



## **Social Media in Cameroon**

### *State of Play and Perspectives*

*Yaounde, April 2014*

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### **Summary**

Social media has exploded in recent years. It is used for a variety of purposes, including private networking, entertainment, news and general information, professional services etc. Across the world it has also become a tool for like-minded social and political actors (advocacy groups, social movements, political parties, civil society) who seek to mobilize supporters, promote certain issues etc. The most spectacular manifestation of this tendency was visible during the so-called Arab Spring, where social media were used actively to promote political change, in particular by shaping the debate, organizing events and engaging international media beyond national borders.

In this research we explore the potential of social media to promote social change (democracy and social justice) in Cameroon in general and its use in supporting of the activities of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and their partners in particular. We analyse the regional context to understand the potential and limitations and assess the use of social media in Cameroon.

# Index

[Summary](#)

[Index](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Objective of the study](#)

[Research approach](#)

[Part 1: Some basic understanding](#)

[The changing world of the internet](#)

[Social Media tools](#)

[Blogging](#)

[Microblogging](#)

[Social Networking services](#)

[Mobile social media services](#)

[Social media and political change](#)

[Part 2: Cameroon and the region](#)

[Economic indices](#)

[Human Development Index](#)

[The Networked Readiness Index](#)

[Mobile and internet](#)

[Social Media Users in the region](#)

[Blogging](#)

[Facebook](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Part 3: Analysing Cameroon](#)

[Preliminary conclusion](#)

[Part 4: The survey](#)

[Discussion](#)

[Part 5: Moving forward](#)

[Results from the workshop](#)

[Part 6: Conclusions](#)

[Challenges for the social media in Cameroon](#)

[1. Link and connect](#)

[2. Innovate and engage](#)

[3. Monetisation](#)

[4. Keep going when needed](#)

[5. Social media is a strategy](#)

[6. Time](#)

## Introduction

Social media can play an important role in facilitating or accelerating social change. Tools like Facebook, Twitter and blogs can be used by ordinary people and active citizens to reach out and make their voices heard on particular issues, be they political, economic or social. It can also help citizens to organize collective action as well as to spread democratic and progressive ideas across international borders. Gerbaudo (2012) argues that social media has become an integral part of the activists' 'toolbox' and that the cyberspace and physical space can no longer be separated when a cause is fought.

Little is known about the use of social media in general and by social and political activists in particular in Cameroon. An important limitation is the access to internet. Although internet usage is still relatively low in Cameroon, the ITU statistics<sup>1</sup> show that all indicators for access to (broadband) internet and mobile telephony are steadily rising. Mobile telephony subscription has reached 60% while internet penetration is 5%. However, keeping in mind that with new technologies the most popular social media will also be available on normal mobile connections<sup>2</sup>, the technical barriers for its use should not be a factor that prevents these tools from being used in the Cameroonian context.

In light of this potentially positive technical context it is justified to explore the social media context in Cameroon for its potential.

## Objective of the study

*To acquire a better understanding of the use of social media, including the blog-sphere, for social/political participation in Cameroon and its potential influence as well as hindrances to promote democracy and social justice*

The principal assumption of the research that has been commissioned by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) in Cameroon is that internet and social media constitutes a potentially interesting (and cost effective) tool:

1. to foster social change in Cameroon to promote political participation and accountability,
2. to help raise awareness of socio-economic and political issues,
3. to facilitate networking among like-minded actors and the spread of progressive ideas, in short: to enlarge the public sphere.

Ultimately, its main object is to understand how social or political activists, civil society and community organizers can use the new tools. The research will also explore to what extent organisations like the FES can integrate the social media dimension in some of its work.

The outcome of this process is an action plan to strengthen the potential in the projects of the FES and to address the hindrances through training, awareness creation or otherwise.

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<sup>1</sup> See: <<http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/explorer/index.html>>

<sup>2</sup> See for example: <<http://press.nokia.com/2013/05/09/nokia-introduces-the-nokia-asha-501/>>

## Research approach

This research is firstly based on the review of literature, internet blogs and social media websites. Only open content publications are used in our review.

In the research we have concentrated on the three main and most important social media tools:

1. Facebook
2. Twitter
3. LinkedIn

Next to these tools we have researched blogs as a way to share information and opinions publicly.

We have not considered the functionality of the tools and concentrated on the information that is shared by the users of the tools. We have looked at the following aspects:

1. Type of information: General characteristics of the information posted in the social media or the blog. We tried to identify the users that published socio-political relevant information.
2. Frequency and duration: The frequency of the posts as well as the first and the last date of the posts are important to determine potential influence of the blogger or social media player. In order to have a high influence a high frequency and / or long history of posts is required.
3. Advertising or social activity: Adverts on the blog is an indicator that the blog also has a commercial motivation. Other social media provide less opportunity to take a commercial angle.
4. Length of the (blog) posts: Especially interesting for blog posts, but also on Facebook, longer posts are possible. Long posts are considered as more work and require more dedication to the medium or the message.
5. Mixing media: We are also looking whether users are active on more than one medium. More media extends the reach of the message.

In the second place we have gathered opinions of active users of social media and bloggers. Interviews and an explorative one-day workshop were conducted. The goal of the workshop was to triangulate the results from the desk research and to get a better and more in-depth understanding of the expectations, reality and limitations of the use of social media by activists in Cameroon.

## Part 1: Some basic understanding

In this section we outline some of the basic concepts that signify the change that internet has undergone in the past years. This change is often labelled the Web2.0 or the Social Web; the web where ordinary people got the tools and started to participate in creating and contributing information.

Let us first have a look at these changes.

### The changing world of the internet

Over the past 10 years, the way in which we work with the internet has changed dramatically; not only in the West, but also in Africa. This change is often referred to as the transition from the Web1.0 to the Web2.0 or the Social Web. Critics are quick to emphasise that the underlying technology of the internet has not changed<sup>3</sup> and that is true. People just started to use the internet in a different manner.

The most important difference between the Web 1.0 and 2.0 is the way and the rate in which information changes. In the old paradigm the information was static and updated once in a while and mostly by people with authority. In the Web2.0 world information changes constantly, rapidly and by people that have that basic computer skills, enough connectivity to put things online and a message to tell the world. Twitter provides a good example of how user-driven dynamic information (content) on the internet has materialised.

The introduction of web applications is also specific for the changes in the new Web2.0 world. In the era of the personal computer all applications were on a person's computer but with the increase of the speed and stability of the internet, users have started to run applications hosted by online servers. This is often labelled with the container term 'cloud-computing'. A good example is the office application functionality that is now offered by Google Apps and that offer a full office suite online that is accessed within an internet browser.

Finally, the control over the content has shifted in the Web2.0 world. Traditionally webmaster controlled which content was put online, but now it is the user who is controlling the content: so called "user generated content".<sup>4</sup> Some authors consider this powershift on content to be the real revolution.<sup>5</sup> Blogging is a good example of this change, where the user is offered a platform which allows him or her to easily put content online and to share it with all people that have access to internet.

These changes can also be observed in the Africa. Although the amount of content that is put online and the use of online tools is still lacking behind in comparison to other regions, that growth of speed and stability and reducing prices of connectivity take away the hindrances to express and participate in the dynamic new internet.

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<sup>3</sup> "The Top Ten differences between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 | ZDNet." 2012. 28 Jan. 2014 <<http://www.zdnet.com/blog/berlind/the-top-ten-differences-between-web-1-0-and-web-2-0/225>>

<sup>4</sup> See for details on user generated content and its characteristics: Vickery, Graham, and Sacha Wunsch-Vincent. *Participative web and user-created content: Web 2.0 wikis and social networking*. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2007.

<sup>5</sup> "Web 2.0 and Social Media - Exforsys." 2007. 28 Jan. 2014 <<http://www.exforsys.com/tutorials/web-2.0/web-2.0-and-social-media.html>>

## Social Media tools

In this section we focus on platforms and tools that offer free or advert-supported social media services. We have made this selection because access to online credit card payments is still very low in Africa as a whole and in Cameroon.

We have made a distinction between blogging, microblogging and social networking services. Although blogging and microblogging could also be considered networking services we separated blogging and microblogging tools as they have proved to have distinguished characteristics. Blogging is designed for large text and allows detailed opinions, while microblogging is short and very dynamic. Social networking services like Facebook and Google+ are multimedia and with medium length messages.

### Blogging

Blogs are the most rudimentary form of social media. A blog is basically a fairly simple content management website with an easy to use interface that brings a stream of articles without a strict hierarchy. Articles have tags or categories to navigate, group or trace them. Readers can comment on the article or articles on the blog. Readers can follow the blog changes through email or RSS alerts.

The main free blogging platforms that are used are:

- *Wordpress.com*: Is the most used blogging site in the world and available in a wide range of languages. According to the website there are almost 75 million blogs on this platform. The free blogs on wordpress.com have only basic functionality and monetising blog traffic is difficult.
- *Blogger.com*: Blogger is the blogging platform of Google and the second largest in the world. Blogger is very easy to use, but functionality is also limited and it is difficult to monetise traffic.
- *Overblog.com*: This blog is very popular among Francophone users as it originates from France. According to the website there are 35 million users of OverBlog worldwide. Many of the blogs we have listed in this research are published on OverBlog. OverBlog allows and supports users to monetise traffic in an easy manner.
- *Mondoblog.org*: This blog is often used by bloggers in Cameroon. The blog platform is based on Wordpress, but is part of a project of Radio France International (RFI).

In the blogsite [Mondoblog.org](http://mondoblog.org)<sup>6</sup> is has been described as follows:

*“La plateforme compte à ce jour 350 blogueurs. Elle combine un média et un projet de formation international. Son objet est de favoriser l’émergence d’une blogosphère francophone internationale et dynamique. L’enjeu est de contribuer à un développement du contenu francophone de qualité sur Internet. ”*

Other popular free blogging platforms are:

- *Blog.com*: Simple to use blog platform. Add-supported for the free accounts.
- *Weebly.com*: Easy to use blog and website creator with e-commerce options in the paid plans.
- *Wix.com*: Like weebly.com it offers blog and website possibilities with e-commerce options. More than 40 Million users worldwide according to the website.

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<sup>6</sup> See <<http://mondoblog.org/>> and <<http://mondoblog.org/a-propos/>>

## Microblogging

Although related to traditional blogging, a microblog differs from blogging in that its content is typically smaller in both actual and aggregated file size. The number of microblogs has diminished and at the moment only few are left of which Twitter is the biggest.

- *Twitter*: Twitter is often described as the SMS service of the internet. Users post opinions, thoughts, information or links in maximum 140 characters to their community. Twitter is considered an important medium for news and belongs to the top 10 most visited sites.
- *Tumblr*: Is both a microblogging and a social networking site with a strong emphasis on other content than just writing; photos, music and video clips.
- *Jux*: Like Tumblr, Jux is also not a conventional blogging site but focuses on more stylish presentation of multimedia content. Jux also aims to be a starting point that creates automatic updates on other social media when the user has added some content.

## Social Networking services

A social networking service is a platform that facilitates building of virtual communities among people who share, for example, interests, activities, backgrounds, or relations in their professional life. Although the number of social networking services was large initially, they have mostly converged into three main services: Facebook, Google+ and LinkedIn, the last one mainly for professional networks.

Although social networking services initially focussed on connecting youth, its potential for other purposes has become apparent. Presently, social networking has become an important tool in education, commerce and marketing, e-government, personal relationships like dating but it is also used in philanthropy and political activism. In the next section we will look in more detail at this last use of social networking services.

Worldwide and in Africa currently the most influential and biggest services are:

- *Facebook*: The largest of the social networking services with more than 1 billion users registered worldwide and a billion active users.
- *Google+*: Over 1 billion registered users, but about 540 million active users of the platform.
- *LinkedIn*: This professional networking service has over 225 million registered users.

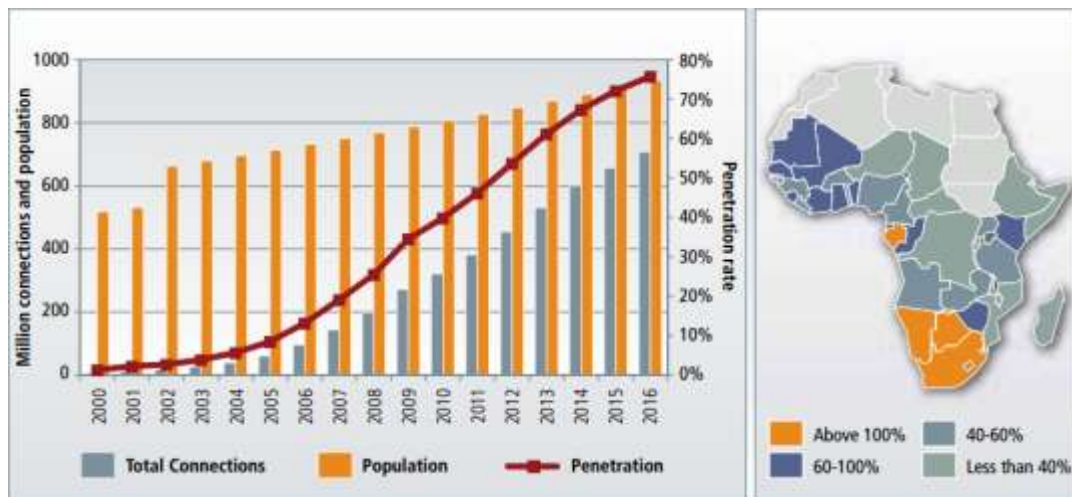
## Mobile social media services

Although internet access is growing steadily in Africa, access to social media received an enormous boost when the web-based services became available on mobile phones with internet capabilities (smart phones and other mobile phone with internet access). In their research on the impact and growth of mobile in Sub Saharan Africa<sup>7</sup>, GSMA report that the unique mobile subscriber base has grown by 18 per cent annually over the last five years, making it the fastest growing region globally. By mid-2013, there were 253 million unique mobile subscribers and 502 million connections. Trends indicate that soon anyone with a phone will be able to access social media at any time, in any place.

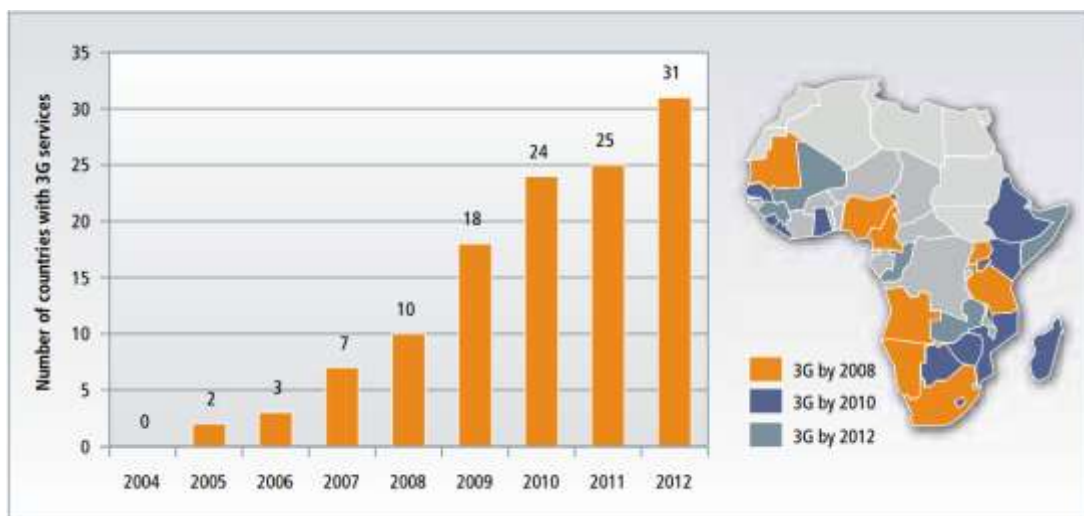
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<sup>7</sup> "Sub-Saharan Africa Mobile Observatory 2012 - GSMA." 2013. 29 Jan. 2014

<[http://www.gsma.com/publicpolicy/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/gsma\\_ssamo\\_full\\_web\\_11\\_12-1.pdf](http://www.gsma.com/publicpolicy/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/gsma_ssamo_full_web_11_12-1.pdf)>



Important for the penetration of fast internet is the introduction of third generation (3G) or even fourth generation (4G) mobile networks. 3G telecommunication networks support services that provide an information transfer rate of at least 200 kbit/s which provides a relatively fast internet experience to users and allows to access virtually all sites and information on the internet. As can be observed from the illustration<sup>8</sup> below, the roll out of 3G networks is steadily progressing.



<sup>8</sup> "Sub-Saharan Africa Mobile Observatory 2012 - GSMA." 2013. 29 Jan. 2014

<[http://www.gsma.com/publicpolicy/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/gsma\\_ssamo\\_full\\_web\\_11\\_12-1.pdf](http://www.gsma.com/publicpolicy/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/gsma_ssamo_full_web_11_12-1.pdf)>



## Social media and political change

The role of social media in political change is not undisputed. In an article in *The New Yorker* Graham Gladwell<sup>9</sup> argues that social media promotes weak ties and low-key activism. “Liking”, retweeting or even blogging is not nearly the same as, for example, going out the streets in what he call high-risk meaningful activism. The loose and leaderless networks that social networks create are not capable of sustained and meaningful collective action. In other words, social movements cannot run on social media alone, they have to exist and organize themselves “in reality” too.

Clay Shirky, on the other hand, in an article in *Foreign Affairs*<sup>10</sup> believes that social media is an important tool for promoting social and political change. In line with the theory of the sociologists Katz and Lazarsfeld, Shirsky also argues that social media adds to the formation of well-informed political opinions. In the first place social media has revolutionized access to information by making information instantly available to people. In her essay ‘Social media, political change and human rights’<sup>11</sup>, Sarah Joseph illustrates this principle clearly in the context of the Arab Spring. Through social media on-the-ground eyewitness reports and other forms of information were able to spread faster and further. Secondly, social media, through the “many-to-many” communication mode is able to support debate that will form political opinions.

Technology brings new possibilities to both sides. Not only do activists get new tools to organise and spread information, repressive regimes also get tools to track down opponents. Cell phones and GPS systems make it easier to locate people. Recently in the uprisings in the Ukraine it was demonstrated how far this can go. *NY Times* reported that the “Ukrainian government used telephone technology to pinpoint the locations of cell phones in use near clashes between riot police officers and protesters.”<sup>12</sup> This was demonstrated to demonstrators receiving a message on their phone stating: “Dear subscriber, you are registered as a participant in a mass disturbance.”

Most countries in Africa do not yet have this kind of sophisticated systems in place but with the registration of sim cards the possibility opens up to do so and care will have to be taken by activists. As for now, governments in Africa use the possibility to shut down the mobile and internet network services to prevent uprising or free flow of information.

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<sup>9</sup> See Malcolm Gladwell, *Small Change*, *New Yorker*, Oct. 4, 2010, at 42, available for download at [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa\\_fact\\_gladwell](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell).

<sup>10</sup> Shirky, Clay. “Political Power of Social Media-Technology, the Public Sphere Sphere, and Political Change, The.” *Foreign Aff.* 90 (2011): 28.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph, Sarah. “Social media, political change, and human rights.” *BC Int’l & Comp. L. Rev.* 35 (2012): 145.

<sup>12</sup> “Ukraine's Opposition Says Government Stirs Violence - *NYTimes.com*.” 2014. 29 Jan. 2014  
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/22/world/europe/ukraine-protests.html>>

## Part 2: Cameroon and the region

In order to better understand the state-of-affairs in Cameroon, we will compare how Cameroon performs in relation to its neighbours. We will compare the figures, where possible, of neighbouring countries: Nigeria, Niger, Gabon and Congo and DR Congo.

### Economic indices

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the market value of all officially recognized final goods and services produced within a country in a year, or other given period of time. GDP per capita is often considered an indicator of a country's standard of living.

2013	Cameroon	Nigeria	Niger	Gabon	Congo	DR Congo
GDP/Capita (USD)	2,342	2,661	665	16,085	422	4,426
GDP Growth (%)	4.7	6.6	11.2	6.1	7.2	3.8

The average for the GDP is USD 4436 due to the high GDP in Gabon and Cameroon is below the average in the region. The average yearly growth rate in 2013 in the region is 6.6%, and Cameroon performs below average compared to the neighbouring countries.

### Human Development Index

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite statistic of life expectancy, education, and income indices used to rank countries into four tiers of human development. In the 2010 Human Development Report a further Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) was introduced. According to the 2010 Report,<sup>13</sup> "the IHDI is the actual level of human development (accounting for inequality)" and the unadjusted calculations for "the HDI can be viewed as an index of "potential" human development (or the maximum IHDI that could be achieved if there were no inequality).

	Cameroon	Nigeria	Niger	Gabon	Congo	DR Congo
HDI 2012	0.495 (150)	0.471 (153)	0.304 (187)	0.683 (106)	0.534 (142)	0.304 (186)
IHDI 2012	0.330 (104)	0.278 (116)	0.200 (131)	0.550 (65)	0.368 (96)	0.183 (132)

From the table it can be noted that Cameroon is close to the average in the region (average HDI 0.465 and average IHDI 0.318).

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<sup>13</sup> "Human Development Report 2010 The Real Wealth of Nations ..." 2013. 31 Jan. 2014  
<[http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/270/hdr\\_2010\\_en\\_complete\\_reprint.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/270/hdr_2010_en_complete_reprint.pdf)>

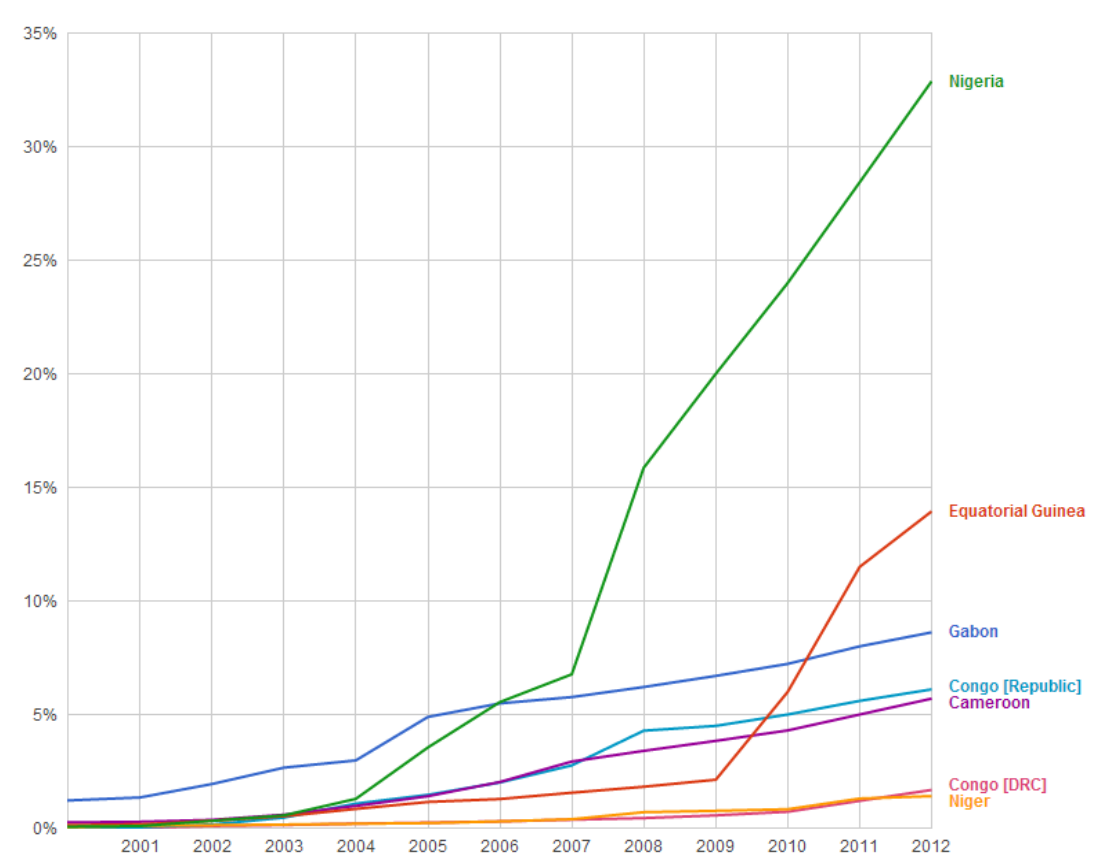
## The Networked Readiness Index

The World Economic Forum's Networked Readiness Index (NRI) measures the tendency for countries to exploit the opportunities offered by information and communications technology. The NRI is a composite of three components: the environment for ICT offered by a given country or community (market, political, regulatory, and infrastructure environment), the readiness of the country's key stakeholders (individuals, businesses, and governments) to use ICT, and the usage of ICT among these stakeholders. It is difficult to determine how Cameroon performs because half of the countries in the region are not listed in the index. From the 3 countries that are in the list, Cameroon scores lowest.

	Cameroon	Nigeria	Niger	Gabon	Congo	DR Congo
NRI 2013 <sup>14</sup>	2.95 (124)	3.27 (113)	no info	2.97 (121)	no info	no info

## Mobile and internet

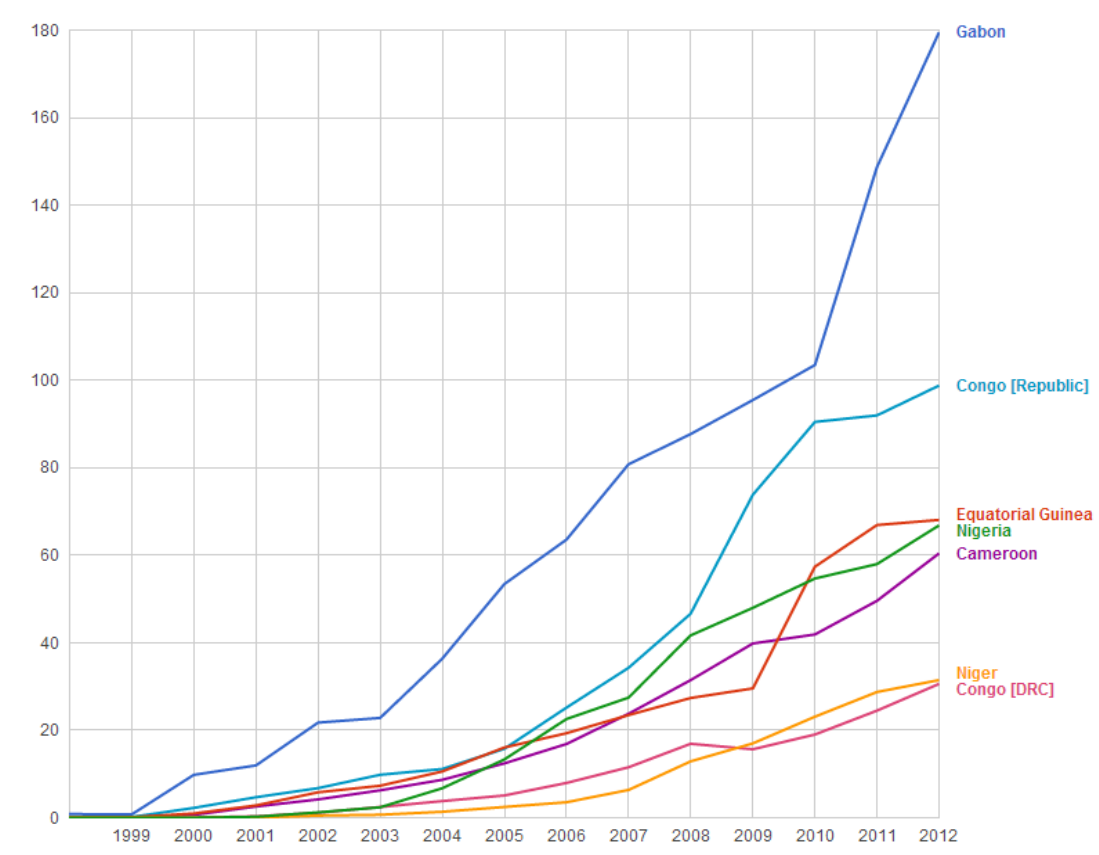
In the graph below the number as published by the ITU of internet users per 100 people for Cameroon and the countries in the region is displayed. It is clear that Cameroon is not performing well in comparison with its neighbours.



Data and graphs from ITU.int

<sup>14</sup> "The Networked Readiness Index 2013 - World Economic Forum." 2013. 5 Feb. 2014  
[http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GITR/2013/GITR\\_OverallRankings\\_2013.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GITR/2013/GITR_OverallRankings_2013.pdf)

Also in the number of mobile telephone subscriptions per 100 people in the population, Cameroon is only performing better than DR Congo and Niger.



Data and graphs from ITU.int

## Social Media Users in the region

Africa is made up of 54 countries each with their own dynamics and therefore precise data on the deployment and usage of social media and web 2.0 tools are scarce. Some general information can be found but in-depth or scientific research is lacking.

### Blogging

Very little information or research was found that explores the number of blogs written by people in Africa. According to Sokari Ekine, activist and author of the blog [www.blacklooks.org](http://www.blacklooks.org) blogging is important for Africa since it presents a challenge to the mainstream media especially in those countries where the media are simply a voice of the government and ruling elite.<sup>15</sup>

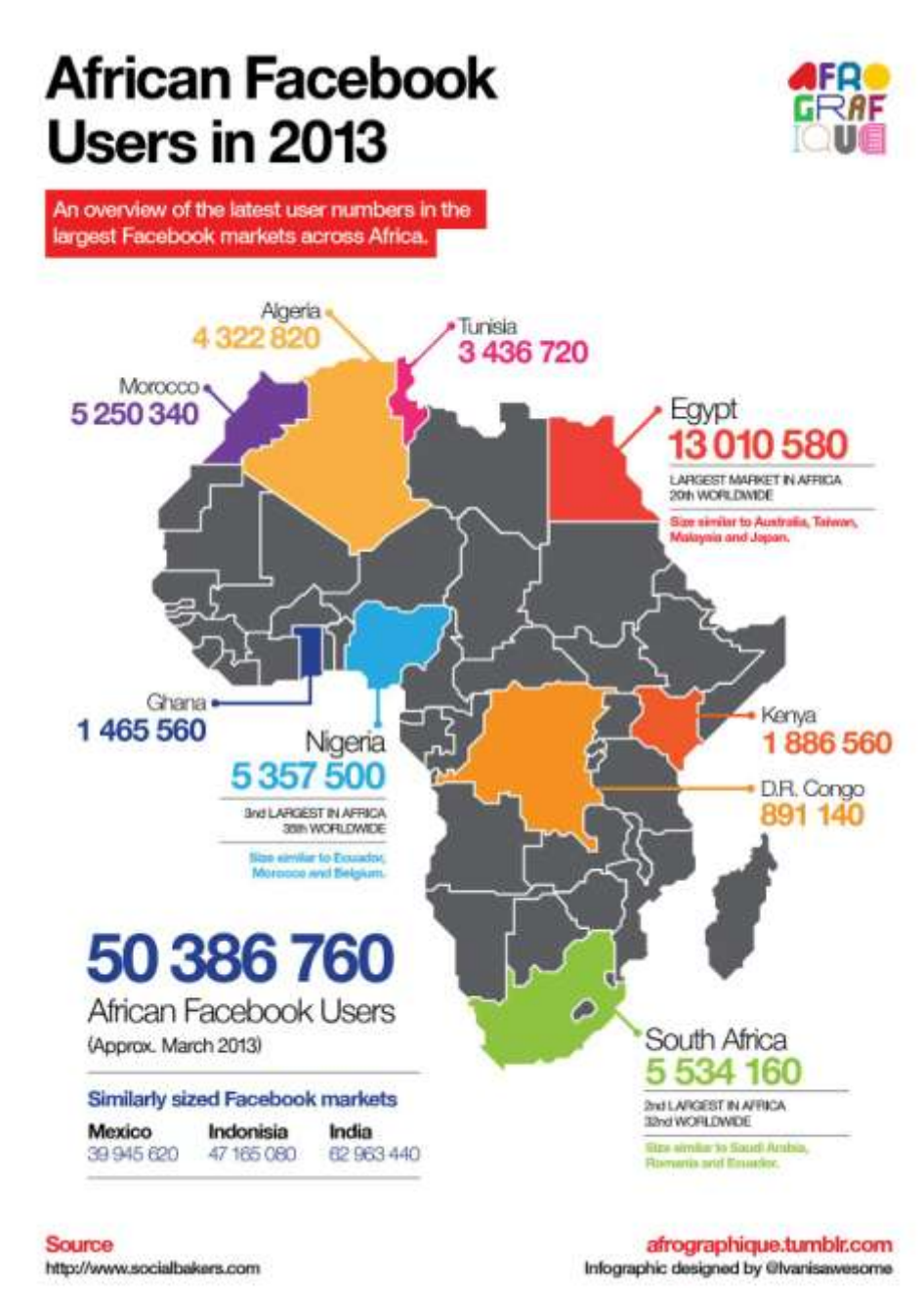
### Facebook

Facebook is undoubtedly the most important social networking tool in the world and also in Africa. According to the report Social Media in Africa by Deloitte, Facebook has become the most visited website in Africa with around 50 million users. In Cameroon, there are about 760.000 Facebook users.

<sup>15</sup> "African bloggers: a world to be discovered « Afronline – The Voice ..." 2010. 5 Feb. 2014  
<<http://www.afronline.org/?p=3398>>

The majority of the Facebook logins across the continent are from mobile devices. It is even estimated that over 80% of Facebook logins in Nigeria and South Africa are made from some kind of mobile device.

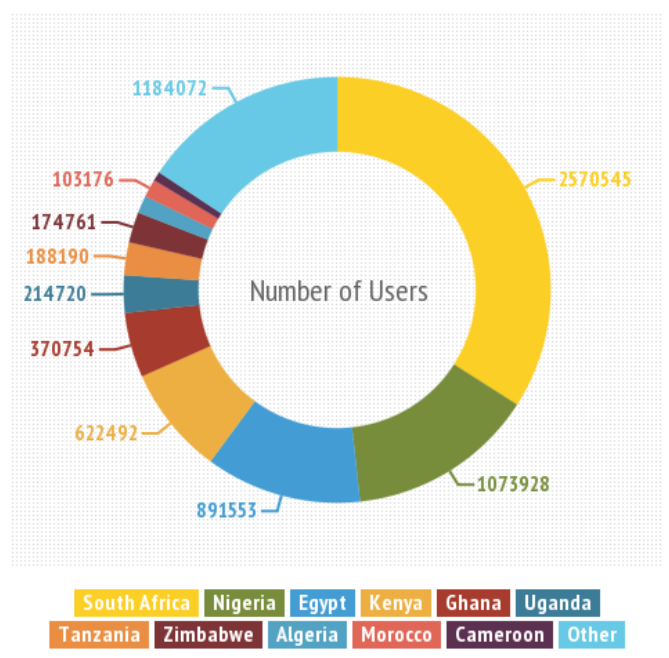
The illustration below shows the distribution of Facebook users in Africa in 2013 as researched by Socialbakers.com.



## LinkedIn

LinkedIn.com is the largest network for professionals. Presently, LinkedIn.com has more than 260 million users, most of whom are located in the United States, India and Brazil.

In Africa LinkedIn has over 7.5 million subscribers. Analytics show that 20% are entry-level professionals and over 60% are from South Africa, Nigeria and Egypt.<sup>16</sup>



Cameroon is the 11th position in terms of subscriber numbers. Except for the Nigeria, none of the neighbouring countries are in the top 100 and are therefore not listed. Nigeria is significantly bigger in actual numbers, but the penetration of LinkedIn is less. When the penetration is correlated with the online population LinkedIn in Cameroon has a penetration level of 24.04% and Nigeria only 2.92%. See the table below.<sup>17</sup>

	Cameroon	Nigeria	Niger	Gabon	Congo
LinkedIn (Actual numbers and general penetration rate and online population penetration rate )	188.438 (0.98%) (24.04%)	1.313.941 (0.85%) (2.92%)	-	-	-

The penetration rate among the online community in Cameroon is high and ranks into the top 10 of highest penetration rates among computer users.

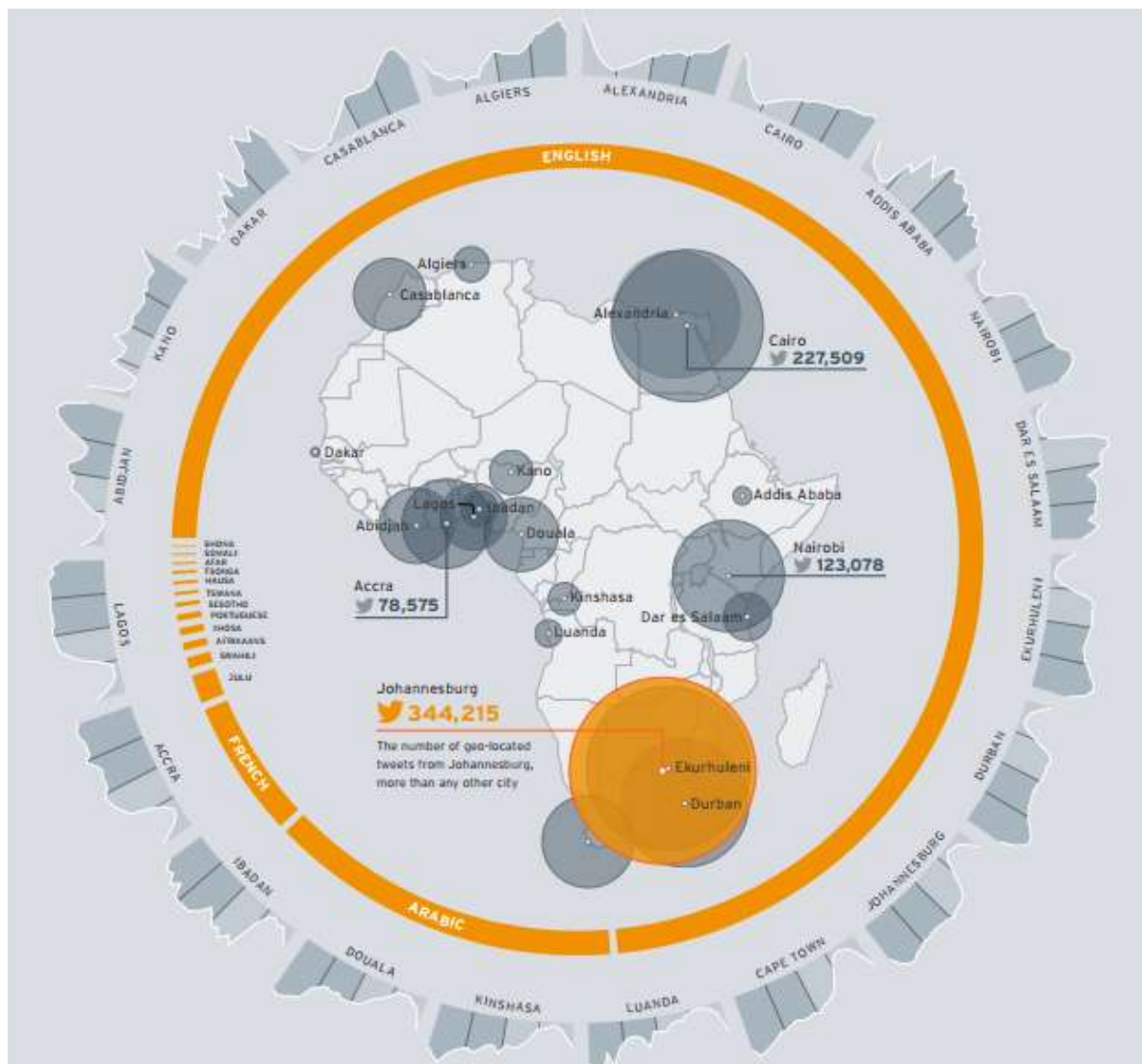
<sup>16</sup> "Infographic: Over 7.5 million Africans on LinkedIn; South Africa ..." 2013. 22 Jan. 2014 <<http://www.cp-africa.com/2013/05/20/over-7-4-million-africans-on-linkedin-south-africa-nigeria-and-egypt/>>

<sup>17</sup> Information based on "Socialbakers: Social Media Marketing, Statistics & Monitoring Tools." 2010. 22 Jan. 2014 <<http://www.socialbakers.com/>>

## Twitter

Twitter has gained quickly ground as social networking tool in Africa over the past years and is still growing steadily. Twitter is popular in Africa among mobile users.

Social media research companies [Tweetminster](#) and [Portland](#) have analysed how Africa tweets.<sup>18</sup> They have geo-analysed<sup>19</sup> the last quarter of 2013 tweets and not surprisingly, the Twitter space was dominated by South Africa followed by Nigeria, Kenya, Egypt and Morocco. In the image below, based on the research, the top 20 African countries in number of tweets are displayed. Cameroon ranked in the top 20 with most Twitter activity in Douala.



<sup>18</sup> "New Research reveals how Africa Tweets – Portland." 2013. 24 Jan. 2014 <<http://www.portland-communications.com/2012/02/new-research-reveals-how-africa-tweets/>>

<sup>19</sup> This means that only tweets have been counted that had enabled the transmission of the location from which the tweet was sent. This is however an option that is not switched on by all the Twitter users.



The main conclusions from the research were<sup>20</sup>:

- Johannesburg is the most active city in Africa, with 344,215 geo-located tweets during Q4 2013, followed by Ekurhuleni (264,172) and Cairo (227,509). Durban (163,019) and Alexandria (159,534) make up the remainder of the top five most active cities.
- Nairobi is the most active city in East Africa and the sixth most active on the continent, with 123,078 geo-located tweets in Q4 2013
- Accra is the most active city in West Africa and the eighth most active on the continent, with 78,575 geo-located tweets in Q4 2013
- English, French and Arabic are the most common languages on Twitter in Africa, accounting for 75.5% of the total tweets analysed.
- Tuesdays and Fridays are the most active tweeting days on the continent. Twitter activity rises steadily through the afternoon and evening, with peak volumes around 10pm
- The day of Nelson Mandela's death – 5 December – saw the highest volume of geo-located tweets in Africa during Q4 2013
- Brands in Africa are becoming increasingly prevalent on Twitter in Africa.
- Football is the most-discussed topic on Twitter in Africa. During Q4 2013, football was discussed more than any other topic, including the death of Nelson Mandela.
- 57% of Tweets from Africa are sent from mobile devices.
- 60% of Africa's most active Tweepers are aged 20-29.
- Twitter in Africa is widely used for social conversation, with 81% of those polled saying that they mainly used it for communicating with friends.
- Twitter is becoming an important source of information in Africa. 68% of those polled said that they use Twitter to monitor news. 22% use it to search for employment opportunities.
- African Twitter users are active across a range of social media, including Facebook, YouTube, Google+ and LinkedIn.

A drawback of the research is that only geo-tagged tweets have been included in the research.<sup>21</sup> Worldwide only 1 in 5 tweets are geotagged and exact figures for Africa are not available. Moreover, the analysis does not relate the number of tweets to the number of inhabitants in a country. We have thus no way of knowing whether a big number of tweets means an extraordinarily high proportion of Twitter users in the population, or not. This may provide similar interesting results as for usage of LinkedIn in the different countries in Africa and Cameroon specifically.

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<sup>20</sup> "New Research reveals how Africa Tweets – Portland." 2013. 24 Jan. 2014 <<http://www.portland-communications.com/2012/02/new-research-reveals-how-africa-tweets/>>

<sup>21</sup> "Economist's Africa Twitter map provides some teachable insights ..." 2013. 28 Jan. 2014 <<http://www.ralphstraumann.ch/blog/2012/02/economists-africa-Twitter-map-provides-some-teachable-insights/>>



## Part 3: Analysing Cameroon

The analysis of the region above shows that access to ICT and mobile technology in Cameroon does not hold a leading position in the Central/West Africa. All indicators indicate a middle position. Also the trend for internet penetration, as shown in the table below, is in line with the figures on internet access that we observe in the rest of the region. We can conclude that the situation in Cameroon is not exceptional or totally different from the region.

Year	Internet users	Population	% penetration	GNI p.c. US\$ <sup>22</sup>
2000	20,000	16,853,500	0.1	600
2006	370,000	18,467,692	2.0	1,010
2009	725,000	18,879,301	3.8	1,153
2011	783,956	19,711,291	3.9	1,210
2012	1,006,494	20,129,878	5.0	1,170

Source International Telecommunication Union

Except for the general indicators, very little is known about the actual use of internet and social media in Cameroon.<sup>23</sup> In his paper on the use of social media in the 2011 presidential elections in Cameroon<sup>24</sup> Kehbama Langmia does emphasise the potential of the social media to support change in Cameroon but finds it hard to quantify its impact. But the potential of

Twitter was noticed by the government in Cameroon which lead to a block of Twitter through SMS.<sup>25</sup> According to the US based Cameroonian blogger Dibussi Tande, this was a "bit to insulate Cameroon against popular uprising similar to those that have toppled regimes in Tunisia and Egypt".<sup>26</sup>



<sup>22</sup> Per Capita GNI in US dollars, source: World Bank, Atlas method.

<sup>23</sup> Endeley, N. *Virtual Activism on Cameroon: The Camnet Files*. African Books Collective, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> "Social Media Technology and the 2011 Presidential election in ..." 2014. 15 Jan. 2014  
<[http://www.ictforafrica.org/attachments/section/4/ict4africa2013\\_submission\\_10.pdf](http://www.ictforafrica.org/attachments/section/4/ict4africa2013_submission_10.pdf)>

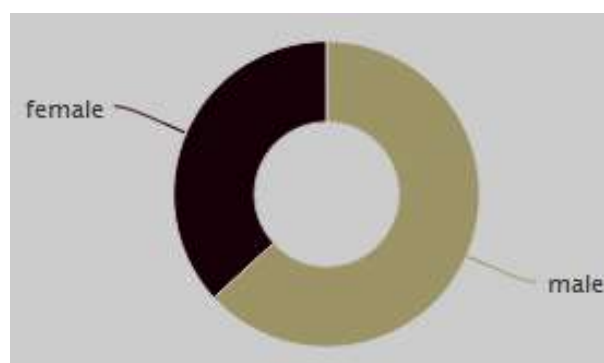
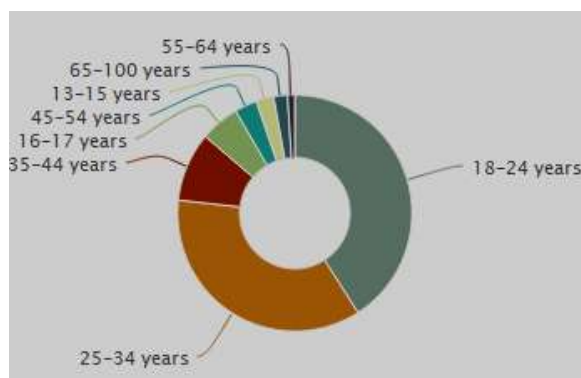
<sup>25</sup> Emil Protalinski. "Cameroon bans Twitter, protests likely to continue - TechSpot." 2011. 24 Jan. 2014  
<<http://www.techspot.com/news/42761-cameroon-bans-Twitter-protests-likely-to-continue.html>>

<sup>26</sup> "Dibussi Tande: Scribbles from the Den." 2006. 15 Jan. 2014 <<http://www.dibussi.com/>>

Bloggers seem to be the most explicit commentators on the political-social situation in Cameroon. There is a small but active group of bloggers that report on issues in Cameroon and they have an equally active space on Facebook: Collectif des Blogueurs Camerounais. Daily updates of blog posts or blogging related information are posted. The group, that is closed, has about 250 very active members. According to the president of the Bloggers association there are about 25 - 35 active bloggers in Cameroon. In the appendices of this report an overview of socially and / or politically active bloggers is presented.



Cameroonians are active on Facebook. According the socialbakers.com, Cameroon has an estimated 760,000 Facebook users.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, there is a large gender bias as 63.2% of the users are male and only 36.8% female. The largest part of the users are in the age group 18-24 (39.5%), followed by the age group 25-34 (36.9%).










<sup>27</sup> Quoted on: <http://histoiresdecem.wordpress.com/2014/01/30/chiffres-facebook-au-cameroun-janvier-2014/>>  
 Social Media in Cameroon

The most popular pages for Cameroonians on Facebook are listed by socialbakers.com by the number of local fans as displayed in the image below.

#	Page	Local Fans ▼	Fans
1	 MTN Cameroon	131 208	143 167
2	 Samuel Eto'o	110 086	2 385 283
3	 Wanda Shops	90 616	96 453
4	 La Fouine	68 959	4 616 516
5	 Sexion D'Assaut	64 431	5 402 518
6	 Orange Cameroun	64 226	73 910
7	 Singuila	53 337	514 242
8	 Zaho	45 730	2 020 599
9	 Maitre Gims	40 993	2 773 013
10	 MICHEL GOHOU OFFICIEL	39 125	705 406

Socialbakers.com also offers a chart on the most popular Facebook accounts in the rubrique “politics”. What is striking is that only one Facebook page among the top 100 is actually about Cameroon or a Cameroonian politician (President Biya). As the SocialBakers statistics are based on Facebook pages that have been added for monitoring and thus may not provide the full picture, it is nonetheless remarkable. Does it mean that Cameroonians who use social media are not interested in local politics? Or does it mean that those who do politics do not use the social media?

#	Page	Local Fans ▼	Fans
1	 Nelson Mandela	19 806	3 924 803
2	 Président Paul Biya (seule...	15 837	32 720
3	 Ali Bongo Ondimba	13 727	161 138
4	 Kofi Annan	5 251	692 240
5	 République du Gondwana	3 518	50 734
6	 Mahamadou Issoufou	3 470	90 670
7	 Goodluck Jonathan	3 460	1 313 330
8	 Nicolas Sarkozy	3 383	908 959
9	 François Hollande	3 072	442 741
10	 La recherche en santé au...	2 808	410 110

More interesting is the analysis of the groups that have been created on Facebook and that focus on Cameroon. In the research we have analysed Facebook groups through the keywords: Cameroon, Cameroun, Yaounde and Douala. We found more than 1000 active groups that satisfied these search criteria. As expected, the largest groups on Facebook are open groups, i.e., groups that can be joined by all people that are interested. The four largest groups that we were able to locate have over 10,000 members.

<a href="#">Culture et Tradition Bamileke</a>	25,000+ members	Est un groupe créé en 2009 par Séverin NGNOSSE dont le but est de découvrir, apprendre et/ou s'approprier la culture et les traditions Bamiléké
<a href="#">Facebook Cameroun</a>	19,000+ members	General information, said to be a-political
<a href="#">Le Cameroun c'est le Cameroun</a>	15,000+ members	Community - « LE CAMEROUN C'EST LE CAMEROUN » est un forum citoyen, républicain, d'échange, de discussion sur le Cameroun. Cet espace se veut une plate forme démocratique, indépendante de partage, courtois et sans insulte. Il se veut unique dans sa démarche et dans son approche sur les réalités de notre pays. De plus, les sujets abordés sont divers et variés. Nous pouvons échanger sur ce qui se passe ailleurs dans le monde. Les sujets sur le Cameroun de manière globale sont prioritaires !!!
<a href="#">You know when you're from Cameroon when ....</a>	14,000+ members	General information mainly focused around fun remarks

*Numbers reflect the situation in March 2014.*














Closed groups are more difficult to explore as not all groups have given the researchers permission to enter the group and to join the discussions. Closed groups are mostly political or single issue groups like:

<a href="#">Un Cameroun Nouveau</a>	2,600+ members	Political Bienvenus chers amis dans le forum UN CAMEROUN NOUVEAU. Sentez-vous libre de publier à votre convenance, mais dans la stricte obligation de citer vos sources. Ce forum se veut grand et noble éloigné de l'intox habituelle.
<a href="#">Jeune Forum Economique et Social du Cameroun</a>	1,100+ members	C'est un mouvement de pensée libérale constitué de jeunes étudiants du Cameroun et de la Diaspora.
<a href="#">MTN Cameroon Free Internet</a>	2,800+ members	No publicly available description offered

*Numbers reflect the situation in March 2014.*

Little has been published on the use of Twitter in Cameroon. Basic information is available from socialbakers.com which indicates that the football player Samuel Eto'o is by far the most followed person on Twitter in Cameroon. But also here, the figures of SocialBakers.com have to be viewed cautiously as they are based on a limited set of Twitter accounts that have been added to the SocialBaker.com database. For Cameroon the number of Twitter accounts in the database seem to be very limited. As we will see in our own research the data from SocialBakers only present a partial reality in Cameroon.

#	Profile	Following ▾	Followers ▾
1.	 Samuel Eto'o (@setoo9) 	31	219 692
2.	 africatechie (@africatechie)	1 189	28 564
3.	 Je Wanda Magazine (@JeWandaOfficiel)	263	5 646
4.	 MTN CAMEROON (@MTNCameroon)	382	4 818
5.	 Infos.cm (@CamerounTopNews)	90	4 515
6.	 Cameroun (@237online)	28	4 306
7.	 PAOLA AUDREY. (@PaolaAudrey)	251	3 854
8.	 Camer24 (@Camer24)	3 093	3 673
9.	 Tumbubosdeluxe (@StanleyEnow)	186	3 436
10.	 Annie Payep (@AnniePayep)	1 578	3 109

Twitter has the opportunity to research and monitor the tweets of users in the specific location.<sup>28</sup> When tweets are followed in Douala and Yaounde we observe an active "Twitter space". In the appendices we have listed the most important Twitter users based on the geotags used in the Douala and Yaounde areas. We used the following two queries:

1. near:"douala" within:15mi
2. near:"yaounde" within:15mi

and assessed users and tweets. For our overview in the appendices we have selected Twitter users with over 1000 followers and more than 5000 status updates.

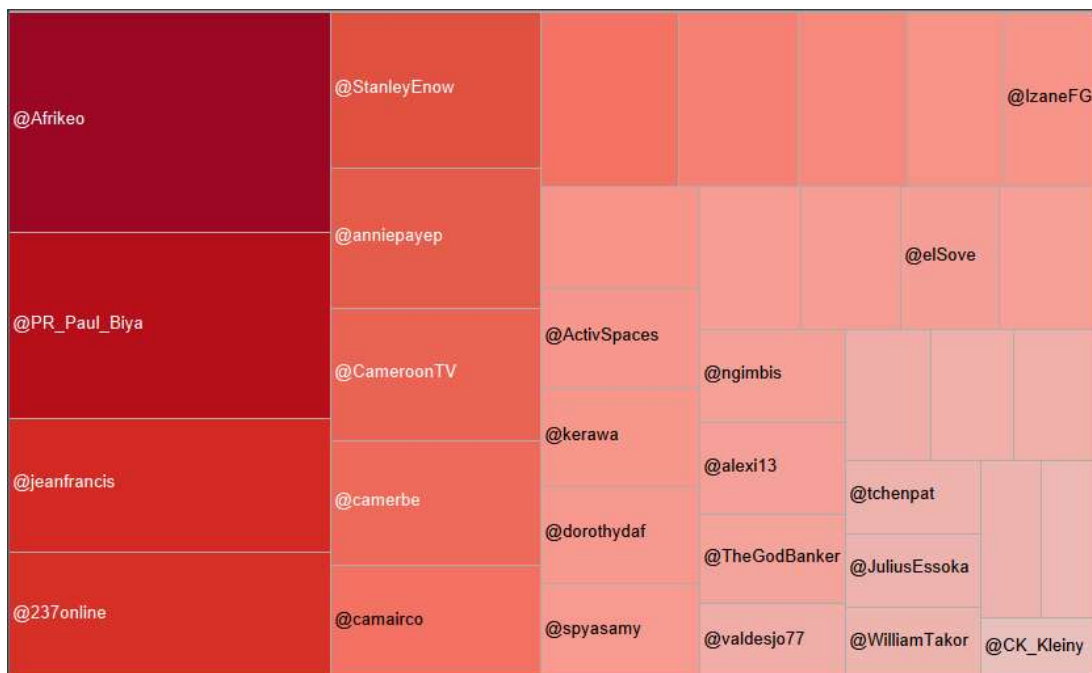
A word of caution is needed in the interpretation of these figures. This research has the same limitations as the research on how Africa uses Twitter by Portland (see previous section). Since the Twitter accounts were identified on the basis of their geotags, Twitter users that have not turned on their geo-location are not included. Globally in 2013 only 1 in 5 Twitter users had their geo-location service in Twitter turned on.

<sup>28</sup> Electionista.com also shows what is currently being tweeted in a geographical location or on specific topic. For Cameroon (<http://electionista.com/content/statuses/cm>) we note a high number of tweets from @Camer.be: Twitter account from <<http://www.camer.be/>> and @AnniePayep: Journaliste and Productrice. Although very active Twitter users, the information on electionista.com seems to be filtered and therefore not useable for Cameroon.

In the graph below we have displayed the most important Twitter accounts by the number of updates, that is the number of postings / tweets since the start of the account. The largest number of updates are by @CameroonTV - 136,000 followed by @spyasamy - 93,300, @kerawa - 83,700 and @jeanfrancis - 44,400.



A similar graph was made for the number of followers of a Twitter account. The number of followers is normally a measure of the perceived importance of the organisation or person that uses Twitter. The larger the area or the darker the color displayed in the graph, the more important the influence of the account that is considered.



The presence of Cameroonians on LinkedIn is high and we have seen that the penetration of LinkedIn among the people using internet is exceptionally high. A penetration of 24% is comparable to countries in Northern Europe and the United States.

To assess the level of activity of the Cameroonian members we looked at the groups. There are about 325 groups created in LinkedIn that pop up when searching for the keywords Cameroon or Cameroun and that are in some way or another related to the country. The large majority of the groups are professional related or commercial (job and trade offers) and there are few groups with general topics. Although there are many groups, in most cases the activity is low and they have few members. The largest and most active LinkedIn groups are listed below.

<a href="#">Journalistes Francophones Africains - Media   Afrique</a>	Networking - Une réseau communautaire pour les Journalistes Francophones en Afrique intéressés par des communiqués de presse, sous-traitez des offres, des missions(attributions) indépendantes et la gestion de réseau	831 members	Daily
<a href="#">Cameroon Network Club</a>	CNG aims to connect Cameroonian and other professionals worldwide who have worked, lived or are interested in Cameroon. CNG will act as a forum for ideas and networking opportunities.	1721 members	Daily (activity is slowing down recently)
<a href="#">Business Club Cameroon - Cameroun   Africa   Afrique</a>	Network for Business Professionals working in Cameroon - Cameroun Afrique	1649 members	Daily
<a href="#">African Innovators (North, South, Middle, East, West Africa) - Innovation Network Community</a>	Network with innovative & creative people & innovation experts from ALL countries throughout the African continent.	102 members	Weekly

*Numbers reflect the situation in February 2014.*

## Preliminary conclusion

In general terms we can conclude that the activity on the social media platforms that we have investigated is directed to general interests and business. On Facebook we find some socially and politically interested groups, but their number is very limited. Bloggers are active but in limited numbers and with varying activity, though with exceptions.

The tone of the blogs is often ironic, but with a serious undertone. For the activists in Cameroon blogs seem to be the preferred social medium at the moment.

The presence of Cameroonian professionals on the LinkedIn platform is impressive, but the number of active groups is very low. We may conclude from this fact that there is a passive presence on this platform.

The analysis of the use of Twitter reveals a very active community although relatively small in our research. As these results are based on geotagged tweets without having information on the percentage of tweets that are geotagged, the interpretation of the actual number of active Twitter users is difficult. In spite of this, Twitter is very active in Cameroon.

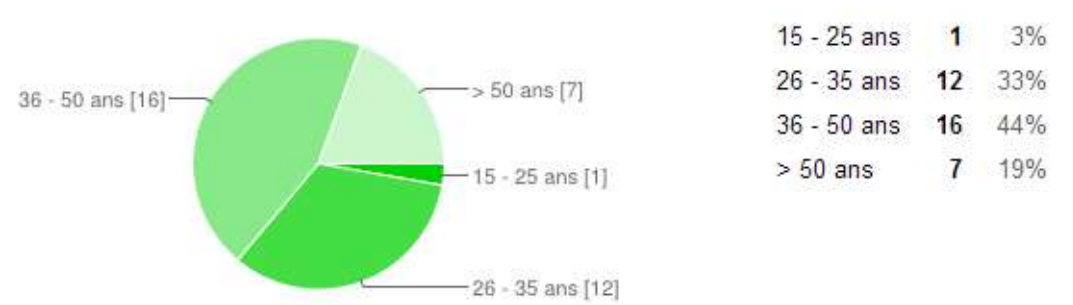


## Part 4: The survey

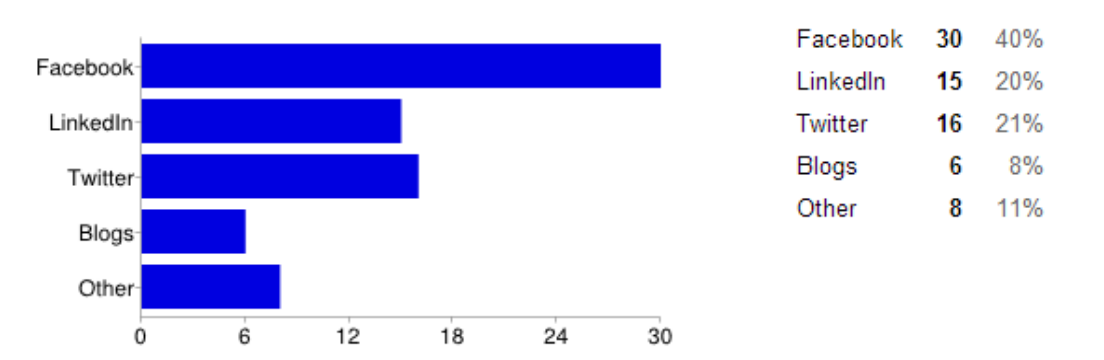
In order to get a better understanding of the target group of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Cameroon and to triangulate the results we found from the desk research we conducted a short - 8 questions - online questionnaire among the partners of the FES. The questionnaire is included as an appendix to this report.

In the survey we asked a selected group of 82 members of partner organisations of the FES to quantify their use of the main social media and to qualify the importance of social media in their daily lives. The scientific rigour of the survey is low but it provides an illustrative indicator and further direction for more in-depth research.

We got a response of 44% (36/82) of which 69% were men and 31% women. Different age groups were all represented as can be seen below, but the age group from 15 - 25 years were under represented and so the response is not significant. In a normal population these are the most active users of the social media.

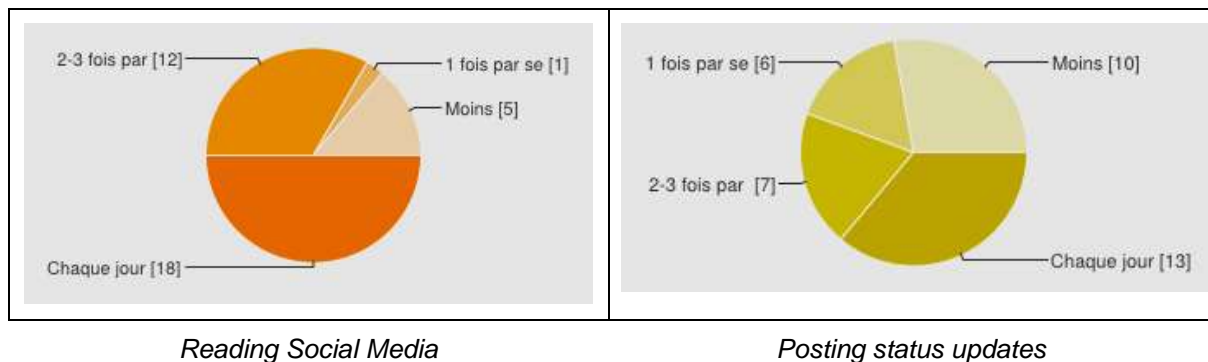


Facebook is by far the most used of the social media in our target group, both for reading and for posting status updates. 40% of the target group has an account on Facebook, which is the same as LinkedIn and Twitter together.

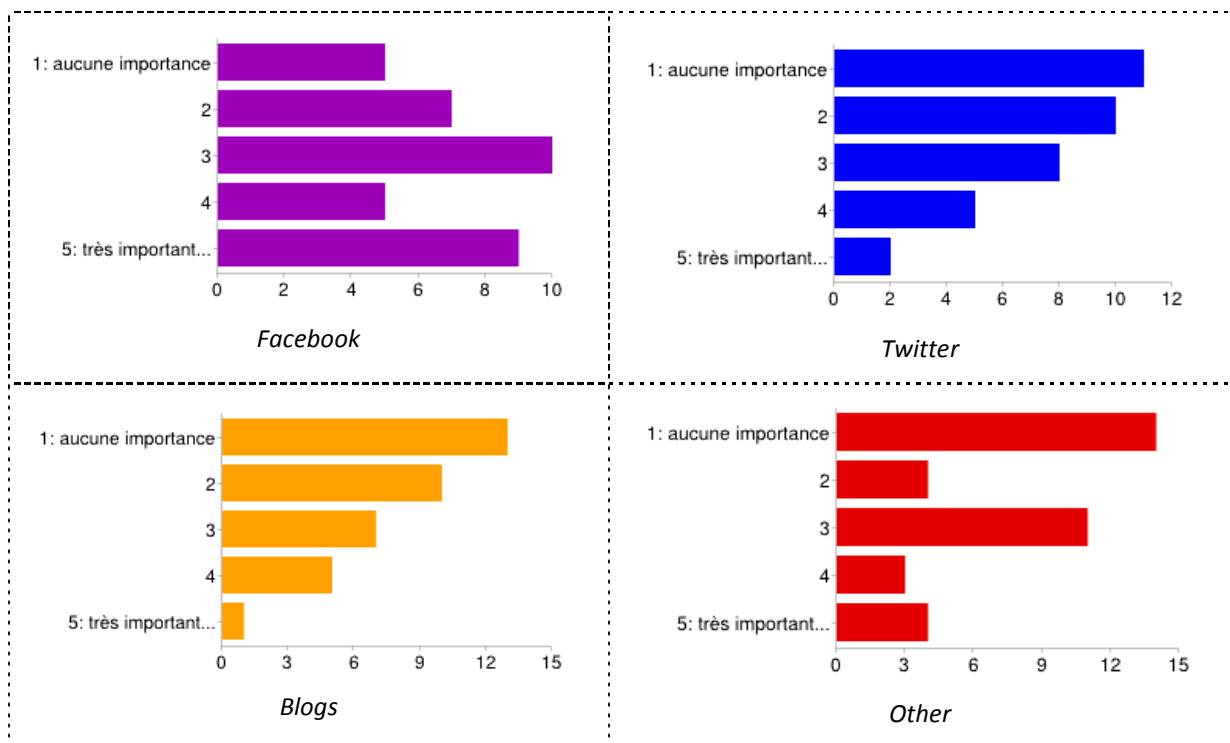




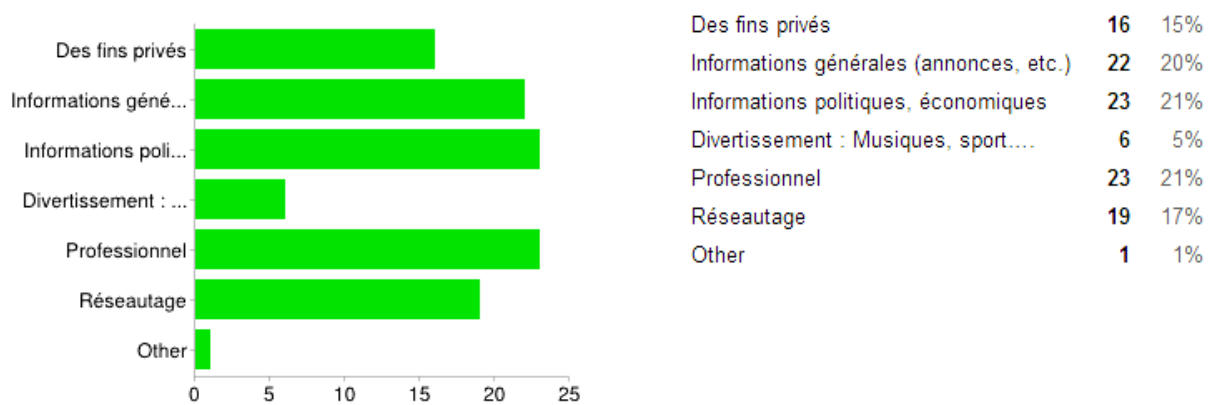
We found a clear difference between the frequency of reading information on the social media and updating someone's own status.



Importance of social media is displayed in the 4 graphs below. In the questionnaire the respondents were asked to indicate the relevance of social media in their lives. It can be seen from the graphs that in general the social media do not play an important part. The most importance is assigned to Facebook, but also the graph shows that the importance is low.



When the respondents were asked to describe how they use the social media, if and when they use them, it shows that political and professional information, together with general information and announcements are most sought after. The respondents are less interested in music and sports. This is surprising because Facebook is the most popular among the social media and music, sports and entertainment are normally the most popular subjects on Facebook.



## Discussion

The survey has targeted a small and selective group of participants that are known to the FES. As it can be observed in the description of the sample group, the group is not representative for the population in Cameroon where the median age is 19.3 years.<sup>29</sup> A quick overview of general similar data for the US social media users<sup>30</sup> clearly shows the differences.

The survey confirms that also among the relations of the FES, Facebook is the most popular of the social media sites. The respondents claim very regular visits and updates. It is interesting to see that other social media were not perceived as an important source of information.

The survey indicates that the initial efforts of the FES to increase the inclusion of social media should concentrate on Facebook.

<sup>29</sup> "Cameroon | Data." 2010. 24 Mar. 2014 <<http://data.worldbank.org/country/cameroon>>

<sup>30</sup> "8 Key Takeaways about Social Media and News - Project for ..." 2014. 27 Mar. 2014 <<http://www.journalism.org/2014/03/26/8-key-takeaways-about-social-media-and-news/>>

## Part 5: Moving forward

In the previous sections it has become clear that there is evidence that social media can play a role in socio-political awareness and change. At the same time, it is clear that we know little on the role social media currently plays in Cameroon although we notice from the limited available statistics that the penetration of social media in Africa is growing and we assume that this is also the case for Cameroon. Presently, we get the impression that social media is still little used in social and political activism in Cameroon.

To determine the way forward we have consulted key players in the social media and blogging field. We have posed the following questions for discussion:

1. Is there a real potential in the use of social media for social and political awareness and change in Cameroon?
  - a. Who are the key players?
  - b. What is their motivation?
  - c. What are the possibilities?
  - d. What are the limitations?
    - i. Technological
    - ii. Other
2. What is the best form of social media to mobilise people and why?
  - a. Is there a special role of the youth?
  - b. How can youth be actively involved through social media?
3. Is there a role for active citizen journalism<sup>31</sup> in Cameroon and how should this take shape?
  - a. What are the possibilities?
  - b. What are the limitations?
    - i. Technological
    - ii. Legal
    - iii. Other
  - c. Who should be targeted?

We have posed the questions in preparatory face-to-face semi-structured interviews with some of the key players in the social media field.

### Results from the workshop

On 12 March 2014 the Friedrich Ebert Foundation organised a one-day workshop in Yaounde to triangulate the results of the findings of the desk research and to explore, with experts, the future of social media and socio-political change in Cameroon. The full presentation of the workshop can be accessed online through [this link](#). Below we will summarize the main points from the discussions.

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<sup>31</sup> The concept of citizen journalism (also known as "public", "participatory", "democratic", "guerrilla" or "street" journalism) is based upon public citizens "playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information."

## Participants to the workshop

The workshop hosted a wide range of socially active participants. 25, mostly young men and women (list of participants is added in the appendices), working with youth organisations, political parties, trade unions, traditional and social media where selected. An active social participation and/or a high visibility on the social media in Cameroon were used as selection criteria to invite the participants.

## Responses to the baseline survey

The desk research and the results from the baseline survey were presented and discussed with the participants. The main observations on the research are listed below:

1. *Social media is becoming important in Cameroon:* All the participants agreed that social media is increasingly becoming important for social, economic and political dialogue and can bring together change agents. Key actors i.e., bloggers, businesses, NGOs, CSOs, political parties and the private sector increasingly start to use social media to inform, be informed, entertain, and for work related purposes. International brands like MTN and Orange currently pave the way, local brands are less visible at this moment.
2. *Social media is proving to be a powerful tool for information:* According to the participants, communication is changing when using social media. Most of the participants use the social media for publicity, scoop, multimedia and employment opportunities.  
One the participants emphasized the power of online petitions. She referred to the case against Herakles Farms palm oil project in Cameroon in which this online tool is used with success.<sup>32</sup>
3. *Social media discussions precede events on the ground:* It was observed that the social media host active and sometimes in-depth socio-political discussions. Most of these discussions are on Facebook and Twitter. They shape public opinions. Political parties are aware of this and slowly start to use the social media. In this context the blockade of Twitter on mobile devices during the 2011 election period was mentioned. It was noted that organisations like ELECAM<sup>33</sup> should venture into social media as part of the sensitisation for voter registration in Cameroon.
4. *Limitations:* The participants are not surprised of the relatively low social media adoption in Cameroon. They blame this on poor quality of the connections and relatively high internet costs, instability of electricity supply and security concerns. Therefore an internet and social media culture has not yet developed like for example in East Africa. This may however change as prices of internet connectivity drop and youth find it easier access to internet through mobile devices.
5. *Presence vs participation:* The participants noted that presence on the social media is not the same as participation. A clear distinction needs to be made between the two. This was noted in the case of LinkedIn. For example, although the number of internet users who have a LinkedIn account seems very high (24%), it is more relevant to look at their participation. As the activity in the groups is low, it is expected that general use of LinkedIn is also low. Similar observations may be made for other social media.

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<sup>32</sup> See: <<http://petitions.moveon.org/greenpeace/sign/investors-in-herakles>>

<sup>33</sup> See: <<http://www.elecaml.com/>>

6. Diaspora: The research should also be extended to Cameroonians in the diaspora as they are considered very important players in the socio-political debates and developments in Cameroon.
7. Gender: There is still an important gender imbalance in the use of ICT in general and social media in particular. The research could have been extended to include this aspect as women are crucial drivers of socio-economic change in Cameroon.

### **The value of social media in Cameroon?**

Social media activists confirmed during the workshop that they use social media to increase their visibility and to get their message across. They are encouraged by the feedback they receive and finding access to information (sometimes classified information). The social media enables them to build networks. It remains a challenge, especially for the bloggers, to continuously post high quality content/postings. This requires time and concentration.

In a monetary sense social media has not been able to generate revenues for its users in Cameroon. It is considered a huge challenge to attract businesses or other organisations that are willing to pay for publications / adverts on the social media in order to enable social media authors to raise money and sustain their activities on their sites. It was mentioned that only in the technology area there are some businesses that like to use bloggers for promoting services or products. Other business models on blogs and Facebook are explored by a very small number. One participant suggested to explore crowd funding options to get projects funded and to provide support in exploring opportunities to monetise online presence. However, it was also said that a number of technical problems hinder this expansion to date. For example, only a minority of Cameroonians has a bank account. Furthermore, financial transactions via the internet (banking, transfers) are still uncommon and subject to security concerns.

It became clear from the discussions that the expectations of the social media for socio-political change are still high in spite of the obstacles. Participants from youth organisations, political parties and trade unions put high value to the use of social media and view bloggers and other social media writers as very relevant change agents and important potential mobilisers of people and public opinions. Their importance is seen through the creation of blog content, creation and extension of existing networks and creating of new, online networks and communities. At the same time they realise that the use of social media requires time and dedication. As one of the participants noted, "having an account is not enough, you also need to remember the password."

It was also clear in the discussion that the use of social media is highly concentrated in Yaounde and Douala. Poor internet connectivity outside the major cities is likely to result in a rather low level use of social media. Capacity development and improvement of media services are essential to change and improve this situation.

### **Social media in politics**

Mr Elvis Nukam Ndansi - President of the NUDP youth wing (National Union for Democracy and Progress) - explained the importance of social media for campaigning and fundraising. Through the use of social media he was able to raise funds from Cameroonians, mainly in the diaspora, and to reach a younger public during the 2013 municipal and legislative elections.

In a similar line, with over 260 Facebook postings on the activities of the Cameroon People's Party (CPP) within the past year, the party's communication officer, Mr. Blaise Mbappe Mike explained that

social media allows his party to reach out to many citizens and especially the youth in Cameroon and the Cameroonians in the diaspora.

In general, however, it is noted that political parties sparingly use the social media and if they do, it is only during elections. According to Parfait Tabapsi – president of the Cameroon Arts Critics CAMAC – only 4 political leaders used the social media during the last municipal and legislative elections. For many (e.g. Paul Ayah, Ekani, Maurice kamto) it was a one shot exercise. An exception was [Kah Walla](#)<sup>34</sup> who has remained consistent with Facebook updates to inform about her party ideas, information and activities. As for content, social media activists described the postings of politicians and political parties as a rather sterile political rhetoric.

The social actors from the trade unions, civil society organizations and NGOs have endeavoured in the development of websites to promote their goals and objectives in-country and beyond the borders, but they also realise that social media provides new opportunities that need to be explored. Fundraising, mobilisation of supporters, crowdfunding, online petitions, are tools that need to be further explored.

### **Traditional media and social media:**

Social media has added a new dimension or channel to the global media landscape<sup>35</sup> and also in Cameroon. The discussions during the workshop between journalists from the traditional media (print and broadcast) and the new media (internet) clearly showed that their perceptions and positions are still far apart. Journalists with a formal journalistic education pride themselves for quality and credibility. Social media writers believe in expert communication which touches individual and collective interests. Because of the characteristics of the medium, social media writers believe that they can supply information quicker.

Critique on the traditional media came from the side of the civil society organisations. They feel that currently the press in Cameroon has a large category of journalists who are not innovative and fail to raise the interest of the public. They promote a stronger mix of traditional media and social media in order to introduce innovative approaches in the traditional media. They point to the increasing use of interactive participative approaches in call-in programmes, e-mails and sms in order to involve a wider public.

Social media facilitates the spreading of ideas across international borders, where traditional media fails to do so. In this regard, one participant highlighted the Arab Spring happenings as a success story on the use of social media. He argued the Cameroonian youths should learn from these events and use sms, Facebook and other social media to bring about information and initiate change on major social and economic issues.

A special mention was made on the credibility of authorship in the case of social media. In the social media it is easy to use a pseudonym and to hide one's real identity. Pseudonyms are sometimes necessary to avoid repercussions as was explained by one participant who mentioned the case of a militant of an opposition political party who nearly lost his job because of Facebook postings in which he spoke out against the ruling CPDM party. In general, the use of pseudonyms do not add to the trustworthiness of the social media. There was praise for political leaders like the Vice President of the

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<sup>34</sup> See: < <https://www.facebook.com/kah.walla> >- with almost 8000 likes.

<sup>35</sup> Kaplan, Andreas M, and Michael Haenlein. "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media." *Business horizons* 53.1 (2010): 59-68.

main opposition party the Social democratic Front (SDF) Mr. Joshua Osih who uses his real identity for his Facebook postings. In other cases, there are doubts on the credibility of some like the social media accounts (Twitter) of the president of Cameroon, Paul Biya, who is believed to use public relation officers to communicate on his behalf.

### Challenges for social media in Cameroon:

Challenges for the use and growth of social media in Cameroon were mentioned easily and often. The main challenges are listed below.

1. *Technical*: The instability and limited availability of the electricity and internet access are considered the premier hindrance for the use of social media. For this reason most users are located in the main cities.
2. *Legal*: The legislative environment is not geared to the digital media and therefore inadequate.<sup>36</sup> There is a law on cybersecurity and cybercriminality (Law N° 2010/012 of 21 December 2010<sup>37</sup>) regulating access to internet. The media law on the other hand does govern classic journalism but not the social media journalists, i.e. bloggers.
3. *Public resistance*: As it was mentioned in the workshop several times, the general public does not feel safe in the digital space. A general sense of socio-political insecurity is affecting the use of social media because people do not want to reveal their identity.
4. *Bias/tribalism*: It was mentioned that social media is sometimes used to polarize. For example, there are some blogs only for militants of the CPDM and another forum only for the Bamileke.
5. *Generation and cultural gaps*: Reluctance to embrace social media by the older generation because of ignorance, fear of exposure or are computer illiteracy. Cultural practices warrant that certain information is not shared with the public .
6. *Financial aspects*: For the time being, writing a blog or publishing on other social media has very little return on investment. Models have to be developed to reward the people that are active in the new media. The key may be in a positive collaboration with traditional journalism.

### The way forward: suggestions by participants

During the workshop the way forward was discussed and several directions were explored:

- *Skills training* for specific groups like political parties, trade unions and women and youth groups (CSOs and NGOs). Training should use appropriate language for an easy grasp of the issues to be discussed.
- *Engagement of the youth*. Political parties, civil society etc. have to realize that the social media are an easy to use tool to reach out to youth, who are often keen users of social media. At the same time, the young users need to understand how to behave in the digital world to avoid personal damage (psychological, abuse or otherwise).
- Develop *business models* for people that want to earn a living with the social media so that they get a return on their efforts. A good return on investment will increase sustainability.
- *Training on writing and publishing* in the social media to increase writing standards.

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<sup>36</sup> Siyam, S. "Cameroon | GISWatch." 2010. <<http://www.giswatch.org/country-report/20/cameroon>>

<sup>37</sup> See text of the law in English here: "Document Details | Law N° 2010/012 of 21 decembre 2010 relating ..." 2013. 27 Mar. 2014 <[http://www.minepat.gov.cm/index.php/en/component/docman/doc\\_details/98-law-n-2010-012-of-21-decembre-2010-relating-to-cybersecurity-and-cybercriminality-in-cameroon](http://www.minepat.gov.cm/index.php/en/component/docman/doc_details/98-law-n-2010-012-of-21-decembre-2010-relating-to-cybersecurity-and-cybercriminality-in-cameroon)>

## Part 6: Conclusions

The research shows that there exists a big potential for the social media to support activities that are geared towards social change. Blogs, Twitter, and Facebook are tools that take away the barriers for people to spread their opinions and concerns among large audiences. That this is can be a powerful tool in a changing world is obvious from the experiences in other parts in the world, but it was also confirmed by interviews and the workshop with stakeholders in Cameroon.

The use of social media and other web 2.0 tools in Cameroon in general, and for socio-political in particular, has not been systematically researched and hardly no data is available. This research has aimed to get a better understanding of the actual situation, both in general terms as well as in view of its use and usability to promote social change, democracy and social justice. It should be regarded as a first, explorative step. More in depth research will be needed to complete the picture.

In light of this we observe that social media are still relatively little used in Cameroon. There is a small group of active bloggers, some groups on Facebook with more than 10,000 members and a little community of very active Twitter users. LinkedIn has a significant penetration among internet users, but their activity in Cameroon-related groups is very low. Within these groups we observe relatively little explicit social/political participation aiming at promoting democracy and social justice. Only few minor groups (closed) engage in this domain. However, workshop participants observed that lively debates on public affairs are taking place in the social media, notably Facebook, even if the groups or fora themselves are not explicitly geared towards the subject of politics. In that regard, discussions about the recent water shortages in Yaounde were mentioned as an example, where social media serve as an outlet and as a public sphere where issues of general concern are raised. One can conclude however, that a basic level of social media participation has been reached in Cameroon which provides a base for further growth and focus.

### Challenges for the social media in Cameroon

In our discussions with key stakeholders, the limitation for the use of social media tend to come easily to the forefront. High costs, technical limitations, a limited and inadequate legal framework and a difficult political environment are at the moment important limitations. We have transformed these limitations into 6 challenges for the growth of social media in Cameroon. The challenges are listed below.

#### 1. Link and connect

Social media in Cameroon has a strong inward looking perspective. Local issues and local connections are dominant. In order to strengthen the social media in Cameroon a more international perspective is needed. This will give the social media landscape more leverage and recognition internationally and consequently a stronger position nationally.

Creating links and connections needs to be done are two levels:

1. Personal/organisational ties need to become stronger between social media activists in Cameroon, the region and the rest of the world. Through local organisations and leaders a strategy needs to be developed to join international bodies. At the level of the bloggers some form of organisation seems to exist, for the other media this still has to be developed. A somewhat noteworthy exception may be the role of the diaspora, which creates links between Cameroon and the rest of the world.



2. Technologies and tools need to be applied to increase international visibility for the social media in Cameroon. Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) tools like using the right keywords and tags in order to get noticed by aggregator sites, interlinking, selection and promotion of the right hashtags etc. need to be explored and applied.



Picture from [Times of Malta](#)

## 2. Innovate and engage

The social media world is characterized by a fast pace of innovation. New tools and new platforms are constantly emerge to increase the reach and participation of the general public or targeted groups. The same pace of innovation was not observed in the Cameroonian social media landscape during this research. Although the basic platforms are in use, few innovative approaches to use these platforms were identified.

In order to increase visibility, build trust and engage the general public, new tools will have to be explored. Particular focus should be on mobile enabled platforms as this will see the biggest growth in Cameroon in the next years to come.

New social media tools for supporting social activism (e.g., online-petitions, crowd mapping, crowd funding etc) need to be put higher on the agenda as they will become quickly more important and we are likely to observe a steep learning curve.

## 3. Monetisation

During our research it has become painfully clear that virtually no one is able to get a return on investment from social media activities in Cameroon. This is a worry as money and some level of income generation can be an important motivator, as well as in certain regards a precondition to professionalize social media activism.

Current and future social media activists need to be encouraged to explore online business models, tools and approaches that can generate income or project funds. Within the context of Cameroon concepts like Facebook shops, online advertising, online brand promotions (e.g. via YouTube Channels), social apps, but also the possibilities of crowdfunding need to explored to create financially viable possibilities for sustainable online presence.

## 4. Keep going when needed

In recent times we have seen that access to internet and the social media can be cut off in times of unrest or during calamities. At the same time this is also the moment where traditional media will find

it increasingly difficult to keep up with their reporting, the people are getting worried and the role of social media becomes more relevant.

It is important that social media technologists and activists are aware of the tools and techniques to continue reporting in the social media when normal connections and technologies are not in place or restricted.

## 5. Social media is a strategy

Our research suggests that very few social media users or organisations have a clear social media strategy in place. This makes it difficult to achieve maximum impact and return on investment, be it in terms of finance, visibility, reputation, recognition, etc.

In order for socially and politically active organisations to maximise the impact of their social media presence they need to be guided to develop and implement a strategy to engage their target audience. An example of such a social media strategy is displayed below. Support to these organisations can be in the form of a step-by-step manual or in a more direct approach.



## 6. Time

Social media have become a serious channel for communication and engagement of target groups for any NGO, association or political party. However, the discussions with the FES partner organisations and the social media activists have shown that none of the organisations have a dedicated social media officer in place. People are active on their own account, while in other cases communication officers have to handle the social media as an additional task. The failure to dedicate time and content to update the social media profiles has as a result that target groups see little merit in engagement.

For all organisations that aim to become an active player in the social media landscape it is key to devote time and knowledge to maximise efforts. A dedicated webmaster, with a clear and agreed upon social media strategy will be able to position the organisation online and engage target groups.