

BETWEEN LIKES AND LOATHING

A CROSS-BORDER INQUIRY INTO THE ONLINE CONFLICT
BETWEEN THAILAND AND CAMBODIA



A collaborative research journey uncovering how digital hostility
shapes identities, emotions, and the possibilities for peace.

PHASIREE THANASIN
SUYHEANG KRY
CHAKRIYA CHHUN
RAYMOND HYMA
RUNGROT TATIYAWONGWIWAT
VUTHY KHORN
FAYANIN MAN
SAIKWAN SRIRA-UDOM
SREYRATH KONG
WANVIPA MARASIN

FOREWORD BY
DR. ELAINE PRATLEY

COMMUNITY RESEARCHERS

Sasikarn Duangtip
Chawanrat Euafua
Thatsanee Haewpet
Lita Heng
Mengthorng Hong
Vuthy Khorn
Sreyrath Kong
Tula Kusurom
Fayanin Man
Wanvipa Marasin

Chonlada Matchimmarat
Narathon Nettrakul
Yuminea Nhouv
Chanyaorn Panrat
Sophaith Phorn
Dyan Roeun
Manita Seourn
Sokun Seung
Saikwan Srira-udom
Rungrot Tatiyawongwiwat

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Malia Imayama

RESEARCH SUPPORT

Chakriya Chhun
Jitrapath Nhurod

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**A cross-border inquiry into the online conflict
between Thailand and Cambodia**

A collaborative research journey uncovering how digital hostility
shapes identities, emotions, and the possibilities for peace.

Women Peace Makers and Wocation Ltd.
PHNOM PENH



The views expressed in this book come directly from participants who shared their perspectives, the research team who reflected on the findings and their experiences, the analysts who reviewed the recorded data, and the authors who translated it all to written form. They do not necessarily reflect the position of any particular organization or partner involved in the implementation or publication of this work.

All participants (“Sharers”) of the inquiry activities provided informed consent to enter the process freely with full information on the project’s scope and the plans for publication of the perspectives they shared.

Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of certain individuals.

Certain excerpts have been lightly edited for clarity and readability, particularly when they were documented in English by community researchers using English as an additional language. All efforts were made to retain the original meaning, tone, and intent.

The research was carried out through the generous support of an anonymous donor. It was developed and implemented in partnership with members from Monash University (Australia) and the University of Warwick (United Kingdom). Connections to communities and participants were also greatly facilitated through collaboration with members of Chiang Mai University, Kasetsart University, and the Royal University of Phnom Penh. We would like to acknowledge and extend our deepest gratitude to our 101 FLD “Sharers” in Thailand and Cambodia who gave their time and shared their voices with us throughout this journey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword by Dr. Elaine Pratley	1
Chapter 1 Introduction: Listening across borders in times of digital hostility	3
Chapter 2 Context: A growingly hostile world, both offline and online	7
Chapter 3 Methodology: Leveraging the Facilitative Listening Design (FLD) method	15
Chapter 4 Findings: A Cambodian perspective	27
Chapter 5 Findings: A Thai perspective	51
Chapter 6 Inquiry for action: The future of Peace Developer	75

FOREWORD

BY DR. ELAINE PRATLEY*

Working for peace is never easy. Working for peace in the middle of conflict? That can feel almost impossible.

This was the reality many young leaders of Peace Developer—the grassroots youth peace movement born from the research in this book—faced at the height of tensions between Cambodia and Thailand.

They were ordinary young people trying to do something extraordinary: resist the flood of divisive narratives spreading across their borders and social media feeds. Many had made genuine friendships with peers “on the other side” through their shared research journey. But as headlines hardened and online vitriol intensified, staying open and hopeful took real courage. Justice felt personal. National pride was at stake. And peace-builders, they discovered, aren’t always celebrated—sometimes, they’re mocked.

Yet these young people kept listening.

What gave these Cambodian and Thai youth the strength to choose connection over contempt, to show up for dialogue when silence—or shouting back—would have been so much easier?

Between Likes and Loathing offers an answer through Facilitative Listening Design (FLD)—a participatory action research approach first developed by Suyheang Kry and Raymond Hyma that turns listening into a catalyst for peace.

This book follows twenty young “Listeners”—ten from each country—who came together to explore why online conflict between Thais and Cambodians persists, and what might happen if they began to listen differently. They didn’t just study hostility from a distance; they stepped into it, making research itself an act of peacebuilding.

The study brought together Women Peace Makers (Cambodia), Wocation Ltd. (Thailand), and researchers from Monash and Warwick Universities around a deceptively simple question: could learning grounded in genuine listening actually shift the digital conflicts shaping young people’s worldviews?

For many youth across Southeast Asia, social media is their main—sometimes only—source of information about their neighbors. What starts as jokes or memes can quickly escalate into streams of hate speech and cultural ridicule. These narratives draw on long histories of tension, amplified by the speed and anonymity of the internet.

The twenty Listeners were trained to conduct 101 in-depth conversations with peers from their own countries. Then, crucially, they came together to analyze and interpret what they'd heard. Listening *with* instead of listening *to*—that shift became the bridge.

What they found was honest, painful, and hopeful all at once.

Thai participants often recognized cultural connections but viewed Cambodia through a “development hierarchy,” shaped by bias and media narratives. Cambodians spoke of exhaustion—of feeling mocked, dismissed, and emotionally bruised by relentless on-line ridicule. Both sides saw how misinformation, trolling, and performative nationalism kept the cycle spinning.

But amid all that noise, the Listeners also found moments of genuine empathy. Conversations that softened certainty. Encounters that turned strangers into collaborators. For many, listening became their first real experience of peace—not as an idea, but as something they could actually do.

And they didn't stop there.

The Listeners established Peace Developer, a cross-border youth network that continues to run dialogues, digital campaigns, and creative educational programs. They've reclaimed the very platforms that hosted conflict to now create connection.

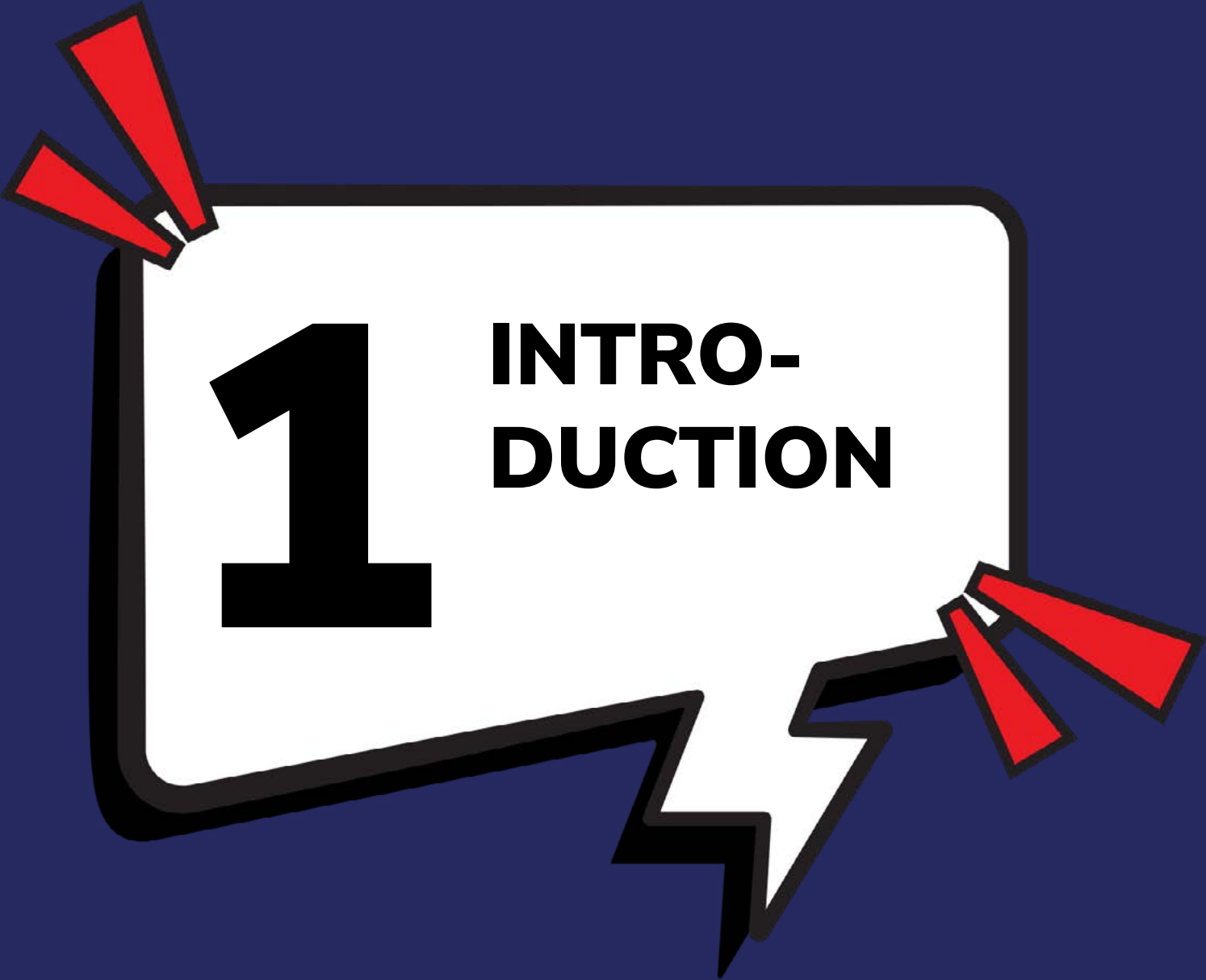
I work with food-based dialogues for peace, and I recognize something familiar in what these young people built. The FLD approach created digital spaces of hospitality—places where strangers could meet, share a story, and be changed by what they heard. That feels remarkable to me, especially when digital spaces so often breed hate and division. These Listeners showed that the same technologies used to fuel conflict can become places where people gather, listen, and discover they're not so different after all.

What these twenty young people proved matters: those most affected by conflict can build the pathways to peace. Not just participate in someone else's peace process—build it themselves.

Between Likes and Loathing is more than a study of online conflict. It's a testament to the courage it takes to listen when everyone else is shouting. It's also a challenge to those of us who work in education, policy, or peacebuilding: listening isn't a soft skill. It's foundational to peacebuilding. It's the ground on which everything else can be built.

Because peace doesn't come from agreement. It comes from listening to those we've been taught to hate—and discovering that hatred was never ours to begin with.

* Dr. Elaine Pratley is founder of Peace Inc. and Peace Kitchen in Melbourne, Australia, and affiliate of the Global Peace and Security Centre at Monash University and of the Initiative for Peacebuilding at the University of Melbourne.



1

**INTRO-
DUCTION**

**LISTENING ACROSS
BORDERS IN TIMES OF
DIGITAL HOSTILITY**

INTRODUCTION

LISTENING ACROSS BORDERS IN TIMES OF DIGITAL HOSTILITY

Although often overlooked by those working in conflict or researching the region, the escalating online hostility between Thai and Cambodian netizens has reached alarming levels. Browsing social media forums dedicated to ASEAN dialogue, it has become increasingly common to encounter highly profane content exchanged between users from both countries. Online hate speech has risen rapidly among youth in Cambodia and Thailand across multiple platforms, often centering on historical narratives of the Khmer Empire and the Kingdom of Siam, and on competing claims of cultural heritage and national identity. There has been no empirical research conducted on understanding the evolving situation to date. While some media reports acknowledge the online feuds, few initiatives have directly addressed these interactions. Findings from this research grounded in everyday conversations with Thais and Cambodians, however, reveal that drivers for the animosity unfolding online are complex and has real-life consequences and implications for people living on both sides of the border.

In 2024, recognizing this continual increase in social media conflict and hate speech, a team of researchers and practitioners decided to explore what was happening and act upon it through an interventional inquiry approach. In collaboration among members from Women Peace Makers (Cambodia), Wocation Ltd. (Thailand), Monash University (Australia), and the University of Warwick (United Kingdom), a research design team prepared to implement a Facilitative

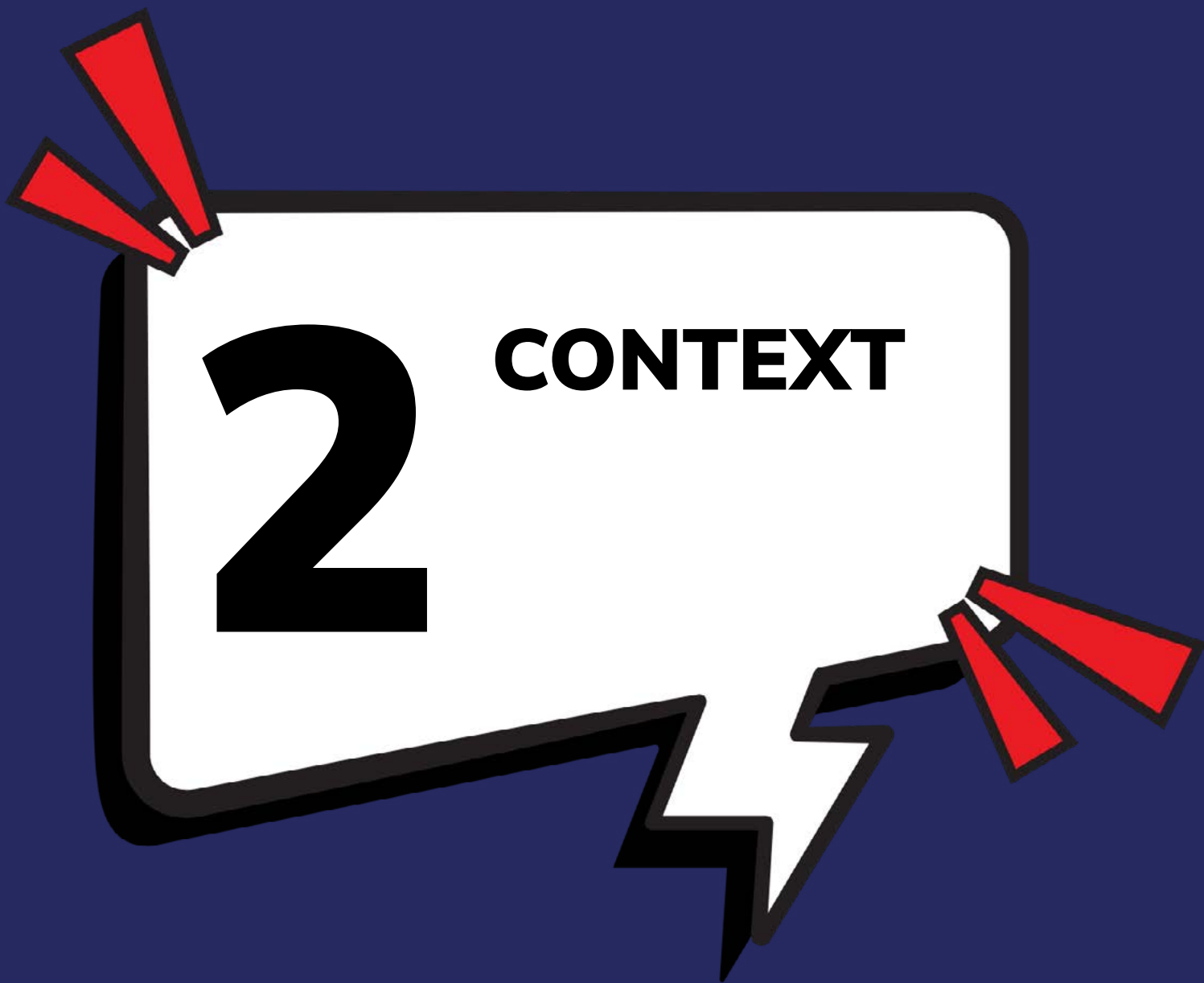
Listening Design (FLD) intervention to both gather new information and foster a space for Thai and Cambodian participants to make first contact and explore the issue together. Beyond the need to understand the causes of online hostility, the team also aimed to test how listening and dialogue among impacted community members could serve as tools for collective sensemaking in the midst of tension.

FLD is grounded in participatory and action research principles, designed to treat inquiry not as observation but as engagement. Each participant, known as a “Listener” in the FLD method, conducted in-depth conversations within their own communities (participants who are called “Sharers”) before coming together with peers across the border to analyze and reflect on what they heard. This process allowed participants to bring their lived experiences into shared interpretation, connecting research with emotion, and understanding with action. The approach was both research and intervention at once. It sought to document the ways young people experience and contribute to online conflict while offering an opportunity to transform the conditions that sustain it. Rather than viewing conflict as an issue to be solved by external actors, the research framed it as a shared social process that can only be understood and changed by those directly involved and affected by the topic of study.

This book brings together what was learned through that process. It presents the voices of Thai and Cambodian Listeners and Sharers, their observations, reflections, and insights into how and why online conflict unfolds and ultimately affects their daily lives. It also shows how inquiry itself became a form of response and how research evolved into collective action through the creation of the Peace Developer network. At its heart, this work is about listening, learning, and acting together. It seeks to understand how digital spaces shape national identity, how humor and humiliation intertwine online, and how young people can lead in reimagining the future of relations between their countries. It does not seek to provide simple solutions but rather to make visible the complexity of emotions, histories, and hopes that underpin online conflict. Through this collaborative inquiry, we have come to see that peace begins not with silence but with listening deeply, across difference, and with the courage to ask what we can do next.







**A GROWINGLY HOSTILE
WORLD, BOTH OFFLINE
AND ONLINE**

CONTEXT

A GROWINGLY HOSTILE WORLD, BOTH OFFLINE AND ONLINE

Like that of most contemporary neighboring countries, the history between Thailand and Cambodia is complex. In what is sometimes described as a “love-hate relationship,”¹ official relations between the two nations from the government perspective, until more recently, had been relatively stable and growing closer over the decades through shared economic interests and corresponding domestic politics despite historical tensions and territorial disputes.² Recent political changes, confrontations, and military clashes along the border, however, have fundamentally shifted that political relationship, rooted in a deeper and more personal feud between former political allies that has unfolded in 2025.³ Although these tensions appear at first glance to be interstate in nature, their public expression has further intensified dynamics between communities and everyday residents living on both sides of the border. Nowhere else is this more evident than in the exchanges taking place between Cambodian and Thai netizens online, where social media is fueling hate and vitriol among those who engage.⁴ Erupting violence in moments of political tensions between citizens of Thailand and Cambodia is not new, having previ-

ously surfaced over time as a result from divergent historical narratives, territorial disputes, and culture clashes from centuries ago right up to present day. Within the current context, however, online access among the vast majority of young people in both countries has led to a type of warfare in which everyday people in any geographical location have the ability to engage directly with who they view as their opponent, and ultimately their “enemy” on the other side.

The recounting of history in Thailand and Cambodia frequently differs, both through the distinct education systems and by everyday people who point to different eras and periods of past glories and downfalls between the Kingdom of Siam and the Khmer Empire.⁵ In Thailand, there tends to be a focus on the resilience of the monarchy and the longstanding avoidance of colonization, sometimes connected to its current day modernization achievements. In Cambodia, history often recounts the achievements of the Khmer Empire, the construction of the Angkor Wat temple, as well as the devastating conflict during the Khmer Rouge regime in the 1970s.

¹ Charnvit Kasetsiri, “Thailand and Cambodia: A Love-Hate Relationship,” *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 3, March 2003, <https://kyotoreview.org/issue-3-nations-and-stories/a-love-hate-relationship>.

² Chhay Lim and Sovitou Long, “The Past, Present and Future of Cambodia–Thailand Relations,” *East Asia Forum*, 27 March 2024, <https://doi.org/10.59425/eabc.1711576800>.

³ Rebecca Ratcliffe, “The bitter feud fuelling the border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia,” *The Guardian*, July 26, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jul/26/the-bitter-feud-fuelling-the-border-dispute-between-thailand-and-cambodia>.

⁴ Koh Ewe, “Thais and Cambodians slug it out on social media, as border tensions flare,” *BBC News*, July 26, 2025, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cy9x91ewzvxo>; Rebecca Ratcliffe and Navaon Siradapuvadol, “Online hate and rising vitriol: deep divisions amid shaky peace between Thailand and Cambodia,” *The Guardian*, August 2, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/aug/02/online-hate-and-rising-vitriol-deep-divisions-amid-shaky-peace-between-thailand-and-cambodia>.

⁵ Samuel Macrae, “A Tale of Two Kingdoms: Thailand and Cambodia,” *The Diplomat*, October 27, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/a-tale-of-two-kingdoms-thailand-and-cambodia/>.

Territorial disputes, often intertwined with historical perceptions and claims between the two states dating back centuries, have continuously played out in Thai-Cambodian relations both at the political and social levels. On 28 May 2025, the death of a Cambodian patrol soldier marked the beginning of the most recent conflict that has resulted in numerous casualties, catastrophic upheavals among those living in border areas, and an intensified conflict among everyday netizens taking place online.⁶ This renewed conflict reflects past disputes taking place around the Preah Vihear temple (known as Phra Wihan in Thai), an area on the border that had been the cause of conflict between the two countries throughout the 20th Century. Prior to these more recent events, the last time there was armed conflict was from 2008 to 2011, when military clashes occurred resulting in the loss of at least 34 lives.⁷ Over a hundred kilometers away, similar skirmishes took place around the same time at the Ta Moan (Thai: Ta Muean Thom) and Ta Krabey (Thai: Ta Khwai) temples. Maritime territories have also sparked conflict between the two countries, particularly in the Gulf of Thailand leading to diplomatic tensions and occasional confrontations.⁸ Of most current, in 2024 the emerging dispute for an island named Koh Kood (Khmer: Ko Kut) in the Gulf of Thailand resumed a 20 yearlong running spat between the two countries impacting the sharing of fossil fuels.⁹

Cultural heritage has emerged as one of the most contentious flashpoints of online conflict in ongoing social media interactions to date. Though few might disagree that Thai and Cambodians share many similarities in culture, nationalistic narratives and culture claiming have become the norm in forums often centered on discussions about Southeast Asia. In 2023, during the Southeast Asian (SEA) Games hosted by Cambodia, the kickboxing competition sparked sentiments of nationalist antagonisms when the Cambodian Boxing Federation made the decision to use the Khmer reference to the sport as “Kun Khmer” rather than the more internationally recognized Thai name “Muay Thai.”¹⁰ Whereas festivals often bring people together across cultural divides, “Songkran,” a new year celebration celebrated throughout the Mekong Region, has further caused tensions across the border. After the Thai government recently had the celebration recognized as a UNESCO cultural heritage, the Cambodian government followed suit declaring its intention to have “Cambodian Songkran” recognized as well. During Songkran in early 2024, a Thai social media influencer visited Siem Reap comparing the festival to Thailand’s, causing an uproar online and fueling further conflict between Cambodian and Thai netizens.¹¹ Angkor Wat, considered one of the most important sources of pride among Cambodians, has also stirred up hostilities between residents from both countries. In 2021, a new Thai temple

⁶ Al Jazeera, “Cambodia PM urges calm after border clash with Thailand leaves soldier dead,” May 29, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/29/cambodia-pm-urges-calm-after-border-clash-with-thailand-leaves-soldier-dead>.

⁷ Martin Wagener, “Lessons from Preah Vihear: Thailand, Cambodia, and the Nature of Low-Intensity Border Conflicts,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 30, no. 3 (September 1, 2011): 27–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810341103000302>.

⁸ William J. Jones, “Revisiting the Cambodia-Thailand Maritime Dispute: International Law, Politics and Nationalism,” *Asia-Pacific Issues*, no. 167 (2024): 1–12.

⁹ Taejun Kang and Mike Firn, “A No Man’s Land Is Key to Unlocking a 20-Year Thai-Cambodian Spat,” *Radio Free Asia*, March 28, 2024, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/cambodia/thai-cambodia-spat-03282024035904.html>.

¹⁰ Danielle Keeton-Olsen, “Ready, Set, Fight: Thailand, Cambodia Spar to Stake Claim on Mekong Boxing at SEA Games,” *South China Morning Post*, May 6, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/people/article/3219553/ready-set-fight-thailand-cambodia-spar-stake-claim-mekong-boxing-sea-games>; Sokvy Rim, “Cambodia and Thailand’s Cultural Rivalry Has Serious Implications,” *The Diplomat*, May 12, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/05/cambodia-and-thailands-cultural-rivalry-has-serious-implications>.

¹¹ Editorial, “Defusing Heritage Rows,” *Bangkok Post*, April 18, 2024, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/2777644/defusing-heritage-rows>.

drew ire among Cambodians for its likeness to Angkor Wat and was viewed as a replica and insult to the Khmer identity.¹² A multitude of other cultural issues have caused chaos both online and offline, including films, beauty pageants, and other representations of cultural identity and expression. Although such events may appear isolated, they form “just the tip of a toxic iceberg that’s years in the making.”¹³ The fact is that all these instances feed into a larger transborder narrative of cultural ownership and appropriation, causing tension, hate speech, and ultimately in the formation of grossly negative perceptions between people on both sides of the border.

On the initial day of the FLD project when Thai and Cambodian Listeners came together for the first time to begin their journey of inquiry on the topic, an activity was designed to allow each country team to discuss in detail how they conceptualized the context of what they labelled as “online conflict” between members of both countries. Drawing from their own lived experience and exposure to interactions taking place in social media, each group presented their national context framing reflecting their collective insights. In the Thai context, participants interpreted the online conflict as part of a broader social condition shaped by history, culture, misunderstanding, and economic realities. They described online hate speech as an outcome of deeper structural issues rather than a root cause, linking it to overlapping histories, cultural similarities, and shared lands that have long blurred national boundaries. Their references reflected an awareness of a wider regional context where belonging and identity are negotiated beyond the nation-state. They also con-

nected conflict to material concerns such as employment and economic competition, indicating that tensions between nations are intertwined with everyday livelihood struggles. By contrast, Cambodian participants made sense of the conflict through experiences of comparison, competition, and emotional injury. They described ongoing comparisons in culture, history, and development, positioning the conflict as one of recognition and prestige. The mention of “racism” and “showing superiority” revealed how online hate speech was understood as exclusion and humiliation rather than misunderstanding. Alongside this, Cambodian participants emphasized pride in their cultural traditions such as religion, language, food, and art as expressions of identity to be defended against perceived cultural dominance and influence. In this way, their interpretation reflected a struggle for respect and visibility within unequal regional relations.

What does online conflict look like, and how does it unfold as actors engage? Online interaction between Cambodian and Thai netizens has become a persistent site of hostility, ridicule, and national humiliation. Across social media, particularly Facebook, users circulate memes, edited images, and engage in comment threads that turn long-standing cultural and historical disputes into a form of digital entertainment. Humor has become a vehicle for aggression. Posts labeling Thailand as “Thiefland” and Cambodia as “Claimbodia” appear playful but work to legitimize prejudice and normalize antagonism. These jokes and caricatures are not isolated but form part of a broader and evolving ecosystem of harassment and trolling that fuels resentment and further divides online communities.

¹² Hutton, “Destinations Known | Why a New Thai Temple Has Angered Cambodian Internet Commenters,” *South China Morning Post*, September 8, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/travel/article/3147949/angkor-wat-temple-copycat-thailand-sparks-cambodian>.

¹³ Pravitt Rojanaphruk, “The Growing Toxicity of Thai-Cambodia Netizen Relations,” October 13, 2024, <https://www.khaosodenglish.com/featured/2024/10/13/the-growing-toxicity-of-thai-cambodia-netizen-relations>.

Evolution of The Thai People



Much of the content is racialized or dehumanizing. Cartoons depict Cambodians as inferior or as imitators of Thai culture, while other images portray Thais as animals or morally corrupt. Insults are mirrored across both sides, with distorted names such as “Khamen” and “Toilanh” circulating widely. These exchanges merge personal identity with national pride, turning ordinary users into self-appointed defenders of their countries. Humiliation functions both as harm and as strategy, as users who feel targeted retaliate in kind, sustaining a cycle of digital hostility that deepens anger and emotional intensity on both sides.



This trend carries implications for peace and regional stability at the community level. What may appear to be trivial online banter reflects deeply embedded historical grievances and growing digital polarization. Humor, mimicry, and mockery act as emotional triggers that reinforce stereotypes and erode empathy, making the digital sphere an increasingly charged space where national identities are constantly defended in real time, leading to escalated retaliation. As the conflict circulates through jokes, parodies, and edited images, it shapes how younger generations understand their neighbors and their place in the region. For many, social media becomes the primary arena for encountering the “other,” meaning that the experience of the neighboring country is mediated through ridicule and resentment rather than contact or cooperation. This is happening not through in person contact, but often among people who have never had the opportunity to meet each other or experience life on the other side of the border. Over time, this erodes trust not only between citizens, but also across communities that might otherwise find more commonalities and mutual interests as neighbors with a long-shared history. The result is an online environment where hostility feels ordinary, and antagonism becomes part of national belonging.

TH

THAILAND

Education is important in Khamen.

46w Like Reply



KH

CAMBODIA

Thailand Education is important in toilanh .

46w Like Reply

TH

THAILAND

Cambodia Don't show dumb. Asean is going to expel Khamen from SEA soon.

46w Like Reply

KH

CAMBODIA

Thailand Don't show dumb. Asean is going to expel TOILET from SEA soon.

46w Like Reply Edited

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THAILAND

Cambodia Now Khamen is a province of China

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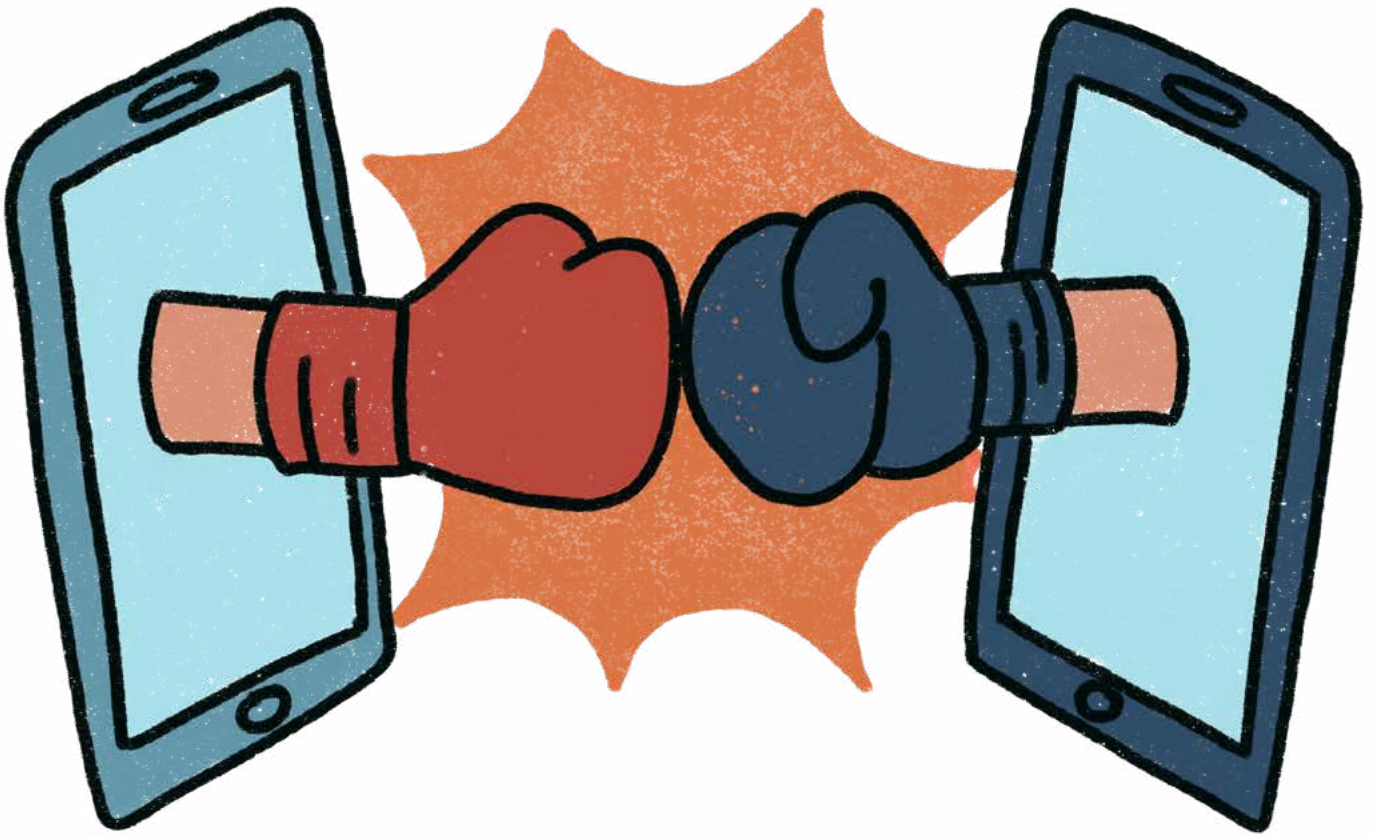


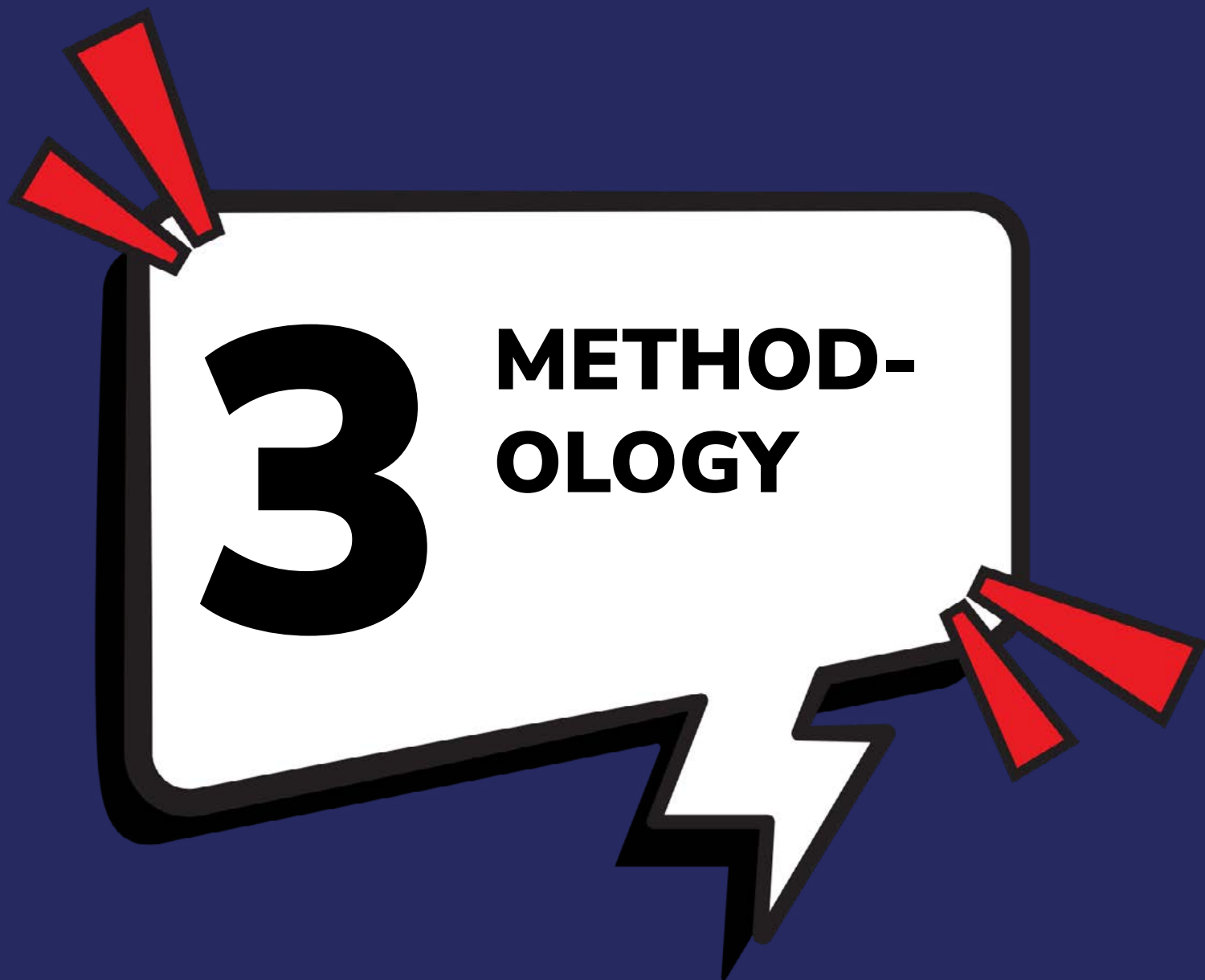
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THAILAND

Cambodia The begger from Khamen trouble in everywhere too.







**LEVERAGING THE
FACILITATIVE
LISTENING DESIGN
METHOD**

METHODOLOGY

LEVERAGING THE FACILITATIVE LISTENING DESIGN METHOD

FACILITATIVE LISTENING DESIGN

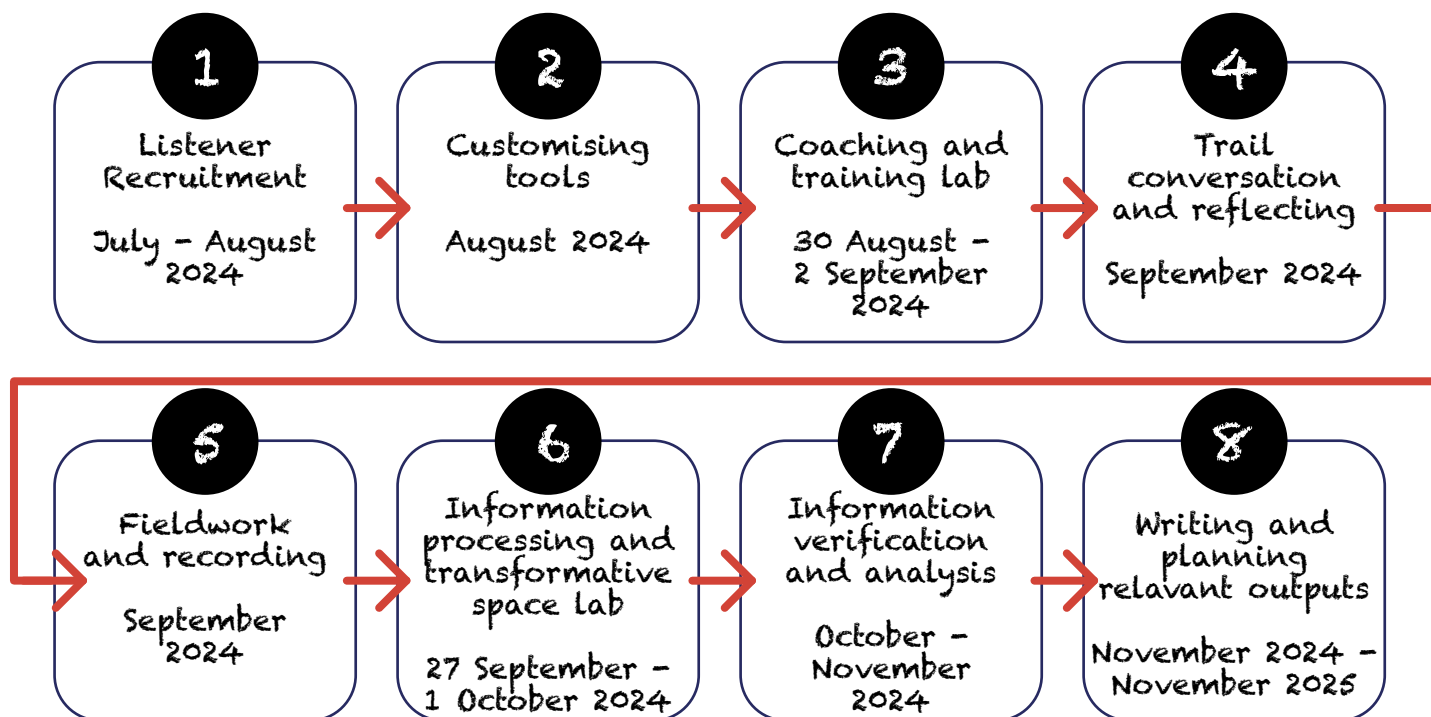
Facilitative Listening Design (FLD) is an action research approach focused on information gathering in conflict and transformative outcomes through the process that emphasizes deep, empathetic conversations to understand people's perceptions. The methodology builds on relational qualitative research methods and conflict transformation practice by bringing diverse individuals together to examine their communities, share experiences, and engage in meaningful dialogue based on collective insights.

FLD is designed to explore sensitive topics through informal, human-centered conversations that prioritize trust and comfort. It removes the formal barriers of traditional research, allowing participants to speak openly without fear of judgment or exposure. While maintaining rigorous standards for data validation, FLD enables timely, discreet engagement and adapts to various cultural and communication contexts. This makes it especially effective for addressing sensitive topics and complex social dynamics while fostering understanding among groups who are at odds with each other with differing perspectives.

In this study, FLD was used to collect data and analyze patterns on growing online tensions in both Thailand and Cambodia, including those directly or passively involved as well as being exposed to it. Given the increasing significance of online interactions in shaping public opinion and conflict, FLD offered a grassroots method of inquiry as both research method and interventional tool. Community researchers, known as "Listeners" in the method, were recruited from each country and engaged with their own communities through informal conversations, creating safe spaces for participants to share their experiences. Later, the 20 Listeners, ten from each country, came together to compare findings, deepening mutual understanding and uncovering shared challenges. The insights gathered provided a strong qualitative foundation for grounded community-based data and further analysis on understanding the complexities of online conflict and growing digital animosity between Thai and Cambodian social media users.

FLD is conducted through a number of planned steps that guide the process and simultaneously strengthen a research team grounded in ongoing learning and reflection. This iteration of FLD followed eight steps as it evolved in practice.

STEPS FOR CONDUCTING FACILITATIVE LISTENING DESIGN (FLD)



FLD IMPLEMENTATION

For this initiative, FLD was intentionally designed to create both the opportunity and the space for young people from Thailand and Cambodia to step into the role of researchers and, through that process, engage in cross-border dialogue on the issues shaping their online interactions. The approach was co-designed by a team comprising practitioners from Women Peace Makers (WPM) in Cambodia and Wocation Ltd. in Thailand, as well as researchers from Monash University and the University of Warwick.

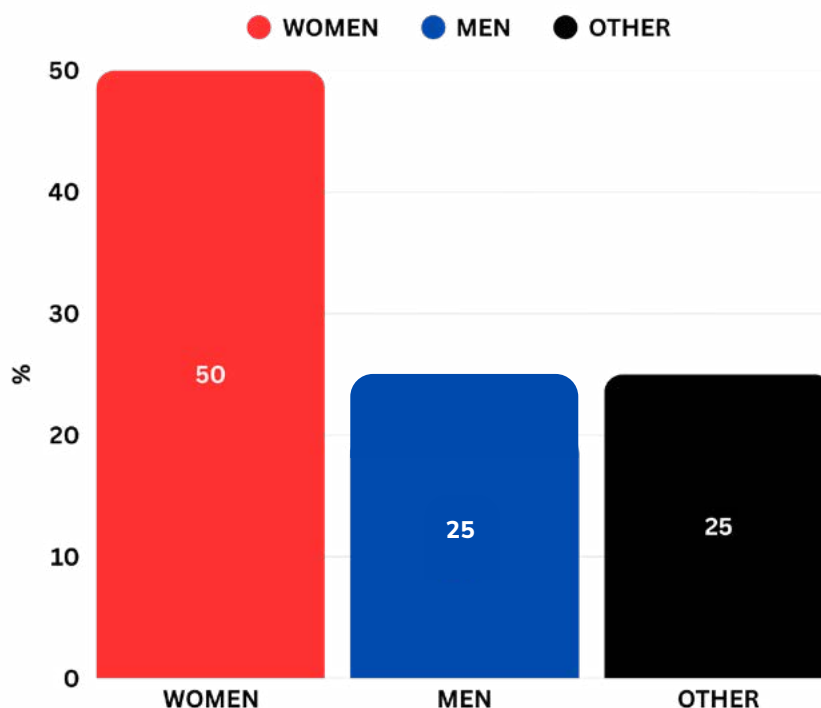
LISTENERS

WPM and Wocation Ltd. were responsible for recruiting ten people in each country. Drawing on their extensive networks, the recruiters sought potential FLD Listeners who were not only motivated to conduct research and engage with peers across the border, but who might also hold biases or even negative perceptions toward the other side. This intentional selection approach reflected a concurrent study examining the potential for transforma-

tion among researcher-participants in participatory processes who might possibly be impacted through their engagement in FLD.

In total, 20 Listeners (ten in Thailand and ten in Cambodia) were recruited from their respective countries. FLD Listeners initially engage as project participants through training and activities but consequently become researchers as they conduct inquiry in their own communities through data collection, analysis, and the translation of knowledge into research outputs. Listeners are crucial given they come from the communities they study. Although they carry out research and are trained to be aware of their biases, they become entwined with the data themselves as they interpret what they heard through their fieldwork and make meaning of it together.

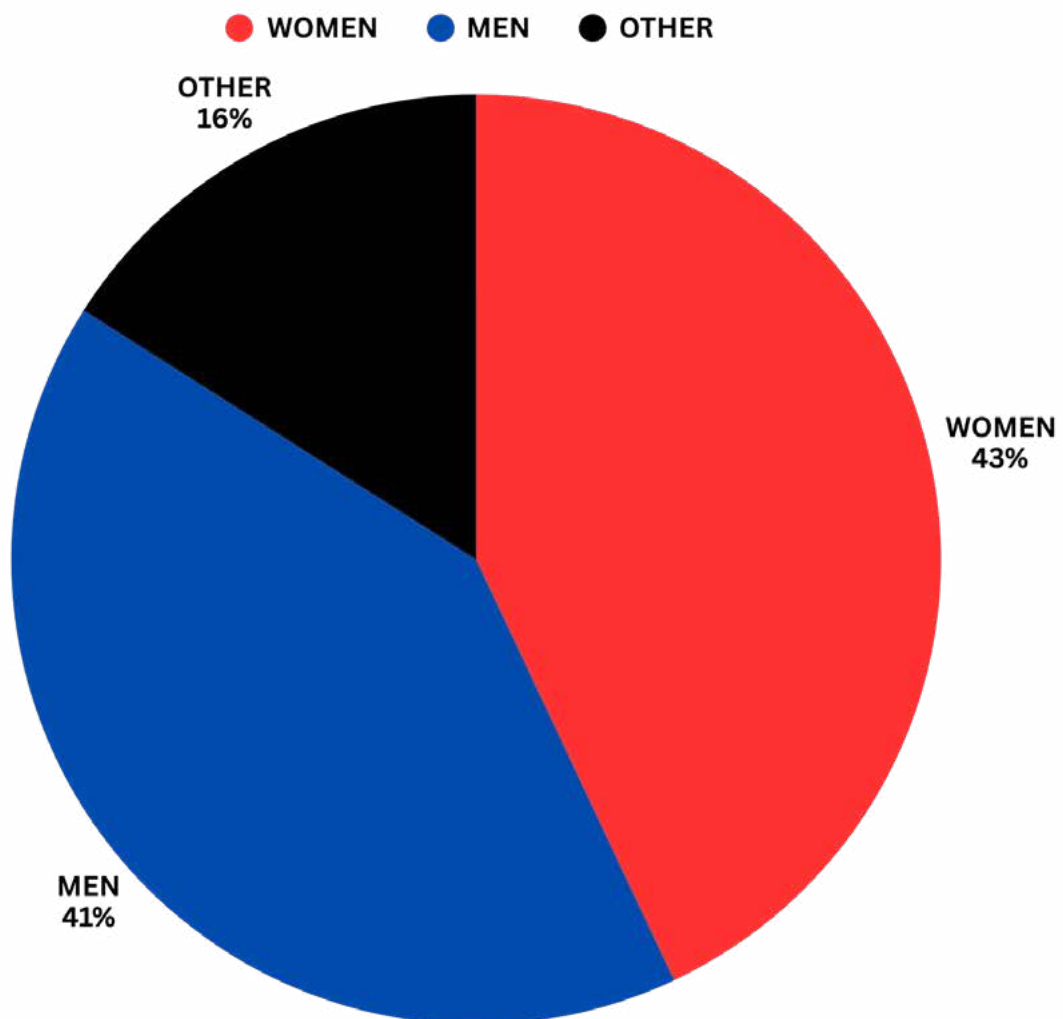
GENDER IDENTITY OF FLD LISTENERS



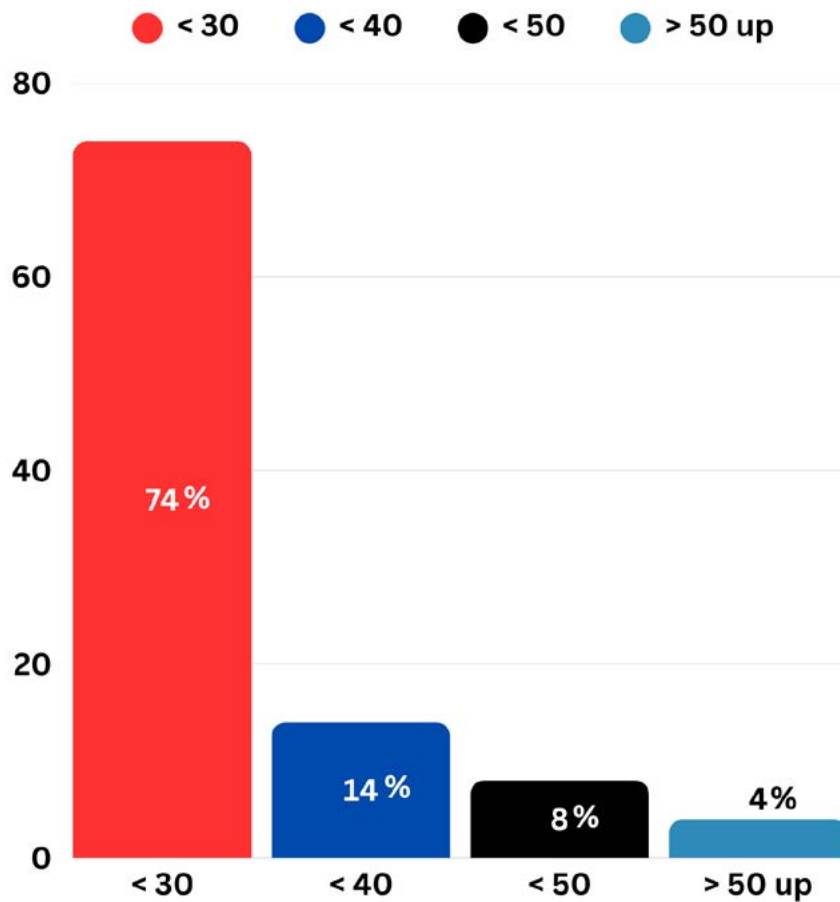
SHARERS

Sharers, on the other hand, are those community members whom Listeners reached out to and engage in conversations. They come from diverse backgrounds and represent various subgroups within their respective communities. Although the data is derived from what Sharers chose to convey during these conversations, it is the Listeners who interpret and communicate those insights as they introduce what they heard and collaboratively make meaning from it during analysis. In this study, FLD Listeners conducted a total of 101 conversations with Sharers (50 in Cambodia and 51 in Thailand).

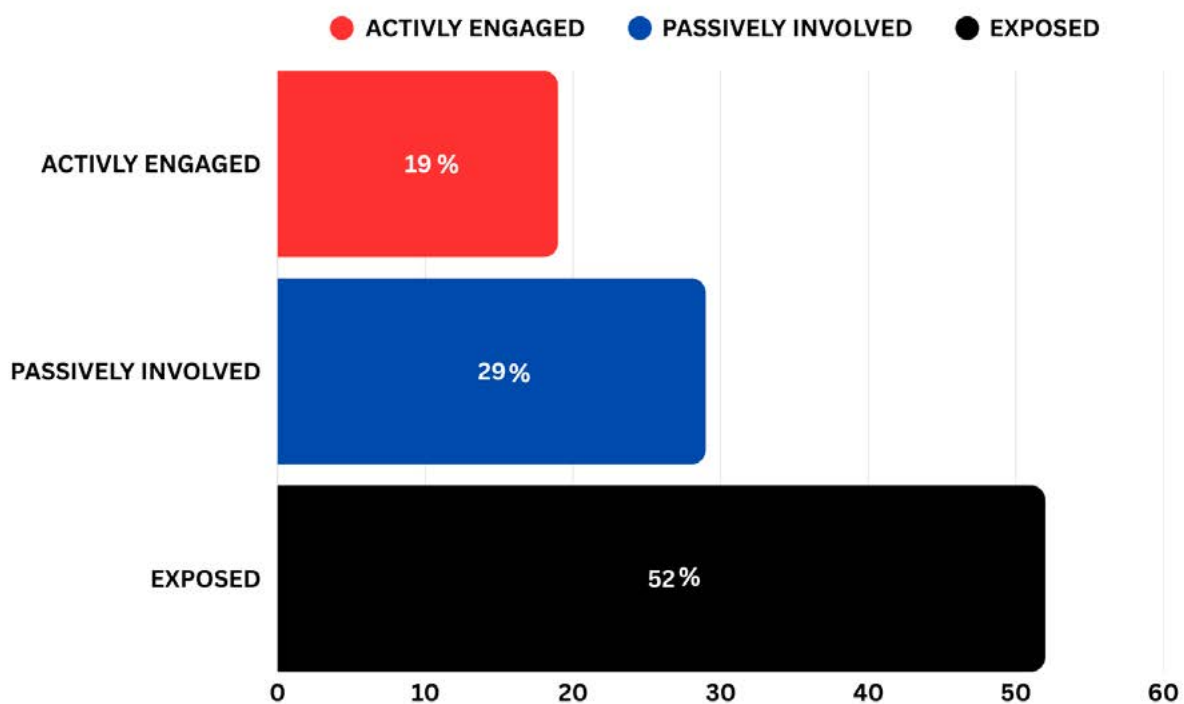
GENDER IDENTIFICATION AMONG SHARERS



AGE RANGE AMONG SHARERS



LEVEL OF ONLINE HATESPEECH ENGAGEMENT AMONG SHARERS



CONVERSATION FACILITATION AND RECORDING TOOLS

FLD uses fully adaptable and tailorable tools to assist in smooth and effective conversations as well as to later reflect and record for initial analysis on the range of issues and themes heard across the conversations. The following tools were developed and designed for this particular initiative to explore the topic of inquiry through listening to multiple perspectives:

CONVERSATION INQUIRY

To support and structure the dialogues, a conversation guide was developed after considering the context and the gaps in existing knowledge. Initially drafted by the initiative's designers, it included a variety of open-ended and follow-up questions aimed at fostering meaningful exchanges through active listening and genuine engagement. During the FLD Coaching and Training Lab, Listeners collaborated to review, discuss, and revise the guide to ensure it was well-suited to their specific context and needs, and culturally appropriate in the languages that conversations would be conducted in.



QUESTIONS	KEYWORDS
Perceptions toward the other	
1. What do you know about [Thailand/Cambodia]?	knowledge, awareness
2. What do you think about [Thai/Cambodian] people?	opinion, views, stereotypes
3. Have you ever visited [Thailand/Cambodia]? If so, what was your experience like?	experience, encounter, first-hand knowledge
4. Do you have any friends or acquaintances from [Thailand/Cambodia]? How would you describe your interactions with them?	connection, relevance, previous contact
5. How do you think the media portrays [Thailand/Cambodia] and its people?	media, mainstream
6. How would you describe the relationship between Thai and Cambodia as nations? Are there any issues you can think of?	politics, nation-state identity, borders
Online conflict	
7. Have you heard about negative interactions happening between Thai and Cambodians online in social media? What kinds of things have you heard about?	social media, hate speech, awareness
8. What is your opinion on this issue?	personal opinion, view
9. Have you personally witnessed or been involved in any online conflicts between Thai and Cambodians? Can you share your experience?	involvement, level of activity
10. How do you think online platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) can influence the relationship between Thai and Cambodian people?	influence, connection, correlation
Future	
11. Can you think of any ways to address online conflict between Thai and Cambodians?	solutions, community intervention, ideas
12. Is there anything that you can do yourself in this situation? What?	self-involvement, pro-action
13. What kind of initiatives or programs do you think would be effective in promoting understanding and cooperation between Thai and Cambodians?	support, needs

CONVERSATION LOG

In FLD, conversations are always recorded in reflection after they take place. The conversation log serves as one of the key recording tools to capture the details of the Sharers' thoughts, opinions, and perceptions based on their conversation with the Listeners. Given the sensitive context of this particular conflict, this initiative provided more flexibility in conducting conversations, and permitted in some cases for only one Listener to meet a Sharer depending on the preference of those engaging in conversations. In such cases, only one conversation log was submitted per conversation. For more typical FLD conversations consisting of two Listeners per Sharer, each conversation had two separate conversation

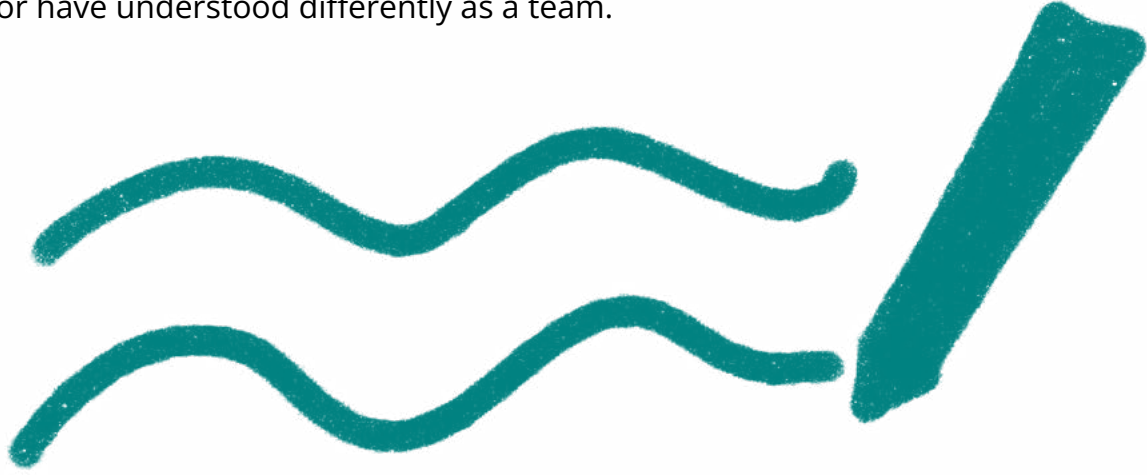
logs, one recorded by each Listener. As per the methodology, Listeners typically completed this individual recording activity immediately following the conversation, or alternatively, took notes and later filled out the template. Each Listener worked alone to initially fill out their individual conversation log beginning with demographic information. They then used the space to recap the conversation through the direct perspective of the Sharer and subsequently highlighted main themes or points expressed. They then provided any of their own observations or opinions about what was said in the conversation and finally highlighted any stories that came out.

Conversation Log	
Date:	Listener name:
Did you inform the Sharer that the information in this conversation might be used in a private publication in a confidential way and did the Sharer provide consent? ☐ ☐	
Time:	Sharer Description Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other Nationality: ☐ Thai ☐ Cambodian Age: _____ years Occupation: _____ Engagement in online hate speech (chose one based on priority from the highest): ☐ Actively involved in hate speech (example, has posted something directly) ☐ Passively involved in hate speech (example, has liked, reacted, or clicked a post) ☐ Exposed to hate speech (has viewed hate speech between Thailand/Cambodia online)
Location:	Language(s) spoken in conversation: ☐ Thai ☐ Khmer ☐ Other: _____
Please summarise what you heard during this conversation (direct perspective of participant – Use “I”):	

What is your opinion of what you just heard from the Sharer?
Can you summarise some direct quotes you might remember from the Sharer in their own words that were important?.
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
Listener: Please share any other useful information from your perspective or any of your observation here.

JOURNALING

Following a set of five conversations, Listeners worked together to reflect and analyze what they heard over multiple conversations in their journal. Most used this collaborative reflection to highlight recurring themes they heard in several instances, contrasts or differences among the Sharers, and bring up any issues they might have disagreed on or have understood differently as a team.



JOURNAL FOR LISTENING PAIRS

This journal is used to record you or your pair's overall reflection each time after 5 conversations have been carried out. During pair reflection, you and your partner will record common themes that you heard throughout all five conversations in this journal and discuss anything about the conversation from each of your perspectives. You may complete only one journal per team. Consider sharing:

- Themes that more than one Sharer discussed
- Any exceptional or unique thing you hear maybe from one Sharer that was surprising or challenged some of the other things you heard
- Your own team understanding of what you heard and what it means
- Any summarising points of these five conversations that will help to understand the bigger picture

You fill out this first page after you have completed all conversations you have committed to. The following two pages may be filled out each time after you complete each set of 5 conversations.

Listening team member(s):

Total number of conversations

Group covered (please tick)

☐ Thailand ☐ Cambodia

Conversation period

from ____/____/2024 to ____/____/2024

SET 1: 5 CONVERSATIONS

Date ____/____/ 2024

What kind of topics or themes did you hear across the conversations you had? What did you hear the most? Did any people say the same thing? Did you both hear it the same or did you hear different things after talking about it - or if you are working alone, was there anything that you might be unclear of or not sure about?

[illegible]

COACHING AND TRAINING LAB

From August 30 to September 2, 2024, the FLD team hosted a three-day workshop in Siem Reap, Cambodia, bringing together the design team and the 20 Cambodian and Thai Listeners. The training focused on applying FLD as a participatory and action-oriented research approach, emphasizing active listening, recognizing bias, and developing core research skills. Participants engaged in practical exercises to explore how everyday listening could be used to gather diverse perspectives. The draft conversation inquiry with follow-up and probing questions was introduced and collaboratively adapted to fit cultural and linguistic contexts, helping ensure smoother conversations with future Sharers in both countries. Listeners also learned how to use the conversation recording tools and practiced documenting interactions through a structured process, both individually and in pairs. In addition, each country team held planning sessions to identify target demographics, manage logistics, and strategize outreach to potential Sharers.

TRIAL CONVERSATION

A trial conversation was incorporated directly into the Coaching and Training Lab to provide hands-on experience with FLD and practice using the provided recording tools. These trial conversations took place outside the workshop venue but within the parameters of the town. Cambodian and Thai Listeners were paired together to facilitate the intercultural dimension and work together to navigate language differences with Cambodians they approached in Siem Reap. This exercise helped Listeners to understand the practical steps and challenges they might face when conducting conversations in pairs during their fieldwork. It also allowed the FLD facilitation team to evaluate the effectiveness of the tools and the overall methodological design, and identify any areas for improvement. After the trial conversations, Listeners reconvened to reflect on their experiences, discuss challenges, and refine their strategies for engaging with future Sharers and documenting conversations effectively.

FLD FIELDWORK

The fieldwork took place in Cambodia and Thailand from September 3-27, 2024, as Listener pairs conducted FLD conversations with their assigned target groups. These conversations took place in Phnom Penh and Battambang in Cambodia, and in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Sakon Nakhon in Thailand. Each pair followed a flexible schedule based on their availability and coordination. All fieldwork was completed within four weeks, allowing Listeners to retain fresh insights and reflections when regrouping for follow-up discussions.



INFORMATION PROCESSING AND TRANSFORMATIVE SPACE LAB (INFO-SPACE LAB)

Following the FLD conversations in their communities, Listeners reconvened for the second workshop, the Info-Space Lab, held from September 27 to October 1, 2024. This lab aimed to achieve two objectives:

1. To analyze the insights gathered from Sharers
2. To offer a supportive space for Listeners to reflect on how the FLD process may have influenced their own perspectives or led to personal or collective transformation across the two groups.

To achieve the first goal, Listener pairs worked intensively to review and present their findings to the full group. After submitting conversation logs and journals, they worked together to summarize recurring ideas, themes, and topics from their fieldwork. Listeners were then asked to present in their groups and engage in a “grilling” exercise to foster deeper critical thinking and dialogue among all Listeners through questions from others. To further verify perceptions on the answers more specifically in terms of the guide questions that had been designed and customized by the group prior to fieldwork, Listeners worked together to provide details on the questions and present their analysis on flip charts for later analysis by the design team. Each country team then participated in a session to identify common patterns, assess data reliability, and discuss emerging themes across the conversations.

The second objective of the Info-Space Lab, examining the personal and collective impact of the FLD process, was addressed after all data had been reviewed and shared. This session gave Listeners a chance to step away from all the listening to others over the prior weeks and to be heard themselves. To support open reflection, the discussion took place in a private, intimate circle without any recording or note-taking. This created a safe space for Listeners to freely express how the experience affected their views, emotions, and any transformations they experienced while working within complex and often tense community contexts, and in collaboration with members from the opposing side of the conflict they studied.





4 FINDINGS

**A CAMBODIAN
PERSPECTIVE**

FINDINGS

A CAMBODIAN PERSPECTIVE

“ ***I believe that hate speech on the internet can contribute to future conflicts for the next generation if we do nothing about it. Social media can hurt other people.*** ”

- a 24-year-old trade union employee in Phnom Penh

OPINIONS SHARED ACROSS FLD CONVERSATIONS WITH CAMBODIANS

During the Information Processing and Transformative Space Lab conducted in Chiang Mai, Thailand, the Listeners came together to reflect upon and analyze their FLD conversation data. The main themes developed by the Cambodian team as found below have been formulated and prioritized in the order by the Listeners through a group ranking process to reflect the most heard themes across the 50 FLD conversations.

1. We see that Thai and Cambodians have many similarities in culture and identity.
2. We know that Thailand is more developed than Cambodia, so why do they continue to claim what is ours?
3. Online conflict between Cambodians and Thai is growing, often initiated by Thai.
4. We see Thai people as very nationalistic and united in their nationalism.
5. Cambodia and Thailand have good government and trade relations.
6. Education, media literacy, government, and NGO intervention is needed to address this growing issue.
7. Both our countries seem to teach different versions of history.
8. Online conflict affects our mental health now, but it is unclear if this could lead to in-person conflict in the future.
9. We are disliked by the Thai and feel like they look down on us.
10. We believe there are outside forces at work driving online conflict for their own personal gains.

This section explores these themes, along with other related topics identified by the Cambodian Listeners through their engagement with Sharers. It also presents findings uncovered through a deeper analysis of the recording tools and follow up work carried out by an analysis team comprised of the design team and six volunteer Listeners with equal participation from both countries.

A SHARED CULTURE YET CONTESTED CLAIMS

“ Cambodia and Thailand share a common cultural heritage, as they once had similar cultural traditions. However, I find it perplexing and frustrating when some Thai people insist that certain cultural elements exclusively belong to Thailand. ”

- a 20-year-old female student in Phnom Penh as recounted by a Listener

FINDING 1: WE SEE THAT THAI AND CAMBODIANS HAVE MANY SIMILARITIES IN CULTURE AND IDENTITY.

As neighboring countries, Cambodia and Thailand share many cultures and traditions, as expressed by nearly half of the Sharers. Across multiple discussions, similarities in culture and identity between the two nations were frequently emphasized. When Sharers referred to these similarities, they described them as encompassing traditions, customs, art, religion, history, language, lifestyle, and civilizations. Some reflected on shared aspects of everyday life, as a 21-year-old female teacher from Battambang Province told the Listeners: “I think Thai and Khmer are not much different in terms of lifestyle and food.”

Language also emerged as a key area of perceived closeness. A Sharer from Phnom Penh mentioned the familiarity of both language and pronunciation: “When talking about Thailand, I think of the similarities between the two cultures and the similar language, because some of the words I have heard are similar, especially the word ‘mother.’” Regarding culture and civilization, several Sharers brought up religion, cultural events, and identity, as expressed by a female student from Phnom Penh: “I think these two countries share the same culture and look similar to me, as we all celebrate the same cultural events.” Others extended these observations to similarities in religion, lifestyle, food, and entertainment, such as watching Thai dramas and movies. A 26-year-old journalist noted these parallels through his childhood education: “When I was young, I like to read Khmer-Thai history books about and I know a lot about land, culture, art of Thailand, which is very similar in some way to Khmer.” Meanwhile, a 22-year-old Sharer who was passively engaged in online hate speech said, “I’ve been to Thailand once, but it was really quick, and I didn’t really feel the difference between the two countries.

While most participants highlighted shared characteristics, some also expressed the challenges that accompany these overlaps. Several mentioned the difficulty of distinguishing between the two cultures, with one noting, “It’s hard for me to differentiate between things from Cambodia and Thailand, as these two countries share a lot of cultural similarities.” A 20-year-old female student in Phnom Penh added, “I find it perplexing

**CAMBODIAN TEACHER REFLECTS ON ENCOUNTERS
ACROSS THE BORDER | SMALL MOMENTS REMIND US
THAT KINDNESS CAN COEXIST WITH PREJUDICE**

A twenty-eight-year-old Cambodian history teacher shared an experience that stayed with him long after his visit to Thailand. While shopping at a local market, he faced hostility when a Thai vendor refused to sell to him and told him to leave after realizing he was Cambodian. The rejection was brief but sharp, showing how easily prejudice can surface in ordinary interactions.

Soon after, another encounter offered a different picture. When he asked someone for directions to the restroom, a Thai stranger responded with kindness and helped him find the way. The contrast between these two moments illustrates how discrimination and empathy can exist side by side, even within the same setting. His story reminds us that while hostility may be visible and loud, kindness often appears quietly in small, everyday moments between people.

and frustrating when some Thai people insist that certain cultural elements exclusively belong to Thailand.” This ambiguity in identifying origins sometimes led to disputes over cultural ownership, claims grounded in modern nation-state perspectives rather than the long history of cultural exchange and blending that has occurred over centuries of contact between the peoples of both countries.

Despite such tensions, some participants still recognized distinct cultural elements, such as traditional dress styles. Yet even shared cultural heritage could be a source of contention. A 24-year-old participant observed, “There is a lot of similarity between Thailand and Cambodia in terms of culture, art, and religion due to Indian influence, which is also why both sides clash based on history.” Similarly, another young teacher from Battambang reflected, “Thailand has a culture similar to Cambodia, but the people there do not always have the best character.”

Disputes over cultural ownership, such as those involving musical instruments, further complicated perceptions of similarity. A 21-year-old young man in Phnom Penh expressed frustration, saying, “There is always controversy between Thailand and Cambodia specifically on traditional instruments which Thai people claim to be their own. However, I agree that there are similarities with shape, still the instruments have their own distinction from each other.”

The reflections of the Sharers show that cultural similarity functions as both a bridge and a boundary between Cambodians and Thais. While shared language, traditions, and history foster a sense of connection, they also surface tensions around ownership and recognition, revealing how intimacy and rivalry often coexist within perceptions of national identity. For Cambodians, this was often received as a challenge to national identity, causing frustration and anger.

THAI PROGRESS; CAMBODIAN ASPIRATIONS

“ When I talk about Thailand, I think of their progress in education, agriculture, industry, the country’s leadership system is more democratic than ours because people have more freedom of expression and participation in social work ”

- a 26-year-old female media professional passively engaged in online hate speech

FINDING 2:

WE KNOW THAT THAILAND IS MORE DEVELOPED THAN CAMBODIA, SO WHY DO THEY CONTINUE TO CLAIM WHAT IS OURS?

When asked about their perceptions of Thailand, an overwhelming number of Sharers compared the development and living conditions between the two countries, frequently describing Thailand as more advanced than Cambodia. A young man from Battambang who was actively engaged in online hate speech stated, “Thailand is a rapidly developed country in all sectors, with a strong economy.”

When comparing the two countries, many Sharers focused on Thailand’s advancement and development, particularly in relation to socio-economic growth and living standards. A young male IT student from Phnom Penh remarked, “When I think of Thailand, I think of the progress of their country. Compared to Cambodia, goods in their country are cheaper because they have more local products.” This sentiment was also shared across diverse Sharer backgrounds, including academics. “As an academic person, I know that Thailand is a much more developed country than Cambodia,” said a female instructor from Phnom Penh who admitted she had been passively engaged in online hate speech. Similarly, other Sharers echoed these views. “All I know about Thailand is that tourism is more developed than Cambodia, and their agriculture is also more developed since their state helps to subsidize,” explained a young web designer.

Beyond general comparisons, many Sharers reflected on specific aspects that, in their view, contribute to Thailand’s development and appeal. This included youth activism, tourism, education, democracy, healthcare, the economy, culture, opportunities, and governance. In terms of employment, Thailand was seen as a major destination for migrant workers within ASEAN, providing opportunities for both Thais and migrants from neighboring countries such as Cambodia and Myanmar. A young man from Battambang who revealed he was actively involved in online hate speech and contributed social media posts in some of the active forums noted, “Thailand has developed well and has provided many job opportunities for Cambodian people.”

Several Sharers also praised Thailand's education system, describing it as more innovative and better equipped with infrastructure. A young female student from Phnom Penh observed, "I think Thailand is a developed country... In terms of people, I think Thai people have good educational standards and a broad perspective." A pair of Listeners who were collecting data also recorded in their journal their own perceptions, noting that "Thailand has a modernization of education while Cambodia still follows the traditional and stereotype ways... People of Thailand have better opportunities to get education and being educated critically based on its equipment and technology advancement." However, these Listeners also noted the feeling of marginalization expressed by some Sharers they listened to, who felt dismissed by Thai people because of Cambodia's lower educational standards. As they reflected, "Thai people do not listen to us because we have lower educational standards than them." They felt that although Thailand's education is technologically advanced, "their perception on history is still narrow and does not match the educational level they received."

Freedom of expression and civic participation were also recurring points of comparison. Thailand was seen as offering greater freedom for youth in social expression, media representation, and politics. A female teacher who was passively engaged in online hate speech reflected, "Thailand has a large population with advanced development. I think Thai people and youth are braver than Cambodians since they had no war in the past, but Cambodia did." Another young media professional in Phnom Penh added, "The education system and democracy in Thailand is better than in Cambodia. The level of participation rights is higher than in Cambodia, even though there are some restrictions."

Beyond education and governance, many also pointed to healthcare and tourism as areas where Thailand appeared more advanced. Thai hospitals were viewed as more professional and better equipped, attracting Cambodian patients. A young female medical student noted, "I have noticed that many Cambodians travel to Thailand for its more advanced healthcare system. I accept this reality and understand that Thailand's healthcare system is more developed." Thailand was also seen as a more attractive tourism destination. "When it comes to Thailand, I think of the development of other countries, and there are more tourists than in Cambodia. I see that many Cambodians go to Thailand for concerts," explained a young computer science student from Phnom Penh.

Sharers also commented on politics and governance. Some, along with Listeners reflecting in their journals, observed that even under military-led governments, Thailand maintains societal development and social protection. They perceived Thai people as having more freedom to express their opinions and participate in political and cultural discussions. Thai political leaders were viewed as prioritizing national interests, and despite a history of coups, Thailand was seen as maintaining stability. A 26-year-old female media professional passively engaged in online hate speech commented, "The country's leadership system is more democratic than ours because people have more freedom of expression and participation in social work."

For many Cambodian participants, Thailand's progress represented both an aspiration and a source of frustration. Admiration for its economic growth, education, and freedoms often coexisted with feelings of inequality and resentment, shaping how Cambodian Sharers interpreted Thailand's actions and claims in the broader context of national pride and competition.

GROWING ONLINE CONFLICT BETWEEN KHMER AND THAI

“ In my opinion, Thai media coverage can be very fraudulent and create a lot of lies about our Cambodians ... so I started to cut myself off from Thai things for a while. ”

- a 24-year-old cyber security young professional in Phnom Penh

FINDING 3: ONLINE CONFLICT BETWEEN CAMBODIANS AND THAI IS GROWING, OFTEN INITIATED BY THAI.

Almost all Sharers were aware of, and shared their opinions on, the ongoing online conflict between Cambodians and Thais. These conflicts predominantly take place on social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok, focusing on issues related to culture, identity, celebrities, and behavior. A female researcher from Phnom Penh who was herself passively engaged in online hate speech explained, “I think now Thai and Khmer are having conflict on social media and both tried to claim culture and history, especially food and culture.” This view was echoed by a young male sociology student in Phnom Penh who stated, “In social media, we both fight to claim over something, and I think this kind of hate speech mostly came from Thai people.” A female medical student from Phnom Penh who was very active in contributing to online conflict between Khmer and Thai added, “As for internet conflicts, I often see at least three or four things happening a week, and what I remember and see often is related to this new food culture, theatrical performances, Angkor Wat temples, etc.” A male seller in Phnom Penh also actively involved in online hate speech also reflected, “With all the online conflict, I think the reactions from the Cambodian side are fairly analyzed, while the Thai side often goes too far. Sometimes, they even create fake accounts to post as Khmers, leading to misunderstandings about our people.”

Most Sharers indicated that the root causes of these online conflicts are complex and stem from historical perceptions, contested ownership claims over culture and identity, personal biases, and, in some cases, celebrity-related disputes. A junior IT professional from Phnom Penh explained:

From my perspective, the media portrayal of Cambodia and Thailand is not so good because some Cambodians’ mindset is ‘Thai is a [historical] thief.’ For instance, some time ago, I saw a conflict between Cambodians and Thais on the topic ‘Kun Khmer belongs to Khmer and Thai copies from Khmer.’ Because of this problem, it led Khmer athletes and Thai athletes who could not officially compete with each other (‘Kun Khmer’ during the 2023 Southeast Asian [SEA] Games).



Another young female journalist from Phnom Penh who was actively involved in online conflict with Thais shared her experience:

In the case of Lakon Khol (Khmer masked theater), they tried to claim it and I used to reply to the comment that it belongs to us, and I shared their post too. Then, some of the Thai people reacted angrily and commented on my post. They then took my picture and photoshopped it to the animal head or prostitute body. Sometimes, they took our country leader or my parents' photo and edited it with an animal face as a joke thing. On another occasion, I used to share about Khmer culture on the 'Yantra' tattoo that Cambodia also has... but those Thai people reacted angrily to all my profile pictures and my post.

This type of harassment was also described by a male student who was actively engaged in online conflict: "I think the Thai people always say bad things and photoshop a lot of bad pictures of Cambodia, such as the image of the leaders, temples, and so on. In my view, the Thai people are very active on social media and have the same views on attacking Cambodian culture and people." Such online tension prompted many Cambodian netizens to join the crowd. A male IT professional who was actively engaged in online conflict between Khmer and Thai stated, "Personally, I joined the online reactions over those [inappropriate] contents ... but I was removed from the group. Whenever I saw Thai people posted something [bad] about [Khmer] culture, I checked and sometimes commented below those posts." In addition to cultural disputes, some Cambodian participants noted that Thai users occasionally mocked Cambodia's political history and the Khmer Rouge regime, which further inflamed online tensions.

Nonetheless, a few Sharers mentioned that not all Thai people they interacted with online were involved in such conflicts, rather, only a small number of users appeared to provoke hostility. As noted by a 24-year-old male student, "The current online conflict on Facebook is caused by a few Cambodians and Thais who are unaware of the belongingness of both nations."

These reflections reveal that while Cambodian netizens often perceive Thais as the primary instigators of online conflict, both sides are entangled in cycles of reaction, ridicule, and nationalism. The resulting hostility not only reinforces digital divisions but also highlights how unresolved historical tensions and questions of cultural ownership continue to play out in virtual spaces.

NATIONALISM AND UNIFIED THAI NETIZENS

“ ***I once left a comment on a Facebook post, and then there were six Thai people replying to it.*** ”

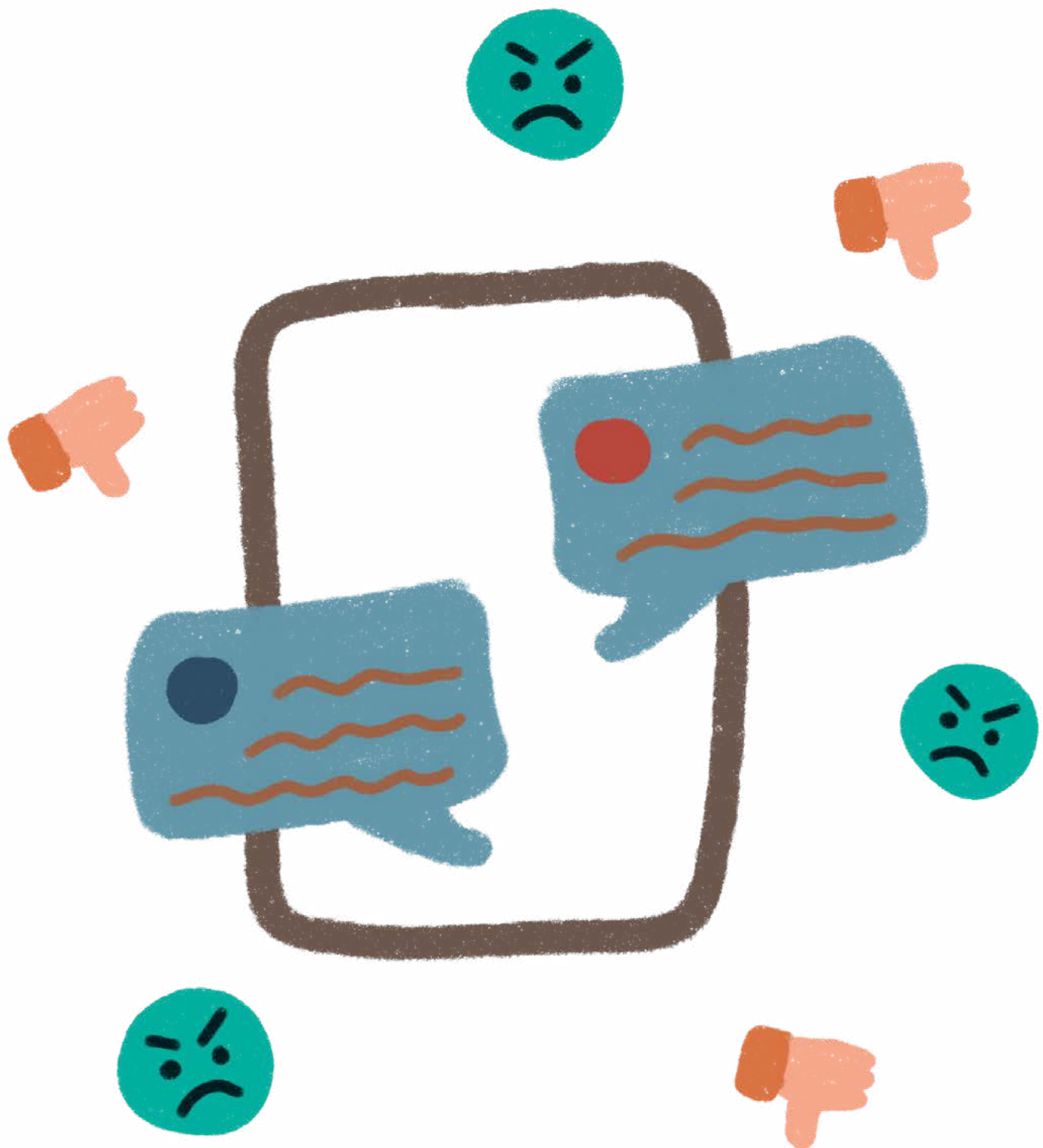
- a young government male official from Battambang Province as recounted by a Listener

FINDING 4: WE SEE THAI PEOPLE AS VERY NATIONALISTIC AND UNITED IN THEIR NATIONALISM.

The Cambodian perspective highlights a strong perceived sense of nationalism and unity among Thai netizens, which was interpreted both positively and negatively. Negative perceptions often stemmed from Sharers' personal experiences or second-hand accounts. A number of the Sharers expressed the view that Thai netizens display a high degree of nationalism, characterized by mutual support and cooperation, particularly on social media. They often noted that Thais predominantly use their own language and currency and consistently support local products, history, culture, and art. Sharers believed that despite internal issues, Thai people remain united and cooperative at the everyday community level. As commented by a young male journalist who described himself as being passively engaged in online conflict with Thais, "I see that Thailand, no matter how their politics change, remains stable. The Thai people are very nationalistic. They tend to use their country's currency, and they have the freedom of expression. Thai people always promote their culture, products, and soft power through their cultural activities." This view was also echoed by a young female content creator from Phnom Penh who stated, "I think that Thai people love each other... They support each other and they do anything together at the same time which we call unity."

Thai nationalism was also often seen among Sharers as part of a longer tradition and an upbringing in Thai society. A 24-year-old male student from Phnom Penh shared, "I think Thai people have a strong spirit of nationalist views, [stemming from] the long-complexed history. I think Thai nationalism was injected through history education, literature, and political propaganda." In their collaborative analysis, a pair of Listeners also recalled a Sharer's story about history teaching in Thailand, who noted that, for example, the Preah Vihear Temple was taught as still belonging to Thailand. They recalled the Sharer saying that "Thai teach their people from a young age to be patriotic ... this is the reason why the majority of the Thai people are nationalist." A few Sharers also came to such a conclusion through firsthand experience online. A university student who was actively engaged in the online conflict, frequently posting content in social media, noted, "They help each other by coming to comment in our post." This view was also observed recounted by many of the Listeners during the collective FLD analysis sessions when they reconvened in Chiang Mai to process data together.

These accounts from the FLD data suggest that Cambodian participants perceive Thai nationalism as both a strength and a source of tension. On one hand, it demonstrates cohesion and pride; on the other, it reinforces boundaries that make dialogue more difficult. The perception of Thai unity, especially in online spaces, continues to shape how Cambodians interpret interactions and conflicts between the two societies, and how they engage and participate themselves as online discourse escalates.



DIPLOMATIC HARMONY DESPITE ONGOING CHALLENGES

“

As for the political relations between the two countries, I see good foreign relations, especially mutual cooperation, investment, and sending workers and so on.

”

- a 25-year-old male journalist from Phnom Penh

FINDING 5: CAMBODIA AND THAILAND HAVE GOOD GOVERNMENT AND TRADE RELATIONS

Until more recently, relations between Cambodia and Thailand appeared to have been significantly improving over time, with stronger diplomatic ties, interconnected markets, and increasingly cooperative government engagement. Given that this study was conducted in 2024, prior to the escalation of armed conflict along the border in 2025, findings tended to reflect this view at the time FLD conversations occurred. A 23-year-old female journalist who was actively engaged in online conflict shared, “The state-to-state relation is good,” while another male journalist who was passively engaged in online conflict added, “Political relations between the two countries are also good, with mutual cooperation, investment, and the exchange of workers.” A few Sharers linked this good governmental relationship with political dynamics, as mentioned by a 22-year-old male student from Phnom Penh who said, “[The relationship] would turn bad if Thai politics change or if Thailand is ruled by the military leaders.”

Listeners also recalled conversations in which Sharers highlighted that Cambodians could migrate to work in Thailand and that the trade relationship between the two countries is mutually beneficial, with Cambodia exporting products and Thailand importing raw materials. Several noted that Cambodia’s relations with Thailand were better than with Vietnam, another neighboring country with which many Cambodians perceive negatively. Despite positive trade relations, however, some Sharers pointed out that the trade balance favored Thailand. As Cambodia imports a significant volume of products from Thailand while exporting fewer in return, conversations expressed a sense of unfairness. As a female mid-career media professional remarked, “The relations between the countries are good but not balanced, as we import more from Thailand than we export.” Another female teacher also added, “But the issue is Cambodian authorities make it easy for them to come to our land, while it is difficult for us to go [to Thailand].” Several Sharers and Listeners also observed that despite these strong state-to-state relations, tensions continued to persist at the people-to-people level. Listeners summarized their engagement during fieldwork, noting that conversations tended to bring up tensions often arising from historical animosities, cultural differences, and

the portrayal of each country on social media. Sharers themselves noted that while governmental relations are stable, conflicts over cultural ownership or territorial claims frequently surface online, leading to hate speech and emotional exchanges. As said by a trade union program officer in Phnom Penh, “Thai and Khmer relations are currently good, but in social media, some use hate speech against one another.” Another youth from Battambang Province attributed this to “historical factors, leading to unresolved issues.”

Sharers tended to emphasize conflicts arising when Thai individuals claimed cultural elements understood as Khmer heritage as their own. A 22-year-old male IT student noted, “It is observed that at present, the two countries have good business and diplomatic relations, but the two peoples do not have a good relationship because there is a conflict from the beginning, related to the cultural areas that the Thai people have always wanted or demanded from us so far.” Sharers also commented on ongoing territorial disputes, noting that military forces stationed along the border continue to cause concern about potential clashes. A 22-year-old female student expressed, “We’re not in the best relationship, especially with military forces stationed along the border. If anything goes wrong, tensions could escalate.” Another Sharer observed that past disputes, such as the border issues and the Temple of Preah Vihear, continue to linger in Cambodian people’s minds.

Reflections from FLD conversations from this timeframe show that while Cambodia and Thailand had strong governmental and trade relations, tensions at the societal level remained unresolved. Historical grievances, cultural sensitivities, and uneven perceptions of power continue to complicate people-to-people understanding even amid formal cooperation. This is significant because such lingering grievances can resurface at any time and, as occurred after this research, contribute to instability, particularly when triggers persist within a latent conflict setting.

VOICES BEHIND THE SCREEN ONLINE REACTIONS REVEAL THE FRAGILITY OF CROSS-BORDER DIALOGUE

It is easy for conversations online to turn hostile when national identity becomes part of the debate. A twenty-five-year-old Cambodian working in an authority position described how one of his posts about a clothing-related issue drew strong reactions from Thai users. The discussion quickly escalated, and he became the target of collective insults and criticism. The incident reflected how easily online spaces can amplify tension between the two countries.

The exchange centered on what might seem like a minor topic, yet it revealed how deep national sensitivity runs. Episodes like this, he believed, can influence how people view one another and risk deepening resentment. He referred to the past burning of the Thai embassy as a reminder of how unresolved hostility can spill beyond the digital world.

Rather than viewing the online attacks as an endpoint, he saw potential for constructive change through communication. He hoped that opportunities could be created for Cambodian and Thai people to meet, exchange ideas, and learn from one another in an environment of openness and respect. His story illustrates how online conflict can magnify old grievances, while dialogue and direct exchange remain essential tools for building understanding and reducing the distance created by digital divisions.

COUNTERING HATE WITH EDUCATION

“ We should have exchange programs to study about the history between both countries, and when problems happen on social media, the relevant ministries should release some clear information or some press to make the public understand and stop the misunderstanding. ”

- a 26-year-old male freelance journalist passively involved in the online conflict

FINDING 6: ADDRESSING ONLINE HATE SPEECH THROUGH EDUCATION, MEDIA LITERACY, AND GOVERNMENT AND NGO INTERVENTION

Many Sharers raised concerns about the persistence of online hate speech and the lack of intervention from relevant actors, warning that such inaction could lead to numerous negative consequences. Addressing this issue, they often emphasized, requires a multifaceted approach involving individuals, educators, governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Almost all Sharers expressed the importance of education in preventing hate speech and reducing future tensions.

Most Sharers highlighted the crucial role of individuals in mitigating the problem. They believed that personal behavior online can either worsen or improve the situation. Some shared their thoughts on how they believed individuals could help reduce hate speech such as by reporting false information, hiding inappropriate content, avoiding interaction with inflammatory posts, and using respectful language when expressing opinions. A 23-year-old female journalist intern stated, “To solve this, we should start by not reacting, hiding the post, or reporting the page.” Another who did this noted, “When I saw the hate speech related post, I reported the page.” A legal professional also echoed similar thoughts saying, “My personal idea to solve this is not to get involved with such posts and report the page. If we interact, we fall into the trap of MMO [Make Money Online].”

Sharers also underscored the key role of education in addressing the problem. They believed educational institutions should teach accurate historical information, revise school curricula, and create more opportunities for exchange programs. Professors should remain neutral when teaching sensitive subjects, while universities can play a role in fostering cross-cultural learning. As a Sharer with a background in media expressed, “University must design a program which gives students an opportunity for study exchange and learn from one another’s cultures.” A Sharer who was a member in a trade union similarly stated, “The way to solve the issue is to have youth dialogue from both countries, accepting cultural differences and focusing on education with an



open mind.” Another 22-year-old female student added, “I think the future solution should start from us, understanding our own belongingness, trying to study and recognizing what we belong to and what we do not.” A history student who had revealed being actively engaged in online hate speech also commented, “Cambodian and Thai history professionals should work closely together to identify [the truth] and I want to see the people of both countries open their hearts and listen to each other.”

In addition to education, many Sharers emphasized the role of governments in promoting understanding and curbing online hostility. They believed that government ministries and offices should educate citizens about historical facts and create opportunities for people from both countries to interact. Initiatives such as exchange programs, seminars, and collaborative projects were viewed as ways to promote peace and mutual respect. Some Sharers also called for stricter policies on social media use to curb the spread of misinformation by influencers and content creators. A young female content creator herself suggested, “Governments should produce videos educating people on proper social media use,” while another Sharer added, “Government should support an exchange study [between Cambodians and Thais] about each other and put the issue on the table and ... government should educate people on culture and history because we don’t want to get more confused and hate one another.” Another Sharer also stressed that governments from both countries should do their best to peacefully resolve ongoing border and territorial disputes.

Sharers further identified the importance of national and community-level organizations as vital stakeholders in this effort. Many mentioned that NGOs should collaborate with individuals, content creators, influencers, and academics to address online hate speech through awareness campaigns and dialogue. NGOs were also seen as having an important role in countering misinformation, promoting media literacy, and facilitating people-to-people engagement. As one Sharer recommended, “NGOs should facilitate exchange research awareness among youth and organize roundtable discussions.” Reflections with Cambodian Sharers affected by ongoing online conflict with Thai netizens reveal a widespread awareness among Sharers that online hate speech is not merely an individual behavioral issue but a symptom of deeper structural and educational gaps. Their calls for collective responsibility across government, education, and civil society indicate an understanding of digital conflict as embedded within broader social relations and historical narratives. The emphasis on cross-border education, media literacy, and state accountability demonstrates a shift from reactive measures toward preventive and dialogic strategies aimed at long-term attitudinal change. However, their appeals also highlight persistent limitations in institutional responsiveness and the uneven capacity of individuals and NGOs to counter entrenched nationalist narratives online. Such insights underscore the need for multilevel interventions that address both the communicative and relational dimensions of online hostility, recognizing that digital peacebuilding requires coordinated efforts between citizens, educators, and institutions.

WHOSE HISTORY, WHOSE HERITAGE?

“

I am neutral between Cambodia and Thailand because we cannot claim anything since our history is written by the winners in the history of France or internationally. What our old generation had taught us was different from the Thai older generation, so this has also brought us into conflict.

”

- a 23-year-old passively engaged in online hate speech

FINDING 7: BOTH OUR COUNTRIES SEEM TO TEACH DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF HISTORY.

Thailand and Cambodia, two of Southeast Asia's oldest kingdoms, share deep historical and cultural roots that trace back to times of ancient civilization. These connections are evident in their similar languages, cultural practices, and socio-ethnic features. However, despite these shared origins, the relationship between the two countries has been marked by tension and conflict, largely due to differing interpretations of history which frequently spill into online interactions between netizens in both countries.

Many Cambodian Sharers expressed concern about Thailand's portrayal of history, particularly regarding cultural ownership. From the conceptualization of the ancient kingdom and empire to ongoing border disputes, each country tends to view the past through its own lens, leading to misunderstandings and tension. In one FLD conversation, a 28-year-old history teacher shared, "Cambodia and Thailand have never been fully in harmony for a long time, due to historical reasons." One of the most significant issues brought up across conversations was the Preah Vihear Temple. While Cambodia views it as a symbol of its historical legacy, Thai historical narratives often view it as part of their ancestral heritage. This divergence in perspectives appears to have been deeply ingrained in each country's education system and emerged in numerous conversations among the Cambodian Sharers. As one put it, "A large number of Thai people, based on the history they've been taught, instruct and share that we Cambodians are thieves of their land, stealing the Preah Vihear Temple and Angkor Wat."

Many Cambodian Sharers accused Thailand of presenting a biased version of history, especially regarding cultural ownership. Some with experience in Thailand mentioned that Thai school curricula teach students that landmarks like the Preah Vihear Temple were once part of Thailand. A 26-year-old female media worker stated, "As I know from my senior who was on an exchange program, Thai accounts of some parts of the history of Thailand are different from Cambodia. For instance, regarding Preah Vihear temple, Thai history states the temple belongs to them... that it is their ancestor's legacy." Another 24-year-old web designer added, "I know from acquaintances with children who

live and study in Thailand that the history they teach is different from Cambodia's, that they teach their children that the Cambodians take their land."

In reflection on the conversations with Sharers, two Cambodian Listeners who were both historians explored their data with what they understood as Thai history. They noted that Thailand's nationalization efforts in the 20th century led to historical narratives that were frequently reinterpreted to emphasize "Thainess" and territorial belonging. This paralleled with what some Sharers discussed about the Thai education system playing a central role in Thai views on history, often grounded in the idea that Cambodia historically belonged to Thailand. They felt that over generations, this perspective fostered a sense of cultural ownership among Thai people, leading to claims over both tangible and intangible heritage, such as temples, traditional music, and other cultural elements. A 24-year-old female seller explained, "I think that Thai people are very hateful to the Cambodian people because of the historical factors that have been taught, accusing the Cambodians of stealing Thai culture." Several Cambodian Sharers further noted that such historical bias significantly influences Thai attitudes toward Cambodians. A musician recounted how Khmer instruments are often misattributed to Thai origins, while others expressed frustration over accusations of cultural theft. A 21-year-old Cambodian female student reported, "As a Khmer musician who plays traditional Khmer instruments, I often encounter confusion when our instruments are mistakenly attributed to Thailand." Another 27-year-old male seller shared, "I get so furious seeing the hateful content about cultural claims as I feel compelled to comment in defense of what is right and wrong." Some Sharers saw the issue as a broader one reflecting education, such as an 18-year-old Cambodian Jiu Jitsu athlete and coach who commented, "I hope Thai can educate their people with real history so people will not have more conflict." Others noted that digital reconciliation might begin through education reform, with collaborative efforts between Cambodia and Thailand to develop shared curriculum content addressing historical biases and presenting more balanced perspective. Other suggestions included establishing bilateral committees to compare and revise history textbooks, implementing programs to teach conflict resolution, and creating initiatives to promote mutual understanding of culture and traditions. Cambodian Sharers also called for stronger advocacy and representation in the media, particularly through sharing accurate stories and showcasing Cambodian heritage to counter cultural misunderstandings. A 24-year-old female researcher at a research institute in Phnom Penh expressed, "I wish our government could discuss this with Thai government. The Ministry of Education should have a system to check what both of us wrote in history in the curriculum. It's better that we can better understand one another."

Reflections among Sharers highlight how history is not merely remembered but continually reconstructed as a tool of identity and power. Competing national narratives about cultural heritage become mechanisms through which both states reproduce legitimacy and belonging, often at the expense of mutual recognition. Ongoing conflict described in conversations over monuments like Preah Vihear did not only represent territory or heritage but appeared to put focus on power and the right to narrate the past. In digital spaces, these historical narratives appear to be amplified and weaponized, turning history education into an emotional trigger for online conflict. The Cambodian Sharers' calls for broader interventions and solutions, such as collaborative education reform, reveal both awareness and agency with a desire to move beyond inherited antagonisms by re-authoring shared histories. Yet, their reflections also expose how difficult such reconciliation can be when the structures of schooling, media, and nationhood themselves depend on sustaining distinct, and often oppositional, memories.

HURTING THROUGH THE SCREEN

“ I worry that if online hate speech continues on social media, it could lead to real conflict in the future. I’m afraid that without clarification, the next generation will struggle to discern what is right and wrong, which could result in them taking a stand and escalating conflicts. ”

- a 25-year-old female corporate employee warning of a possible future conflict

FINDING 8: ONLINE CONFLICT AFFECTS OUR MENTAL HEALTH NOW, BUT IT IS UNCLEAR IF THIS COULD LEAD TO IN-PERSON CONFLICT IN THE FUTURE.

Digital media has become a powerful force, transforming how people communicate and interact. The rise of social media has shifted historical and cultural disputes between Cambodia and Thailand into the online space, creating new tensions and misunderstandings. Many Sharers worried about how these online conflicts would affect the future relationship between the two countries. A 26-year-old female working in media explained, “I think this online conflict is also part of the impact on the relationship between the people of the two countries, because as this happens and continues, people on both sides will hate each other more and more because of it. Both sides spend time focusing on the problem rather than the solution.”

Many Sharers focused on discussing online arguments often revolving around issues of cultural heritage. A 23-year-old male web designer described:

A few weeks ago, I saw a Khmer marriage video on TikTok. I saw some comment saying, “Thai dress so beautiful.” Then Cambodians responded, “Thai copy land.” At that time, I did not react on TikTok, but I just asked myself in my mind “Do they open their eyes?” I even responded to myself, “Oh, maybe they do not know how to open their eyes to look clearly.” When I saw those posts, sometimes I was angry inside but did not directly reacting to this hate speech. I just stopped doing anything related to Thailand for a while. I just don’t understand why they cannot separate what is theirs and what is ours.

A 20-year-old international relations student recalled another example of their own engagement online in responding to a controversy:

A Thai Miss Grand beauty pageant contestant who visited Angkor Wat wore Thai clothes and posted the caption “Happy Songkran in Thailand.” This will make many people misunderstand that Angkor Wat belongs to Thailand, because she is also a well-known person. Because I do not want to allow such confusion, I also commented, “If you do not know the history, you should go to school and consider before deciding

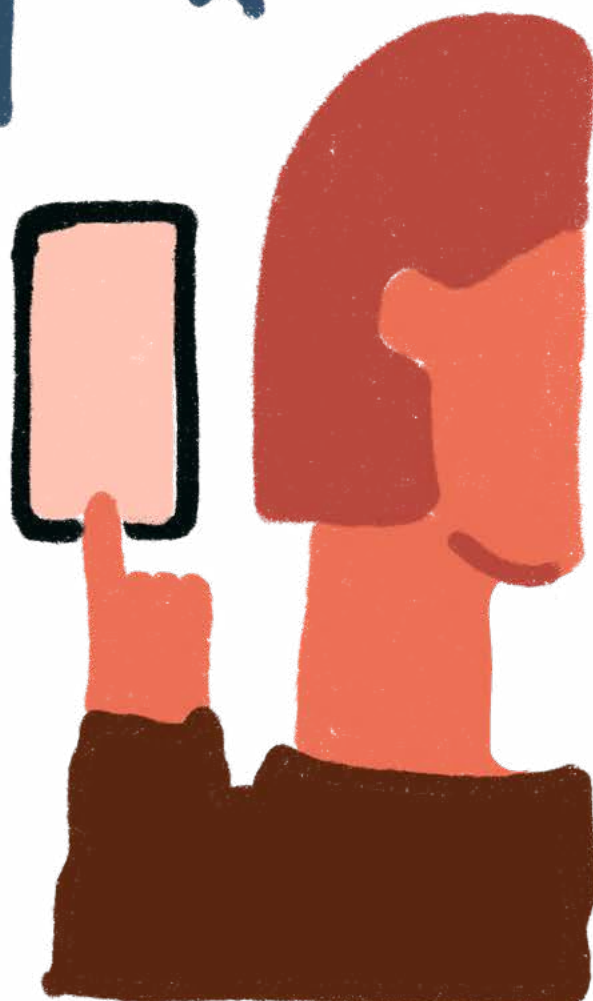
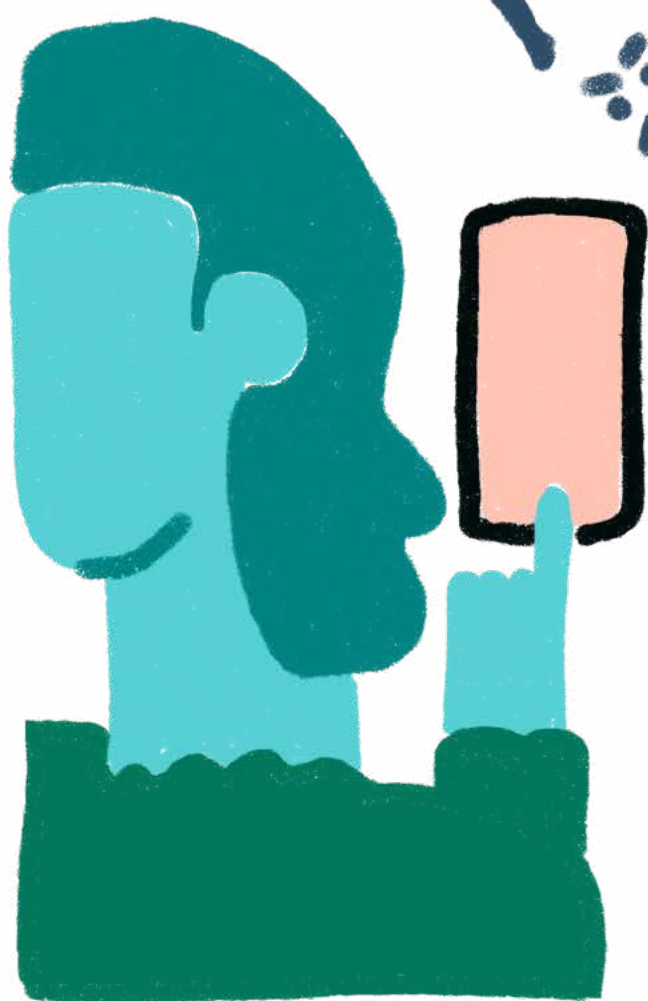
to do something.” I also went to reply in other comments by those who supported her, because at that time it made me feel very unhappy that they were doing this to us. Even though this happened, I still like the film industry and the Miss Grand beauty pageant in Thailand. I don’t think it can lead to state-level conflicts, but it is creating community conflicts between the people of the two countries.

These tensions often did extend beyond the digital space, however. Another Sharer recalled how cultural disputes online had affected Cambodian workers in Thailand, with some losing their jobs. Others mentioned Cambodian celebrities being harshly criticized for visiting Thailand during disputes, affecting their mental health and sense of safety.

The emotional toll of online conflict appears significant in Cambodia. Many Cambodian Sharers expressed feelings of personal anger and sadness in response to what they were seeing in social media. “The quarrel in the media did not affect me at first, but when I saw the nasty pictures used by the Thai attackers, it made me feel bad,” said a 20-year-old male student. Another 21-year-old female student shared, “When I saw all those [online] activities, I thought they were unclear, and it hurt my feelings.” Some did convey worry that online hate speech could eventually spill into real-world conflict. A 19-year-old female computer science student said, “Online conflict just makes both people sides feel angry with each other for a short term while problems happen. It can lead to physical conflict.” There was further concern that these disputes might intensify if left unresolved. A 21-year-old female teacher commented, “I think the online conflict has negative impacts on the society and also the relationship between the two countries, particularly increasing tensions along the border and between cultures.” Another 24-year-old female teacher echoed this view, saying, “I think the online hate speech has a negative impact on the society, and it could lead to real-life conflict.” A 22-year-old female marketing student added, “Real conflict could arise in the future if online hate speech persists, particularly concerning border issues. Normal topics are less likely to provoke conflict.”

To address these challenges, many Sharers emphasized the need for proactive intervention. They believed that both Cambodian and Thai governments should take steps to tackle online hate speech and promote mutual understanding. Education, historical clarification, and awareness campaigns were all mentioned among Sharers as essential tools for preventing escalation. As a 25-year-old female corporate employee expressed, “I worry that if online hate speech continues on social media, it could lead to real conflict in the future. I’m afraid that without clarification, the next generation will struggle to discern what is right and wrong, which could result in them taking a stand and escalating conflicts.”

Sharers’ reflections show that online conflict has already begun to affect their emotions, trust, and sense of security, even if it has not yet translated into direct confrontation. They described cycles of frustration, withdrawal, and helplessness that reflect the mental strain of ongoing digital hostility. Although opinions on whether the possibility of physical violence or offline conflict could result from online aggression were divided, many recognized that the danger lies not only in words exchanged online, but in how these words quietly shape future attitudes. Their concerns reveal that the boundaries between virtual and real conflict are increasingly blurred, and that preventing escalation will require not only policy and education, but also empathy, awareness, and cross-border dialogue to repair the emotional harm already felt.



LEARNING BEYOND BORDERS WHEN DISTANCE CHALLENGES UNDERSTANDING

It is easy to form opinions from a distance, before seeing life up close. A twenty-five-year-old Cambodian, now working in the corporate sector, recalled that before studying in Thailand she had absorbed negative impressions of the country from those around her in Cambodia. Once she arrived in Thailand, however, she found a reality far more complex than the stories she had heard.

During her time as a student, she encountered Thai classmates who were welcoming and open in their interactions. Many showed interest in Cambodian culture and everyday life, often asking questions that reflected both curiosity and misunderstanding. While some of these questions drew on common stereotypes, conversations with her peers remained calm and respectful, creating an atmosphere where both sides could exchange ideas and learn about each other's cultures.

Online spaces told a different story. Because she could read both Thai and Khmer, she often saw how each side portrayed the other unfairly. Negative posts about Thailand appeared in Khmer media, while some Thai users shared hostile comments about Cambodia. Reading such exchanges left her disheartened, yet she chose not to respond, aware of how easily conflict can grow. She worried that continued exposure to divisive messages might shape the next generation's perceptions and deepen misunderstanding between the two nations.

Her story demonstrates how firsthand experience can challenge inherited bias, revealing the difference between what is told and what is lived. It suggests that while prejudice can spread quickly in online spaces, genuine connection and conversation in everyday life remain powerful forces for understanding.



UNDER THE THAI GAZE

“ **Some Thai people are good, but others, when they know that we are Khmer, distance themselves from us. They do not like us, they do not want to talk to us, they think we have stolen everything from them.** ”

- a 24-year-old female seller

FINDING 9: WE ARE DISLIKED BY THE THAI AND FEEL LIKE THEY LOOK DOWN ON US.

The relationship between Cambodia and Thailand has long been influenced by cultural, social, and political factors. While some Sharers recognized that there are Thai people who are friendly toward Cambodians, there appeared to be a noticeable perception that many Thais hold onto negative views of Cambodians. This theme often emerged from the experiences and perceptions of discrimination that some Cambodians had with Thai people, both in person and on social media as conveyed by Sharers through firsthand or second-hand accounts. The narrative of being looked down upon, disrespected, and discriminated against by Thai individuals was a recurring sentiment expressed by many Sharers throughout FLD conversations. Through personal anecdotes and reflections, their perspectives highlight the complexities of the Cambodia-Thailand relationship from the Cambodian point of view, emphasizing the impact of nationalism, cultural differences, and the power of social media in shaping public opinion.

There was a strong sense among Cambodian Sharers that some Thai people dislike them and look down on them, especially when they identify as Khmer. A 24-year-old female Sharer said, “I used to go to Thailand for treatment a while ago and there was a good reception inside the hospital, but outside, some Thai are very discriminating against Cambodians and don’t want to talk with us.” Such a negative perception extended beyond just in-person interactions. Another Sharer went into detail about her own online experience when engaging in public posts on sensitive issues about the Cambodian-Thai relationship. The 16-year-old female computer science student explained, “I once shared a post on TikTok about the boycott and movement to unfollow Thai stars because at that time I saw the news about Khmer laborers in Thailand who were being fired and blamed when accused of Khmer stealing Thai culture.” Others also conveyed their general perceptions viewing Thai people as unfriendly toward Cambodians. A 21-year-old male sociology student said:

About the people, they are not very welcoming or friendly at all. And when they come to Cambodia, they do not really respect us even though we try to welcome them as a good host. When I went to a market in Thailand, they didn’t welcome me, and didn’t want to talk with me when they found out I’m Khmer or heard me speaking Khmer. But when I speak Thai, they act as normal. In my opinion, around 30% of Thai people look down on Khmer people.

Social media often amplified these feelings of mistreatment and discrimination. A 23-year-old female intern in journalism shared her own personal experience: “My [Thai] ex is fine, he is good, but most people Thailand seem very selfish and not good. Social

media between Thai and Khmer nowadays shows that Thai look down on Khmer and Thai bully Khmer online. Thai really look down on us. I used to see posts which are too bad for Khmer people, revealing discrimination.” She further elaborated on this in the broader context of social media and nationalism stating:

The way they are using the media is very discriminatory toward our country and shows they think very badly about our people, like trash, based on social media posts. Some page posts discriminate and look down on our people who migrate to their country. Only a small group of people is making this issue big and encouraging extreme nationalism because when they see Cambodia successfully develop in some area, they come to claim it and create some negative discussions about it. Seeing the memes posted on social media, it was so racist! I think that they look down on us so much and they never recognize that we are also a nation in this world. They think our country should not exist on the map and we should not share the border with them.

There were also instances described among Sharers in which Cambodians felt insulted in person when engaging directly with Thai. A 27-year-old male vendor shared his experience visiting Thailand, saying, “I’ve been to Surin, and everyone seemed very nice to me. However, there was one incident when I spoke in broken Thai at a supermarket, and the girls there laughed at me. It made me feel embarrassed.” Many Cambodian Sharers felt that Thai generally thought poorly of their country and its people. A 19-year-old university student said, “Thailand thinks of us negatively and we also think of them in a negative way as well. I think Cambodian media is better because Thailand likes to spread fake news. The relationship between us and them is not so good because they don’t welcome us.” Some Cambodian Sharers who had worked in Thailand, or who knew others living and working in the country, similarly shared stories of mistreatment. A 23-year-old female told Listeners, “I know some people who work in Thailand, and they have experienced being exploited by their employers in various ways and have faced discrimination from Thai people.” Another male Cambodian student said, “I have relatives who live in Thailand, and I myself have lived there, but it wasn’t easy due to the discrimination from Thai people.”

In the context of culture and heritage, some Cambodian Sharers felt that Thai people do not acknowledge Khmer contributions to their own culture. An 18-year-old male IT student shared, “I do sometimes feel that Thai people don’t fully appreciate us in certain areas, such as in the entertainment sector. For instance, a film produced by [Cambodian company] Sastra Film was banned in Thailand, reflecting a lack of recognition and respect for our cultural contributions.” Sharers also discussed how social media plays a significant part in shaping such negative perceptions around questions of culture. A 23-year-old teacher referring to an incident in 2023 when a Thai footballer threw his silver medal into the crowd, said, “When there is a SEA Games competition, we are the hosts, but they don’t value us. The gifts we give them are often discarded.” The same Sharer also referred to the banned film issue lamenting, “...and when it comes to Cambodian films, they don’t allow their people to watch our movies.”

Across these accounts, Cambodian Sharers expressed deep frustration and sadness at being perceived as inferior. Their reflections reveal how discrimination is not confined to isolated moments but is also felt as part of a wider pattern of unequal relations. Everyday interactions, whether online or in person, often reinforced hierarchies of worth shaped by history, nationalism, and media portrayal. While most Sharers did not describe overt hostility, their experiences suggest that feeling looked down upon can erode confidence, reinforce resentment, and make cross-border friendship harder to sustain.

INVISIBLE ACTORS INFLUENCING ONLINE SPACES

“ ***I think that it is just propaganda by someone, it's just a small thing that some people try to do.*** ”

- a 23-year-old university student

FINDING 10: WE BELIEVE THERE ARE OUTSIDE FORCES AT WORK DRIVING ONLINE CONFLICT FOR THEIR OWN PERSONAL GAINS.

The ongoing hate speech and online conflict between Thai and Cambodian users on social media were often seen to be fueled by anonymous accounts, fake profiles, and individuals seeking personal or political gain, mentioned across FLD conversations in Cambodia. Many Sharers expressed a belief that these online tensions are manipulated by outside forces for financial, political, or opportunistic reasons rather than genuine public sentiment. This was often expressed explicitly as they shared their opinions and perceptions with Listeners. For example, a 23-year-old university student expressed:

I think those posts on social media come from hidden identities and anonymous posters. I don't know who is posting this kind of stuff and it seems like they're fake profiles. I think their purpose is to make Khmers and Thais confused and post hate speech on social media. I no longer react to it or comment on any of those posts anymore as it's very useless information for me and nobody cares. But I still go through it and read the comments.

Some also felt that such possible perpetrators behind these negative online posts were anonymous users seeking attention or financial reward. A 20-year-old male student said, “The Thai media users who caused the conflicts do not reveal their true identities on social media.” Another 22-year-old female student who was often exposed to Cambodian-Thai conflict in digital spaces added, “I think the online hate speech happens as it provides some kind of financial gain for those who produce and create that content.”

Some Sharers expressed the idea that social media has become a breeding ground for opportunistic behavior, where individuals or groups exploit content related to the conflict to attract followers or generate income. A 21-year-old female student said, “I think content creation may be done for any kind of benefits to the user, such as popularity.” Another 23-year-old male web designer said, “Nowadays some MMO [Make Money Online] schemes try to make these contents to earn money.” The transient and fast cyclical nature of some online conflicts also suggested opportunism as discussed by some Sharers. As one shared, “Some things happen, but only a few days later, most of them disappear. I think sometimes, maybe they just come from some opportunists who are checking who might want to take advantage of that.” A 19-year-old female computer science student reflected, “Thai and Cambodians online on social media discuss topics such as Black Pink versus BTS, Miss Grand, temples, and Vanda. Some news is weird. I just block and report those pages, such as those that claim Vanda is Thai. I observed that those who create the hate speech content are the same as previous people posting.” A few Sharers also noted how some pages intentionally create conflict for popular-



ity, possibly to gain financial profit in some way through online business. A 20-year-old international relations student explained this idea saying, “Some pages post information to get a lot of attention when there is a popular story, and I noticed that some pages, once there are a lot of followers, start deleting that content and sell those pages to others online.” Another 22-year-old male IT student reflected, “Some people take the opportunity to make money on the internet, because I used to see some pages before popping up like this, but when many likes and followers join, they began to delete all that information and sell it to other businesses.” The creation of fake accounts to amplify conflict was also seen as common. A Jiu Jitsu athlete and coach said, “Meanwhile, I think those posts are anonymous and some comments are from fake profiles, but I still tried to explain what’s going on between Khmers and Thais.”

Some Sharers also believed that political motives were behind many of these unfolding conflicts taking place online. They suspected that political leaders or interest groups might be using online arguments to gain visibility or manipulate public opinion. A 24-year-old female researcher explained, “I used to read their comments on those posts. Some posts have a political purpose and were created to make something more popular to capture the interest of people and get some kind of benefit from it. If some political leader in their country tries to make that issue become bigger to gain support from their people, the problem will become bigger, matching their intention.” A common belief was also shared that external actors may be driving the conflict for their own purposes. A 22-year-old female teacher reflected, “I also think that this conflict is not always from both countries. Sometimes there may be a third party who wants us to have a conflict with each other, which could influence the views of the majority.”

To address these challenges, many Sharers suggested avoiding engagement with conflict-driven content. A 25-year-old law student offered a thoughtful analysis and solution-based comment:

My personal idea to solve this is not to get involved in these kinds of posts, and we can report the pages. If we keep interacting with this, we will get trapped by the MMO [Make Money Online] schemes. To deal with this I suggest Cambodian and Thai NGOs should exchange research and foster awareness among youth by having round table discussions about this problem. For government, policy should be developed to punish these content creators because they lead the conflict. We should have influencers tasked to raise awareness on social media about fake news and about our cultural similarities.

Across these reflections, Sharers revealed a growing awareness that online conflict is not always spontaneous or authentic. Many believed it to be intentionally fueled by opportunistic or politically motivated actors who manipulate social media for profit or power. This sense of manipulation deepens distrust not only between Thai and Cambodian users but also toward the platforms themselves. For Sharers, the challenge is not only to identify truth from deception but also to resist being drawn into cycles of anger that serve others’ interests. Their perspectives underscore the need in Cambodia for digital literacy, regulation, and cross-border collaboration to expose and counter these possible external forces that exploit division for personal gain.



**A THAI
PERSPECTIVE**

FINDINGS

A THAI PERSPECTIVE

“ **The first thing that came to mind about Cambodia was the online conflicts I often see on social media. Initially, I thought it was dangerous, and the people seemed untrustworthy... I admit, at first, I felt scared because I didn't know what people there would be like. But once I arrived, I have to say, the people were actually very nice.** ”

- a 31-year-old journalist in Thailand as recounted by a Listener

OPINIONS AND THOUGHTS SHARED ACROSS CONVERSATIONS WITH THAI

At the Information Processing and Transformative Space Lab in Chiang Mai, Thailand, Thai Listeners recalled key themes that emerged from their conversations with Thai Sharers. Through these facilitated sessions, Listeners reflected on their discussions and identified the most frequently mentioned ideas. The main themes are presented below, ranked through a group voting process to highlight those that resonated most strongly across all conversations. Thai Sharers were categorized into three types: those actively participating in online hate speech, those passively participating, and those exposed to hate speech without engaging in it. The themes reflect this mix of participation among Sharers.

1. We have a shared culture with Cambodians as a neighboring country.
2. Cambodia is less developed than us and tries to claim our culture and achievements.
3. The current situation online is trivial and is not affecting us, although it could impact the future generation if prolonged.
4. We do not know a lot about Cambodia even though it is a neighboring country.
5. Media on both sides is perpetuating negative sentiments through negative portrayals and misinformation.
6. The conflict is very difficult to solve, but deeper contact and connections across the border could help to foster mutual understanding.
7. Thai and Cambodian governments have good national relations.
8. Outside actors are playing a role in perpetuating online conflict between us.
9. We have historical grievances and different perspectives that continue to impact our current relations.
10. Poor critical thinking contributes to ongoing issues between Thai and Cambodians

This chapter expands on these themes and other topics identified by the Listeners, examining findings revealed through a deeper analysis of the recording tools and follow-up work conducted by the analysis team.

A SHARED CULTURE IN CONFLICT— BOUND TOGETHER, PULLED APART

“**The issue of various claims is seen as a matter of cultural fluidity, and there is no need to judge who it belongs to.**”

- a 31-year-old female journalist

FINDING 1: WE HAVE A SHARED CULTURE WITH CAMBODIANS AS A NEIGHBORING COUNTRY.

As Thai Listeners unpacked emerging themes during data processing in Chiang Mai, they collectively reflected on how Thailand and Cambodia, neighboring countries in Southeast Asia, share a long history and a border that has fostered significant cultural overlap in areas such as art, religion, language, clothing, and cuisine. One pair of Listeners described this relationship as an “interconnected regional heritage,” emphasizing how deeply these cultural ties run.

Some Sharers highlighted similarities in art and religion. For instance, one Sharer noted that images of Buddhism and Angkor Wat often come to mind when thinking of Cambodia, as both countries express their shared beliefs through similar religious structures and artistic forms. Another Sharer reflected on this connection, observing that Cambodia feels “similar to Thailand with a mix of both positive and negative aspects.” These reflections illustrated a shared cultural heritage that has developed over centuries of interaction and mutual influence between the two countries.

Language similarities were also discussed. One Sharer pointed out that in the northeastern Thai provinces bordering Cambodia, such as Surin, Buriram, and Sisaket, many Thais speak Khmer, and borrowing words between the two languages is common. Regarding clothing, another Sharer observed, “It’s common for neighboring countries to have similar costumes based on their regions. Lanna costumes in northern Thailand resemble those of Burma, and southern Thai attire is similar to Malaysian styles. It’s not surprising that Khmer costumes share similarities with those in other parts of Thailand.”

Food was also seen as a shared cultural element. A Sharer who had visited Cambodia noted that Cambodian cuisine has much in common with Thai food, underscoring the connection between the two countries. During the FLD training, when Thai Listeners visited Cambodia, similarities in curry dishes such as Amok and Hor Mok, both steam-cooked in banana leaves, sparked discussions about how shared flavors and culinary techniques reflect the interconnectedness of the two cultures. Listeners from both countries compared dishes, noting both parallels and subtle differences. These conversations highlighted not only the interconnectedness of Thai and Cambodian cuisines but also how cultural identity is expressed and celebrated through food.

CULTURAL FLUIDITY FASHION EVOLVES, BUT UNDERSTANDING DOES NOT ALWAYS KEEP PACE

A thirty-four-year-old Thai woman who worked as an interpreter spoke about the small but recurring conflicts she noticed online between Thais and Cambodians. She had never met anyone from Cambodia and admitted that she did not really have an image of Cambodian people. "I don't feel anything special about Cambodia," she said. "I've just never had the experience." Most of what she knew about Cambodia came from what appeared on social media. She often saw people arguing about who "owned" traditional Thai clothing or even about public figures being claimed by another country. "I don't really care about those arguments," she said. "They're just toxic." For her, fashion is fluid and naturally changes over time. "Thai traditional clothes as we know them today were inspired by many different sources," she said. "Even each region in Thailand has its own style." She laughed as she mentioned that "Thai people also wear Japanese school uniforms," seeing it simply as fashion, something people enjoy.

Her reflections revealed a calm understanding of how culture evolves. She saw imitation as appreciation and believed that arguments over cultural ownership missed the point. Rather than dividing people, these exchanges remind us that influence and creativity continually flow between societies.

Such shared elements of language, clothing, and cuisine that were mentioned demonstrated the deep cultural ties that continue to bind Thailand and Cambodia despite their differences. These cultural elements reflect a long history of exchange and interaction among communities and kingdoms, with cultural interchange taking place long before modern borders were defined. Historical ties between Thailand and Cambodia have fostered an ongoing exchange that continues to this day, shaped by shared civilizations that evolved over centuries in Southeast Asia. However, these similarities did not always appear to foster unity. At times, they seemed to have led to misunderstanding and tension. One Sharer observed, "I've come to realize that everything being argued back and forth is actually about the fact that we share a common culture. There are overlapping aspects of truth that make it difficult to determine who truly owns what." Listeners reflected that online conflicts often revolve around cultural claims, with debates about Thai costumes, Khmer boxing, and temples. Many Sharers viewed these as part of a broader regional culture in which cultural elements are naturally shared. "There was no need to decide what belonged to whom," one pair of Listeners reflected, explaining that historical evidence continues to emerge and reshape understandings of culture. They added that it is natural for neighboring countries to share cultural elements and that "fashion is fluid, changing over time," making rigid ownership claims less relevant today.

Many Sharers believed that collaboration offers a way for shared cultural heritage to thrive without disputes over ownership. By working together, Thailand and Cambodia could leverage their shared cultural and natural resources for mutual benefit. Several participants suggested that fostering respect and open-mindedness would help preserve shared heritage while reducing conflict. They also saw value in involving experts from both countries to research cultural origins and foster a more balanced understanding. Findings from Thai Sharers show that Thailand and Cambodia share a deeply interconnected culture as neighboring countries. For many Thais, it feels natural for countries in the same region to share cultural elements, connections that carry historical significance and continue to shape both nations today. However, online conflicts often center on debates over cultural ownership. To foster mutual understanding and respect, both countries could benefit from collaborative efforts to bridge these cultural divides. Government and relevant agencies may play a key role in facilitating such dialogue and promoting a shared sense of heritage.

CLAIM AND COMPARISON, DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL OWNERSHIP

“ ***Sometimes I wonder why they have to claim everything from us... .Lisa¹⁴, Muay Thai, even our food. If their country is truly proud of its own identity, they wouldn't need to do this.*** ”

- a 22-year-old university student from Bangkok

FINDING 2: CAMBODIA IS LESS DEVELOPED THAN US AND TRIES TO CLAIM OUR CULTURE AND ACHIEVEMENTS.

A common perception emerged among Sharers that Cambodia is viewed as less developed than Thailand. This view was shaped by a combination of direct experiences, media portrayals, shared assumptions, and socioeconomic comparisons. Some Sharers described firsthand experiences of visiting Cambodia, where they observed noticeable differences in infrastructure and economic conditions, often describing the country as resembling “Thailand ten years ago.” One Sharer illustrated this perception by recounting her journey: “I traveled by bus from Thailand, passing through the Khao Chom checkpoint in Surin Province. But I could see the difference between Thailand and Cambodia. The roads on the Thai side were better. When I entered the Cambodian side, it was a different story.”

Media representations also contributed to this perception. Several Sharers mentioned that television and social media often depict Cambodia as a country struggling with poverty and inequality. As one person noted, “I’ve seen on TV and Facebook, I think that this country is less developed than us in every way.” Beyond media influence, however, shared assumptions further shaped Thai perceptions of Cambodia. The country was described by Sharers using words such as “famine,” “backward,” and “poor,” impressions often based on narratives passed on by others. Given that Thailand hosts a significant number of Cambodian laborers, some Sharers drew assumptions from this observation. One remarked, “Many of them come to work in our country as migrant laborers,” while another said, “The population is poor, mainly working as laborers.” Cambodia’s economic hardships and low wages reinforced its image as a labor-exporting nation, further strengthening this perception. Many Sharers also noted that development appears uneven, with progress concentrated in tourist areas while much of the country remains rural and impoverished.



Comparisons with other ASEAN countries were common, and many Sharers ranked Cambodia the lowest in terms of development, often grouping it with Myanmar as “underdeveloped.” Although a few acknowledged Cambodia’s efforts to improve, the dominant narrative suggested stagnation. As one person stated, “Cambodia and Burma are still considered underdeveloped countries,” while another added, “It is the least developed and not somewhere I would prefer to go.” These perceptions were rooted in a combination of limited interaction, media influence, stereotypes, and a sense of national comparison that positions Cambodia as struggling to catch up. In addition to these views on development, many Sharers expressed frustration with what they perceived as Cambodia’s attempts to claim aspects of Thai culture and achievements, such as traditional clothing, Thai boxing, and well-known Thai public figures like Lisa and Buakaw¹⁵, as well as the popular animal character “Moo Deng.”¹⁶ One Sharer remarked, “They keep claiming things for no reason—there’s no need to claim when they already have their own things,” while another added, “There’s a perception that Cambodians behave like clowns, frequently taking credit for things that belong to others.” Sharers generally felt that these claims lacked authenticity. Some interpreted this trend as an attempt by Cambodia to build national pride, viewing the claims on Thai culture, music, and public figures as efforts to foster a stronger national identity. One Sharer shared a particular frustration: “I hate it even more when Cambodian ladyboys wear Thai clothes to Wat Phra Kaew (or Royal Palace Day) and hold up the Cambodian flag to take a picture and say that it’s theirs. It’s so smooth.”

Thai Sharers generally perceived Cambodia as less developed in comparison to Thailand and felt that Cambodia’s claims on Thai cultural elements and public figures complicate relations. While they acknowledged Cambodia’s efforts to grow, many viewed these claims as part of a broader attempt to build national pride, which, in their opinion, could be better achieved through a more distinct and self-defined cultural expression.

¹⁴ Lisa Manobal, a Thai singer best known as a member of the South Korean pop group BLACKPINK.

¹⁵ Buakaw Banchamek, a world-famous Muay Thai fighter recognized for his international championships and promotion of Thai martial arts.

¹⁶ Moo Deng, a baby pygmy hippo born in 2024 at Khao Kheow Open Zoo in Thailand that became a viral social-media sensation.

FROM LOL TO IRL

“

I think what they're arguing about is trivial and doesn't deserve attention.

”

- a 36-year-old male university staff

FINDING 3: THE CURRENT SITUATION ONLINE IS TRIVIAL AND IS NOT AFFECTING US, ALTHOUGH IT COULD IMPACT THE FUTURE GENERATION IF PROLONGED.

Many Thai Sharers expressed the belief that online arguments between Thai and Cambodian users are mostly trivial and have little bearing on real life. For many, the conflict exists only in the digital world and does not affect their day-to-day experiences. “These are just words intended to create bad feelings,” one Sharer reflected, adding that the situation might dissipate on its own unless further amplified. Others viewed online arguments as distractions. “It’s not worth our time to debate with people who don’t know what they’re talking about,” said one. Another Sharer noted, “It’s mostly a small group of people online. We don’t even know if they’re real.” Many described these online exchanges as the work of people with too much free time, calling the claims and counter-claims “funny,” “pathetic,” or “nonsense.”

Several Sharers dismissed the idea that these disputes could escalate into real-world conflict. They shared a sense of detachment from the discourse, saying it did not affect their relationships with Cambodian people in person. “I focus on the people in front of me,” one said. Others emphasized that most people, especially those with responsibilities, simply scroll past the comments and ignore them. “If they were busy, they wouldn’t be involved in these things,” a Sharer pointed out.

However, while many minimized the impact of the conflict today, others expressed concern about what it could mean for the future if left unaddressed. Social media, they warned, accelerates the spread of misinformation and emotional reactions. “Current tensions are likely exacerbated by social media, which amplifies the speed at which information spreads,” one explained. Another added, “If false or unfounded information continues to be shared, it could create misunderstandings and confusion about what is truly original or authentic.” Sharers noted that while online debates may not influence national relations now, they might gradually shape attitudes, particularly among younger generations or in border provinces where face-to-face interaction is more common.



There was concern that sustained exposure to online hostility could reinforce harmful stereotypes and normalize discrimination. One Sharer warned, “If someone who is very fanatical meets a Cambodian in real life, they might insult or discriminate against them.” Others feared that long-standing prejudice, rooted in historical narratives, could be reignited by digital conflict, particularly if left unchecked. “If this continues, it could be like cultivating the problem of hatred more and more clearly,” one said.

Some Sharers emphasized the importance of addressing these tensions early. They believed that efforts toward mutual understanding, awareness, and truth-telling are needed before the conflict moves from screen to street. One said, “If, in the future, there is an effort to understand each other and find common ground, this conflict could be stopped. But without that, the result will likely be clear racial discrimination.” Others highlighted the real-world risks to groups such as border-crossing workers, who might be the first to feel the effects of worsening tensions. One Sharer shared, “If the situation escalates to the point where the borders are closed, the safety of this group of people will immediately become nonexistent.”

While many Sharers currently view the Thai-Cambodian online conflict as unserious or temporary, they showed a growing awareness that if left unresolved, the long-term effects could be more profound. What now feels like noise on a screen may gradually shape attitudes, foster distrust, or even lead to discrimination in real-world interactions. Whether or not the conflict escalates may depend on whether meaningful dialogue, empathy, and cooperation are pursued in time.



SO CLOSE, YET SO UNKNOWN

“ ***I think Cambodia is a neighboring country.
I don't know much about it,
I don't have any opinions.*** ”

- a 28-year-old female

FINDING 4: WE DO NOT KNOW A LOT ABOUT CAMBODIA EVEN THOUGH IT IS A NEIGHBORING COUNTRY

Although Thailand and Cambodia share a long border and centuries of intertwined history, many Sharers admitted that they know very little about Cambodia. Despite the geographic proximity, Cambodia remains unfamiliar, overlooked, or misunderstood in the minds of many Thais. “Honestly, I’ve never paid much attention to Cambodia,” one Sharer said. “Among all the neighboring countries, it’s probably the one I’m least interested in.”

A recurring reflection was the lack of personal relationships with Cambodians. Many Sharers mentioned that they had never met or spoken to a Cambodian person. “I don’t really know anyone from Cambodia,” said one. “I’ve never had the opportunity to talk or have Cambodian friends,” echoed another. Most FLD Sharers in Thailand described a sense of social and emotional distance shaped by limited contact and curiosity. This unfamiliarity extended to knowledge about Cambodia’s society, culture, and politics. Several Sharers admitted they only knew basic facts, such as Angkor Wat, the Phra Wihan Temple dispute, or Cambodia’s historical status as a former vassal state of Thailand. Some said their mental image of Cambodia remained stuck in the past. “When I think of Cambodia today, I can’t picture anything. But when you mention Khmer or ancient Khom, I can imagine the past,” one noted. Others described associating Cambodia with temples, rugged terrain, and ghost stories from childhood or social media. “I wanted to visit Angkor Wat,” a Sharer shared, “but I didn’t know where else to go.”

Textbooks and formal education were mentioned as limited sources of information in Thailand. Several Sharers noted that Cambodian history was barely covered in Thai classrooms. Instead, their impressions came from social media, personal anecdotes, or long-standing stereotypes. Some said they only became curious about Cambodia during moments of political tension, such as the Preah Vihear conflict, or after seeing viral posts online. “When the issue happened, I became curious,” one explained. “So I searched on Google to find out what Cambodia was like.”



Others recalled problematic narratives learned during childhood. Some were taught to bargain aggressively at border markets, reinforcing perceptions of Cambodians as untrustworthy or dishonest. A few openly acknowledged holding negative assumptions based on these early teachings, describing Cambodians as “backward,” “brainwashed,” or “dishonest,” often without having interacted with Cambodians themselves. “I’ve never met any Cambodian people,” said one, “so I feel indifferent toward them.” Another added, “I think Cambodians are just like any other normal foreigners. I feel indifferent.”

While some Sharers expressed disinterest or detachment, others reflected on how easy it was to overlook Cambodia. “Maybe because I’m in Chiang Mai, which is far from the border,” one said. “If you ask people in provinces near Cambodia, they probably know more.” A few mentioned that when planning travel, Cambodia was rarely at the top of their list. Some wanted to visit Angkor Wat but said there seemed to be little else promoted about the country. “I know Vietnam has Da Nang and Banana Hill,” one Sharer explained. “But I don’t know what’s in Cambodia, so I haven’t gone.”

Despite this prevailing indifference, some Sharers acknowledged that the lack of knowledge can contribute to misunderstanding and prejudice. One reflected, “I think Thai people don’t like Cambodians coming here as foreign workers... like they’re stealing jobs or influencing our country.” Another added, “The mistake on the Thai side was failing to distinguish between Khmer identity and Cambodian identity from the start.” A few also noted that Cambodia is often associated only with laborers, reinforcing narrow and incomplete images of the country and its people.

While Thailand and Cambodia are geographically close, many Sharers revealed just how distant Cambodia feels in their minds. This knowledge gap, shaped by limited education, outdated narratives, disinterest, and lack of personal engagement, creates a fragile foundation for mutual understanding. As a few Sharers put it, “We are neighbors,” and “I hope that these two countries will reconcile in the future and become good neighbors to each other again.”

PAINTED THROUGH THE MEDIA LENS

“Online media often sensationalizes stories... Thai outlets sometimes post exaggerated or inaccurate content, such as certain ASEAN pages that blur the line between fact and fake news.”

- a 32-year-old male librarian

FINDING 5: MEDIA ON BOTH SIDES IS PERPETUATING NEGATIVE SENTIMENTS THROUGH NEGATIVE PORTRAYALS AND MISINFORMATION.

Many Sharers pointed to the role of media as a key force shaping public perception and reinforcing tensions between the two countries. They observed that media coverage, especially online, often leans toward sensationalism, negative portrayals, and nationalistic framing that fuels misunderstanding and conflict.

FLD Sharers frequently criticized the way Thai media depicts Cambodia. Several reflected that from a young age, they encountered media that presented Cambodians in a negative light, often as illegal workers, scammers, or beggars. “From what I’ve seen, Thai media, like the news, often portrays Cambodia as a troublemaker,” one Sharer said, while another noted that these images lingered well into adulthood. Some recalled media highlighting Cambodian drug dealers or migrant issues, which shaped their early assumptions. Others mentioned that older generations, who consume mostly TV news, still carry the belief that Cambodia is more “backward” than Thailand, an attitude that, in their view, has been shaped by years of biased reporting.

The portrayal of cultural conflicts was also a common concern. Sharers noted that Thai media often emphasizes Cambodia’s “claims” over cultural elements like temples, food, or traditional dress, frequently without full context or clear evidence. Repeated headlines such as “Cambodia claims Thai culture” were seen as provocative and one-sided. One Sharer reflected that this kind of reporting builds a foundation of misunderstanding, “creating a skewed understanding of history and cultural ownership that’s difficult to dismantle.” Unregulated online content was another major issue raised. Sharers criticized the rise of Facebook pages, YouTube channels, and influencer-driven media that blur the line between fact and opinion. These platforms often post emotionally charged stories designed to provoke reactions and increase engagement. “Only about 10% of what I read about Cambodia on Facebook is believable,” one Sharer remarked. Others noted that misleading headlines, mistranslations, or mockery are often used as bait to

THAI STUDENT REFLECTS ON MEDIA INFLUENCE NOT EVERYTHING SEEN ONLINE REFLECTS REALITY

It is easy to inherit negative ideas when the first impressions come from the media. A twenty-year-old Thai student recalled that as a child, watching news about the Preah Vihear dispute on TV led him to believe that Cambodians were "claiming rights over everything as if they were uneducated and arrogant." These early impressions shaped his thinking long before he had ever spoken with a Cambodian.

He remembered visiting Poipet as a child and finding people there far more ordinary than the media had led him to expect. Growing older, he realized the danger of relying only on one-sided narratives. "We cannot generalize from what we see online," he reflected, noting that only a small group writes such extreme comments. For him, this showed how media on both sides can perpetuate negative sentiments and distort reality. His story demonstrates how perspective evolves with experience, and how maturity brings the ability to question information instead of accepting it at face value.

drive clicks. Because users from both countries tend to comment in their own languages and rely on automatic translation, misunderstandings are common and can quickly escalate. Some Sharers noted that even mainstream media can be complicit, often presenting Cambodia's faults while portraying Thailand as superior. One Sharer stated plainly, "The media often fuels hatred more than it provides knowledge."

Despite these concerns, not all Sharers viewed the media in the same way, particularly in comparison to media across the border. A few expressed more trust in Thai media, saying it reports "truthfully" or in a more straightforward manner than Cambodian outlets. Some believed Cambodian media tends to highlight only positive aspects of its government and avoid criticism. Most Sharers, however, were more concerned about how both countries' media, particularly through social media platforms, amplify conflict, distort understanding, and deepen divisions. Some emphasized the importance of more ethical and balanced reporting. "Media in each country should present things neutrally," one said, "not just promote their own side or show only negative aspects of the other." Others believed improving digital literacy could help audiences better evaluate sources and reduce the spread of harmful narratives. "Everyone should be aware of where the information comes from and verify it," one Sharer urged.

Ultimately, Sharers viewed the media as a powerful force, one that can either deepen division or help rebuild understanding, depending on how stories are told. As one person reflected, "Instead of clarifying the roots of our shared cultural heritage, the media often ends up escalating the conflict."



A HARD PROBLEM TO SOLVE, BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE

“**Our role should be to help people rise above misconceptions and foster understanding to create a more peaceful society.**”

- a 40-year-old male national archives staff

FINDING 6:

THE CONFLICT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO SOLVE, BUT DEEPER CONTACT AND CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE BORDER COULD HELP TO FOSTER MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING.

The ongoing online conflict between Thailand and Cambodia, driven by historical disputes and cultural misunderstandings, remains a challenging issue. Many FLD Sharers expressed doubt that the conflict could ever be fully resolved, describing it as a long-standing problem shaped by individual beliefs, generational attitudes, and the nature of social media. While many felt it was beyond the control of any one person, some still held hope that building mutual understanding across borders could help ease tensions over time.

Many Sharers expressed deep skepticism about whether the issue could be resolved at all. “I don’t think the online conflicts can ever be resolved,” one said. Others pointed to the rapid spread of online content and the difficulty of controlling who posts and shares it. “Even if someone gives an order, it’s hard to stop people from posting,” one Sharer remarked. They noted that social media allows anyone to act as a media outlet, regardless of accuracy or ethics, making the problem difficult to manage. A few added that online arguments flare up quickly and just as quickly fade, often replaced by new topics within days. “The conflict might disappear,” one said, “but it will take time.” Sharers also reflected that online conflict is often driven by long-held attitudes passed down through families and society. Even changes in school curricula might only make a limited impact if larger social views remain unchanged. “It’s about mindset,” one said. “Even if you fix the lessons in school, it might only help 20%. Society, parents they can still influence the way kids think.”

Despite this pessimism, many Sharers identified pathways that could help ease tension. A recurring idea was the need for structured support from institutions. While most agreed that ordinary citizens alone cannot solve a conflict with historical roots and political sensitivities, they did not necessarily see the government as the only actor. Several suggested that independent organizations, cultural ministries, or collaborative platforms could take the lead in providing credible, balanced knowledge and fostering public dialogue. “If I had the power, I’d set up an organization to educate people on the differences between the two countries,” one said. Another added, “We need credible sources from both sides to help people understand what’s true and what’s not.”

NAVIGATING COMPLEXITIES UNDERSTANDING GROWS WHEN CONVERSATION REPLACES COMPETITION

A thirty-two-year-old Thai librarian reflected on the subtle tensions that continue to shape perceptions between Thailand and Cambodia. Although he had not interacted closely with many Cambodians, he recalled a Cambodian colleague from years past who left a strong impression. "He seemed to be a composed and humble individual," he said. That experience reminded him that real-life encounters often differ from what is portrayed online.

He noticed that online platforms tend to intensify division rather than dialogue. "The online environment has fostered a competitive instinct," he explained. "Both sides are eager to validate their positions." These exchanges, he observed, sometimes spiral into ridicule and racial slurs. "This behavior is deeply rooted in a mindset that has been instilled over time," he said, adding that while the situation is not yet severe, it has the potential to worsen if ignored.

Despite these challenges, he remained hopeful. "The main challenge is fostering constructive conversations between Thailand and Cambodia," he said. "By promoting understanding and dialogue, we can work toward a more peaceful coexistence." He believed progress would come from understanding that similarities and differences can exist side by side. "Navigating these cultural and historical complexities requires a balanced approach," he said, "recognizing our shared humanity while addressing the challenges that arise from our differences." His reflections remind us that peace is not found in silence or victory, but in the steady effort to understand one another.

There was also a strong belief that reconciliation would require a deeper understanding of history and shared cultural heritage. Sharers emphasized the need to move away from simplistic geographic claims and toward more thoughtful engagement with cultural roots. "We need to prioritize dialogue and mutual respect," one said. "Culture doesn't stop at borders." Another reflected, "Our role should be to help people rise above misconceptions and foster understanding for peaceful coexistence." Several Sharers pointed to the importance of building understanding from a young age. They called for improvements to the school curriculum, especially in history and social studies, to include more accurate and balanced content about Cambodia. One explained, "If we want people to have empathy and understanding, we need to teach it from a young age." While some believed this would take time, they still saw it as one of the most realistic long-term strategies. Others suggested personal, people-to-people strategies to reduce prejudice and promote empathy. They proposed cultural exchange programs, joint events, and educational activities to connect Thai and Cambodian youth. Some admired how countries like Japan and South Korea use festivals and expos to build soft power and mutual interest. "I rarely see programs that foster mutual understanding, but they're needed especially for young people with diverse perspectives," one said.

Still, frustration and helplessness were common. A few Sharers expressed disinterest in solving the issue or felt it was beyond their responsibility. "If these things have to be the burden of the people, why do we have institutions?" one questioned. Others shared a desire for peace but admitted that they didn't know where to start. "I want this issue to be resolved," one said. "But I don't know how. I just know it can't be solved by one person."

In the end, while many Sharers viewed the conflict as deeply rooted and hard to address, they also recognized the potential of small, sustained efforts. Rather than silencing disagreement, they saw value in creating spaces for connection through education, accurate information, cultural dialogue, and shared human experience.

GOVERNMENTS LEAD, PEOPLE FOLLOW?

A relationship by marriage between the Shinawatra family of Thailand and the Hun Sen family of Cambodia to benefit each other is a very bad thing. There are some groups of people who have good relations because they benefit each other. As for ordinary people, they continue to fight each other. How can it be good?

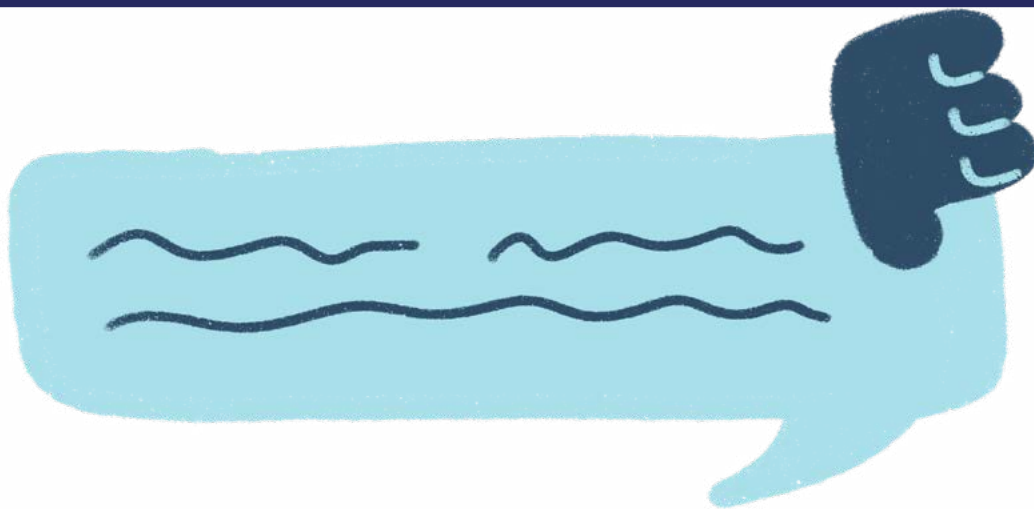
- a 68-year-old female retired teacher

FINDING 7: THAI AND CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENTS HAVE GOOD NATIONAL RELATIONS.

The relationship between Thailand and Cambodia is complex, involving elements of both cooperation and underlying tension. Although official diplomatic relations appeared stable at the time of this study, significant socio-political challenges persist. While economic interdependence remains a positive aspect of the relationship, several Sharers pointed out a disconnect between political elites and the general population. This gap, they noted, contributes to misunderstandings, weak people-to-people relations, and public distrust in political motives.

One recurring theme identified by Listeners was the perception that high-level political ties between the two countries often serve elite interests rather than the welfare of ordinary citizens. These relationships were seen as transactional, benefiting those in power while sidelining public needs. Some Sharers suggested that the preservation of diplomatic ties may be motivated by personal or financial gain among elites. One Sharer shared a story: "I know one person who is a fortune teller with gypsy cards. He had the opportunity to go to a casino in Cambodia and met many important Thai people there. It is well known that they launder money. The money that goes there, no matter where it comes from, can be treated as clean money."

The elites mentioned by Sharers included figures such as "Thaksin and Hun Sen" and "the royal family and the royal family." Another Sharer added, "The royal families of both nations may be seen as having a part in supporting the dictatorship system... the problem may be because the elites of each side chose to use the divide and rule method." These narratives point to public skepticism about the integrity of political leadership and its role in shaping bilateral relations.



In contrast to the perceived closeness among elites, Sharers noted a lack of meaningful connection and mutual understanding among ordinary Thai and Cambodian citizens. One Sharer remarked, “I think that the high-level people of both countries are close. However, the people of both sides seem to know little about the other side.” Despite their geographic proximity, Thai people often have limited exposure to Cambodia’s cultures, histories, or lived experiences. This disconnect reinforces stereotypes and reduces opportunities for building grassroots solidarity.

The information gap further deepens this divide. Sharers expressed concern over the limited access to reliable information about Cambodia in Thailand. One noted, “At the public level, it seems like people don’t know much about each other. When searching for information on the Internet, there’s not much information.” The lack of accessible, accurate, and balanced information about Cambodia contributes to misunderstandings and misinformed opinions. While some Sharers acknowledged that media representations shape public attitudes, one clarified, “The media does have an effect on people’s thoughts, but I don’t think it affects international relations that much.”

Though social tensions persist, the economic relationship between Thailand and Cambodia remains a stabilizing factor. Trade and labor exchange were seen as key pillars of the relationship. One Sharer pointed out, “The relationship between the countries is good. Thailand has an advantage in trade because we export to them.” Another added, “Cambodia has always been reliant on importing goods from Thailand. They still depend on Thailand for many things.” Despite this economic interdependence, one Sharer observed that regional efforts to deepen cooperation, such as those inspired by the European Union, have largely stalled due to domestic political issues within ASEAN members. The Sharer recalled, “I heard that there used to be an attempt to do the same thing as the EU, but it seems that they stopped... Each country in ASEAN still has its own political problems and domestic problems.”

Perceptions of the Thai-Cambodian relationship varied among Sharers. While some expressed optimism, saying, “On a national level, I don’t think there’s any big issue between Thailand and Cambodia... I’d say the relationship is quite peaceful,” others highlighted ongoing tensions. One Sharer stated, “I think the current relationship is leaning more toward the negative side... quite a lot of tension.” Despite these differing views, most Sharers acknowledged the importance of the bilateral relationship. Whether marked by friction or cooperation, the connections between Thailand and Cambodia remain deeply rooted. Yet the gap between high-level diplomacy and everyday experience continues to raise questions about whether government-led relations translate into improved understanding among ordinary people.

STAGED FIGHTS, REAL DIVIDES

“**The Cambodians who argue with us online might actually be Thai people...**”

- a 34-year-old male lecturer

FINDING 8: OUTSIDE ACTORS ARE PLAYING A ROLE IN PERPETUATING ONLINE CONFLICT BETWEEN US.

Many Sharers expressed doubt about whether the online conflict between Thailand and Cambodia genuinely reflects the views of everyday people. While digital arguments often appear to represent national sentiment, some Sharers questioned whether the hostility might be exaggerated or even fabricated. They wondered if those posting provocative content were truly citizens of either country or instead outsiders or anonymous actors with hidden agendas. Sharers pointed to two possible sources they believed could be fueling the conflict: political manipulation, including potential Information Operations (IOs), and individuals seeking visibility and engagement online. Listeners frequently referred to this phenomenon as an “invisible hand” when engaging in analysis together. Underlying both concerns is the role of anonymity, which makes it difficult to discern who is truly behind the screen.

Sharers raised concerns about the anonymous nature of many accounts involved in the conflict. One remarked, “Most comments come from anonymous accounts, making it hard to identify the true individuals behind them.” Another added, “This is compounded by the presence of anonymous accounts on social media that stir up tensions.” These anonymous profiles contribute to a sense of uncertainty, where users cannot verify who they are interacting with or what motivations lie behind each post. Some Sharers went further, suggesting that certain accounts may pretend to be Cambodian or Thai in order to provoke anger. One reflected, “Sometimes, the Cambodians who argue with us online might actually be Thai people.” Another added, “Sometimes I wonder if the posts from Cambodian profiles are actually the work of Thai individuals aiming to incite dislike toward Cambodia.” A third summed it up: “Sometimes, we don’t know who is who online. It’s possible that Thai people are arguing among themselves.”

Several Sharers believed that online tensions are not entirely organic but are strategically fueled by political actors for their own benefit. Some pointed to what they suspected were Information Operations, or IOs, coordinated efforts by groups acting like an online army, posting and commenting to sway public opinion or promote specific political agendas. These accounts often operate anonymously and are believed to intentionally escalate conflict, stir nationalistic sentiment, or distract from other political issues. One Sharer observed, “Sometimes, it seems like there are attempts to stir the pot, especially during elections. Nationalistic sentiments are often amplified by cultural claims



during these times.” Others believed these conflicts are intentionally sustained to generate support through controversy or to divert attention from domestic concerns. One explained, “They bring up something and say it’s theirs in order to create nationalism so that people will vote for them.” Another added, “The government benefits from portraying us as enemies. If both the Cambodian people and government have a common enemy, it serves political interests.” These reflections suggest that behind many heated online exchanges, political agendas and organized digital operations may be quietly shaping public discourse.

While some Sharers focused on political strategies, others described the role of individuals who join online conflict for personal visibility. “I suspect that some educated individuals also join in the fray to attack Thailand and assert claims over Thai culture for the sake of gaining likes and engagement,” one said. Another added, “I think some of these individuals may be trying to build a social media presence and create engagement by participating in these discussions.” One Sharer pointed to certain Facebook pages, especially those labeled “ASEAN” or written in English, that often highlight cultural comparisons and spark arguments. “Many pages are named ASEAN, but I don’t know what nationality the page administrators are. There are a lot of them. I don’t know why they create content like this.” Another commented, “I don’t know if it’s IO or trolls stirring things up, because some things are clearly Thai, but they post that they’re theirs. So it looks funny. But actually, I think the reason might be the mindset and attitude of the previous generation of Thais.” This Sharer was suggesting that although these accounts appear Cambodian, the tone and attitude behind the posts feel distinctly Thai.

Sharers expressed deep concern over the blurred lines between real and fabricated conflict in Thai-Cambodian online spaces. Whether driven by political interests, anonymous Information Operations, or individuals chasing engagement, the source of many online arguments remains unclear. The anonymity of social media allows manipulation to thrive, making it difficult to know who is speaking and why. As online conflict continues, the central question among the Listeners remained: how can mutual understanding be built when we no longer know who we are truly speaking to?

UNFINISHED STORIES BETWEEN US

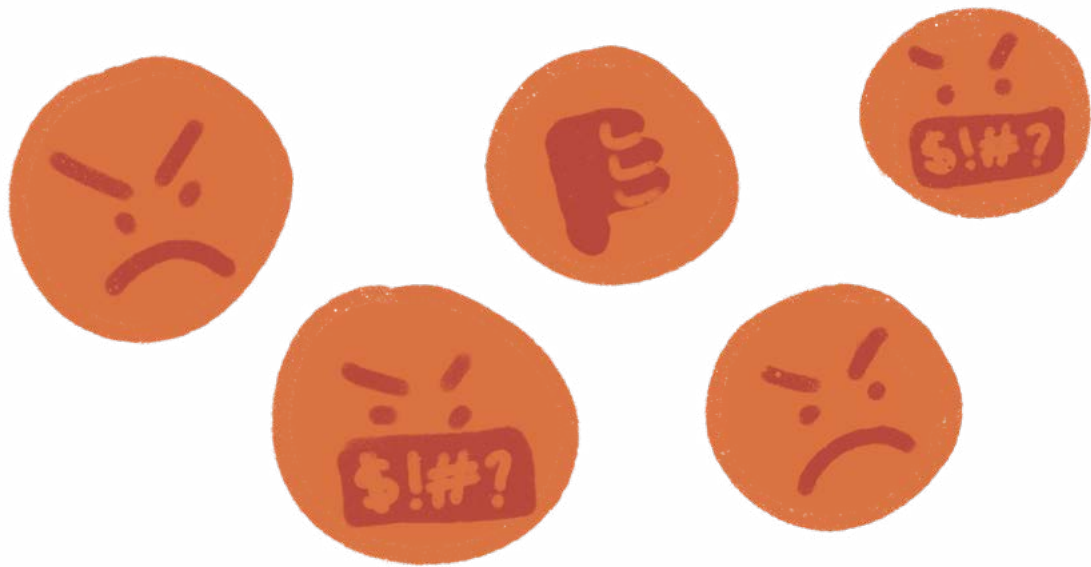
“ At first, I wasn’t very happy about the Phra Wihan Temple issue. I thought, why are Cambodians so eager to claim something that belongs to Thailand? But since I’m the kind of person who likes to understand things for myself, I decided to look up more information about it. After reading and learning more about the history, I began to understand their perspective and realized that they had their own reasons for not giving in. ”

- a 27-year-old digital marketer

FINDING 9: WE HAVE HISTORICAL GRIEVANCES AND DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES THAT CONTINUE TO IMPACT OUR CURRENT RELATIONS.

The long history between Thailand and Cambodia continues to shape how people from both countries see each other today. Many FLD Sharers reflected on how past events such as territorial disputes, wars, and political tensions still linger in people’s memories and influence everyday attitudes. One Sharer recalled a significant moment: “One well-known incident is when they burned down the Thai embassy in Cambodia about ten years ago, which happened due to misunderstandings.” Others mentioned how these episodes, such as the Preah Vihear Temple dispute, remain sensitive topics that easily ignite nationalistic sentiment. “A significant oversight on Thailand’s part has been the lack of a clear distinction between Khmer identity and Cambodian identity from the beginning,” one Sharer remarked, pointing to the ongoing complexity of cultural claims.

Several Sharers also acknowledged that historical conflict was not just a distant memory but something they had experienced within their own families. One reflected, “Personally, I have never been to Cambodia, but ancient sites like Angkor Wat have made me interested... My father used to be a soldier during the war, living on the border with Cambodia.” Others recalled moments of direct tension, such as when family members were deployed during past military standoffs or when Cambodians sought refuge by crossing the border. These memories formed the background for many Sharers’ views on the current relationship between the two countries.



The Preah Vihear dispute stood out in multiple conversations not only as a territorial conflict but also as a symbol of national pride and historical loss. “That is, Thailand has lost territory 12–13 times. We lost it to Cambodia. The event that made me feel the worst was the loss of Preah Vihear Temple,” one Sharer expressed. Others emphasized the emotional impact of those losses, noting how the involvement of colonial powers like France further deepened the sense of injustice. “Tensions likely intensified around the Phra Wihan Temple,” one noted. “Most Thai people naturally supported Thailand’s side, and I feel it was unfair that France and other foreign entities made boundary decisions without fully considering the surrounding evidence.”

Some Sharers suggested that cultural conflict today stems partly from this historical backdrop and a shared desire on both sides to strengthen national identity. “Sometimes, these cultural claims may stem from a desire to establish national identity, as both countries work to enhance their global image,” one observed. Another added, “I think the Cambodians who do this are probably just trying to express their stance and attempt to reclaim what they believe was once theirs.”

Personal experiences also reflected how historical views could strain relationships. One Sharer shared that a relationship with a Cambodian partner ended because of disagreements over history. Another recalled reading about the Khmer Rouge as a child and forming an early perception of Cambodians as “cruel and unworthy of associating with.” These statements underscored how historical narratives and inherited perspectives continue to shape individual emotions, sometimes leading to prejudice or avoidance. Yet there were also voices that demonstrated growth and attempts at understanding. One Sharer recounted an early sense of anger over cultural disputes but later came to see things differently: “At first, I was not very happy about the Preah Vihear Temple. I thought, why is this kind of person so eager to get Thai things?... But after reading more, I understood his perspective and realized that he had his own reasons for not giving in.”

Sharer reflections suggest that while historical grievances run deep, they are not fixed. The weight of the past continues to influence how people interpret present-day events, but with greater openness, education, and dialogue, there may be space for more nuanced understanding. As one Sharer noted, “Cambodia and Thailand have a long history together”—a shared past that continues to shape the present, for better or for worse.

WHEN THINKING STOPS, CONFLICT GROWS

“ ***I felt that we had different knowledge, and they didn't want to know the facts about this matter. Arguing about it was useless.*** ”

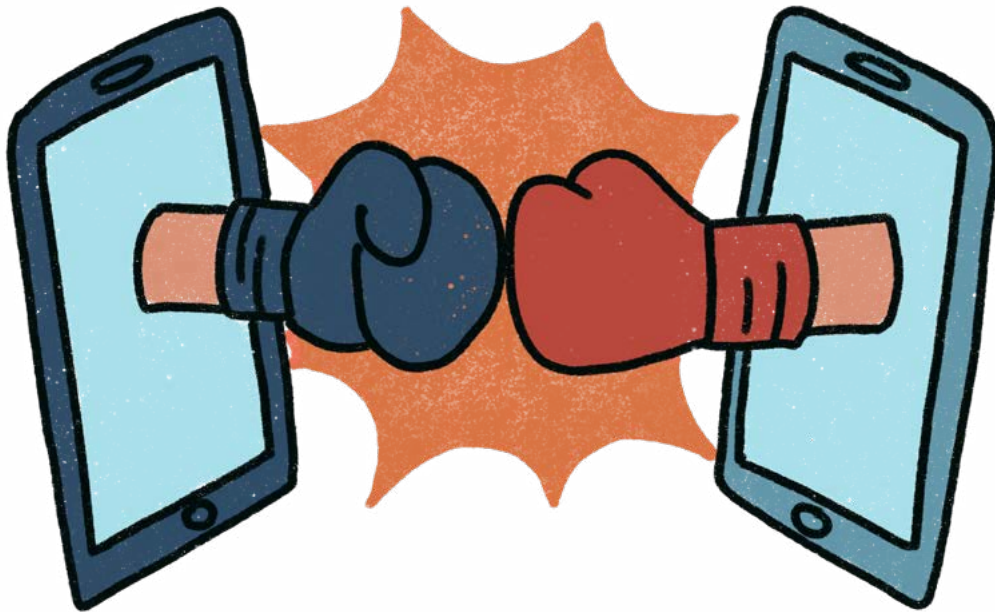
- a 29-year-old male barista

FINDING 10: POOR CRITICAL THINKING CONTRIBUTES TO ONGOING ISSUES BETWEEN THAI AND CAMBODIANS

Many Sharers in Thailand believed that the persistence of online conflict between Thais and Cambodians is partly due to a lack of critical thinking and media literacy. In a digital space where anyone can post or comment, information spreads quickly, regardless of accuracy or intent. Sharers observed that both Thai and Cambodian users often react emotionally, argue without full understanding, or repeat claims without verifying the facts. “Online, it can be challenging to discern whether commenters are genuinely knowledgeable. Often, individuals engage for the sheer pleasure of commenting without a solid understanding of the topic,” one Sharer reflected. Another added, “We should analyze the information we receive and not believe everything online so easily,” while a third urged, “We should use discernment in consuming or believing anything presented to us.”

Several Sharers emphasized that education plays a key role in changing this pattern. “Education remains essential to foster understanding and prevent people from wasting time on baseless issues. Only those with too much free time would engage in these debates without seeking the truth,” one Sharer commented. Still, others were doubtful that even accurate information would change public opinion. “Educating people about the truth doesn't lead to any real change in perception, as they seem unwilling to listen,” one said. Many suggested that misinformation persists not only because people lack accurate knowledge, but because they lack curiosity, reflection, and self-control when engaging online.

Sharers also spoke about the generational dimension of the conflict, suggesting that long-standing attitudes continue to shape how people interact online. “Most people who make claims online are from the older generation, such as parents' age,” one Sharer noted, while another described the difficulty of trying to correct misinformation: “I once went into a comment and tried to explain history... but I felt that we had different knowledge and they didn't want to know the facts about this matter. Arguing about it was useless.” This also reflected the role of “keyboard warriors,” or anonymous posters of aggressive online messaging, which emerged as a recurring theme. “It must be keyboard warriors who have no basis in reality, just exchanging responses back and forth,” one said. Others described these users as people who hide behind screens and escalate tension through mockery or misinformation. “Some people only know a little bit, but they keep adding embellishments and making up stories,” a Sharer added.



Some Sharers reflected that the problem lies not only in what people argue about, but in how they argue, often without fact-checking, thoughtful reasoning, or openness to other perspectives. “Misunderstandings and speaking without supporting information reveal multiple perspectives; it depends on which one we choose to see,” one said. Another added, “Expressing opinions and claims like uneducated people with high ego... we cannot generalize from what we receive from a single group.” These comments suggest that the real issue is not just misinformation itself, but the absence of critical engagement with complex topics that contributes to a gap that, if left unaddressed, will continue to fuel division.

Some felt that changing attitudes requires more than correcting content; it calls for emotional awareness and stronger critical thinking skills. “It will be difficult to make this kind of content disappear in the future, but people must know how to be aware of their emotions and know how to manage their own feelings,” said one. Another offered a more hopeful view: “Dealing with these issues, I think we have to start with ourselves. If we don’t keep them to ourselves and just read them as jokes, one day everyone will grow up and the issues will gradually disappear.”

Many Sharers agreed that the online conflict is sustained not only by misinformation, but also by the lack of media literacy and emotional regulation. While regulation may be difficult, they believed that fostering more thoughtful and informed digital habits, starting with individuals, could gradually shift the tone of cross-border interaction and promote greater understanding between Thais and Cambodians.









6

**INQUIRY
FOR
ACTION**

**THE FUTURE OF PEACE
DEVELOPER**

INQUIRY FOR ACTION

THE FUTURE OF PEACE DEVELOPER

When the research began, it was never intended to end with a book. From the outset, the aim was to understand a real problem that was unfolding in real time and to act upon it through inquiry. What started as a study of online conflict between Cambodians and Thais evolved into a process of engagement, learning, and collaboration that has continued beyond the initial project. The FLD approach created the conditions for young people from both countries to listen, inquire, and make sense of the tensions affecting their communities while generating new knowledge about an issue that has dramatically escalated and changed throughout the process. The result was not a single set of findings, but the foundation of an ongoing movement called Peace Developer.

Peace Developer grew out of the relationships and questions that the research process made possible. It is not a project extension or an outcome in the conventional sense, but an evolution of action research itself, a way for our Listeners to continue learning and acting collectively on the issues that matter to them, and in particular, on an issue they invested so much time and effort on together. Through this network, young people in Cambodia and Thailand have taken ownership of the inquiry, connecting their experiences across borders and translating them into awareness-raising, digital dialogue, and cross-cultural initiatives that challenge the narratives fueling division.

The purpose of this final chapter is to reflect on that evolution and to consider what it means to carry research forward as action. It outlines why this work matters, the main calls emerging from the research, and why continued inquiry led by young people is essential to prevent the next generation from inheriting hostility and repeating narratives of separation and distrust toward their neighbors.

Why action research matters now

In a context where online hostility continues to shape public attitudes and deepen mistrust, traditional research alone is not enough. Understanding conflict requires more than data collection or detached observation. It requires participation, engagement, and a willingness to learn through doing. Action research provides this orientation. It treats inquiry as both a way of knowing and a way of acting, positioning those closest to the issue as co-researchers who can investigate and respond to the challenges within their own communities.

In the case of the Cambodian-Thai online conflict, this approach has proven vital. The Listeners engaged in this research prior to the dramatic shift in armed conflict between the two countries in May 2025. Their cross-border relationships endure in spite of strong social pressures and external forces that reinforce “sides” and the need to take one. The dynamics unfolding on social media are constantly shifting, influenced by new events, viral trends, and political rhetoric. Static studies risk becoming outdated

before they are even completed. Action research, by contrast, is adaptive and iterative. It allows researchers and communities to remain responsive, asking new questions as realities change. This quality makes it particularly suited to digital conflict, where speed, emotion, and participation drive the spread of narratives.

At its core, action research is about responsibility. It asks what should be done once knowledge is produced and challenges the idea that researchers can observe conflict without intervening in it. Inquiry becomes a social act, one that demands care, ethics, and reflection on how information is used. The FLD approach has helped bridge this gap by embedding listening and dialogue within the process of investigation itself. Through it, research becomes a living practice that not only examines the conditions of conflict but contributes to addressing them.

Action research matters now because it reflects the urgency of our time. It aligns with the need for new forms of collaboration that extend beyond borders, disciplines, and institutions. It brings knowledge back into the hands of those directly affected and connects research to the practical work of peacebuilding. In this sense, it is not a methodology confined to academia, but a collective process of inquiry that continues to evolve wherever people choose to question, engage, and act. Our Peace Developers are showing us just that as they lead the way into an unknown future in which escalating conflict feels like it is becoming the norm.

The emergence of Peace Developer

Peace Developer emerged organically from the action research process. It was not planned as a formal outcome, but took shape as participants and community partners recognized the need to continue the work beyond the research phase. During the FLD project, young Listeners from Cambodia and Thailand built relationships through inquiry, dialogue, and shared analysis. They also engaged in social activities, creating bonds both individually and in groups. These relationships became the basis for a cross-border network that has since evolved into a collective initiative.

Peace Developer brings together the same spirit of inquiry that guided the research, but with an expanded purpose. It is led by young people who now design and implement their own initiatives to address the challenges they continue to see online. These include digital dialogues, cross-border campaigns, and educational exchanges that counter divisive narratives and promote constructive engagement between Thais and Cambodians. The initiative operates as both a learning space and a platform for action, driven by the knowledge already experienced through the FLD process and incorporated into their next phase: that peacebuilding is an ongoing process that requires participation and creativity from those directly affected.

The group's early efforts, such as the Harmony Nexus webinar series and social media campaign, have shown how digital platforms can be repurposed for connection instead of division. By creating spaces where dialogue replaces mockery and where stories are shared rather than distorted, Peace Developer demonstrates what inquiry can achieve when it is carried forward into collective practice. Each activity is an experiment in learning together, building understanding, and sustaining collaboration across borders.

What makes Peace Developer distinct is its foundation in research practice. The participants did not begin as activists or peace advocates, but as emerging researchers, learning to ask questions, listen, and interpret. They then grappled with data, together, hearing perspectives from the other side that were often difficult, confusing, and sometimes hurtful. This grounding has shaped how they continue to act. Rather than approaching peace as an abstract goal, they approach it as an inquiry into relationships, communication, and social responsibility. The result is a living network that connects the spirit of research with the everyday work of building mutual understanding.

The main calls of the research and the practice

The research revealed several urgent calls that continue to guide the work of Peace Developer and those committed to cross-border peacebuilding. These calls are not abstract recommendations, but grounded insights drawn directly from inquiry and engagement with communities in both countries. They highlight what is needed to respond effectively to the rise of online conflict and to support the next generation in shaping a more constructive digital environment.

1. Recognize online conflict as a real and serious peace issue.

Online spaces are not separate from everyday life. The hostility, misinformation, and ridicule circulating between Cambodians and Thais shape perceptions, influence social relations, and affect how young people understand one another. Digital conflict must be treated as a legitimate peace and security concern that requires attention, resources, and sustained engagement.

2. Support youth-led inquiry as a path toward action.

The experience of this project shows that young people are not only witnesses to online hostility but are capable of leading their own inquiries into its causes and consequences. When provided with the tools and space to investigate, they generate insights that are both credible and practical. Their research becomes a starting point for collective action, education, and advocacy.

3. Strengthen cross-border collaboration and learning.

Sustained peace in the region depends on relationships that reach beyond national boundaries. Cross-border collaboration between youth, organizations, and researchers fosters shared understanding and breaks the cycle of misinformation. Networks like Peace Developers play a crucial role in maintaining dialogue and building long-term partnerships that can adapt as new challenges emerge.

4. Build literacy for peace in digital spaces.

Peacebuilding now requires digital awareness. The ability to critically interpret online content, identify manipulation, and understand emotional triggers is essential to preventing conflict escalation. Developing digital literacy programs that combine media education with empathy-building can help reduce the spread of harmful narratives and increase the quality of online engagement.

5. Embed research within practice.

Inquiry must remain active and connected to ongoing work in communities. The FLD approach demonstrates that research is most meaningful when it is participatory, reflective, and applied in real time. Continued documentation, analysis, and sharing of lessons learned are vital to sustaining the impact of both research and action.

These calls reinforce the need for inquiry to remain a living process. They remind practitioners, educators, and young people that peace work begins with asking questions, listening, and engaging where conflict takes place, including in the digital spaces that shape how communities see themselves and each other.

A call to the next generation

The growing hostility between Cambodians and Thais both online and offline is not inevitable. It reflects choices such as how people respond to history, how they use technology, and how they speak to one another. The next generation now faces a critical decision: whether to continue repeating the same narratives that divide, or to create new ones that connect. The future of this relationship depends on which path they choose.

Young people today have access to tools that can either deepen conflict or help prevent it. Social media can amplify hate, but it can also amplify understanding. Inquiry, listening, and collaboration offer a way to shift the pattern. By asking questions, engaging across borders, and sharing knowledge, youth can challenge the inherited biases that have shaped national identity online. What begins as a small act of curiosity or dialogue can become a foundation for peace if it is sustained and collective.

Peace Developer embodies this possibility. It shows what can happen when inquiry continues beyond research and becomes a shared commitment to act. Each conversation, post, and campaign are part of a larger effort to ensure that future generations do not inherit division as a default. The responsibility now is to sustain that momentum, to keep asking questions, and to continue building small connections that make hostility harder to maintain.





BETWEEN LIKES AND LOATHING

***A cross-border inquiry into the online conflict
between Thailand and Cambodia***

Why do online conflicts between Cambodian and Thai internet users spiral so quickly from humor to hate?

Based on more than a hundred in-depth conversations across both countries, *Between Likes and Loathing* uncovers the emotional and cultural undercurrents driving one of Southeast Asia's most persistent digital rivalries. Drawing on action research using Facilitative Listening Design (FLD), the study reveals how history, culture, nationalism, and social media collide to shape how young people see each other and themselves.

The findings expose complex patterns of pride and pain: Cambodians' frustration at feeling mocked and inferior, Thai participants' disinterest tempered by a sense of hierarchy, humor as both weapon and wound, and the emotional toll of living within constant online tension. They also point to education, media literacy, and cross-border dialogue as crucial pathways to rebuild understanding amid digital hostility.

Conducted in 2024, before the armed clashes and renewed border tensions of 2025, this research offers rare and timely insight into the attitudes and emotions that shape evolving relations between everyday people in the two nations.

Between Likes and Loathing invites readers to look beyond the comment threads to the people and histories behind them.

