country had with the US. This is further confirmed by the 2006 report from CARMA International (the global media analysts). They found western self-interest to be a 'pre-condition for significant coverage of a humanitarian crisis' (CARMA, 2006, 5) and confirmed that there is apparently no link between the scale of the disaster and media interest in the story.

To further support this finding, we could perhaps point to the extensive coverage of the *ebola* outbreak – to which westerners might also be vulnerable – has received in the western media as opposed to stories about the on-going and substantially more lethal activities of the Boko Haram terrorists in Nigeria – a threat from which westerners are currently distanced, and in which the US does not currently wish to become embroiled. Indeed, veteran American politician Newt Gingrich is among the observers who have noted that while the *ebola* outbreak was 'stressed' by both the White House and US media, the Boko Haram atrocities were 'ignored' (Gingrich and Bird, 10 February 2015). As the CARMA report further maintains, 'politics determines the timing, level of interest and story angle, not the humanitarian issues' (CARMA, 2006, 6). Thus, with no economic links, a domestic context that few westerners could relate to, and a political community in the west that would not welcome news about Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge atrocities failed dramatically to score in terms of this particularly important factor of newsworthiness.

As Jeremy Tunstall (1996, 341) succinctly puts it: 'A nation's foreign news – like its definition of history – reflects its prejudices and sentiments; it ignores the events and places we want to forget and it emphasizes the events, places, and faces we prefer and admire.'

Consonance and unexpectedness

Here, too, Cambodia's troubles failed to score. Given that people in the west at that time had no 'preconceptions' of the people involved in this horror, it could not be 'consonant' with existing ideas or mindsets. It did not register in the communal western consciousness. For this reason, 'unexpectedness' was also arguably an irrelevant concept.

Continuity/co-option

Again, following the American defeat in Vietnam, the region had in general dropped out of

the news. There were, therefore, no factors of continuity or co-option to support interest in Cambodia's fate.

Eliteness of nations and people involved

As has been discussed, not only were the 'elite' western nations and their 'elite' leaders no longer involved in Southeast Asia, they were positively discouraging questions about this part of the world. Again, Cambodia failed.

Personalisation

With no 'news net', and negligible contact with the outside world, Cambodians were unable to get their stories out to the world at large. There were, therefore, no individuals whose stories could touch the hearts of people in the west. In the UK in particular, this would have to wait for John Pilger.

Negativity

It hardly needs commenting that here, at least, Cambodians during 1975 and 1979 – and beyond – would have had few rivals to match the negativity of their conflict. Here, the story scored highly.

Composition

But, again, it would have struggled to win a place in the composition of media news sections. As discussed above, people's interest in foreign news is limited, and the competition to win a slot would have put Cambodia at an overwhelming disadvantage, given its failures on other fronts. Similarly, there would have been no 'competition' – or following suit - among journalists to cover the atrocities, since all news media, certainly in the US and UK, were reluctant to give Cambodia any mention at all.

Thus, this paper argues that the absence of the 'news net', the purposeful 'wall of silence' among elite sources and substantial failures to score in respect of several key factors of newsworthiness conspired against the appearance of Cambodia in the western news media of the time. To further text these arguments it is worth examining another world conflict that did, ultimately, excite the western news media.

THE COMPARATIVE 'NEWSWORTHINESS' OF THE CRISIS IN SOMALIA IN THE 1990s

In the late 1980s and early 1990s Somalia was embroiled in ferocious civil war. Although for some of this period western forces were involved, the ending of the Cold War, and, with it, Somalia's strategic importance to the west, led to the withdrawal of western troops. However, the end of Cold War sponsorship prompted the various Somali factions into civil rivalry, each faction led by a 'warlord'. As Mark Bradbury and Sally Healy (2010) report: "In the midst of drought, the destruction of social and economic infrastructure, asset stripping, 'clan-cleansing' and the disruption of food supplies caused a famine in which an estimated 250,000 died."

However, with the country sinking into obscurity in terms of relevance to the west, the plight of the Somali people looked likely to become as largely unreported as its Cambodian equivalent (Carruthers, 2000, 219). This changed dramatically around the year 1992 – before and during Operation Restore Hope - as a result of factors lacking in Cambodia.

The 'news net' was already in place

As a country of strategic importance to both the US and the USSR during the Cold War, Somalia, had, since the 1980s, been a large recipient of US aid. And although the country's 'descent into anarchy' had prompted the US to abandon Somalia in 1991, the US executives were still 'responding to the war and famine' in that country (Robinson 2002, 46-47). For this reason, it was still earning some coverage in the western media as there remained a western involvement and a related 'news net'. Even so, as the then UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali opined, Somalia was at that stage still side-lined in the media by the 'rich man's war' in Yugoslavia (Meisler, 2007, 62). This latter conflict was more *relevant* to western audiences who considered the people involved to be 'like us', and the then Yugoslavia was a popular holiday destination.

Elite sources promoted media coverage – even staging PR events

Westerners thus remained in Somalia, especially representatives from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) whose concern for the suffering of the ordinary Somali people inspired them to push for the greater involvement of people in the west in the relief effort in that country. These lobbyists included the influential, and 'elite', Director of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) Andrew Natsios (Strobel, 1997, 106), and it is largely thanks to the 'elite' Natsios that an even more 'elite' person became directly involved. Reporting himself sickened by pictures of death and suffering in Somalia that appeared daily on his TV, the out-going President George H.W. Bush decided that American troops should be committed to Operation Restore Hope. Heralded as a humanitarian mission to support the supply of food to the victims of the civil war and man-made famine in Somalia and thereby to relieve suffering, Operation Restore Hope was thus launched, the involvement of the world's most elite person and nation was guaranteed, and Somalia consequently became a news focus throughout the western media. Indeed, many have argued that the reasons behind Bush's decision had less to do with humanitarian concern than with the – ultimately misguided – belief that this intervention would boost America's, and therefore his own, image, particularly as his presidency drew to a close (Robinson, 2002, 49). But in either case it was in Bush's best interests for the crisis subsequently to receive maximum news coverage: the choice of Thanksgiving Day, 1992, for the announcement ensured a wide airing while people were enjoying a public holiday and were thus free to watch and read, and was in time for a vast press corps to be in place to film the arrival of the US troops on an appropriately illuminated Somali beach (Taylor, 2002, 14).

Scoring highly in 'factors of newsworthiness' – at least at the start

In contrast to the Cambodians, the Somalis thus had a 'news net' in place, and the involvement of the most elite of people, who were, furthermore, pulling the stops out to promote media coverage for their own aggrandisement. American troops were leading a coalition of UN peacekeepers, which meant that soldiers from many other countries were also involved, widening the media appeal.

These elements also contributed to the greater success of the crisis in Somalia in terms of the factors of newsworthiness.

Recency and superlativeness

The crisis in Somalia was *recent* and *superlative* in that, on one side, many thousands of Somalis were suffering, and on the other, the US was leading a significant UN peacekeeping force.

Unambiguity

At the start at least, the story was simple and clear-cut: Operation Restore Hope would do just that by going in, supporting food supplies, putting a stop to starvation, and then leaving again after which the assumption was that Somalia would be able to sort out its own troubles.

Relevance

Events in Somalia had become *relevant* to western audiences through the involvement of western troops – it had become ‘our’ war.

Consonance, continuity and co-option

Initial Cold War involvement, followed by the arrival of, first, the western NGOs and then the US and UN forces meant that western audiences already had preconceived notions about the situation and the people involved. It had a degree of familiarity to it. This also supported the co-option and continuity factors in that the on-going events continued to link-in with previously established contexts and events.

Unexpectedness and negativity

The troops were responding in an *unexpected* way to an outstanding example of *negativity*.

Eliteness of nations and people involved

As has been discussed, the US President, US nation and many other western countries who supplied troops to the UN peacekeeping force ensured that these factors were both fully supported.

Personalisation

Furthermore, the troops and reporters on the ground were well placed to satisfy the requirement for *personalisation*.

The fall into obscurity as news factors wane

Thus, at the start at least, there was a lack of *ambiguity*: the intention was that the troops would swoop in, restore order so that people could acquire food, and then retreat. It was clear-cut and the idea was that the oppressed Somalis would welcome the US intervention, and that no US soldiers would perish.

The fact that, particularly in terms of the *unambiguity* factor, the operation did not go as planned, could arguably explain why the media ultimately lost interest in the conflict and withdrew, especially since this was accompanied by a waning enthusiasm for the intervention by the then new US President Bill Clinton. As is so often the case, restoring order to ease the supply of food aid was nothing like as easy as the US and, more widely, the UN, had anticipated. Indeed, the US/UN intervention soon found itself in conflict with General Aideed, a warlord who was controlling Mogadishu, the Somali capital, and ‘mission creep’ set in. In other words, the original *unambiguous* aim of supporting food supplies was expanded and

the troops were then additionally charged with restoring order and a related government structure. As has happened in Afghanistan, the ultimate aims and objectives of this initially strictly humanitarian intervention thus became difficult to determine, an end was no longer clear, and media interest dwindled. Indeed, when the notorious 'Black Hawk Down' incident occurred – in the context of a battle that cost the lives of 18 American soldiers – and the body of the dead American airman was dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, the event was covered by a local stringer: there were no western journalists left in the country (Strobel, 1997, 176). Thus, an intervention that had been launched in a blitz of positive media coverage became an embarrassing failure with which the public had become bored.

It is significant to this paper also to note that although the paucity of news about Somalia that is currently the case might suggest that the conflict is long over, the country has remained troubled. Since the early 1990s, there have been frequent outbreaks of civil war, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and, more recently, the country has been a haven for pirates (BBC, 2014). Ironically, Cambodia might have lost out from lack of coverage when its troubles were at their worst, but today it is certainly in far better shape than Somalia and enjoys a growing reputation in the world's media for positive growth and progress towards a more just and equitable society.

WHAT LESSONS CAN BE LEARNED FROM THIS?

This paper has presented a set of reasons why the western media failed to report the Cambodian genocide. Given the ultimate compassion shown by the British people, and their subsequent overwhelming interest in the fate of the Cambodian people, it seems that the absence of the 'news net', and more specifically role of elite sources were mainly responsible for keeping the story out of the public eye in the west. In fact the British people were very concerned when they heard this news – although the use of personalisation and the sheer reporting skill of John Pilger are also highly significant in generating this concern. It seems that the sheer *superlativeness* and *negativity* of events in Cambodia, and the fact that the ordinary British people could relate to the acute suffering of others - on a purely humanitarian level - gave the event *relevance* on a basic human scale that overcame differences in culture, language and general national context, as well as the fact that there was no history to provide *continuity* or *consonance*.

It can also be argued that the elements presented in this paper could be co-opted to increase a country's international media coverage for more positive purposes. There is no doubt that, especially at a time when Cambodia needs to promote its nation brand to compete, for example, in the wider economic community of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ability of journalists and PR professionals to get positive stories about the country more widely disseminated, would be helpful. The analyses presented here thus offer some useful, general guidelines.

These guidelines might also give Cambodian journalists pause for thought in their approaches to, and thoughts about, reporting events in other countries. Bringing human suffering into the open should be part of journalism's more idealistic aims, wherever it is taking place.

It is also interesting to speculate about whether or not the international media circumstances surrounding Cambodia during its nightmare years could ever be repeated. Mercifully, in

many ways this is now unlikely. On a basic level, the country is now increasingly known to others – even in the west – as a pleasant holiday location. Khmer arts and cuisine are being increasingly recognised and enjoyed, and many countries – including the UK – are seeking to establish strong diplomatic ties and even deeper links that are economic and commercial. East and west increasingly enjoy the same music, fashion, films and food. The Cold War is long gone and the powerful Chinese are engaging in ‘soft’ rather than ‘hard’ power, seeking to increase their influence and international role through attraction rather than fear (D’Hooghe, 2011, 163). It could be argued that this is also bridging cultural gaps between western and eastern minds.

It is also reasonable to suggest – and hope - that the growth of the Internet, and the use of social media would these days enable people to relay news of their distress more easily than was the case in the 1970s and early eighties. As Jeremy Bowen (2012, 53) summarised the situation during the start of the Arab Spring in Egypt:

By the time the Egyptian police killed Khaled Said⁵ social media meant everybody with a computer could join in the conversation. The people who used the social network – mainly educated middle-class professionals in their twenties and thirties – had a lot in common, and they seized it to help them organise. The web, along with satellite television, was a critical factor right across the region in making them the most knowledgeable and connected generation of Arabs in history. They knew what was wrong with their lives, and they knew that not everyone in the world suffered in the same ways.

It is also reasonable to suppose that the plight of Cambodia might have been a focus for the powerful online activist networks such as Avaaz and Amnesty International, which now exist to gather worldwide support in condemnation of such human rights abuses.

Writing as far back as 1995, Charles Swett, a staff member in the US Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (Policy Planning) (in Ferdinand, 2007, 12), predicted:

The Internet is clearly a significant long term strategic threat to authoritarian regimes, one that they will be unable to counter effectively. News from the outside world brought by the Internet into nations subjected by such regimes will clash with the distorted versions provided by their governments, eroding the credibility of their positions and encouraging unrest. ‘Personal’ contact between people living under such governments and people living in the free world, conducted by e-mail, will also help to achieve a more accurate understanding on both ends and further undermine authoritarian controls. Information about violations of human rights and other forms of oppression will be increasingly conveyed to the outside world by the Internet, helping mobilize external political forces on behalf of the oppressed.

In a wider context, the world needs to be more aware of crises. It could be argued that it is morally wrong that abuses such as those committed by the Khmer Rouge should go unnoticed, and hence unchallenged, by the rest of the world. That said, there is a question

5. The police beating of the young man Khalid Said, and the spread of the photographs Said's brother took – and distributed - of his fatal injuries on a mobile phone, were significant in fanning the flames of revolution among ordinary Egyptians.

surrounding the form external intervention should take: as was seen in Somalia, even the best 'humanitarian' exercises can end in disaster and arguably become counter-productive. Even so it must surely be the responsibility of journalists throughout the world to make sure that neither Cambodia, nor any other country in need, is ever again ignored and left to feel abandoned and expendable.

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New Media and Political Participation: Cambodian Citizens' Use of the Internet for Participatory Democracy

Sovannara CHAN

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the political engagement of Cambodian new media users. It explores their patterns of new media consumption for political engagement and their motivations in using new media for engagement in politics. The cross-sectional study is quantitative, and the data is collected randomly through a survey of 401 Cambodian citizens via online questionnaires. The finding confirms that new media are increasingly a trendy tool for citizens to engage in participatory democracy with greater outreach, convenience, timeliness and independence and with less information censorship, threat and influence. The result also suggests that new media enhance citizens' new social duty as online social and political activists. Based on the use and gratification theory, users mainly access new media for information seeking, and to a lesser extent for socialization and personal identity/ self-expression.

Key words: new media; political engagement; motivation; virtual democratic participation

INTRODUCTION

The 5th general elections in Cambodia in 2013, resulting in the narrow victory by the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) over the main opposition, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), that is, 68 against 55 of the 123 seats in the parliament, is deemed the most heated in the history of Cambodian elections. The elections for the first time saw the engagement of Cambodian citizens, particularly those under 25 years of age in politics via new media, especially Facebook (Greenwood, 2013). The elections showcase the interplay between new media and virtual political participation. This use of social media for political engagement is certainly not unique to Cambodia; it is actually a global trend. Joe Mohen and Julia Glidden (2001), for example, studied the Internet voting in the United States of America initiated by Arizona Democratic Party in 2000; Monte Lutz (2009) investigated Barack Obama's political campaign on social media in 2008; Clay Shirky (2011) explored impact from social media on political revolution in Moldova in 2009, and Rita Safranek (2012) wrote about the use of social media in the Iranian anti-government movement.

Since this paper is developed from my thesis submitted to the University of Porto, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Professor Nuno Mountinho, who was my academic supervisor. I wish to thank all the respondents who filled in the research survey as well. I frankly thank Dr Say Sok, who is the editor of this publication, and the Department of Media and Communication and Cambodia Communication Institute, which accepted my paper for publication.

The invention of new media has transformed how people access and share information and enhanced the public's engagement in voicing their concern over and solving social and political issues. The engagement in politics via new media denotes the possibility for the public to exercise their rights to express opinion on social and political issues. New media also capture the activities of politicians and social issues, enabling citizens to pay more attention to and be aware of what occurs in society. New media can change citizens' perception and aid in democratic promotion, freedom of expression and human rights promotion, including how people are able to access to information, and share and comment on new media.

Within this context, this study intends to examine how Cambodian young Internet users access new media for political engagement by investigating their use patterns and use motivations. That is, it intends to answer two main research questions: how do Cambodian citizens use new media for political participation? And why do Cambodian citizens use new media for political participation?

CONCEPTUAL DEPARTURE

Political Engagement via New Media

New media is defined as "the products of mediated communication technologies coming along with digital computer" (Creeber and Martin, 2009, 2), and accessing the Internet through digital devices falls into this category. Political participation is explained as the individual activities of the public to influence and/or support the government and politics (Dario and Ilcheva, 2010). The interaction between new media and politics is a new trend whereby citizens involve in political participation with greater outreach, convenience, timeliness and independence without filtering from gatekeepers of information and influence (Kanhe and Cohen, 2012). Bruce Bimber (2001) demonstrated that adults in the United States of America use the Internet to follow up the activities of politicians and public figures, to contact them to express their views on the government or politics, to learn about political issues, and to browse through new media platforms for political information.

A study by the European Association for Viewers' Interests (EAVI) for the European Commission (2009) revealed that individuals access new media within three levels of competency: usage, critical analyses and communicative ability. These different levels of competency indicate new media literacy among the individuals who access the media and who improve their usage through regular access to the media. Each level of competency has its minimal components: 1) new media usage denotes literacy in digital devices, habit of usage, and attachment to the usage, 2) critical analyses include functional content, knowledge from new media, and users' behavior, and 3) communicative approach looks into social relation, citizens' participation, and content creation (EAVI, 2009).

Along this line of argument, Stanley J. Baran and Dennis K. Davis (2009) argued that media literacy refers to the ability to access to, to analyze, to evaluate and to communicate a specific type of media contents. It is understood that access refers to the activities which require skills to properly use media contents (Livingstone, 2003), while analyses and evaluation denote the critical thoughts or understanding on the part of users who can make correct judgment on media contents, and communication refers to the required knowledge

to construct and contribute media messages to the public (Center for Media Literacy, 2008).

Thomas E. Ruggiero (2000) argued that new media consumption through the Internet features a more advanced aspect than traditional media in that it allows for more interactivity, de-massification, and asynchronicity. Frederick Williams, Ronald E. Rice, and Everett M. Rogers (1988, 10-13) defined interactivity as “the degree to which participants in the communication process have control over, and can exchange roles in their mutual discourse,” while “de-massification means that a certain degree of the control of mass communication systems moves from the message producer to the media consumer,” and finally asynchronicity refers to the fact that a user can access, send and receive messages at any convenient time that he or she is available.

Why do users access new media for political engagement?

To understand users' motivations in relying on new media for political engagement, the study uses the use and gratification theory, which is a common media theory that researchers use to understand the relations between the audience and media. Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., and Gurevitch, M. (1974) claimed that this theory discusses both 'social and psychological' needs for media and other reasons for media consumption. The five underlying principles of this theory are that: 1) audience are media users; 2) audience have specific goals in using media; 3) media consumption satisfies audience's needs; 4) audience understands reasons for selecting a medium, and 5) use and gratification has the original media content, exposure and context for dissemination (Mcleod and Becker, 1981 as cited in Ancu and Cozma, 2009). Denis McQuail (2005) proposed four main indicators for the use and gratification theory— seeking for information, personal identity, socialization, and entertainment. He explained that these four indicators are the basic motive factors that drive audiences to use and access media in general. Similarly, Anita Whiting and David Williams (2013) raised other similar motive factors for using social media. Their list runs from social interaction, information seeking, passing time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, and convenience utility (see also Li, 2005; Sundar and Limperos, 2013).

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

Data Collection

This study, conducted quantitatively, is based on an online survey with 401 Cambodian citizens randomly. The questionnaire is divided into three sections. The first section includes questions about understanding of uses of new media for political participation. The second focuses on the motivations for using new media for political participation based on the use and gratification theory. The last section covers the demographic information of the respondents.

The instrument posted on www.surveymonkey.com was available in both Khmer and English. Before the conduct of the survey, the validation of the instrument was confirmed via a pilot test with 15 people, consultation with related literature, and discussion with experts in media and communication. The feedbacks and comments had contributed significantly to improving the quality of the statements in as well as the final survey questionnaire.

Participants

A total of 401 respondents took part in the survey. This is made up of 53.6% male and 46.4% female, with ages ranging from 18 to 34 years old. 54.9% of the respondents are currently studying at university, and 43.1% have already graduated. Only few people are studying at high school or have quitted university (see Table 1 for more information). Most users own a personal smart phone/ tablet/ Ipad (92.3%) and a computer/ laptop (77.1%), which they use to access new media.

Most of them access new media almost everyday and have been using new media for more than three years. Based on the duration and frequency of use and their self-assessment of their digital ability, it seems that they are quite good in using new media. Table 2 shows that most respondents report that they are good and very good in using the Internet (74.30%), English (75.56%) and using digital devices (75.05%).

Table 1: Selected Demographic Information of the Respondents

(N=401)	Number	Percentage	(N=401)	Number	Percentage
Gender: - Male: - Female:	215 186	53.6% 46.4%	Education: - Currently in university - Graduated from university - Others	213 173 15	53.1% 43.1% 3.7%
Age: - 18-25 - 26-34	284 117	70.82% 29.17%	Social Position: - Student - Non-student	220 181	54.9% 45.1%

Table 2: Participants' Engagement with New Media

(N=401)	Number	Percentage	(N=401)	Number	Percentage
Device for Internet Access: - Smart phone/ tablet/ Ipad - Computer/ Laptop at home - Wi-Fi at a restaurant - Internet at a café - Computer at school/ work - Others	370 309 128 127 156 3	92.3% 77.1% 31.9% 31.7% 38.9% 0.7%	Level of Use: 1. The Internet - Poor: - Little: - Average: - Good: - Very good:	3 10 90 199 99	0.74% 2.49% 22.44% 49.62% 24.68%
Duration of Internet Use: - Less than 6 months - One year - Two years - Three years - More than three years	8 19 31 34 309	2.0% 4.7% 7.7% 8.5% 77.1%	2. English - Poor: - Little: - Average: - Good: - Very good:	3 13 102 201 82	0.74% 3.24% 25.43 50.12 20.44%
Frequency of Internet Use: - Never use - Less than once a month - Once a month - Several times a month - Once a week - Several times a week - Everyday	0 5 3 9 7 25 352	0.0% 1.2% 0.7% 2.2% 1.7% 6.2% 87.8%	3. Digital Devices - Poor: - Little: - Average: - Good: - Very good:	2 11 87 217 84	0.49% 2.74% 21.69% 54.11% 20.94%

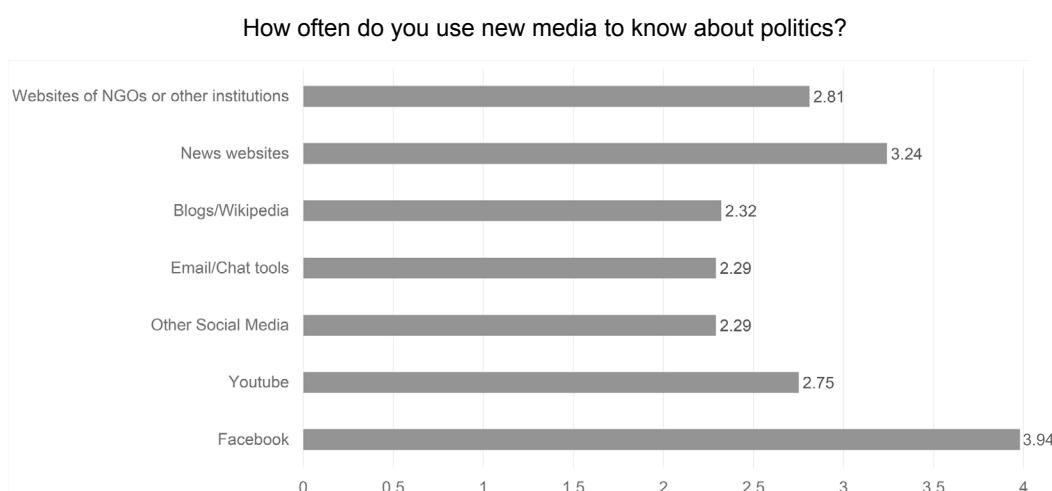
FINDINGS

RQ1: Uses of New Media for Political Engagement

As stated above, this paper explores how Cambodian citizens access new media for political participation. To understand their participation via new media, the paper examines four inter-related facets, i.e. new media platforms; trust in new media; perception towards new media, and political activities via new media. These four aspects emphasize the use of new media in terms of use and access, critical understanding, and communicative ability, which are the three indicators used in the study by EAVI (2009) cited above.

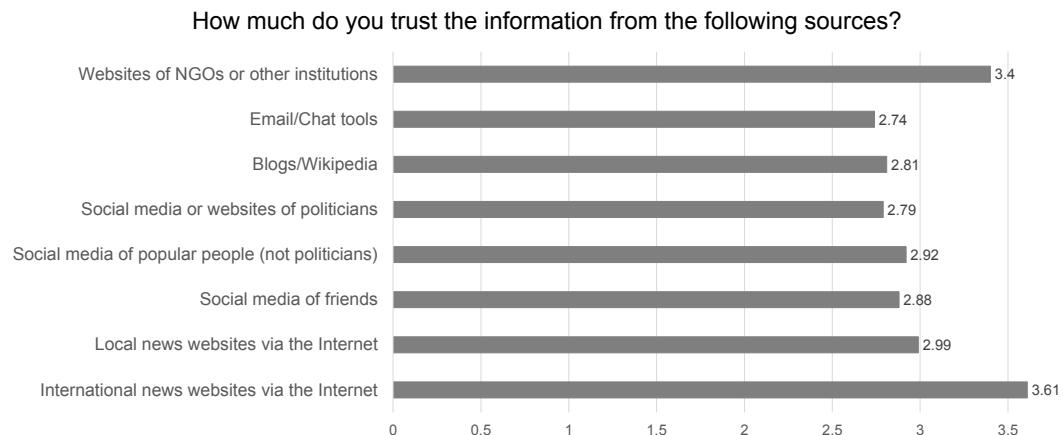
First, the new media platforms that are used for political engagement are discussed here. Seven main platforms most commonly used in Cambodia are surveyed. The finding indicates that Facebook is the most popular platform among Cambodian new media users who access media for information and political engagement, with a mean score of 3.94 on the five-point Likert scale. News websites, with the mean score of 3.24 on the same scale, are the second most common platform. According to the author's observation, there is an inter-link between Facebook and news websites too. Users access news websites for news and information, and then they share the news contents on their Facebook accounts to receive comments and likes. Websites of NGOs and other prominent institutions and YouTube are the next common platforms, with the mean score of 2.81 and 2.75, respectively. These two platforms are also important sources and space that citizens can access to get and share information and comment on political issues. On the other hand, citizens seem less interested in using blogs, Wikipedia, email, chat tools, and other social media platforms for political engagement. Figure 1 below briefly presents the most common online platforms users access for political engagement.

Figure 1: Common New Media Platforms for Political Engagement (on a Five-Point Likert Scale)



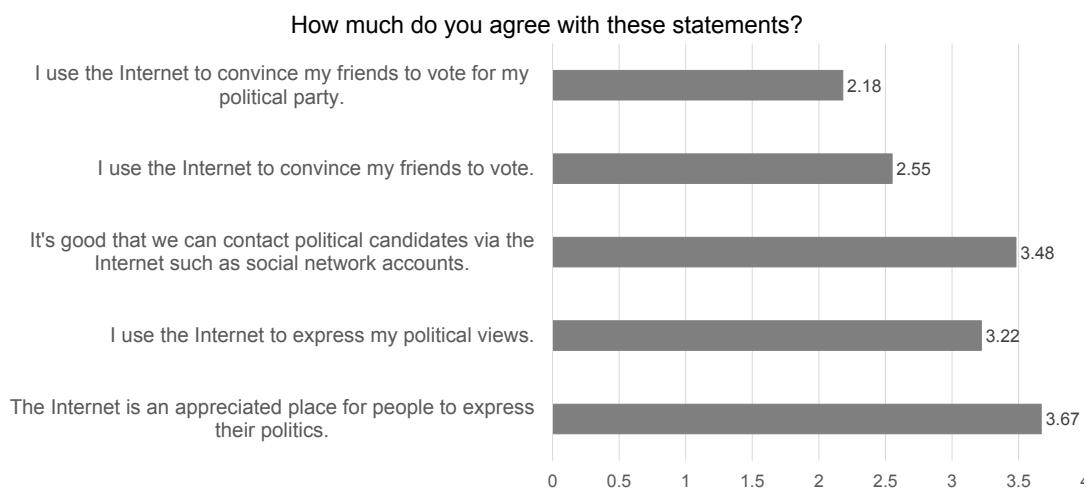
The second finding focuses on users' trust on new media. This is done to understand their perception and evaluation of the online platforms. We design eight indicators (as seen in Figure 2) to measure their trust on new media. The data shows that "international news websites via the Internet" and "websites of NGOs or other institutions" are the most common platforms that users trust for news contents, with the mean score of 3.61 and 3.40, respectively, while with the mean score of 2.99, "local new websites via the Internet" ranks third in terms of users' trust for contents. For social media, which most users often access, users have less trust on them for contents; these include social media of friends (mean=2.88); social media of popular people (mean=2.92), and social media or websites of politicians (mean=2.79). As for trust on new media, we can conclude that respondents seem to have more trust in the news contents from international broadcasters than the national ones.

Figure 2: Mean Score for Respondents' Trust on New Media (On a Five-Point Likert Scale)



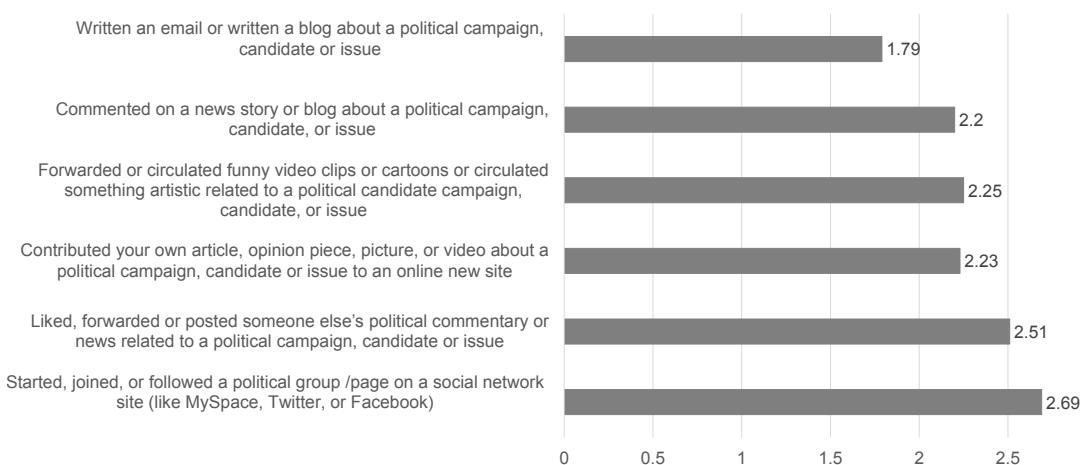
The third aspect focuses on the respondents' perception on the use of new media for political participation. The overall picture is that respondents do not use new media via the Internet as the platform for active political engagement. The data shows that most respondents agree that the Internet is a useful site for people to express their political support, belief and expression (mean=3.67). They also express that the Internet is good as it makes them able to contact political candidates via social networks (mean=3.48). However, we find that respondents do not agree to this statement: "I use the Internet to convince my friends to vote for my political party" (mean=2.18), and they somehow feel neutral towards this statement: "I use the Internet to convince my friends to vote" (mean=2.55). That is, they do not use new media via the Internet for political advocacy purposes. For expressing their political views on the Internet, they moderately agree with the statement that new media be used for this purpose, with the mean score of 3.22 on a five-point Likert scale. Figure 3 presents the results in brief.

Figure 3: Mean Score for Respondents' Perception on New Media (on a Five-Point Likert Scale)



The last facet investigated in this section is the users' communicative ability through new media via the Internet for political engagement. Interestingly, users are generally not interested in acting upon the six activities listed in the figure below, which can measure their activeness in political engagement via new media. Figure 4 shows that respondents do not act much on the six suggested activities, which are adapted from Joseph Kahne and Cathy J. Cohen (2012). The mean score of all the activities ranges from 1.78 to 2.69 on the five-point Likert scale; that is, they are on average or below. It means that respondents have limited active engagement in politics via the new media. Figure 4 presents the finding briefly.

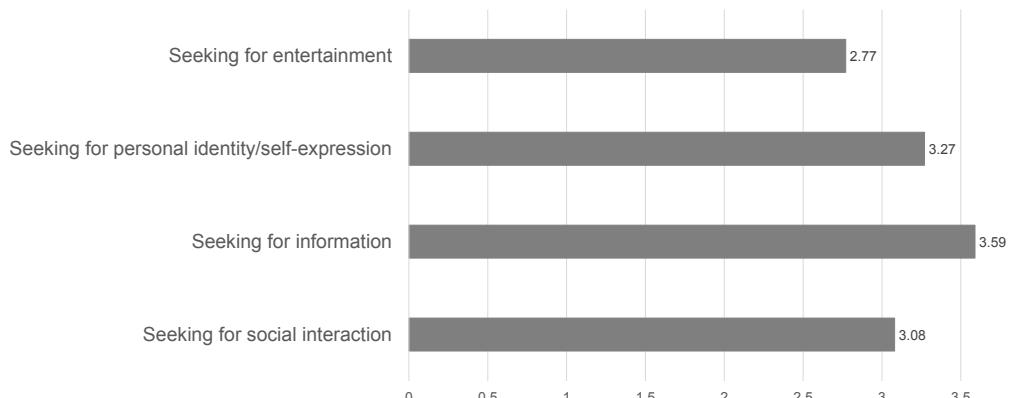
Figure 4: Mean Score for Respondents' Online Political Activities (on a Five-Point Likert Scale)



RQ2: Motivation for Political Engagement

Based on the use and gratification theory, the study produces four constructs to measure use of new media for political engagement: seeking for information, personal identity or self-expression, social interaction, and entertainment. Among all the motivations, seeking for information is the most common among respondents, with the mean score of 3.59 on a five-point Likert scale. Seeking for personal identity or self-expression (such as sharing thoughts, asserting identity, broadcasting to followers, being aware of political issues, influencing political outlook, and being a part of the community) is the second common motivation, with the mean score of 3.27 on a five-point Likert scale. Seeking for social interaction (such as building social capital, interacting with many people, involving in political discussion, meeting other supporters, and updating on what people say) is the third motivation, with a mean score of 3.08 on a five-point Likert scale. The less common motivation is seeking for entertainment (such as entertaining, finding politics as a fun topic, exciting with political expression, and escaping loneliness) with a mean score of 2.77 on a five-point Likert scale (see figure 5).

Figure 5: Mean Score for Motivations for Using New Media for Political Engagement (on a Five-Point Likert Scale)



DISCUSSION

New media have become an effective tool that enables users to explore social issues and latest development. So are they the means to express and share opinions on social and political issues (Greenwood, 2013). This study has shed light on how Cambodian citizens use new media for political engagement and their motivations for such engagement. Like experience elsewhere, new media have become a public sphere that enables people to involve in politics and offers users a sense of greater independence and without any external influence and filter; it also boosts social dialogues between individuals and social groups via digital devices (Kahne and Cohen, 2012). In addition, new media have improved equality and inclusiveness of political engagement (Nam, 2012), although the trend is dependent upon civic behavior, political attitude and level of participation of individual users (Peou and Chea, 2011).

According to the empirical analysis above, respondents express that they rely on Facebook for a potential online space to express and share political matter and to keep themselves abreast of latest social and political issues. In this regard, a previous study likewise indicates that users have the habit of accessing this tool to consume news on the daily basis (Saray et al., 2010). Accessing Facebook on the regular basis allows them to receive diverse information and news about society, politics, etc. Faine Greenwood (2013) claimed that political information during the general elections in 2013 was the most widespread via online, particularly on Facebook, and this enhanced the access amongst Cambodian youths and raise their awareness on key social and political issues. Facebook is thus believed to be a main tool and provides wide access for young Cambodians to engage in politics. Users do not only access but also provide comments and share political contents on Facebook, some of which are apparently for murky purposes (Pin and Sok, 2015). This shows that the Internet as well as Facebook, more particularly, is the potential space for free expression and democratic participation.

Users' reliance on new media for political engagement in the past decade is not confined to Cambodia. This is certainly a global trend. A study by Rajesh Kumar and Devam Thapa (2015) suggests that social media are a catalyst in civil society movement in India. It demonstrated that social media enable the public to express their opinions and critique social and political issues freely and fearlessly and that they provide a virtual space for civil society movement and protest. Kara Alaimo (2015) studied how social media aided the latest Egyptian revolution. It is confirmed that social media provided a powerful space for political change as they allowed political activists to inform each other of their activities and plans. Sebastian Valenzuela (2013) argued that there are studies that show positive correlation between social media and political engagement, but they do not provide clear explanation as to how the use of social media enhances political activism. He furthers that his study shows the connection; that is, the public uses social media as a tool to express their opinions, and they are the platform for activists to build relationship and momentum. His study also suggests that social media play the role as a digital platform which facilitates political engagement.

Even though social media are portrayed as a conduit for political engagement, the finding suggests that users do not generally think that information shared on social media are trustable without crosschecking with other media or websites. This is related to the open nature of social media, whereby people can freely post, comment, and share (Kahne and Cohen, 2012). Devan Rosen, Pascale Roy Lafontaine, and Blake Hendrickson (2013) claimed that social media users who never meet face-to-face with other users have lower sense of trust in and belonging to each other than the ones who do. Dhiraj Murthy, Calla M. Hastings, and Somya A. Mawrie (2014, 170) likewise argued that social media "foster trust among organizational member and play a role in creating and maintaining lightweight collaborative relationships". For other digital platforms, the finding confirms that users are likely to believe and trust international news websites rather than social networks and local news websites. This can be resulted from the instinct negative thoughts of Cambodian users towards the lack of professionalism, media restriction, practice of self-censorship and biased reporting, and allegedly bribery in reporting political issues amongst many local media companies, organizations and broadcasters (BBC Media Action, 2012). A study by Chivoen Peou, Manika Pin and Say Sok (2013) on how Cambodian media report governance suggests that generally the international broadcasters and media outlets run

by non-governmental organizations present more neutral voices in their reporting and rely on more information sources to produce news stories. Therefore, it can be said that users tend to appreciate and access international news websites as well as those run by NGOs for political contents since they believe that the contents are more neutral and balanced. Most international broadcasters are funded by international agencies and they are perceptively not affiliated with any political parties, differentiating them from many local new media outlets that are supported or owned by local elites with their own political inclination.

Users' perception towards new media for political participation indicates that they are quite a critical user of new media, although limitation exists. Respondents identified that the Internet is a good place for people to express their opinion on politics and that it provides a means to connect or contact with political candidates via social networks. Most respondents use the Internet to follow up the activities of politicians and government officials; contact government officials and political candidates; express views on public affairs or politics; learn about political issues, and browse for general political information. The eagerness to get information and latest update from prominent figures can attest itself in the increasing and large number of fans of pages owned by popular public figures. The finding matches with a study by Bruce Bimber (2001), who showed that American adults access new media to keep up with politicians by asking, following up, and keeping abreast their activities. According to Karen Ross and Tobias Burger (2014), new media are influencing the methods of communication between politicians and the public. They enable both sides to interact and share messages with each other. The public can follow politicians on social media pages and comment on their posts and send messages directly. Similarly, Mads P. Sørensen (2016) argued that social media offer an online platform for political conversation between politicians and the public. Citizens can give them feedback via new media, which provides a digital space for political engagement.

Even though users feel positive about the role of new media for political engagement, they seem to limit their activities for political participation. They just started to use new media for political engagement; recently joined online political groups or pages, and simply observed what is going on through the pages or groups rather than contribute articles, comment or create contents. Based on participative skills proposed by EAVI (2009), it can be said that Cambodian users are not very active political participants and have quite basic competency in new media literacy, with quite limited critical analyses and communicative ability. The research did not try to understand why this is the case, but generally it can be a matter of political fear. In Cambodia, according to LICAHDO (2008) censorship, threat and prohibition are believed to be widespread, and freedom of expression is still restricted. According to Freedom House (2013), Cambodia's press freedom is considered "not free". The atmosphere thus could potentially restrict users in voicing their critical thoughts online, and it will need more time, energy and initiatives to improve online political participation. Limited new media and computer/ smart phone literacy can be another explanation. Facebook (let alone other less popular new media platforms) was not a major means for virtual communication as late as 2010. The boom in its popularity occurred before the 2013 national elections, and hence a majority of users just use it for basic communication purposes, i.e. posting and sharing and for more personal reasons. Like Facebook's popularity, rapid increase in the use of smart phone devices is a new phenomenon in Cambodia as well.

This study draws upon the use and gratification theory to understand users' motivation

in accessing new media for political engagement. Amongst the four reasons presented, seeking for information is the main motive factor for using new media. Hazel Henderson (1974) claimed that the rise of citizen movements is grounded on the power of information. In Western Europe, the United States of America, Australia and Japan, the best strategy to prevail citizen movements is to have power over information and control rational views of the public. Likewise, Cambodian users can be said to be interested in seeking for information from new media as a means to keep themselves updated on social and political issues as a basis for their decision-making – and by extension empowerment.

Cambodian users, to some extent, see new media as a platform for self-expression or self-identity. Michail D. Kokkoris and U. Kuhnen (2014) argued that the interactive effect of self-expression has an impact on information processing. The information is sought for and translated for self-expression. This helps users to identify their personal interests and then share to online groups. Users are willing to give their thoughts and take part in their virtual communities. However, a study by Katie Davis (2011) cautioned that online self-expression can be risky given the nature of the Internet which offers a lot of leeway to users and thus they can be deceived. These arguments can perhaps explain why Cambodian users are cautiously eager to use new media for self-expression or self-identity in the realm of politics.

Like self-expression, Cambodian users, to a lesser extent, use new media for the purpose of social interaction. Trevor Diehl, Brian E Weeks and Homero Gil de Zúñiga (2015) argued that online socialization offers a chance for political persuasion and that relationship can be strengthened through social and political discussion. In this sense, users somehow see new media as a platform to build online social capital, engage with political candidates, and participate in online groups (Yang and DeHart, 2016). Finally, seeking for entertainment through political engagement is the less common motive for online activism. However, generally people still agree that politics is a fun topic and are eager to discuss about it online.

In general, it can be argued that many Cambodian users are active online users and have quite clear motivations in using new media for political engagement. They are audience who actively gratify the new contents (Rubin, 2009). They can identify their purposes in new media consumption and somehow are able to voice their criticisms over what they see or hear online. They are not merely followers of new media.

CONCLUSION

The study presents how the advancement of new media has changed political participation in Cambodia. It discusses how new media has transformed freedom of expression and enhanced participatory democracy, improving outreach, convenience, timeliness and independence in accessing information with less information censorship, threat and influence. New media also enhance citizens' new social duty as online activists for social and political change. This research also attempts to explain the motivations that users have in accessing new media for political engagement. Seeking for information is the most common motive for online engagement, while seeking for entertainment through political engagement is the least common.

This study does not investigate the issue of online political engagement from politicians' perspectives and the influence and impact of new media on actual political participation.

These are two areas worth further exploration. The sample of the respondents is quite small and was not systematically selected for accurate representation of the electorates. Subsequent research may factor these sampling issues into consideration. Despite the limitations, this study still provides an important reflection on the role of digital media in mobilizing people to engage politically in a transitional post-socialist society. This study can provide baseline information to future research in this area of study in Cambodia and a reference for similar studies in other societies.

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Mainstream Media and Environmental Communication in Cambodia

Monny Vathna KET

INTRODUCTION

Wibowo Lukas Rumboko, Digby Race, and Allan Curtis (2013), in their research related to the environment, mentioned the loophole regarding the public dissemination of environmental information:

Despite the large amount of literature available on the subject, most people know little about the causes and consequences of climate change, partly because the information is scattered, and basically available only in scientific reports where it is obscured by jargon and sophisticated mathematical models... This information is hardly accessible for poor countries like Nepal, even though they are vulnerable to climate change, thus their people cannot be alerted because of persistent poverty, illiteracy, and ignorance.

Similar to the rest of the developing world, Cambodia has been facing a range of environmental problems. As environmental problems such as climate change affect everyone, the public should ideally be widely informed on what's going on with the environment.

Robert Cox (2010) explains environmental communication as "the pragmatic and constitutive vehicle for our understanding of the environment as well as our relationships to the natural world; it is the symbolic medium that we use in constructing environmental problems and negotiating society's different responses to them".

The mainstream media¹, which is a component of environmental communication, is rarely taken by the public to be meaningful reporting of environmental aspects. Communication through mainstream media ought to be about how an individual can be empowered. It should be about motivating people to be more concerned about environmental issues through reading, watching, or listening to news reporting.

Despite this aim, environmental communication has not played its role to inform the people

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1. According to the Oxford Dictionary, "mainstream media" refers to "traditional forms of mass communication, such as newspapers, television, and radio (as opposed to the Internet) regarded collectively".

about problems. In *Reporting Governance: A Content Analysis of Cambodian Media Outlets*, Chivoine Peou, Manika Pin and Say Sok (2013) illustrate the proportion of environmental topics which were reported in a two-week timeframe between December 5 and 18, 2012. The environment as a primary topic of reports represented 0.8%, 0.9% and 0.4% of the content in newspapers, TV, and radio, respectively.

Environmental communication is fundamental for Cambodia as the country is struggling to achieve sustainable development. Mainstream media play a big role in environmental communication to inform and educate people about environmental problems. Now consider, how much has the public been informed about environment through mainstream media? The answer is 'not much', this paper will argue.

This article is about the discussion revolving around external and internal factors that influence the mainstream media in Cambodia on how they inform the public about environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION, POLITICS, FOREIGN INVESTMENT, NGOs, AND ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

In Chapter 5 "Media Coverage of the Environment" in *Environmental Communication and Public Sphere*, Cox (2010) starts with a quote from Travis Wagner (2008, 27), "Most of what society learns about the environment is from news... [Yet] news is not an objective presentation of political reality, but an interpretation of events and issues from the perspective of reporters, editors, and selected sources...."

Reflecting on environmental issues, the mainstream media in Cambodia seem to pay less attention to the environment compared to other issues such as politics, crime and security, and traffic accidents. Journalists are bound to find it difficult to report on the environment with challenges barring them. The term "environment" is broad and has connections to other facets of society. Yet, there are more challenges lying in societal layers that influence and contribute to the hardship of journalists in producing environmental reports. Those sectors are described in the following paragraphs.

The influence of politics in environmental reporting is considered to be a key agent in altering the message on the environment. In reality, when it comes to environmental issues, the media rarely discuss sustainable ecology, focusing, instead, on economic development which is related to politics. In spite of the number of stories and reports about environmental issues, very few touch meaningfully on environmental messages. Politics sometimes dominates the angle of such reports, referring to the clash in opinion between the government and the opposition party, for instance. This leads to the overshadowing of the environmental message. More importantly, the repercussion of the politics, alongside corruption, in Cambodia contributes difficulties towards journalists who cover the environmental news. From another perspective, news related to politics outnumbers other issues any day. In addition, a lot of mainstream media are partial and are unduly influenced by the government or prominent politicians (Khoun, 2014), which results in the censorship of anything interfering with the government's reputation.

Foreign investment towards initiatives such as dam construction and large-scale agri-business contribute enormously to the deterioration of natural environment. With such

consequences, it likewise disturbs environmental reports. It obstructs environmental communication. Information on environmental impact of foreign investment projects is rarely found publicly. Furthermore, reporters find it hard to get information from the side of the government or the company to talk when they do the report, making it difficult for reporters to find balance reporting between economic development and sustainable ecology.

Non-governmental organizations which get funds from donors also pose a challenge for environmental journalism. The challenge is that the work they do is rarely communicated to the public through the mainstream media. As a matter of fact, either NGOs or the government has been doing a lot of work related to environmental conservation, climate change adaptation, resilience and mitigation, as well as environmental knowledge management. However, it seems that information on those outcomes can only be found within NGO and government circles. Communication from NGOs to the media concerning their work seems to be limited, for the work of NGOs is rarely seen in mainstream media. Is it because NGOs do not want journalists to cover their work? Reports from NGOs provide insight on their work, yet reporters only look for reports that are related to hot issues.

Academic and research institutions, similarly, contribute to ineffective environmental communication to the public through mainstream media. Every year, environmental studies and research are conducted and published, yet they are left on the shelf for interested scientists, researchers, and educators. Is that because journalists have never been able to get interesting news from those studies, or is that because the academic and researchers rarely communicate their findings to the media? The answer might be both. Academic work is rigorous with scientific findings but complex and time consuming to read. It is not, to a certain degree, interesting to a public audience.

WHY IS THERE A LACK OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH MAINSTREAM MEDIA?

In 2013, Professor Steve Schwarze, Director of the Communications Department at the University of Montana spoke to The Missourian Radio Talk Show about his research on public involvement in environmental conversation. One of the respondents responded, "Why should I?"

Motivating people to look beyond what they see is not easy. Understanding environmental problems and their impacts is akin to looking through a hazy mirage, where you may not believe what really exists behind it all. Environmental reporting should clearly define the aspect of the environment, the ecology, or the realm of nature; should be about the deterioration of sustainable ecology, or the catastrophe of natural habitats; should be about why the public have to know about it, and should be about what the public can do to contribute after knowing all of this. Unsurprisingly, communicating about the environment to the public has never been easy. This section attempts to explain why these important themes about the environment are generally not communicated to the public via the mainstream media.

Angle selection in news reporting is an essential part of writing the news. Without choosing an angle, journalistic pieces would be chaotic. Choosing an angle when reporting environmental news is important, yet it can affect the essence of the environmental message embedded in the news. Contemporary situation in Cambodia lies in a lot of social and political issues. Such

issues as political confrontation, traffic accidents, and environmental problems especially deforestation catch the attention from the mainstream media. Albeit there are news reports or broadcasts related to environment, the angle mostly focuses on governance, politics, and economic development such as land concession, corruption, or illegal logging per se. That is, going in-depth into the meaningful message of the environment is rare even though to some extent environmental explanation is seen as the background information of the news. By choosing the angle to write about, journalists frame a lens for readers to view the story, for example, making a story about illegal logging more about politics than the environment.

Angle selection is also restricted due to the influence of the owners of media outlets who do not like to see too much politically sensitive environmental reporting. In contemporary society, most media outlets belong to powerful people. Some owners are affiliated with powerful politicians or business tycoons. The media is thus seen as necessary to show 'development' and to avoid the publication/broadcast of certain issues which would affect powerful elites.

Based on the observation of the writer, in the two weeks from March 1, 2016, to March 12, 2016, the Phnom Penh Post newspaper in English published 14 news reports which may be considered to be in the environment category. In contrast, the Kampuchea Thmei newspaper, which is owned by a businessperson, did not publish any meaningful environmental news during the period.

Lexicon in the realm of environment in Khmer language is not rich, and most terms are still too technical for every day usage. The author himself when trying to write environmental op-eds in Khmer has encountered numerous difficulties in using the right words to communicate the environmental message simply and precisely. "Environmental communication" is an obvious example. How can the term be translated into Khmer with a meaning that everyone is able to understand? Another example is the term "climate change". A lot of people still do not understand what it is, some people still get confused between "climate" and "weather" as the two terms "ភាគសធាតុ" and "បិយោគស", in Khmer for climate and weather, are commonly used interchangeably among people in their daily conversation.

Environmental lexicons can be found in environmental reports from NGOs and stakeholders working in environmental programmes and projects, yet those are rarely found in news reports due to the lack of in-depth environmental reports. Those terms are technical and are not interesting to the general public without simplification and explanation. For example, Taiji Fujisaki (2013) wrote in his report that not many people know what REDD-plus is. Even most officials working in this programme at the sub-national and national levels do not know what it means exactly because they rarely hear or read about the word, much less use them.

Knowledge of journalists in the realm of environment, additionally, is another factor contributing to the lack of environmental reporting through mainstream media. Environmentalism requires strong knowledge in order to convey the problem in an easily understandable way. Like Albert Einstein said, "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough." In Cambodia, the journalism sector has been gradually professionalized. However, the journalism industry has yet to reach a size where the media outlets can afford to have journalists dedicated to specific fields, especially when environmental news sections are not in demand. Nowadays, journalists from mainstream media are assigned to different topics

from day to day. Albeit there are journalists who ‘specialize’ in political fields, a journalist who is an expert in the environmental field is yet to be found. Such a journalist can deliver messages to the public about environmental concepts beyond illegal logging.

Readers, more importantly, is the other influential factor. Most mainstream media outlets focus on consumer demand such as entertainment, traffic accidents and politics. On the contrary, educating the public is rarely seen as an objective among media outlets, especially with regard to environmentalism.

There are three reasons that may contribute to the ignorance. First, people tend to forget the gradual impact of environmental problem on their life. That is, human’s reaction and realization emerge towards instantaneous effect, yet environmental problems do not bring about the cause in that way. One of the most obvious examples is climate change. The second reason is the fear from political interference in environmental reporting. That is, readers may not want to focus on environmental reporting, seeing problems surrounding environmental activists. The framing of environmental problems in terms of politics may cause fear and lead to the disengagement of people from environmental activities. The other reason is that readers’ interest tends to sway with the news that they are fed by mainstream media. Every day, the public is informed about numerous national and international issues. The interest of the readers is thus directed towards the hottest or biggest news dominating their surroundings.

The knowledge of readers limits the motivation of media news outlets towards publishing and covering the environment. While it is difficult to cover and write about environmental issues, it is even more difficult to write about a topic that no one is going to read. More critically, environmental issues require people to think.

CONCLUSION

Environmental issues affect everyone in the long term. Raising awareness about environmental problems should be prioritized, and should be done in a transparent, in-depth, and precise way. All mainstream media ought to provide space, time, and programs towards environmental education of the public. Experts should be invited to talk about the environment. If the economy, politics and international issues can have their own sections in newspapers, why not the environment?

Although there is a lack of environmental messages to the public via the mainstream media, one positive is that Cambodia does not only rely on the newspaper, television, and radio. The availability of the Internet has opened a new way of communication and spreading news from the individual to a mass audience. Social networks such as Facebook have been one main platform where people have been reading and watching environmental news, discussing environmental topics, and creating environmental campaigns. Not only can the public see more environmental news from around the world, most people can engage with such news through comments, and gradually increase their understanding of environmental problems around the world. Interestingly, most mainstream media outlets are now upgrading their work in social media platforms, too.

Another fundamental factor for better and meaningful environmental movement is education.

Climate change and other environmental studies should be introduced into primary and secondary education as an extra-curricular courses and activities so that people are able to build up their mindset from young ages.

Our generation may be still living in a prosperous condition. But if we do not take action and continue to take environmental problems for granted, both this generation and the next will bear the consequences.

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A Reflection on Multimedia and Online Journalism in Cambodia

Bun YUNG

INTRODUCTION

Technology has been changing the way journalists work. Traditional journalists would argue about styles and techniques of news writing to maintain the standards of journalism. However, when it comes to writing news for the web, those writing styles and techniques are somehow different. In the age of multimedia and online journalism, a notebook and a pen are no longer sufficient for journalists to effectively tell a story as well as to reach and fit readers' diverse interests. They need to be multi-skilled. For instance, besides the ability to write clearly, they need to know how to produce a video or sound clip or take a photograph to supplement their news articles. Moreover, the ability for media institutions and journalists to interact instantly with readers is required to make sure that a piece of news a journalist posts is engaging.

Lorraine Lee (2008) correctly stated, "Multimedia journalism – which often includes a print or online story supplemented by some other forms of media that is more interactive than just text – is becoming a prevalent way to 'do' journalism." Through the power of the Internet, multimedia journalism offers readers different types of contents including text, video, audio, photo and other infographic elements with just a click. Some people may like to read the news article itself while others may prefer watching video or listening to an audio clip. Different multimedia formats, to a certain extent, help readers understand the story better since an issue is chopped into various angles covering in different multimedia story elements. In short, these elements make the story more informative, interactive, and enjoyable to consume.

To catch up with the trend, many news agencies around the world have started to launch their online versions in supplement to the existing print and others have moved to online media completely. However, the transition from print to online takes time, effort and investment. While some media houses transform the existing newsrooms to multimedia ones, the others invest in building new multimedia teams. To succeed in this challenging task, a news agency needs more people who have better knowledge in technology and multimedia and it has to train those staff to be multi-skilled. Yet many of those new skills are not familiar to everyone. With enough talents and resources, some media houses have successfully owned professional multimedia websites and, on the other hand, some just do multimedia journalism for the sake of having it or going trendy. According to a journal article entitled "Multimedia Journalism: The Age of New Technology and New Opportunities," Diana Day (as cited in Lee, 2008) said multimedia can produce opposite desired effects if it is not practiced in the right way. It stands both challenges and opportunities. Lee (2008) continued, "The worst quality of multimedia journalism is when the multimedia aspect is trivial or is done just to fit a trend or just to 'go multimedia' for its own sake. When the story is primary and when the storytelling medium chosen fits the story that is being told, that's when multimedia is at its best."

In recent years, Cambodian media have been undergoing the transition from traditional offline to multimedia and online journalism. Some media houses have produced good and professional online media platforms, while others simply create ones for the sake of having them or ones that look clumsy and unprofessional. This commentary aims, therefore, to discuss the current practices of multimedia and online journalism in Cambodia vis-à-vis principles of online journalism as well as opportunities and challenges media companies have in the move towards multi-media online journalism.

MULTIMEDIA AND ONLINE JOURNALISM IN CAMBODIA

Not different from others media houses around the globe, Cambodian media also go online. Based on observation, the transition from print to online started in late 2000's, and since then more and more local news agencies have launched their news websites. Some of the famous news websites include www.vodhotnews.com, www.dap-news.com, www.postkhmer.com, www.cen.com.kh, www.sabay.com.kh, www.thmeythmey.com, www.kampucheathmey.com, www.khmerload.com, www.khmer-press.com, and www.khmer-note.com. These websites are popularly known for breaking, hot to entertaining news and information. Some news websites can afford to offer quality news with different supplement storytelling formats like video and audio, photo, infographic and other interactive elements. Nevertheless, many other sites focus more on entertaining news, health/beauty tips, gossips, and even rumors. In addition, some of them just post stories with 'attractive' pictures, copy and paste news from other newspapers or translate international news or health/beauty tips and post them online. Regarding the web design, very few sites have a professional look with acceptable level of usability, while many others fill up their pages with ads and promotional information.

On the one hand, moving to online in Cambodia is seen as a trend and, on the other hand, it is a matter of fact that many readers as well as advertisers also go online. The number of Cambodian Internet users keeps increasing remarkably from year to year. The number of users jumped from merely 6,000 in 2000 to 5,000,000 in November 2015, and at the same time the number of Cambodian Facebook users reached 3,300,000 (internetworldstats.com, accessed in December 2015). This shows a huge change in online space and presents new opportunities in the digital world. Significantly, with this increase in digital space news institutions can reach different types of audience and advertisers.

However, having online media is not simply a matter of having the news websites and just posting any news or information. The most important questions for media agencies that wish to go online to consider include: how are they doing it? Do they have a multimedia newsroom? Are their staff multi-skilled? Many things on numerous news websites from web design to news contents are running off track because many of the media houses in Cambodia are just doing it for the sake of having it or they just convert the traditional to multimedia newsrooms with little preparation and investment. Keeping the same newsroom structure as the print one will not work for online. "The web has different attributes from print, and it will call for a different approach," advised Martin Baron (2015). So the transition must be done carefully and professionally.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Doing multimedia and online journalism in Cambodia stands both opportunities and

challenges. Although the opportunities are obvious, challenges cannot be taken for granted. News institutions must have a clear strategy to deal with those challenges to maximize the opportunities and to improve principles of and value in journalism.

Broader readership is what online journalism can offer. Given the fact that more and more Cambodians are going online and many spend more time online, many of them get news through the digital world. They either go to the sites directly or access them through links shared on social media especially Facebook and Twitter. Many Cambodian media houses host their own Facebook pages or Twitters in addition to their homepages. By so doing, readers can access news anytime and anywhere through their desktops, laptops, tablets and even smartphones. This provides media agencies the opportunity to reach wider audience and serve their readers better through offering news in different storytelling formats. It is by far the greatest thing online journalism can offer compared to traditional media.

Another opportunity for the media houses and news writers is the interactive feedback from audience. Unlike print, online journalism allows readers to do different things on the posted stories instantly. They can read; they can click 'Like' or 'Share'; or they can comment and make a discussion. Similarly, the editors or journalists can keep track of their readers as well as communicate with them directly and instantly. According to Baron (2015), there are more that digital world can offer and enhance journalism. "Technology, of course, gives us the power to measure everything we do. How our stories are doing. How much time people spend with each story. How deep into a story they read. Whether they read one more story after the first one, whether they return to us, where they come from, where they go when they leave us, and what their interests are." Media houses can rely on it to maximize the benefits it offers in order to improve their websites and practices.

Besides getting more readers to visit the sites, the opportunity of getting ads also increases. As long as the news sites have a huge number of viewers, advertisers are more than happy to place their ads on the pages. It is seen that the online ad market around the world is growing and keeps increasing over time. According to Forrester Research, as quoted in the Wall Street Journal, "US online display ad spending will nearly double by 2019." In Cambodia, although data is not available, clearly advertising market has continued to grow with the expansion in digital and social media, according to IMS Group. With the expansion of the private sector and online media, the online ad market has similarly expanded.

Despite the opportunities online journalism offers, challenges in creating and maintaining professional online journalism remains. Securing good site traffic is not simple. It depends mainly on contents, story writing styles and techniques, and users' satisfaction with the sites, and partly on the site design and usability. To maintain and sustain credibility it is important that the site owners understand and balance between the site popularity and contents they provide. If the site traffic is getting down, it will affect marketing because advertisers depend mainly on the big number of the site visits to decide whether they should place ads on any site. At the same time, they also need to ensure maximum professional standards and uphold journalistic principles. Or those foreseen opportunities could be vanished.

Since many aspects in multimedia and online journalism are different from those in print or broadcast journalism, journalists cannot just copy and paste the ways they work previously and apply them into producing online materials. Writing for the web is different and this poses

a challenge for online journalism in Cambodia. Often many Cambodian reporters just use the writing styles and techniques they write for print and broadcast to apply on web stories. Some news agencies even copy their stories in print or broadcast and paste them into the websites with little or no change in contents, design and formats. But professional online journalism does not work that way. Practically, the lengths of the sentences, paragraphs, and even the whole stories are supposed to be shorter than the length of print stories because online readers tend to prefer shorter to longer texts. The writing styles and story structures should be interesting enough to catch the readers' attention from the beginning because most of the readers do not read the whole stories, but rather scan for areas of interest. According to Jakob Nielsen (1997), 79% of the tested online users scan webpages for interesting keywords or sentences rather than read word-for-word. The same study suggested that writers use "scannable text" including using keywords, sub-headings or listings to catch readers' attention. And this is not a practice adopted by many online news agencies in Cambodia.

Writing an appropriate headline is another challenge for many Cambodian online journalists. A headline is an important element for web writing because it is usually the first thing readers read before scrolling down. To hook the readers and make sure that they read the rest of the story, the headline must be punchy and followed by attractive teasers. Generally, magnetic headlines impress readers and get noticed. "Make a good first impression with short, keyword-leading headings that sound authentic, contain useful information, and make sense out of context," advised Hoa Loranger (2015). However, what can be seen from many Cambodian news websites is that the headlines are often the wrap-up of the whole stories and sometimes even mundane or misleading. Some readers may click to read the story because the headline is very appealing, but end up disappointed after finding out that the story is somehow different from what the headline suggests. Those news websites where such stories are frequently posted may have gotten many clicks for such stories, but they will lose readers if they repeatedly do so. It takes years to get readers trust a news site but it can take just seconds to get that trust ruined if professionalism is not adhered to.

Doing multimedia journalism does not mean a news website just provides news articles with supplement video or audio clips. News agencies have to understand their readers' preference and know what they want from the sites. Kathryn Whitenton (2014) said, "Most site visitors won't read all of the content provided but settle for a 'good-enough' answer. Better sorting and clearer writing satisfy users without exhausting the limited time they're willing to spend on a website." Because different online readers come to a news page with different purposes; for example, some may prefer reading texts while others may like watching video clips or infographic elements; the information architects have to try to satisfy their taste. But how can they do it? Understanding the audience's areas and levels of interest is very essential here. After identifying those areas and levels, a site should have some ideas, like what types of readers prefer what types of contents or storytelling formats. By so doing, a story is cut into small pieces with different angles and they should know which angle should be covered in which formats: text, video, audio, photo, or other infographic elements. It is the better way to keep readers visit the site regularly, or they will not come back again as they have access to countless content options on the web.

Last but not least, dealing with different comments and feedback is another tricky issue. Many Cambodian news websites can offer the comment function, but fail to handle those

comments professionally. Some sites even allow all kinds of comments, including ones with inappropriate or insulting language, on their pages while a few others have certain standards to filter comments. Lee (2008) wrote that it is important that news agencies should work on “having comments of quality” to make sure that people will not get into online fights as well as to maintain a level of civility. Plus, it is important to have a good set of standards for commenting or other types of comment filtering mechanisms to maintain morality and ethical practice. To achieve a better result, news agencies should have someone responsible for managing all the comments.

NEWS VALUE V.S. MARKETING

Although the ways journalists work and the storytelling styles and techniques change when news agencies go multiplatform and online, the news value shall not be changed. Many Cambodian news websites fail to maintain the standards of journalism and enhance news value while trying to maximize the benefits from doing marketing. When they are too much business-oriented, they tend to ignore quality of news and upholding professional practice of their reporters. Instead of playing the roles of an opinion leader, a watchdog or even an agent of change, they simply follow the public opinions and publish stories they think their readers like to read and want to see to attract more readers with no regard for journalistic values and principles. In this sense, critical news is hardly found on many Cambodian news websites except for a few sites which are mostly run by foreign broadcasters and local NGOs such as www.postkhmer.com and www.khmer.voanews.com.

To attract readers to their sites, many Cambodian news sites fill up their pages with information about entertainment, rumors, gossips, traffic accidents, bloody stories, sex-related stories, and even household conflicts rather than more meaningful news and analyses. These stories are often followed up by sexy or bloody pictures and are full of inappropriate language. Furthermore, some news agencies post stories which are beneficial to their advertisers (like articles to promote a product) or even got paid to post such stories. Such a practice can make critical readers fed up with the sites as they expect to read or see more than information about rumors or gossips not to mention information about companies' events or product launch. To attract and retain more critical readers, reporters should be able to distinguish between news and information and know how to transform information to quality news. News agencies should also uphold proper journalistic practices and maintain media professionalism. By so doing, they can satisfy both their average and critical readers.

Another journalistic aspect, ad placement, to be specific, is another serious issue. Some websites dedicate more space for ads than news. It is irritating for critical readers to see that the pages are full of ad pop-up with flashy colors or very big ad posts. Sometimes it takes readers a few minutes to just distinguish between ads and news. In some worse cases, readers have to scroll down half a page of ads to reach the news section. Generally, ad placement should be done in a neat and well-structured way so that readers will find it easy to differentiate the two and focus more on news. An article on ad placement for mobile by Aurora Bedford (2015) warned, “Whether a user ignores an ad completely or becomes annoyed with its presence is strongly related to the ad's size and placement on the page.” The same article mentioned that an ad poses a conflict between business of the site and the contents readers want. So it is vital to minimize the impact by dedicating a small portion of the page to ads and place them “strategically so that they do not create false floors and do

not stop people from discovering additional page content,” continued the article.

To a broader image, the idea of marketing journalism is still widely practiced in Cambodia. While many online news agencies target more advertisement, they are more inclined to provide contents that they think readers like to read with no or little regard to the new values and principles of journalism. By so doing, they should be aware that increasing their revenue through advertisement will just alter the news value and undermine the principles of journalism. Baron (2015) said, “We must keep our values. The first amongst them is the determination to do what we feel is right and in the public interest – even when there is commercial risk, even when the risk exceeds that.” In a sense, although media institutions may need to make revenue to operate and generate income, the need for profit shall not overshadow the need to uphold professional practice and conducts.

NEWS SITE RANKING AND MEDIA LITERACY

Website ranking in Cambodia is no surprise to local long-term media observers. Entertaining news sites are more well-liked than those offering more critical news. While the ranking shows the popularity of each news website, it can reflect readers’ media literacy too. That is, readers are less interested in critical reporting and are more into entertaining and/or hot news. According to www.alexa.com, entertaining news sites receive more traffic. For example, www.sabay.com.kh ranks 4th after www.facebook.com, www.google.com, and www.youtube.com, and is closely followed by other entertaining websites, like www.khmerload.com which ranks 6th; www.khmer-press.com which ranks 9th; and www.khmer-note.com which ranks 11th, and www.Kohsantepheapdaily.com.kh, an online version of the Koh Santepheap Newspaper, known for its coverage of social issues, ranks 22nd. In contrast, a number of news websites, which are considered to have better upheld journalistic values and principles, provide more quality news in more varied news formats, and cover sensitive stories with more professional standards, rank a great distance from those entertaining ones. For example, www.postkhmer.com (the online version of the Phnom Penh Post Khmer) ranks 31st and www.rfi.fr (the online version of the Radio France Internationale) ranks 117th.

The ranking clearly shows that the majority of Cambodian Internet users tend to prefer entertaining and less serious news sites to the more professional ones which provide better quality news. While many of them go to the sites for entertaining news, attractive pictures, star gossips, and bloody stories, the websites try to fill their pages with those kinds of stories. Although knowing that it is unprofessional and sometimes even unethical to do so, they want to feed their audience’s desire. Critical readers, however, have a different taste for news. They would ignore such contents and go to more professional online news websites.

As a reflection from the ranking and the commonly preferred stories, it can be inferred that a majority of online news audience still has limited media literacy. According to Weiss (2013), media literacy refers to “the skillful application of literacy skills to media and technology messages. It’s long been an important part of thoughtful civic engagement, and the digital revolution has made it even more critical.” In this digital age, it is essential that the audience has the ability to examine every single information they receive and judge its message whether it is true or misleading. Moreover, Weiss (2013) stated that “a truly media literate citizen in 2013 is someone who not only understands the meaning behind the messages he or she encounters, but who can also create quality content and distribute it in a variety of

forms in order to become part of society's larger dialogue." According to a study by Samadee Saray, Chivoine Peou, and Lyda Chea (2010) on the motivations for using social media in Cambodia, Cambodian Facebook users are more inclined to using social media for the purposes of socialization, friendship maintaining, and information seeking. A later study by Sovannara Chan (in this publication) on the use of social media for political participation confirms that users are less interested in using them for more serious, engaging and critical purposes.

In this sense, the ability of many readers to judge and make sense of the online news they expose to is relatively low. As observed, some readers comment and share any news they think interesting or eye catchy, but fail to assess whether the news is trustworthy or one-sided and whether it is just a rumor or a promotional piece. While some information is misleading, the inability to make sense of the news and evaluate the hidden agenda behind it may cause chaos both in the digital and real world. In some cases, a piece of information can stir online conflicts ranging from the use of impolite comments to curse or even verbal threats. Consequently, these acts may lower the level of morality and civility not only on the online platform but also in real life. In worse instances, some online information even contains inciting motive which can lead those who involve in the act of sharing or reposting it face legal charges. So it is crucial that online audience has better skills in reading any piece of news or information they receive and, at the same time, critically question what they are reading or seeing before they comment on, share or repost it.

CONCLUSION

It is good to see that many different news websites exist, and news or information is shared to a wider audience via social media like Facebook and Twitter. In a broader image multimedia and online journalism in Cambodia is a prevalent trend. Although many of the news websites are not doing it in the right ways, online journalism has become a good platform, to some extent, to enable broader public discussion as well as civic engagement. Online journalism has brought the issues in contemporary Cambodia to be better known and actively discussed with different stakeholders involved although currently the entertaining news or information is exceeding the quality one.

At the same time, we must admit that a more ethical and professional practice of multimedia and online journalism is required to guarantee a much better engagement and respect for journalism as a profession. As a movement to a more democratic society needs a more professional and responsible press, media institutions should consider doing multimedia and online journalism in the right ways with the right transitional pace given the opportunities and challenges it offers. They should be aware of the challenges they are facing and be able to transform them into opportunities for themselves as well as for journalism as a profession.

Moreover, those online news institutions should keep a balance between marketing and news values by understanding that targeting too much on marketing to boost the revenue from the sites will produce a negative impact on the news values and destroy trust from the audience on the media institutions. This will also surely lower the country's quality of journalism which has already been rated negatively in the past decades. It is best to do it not only to just fit the trend but also to make the most of multimedia and online journalism to enhance professionalism and value in the media institutions. Or else it will become trivial.

Another important issue is media literacy among online news consumers. Since many of them have quite limited skills to critically assess news and make sense of the news they read, they are likely to cause certain online conflicts. Media literacy campaigns or training should be implemented to make sure that audience is able to comb out misinformation and distinguish facts from rumor and propaganda as well as to make the best use of the news they are exposed to. At least they can make a more-informed decision after reading the online news and have a sound judgment of what they read before sharing or commenting on it. Although it takes time and requires a great effort, doing so would gradually improve media literacy as well as promote professional journalistic practice among Cambodian media.

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