THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICAL SPACE

Verifying and Contextualizing Predictors of Online Political Engagement In Cambodia

Introduction

The internet and social media has allowed people to consume more political news and be aware of domestic and international political developments through more readily available access to information and networks (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram provide a platform for people to consume politics and interact with. It is especially critical for citizens in authoritarian countries to participate in politics, especially in a setting with limited open media and civil society (Khondker, 2011). The internet and social media have played significant roles in many major political movements in the 21st century, serving as a popular medium for communication and the rapid dispersion of information. The Arab Spring was a movement across the Middle East and North Africa that included protests and uprisings calling for dismantling corrupt and authoritarian governments. It saw social media utilized as a tool to accelerate mobilization efforts by formulating networks and organizing gatherings (Frangonikolopoulos & Chapsos, 2012). Similarly, the Milk Tea Alliance, which started as a meme on the internet in response to Chinese nationalist commentary on social media, eventually turned into an online protest movement against authoritarianism across East and Southeast Asia (Huang & Svetanant, 2022; Schaffar & Praphakorn, 2021).

These two examples reveal that the online sphere and the political space have become increasingly intertwined, making them relevant and timely topics of study. The popularization of the internet and social media for political communication has enabled the swift formation of mass networks and information dispersion and allows for the transcending of geographical barriers. These advantages of social media use make it desirable and, in some instances, the only means for people in repressive regimes to receive political news and express their political views.

The aim of this study is to investigate how social and political factors affect online political engagement in Cambodia. To achieve this, the author will first review the existing literature on determinants of online political engagement in Cambodia and develop a theoretical framework for the study's design by selecting key factors as determinants. Then, an analysis will be conducted on how the determinants identified in the literature review influence online political engagement. Lastly, interview data and further literature will be used to validate and contextualize the findings from the analysis.

Theoretical Overview & Literature Review

Defining Online Political Engagement

The definition of online political engagement remains a contested topic among scholars (Ruess et al., 2023). Friess et al., (2021) highlight the ongoing debate over what constitutes true engagement in the digital political sphere. Some researchers assert that online political participation necessitates active involvement, such as sharing opinions, creating content, and engaging in discussions. This perspective emphasizes the role of expressive activities as the key indicator of online political engagement. Meanwhile, some scholars extend their measurements of online political engagement to include sharing and liking political content on social media (Chunly, 2021). Others argue that simply consuming political content, such as reading articles, watching videos, or following political discussions, is sufficient to be considered politically engaged online, accounting for passive forms of engagement that may still influence political opinions and behaviors (Christy, 1987; Casteltrione, 2015). Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that in studying online political engagement, definitions of political engagement have to be dynamic to accommodate pragmatic considerations such as available data and theoretical considerations (Dayican, 2014; Hargittai, 2020).

Observations of expressing political opinions online may be limited in the context of authoritarian regimes, as it can entail significant risks (Weeks et al., 2024). Therefore, a broader definition of online political engagement is appropriate in the context of this study, Cambodia. This study will investigate both consumption and expression as facets of online political participation by operating under the following working definition: *"Online political participation" is the act of consuming political information or expressing one's political views on the internet or social media.*

Cambodian Politics and the Rise of Online Political Engagement Discourse

Cambodia, under the rule of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), has been identified as an electoral authoritarian country by many scholars and members of the media (Hyde et al., 2023; McCargo, 2005; Morgenbesser, 2019). The CPP has long used legal tactics, harassment, and targeted violence against traditional media and opposition parties to undermine democratic governance and ensure their continued rule (Giry, 2015; Ledgerwood, 1996; Un, 2011). They experienced landslide victories in the 1998, 2003, and 2008 National Assembly Elections. However, in the 2013 election, the CPP won only 68 of the 125 available seats. The opposition party, the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), secured 55 seats, which had major implications as it meant that the CPP no longer had the two-thirds majority required to amend the constitution.

The popularization of social media, particularly Facebook, has been identified as a significant factor in enabling a strong opposition movement against the CPP (Finsen, 2015; Kimseng, 2014). During the campaign period, approximately 1 million people signed up for Facebook. This development is noteworthy for two main demographic reasons. Firstly, the majority of Cambodian voters are youth, who have expressed dissatisfaction with the CPP's

practices of corruption, nepotism, and cronyism, leading to social inequalities and limited opportunities (Un, 2015). Although these practices have long been associated with the CPP's rule, it was not until 2013 that the youth began voting against the CPP. Several explanations have been proposed for this shift. One explanation is the demographic change, with over 50% of eligible voters being under 25 in 2013, making the political activity of these young voters a driving force of opposition to the CPP. Additionally, it is argued that the youth are no longer apathetic towards the CPP (Un, 2015). A survey indicated that 55.24 percent of youth with Facebook accounts support the CNRP, while only 6.67 percent support the CPP (Thun, 2014). Facebook usage allows youth to access and share political, social, and economic news online. However, leaked surveys by an Israeli consulting group found that most 18 to 29-year-olds support Hun Sen and the CPP, while more 30 to 39-year-olds support the CNRP and Sam Rainsy (Young, 2021).

The presence of widely adopted use of social media also addresses the long-standing urban-rural division in Cambodia pertaining to information access. Scholars have documented independent media's role in informing rural Cambodians of political, economic, and social developments. Beban et al. (2019) point to the role of non-state-controlled media such as the Cambodia Daily, The Phnom Penh Post, and Radio Free Asia as critical players in the dispersion of information to rural areas of Cambodia through radio. Social media also serves as another avenue for these independent media outlets to disperse their information. With access to this information through the internet, rural Cambodians have become aware of the movements of the urban poor and contribute to the opposition movement (Hughes & Eng, 2019). Scholars agree that it has bridged the urban-rural divide in Cambodia, enabling rural people access to political information and providing a platform to express their political opinions. The gap in smartphone and internet access between urban and rural areas has also been narrowing (Phong et al., 2016).

Recognizing the potential of the online space for disseminating information and shaping discourse, as well as the opposition's effective use of it (Kimseng, 2014), the CPP has also implemented its own strategies for using the online space to reach voters and promote its image. (Norén-Nilsson, 2021) identified Fresh News, an online media outlet, as an "authoritarian innovation" as it plays a role in the dissemination of pro-CPP information. While the truthfulness of the media outlet can be questioned, the author argues that it has supported and legitimized the CPP's authoritarian practices. A study of Hun Sen's Facebook activities by (Doyle, 2021) also reveals that the ruling party has utilized social media for the construction of political narratives to support the incumbent party. He concludes that the narratives circulated online by the former Prime Minister are reminders to the public of his efforts that brought the nation to its current state of peace, development, and prosperity. In addition to utilizing the online political space, the CPP has also made attempts to manipulate the media space. In 2017, the Cambodian Daily, which was one of the last standing independent print newspapers in Cambodia, was forced to shut down due to a six million US Dollar tax bill (Paddock, 2017). Nevertheless, efforts to restrict media space by the CPP propelled social media forward as a critical space for political information sharing and critical expression (Young, 2021).

The subject of online political engagement in Cambodia and globally has evidently become a prominent focus of academic research. However, there has been limited discourse on the determinants influencing this engagement. Sereyvicheth Chunly is the only scholar who has produced such a study on this topic. However, the scope of that study was limited to only within Phnom Penh, the capital city, and restricted to Facebook. Therefore, a gap in the literature exists on evaluating determinants of online political engagement on a nationwide scale.

Methods & Data

This study employs a mixed-methods design to explore online political engagement in Cambodia. Initially, a quantitative analysis of determinants of online political engagement is conducted by (1) visualizing the frequency of online political engagement by age and location through clustered bar graphs to explore the distribution of the dependent variables and how responses vary between age and location (Zinovyev, 2010). Then, a regression is conducted to further investigate the significance of the relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. Furthermore, regression analysis allows for the inclusion of more independent variables in a single model. While it cannot consider all potential factors influencing the likelihood of online political engagement, it allows us to investigate what the literature suggests is most important simultaneously. Since the responses to the questions above were coded on a Likert scale, ordinal regression is the most appropriate method to investigate the relationship between the factors outlined above and the political space. This will account for the ordered ranking of the dependent variables. Furthermore, a qualitative approach in the form of in-depth, semi-structured interviews was then utilized to support the quantitative analysis. Insights from the interviewees provide the chance to validate inferences made from the quantitative findings, challenge misleading interpretations of the data, and contextualize the findings within the norms and practices of Cambodian society (Ruark & Fielding-Miller, 2016).

Wave 4 Asian Barometer Survey

This study relied on data from the 4th wave of the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS Wave 4), the most recent survey that includes data gathered from Cambodia. The survey, organized by the National Taiwan University, was administered by the Center for Advanced Studies in Cambodia between October and November 2015. This time period encompassed many significant political developments in Cambodia, such as the aftermath of the 2013 Cambodian General

Elections, the 2013-2014 mass protests, and the order of Sam Rainsy's arrests. The survey gathered public opinion data concerning political attitudes and socio-demographic data among 1200 respondents from all 25 provinces aged 18 and above (Center for Advanced Studies, 2017). The characteristics of online political space engagement are measured through the following questions:

- Consume: How often do you use the Internet or social media networks to find information about politics and government?
- Express: How often do you use the Internet or social media networks to express your opinion about politics and government?

The dependent variables are ordinal and are on a Likert scale, where 1 = Everyday, 2 = Several times a week, 3 = Once or twice a week, 4 = Once or twice a month, 5 = One or twice a year, and 6 = practically never. The data was filtered to include only respondents who have access to the internet and chose a response, resulting in a final sample size of N = 199 for Consume and N = 198 for Express. The following tables present summary statistics for consume and express. It should be noted that the specific definition of expressing opinion about politics and government is not specified.

51. How often do you use the Internet or social media networks to find information about politics and government?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Everyday	68	5.6	28.1	28.1
	Several times a week	40	3.3	16.5	44.6
	Once or twice a week	46	3.9	19.3	63.9
	A few times a month	31	2.6	13.0	76.9
	A few times a year	8	.7	3.3	80.2
	Practically never	48	4.0	19.8	100.0
	Total	241	20.0	100.0	
Missing	Not applicable	959	80.0		
Total		1200	100.0		

52. How often do you use the Internet or social media networks to express your opinion about politics and government?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Everyday	11	.9	4.5	4.5
	Several times a week	7	.6	3.0	7.5
	Once or twice a week	11	.9	4.5	12.0
	A few times a month	9	.8	3.8	15.8
	A few times a year	11	.9	4.6	20.4
	Practically never	191	15.9	79.6	100.0
	Total	240	20.0	100.0	
Missing	Not applicable	959	80.0		
	Can't choose	1	.1		
	Total	960	80.0		
Total		1200	100.0		

The independent variables investigated were common factors mentioned in relation to the online political space engagement in Cambodia: age, the urban-rural divide, internet usage, political affiliation, and political interest (Becheri et al., 2022; Quintelier & Theocharis, 2013)

Moreover, region and gender are included as control variables to account for variations across regions and genders and improve the model's fit.

Initially, clustered bar graphs are created to explore the insights the ABS Wave 4 provides on the online political space in Cambodia. They show how online political consumption and expression vary across ages and levels. The age groups assigned are 18 to 29, 30 to 49, and 50 above. Meanwhile, the level follows the survey's classification of urban and rural areas. This will create visual observations of the relationship between our independent and dependent variables, allowing for the formation of a preliminary understanding of how age and location affect online political engagement. To adjust for errors in sampling distributions, the weight factor included within the dataset was applied to adjust for over-sampling or under-sampling of certain groups.

In-depth Semi Structured Interviews

Additional data was obtained for this study through face-to-face interviews in Phnom Penh on July 31st, 2024, with two individuals who hold high leadership positions in organizations whose work involves political research and advocacy. These individuals include the director of a foreign-based political foundation and a director of a Cambodian-based think tank that analyzes policy challenges to topics such as civic engagement, youth, and new technologies. The interviewees were first asked questions about the online political space in Cambodia, including their general assessment of the internet and social media usage in Cambodia for political engagement, how they would describe the openness of the online political space in Cambodia today, and what they think are the main challenges faced by Cambodian citizens when using the Internet for political engagement. They were then presented with key findings from the data analysis and then asked about their impressions of it and if they were surprised by the findings. Lastly, one question was asked pertaining to the insights the interviewees may have given the roles they possess in their

organizations. Follow-up questions were asked appropriately for the interviewees to expand on or clarify their points.

The interviews were recorded, with a duration of 30 minutes and 35 minutes. The interviews were then transcribed with oTranscribe, a free online transcription software, with the transcriptions' accuracy verified by checking with the recordings. Each transcript was then analyzed to identify mentions of key factors relating to the independent variables investigated in the quantitative analysis – providing critical data points to use as verification. Moreover, the in-depth nature of interview responses provides insights and detail, which will guide the contextualization of the findings from conducting the quantitative analysis.

Results

Online Political Space Engagement Across Age Groups and Locations

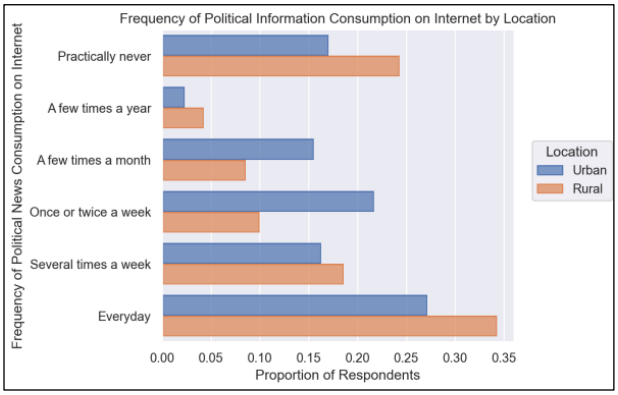

Fig. 1. Frequency of political consumption on the internet by location.

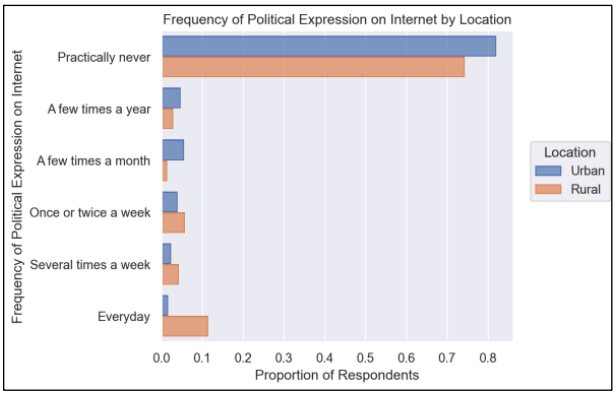

Fig. 2. Frequency of political expression on the internet by location.

Figure 1 reveals respondents' frequency of using the Internet or social media networks to find information about politics and government by location. Interestingly, respondents from rural areas have the highest proportion who consume everyday and several times a week, at about 34% and 18%, respectively. However, the proportion of rural respondents who responded practically never (17%) is less than that of urban respondents by 7%. A significantly greater proportion of urban respondents infrequently use the internet to consume information about politics and

government. Figure 2 shows that overall, the majority of respondents do not express their opinions about politics and government frequently. However, we can visually observe a significant difference between the proportion of urban and rural respondents who express their opinions about politics and government on a daily basis. This supports the findings of (Hughes & Eng, 2019), who argue that the use of the internet for political information sharing and mobilization spans the urban-rural divide.

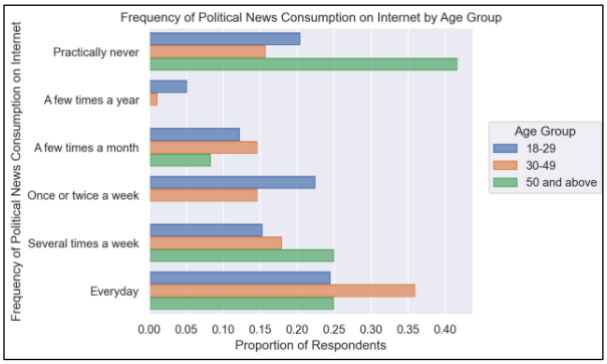

Fig. 3. Frequency of political consumption on the internet by age group.

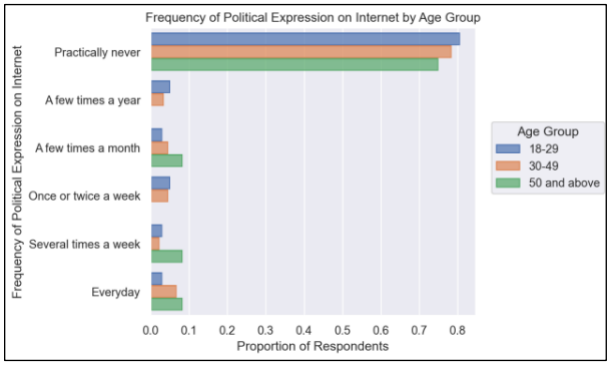

Fig. 4. Frequency of political expression on the internet by age group.

Figure 3 depicts the respondent's frequency of using the Internet or social media networks to find information about politics and government by age group. The 30 to 49 age group has the highest proportion of everyday consumption, around 36%, and the lowest proportion of practically never, about 16%. The 50 and above age group mostly responded practically never (around 42%), but about 25% use the internet for political information every day or several times a week. The 18 to 29 age group has the lowest proportion of everyday use, around 24%, but higher proportions for a few times a year, a few times a month, and once or twice a week compared to older groups. The middle age group appears to use the Internet or social media networks to find information about politics and government most frequently. The oldest age group, those aged 50 and above, appear to either consume political information online frequently or practically never. While young people, 18 to 29 year-olds are more spread out in terms of frequency of online political information

consumption. Similarly to the observations made in Figure 2, Figure 4 reveals that the majority of respondents across all three age groups practically never use the internet to express their opinions about politics and government. However, it can be observed that a larger proportion of those aged 50 and above express their opinions frequently, while the youngest group expresses them least frequently. This challenges the conventional literature, which suggests that youth are the main actors in the online political space (e.g., Chan, 2015; Un, 2015; Vong & Hok, 2018). While the youth may comprise the majority of internet users in Cambodia and are also those who use it with the most frequency, it does not entail that their online activity is political.

Modeling Determinants of Online Political Engagement

The ordinal regression analysis expands on the observations made in the previous section while also accounting for more factors. In this section, the association between online political engagement and other social factors, including gender, education, income, and frequency of internet use, will be investigated. In addition, political factors such as the party people feel closest to and their interest in politics will also be investigated.

*Table 4: Frequency of internet or social media use **to find information** about politics and government*

Variable	B	Exp(B)
Region (compared with coastal)		
Tonle Sap	1.071**	2.917**
Phnom Penh	0.456	1.578
Central Plain	0.717*	2.048*
Plateau/Highland	0.600	1.822
Social Factors		
Location (compared with urban)		
Rural	– 0.354	0.702
Gender (compared with female)		
Male	0.017	1.017
Age Group (compared with 50 and above)		
18 – 29	– 1.368*	0.255*

30 – 49	– 1.610*	0.200*
Education	– 0.080***	0.923***
Income (compared with highest quantile)		
First quantile	0.662*	1.939*
Second quantile	0.792*	2.207*
Third quantile	0.723*	2.06*
Fourth Quantile	0.805*	2.236*
Frequency of Internet Use	0.207**	1.230**
Political Factors		
Party Feel Closest To (compared with none)		
CPP	-0.072	0.930
CNRP	-0.179	0.836
Interest In Politics (Compared with not at all interested)		
Very interested	–1.276***	0.279***
Somewhat interested	– 0.921***	0.398***
Not very interested	– 0.897***	0.408***

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4 reveals several key insights into the factors influencing online political consumption. In terms of social factors, notably, location and gender do not have a significant relationship with the likelihood of consuming political information online. However, relative to those aged 50 and above, individuals aged 30-47 are 5% more likely than those aged 18-29 to engage in online political consumption. Educational attainment positively correlates with online political consumption, indicating that individuals with more years of education are more likely to consume political content on the internet. Interestingly, income has an inverse relationship with online political consumption, with the exception of the second quantile, which has the second highest likelihood of online political consumption. Higher income levels are generally associated with a decreased likelihood of consuming politics online. Furthermore, more frequent internet usage is linked to increased consumption of political information. Party closeness does not emerge as a significant predictor in this context. Finally, a greater interest in politics significantly increases

the likelihood of frequently consuming political news via the internet, underscoring the importance of political interest as a driving factor in online political engagement.

*Table 5: Frequency of internet or social media use **to express opinions** about politics and government*

Variable	B	Exp(B)
Region (compared with coastal)		
Tonle Sap	1.051*	2.860*
Phnom Penh	– 0.032	0.968
Central Plain	0.388	1.474
Plateau/Highland	– 0.159	0.853
Social Factors		
Location (compared with urban)		
Rural	– 0.008	0.992
Gender (compared with female)		
Male	– 0.512	0.599
Age Group (compared with 50 and above)		
18 – 29	– 0.580	0.560
30 – 49	– 0.389	0.678
Education	– 0.15	0.985
Income (compared with highest quantile)		
First quantile	0.515	1.674
Second quantile	0.491	1.633
Third quantile	0.770*	2.159*
Fourth Quantile	0.858*	2.359*
Frequency of Internet Use	0.422**	1.526**
Political Factors		
Party Feel Closest To (compared with none)		
CPP	– 0.294	0.746
CNRP	– 0.635*	0.530*
Interest In Politics (Compared with not at all interested)		
Very interested	– 1.189*	0.304*
Somewhat interested	– 1.471**	0.230**
Not very interested	– 1.137*	0.321*

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

On the other hand, Table 5 reveals how the same factors influence the likelihood of expressing political opinions online. Once again, it is location and gender do not have a significant relationship with online political expression, and neither does age or education, as their influence is no longer significant. Interestingly, higher income levels are associated with a lower likelihood of expressing political opinions on the internet, although the first and second income quantiles are statistically insignificant in this regard. Similarly to the findings for online political expression, more frequent internet use is positively correlated with a greater likelihood of expressing political opinions online. Political affiliation plays a significant role when looking at online political expression, with those feeling closest to the CNRP being more likely to express their political opinions online compared to those who do not feel close to any party. Closeness to the CPP, however, is observed not to be statistically significant. Additionally, individuals who are somewhat interested in politics are more likely to express their political opinions online compared to those with different levels of interest by about 10 percent, with this relationship also being more statistically significant.

Validation and Contextualization of Quantitative Findings

This section will highlight insights from the interviews on the two major observations made in the quantitative analysis. Firstly, the contrast between the frequency of consuming political information online and the frequency of expressing opinions about politics online, and secondly, key findings on the relationship between social and political factors and online political engagement. However, the ability of the qualitative data to attest to the second observation is limited by the topics talked about in the interviews. Therefore, only education, age, and party closeness are discussed in this section.

Both interviewees' initial impressions of the discrepancy between the greater frequency of using the Internet and social media to consume information about politics and expressing their opinions about politics were similar. One interviewee, whose educational training is in sociology, emphasized that consumption is an inherently natural act that humans perform, whereas expressing one's opinion requires learning and practice. The same thinking is applicable to the analysis of online political engagement. Although consuming political information and expressing political views online can both be used to measure online political engagement, they cannot be considered equal measurements of it due to the differing circumstances that enable them to occur.

> *"We don't have to learn to consume. We have to learn how to express. So to me, it's not very surprising that there's divergence between how I consume political information and how I express my opinion, because it's very easy to consume, but I need to learn how to express right?"*

Just as school is an important place for knowledge acquisition to occur, it is also an important place where values and psychological attitudes are developed. While skills learned in school, such as literacy and digital skills, can equip people with the ability to consume information, it does not necessarily mean that those skills will translate directly to the expression of opinions. The education system in which people are brought up can shape their behaviors towards certain topics, especially when it comes to sensitive matters such as politics. If the learning environment encourages students to think critically and voice their own opinions, then it can be expected that students will feel more comfortable in doing so and do it more frequently. On the contrary, if the learning environment discourages or even punishes a student's expression of their opinion, such as the interviewee suspects is the case in Cambodia, then the opposite outcome is to be expected.

You have one person in front who tells you what the truth is, and then you follow. Now, there's not a lot of opinion developing happening if you just listen to a person, and if your entire education is based off listening to a person and then accepting this, what the person is saying, you don't really increase the incentives of developing your own opinion. So I would say it really boils down to your educational system.

Beyond explaining the difference in the frequency with which people use the Internet to consume political information and express political opinions, the interview's discussion of the role of education also provides insight into why higher levels of educational attainment do not significantly correlate with expressing political opinions. A greater education level being positively correlated with a greater frequency of expressing political opinions online requires the assumption someone who is knowledgeable about a political topic and has an opinion about it would share it and that they are an internet user. The ordinal regression model already accounts for the second condition of this assumption by limiting the data to only those with internet access. However, perhaps assuming that someone would share an opinion they have about a political matter is incorrect.

They [the relationship between higher education levels and expressing opinion about politics online] appear valid if you would like to make the argument that education is important to reflect on political information. Yes, it is more certainly, but I think it would be a mistake to think that just because I can reflect on political information, I would act upon it logically.

One reason someone may choose not to share the opinion they have is due to the self-censorship that occurs from the perceived and potentially immanent threats and risks that may

arise (Ong, 2021). Given that Cambodian society observed political violence in the aftermath of the increasing threat to the incumbent CPP government by the opposition party, CNRP, Cambodians could have been deterred from voicing their political opinions. Although the internet and social media serve as a place where people can operate under anonymity, the main use of social media for socializing means that the identity of users and their networks become identifiable. While this puts into question the validity of the finding that those who feel closest to the CNRP are more likely to express their political opinions online compared to those who do not feel close to any party, an extensive body of literature acknowledges the role of social media for CNRP supporters to express their support. Moreover, given that the data is from 2015, which marked only the beginning of greater internet use in Cambodia, awareness surrounding risks associated with sharing political opinions online was not widespread. This led one interviewee to suggest that the internet was a much more open space, and therefore more opposition activity was observed in the digital sphere.

> *…back then the internet thing was, it was really the beginning of the internet thing. So people themselves will not really need to consider the consequences. For instance, everyone was like into the internet. They trying to do whatever they can do, what they want to do, without thinking of the political repercussion. Even the government [CPP] themselves back then was also learning about the internet, about this digital political space. So they were not, they were not yet capable of, let's say, from a political perspective, controlling it yet. They were not yet ready to, so that meant the space back then was more favorable for people to express themselves.*

The quantitative findings related to age challenge the existing literature that youth are the main drivers of online political engagement. In both measurements, the youngest group

(aged 18 – 29) was less likely to engage in the online political space compared to the middle-aged group (30 – 49). One explanation is that youth are using the internet for different purposes other than to engage in politics. A report from 2016 indicated that over three-quarters of Cambodians said that the main purpose of using the internet is for entertainment (Phong et al., 2016). While the report did not break down the responses by age, empirical observations by the author, supported by literature (e.g. Vong & Hok, 2018), suggest that the largest proportion of social media users are youth. Hence, it is within reason to argue that just because youth are the most active online, they are not politically active online. Another explanation offered by one of the interviewees regards the cultural context of Cambodian society, emphasizing the role that political culture plays in determining political behavior.

> *… they are, to a certain extent, constrained by lots of cultural barriers. So cultural barriers, I refer to the kinds of social expectations of use when it comes to political engagement. When it comes to voicing your own opinions on the performance of those who are of older age, for instance. So that means young people tend to be very reserved when it comes to expressing themselves in publics and in front of older people, not to mention on the on the topics that are the result of older people's actions or decisions.*

Conclusion

This study reveals a distinct difference between political consumption and expression online. Consuming political content does not necessarily translate to expressing political opinions. Consumption is an inherently natural act, while expression involves active participation. For individuals to express their political views online, they need to feel encouraged and safe and must have been taught how to express their opinions. This differentiation underscores the complexity of examining determinants of online political engagement.

When examining the determinants of political engagement, the findings show mixed alignment with existing literature and societal observations. In terms of consumption, the expected urban-rural divide in online political consumption has dissipated. Political interest remains a strong predictor of political consumption. However, contrary to some expectations, the youngest age group is not the most likely to consume political content online. In terms of expression, the findings are more consistent with existing literature and societal observations. CNRP supporters were notably expressive online, particularly significant given the context of 2015.

Several limitations constrain this study. Firstly, the dataset is limited in size, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the data represents a single point in time, limiting the ability to observe trends or changes over time. Moreover, the study did not include interviews with ordinary citizens, which could have provided valuable qualitative insights into the motivations behind online political engagement. Finally, the clarity of the questions posed to respondents was not always certain, suggesting that further study is needed to refine these questions and ensure they capture the accurate the study's measurements of online political engagement.

For future research, the author recommends an in-depth analysis of the links between region, income, and other socio-demographic factors and online political engagement. Such a study would provide a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between these factors and online political behavior. They also recommend developing the design into a longitudinal study in order to investigate the relationship between increased internet use and online political engagement. This will allow for a close examination of the role of the digital transformation in shaping the political space in Cambodia.

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