A Study of Effect of SNS News Consumption on Social Engagement and Government Transparency in Cambodia

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Abstract

SNS is perceived as an effective tool for sharing news and enabling news content to reach many more users than before. And some users think that SNS is an important source to get news. This study's purpose is to understand the key factors contributing to behavior of news consumption on social network sites in Cambodia and its influence. We identified three key factors including convenience, recency, and variety; however, recency showed less significant effect on news consumption on SNS. Besides the key factors, it also seeks to understand the impact of news consumption on social engagement and government's transparency in Cambodia. The analytical results achieved through the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach.

Keywords : SNS News Consumption, Social Engagement, Government Transparency, Convenience, Recency, Variety

1. Introduction

While young people believe that being informed about current events is important, the traditional news formats such as newspapers, radio, and TV seem in less favor among them. Instead, young people get much of their news from their social networks [Marchi, 2012]. According to Mitchell et al. [2013], some people said Facebook, the largest SNS, is a crucial source of getting news because they do not have time to keep up with the news on a bunch of different locations. As the site exposes more people to news, the more time one spends on the site, the more likely they are to get news there [Mitchell et al., 2013].

The boom of SNS is undoubtedly related to Web 2.0, the second phase in the Web's evolution which allows users not only to access to content of Web sites but also create content, i.e. user-generated content [Murugesan, 2007]. News organizations use SNS for sharing news, enabling media content to reach many more users than before, which makes media consumption habit in SNS becoming so significant [Urban, 2012]. SNS is also proved to be an effective tool to organize social activism and public as it allows information to be shared instantly by and with anyone with access to the technology [CCHR, 2012].

In Cambodia, which was marked as 'partly free' for the Freedom on The Net in 2014 [House, 2014], there are 3.80 million of Internet users. Almost 50% of Internet users have Facebook accounts, and there are 1,100 people joining Facebook every day (Social Media Cambodia).

The dissemination of news content on the Internet has increased remarkably as a large number of independent Cambodia news websites and radio stations use social media platforms and websites such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube to spread their news and programs [CCHR, 2012]. Not only media organization, but also human rights organizations make extensive use of Facebook, and use the website to spread news and information about social issues or to inform people about their work, including publishing statements and reports [CCHR, 2012]. This heavy consumption of SNS for news could be the result of heavy and strict control of traditional media, namely print media, radio and television, by the government [CCHR, 2012]. Clearly, the Arab Spring heralded a new dawn for the use of social media as a tool, not only to participate in politics, but also to drive democratic reform [CCHR, 2012].

This study can be considered as an initial study that aims to identify the key factors that encourage Cambodian users to consume news through social network sites, particularly Facebook. Added, this study also seeks to understand the influence of consuming news behavior on social network sites.

Based on literature review, we identified three key factors including convenience, recency, and variety as antecedent variables of SNS news consumptions. Also, we inferred that SNS news consumption enhances social engagement and government's transparency in Cambodia.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. It begins with literature review. Next, it introduces research model and hypotheses.

And then, it presents research method, followed by the analysis of the data. Discussion and conclusion appear in the last part.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Network Sites and News Consumption on Them

Social Network Sites (SNSs) are the web-based services that allow users to create their own public or semi-public profiles and share connection with other users within a bounded system [Ellison, 2007]. The both terms "network" and "networking" are often used interchangeably, where the difference is "networking" emphasizes relationship initiation, often between strangers while this is not the primary practice on many of social network sites [Ellison, 2007].

Some of the leading social network sites accumulate users actively interacting every month ranging from million to billion. In case of Twitter [Twitter, 2015], there are 302 million monthly active users and 500 million Tweets being sent per day. Facebook holds the largest number of 1.44 billion monthly active users (MAUs) and on average of 936 million daily active users (DAUs) [Newswire, 2015]. Average time spent on Facebook per visit is 18 minutes and average number of friends per Facebook user is 130 [Brain, 2014]. Each user has an average number of pages, groups, and events connected to is 80 [Brain, 2014].

In today generation, getting news in different forms is essential. Young people have an interest in current events but find newspapers and TV news boring [Marchi, 2012]. They prefer getting news via cell phone texts, email, social networking sites, and conversations with friends and family [Marchi, 2012]. Being the largest social networking site, Facebook has many services provided to users. Distributing news is one of Facebook services as Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook, announced making Facebook the fresh newspaper [I&B, 2013]. Facebook enables audiences and media to interact in new ways, while it is also capable of distributing news so media can reach a wider audience [Urban, 2012; Hille et al., 2013].

2.2 Convenience

Convenience, which refers to reduction in time and effort [Farquhar et al., 2009], has been seen as a common key characteristic in other online business such as Internet Shopping [Gupta et al., 2010]. Same with online news context, convenience is one of the primary factors encouraging people to consume news on SNS. Many people consume news online because the ability to find things faster [Ahlers, 2006] and the organization of information and archives that lets users easily look back at past articles [Marchi, 2012]. Precisely, as mentioned by Mark Zuckerberg making Facebook the fresh newspaper, followed by the introduction of Hashtags [I&B, 2013], which help people more easily discover specific event currently happening or topic other people are talking about and participate in public conversation [Lindley, 2013]. Furthermore, Facebook provides users a way to form their favorite news organization pages into a list as demonstrated in <Figure 1> and <Figure 2>. The accumulation of pages helps users to easily and quickly see all content from those news organizations.
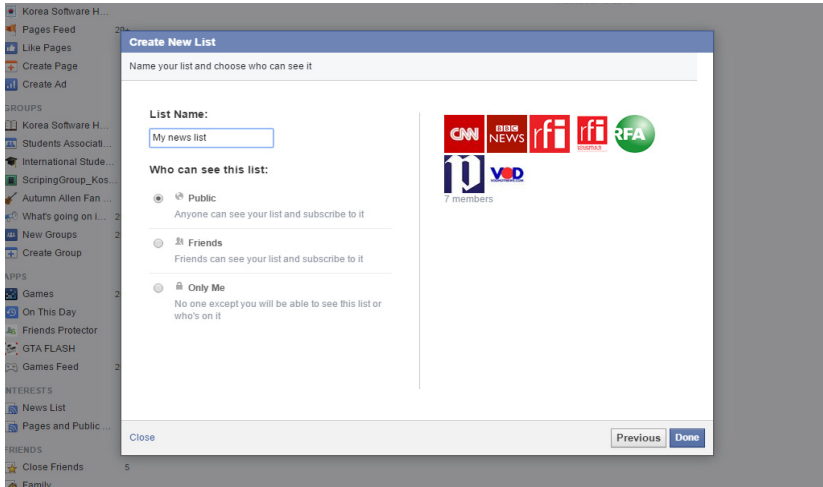
⟨Figure 1⟩ Creating a List with Seven News Pages, May 19, 2015
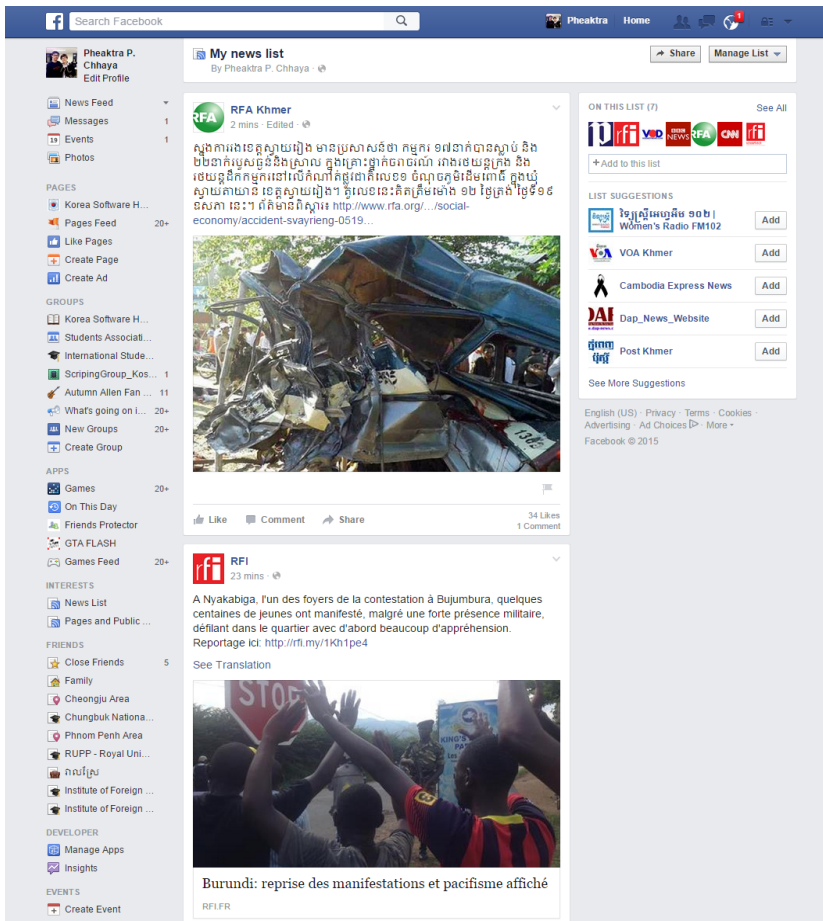
⟨Figure 2⟩ Contents from all News Pages in the Newly Created List, May 19, 2015

2.3 Recency of News

We identified recency of news as the second factor that motivates people to consume news on SNS. Recency is defined by Wiktionary as "*the property of being recent, newness.*" To put it explicitly, recency of news refers to the breaking news; it describes the news contents that are exposed to the news consumers instantly as the event has just happened or is currently happening.

Internet is a primary source to get breaking news. A majority of online news readers stated that they checked the web daily for breaking news [Adams, 2007]. While SNS is serving as a tool to get news, most of the time, news on SNS is broadcasted faster than on news sites themselves. For instance, Ms. Randi Zuckerberg stated in an interview conducted by O'Connor [2009], "*On many days, I hear about the current events because my Facebook friends will post articles and write thoughts about it … even before I discover it from a news site.*" From what mentioned above, SNS is an effective aid for news consumers to getting breaking news.

2.4 Variety of Sources

Last but not least, another primary factor of consuming news on SNS is variety of sources. It refers to the accumulation of different news, from different sources. People would like to get news, politics, current events, and important topics on a site they are already on, like Facebook, rather than travelling off to another site if they are already on Facebook engaging with friends and doing other things [O'Connor, 2009].

Moreover, online news also shows the different viewpoints on the same topics. As one study found [Marchi, 2012], teens like how comments on online news exposed them to a variety of opinions, both good and bad, that helped them form their own opinions. Another study reported that [Westling, 2007] the vast majority of information on Facebook comes from some other locations and Facebook's role is to provide a means to share information through a single network.

In addition, news does not come from only the news organizations, but also each individual who is using SNS. Again, as mentioned above by Ms. Randi Zuckerberg, she knew about current events from her Facebook friends who post articles or thoughts about the current events. Another example of disseminating news by individuals is after the national 2013 election in Cambodia, many users spread videos and information of voting fraud on social networking sites [House, 2014].

Indeed, in the book 'The wisdom of crowds', Surowiecki [2005] noted that the Internet is the great source because it aggregates information from many different sources. We do not always know where good information is and we may come across information in a place, possibly non-traditional location, which we never expected to find it.

2.5 Social Engagement

Among researchers, there are multiple overlapping definitions of what social engagement. Of definition of social engagement, various re-

searchers have different concepts such as "participation in formal and informal social groups" [Prohaska et al., 2012], "personal interaction and participation in social activities," "the maintenance of many social connections and a high level of participation in social activities," and "making social and emotional connection with people and the community" [Kimura et al., 2013]. In this paper, we view social engagement as participation in society and interpersonal activities with other people outside home and workplace.

In social network sites context, there are few studies digging into social engagements used by websites; however, some studies stated that they see increment of social engagement in the use of social network sites [Zhang et al., 2011, May].

One study reported that Facebook can be used to support social events in four different phases, i.e. *proposing*: discussing ideas or proposing events; scheduling: planning event, sending invitations, and checking availability; *interacting during event*: broadcasting or commenting; *post-event sharing*: uploading photos, tagging and commenting [Zhang et al., 2011, May].

An anecdotal evidence from the 2008 U.S. presidential election shows that SNS can have a prosocial effect [Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012] in the way that the Obama Campaign created an online network site, my.barackobama.com, to successfully recruit campaign volunteers from across the country.

On March 4 2011, for example, [CCHR, 2012] a public event entitled "White out the Independent Monument" was created on Facebook, in order to celebrate Cambodia's relatively free ac-

cess to the Internet in Cambodia. Despite the organizer was based in the United States and was failed to connect with the active online network within Cambodia to publicize it, some people turned up, which reflected that social engagement in Cambodia started increasing.

2.6 Government's Transparency

Government's transparency is the ability to find out what is going on inside public sector organization, i.e. government, through various ways such as open meetings, access to records, the proactive posting of information on websites, whistle-blower protections, and illegally leaked information [Piotrowski et al., 2007]. In online context, [Bertot et al., 2010] social media technologies have tremendous ability to transform governance by increasing government's transparency and its strength lies in the ability to create an immediate dialog through an interactive forum. The potential of the internet as a platform and resource for disseminating information about human rights and about violations of human rights is clear, and it also improve the transparency and accountability as people can more easily access and share information [CCHR, 2012].

Social networking sites, such as Facebook, have played a significant role in development of digital democracy. As an example in Cambodia, around the national 2013 election, online political discourse was participated by a lot of Facebook users [House, 2014]. After the election, users disseminated a lot of videos and information alleging voting fraud during the election.

3. Research Model and Hypotheses

In societies where citizens have less faith in their domestic media, they tend to seek alternative news sources such as foreign news media, social media contacts and blogs [Wolfsfeld et al., 2013]. Similarly, in Cambodia, the strict control of traditional media by the government brings citizens to heavily use SNS to consume news [CCHR, 2012].

In this study, we identified three factors encouraging people to use SNS to consume news, including convenience in accessing to news content, recency of news, and variety of news sources. Convenience provides the ability to find things faster [Ahlers, 2006] and to easily look back at past articles [Marchi, 2012]. In other online business such as Internet Shopping [Gupta et al., 2010], convenience is also a common key characteristic. Therefore, in the context of SNS news, we expect that convenience will positively influence the behavior of news consumption on SNS.

H1: Convenience to access to online news has positive effect on news consumption on SNS.

Recency of news is another factor encouraging users to consume news on SNS. Many people checked the web daily for breaking news, and, sometimes, news on SNS is broadcasted faster than on news sites. Hence, in the context of SNS news, we build upon this line of arguments and expect that recency will positively influence the behavior of news consumption on SNS.

H2: Recency of news available online has positive effect on news consumption on SNS.

Internet is the great source of information since it aggregates information from many different sources [Surowiecki, 2005]. Same with SNS news context, the news contents come from many different news organizations and users. Added, people would like getting news on the site they are already on, like Facebook, rather than travelling off to another site [O'Connor, 2009]. Hereby, we expect that variety will positively influence the behavior of news consumption on SNS.

H3: Variety of news sources available online has positive effect on news consumption on SNS.

The consumption of news on SNS lays some impacts on political issues. From Arab Spring example, social media helped spread democratic ideas across international borders and played a central role in shaping political debates [Howard et al., 2011].

In case of developing countries, especially Cambodia, we identified two remarkable impacts: social engagement and government's transparency. According to one research [Zhang et al., 2011, May], social engagement has gradually increased through the use of social network sites. SNSs can be used to support social events and call for people to join. For instance, a social event created on Facebook to celebrate the free access to the Internet in Cambodia was successful in calling for people to participate [CCHR, 2012]. Taking this argument into account, we expect that SNS news will positively influence the social engagement.

H4: News consumption on SNS positively affects social engagement.
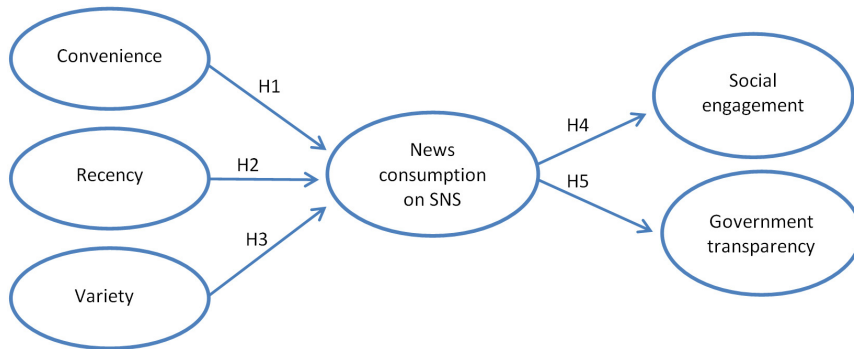
〈Figure 3〉 Research Model

Social media technologies have tremendous ability to transform governance by increasing government's transparency [Bertot et al., 2010]. Internet also improves the transparency and accountability of the government as it is capable to provide platform and resource for disseminating general information about human rights and information of human rights violations. Therefore, we expect that SNS news will positively influence the government's transparency.

H5: News consumption on SNS positively affects government transparency.

4. Research Method

Facebook is the largest social networking site in the world, and is also the most popular one in Cambodia. Almost every high school or university students has Facebook account and use it frequently. The research model was tested among Cambodian Facebook users.

4.1 Data Collection

Empirical data is required for this study. The data was collected by an online survey, which is powered by Kwiksurveys (*www.kwiksurveys.com*). The online questionnaire was conducted in Khmer (Cambodian) language, and the target respondents for this study were current Facebook users in Cambodia. The respondents voluntarily participated in filling in the questionnaire. There was no incentive or any pressure for the respondents to participate. The hyperlink to the online questionnaire was posted on the author's own Facebook timeline and in a few Facebook groups, which are made up of Cambodian users. The online questionnaire was appropriate for this study because it was free of charge, fast in responding, and convenient in collecting data. The pretest was conducted before the actual questionnaire was implemented.

The data was collected in 5-day duration from May 9th to May 13th of 2015. A total of 102 responses were obtained; 14 responses were incomplete, thus were discarded. Only 88 responses[1] were complete and used for further analysis. Looking at the proportion of respondents' gender, more than three quarters were

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1) The small size of data set leads to limitations of this study. Please refer to 'Discussion and Conclusion' section.

male. A majority of the respondents (85.23%) were between 20 and 25 years old. More than 98% of the respondents were in a university or graduated from a university. All of the respondents had experience in using Facebook for 2 years or above, and 13.64% among them had been using Facebook for more than 6 years. The duration of Facebook usage varies from user to user. 10.23% of the respondents used Facebook for only 30 minutes or less in a day; 28.41% used for around 1 hour per day; 18.18% used for around 2 hours; 15.91% used for around 3 hours; 11.36% used for around 4 hours; and another 15.91% used Facebook for 5 hours or more per day. All of the respondents sometimes or usually read news on Facebook; and more than 90% of them sometimes or usually see what

friends posted or watch videos on Facebook.

4.2 Measures

We explored how Cambodian users used Facebook to consume news with five-point Likert Scale, which is used primarily to obtain participant's preferences or degree of agreement [Bertram, 2007]. The measurement, in this research, was adapted from Ellison et al. [2006] with minor modification of the agreement level terms to fit the research context. All items of the constructs were measured on a five-point Likert Scale marked with "Disagree," "Neutral," "Agree," "Strongly Agree" and "Very Strongly Agree." All items of each construct are listed in <Table 1>.

<Table 1> Measurement Properties of Constructs of Research Model

Construct	Items	Item Loading	T-Stat.	Composite Reliability	AVE
Convenience (C)	Facebook is convenient to read news: C1: It is easy to find news on Facebook. C2: You can get news instantly as you need. C3: You think It is convenient to read news on Facebook.	0.897 0.837 0.899	22.578 13.039 37.966	0.910	0.771
Recency (R)	Facebook provides breaking news: R1: News on Facebook is instantly updated. R2: By using Facebook, you know the current events happening around you. R3: You think Facebook is a good way to get breaking news.	0.853 0.831 0.899	17.339 18.695 33.956	0.896	0.742
Variety (V)	A variety of news sources is on Facebook: V1: There are many different news sources on Facebook. V2: On Facebook, different kinds of news are available. V3: The same news from different sources is not always the same, and you can compare them.	0.854 0.846 0.715	19.289 21.782 7.975	0.848	0.652
Social Engagement (SE)	News on Facebook encourages you to engage in society: SE1: You can engage in various issues more than before. SE2: You have more opportunities to engage in society. SE3: You think news on Facebook encourages you to engage in society.	0.918 0.957 0.893	36.695 79.143 31.501	0.945	0.852
Government Transparency (GT)	With news on Facebook, government's actions become more transparent: GT1: You think government's actions become clearer. GT2: Better than before, you know what the government is doing. GT3: With Facebook, bad things in government are being cut down.	0.841 0.851 0.908	16.797 18.242 34.089	0.901	0.752
News consumption on SNS (NCS)	You prefer using Facebook to get news rather than other ways: NCS1: You prefer using Facebook to consume news rather other ways. NCS2: You think Facebook is a good way to get news. NCS3: You want to get news by using Facebook.	0.867 0.924 0.880	21.279 49.110 19.544	0.920	0.793

5. Analysis

We used Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach to estimate the research model. *Smart-PLS2.0.M3* program was used to assist our analysis. In information systems research, Partial Least Squares is a frequently used statistical technique for testing research models involving constructs measured with multiple indicators. We chose PLS for this study with the following reasons. First, PLS is a suitable method for the exploratory model that needs further verification. Second, there are no studies of effect of SNS news consumption on social engagement and government transparency, so we believe that PLS is an appropriate tool for our study.

5.1 Measurement Model

The item loadings, t-statistic value, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) of the reflective constructs are shown in <Table 1>. Convergent validity shows the extent to which the items of a scale that are theoretically related to each other should be related in reality. All item loadings are greater than 0.7, indicating convergent validity at the indicator level. All AVE values are greater than 0.5, suggesting convergent validity at the construct level. All CR values are greater than 0.7, indicting acceptable reliability.

Discriminant validity is the extent to which the measurement is not a reflection of some other variable. The square root of each AVE (shown on the diagonal in <Table 2>) in the construct correlation matrix is greater than the correlations between constructs which suggests that discriminant validity is verified.
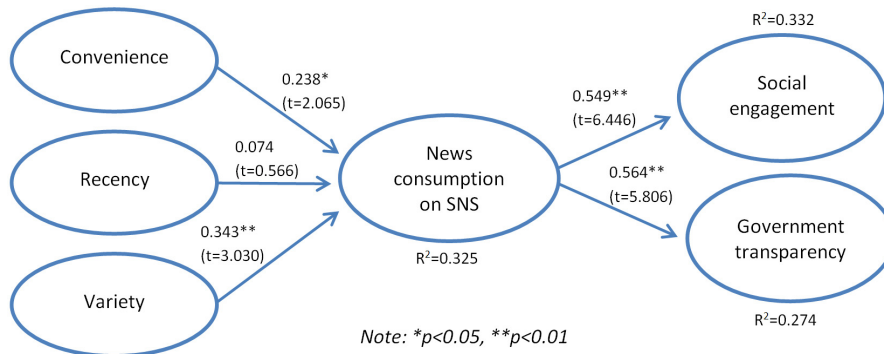
5.2 Structural Model

The results of the structural model assessment, including the estimations of the path coefficients (all significant paths are indicated with asterisks), the associated t-value of the paths, and the overall explanatory power, are shown in <Figure 4>. We run the structural model using the bootstrap resampling procedure.

According to the results in <Figure 4>, all the factors (except the recency) are the antecedents of news consumption on SNS. Both convenience and variety have strong impact on news consumption with path coefficient of 0.238 (at 0.05 significance level) and 0.343 (at 0.01 significance level) respectively. However, the

<Table 2> Correlation Matrix of the Constructs

	C	R	V	SE	GT	NCS
Convenience (C)	**0.878**	0	0	0	0	0
Recency (R)	0.649	**0.861**	0	0	0	0
Variety (V)	0.530	0.572	**0.807**	0	0	0
Social Engagement (SE)	0.502	0.534	0.554	**0.923**	0	0
Government Transparency (GT)	0.346	0.494	0.381	0.517	**0.867**	0
News consumption on SNS (NCS)	0.478	0.428	0.513	0.577	0.523	**0.891**

⟨Figure 4⟩ Results of the Research Model

recency of news does not have significant effect on news consumption. As a result, convenience and variety explain 32.5% of the variance in news consumption on SNS. In addition, news consumption on SNS shows 33.2% of the variance in social engagement with path coefficient of 0.549 (at 0.01 significance level), and 27.4% of the variance in government transparency with path coefficient of 0.564 (at 0.01 significance level).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study is to understand the key factors contributing to behavior of news consumption on social network sites and its influence on society and government in Cambodia. It first started with literature review introducing some related work to SNS, convenience, recency, variety, social engagement, and government's transparency. After that, it proposed research model and hypotheses. Next, comes the research method presenting data collection and measures. Finally, it analyzed the data with PLS and presented the results.

This study is the first attempt to find the causes for users in Cambodia to consume news on SNS, Facebook specifically. Resulting from our findings, the behavior of news consumption on SNS is determined by two main factors: *convenience* and *variety*. Convenience plays an important role in motivating users to consume news on SNS. The ability to find things faster and the organization of information and archives, which allows users to easily look back at past articles, make many people consume news online [Ahlers, 2006; Marchi, 2012]. Another crucial factor encouraging users to consume news is variety. Variety, the accumulation of news in one place, fosters users' interest in getting news on SNS because people would like to get news on a site they are already on, like Facebook, rather than traveling off to another site if they are already on Facebook engaging with friends and doing other things [O'Connor, 2009]. Moreover, they do not have time to keep up with the news on a bunch of different locations [Mitchell et al., 2013]. In contrast, the recency of news does not indicate any significant impact on news consumption behavior on SNS. This phenomenon may be explained by the characteristics of SNS. It could be overlapped with SNS's cha-

racteristic since most SNSs provides instant messaging technology [Ellison, 2007], which allows users to get new messages instantly as soon as the messages are sent. Based on this argument, recency of news shows no significant effect on motivation for news consumption on SNS.

Apart from the factors influencing people to consume news on SNS, this study also tried to understand the result coming from news consumption on SNS. According to what we have found, it shows that news consumption on SNS yields significant result in improving social engagement and government's transparency in Cambodia. The more users use SNS to get news, the more they likely to get involvement in public events and social activities. The transparency in government is also improved as much as the information related to people and government is published openly.

This study has suggested some implications for SNS designers, news organizations, and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and government. First of all, the findings of this study suggest that the convenience to access to the news and the variety of news sources are important for users to use SNSs for consuming news. In order to retain existing users or obtaining new users, SNS designers should find strategies that enable users to more easily and quickly access to news as well as to disseminate news content to other users on the sites. Second, it is an opportunity for the news organizations to gain competitive advantage. In news websites, 60~65% is the proportion of direct traffic (including cross-links from other articles in the same por-

tal) while 35~40% of the traffic comes from external links, where Facebook is the second external source after Google [Urban, 2012]. As soon as the news organizations take this opportunity to integrate their news on SNS, they would have better chance to obtain more people coming to visit their websites. Third, this study also suggests that news consumption on SNS contributes to improvement of social engagement and government transparency. This is another opportunity for NGOs and government who wish to promote social engagement or transparency in their government. Both NGO and government may make extensive use of SNS to disseminate news and information about social issues or inform people about their work, including publishing statements and reports, which lets people participate more in society and learn what is happening in their communities as well as in the whole country.

Although this study makes some contributions to our knowledge on news consumption on SNS, several important limitations and future research opportunities need to be noted. The first limitation related to the nature of data set we used. The size of data set is relatively small for PLS approach, and the respondents were the users of only one site, i.e. Facebook. Future research should collect more data from various SNSs, examine users in different SNSs and compare the results to see if there is any behavioral difference among users in different SNSs. Second, we did not consider the impact of the users' traits such as gender, age, education level, etc. Young and old people may focus differently on the news consumption on SNS.

Future research would benefit from demographic factor being tested statistically. Finally, this study did not examine the news categories. Different users may have different flavors of news. For example, some users may prefer entertainment news over political news; male users may prefer sports news while female users may prefer health news. A possible future study could take account of either news category variable alone or its combination with demographic variable, which would produce more fruitful results in the research.

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