



ADISI - CAMEROON

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Report

DYNAMICS OF INTERNET ACCESS IN CAMEROON:

Trends, Challenges and Prospects.

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ABOUT ADISI-CAMEROON

The Association for Integrated Development and Interactive Solidarity (ADISI-Cameroon) is a civil society organization under Cameroonian law which has been campaigning for years for the defence of human rights, namely: access to information and freedom of expression; its core business is information and its governance. Its head office is located in Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon, at the place called Feu rouge Bessengue on the 3rd floor of the AZICCUL microfinance in the 1st district.

Its strategic axes are:

Access to information and Open Data Advocacy and lobbying for the adoption of a law on freedom of access to information access to information in Cameroon-Freedom Of Information Act. Data journalism is a new form of journalism based on the factual, relevance and irrefutability of data and information.

Freedom of Expression, Press and Data Journalism Training and support technical and technological support, empowerment of journalists in accessing information sources information sources. Raising awareness of the role of the journalist as a pillar of democracy and a thermometer of society.

Digital Rights Digital Rights are the human and legal rights that allow individuals to access and individuals to access and use electronic devices,

Smartphones and many others and telecommunications networks. The concept is linked to the protection and realization of rights such as the right to privacy and freedom of expression in the context of digital technologies, in particular the Internet. In this particular case, ADISI-Cameroon enables the opening up of data on the digital side via its online information site and its digital platforms.

Studies and Research The results are real decision-making tools. They give a panoramic view of the problem addressed. Just like for journalists, they make press articles more relevant and illustrate for more strength.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADISI	Association for Integrated Development and Interactive Solidarity/ Association pour le Développement Intégré et la Solidarité Interactive
AFD	Agence Française de Développement
ART	Telecommunication Regulatory Board
BONET	Big Steps Outreach Network
CAMTEL	Cameroon Telecommunications
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ELECAM	Elections Cameroon
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
IXP	Internet Exchange Point
LOYOC	Local Youth Corner
MINPOSTEL	Ministère des Postes et Télécommunications du Cameroun / Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications of Cameroon.
MTN	Mobile Telephone Network
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
NAICT	National Agency for Information and Communication Technologies
NCC	National Communication Council
NCPBM	National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism
NDS	National Development Strategy
NICI Plan	National Information and Communication Plan
SCM	Société Camerounaise de Mobile
SIGI-PES	Integrated Computer Management System for State personnel and salaries
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TRB	Telecommunications Regulatory Board
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	United States Dollar
WHO	World Health Organization
XAF	Central African CFA Franc



CONTEXT

As of February 2020, according to the online newspaper “Invest in Cameroon”, the internet penetration rate in Cameroon is estimated at 30% “thanks to the arrival of 570,000 new internet users”. This brought to 23.62 million Cameroonians connected with a smartphone and 7.87 million Internet users in Cameroon out of a population estimated at 26.21 million inhabitants according to a study conducted by the firm Hootsuite and We are social under the title “digital 2020”. The said study also indicates that 3,700,000 Cameroonians are active on social networks with 3,500,000 on Facebook, making it the most used network in Cameroon with among users, 58.8% men and 41.2% women.

However, this access is still not easy because of several parameters. These include the cost of internet access. According to a study by Cable, data from 2019 and 2020 show that the cost of internet has increased in Cameroon. As an illustration, in 2019, the cost of Gigabit in the African ranking was US\$1.71, Cameroon ranked 7th and in 2020 it was ranked 22nd with US\$2.75 for the same amount of bandwidth. In addition to this cost which is a barrier to access at interest, according to the UNDP report of 2020, for the last 10 years, the average income of Cameroonians is below one dollar a day. In addition to this aspect of cost, many citizens are hunted down by security forces on the net because of their opinions. It is a question in this case of the Cameroonians of the diaspora, notably those gathered within what is called “Brigade Anti-Sardinard” in short BAS. Internally, several citizens questioned by the police are sometimes heard about the content of their posts on social networks.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In recent years, internet accessibility has increased worldwide including in Cameroon and there have been a number of government initiatives geared at promoting access to the internet. In Cameroon, internet is not only used for communications but equally for many other reasons such as education, E-commerce, banking, cashless transactions, research, social networking, etc.

The main objective of this project is to study the level of internet access and the exercise of digital rights in Cameroon as well as the challenges plaguing the digital ecosystem in Cameroon. A total of 602 respondents successfully participated in the field survey across six (6) metropolitan cities and regions of Cameroon including Yaounde, Douala, Buea, Bamenda, Bafoussam, and Maroua as representing the Centre, Littoral, South West, North West, West and Far North regions respectively. The results of this field survey indicate that there are challenges to internet accessibility in Cameroon as well the exercise of digital rights. In fact, participants highlighted fake news (85%), misinformation (81%), constant electricity cuts (81%), poor internet services (80%), poor internet infrastructure (76%), high cost of data bundles/calls (75%), limited internet services (65%), hacking (62%), hate speech (59%), limited privacy (55%), surveillance by state and ISPs (48%), digital illiteracy (38%) and digital gender divide (28%) as core impediments to their digital and media related activities in Cameroon.

To overcome these challenges, ADISI has formulated multi-stakeholder recommendations to foster digital rights and freedoms in Cameroon. These recommendations include a constructive dialogue between government, CSOs and ISPs to collectively seek globally applicable solutions to better protect and respect the freedom of expression and privacy of Cameroonians and their online activities; place greater emphasis on privacy principles to mitigate the spread of hate speech, fake news, disinformation and related cyber threats that severely hamper activities on the web, as well as the need for citizens to practice more responsible use of media and social networks by avoiding the perpetration of fake news, disinformation, hacking, scams, hate speech, etc. both online and offline.



INTRODUCTION

Since 1997, the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector in Cameroon has greatly evolved with more people having access to mobile and internet connectivity. Cameroon currently has 4 internet service providers which include MTN, CAMTEL, Orange and Nexttel present across all the 10 regions of the country. According to We are Digital and HootSuite report of April 2021, there were 9.15 million internet users in Cameroon by January 2021, representing an increase of 1.3 million (+16%) between 2020 and 2021, internet penetration rate at 34.0%, with 4.30 million social media users; representing an increase of 600 thousand (+16%) between 2020 and 2021. Similarly, the report reveals that there were 26.60 million mobile connections, recording an increase of 2.6 million (+11%) between January 2020 and January 2021. These figures are quite impressive and consistent with preceding years despite the prevailing challenges plaguing the digital and media landscape in Cameroon. For instance, according to Datareportal, by January 2020, there were 7.87 million internet users in Cameroon, a 7.8% increase between 2019 and 2020, representing an internet penetration rate in Cameroon of 30%; 3.70million social media users with an 11% increase between April 2019 and January 2020. These digital trends further reveal that the internet market is growing fast in Cameroon, thanks to the availability of 3G and 4G broadband internet services. Several previous studies have found that despite some remarkable evolution across the digital and media landscape in Cameroon, there have equally been increasing challenges such as fake news, misinformation, hacking, scamming, political manipulation, violation of privacy rights and human dignity (especially undue sharing of nude pictures and videos), as well as limited availability, accessibility, affordability and poor quality of internet services. Similarly, ANTIC revealed that they identified the following among prominent cybercriminal acts including “scamming” (financial frauds on the internet), “skimming” (banking card frauds), Simbox frauds (reroute international calls to make them appear as local calls) “Web defacement” (unauthorized modifications to a web site’s homepage) and spoofing (identity theft”).

In Cameroon, internet is not only used for communications but equally for many other reasons such as education, E-commerce, banking, cashless transactions, research, social networking, etc.

Following confirmation by the World Health Organization (WHO) of an outbreak of a novel coronavirus on January 12th, 2020, Cameroon recorded her first case on March 6th, 2020. On March 17th, 2020, the government of Cameroon announced a series of measures to limit the spread of the virus among which were closure of schools, universities, training centers and workers were advised to work from home. This meant that most of the learning, meetings, seminars, workshops, trainings and work were going to be done from home using the internet. With the recent strong mobile and internet penetrations in Cameroon, the purchasing habits of consumers are changing and moving towards E-commerce which is rapidly growing.

In the past years, the Government of Cameroon has undertaken several national initiatives in the field of Telecommunications and ICT. President Paul BIYA stressed this idea on November 30, 2002, when he declared, about the effective emergence of an Information Society, that the latter should help to “strengthen the unity of our people and to fight against inequalities by enabling many persons to have access to knowledge”...and so, “put the country in the best conditions to face the third millennium “. Similarly, on November 3, 2004, after his re-election, President Paul Biya declared in his keynote address; “Our country needs a generalized access to the Internet to be better placed to enter the third Millennium.”

The government of Cameroon highlighted the importance of the telecommunications and ICT sector in



her Growth and Employment strategic paper which has been reviewed and transformed into the National Development Strategy (NDS) within the framework of the country's development Vision 2035. This national Telecommunications and ICT strategy is based on three key areas, namely:

First key area: Building and updating the legal, regulatory and institutional framework;

Second key area: Increasing the offer of services in quantity, quality, and at affordable prices;

Third key area: Increasing the use of ICT and enhancing the industrial fabric of ICT enterprises.

Others efforts by the state of Cameroon to stimulate the use of ICTs in Cameroon include: Creation of Multipurpose Community Telecentres around the country, Integration of ICT in the school curriculum and creation of multimedia resource centers in schools, Implementation of ICT development program by the Ministry of Higher, Education which includes providing 500,000 laptops to higher education students and construction of nine computer development centers in all state universities, Government action plan for an information and knowledge-based society by Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation, Use of ICTs to manage State Personnel by Ministry of Public Service and Administrative Reform (SIGIPES), Computerization of National Identity Card by the Delegation of National Security, Computerization of Electoral Process by ELECAM.

Cameroon's Initiatives are being supported by external funding which include:

- Definition of National Information and Communication Plan (NICI Plan) by UNECA;
- UNDP Initiative on ICT Policy in Cameroon within the framework of the Second Tokyo International Conference for African Development (TICAD II);
- ITU Support for formulation of MINPOSTEL Sector Strategy;
- UNESCO Support to development of community and rural radios
- CTO support to MINPOSTEL in developing Cameroon's national cybersecurity strategy.

ICT Infrastructure Development

The government of Cameroon has carried out infrastructural development to improve telecommunications and access to ICT services around the country. Some of these projects include: The National backbone infrastructure project which involves the installation of optical fibre throughout the national, extension of government intranet, establishing an Internet Exchange Point (IXP), Wimax telecommunications infrastructure network and Equipped multimedia centers.

Digital 2020: Cameroon; Retrieved from <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-cameroon>

See Toussi, Simone, September 2021. Overview of Cameroon's Digital Landscape: <https://cipesa.org/2019/09/overview-of-camerouns-digital-landscape/>, accessed 12/07/2021.

Business in Cameroon, Cybersecurity: ANTIC claims it deleted 3,372 fake Facebook accounts out of 4,242 identified in 2020, published on June 21, 2021, available online at <https://www.businessincameroon.com/public-management/2106-11696-cybersecurity-antic-claims-it-deleted-3-372-fake-facebook-accounts-out-of-4-242-identified-in-2020>, accessed 13/07/2021.



METHODOLOGY

To better achieve the objectives of this evaluation, we adopted a mixed methods approach to data collection and analysis. In other words, this study used both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques. With regard to qualitative techniques, we used interviews to collect primary data and a desk study for secondary data.

About 24 key informants were selected in a targeted manner and on the basis of their knowledge or previous experience with digital rights and the media landscape in Cameroon. Some of these informants were also selected using cluster sampling and the snowball technique, taking into account the sensitivity of certain information. The interview process was guided by semi-structured and open-ended questions covering all dimensions and themes of this report as shown in the annex. In terms of quantitative techniques, a well-structured questionnaire with mainly closed questions was designed and administered (see the annex for the full questionnaire). A total of 602 respondents were received and were sufficiently representative of the six (6) cities and regions selected as the scope of this study. These were: Yaoundé-Centre, Douala-Littoral, Bafoussam-West, Buea-Southwest, Bamenda-Northwest and Maroua-Far North.

The analysis was conducted using simple descriptive statistics and Microsoft Excel to generate tables, charts and graphs to better capture the extent of occurrence of the different themes studied. Qualitative data from primary and secondary sources was then used to enrich the analysis in terms of deductive and inductive interpretive logic, direct quotes and content analysis. Where appropriate, data and diagrams from secondary sources were also replicated to enhance the understanding and richness of the current study and report. The data collection and analysis processes were conducted in strict compliance with various ethical considerations, including confidentiality, privacy, anonymity, covid-19 barrier measures and the DO NO HARM principle, to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings in this report.

This report is thus structured into five main chapters covering the following: Chapter one- The legal and institutional framework for internet and digital rights in Cameroon; Chapter two - Dynamics of internet access and Media Landscape in Cameroon; Chapter three -The Digital Divide: Youth, Women and Men; Chapter four- Local Initiatives and Constraints to Digital Activities in Cameroon and Chapter five -Stakeholder Recommendations Towards Fostering Digital Rights Freedoms in Cameroon.



CHAP 1

THE LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR INTERNET AND DIGITAL RIGHTS IN CAMEROON

This chapter focuses on the legal and instructional frameworks related to various digital platforms and media activities in Cameroon. The first section will thus revisit some of the relevant legislative frameworks in force, while the second will recall existing institutional provisions in Cameroon. While most of these legal and institutional provisions have been in force over the years or months as noted through secondary sources, some of the findings from the field are equally invoked to enhance or enrich understanding and effective application.

1.1. Legislation of the digital landscape in Cameroon

Following the rapid changes that have occurred in the ICT and media sectors over the years, states in general and Cameroon in particular noted that it has become imperative to modify and create new legislation and or policies that foster an enabling environment for maximum exploration of the digital space. This partially justifies why the government of Cameroon has promulgated a series of laws that govern Telecommunications and the media landscape throughout the country:

- The preamble of the 1996 Constitution of Cameroon clearly provides for freedom of expression, freedom of the press and of communication through any media consistent with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted on December 10th, 1948;
- Law no. 90/052 of 1990 regulating the press in Cameroon;
- Law no. 98/014 of July 1998 governing telecommunications in Cameroon;
- Law no. 2001/0130 of 23 July 2001 establishing the minimum service in telecommunications;
- Decree No. 2001/830/PM of 19 September 2001 to lay down modalities for the operation of telecommunications networks;
- Law No. 2005/13 of 29 December 2005 to amend and supplement some provisions of Law No.

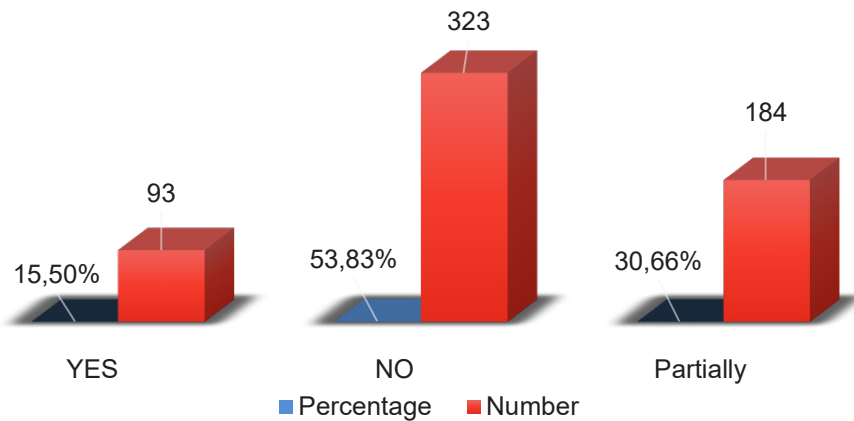
98/14 of 14 July 1998 to govern telecommunications in Cameroon;

- Law no.2010/013 of December 21 2010 on e-commerce and its amendments of April 2015;
- Law no. 2010/012 of December 21, 2010 on cyber security and cybercrime (security framework);
- Law no.2011/012 of 6 May 2011 on consumer protection. This Law was enacted to protect consumers by providing for individual or collective legal action, authorizing the Cameroon's telecommunications regulator, the Telecommunications Regulatory Board (TRB) to be responsible for mediation and settlement of conflicts in the case of noncompliance by operators (AI4A 2014);
- 2019 Finance Act. Section 8 stipulates the taxation levy on software application downloads produced outside of Cameroon at 200 XAF (about half a dollar);
- 2014 Antiterrorism law;
- Law No 2016/7 of 12 July 2016 relating to the Penal Code.

It is astonishing to note that despite the plethora of regulatory measures and laws related to the digital and media space in Cameroon, many people expressed their ignorance about them. In fact, out of 602 survey participants, only 15% posited that they are aware of any one of the digital and media related laws compared to an overwhelming 53% without any knowledge and barely 30% with partial knowledge of the laws.



Graphic 1: Knowledge of Laws that currently govern access to internet and the media in Cameroon

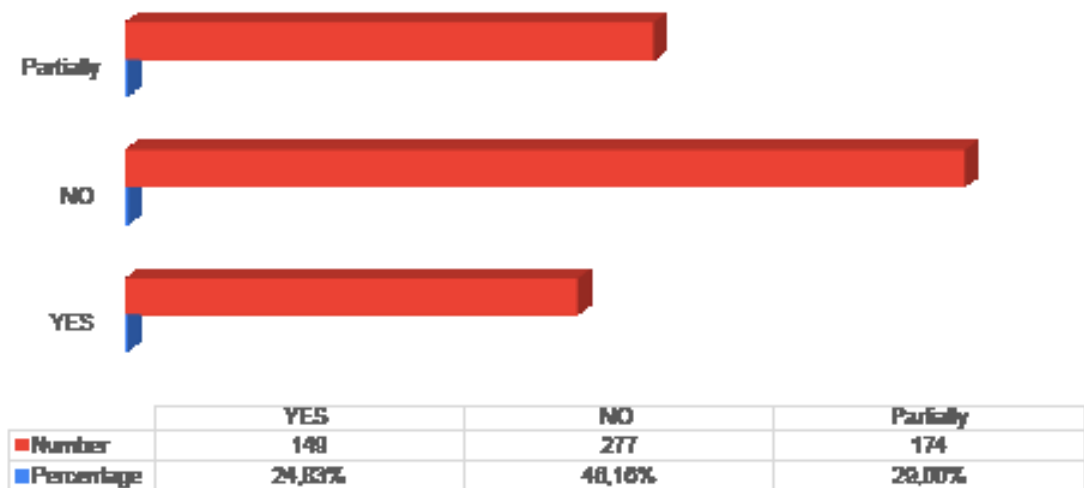


Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey, 2021.

Further discussions with some of those who claimed knowledge of these laws such as journalists, civil society activists, internet users and business persons revealed that they could not retain precise provisions related to their digital or media activities. This partly justifies the increasing trend of hate speech, inflammatory speech, cybercrimes, misinformation among other abuses and or shortcomings observed across the digital and media landscape in Cameroon.

Notwithstanding their ignorance of existing regulatory frameworks in Cameroonians, this study sort to know whether they felt the laws were being effectively implemented. Interestingly, an overwhelming proportion of 46% categorically refuted the claim while, 29% felt the laws were being partially implemented with only 25% who are/were convinced that current laws are effectively being applied to govern the digital and media landscape in Cameroon.

Graphic 2: Effectiveness in the application of laws that currently guide access to the internet and the media in Cameroon



Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey, June 2021.

■ Number ■ Percentage



The situation further attests to why several local and international organizations are increasingly involved in initiatives and campaigns geared towards fostering digital rights, fact-checking, responsible media and social media usage by curbing hate speeches, misinformation, to cite just few. It is however critical to highlight the fact that even among participants who claim knowledge of effective application of existing digital and media related laws in Cameroon, less than 5% of them could recall specific provisions of these laws. Meanwhile, many participants further questioned the selective and biased nature with which some of these laws including that related to hate speech is being applied.

1.2. Institutional Frameworks Related to Digital and Media in Cameroon

In addition to existing regulatory frameworks or instruments in Cameroon, the government has equally continued to establish operational structures with among other tasks of enhancing decision-making processes; accountability; consumer protection, dispute resolution and enforcement powers across the digital and media landscape. Faced with increasing and multifaceted pressure and popular demands related to digital and media related activities, the government of Cameroon has over the years created regulatory and monitoring bodies to ensure effective implementation of existing laws.

These regulatory and monitoring bodies include Telecommunication Regulatory Board (ART), National Agency for Information and Communication Technologies (NAICT), the National Communication Council (NCC) and the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MINPOSTEL),

1.2.1. Telecommunication Regulatory Board (ART)

ART is the main telecommunications regulatory body in Cameroon. It was created by decree n°98-197 of 8 September 1998 with mandate to regulate, control and monitor the activities of users and operators in the telecommunications sector. It has the following missions:

- Ensure the implementation of the legal and regulatory

texts in Telecommunications and Communications Information Technologies;

- Ensure that access to open networks by the general public is carried out in objective, transparent and non-discriminatory conditions;
- Ensure safe and legal competition in the Telecommunications sector and Communications Information Technologies;
- sanction any breach of obligations by operators as well as non-competitive practices;
- Establish the principles regulating the pricing of supplied services;
- Inform on the license applications and prepare the relating decisions;
- Formally issue receipts of declaration;

See evidence of some organizations involved in the fight against hate speeches in Cameroon via https://openculture.agency/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/dhn-Cameroon_FG_EN_FINAL_Online_01-Social-Media-Conflict.pdf, accessed on 15/06/2021.

Colin B. & Lara S. (2011). Telecommunications Regulation Handbook [pdf]. Retrieved from <https://libguides.ru.nl/apaEN/reference-examples-books-and-reports>, accessed on 10/05/2021

- Define the conditions and obligations of interconnection and the sharing of infrastructure;
- Put forward an opinion on all legal and regulatory draft texts in electronic communications;
- Ensure allocation and control of the frequency spectrum;
- Prepare the call to tender files for concessions and licenses;
- Develop and manage the numbering plan;
- Submit to the government; any proposal and recommendation that could develop and modernize the Telecommunications and Communications and Information Technologies sector;
- Allocate addressing resources;
- Inform on terminal equipment certification applications and prepare the related decisions;
- Issue accreditations;
- Carry out any other mission of general interest entrusted by the Government in the Telecommunications and Communications and Information Technologies sector;
- Guarantee consumer protection.



1.2.2. National agency for Information and communication Technologies (NAICT/ANTIC)

The NAICT (ANTIC) is a Public Administrative Establishment with legal personality and financial autonomy. It is placed under the technical supervision of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications and the financial supervision of the Ministry of Finance. Following the promulgation of law N° 2010/012 of December 21, 2010 relating to cyber security and cyber criminality and law N° 2010/013 of 21 December 2010 governing electronic communications in Cameroon, ANTIC has been assigned to regulate activities of electronic certification and regulation of the Internet in Cameroon.

ANTIC has the following missions:

- Promotion of ICT;
- Regulation of activities of electronic certification:
 - Security audit;
 - Security Intelligence;
 - Electronic certification;
- Regulation of the Internet;
- Management of the .cm domain.

Hence, ANTIC thus serves as the internet security watchdog, as it tracks perpetrators of cybercrime such as those with false identities, impersonation, data safety, online fraud, fake domain names, fake news, and online scamming that are equally on the rise in Cameroon.

1.2.3. Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MINPOSTEL)

MINPOSTEL is the general supervisory authority of various digital and some media regulatory structures (ANTIC, ART & NCC) and activities in Cameroon. This however does not imply putting to question the legal provisions related to the decision-making and financial autonomy of these regulatory structures although often perceived to be subjects of overwhelming political and government influence. This Ministry also has the following responsibilities:

- Ensuring the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), as well as electronic communications in all their forms, in conjunction with the Administrations concerned;
- Monitor the activities of mobile or satellite telecommunications companies;
- Monitor activities relating to e-commerce and issues

of cybersecurity and cybercrime, in conjunction with the Administrations concerned;

- Develop, analyze and keep statistics relating to the domain of Posts;
- Telecommunications and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs);
- Monitor activities of regulatory Bodies operating in his sector of competence (ART and ANTIC).

1.2.4 The National Communication Council (NCC)

The NCC was created by Law No. 90/052 of 19 December 1990 on Freedom of Social Communication as a consultative and regulatory organ, with legal capacity and financial autonomy though placed under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister's Service in Cameroon. This structure however only became operational following Decree No. 2012/038 of 23 January 2012 re-organizing the National Communication Council. While the NCC's mandate as the media watchdog was initially highly visible across the media landscape in Cameroon, it is equally increasingly paying keen attention to online and citizen journalism that have all come to stay. With this mandate, the NCC seeks to ensure effective compliance with professional ethics and deontology irrespective of whether one is practicing online, on print, radio and television. In fact, "Article 4 (1) of the decree of 23 January 2012 reorganizing the NCC, ensures the respect of professional ethics and deontology, as well as social peace, National unity and integration in all media."

The NCC has however remained a subject of controversies and debates considering the fact that its authority continues to be challenged by media organs and individuals that have been sanctioned for misdemeanors including defamation, unethical practices, unprofessionalism, fake news, misinformation, hate speech and sedition.

*More details about the role of the NCC can be explored in this article which focused on its watchdog role including over the leading state broadcaster known as Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV), and <https://www.crtv.cm/2019/02/national-communication-council-calls-on-responsible-journalism/>, accessed on 15/06/2021; and Peter Tiako Ngangum (2020) *The National Communication Council: Opportunity or Constraint for Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression in Cameroon?*, *African Journalism Studies*, 41:1, 1-16, DOI: 10.1080/23743670.2019.1703776.*



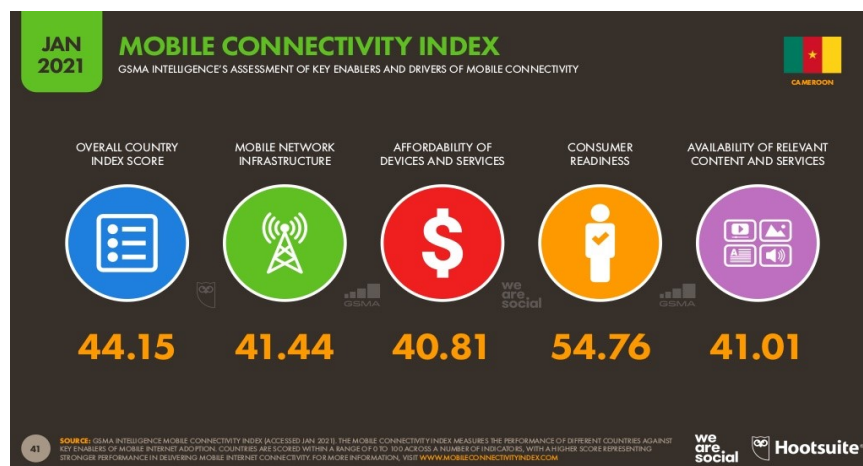
DYNAMICS OF INTERNET ACCESS AND MEDIA LANDSCAPE IN CAMEROON

CHAP 2

This chapter is dedicated to various trends and salient features that determine availability, accessibility, and affordability of internet and media related activities in Cameroon. Some previous reports including by Statistica, We Are Social and Hootsuite have noted that the internet penetration rate in Cameroon was about 34% as of January 2021 compared to a regional average of barely 26% representing the lowest in Africa and the world. Based on analysis of multiple data sources, the same Digital report ranks Cameroon at 44.15 in terms of overall

country index score, 41.44 for mobile infrastructure, 40.81 for affordability of devices and services, 54.76 for consumer readiness and 41.01 for availability of relevant content and services. This chapter thus duels on dynamics of internet access and media landscape in Cameroon based on findings of a field survey conducted from May to June 2021. The chapter will be divided into sections and subsections each focusing on a specific dimension of interest or relevance to digital rights and media activities in Cameroon.

Figure1: Mobile Connectivity Index in Cameroon



Source: We Are Social and Hootsuite, April 2021.

It begins with some relevant demographic traits of respondents that participated in this study including through the field survey and interviews. It further looks at findings and analysis regarding digital literacy and media activities in Cameroon, factors that influence use of digital and media spaces in Cameroon. The analyses are directly corroborated or contrasted with findings from other secondary sources as well.

2.1. Demographic analysis

A total of 602 respondents successfully participated in the field survey across six (6) metropolitan cities and regions of Cameroon including Yaounde, Douala, Buea, Bamenda, Bafoussam, and Maroua as representing the Centre, Littoral, South West, North West, West and Far North regions respectively.

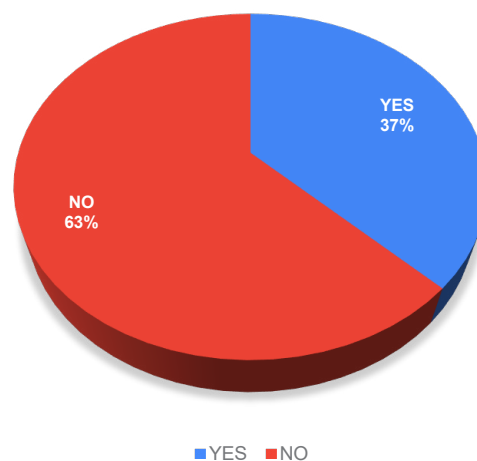
Out of these number, 56% compared to 44% were male and female respectively, ranging between less than 20 to 60 years although predominantly (74%) persons between 21- 40 years old. Most (64%) of these respondents were/are equally single compared to 20% who were/are married, and coming from diverse education backgrounds including tertiary (54%), secondary (19%), Vocational (17%), informal (7%) and basic education (3%); and professions such as the private sector (34%), students (27%), public sector (15%), informal sector (14%), NGO/CSOs (8%), and others including the unemployed. These demographic insights also serve as key determinants vis-à-vis the knowledge, degree of exercising different digital rights and involvement in media activities in Cameroon.

2.2. Digital Literacy and Media Activities



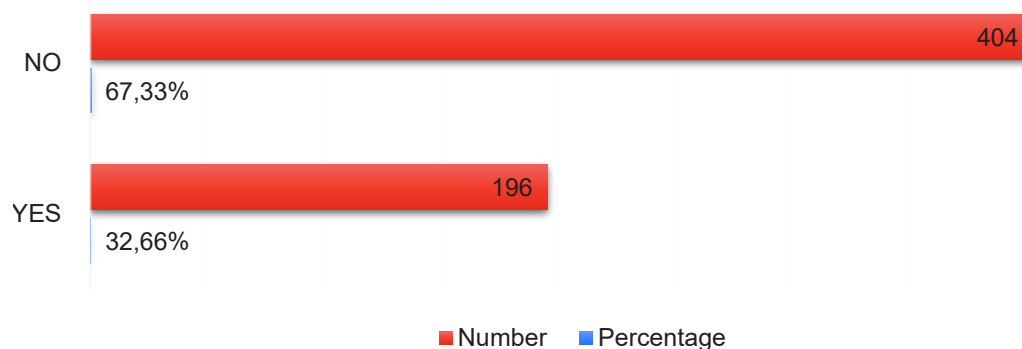
This study attempted to assess the digital knowledge and capacity of participants as highly relevant in shaping their online or media activities. Unfortunately, an overwhelming proportion of 63 % have neither received prior training or lessons related to internet activities compared to 37% who revealed having received such before. The situation is further compounded considering the fact that barely 33% compared to 67% have been opportune to receive any prior training or lessons on how to safely conduct their activities online. This revelation is not surprising considering the fact that it suffices for many people to purchase or be offered a digital gadget (e.g android phone, laptop, and iPad) and they learn by using irrespective of challenges. Such a phenomenon partially accounts for some of the irresponsible media and social media activities increasingly visible across the digital space in Cameroon.

Graphic 3: Training/Lessons Received on Internet Usage



Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey, June 2021.

Graphic 4: Training/Lessons Received on Online Safety



Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey, June 2021.

Irrespective of having prior training/lessons or not related to computer literacy and internet related activities, it is quite interesting to note that 97% of respondents own social media accounts many of whom have been online for 6- 10 years (35%), 1-5 years (20%), 11-15 years (18%), 16-20 years (15%) and others who were not specific (13%). It is not surprising to see that barely 15% of participants claim to have been using the internet for 16-20 years corresponding to the

20th anniversary of mobile telephony in Cameroon. More interestingly is the fact that the relatively good number of people (35%) who disclosed having been online between 6-10 years are highly justified by the increasing use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp (Instant Messaging), etc. compared to previous years when internet access was quite costly and limited to few.



Table 1: The amount of time already spent using the internet

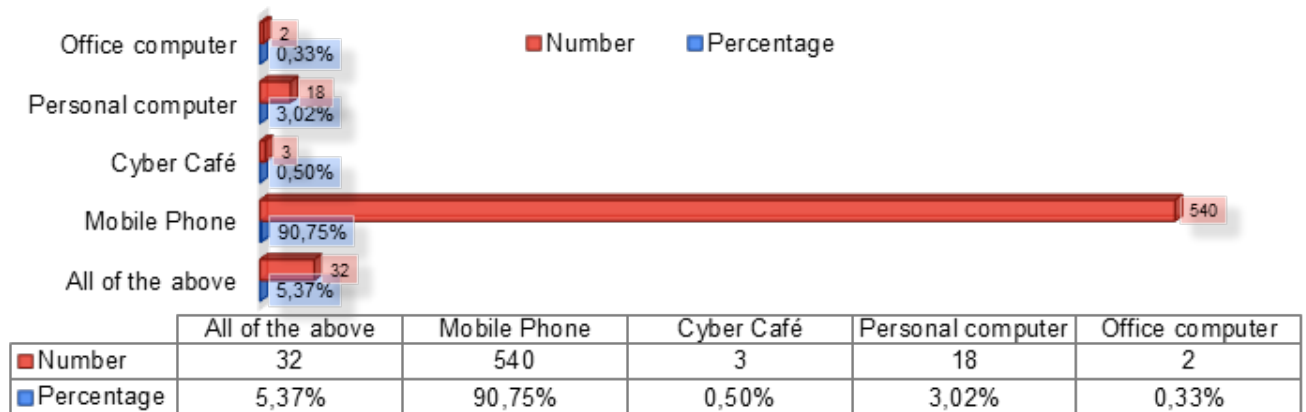
How long have you been using the internet?	11-15 years	1-5 years	16-20 years	6-10 years	Not specific
Percentage	17.47%	19.80%	14.80%	35.44%	12.47%
Number	105	119	89	213	75

Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey, June 2021.

Worth noting too is the fact that majority (91%) of respondents use the internet via mobile phones (Android and Smart Phones). Figures which are very consistent with global statistics which reveal that over 92.8 % of internet subscribers use their mobile phones. Some of

the justifications to support this finding includes the fact that “mobile connections are much cheaper and do not require the infrastructure that is needed for traditional desktop PCs with fixed-line internet connections.”

Graphic 5: Most Convenient Means of Communication



Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey, June 2021.

We Are Social and HootSuite Report of April 2021, <https://datareportal.com/reports/6-in-10-people-around-the-world-now-use-the-internet/>, accessed on 16/06/2021.

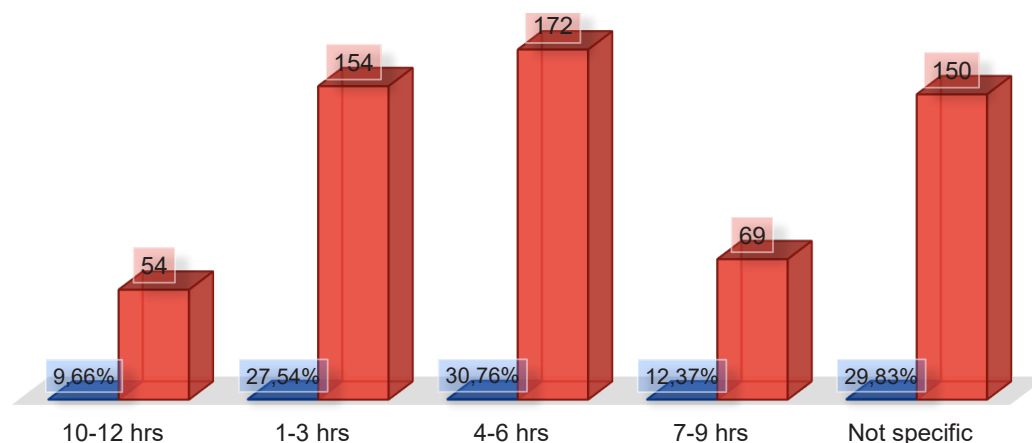
For more details, see Statista.com <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1124283/internet-penetration-in-africa-by-country/>, accessed 16/06/2021.



Predisposition to digital skills, devices, and opportunities may not always imply or translate into effective internet usage. Professional and educational backgrounds may also play a vital role in determining how much time an individual spends online and what precisely they do. In this study, about 31% of participants revealed that they spend 4-6 hours online every day, compared to 28% who spend 1-3 hours, 13% who spend 7-9 hours, 10% spend 10-12 hours and 30% who were not specific considering their daily activities. These findings are

equally consistent with some of the demographic trends which reveal that more young people between 21- 40 years, students, researchers, business persons (e-commerce operators) among other tend to spend more time online. The findings equally reflect global trends as We Are Social and HootSuite 2021 report shows that active internet users spend an average of 6 hours 56 minutes online daily with 3 hours 36 minutes of the time via mobile devices.

Graphic 6: Average Time of Accessing the Internet Daily



Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey

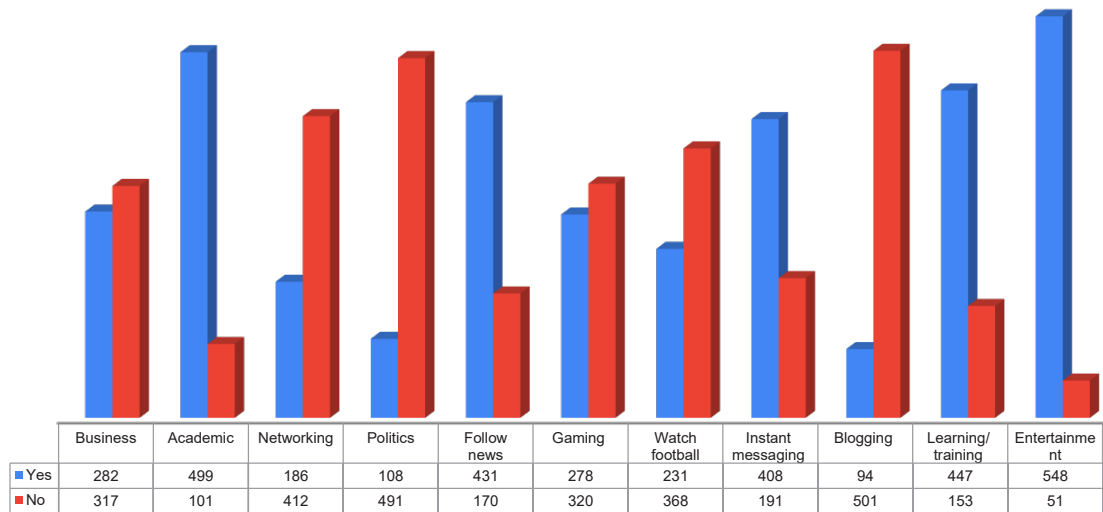
In terms of the time people spend online, the majority (548) revealed that they often focus on entertainment, 499 on study/research, 447 on learning/training, 431 on news, 408 on instant messaging, 282 on business, 278 on games, 231 on football, 186 on social networking, 108 on politics and 94 on blogging.

It is no secret today that digital platform, especially when accessed via social media, are the main sources of entertainment, as is the case with Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, YouTube, among others, as other studies such as the We Are Social and Hootsuite reports of recent years clearly show. Although many respondents said they use the internet for research or study purposes, in-depth discussions with some of them reveal that they do not really master and explore the various online research tools and sources effectively. The situation is relatively better for those who reveal

that they spend time online for learning and training purposes, given that since the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020 in Cameroon, the protective measures that followed have forced a significant section of the population to study or even work from home, regardless of the digital gaps that existed before the pandemic. In fact, many Cameroonians, especially the youth, have obtained many degrees and other training courses online, while others, especially CSOs, policy makers, researchers, economic operators, have to organize/host conferences, workshops, seminars and high-level summits virtually.



Graphic 7: Activities Users Carry Online



Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey

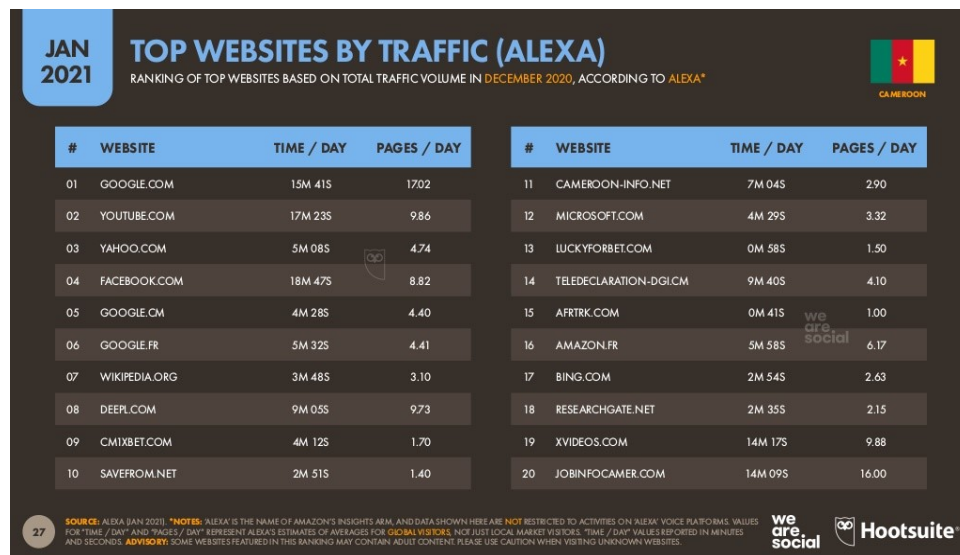
The preceding results further reveal the fact that majority of internet users in Cameroon are young people less than 40 years old who spend most of their time on entertainment, instant messaging, news, football, and academic oriented sites. These results sharply contrast but equally align with some of the previous findings by We Are Social and HootSuite, which reveals that aside research oriented sites including google.com, google.cm, google.fr, Wikipedia.org, and researchgate.net, many internet users in Cameroon spend more time on social networking and entertainment related sites such as youtube.com, yahoo.com, facebook.com, and even pornography (xvideos.com). more thought-provoking is the fact many young and unemployed people especially boys and men spend more time on

gambling sites like cm1xbet.com, luckyforbet.com and pornography than sites that offer job opportunities like jobsinfocamer.com. It is based on such facts, that some people especially parents, policy makers and religious authorities have tended to argue for strict social media regulation by the government in view of upholding some moral standards in society. However, going by the very principle of democracy to foster various freedoms both online and offline, some proponents of freedoms including social activists, digital rights advocates, ISPs and even some policy makers rather argue that digital and social media literacy campaigns are better to ensure more responsible use of digital spaces than stringent forms of regulation.

This debate remains strong across the globe among digital optimists versus digital pessimists. Nsaiedze, Sakah Bernard aptly examines such divergent perspectives in his Doctorate thesis titled "Social Media Regulation and Citizen`s Participation in Democratic Governance in the North West and South Regions of Cameroon", publicly defended in October 2019 at the Pan African University-Yaounde.



Figure 2: Top Websites Visited in Cameroon



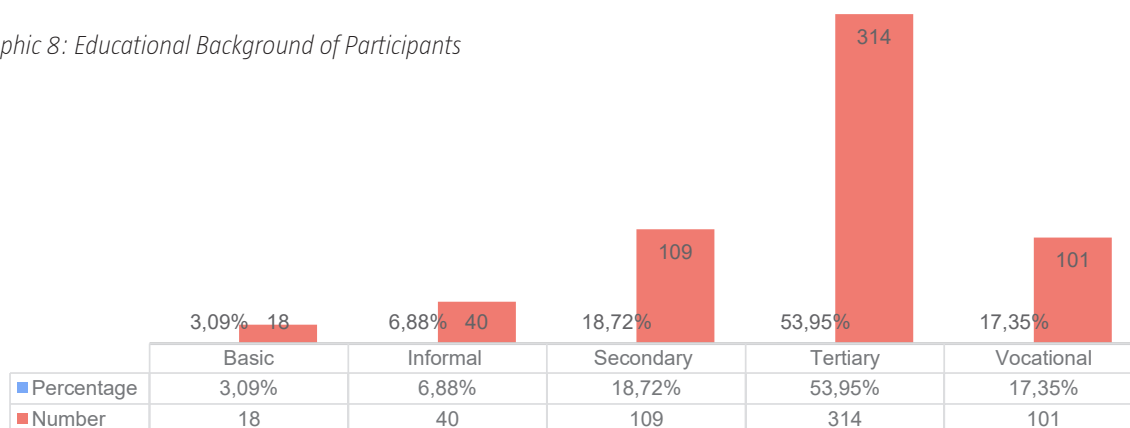
Source: We Are Social and Hootsuite, April 2021.

So far, the ensuing results and analysis reveal the fact that there are several dimensions to consider when looking at digital rights, internet access and media activities in Cameroon particularly and globally. It is also not surprising to see that Facebook.Com is among the top websites often visited in Cameroon with over 4 million Facebook users out of the over 9.15 million Cameroonians online. Another critical dimension to consider in this study is that on factors that influence availability, accessibility, affordability, and use of various internet related services.

2.3. Factors that influence access and use of digital space in Cameroon

There are several factors or variables that determine availability, accessibility, affordability, and use of internet services. On this note, some of the factors considered in this study may not necessarily apply same in different context. For instance, although not necessarily a core determinant to internet access in Cameroon, this study attempted to revisit the educational background of participants. Most (54%) of those who were willing and knowledgeable to participate in this study are of tertiary education background followed by those (19%) from secondary level, 18% from vocational level, 7% with informal education and 3% with basic education.

Graphic 8: Educational Background of Participants



Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey

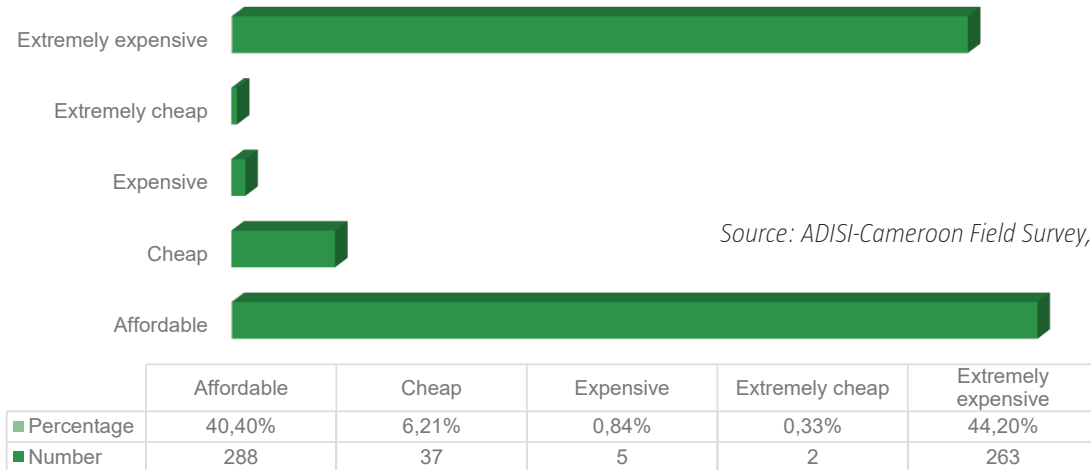


Based on previous findings from this survey and other sources like the We Are Social and Hootsuite reports which reveal that many Cameroonians visit among others research oriented sites, news sites, google platforms and business sites, it can be deduced that the higher the education level of an individual, the more likely the person would access and usage several online platforms. This reasoning applies irrespective of the fact that over 60% of internet users have not had any prior digital literacy training but may have simply explored the self-learning opportunities offered

by various digital platforms. In addition to general education and digital literacy, other factors such as cost are key to determining the capacity of accessing and affording quality internet services.

Cost: Regarding their perception of internet and calls affordability in Cameroon, many (48%) internet users hold that these services are affordable or even cheap (6%) compared to 44% who think that they are extremely expensive. These perceptions are highly based on individual experiences, income level/sources, purchasing power and service provider.

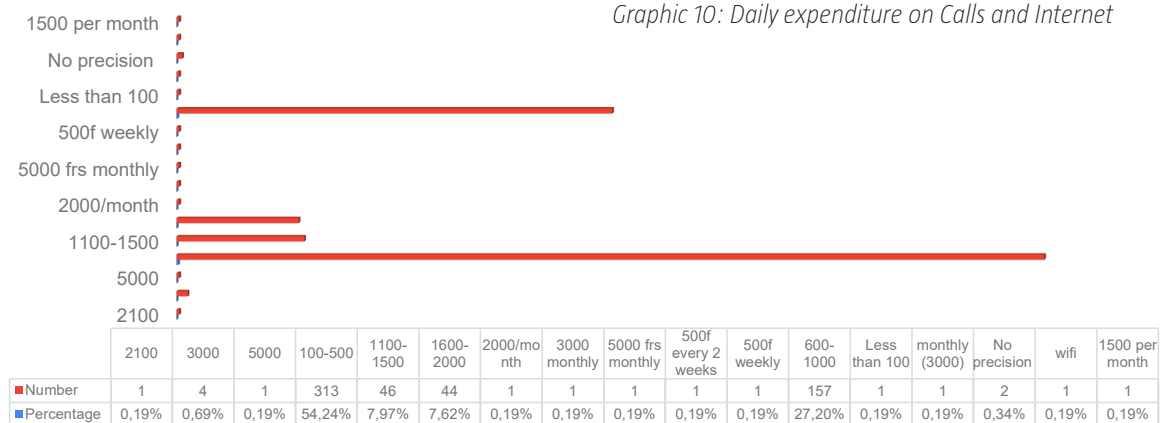
Graphic 9: Affordability of Calls and Internet in Cameroon



Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey, June 2021.

For instance, majority (54%) of respondents revealed that they spend 100-500 xaf (maximum USD1) daily on both calls and internet services, 27% spend 600- 1000 xaf (about USD1-2), 8% spend 1100- 1500 xaf (about USD3), 8% spend 1600-2000 xaf (about USD4) and others who spend less or more than the stated costs. While it is normal for business operators, researchers,

students and teachers for instance to spend more time online, the reality in Cameroon is different as more youth spend time and money on entertainment sites like You Tube, Facebook and instant messaging apps like WhatsApp. Strangely, many of these youth spend less time and money doing genuine business, working, and or searching for gainful employment as seen in figure 9.



Graphic 10: Daily expenditure on Calls and Internet

Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey, June 2021.

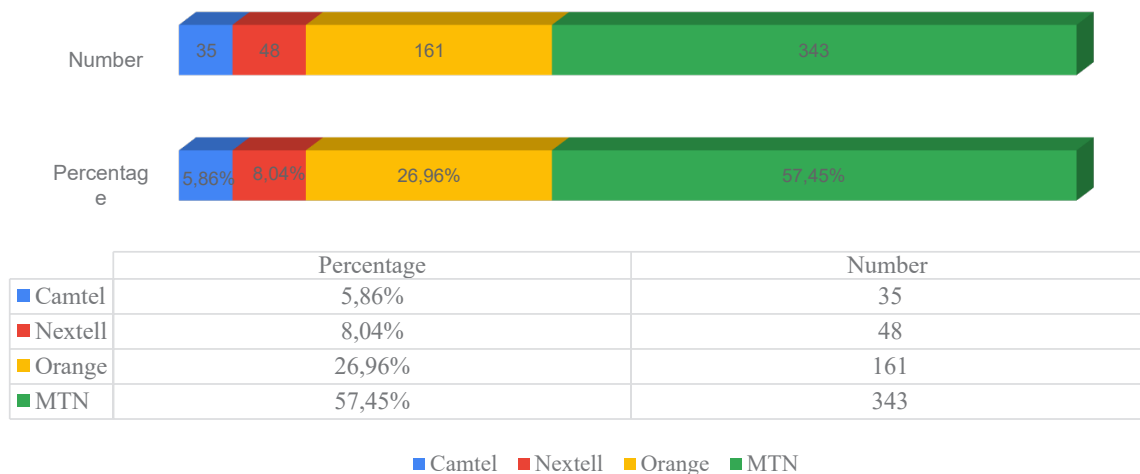


Similarly, the issue of availability, accessibility and affordability of services in Cameroon is highly dependent on available service providers. According to ART, from 2010 to 2019, the average cost of calls per minute in Cameroon reduced by 93.8% that is from 123 xaf to 7.64 xaf per minute. Such a drastic drop in cost of calls is mainly attributed to various bonuses, cheaper bundles for calls, internet and SMS introduced by various ISPs. Despite this seemingly commendable evolution, the Federation of Cameroonian Associations of Consumers or users of ICT products and services (Factics in French) expressed their dissatisfaction while calling on the competent authorities to further ensure proper reduction in cost of communication in Cameroon as the case across West Africa. In fact, Factics revealed that “the cost electronic communications within households is averagely tree three times more

expensive than electricity and ten times more than water bills” in Cameroon. These facts are evident of the critical situation which remains to be addressed vis-à-vis affordability of internet services and communication cost in Cameroon.

ISPs: This survey equally sought to know from participants their preferred ISP among those legally operating in Cameroon including Orange, MTN, Nextell and Camtel. Interestingly, about 58 % prefer MTN, 27 % prefer Orange, 8% prefer Nextell and 6% prefer Camtel services. It must be stressed here that some of the participants in this study like many other Cameroonians own at least 2 or 3 phone numbers from different ISPs depending on their social status, geographic location, profession, and source of income which are key determinants to accessibility of digital services in Cameroon.

Graphic 11: Preferred ISP in Cameroon



It is strange to see that very few (5%) respondents expressed their preference for Camtel which is the main ISP in the country. To boost its presence and service quality, Orange Cameroon is said to be awaiting installation of 122 sites (especially in rural areas) from a Canadian firm known as NuRAN WIRELESS Inc. by December 2021. This initiative falls within the framework of an economic model known as “NaaS (Network-as-a-Service)” intended to address the service availability, accessibility and affordability challenges across rural communities in Cameroon with about 80% of telecoms investments mainly concentrated in Douala

and Yaounde among other cities in Cameroon. It is also more interesting to highlight that these four (4) main ISPs in Cameroon are building on the foundation laid since 1999 that Cameroon saw her first Mobile Telephone company known as Société Camerounaise de mobile (SCM). From 40 000 mobile telephone subscribers in the year 2000 to 4 million in 2008 and over 20 million in 2021 divided among the four main operators including MTN, Orange, Camtel and Nexttel. In fact, the We Are Social and Hootsuite report estimates that there are 26.60 million mobile subscriptions in Cameroon as of April 2021.

Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey, June 2021.



See Investir au Cameroun, *Téléphonie mobile : au Cameroun, le coût moyen de la minute de communication vocale a été divisé par 16 en 10 ans*, published on June 3, 2021 and available online at: <https://www.investiraucameroun.com/economie/0306-16457-telephonie-mobile-au-cameroun-le-cout-moyen-de-la-minute-de-communication-vocale-a-ete-divise-par-16-en-10-ans>, accessed on 13/07/2021.

See article by Investir au Cameroun, *Fin 2021, le Canadien NuRAN Wireless aura livré à Orange Cameroun 122 sites télécoms à installer dans les zones rurales*, published on April 30, 2021, available online https://www.investiraucameroun.com/gestion-publique/3004-16318-fin-2021-le-canadien-nuran-wireless-aura-livre-a-orange-cameroun-122-sites-telecoms-a-installer-dans-les-zones-rurales?fbclid=IwAR1BTCsrzW_uWO10yDcUlgLCclE-X-x_E7P5Hoa61Xix1S6D507q8sox9y0, accessed on 16/06/2021.

Further details are available online at: Investir au Cameroun, *Une conférence pour faire le bilan des 20 ans de la téléphonie mobile au Cameroun*, published on May 5, 2021, <https://www.investiraucameroun.com/economie/0505-16337-une-conference-pour-faire-le-bilan-des-20-ans-de-la-telephonie-mobile-au-cameroun?fbclid=IwAR1QNWFqhreH4eI>

[aLfTNbQN6TNglpBAbhg8ogEND1fwTXQ30T4aoK9REJo](https://www.investiraucameroun.com/economie/0505-16337-une-conference-pour-faire-le-bilan-des-20-ans-de-la-telephonie-mobile-au-cameroun?fbclid=IwAR1QNWFqhreH4eI), accessed on 16/06/2021.

See <https://datareportal.com/reports/6-in-10-people-around-the-world-now-use-the-internet>, accessed on 16/06/2021.



THE DIGITAL DIVIDE: YOUTH, WOMEN AND MEN

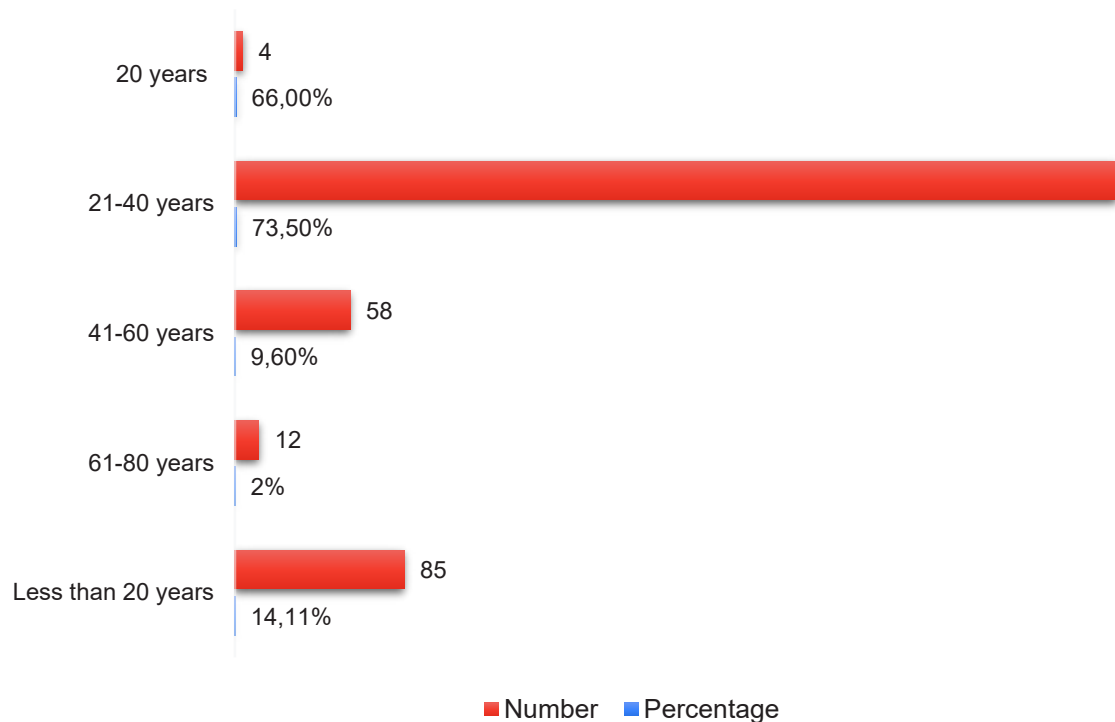
CHAP 3

The digital divide is one of the critical constraints to internet access and online activities. Not only are there disparities in terms of women, men, and youth, but there are equally marked differences and inequalities among those living in urban and rural communities. For instance, in Cameroon most (about 80%) of the telecommunications including internet investments are highly concentrated in cities like Douala and Yaounde. Such concentration of digital infrastructure in selected cities tends to deprive many people from accessing them as well as results in poor service delivery across enclaved zones without the necessary infrastructure to boost availability, accessibility, affordability and quality of services. This chapter further examines the digital divide and youth as well as the digital divide and women in Cameroon.

3.1. Digital Divide and Youth in Cameroon

The digital era has been variously described based on those highly involved in creating, innovating and use of different technologies across the world. In Cameroon, President Paul in his 11th February speech to the youth, described them as the “Android Generation” implying their primordial or frontline role as far as inventing and using new digital technologies are concerned. Findings from this survey clearly attest to the fact that more young people master and use digital technologies including the internet in Cameroon compared to the elderly. The following diagram shows that about 88% of internet users are below the age of 40 years.

Graphic 12 : Digital Usage and Age

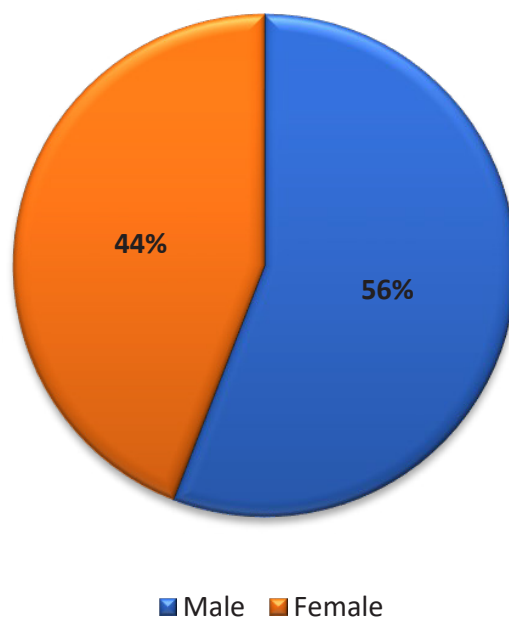


Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey, June 2021.



The findings may further explain why most of the respondents revealed that they spend time online pursuing activities such as entertainment, instant messaging, watching football, gaming, social networking, blogging and business in addition to time spent following news, politics, and academic activities including online studies/training. It has also been observed that out of the current 9.15 million internet users in Cameroon, 4.30 million are on social media such as Facebook with 4 million users. While everyone has the right and freedom to belong any association or network (online and offline), it is critical to pay keen attention towards activities that many people especially the youth often indulge themselves into across online platforms. For instance, when it comes to scamming, gaming, entertainment, gambling, watching football and hacking online, many young Cameroonians have often indicted. Hence, the question as to how important are digital rights and freedoms if not exercised for positive motives, nation-building and sustainable development of a country.

Graphic 13: Digital Gender Divide



3.2. Digital Divide and Women

The phenomenon of digital gender divide remains a burning issue globally and in Cameroon particularly. Several reasons are often invoked to justify or explain why this divide including harmful social and cultural norms and practices, discrimination, societal perceptions, parental influence, limited digital infrastructure, patriarchal educational systems, preference for boys over girls vis-à-vis education especially Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), among others.

The direct consequences of these harmful norms and practices have equally contributed to widening the gap between women and girls versus men and boys as further revealed through survey findings which show 44% of women/girls compared to 56% of men/boys who participated in this study.

Source: AAVDISI-Cameroon Field Survey, June 2021.



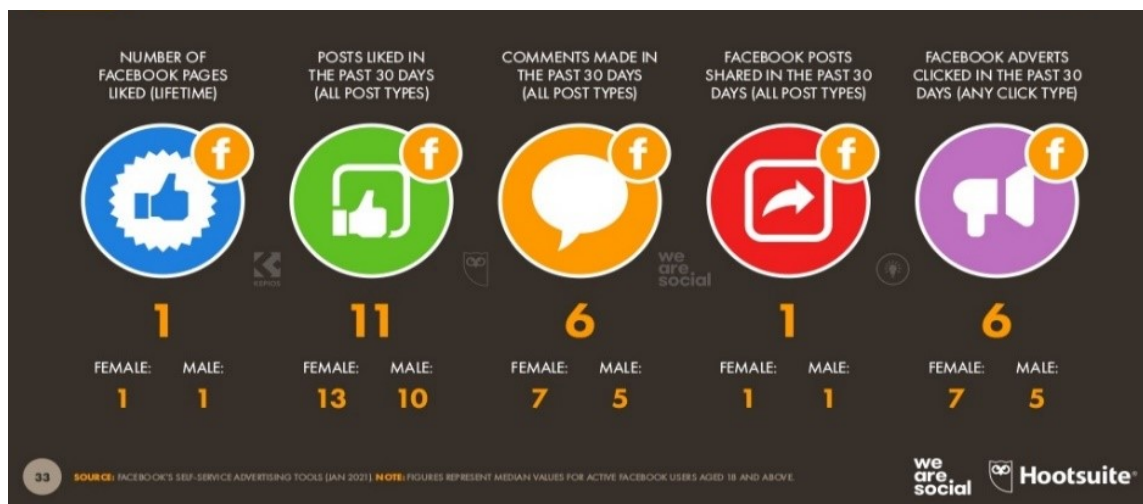
The preceding findings further reflect global and regional digital trends which reveal that 48% of women/girls compared to 52% of men/boys have access to digital spaces. More precisely, the GSMA Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020 revealed that women are 20 per cent less likely than men to use mobile internet including the fact that women across developing countries are less likely to have internet access daily. But where internet access is relatively balanced between the genders, women are more likely to use social media than men despite the fact that, about 25 percent of women globally are less likely than men to use social media. Such figures are astonishing considering that women are said to constitute slightly over 50% of the world’s population including over 51% of Cameroon’s population.

Meanwhile, the Digital 2021 Global Overview Report revealed that female users constitute about 45.6 per cent of the social media users globally with

data showing 300 million more men than women using social media today. These global trends once again are consistent with some specific country experiences as Cameroon looking at findings of this study which showed over 91% of internet users who prefer mobile devices to access social media platforms and 97 % of citizens revealed that they currently own social media accounts. And as earlier stated, 44% of these internet and social media users are women, slightly above the 42.5% versus 57.5% advert audience for women and men respectively from the current 4 million (from the 4.30 million social media users) Facebook users in Cameroon.

The full and detailed report is available via this link: <https://data.gsmaintelligence.com/research/research/research-2020/the-mobile-gender-gap-report-2020>, accessed on 16/06/2021.

Figure 3: Facebook Activity Frequency in Cameroon

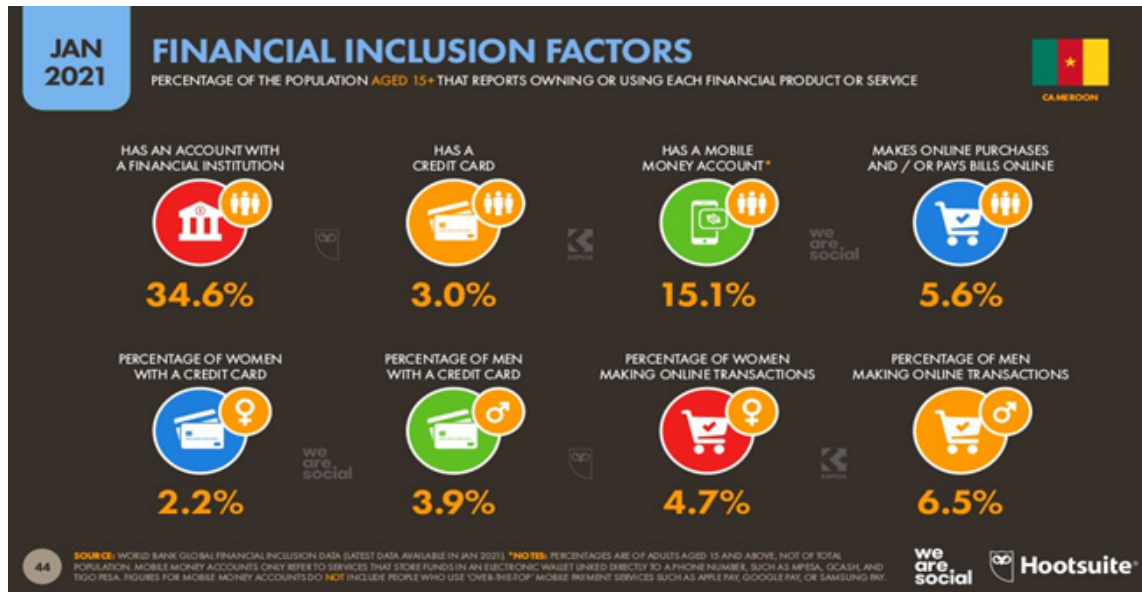


Source: We Are Social and Hootsuite, April 2021.

Aside social media presence and activities, it is vital to revisit other productive and financial activities often conducted online by men and women in Cameroon.



Figure 4: Productive and Financial Activities Carried Online



Source: We Are Social and Hootsuite, April 2021

Looking at some financial activities that require mastery and access to digital platforms, we noted that just 2.2% of women own a credit card compared to 3.9% of men in Cameroon, while 4.7% of women compared to 6.5% of men making online transactions.

It also cannot go without notice that most of those very active across digital spaces are single which may partly be justified by their search for employment and business opportunities among others. This assertion

is subject to debate considering the ALEXA results of rankings of top sites visited in Cameroon by December 2020 as cited in the We Are Social and Hootsuite April 2021 report which revealed that the jobs opportunities site (jobinfocamer.com) only comes at the 20th position compared to pornographic sites (xvideos.com), gambling sites (luckyforbet.com, cm1xbet.com, etc), and entertainment sites like youtube.com.



LOCAL INITIATIVES AND CONSTRAINTS TO DIGITAL ACTIVITIES IN CAMEROON

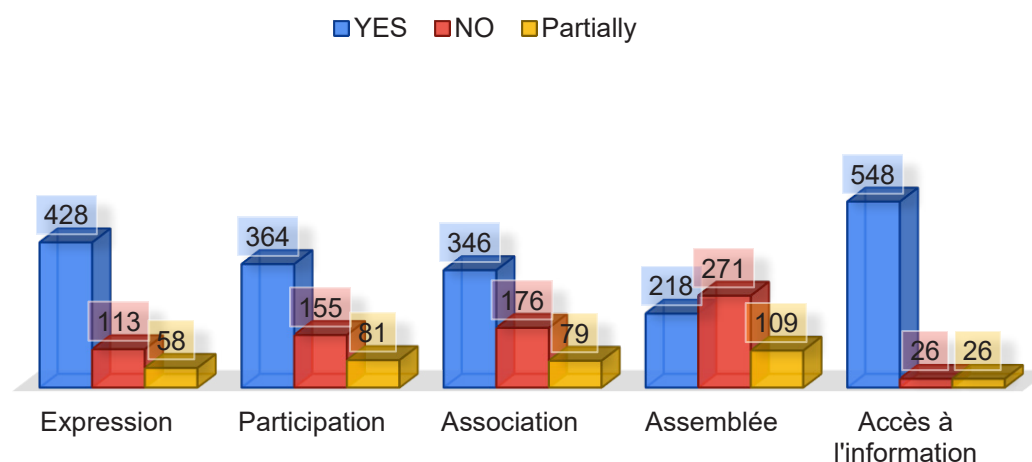
CHAP 4

This chapter examines some initiatives that have been undertaken by several local organizations and individuals to boost the digital landscape across the country. It also discusses some of the constraints vis-à-vis the digital landscape in Cameroon.

4.1. Local Initiatives towards Fostering Digital Rights and Freedoms in Cameroon

So far, this report has extensively revisited and discussed several dimensions related to internet access

and the media landscape in Cameroon. Like some previous studies have demonstrated, this report equally found that access to the internet is crucial to enhancing exercise of several rights and freedoms including freedom of expression, participation, association, assembly and access to information. Evidence suggests that access to the internet has greatly enhanced access to information and freedom of expression for many citizens in line with Constitutional provisions and the 1990s freedom laws in Cameroon.



Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey, June 2021.

In partial response to some of the challenges plaguing the digital ecosystem in Cameroon, several organizations, public institutions, individuals, and even international actors have over the years been pursuing multidimensional initiatives worth highlighting.

For instance, within the last two years, local organizations or CSOs such as: Association for Integrated Development and Interactive Solidarity (ADISI), Defyhatenow, Local Youth Corner (LOYOC), Big Steps Outreach Network (BONET)-Cameroon, and Coalition for Digital Rights in Cameroon have been driving campaigns targeting digital rights, fact-checking, hate speech, misinformation, fake news, peace journalism,

just to cite these few. Some government structures including the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MINPOSTEL), National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism (NCPBM), NCC, ANTIC and ART with direct mandate and interest towards the digital space in Cameroon have equally been conducting several campaigns especially sensitization vis-à-vis hate speeches, responsible social media use, fake news, misinformation and cybersecurity. Within the year 2020, ANTIC deleted over 3000 social media accounts for diverse reasons threatening the cyberspace, privacy and rights of others in Cameroon. Within the framework of a nationwide campaign against



all forms of cyberthreats in Cameroon, the Minister of Post and Telecommunications while launching the campaign in Buea- South West region announced that the government was going to provide one-year free internet to users at the Silicon Mountain.

Most of the initiatives from CSOs have received funding or collaborative support from international partners such as UNESCO, AFD, UNDP, and UNICEF based on their particular interest regarding digital rights, human rights, democratic principles and good governance.

However, there are persistent constraints to enjoyment of these rights and freedoms in Cameroon as noted over the years with experiences of journalists, bloggers, citizen journalists, researchers, opposition political activists, social activists and Cameroonian diaspora. Some of the most recent cases and challenges are further discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

4.2. Barriers plaguing access to internet and media in Cameroon

There are multiple and multifaceted constraints plaguing access to the internet and media activities in Cameroon. This study attempted to identify and elucidate on some of them with reference to practical examples and cases recorded per specific right and freedom under abuse. The study equally noted that the digital landscape in Cameroon has continued to suffer from diverse threats some of which may be linked to limited digital illiteracy and ignorance, neglect or intentional violation of or existing legal and institutional frameworks in force. As earlier stated, barely 33% of respondents in this study affirmed having received any prior digital literacy training or lessons. Similarly, about 47% revealed that they have full (16%) or partial (31%) knowledge of existing laws that govern the digital and media landscape in Cameroon, although an overwhelming majority (75%) posit that these regulatory frameworks are either not (46%) or just partially (29%) being effectively implemented. These all necessitate further analysis of some prevailing challenges with significant influence on the availability, accessibility, affordability, quality of service and usage in Cameroon.



Table 2: Challenges plaguing internet access & media activities in Cameroon

Challenges plaguing internet access & media activities in Cameroon				
	Yes	#Responses/ 602	Proportion %	Rank
a. High cost of data bundles/calls	1	449	75	5
b. Poor internet Infrastructure	1	457	76	4
c. Poor internet services	1	483	80	3
d. Limited internet services	1	391	65	6
e. Constant electricity cuts	1	488	81	2
f. Digital illiteracy	1	228	38	11
g. Digital gender divide	1	169	28	12
h. Hacking	1	373	62	7
i. Hate speech	1	355	59	8
j. Limited privacy	1	331	55	9
k. Surveillance by state and ISPs	1	288	48	10
l. Fake news	1	511	85	1
m. Misinformation	1	489	81	2

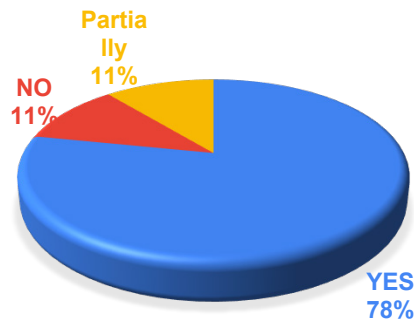
Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey, June 2021.

The preceding table clearly portrays some of the critical factors that are negatively influencing access and activities across digital platforms in Cameroon. In fact, participants highlighted fake news (85%), misinformation (81%), constant electricity cuts (81%), poor internet services (80%), poor internet infrastructure (76%), high cost of data bundles/calls (75%), limited internet services (65%), hacking (62%), hate speech (59%), limited privacy (55%), surveillance by state and ISPs (48%), digital illiteracy (38%) and digital gender divide (28%) as core impediments to their digital and media related activities in Cameroon.

These challenges succinctly corroborate the argument that despite the comparative impressive evolution of national and international policies and initiatives aimed at fostering the availability, accessibility and affordability of internet as well as the entire digital ecosystem in Cameroon, such persistent impediments demand urgent attention. In fact, looking at a growing phenomenon like hacking, some young men were arrested in May 2021 at Bafoussam (West region) for allegedly hacking the West Regional Governor's mobile phone number with complicity of an agent from the said ISP.



Graphic 15: Verification of Information before Sharing Online

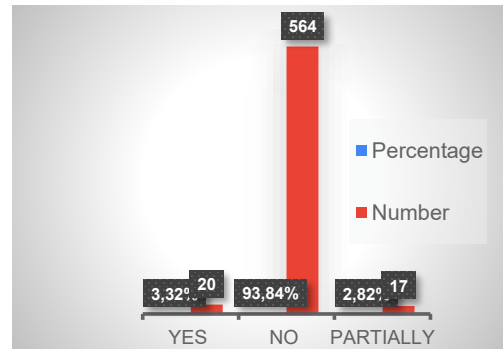


Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey, June 2021.

It is challenging to understanding the fact that 89% of respondents claim they often verify (78%) or partially verify (11%) information/content before dissemination online or via any media when at the same time majority of them deplored the phenomenon of fake news (85%) and misinformation (81%) among the top challenges plaguing digital space in Cameroon. Meanwhile, 69% of them disclosed that they have never experienced any online attack as opposed to 24% who have been attacked or partially threatened (7%) online. Thus, there may not be any surprise to the claim by 94% of respondents that they have never experienced any sanctions regarding their online or media activities with barely 6% that have either being fully or partially sanctioned.

It is significant to revisit the recent revelations from ANTIC that they deleted 3,372 fake Facebook accounts of the 4,242 detected 2020 within the framework of its Cameroonian cyberspace surveillance mission. To denounce or report fake accounts among other cyber threats, ANTIC has the toll-free number 8202 and email address alerts@cirt.antic.cm. With

Graphic 16: Sanctioned for Online or Media Related Activities in Cameroon



support from ANTIC, the defense and security forces in Cameroon were able to launch 12000 requisitions in 2020.

For more details: Business in Cameroon, Cybersecurity: ANTIC claims it deleted 3,372 fake Facebook accounts out of 4,242 identified in 2020, published on June 21, 2021, available online at <https://www.businessincameroon.com/public-management/2106-11696-cybersecurity-antic-claims-it-deleted-3-372-fake-facebook-accounts-out-of-4-242-identified-in-2020>, accessed 13/07/2021.

Some policy makers argued that perpetrators of the prevailing and persistent trend of fake news, misinformation, online manipulation, and hate speech across digital spaces in Cameroon have not all been sanctioned accordingly due to “administrative tolerance”. Similarly, many Cameroonians attributed such dangerous trends to the ineffective application of existing laws while expressing mixed feelings regarding the law against hate speech which was promulgated in 2019 and yet to deliver expected results.

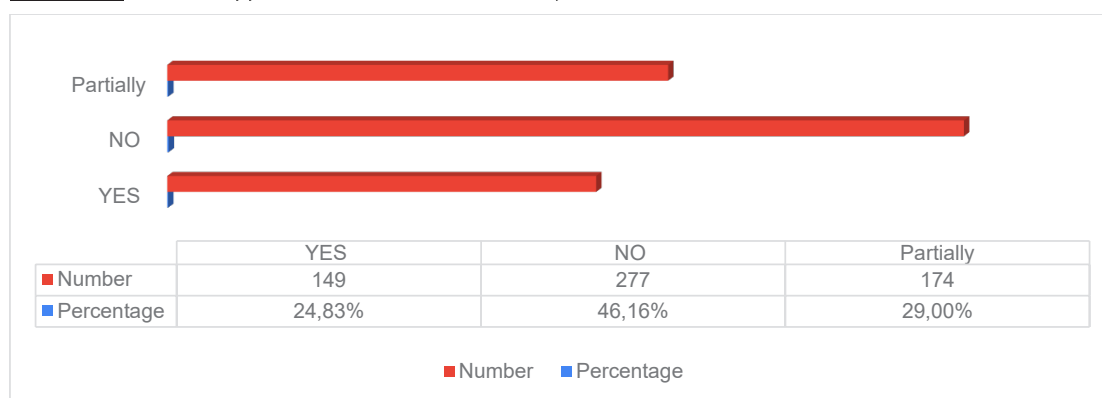
4.3. Case Analysis of Digital Rights Abuses in Cameroon



Notwithstanding the series of legal instruments and institutional mechanisms put in place by the government of Cameroon, effective implementation remains a major challenge as participants in this study clearly demonstrated. The fact that only 25% of respondents felt there is effective application of existing

laws that govern digital space and media activities in Cameroon compared to 46% who blatantly refuted the assertion as well as 29% who expressed partial feelings regarding the application of the legal frameworks can serve as partial justification to the prevailing digital and media lapses across the country.

Graphic 17: Effective Application of Laws that Currently Govern the Internet and the Media in Cameroon



Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey, June 2021.

Ineffective implementation of existing laws, dysfunctional or weak institutional mechanisms all leave far reaching consequences vis-à-vis protection and promotion of digital rights in Cameroon. Unfortunately, increasing number of digital rights abuses have left many Cameroonians wondering as to what the future of digital rights and media practices hold in stock for them. For instance, on the 28th of May 2019, a famous blogger Paul Tchouta was arbitrarily arrested and detained on claims of defamatory content by a certain French-Cameroonian author Calixthe Beyala.

After adjourning his case 27 times, the verdict was finally passed on the 18th of May 2021 sentencing him to 23 months in prison (while he had already spent 24 months in pre-trial detention), 2 million XAF as damages and 160 000 XAF fine. This verdict received mixed public reactions especially critical of the fact that it rather exposed the extent to which the government cracks down on journalists and activists seeking to foster freedom of expression and access to information. Such abusive treatment of journalists rather asserts the government position regarding online especially social media activities as the President of the National Assembly Cavayé Djibril during the Opening Session

of Parliament in November 2016 described “social media as a new form of terrorism” that needed to be combatted like Boko Haram in the Far North region of Cameroon.

Taking another controversial incident on June 16, 2021, alleged sex tapes of a prominent sports journalist and author Martin Camus Mimb and a minor (15 years girl Malicka Bayemi) went viral across online and offline media platforms while attracting widespread condemnation and debates. This incident attracted local and international attention regarding abuses exposed via social media, citizen journalism, rights to privacy and human dignity, all sanctioned by existing 2010 cybersecurity and cybercriminality laws in Cameroon. On June 25, 2021 the accused journalist Martin Camus organized a press conference during which he publicly regretted his act and solicited forgiveness from the victim (Malicka), her parents, his wife, family members and the public at large. He equally promised to deactivate his social media accounts for some time as part of measures to tackle the situation which gained prominence thanks to different media outlets. The same incident further exposes the challenges of ensuring professionalism, ethics and deontology as well



as use of media spaces for popular manipulation and defamatory activities sanctioned by among others the Cameroon Penal Code and the NCC.

Similarly, a journalist by name Martinez Zogo, working at Amplitude FM, was arrested and jailed in January 2020 for charges related to defamation, cyber-criminality and blackmail based on a complaint from a spouse of a government official in Yaounde. Martinez Zogo was fortunately released after two months. The International Crisis Group report in December 2020 provides more of these cases including that “on 23 October 2018 authorities arrested journalist Michel Tong for disseminating news on violence in the Anglophone regions, accusing him of supporting terrorism. They released him in December of that year.”

See online article by Voice of Africa, Un journaliste camerounais condamné à 23 mois de prison après 2 ans en détention, published on May 18, 2021, available at: <https://www.vooafrique.com/a/un-journaliste-camerounais-condamn%C3%A9-%C3%A0-23-mois-de-prison-apr%C3%A8s-2-ans-en-d%C3%A9tention/5895455.html>, accessed 18/06/2021.

For more details, check: International Crisis Group, “Easing Cameroon’s Ethnopolitical Tensions, On and Offline”, published on December 03, 2020, Africa Report No. 295, available online at: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/295-easing-cameroons-ethno-political-tensions.pdf>, accessed 18/06/2021.



STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS TOWARDS FOSTERING DIGITAL RIGHTS FREEDOMS IN CAMEROON

CHAP 5

The results of the field data collection and subsequent analysis have so far demonstrated the extent to which digital services are available, accessible, affordable, and meet quality expectations for users in Cameroon. While the findings and discussion have extensively addressed issues raised by our study respondents during the field survey, interviews and desk review of existing literature, they have equally triggered the need to direct particular attention towards several possible solutions based on challenges earlier raised by participants themselves. As a result of the data analysis, some recommendations were developed, the content of which can be categorized by ranking and also per targeted stakeholders for more clarity, specific responsibilities and feasibility regarding their application.

5.1. Recommendations

Drawing from recommendations advanced by various study participants, it can be deduced that there are some urgent and highly important policy recommendations to be considered by different stakeholders. For instance, an overwhelming majority (93%) of people feel that it is highly imperative and urgent to improve internet services especially across cities and regions including Far North, North West, South West and West compared to the Centre and Littoral regions that were involved in the study. This position is closely followed by that of many (92%) who equally assert the urgent need to improve on internet infrastructure across Cameroon as some of the current ISPs like Camtel and Orange are doing across some regions like the West to boost internet availability as further exerted by 88% of participants. More so, 87% of respondents argued that it is vital to reduce the cost of data bundles and calls which they feel is not easy for many Cameroonians with low income levels especially in rural areas to afford in addition to the need for

government to ensure constant electricity supply which is primordial vis-à-vis access to most digital platforms in Cameroon. Quite importantly too, 86% of participants feel that it is rather very important to collectively fight against misinformation. Similarly, many (82%) equally highlighted the urgent need to institute more and or effectively implement cybersecurity laws against hacking, closely followed by those (81%) who stress on the need for effective data protection and online privacy law(s) in Cameroon. It is however crucial to recall some of the elements related to protection of right to privacy online already exists in laws such as 2010 cybersecurity and cybercriminality laws, and even privacy and security policies put in place by online companies such as Facebook, many (over 67%) Cameroonians do not read or are not aware as revealed by participants in this study. Facebook has equally developed and constantly improving on “Community Standards” with use of local experts and community members to ensure proper verification and facts-checking of information published on their platform. This further justifies the strong recommendation regarding internet and digital literacy programmes as many (80%) posited; effectively application of 2019 law against hate speech (76%), need for the state and ISPs to stop online surveillance of citizens activities (56%); and tackle digital gender divide (51%).



Table 3: Proposed Solutions towards Fostering Digital Rights Freedoms in Cameroon

Proposed solutions	Tick all that apply		Proportion in %	Rank
	Yes	#responses/602		
a. Reduce cost of data bundles/calls	1	522	87	4
b. Improve internet infrastructure	1	557	92	2
c. Improve internet services	1	560	93	1
d. Improve internet availability	1	530	88	3
e. Ensure constant electricity supply	1	526	87	4
f. Increase internet literacy programs	1	482	80	8
g. Tackle digital gender divide	1	308	51	11
h. Institute more cybersecurity laws against hacking	1	492	82	6
i. Effectively apply new law against hate speech	1	456	76	9
j. Introduce data protection & online privacy law	1	490	81	7
k. State and ISPs should stop online surveillance of citizens activities	1	334	55	10
l. Foster collective fight against fake news	1	527	87	4
m. Foster collective fight against misinformation	1	518	86	5

Source: ADISI-Cameroon Field Survey, June 2021.

5.2. Responsibilities of various stakeholders

5.2.1. Government

The state has the legal obligation to respect, protect and promote the various digital rights and freedoms defined in the international human rights conventions they ratify. The state also has the obligation to protect her citizens and groups from digital rights abuse from any third parties including ISPs. Their obligation to protect digital rights means that States must take positive actions to facilitate the enjoyment of basic digital rights. To foster internet freedoms

in Cameroon, the Cameroon government should therefore;

- Uphold and protect all human rights especially digital rights;
- Communicate transparently about the laws, regulations and policies relating to freedom of expression and privacy, and their implementation;
 - Periodically evaluate laws and regulations addressing any gaps or need for changes, and establishing new regulation on an in-depth understanding of technologies and the global context of their use;
 - Sort dialogue and apply political solutions to



socio-political challenges rather than shutting down or restricting internet access.

5.2.2. Internet Service Providers (ISPs)

- Be part of the “Telecommunications Industry Dialogue on Freedom of Expression and Privacy” whose main objective is collaboration to promote freedom of expression and privacy in telecommunications. Together, these companies are to develop common principles to be supportive when a regime makes unreasonable demands to intercept or track subscribers or even attempt to shut down the Internet. They also collaborate to identify how they can respond to and respect freedom of expression and privacy;
- ISPs are encouraged to stay in touch with their own governments and make joint representations to host governments when “unreasonable” requests are made;
- ISPs should put in place, where feasible, strategies to anticipate, respond and minimize the potential impact on freedom of expression and privacy in case of any government’s unlawful demands.;

5.2.3. CSOs and Digital Activists

- Engage in constructive dialogue with government and ISPs to collectively seek globally applicable solutions to best protect and enforce Cameroonians’ freedom of expression and privacy and their online activities;
- Identify digital areas where human rights are most at risk; understand how different technologies and business practices impact on human rights; and develop measures to advocate for greater protection of internet freedoms;
- More CSOs should create, nurture and support strong coalitions/networks (e.g., the Coalition of Digital Rights Activists in Cameroon) that will investigate, expose and analyze internet filtering and surveillance, in order to inform better public policy and develop better advocacy work;
- CSOs should support the fight against hate speech and fake news on the web;
- CSOs need to build capacity on digital rights

and existing regulations and institutions to conduct research, generate reliable data and relevant analysis to advance strategic and evidence-based advocacy;

- CSOs should be proactive in developing digital advocacy strategies to put their issues on the government agenda.

5.2.4. Social media Companies

- All social media and instant messaging platforms need to place greater emphasis on privacy principles in order to mitigate the spread of hate speech, fake news, misinformation and related cyber threats that pose a serious threat to web-based activities;
- Facebook (the country’s most used social media platform), should work with the government, ISPs, civil society and other stakeholders to limit inflammatory content or misinformation lest inter-communal relations break down further;
- Other social media and instant messaging platforms like Twitter and WhatsApp respectively need to replicate best practices such as Facebook’s “Community Standards” in view of mitigating the spread of fake news, misinformation and related cyberthreats common across these spaces;

5.2.5. Individuals

- Intensify efforts towards mastering existing digital and media related laws in the country and beyond;
- Collaborate with other stakeholders towards fostering better digital and media spaces aimed at fostering democratic practices, good governance, rule of law and sustainable development in Cameroon;
- Need to practice more responsible media and social media use/activities. For instance, avoid perpetration fake news, misinformation, hacking, scamming, hate speeches, etc. both online and offline;
- Respect the rights and privacy of others online and offline.

CONCLUSION



The results of this study and analysis have clearly demonstrated the fact Cameroon is steadily striving towards positioning itself within the global digital ecosystem. This assertion is evident from the various legislative and institutional frameworks that the government of Cameroon has since the 1990s promulgated to foster, regulate or govern the digital and media landscape in the country. Prominent among such legal frameworks includes the 1998 Constitution, the famous 1990s freedom laws of expression, association, assembly and the press; 2010 digital laws related to all forms of electronic communications, cybersecurity and cybercriminality, e-commerce; 2014 anti-terrorism law and the 2016 penal code amended in 2019 to provide for sanctions against perpetrators of hate speech in Cameroon. For operational purposes, several institutions have been put in place such as the MINPOSTEL, ANTIC, ART and NCC with interrelated and interdependent mandates to ensure responsible and professional use of various media spaces as well as prosecution of defaulters of existing legal frameworks in force.

Unfortunately, many Cameroonians are not aware of the provisions of most of these legal and institutional frameworks thereby partially justifying the increasing and disturbing trend of cyberthreats,

media related abuses including inflammatory speeches, hate speeches, fake news, misinformation, scamming, hacking, abuse of privacy, manipulation and phishing. The situation is further compounded by several challenges plaguing digital and media related activities such as constraints of availability, accessibility, affordability and quality of services across digital platforms in Cameroon; erratic electricity supply, digital gender divide, poor or limited digital infrastructure and surveillance by government and ISPs as attested by the study participants.

The study thus concludes that it is imperative to effectively embrace the multi-stakeholder approach to governing the digital landscape in Cameroon while guarding against any infringements on various rights and freedoms such as freedom of expression, access to information, and use of any media in line with national and international instruments to which the country has committed itself as part of measures towards accelerating democratization and good governance processes. Hence, the realization of Cameroon's emergence by 2035 would not be possible without fully embracing and fostering the use of emerging digital technologies, media opportunities, digital economy and ensuring effective internet governance for the common good of Cameroonians.



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ANNEXES

1. QUESTIONNAIRE

2. INTERVIEW GUIDE



Questionnaire

An evaluation study on internet access and digital rights in Cameroon

Introduction

I am Sakah Bernard Nsaidzedze (PhD), currently serving as an expert evaluator for the Association for Integrated Development and Interactive Solidarity (ADISI-Cameroon) as part of a study: "An evaluation of internet access and digital rights in Cameroon" across the following cities: Maroua, Yaounde, Douala, Buea, Bamenda and Bafoussam. We would therefore highly appreciate if you can spare 5-10 minutes of your time to share your experiences with us by answering the following questions. Your participation in the study is voluntary and you can withdraw at any point in case you do not feel comfortable to continue for any reason.

Your responses and findings of this study shall only be used for the purpose for which they were meant and we hereby reiterate our responsibility to protect your privacy and confidentiality throughout the study and dissemination of its findings.

Please write down or tick your responses from among the possible options provided corresponding to the questions as you deem most suitable to your experiences and opinion.

Consent

I have read and understood the purpose of this study and I am willing to participate in the survey:

Yes	No
1	2

Section 1: Demographic Information

- 1) Gender: Male Female
- 2) Email: _____
- 3) Phone: _____

		1	2	3	4	5	6
4	Age Range	Less than 20 years	21-40 years	41-60 years	61-80 years	Other (specify)	
5	Profession	Public sector	Private sector	NGO/CSO	Informal sector	Other (specify)	
6	Education	Basic	Secondary	Tertiary	Vocational	Informal	
7	Region of Origin	Far North	North West	South West	Centre	Littoral	West
8	Marital status	Single	Married	Divorced	Engaged	Not specific	

Section 2: Knowledge and Internet Access

9. What according to you does the internet represent?



		1	2	3	4	5	6
10	Do you have a social media account	Yes	No				
11	If you answered 'Yes' in question nine (10) which is your most preferred social media platform	Facebook	Twitter	WhatsApp	YouTube	Instagram	Other(s) e.g.
12	If NO in question nine (10) above, how do you access the internet?	Google.com	Gmail.com	Yahoo.com	Hotmail	Corporate account	Other(s) e.g.
13	What is the most convenient means of internet access to you?	Mobile Phone	Personal computer	Cyber Café	Office computer	All of the above	
14	How long have you been using the internet?	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	Not specific	
15	What is your average time of accessing the internet daily?	1-3 hrs	4-6 hrs	7-9 hrs	10-12 hrs	Not specific	
16	Which is your preferred internet service provider in Cameroon?	MTN	Orange	Nextell	Camtel	None	

17. What activities do you carry out online?

Activity	Yes	No
Business (selling/shopping)		
Academic (Research, teaching, learning, etc)		
Networking		
Politics		
Follow news		
Gaming		
Watch football		
Instant messaging		
Blogging		
Learning/training		
Entertainment (Music, movies, comedy, etc)		



Section 3: Cost and digital skills to access the internet in Cameroon

		1	2	3	4	5
18	How much do you spend on internet and calls daily (cfa)?	100-500	600-1000	1100-1500	1600-2000	Other (specify)
19	How will you describe the cost of calls and internet connectivity in Cameroon?	Extremely expensive	Affordable	Cheap	Extremely cheap	Other (specify)
20	Have you received any training or lessons on how to use the internet before?	Yes	No			
21	Have you received any training or lessons before on how to stay safe while online?	Yes	No			

Section 4: Current digital and Media Regulation in Cameroon

Question/Option	Yes	No	Partially
22. I have knowledge of the law (s) that currently govern access to internet and the media in Cameroon.	1	2	3
23. There is effective application of laws that currently guide access to the internet and the media in Cameroon.	1	2	3
24. I always verify any information before sharing/posting online or via any media.	1	2	3
25. I have experienced any online or media related attack.	1	2	3
26. I have been sanctioned or prosecuted for online or media related activities in Cameroon.	1	2	3

Section 5: Access to internet and freedoms in Cameroon

Question/Rating	Yes	No	Partially	
	1	2	3	
27. Access to the internet has enhanced my exercise of the following freedoms.	a. Expression	1	2	3
	b. Participation	1	2	3
	c. Association	1	2	3



	d. Assembly		1	2	3
	e. Access to information		1	2	3

Section 6: Challenges Plaguering internet access and the media in Cameroon.

28. What are some of the challenges plaguing your access to internet and other media in Cameroon?

Challenges	Tick all that apply	
	Yes	No
n. High cost of data bundles/calls	1	2
o. Poor internet Infrastructure	1	2
p. Poor internet services	1	2
q. Limited internet services	1	2
r. Constant electricity cuts	1	2
s. Internet illiteracy	1	2
t. Digital gender divide	1	2
u. Hacking	1	2
v. Hate speech	1	2
w. Limited privacy	1	2
x. Surveillance by state and ISPs	1	2
y. Fake news	1	2
z. Misinformation	1	2

Section 7: Future of internet and media in Cameroon.

29. What is the most urgent thing to do towards improving internet access and media activities in Cameroon?

Options	Tick all that apply	
	Yes	No
n. Reduce cost of data bundles/calls	1	2
o. Improve internet infrastructure	1	2
p. Improve internet services	1	2
q. Improve internet availability	1	2
r. Ensure constant electricity supply	1	2
s. Increase internet literacy programmes	1	2
t. Tackle digital gender divide	1	2
u. Institute more cybersecurity laws against hacking	1	2
v. Effectively apply new law against hate speech	1	2
w. Introduce data protection & online privacy law	1	2
x. State and ISPs should stop online surveillance of citizens activities	1	2



y. Foster collective fight against fake news	1	2
z. Foster collective fight against misinformation	1	2

Thank you for your time and valuable responses



Interview guide

An evaluation study on internet access and digital rights in Cameroon

Introduction

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Your responses and findings of this study shall only be used for the purpose for which they were meant and we hereby reiterate our responsibility to protect your privacy and confidentiality throughout the study and dissemination of its findings.

Section 1: Demographic Information

Age Range:

Gender:

Profession:

Education:

Region of Origin:

Marital status:

Section 2: Internet access and digital rights in Cameroon

1. How long have you been using the internet? Which are your most preferred platforms of accessing the internet? And why do you prefer them over others?
2. What is your most convenient means of accessing the internet and why?
3. How do you find the internet and media landscape in Cameroon?
4. What activities do you often conduct online?
5. How often do you stay online?
6. Are you aware of any laws, policies and institutions that currently govern the internet and media landscape in Cameroon? If yes, can you cite any or all that you know? And your impressions about them?
7. Do you think any of the laws, policies, or institutions cited in question 6 are effectively been implemented or functioning in Cameroon?



8. Do you always verify any information you share on your different digital platforms? If yes, why? And if no, why?
9. Have you experienced any online related attacks since you started using the internet or other media outlet? If yes, can you share your experiences further with us?
10. How do you think the internet affects various forms of freedom in Cameroon?
11. What do you think hinders access to the internet and media activities in Cameroon?
12. How do you think the various challenges plaguing internet access and the media in Cameroon can be addressed?
13. How about the role of companies such as Facebook, Google, WhatsApp, Twitter, etc? what do you think they are currently doing or should to enhance internet access in Cameroon?
14. What do you think would happen to the internet and media in the next 5-10 years?
15. Is there any other thing you want to share regarding the internet and media in Cameroon?

N.B: The above questions only serve as a guide to ensure focus on the subject matter of the interview/study. During interview, not all the preceding questions maybe asked as the interviewee sometimes may respond to about 2 or more questions at once. Hence, the dynamics of the interview often determines what probing questions to bring up and those not to even pose.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND VERY RELEVANT RESPONSES!

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