



CYBER

SECURITY

**Situational
Analysis of
Digital Security
in Cameroon.**

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Introduction

Over the last five years, Cameroon has experienced a rapid increase in internet access. Year to year, internet users have doubled, making the country one of the top three African countries with the highest growth in internet access. In 2017, 23.2% of the population was connected to the internet, 16.9% of households in the country had a computer, and 21.7% had Internet access at home (Import-Export Solutions, 2020). Currently, 30% of Cameroonians are connected to the internet and 83% connect through their smartphones (Ndonwie, 2020). According to the report by Awondo reported a high increase in smartphone usage with 72% of households reported owning at least one smartphone (Awondo, 2018).

Access and use of the internet has brought considerable advantages to the people of Cameroon, for example it has increased the flow and exchange of personal data between public and private actors, individuals, associations, and companies (Boraine, 2019). It has led to the rapid growth of e-services, social media use and high penetration of mobile services and this has gone a long way to improving the quality of life, efficiency, and productivity (ECSD, 2020).

Social media usage stands at 14% with over 3.70 million social media users (Kemp, 2020). Facebook is the most widely used social media platform in Cameroon and is used for various purposes including work, entertainment, communication,

business, education, etc. According to Global Stats, out of all public social media platforms used in Cameroon, Facebook subscriptions stand at 87%, followed by Pinterest: (7.6%), Instagram (2.2%), Twitter (2.1%), YouTube (1.3%) and LinkedIn (0.01%) (Mallet, 2020).

Despite these benefits, internet access and technological developments have exposed users to numerous potential risks, such as scamming, pharming, skimming, SIM-box fraud, defacement, unauthorized disclosure, identity theft, to name a few (Boraine, 2019). An example of such scams are perpetrators that pose as suppliers of cash crops, minerals, artifacts, and even orphans for adoption (Hinshaw, 2011) using forged identification and business authorization documents.

A recent development in cyber scams in Cameroon involves sending threatening emails via text message, WhatsApp, or other social media, demanding that recipients demonstrate they have “chosen a side” in the Anglophone crisis – either the separatists’ or the government’s – by sending mobile funds to the scammer. (Yaoundé, 2019)

Cameroonians have experienced their share of online threats and intimidation from the government. In 2016, the President of the National Assembly called internet users “traitors of cyberspace” and social media “terrorists” (Owono, 2016). In 2017, the government used telecom companies to send text

messages to subscribers threatening up to two years in prison if they used social media to spread rumors and false news (APC, 2018). In 2015, it was reported that 48,819 African governments asked Orange for customer data and that Cameroon led all others in subscriber information requests (Vota, 2017). Still, between 2016 and March 2017, the country shut down the internet for 230 days. The internet shut down came after months of protests against the dominance of French-language use in courts and schools. In Cameroon's Constitution, French and English are meant to be co-equal languages (Snowden, 2017)

The National Agency for Information and Communication Technologies (ANTIC) reported that over 90% of software and operating systems used in Cameroon are hacked including email addresses and social media accounts of businesses, individuals, and government members resulting in lamentable losses for operators, individuals, businesses and the state (Boraine, 2019).

Today, the government of Cameroon is working with civil society organizations, NGOs, and academic institutions in order to educate the population and raise awareness in an effort to mitigate cyber risks (AUC, 2016).

Cyber Legislation in Cameroon

Cameroon enacted the Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Law in 2010 which includes criminal substantive rules, procedural rules as well as provisions on international cooperation. Cybercrime offenses and penalties are provided for in art. 60 to 89 of the Law, illegal access (art. 65 §2), misuse of devices (e.g. art. 66 §2, art. 86 §1), data interference (art. 71 and 72, art. 86 §2), computer-related fraud (art. 73 §1). Offenses related to child pornography are also criminalized (art. 76, 80, 81), as well as grooming (art. 83).

In addition, Cameroon has established a National Computer Emergency Response Team to handle incidents related to cyber threats. Cameroon has a state agency known as the ANTIC - National Agency of Information and Communication Technologies, which coordinates with Information Communication Technology (ICT) security. One of ANTIC's primary functions is to help raise cyber threat awareness and strengthen the overall technical capacity to deter cybercrime and enhance cybersecurity.

Online violence against women in Cameroon

Cameroon has sex-disaggregated data for all sectors except for crime (Web Foundation, 2018). This means there is a lack of data about the extent of online violence against women. As part of an ongoing evaluation of the Safe Sisters digital

safety training program, Internews has commissioned the development and testing of a needs assessment tool to understand the threats women in Cameroon face online, their digital safety knowledge, practices and needs,, and their knowledge of local laws that might impact them.

According to a social media poll by Internet Without Borders, nearly half of women polled across English and French-speaking countries in West and Central Africa, have experienced gender-based violence while using social media (Bagnetto, 2019). “Men make these women think they live in Europe and are big personalities. They also pretend to travel all over the world looking for a woman to marry. They know that African women can be very swayed by Westerners and luxury”- a professional hacker who goes by the name Ismalito told Anadolu Agency Women in media organizations in Cameroon described how they are subject to misogynistic abuse online when covering a range of political issues, especially related to women’s rights and gender-based violence (Web Foundation, 2019)

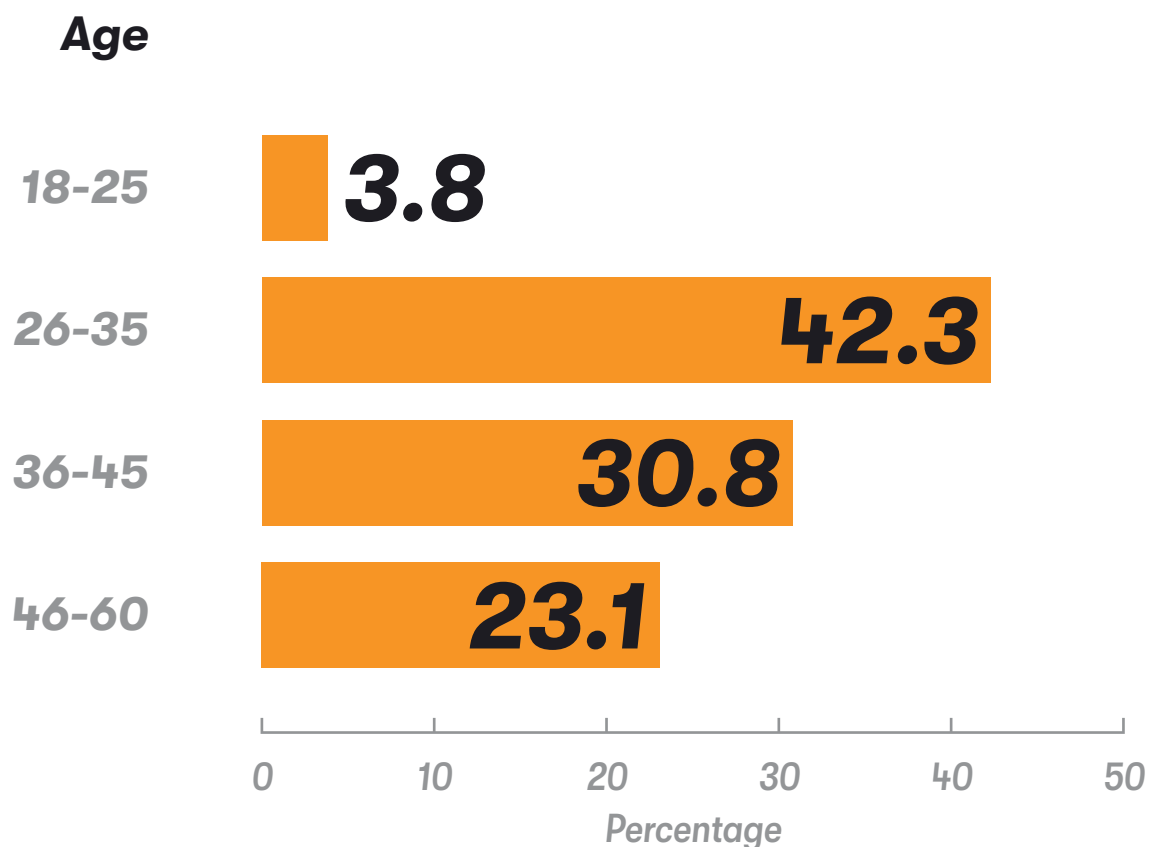
Methodology

A semi-structured questionnaire was developed aimed at collecting information on digital security threats faced by women in Cameroon as well as the knowledge, attitudes and practices related to digital hygiene. Feedback was solicited from a number of experts and incorporated.

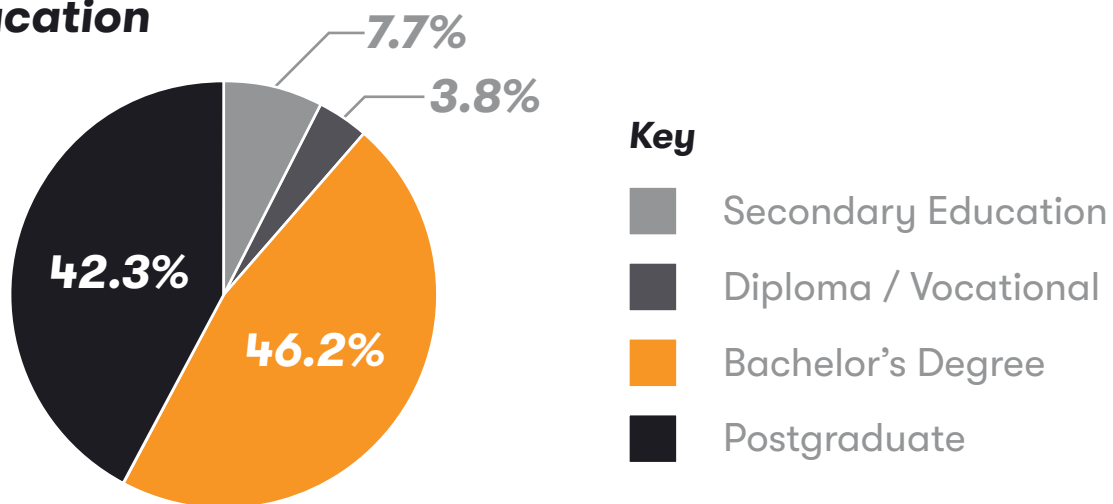
The questionnaire was then programmed into a Google Form and shared with closed, private networks in Anglophone Cameroon. A total of 30 persons filled out the survey, including twenty-six women.

Findings

Demographics



Education

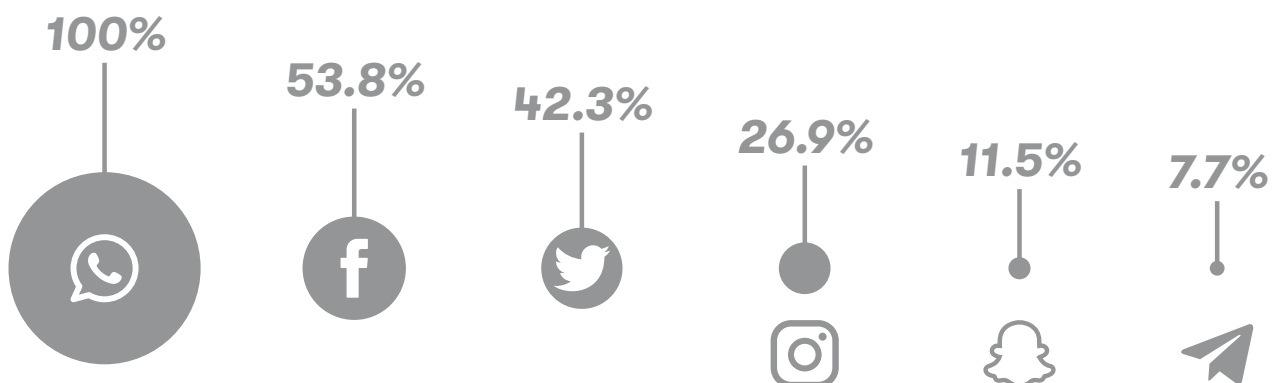


Forty-two (42%) of the respondents were between the age of 26-35 years. The overall demographic of participants was skewed towards a higher education attainment level.

Forty-six percent (46%) of participants had a Bachelor's degree and another 42% had listed postgraduate as their highest level of education. Forty-six percent (46%) reported working for a Non-governmental/Non-profit Organization.

Internet Use

Ninety-six (96%) of women surveyed reported using a personal mobile phone to access the internet with the majority (77%) reporting going online for more than three hours a day.



Whatsapp was the most popular social media platform reported to be used by all the women who participated in the survey. This was followed by Facebook (54%), Twitter (42%), and Instagram (27%).

Have you ever experienced online harassment?



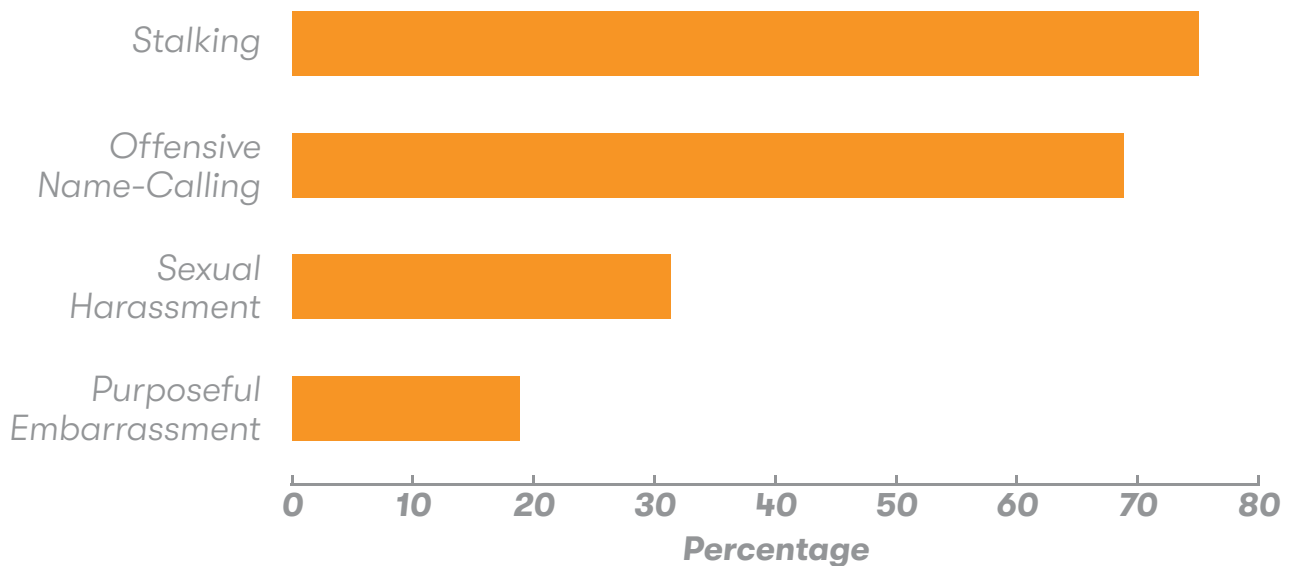
Concern about online safety

When asked about their concern regarding safety on the Internet, the majority (81%) mentioned that they were either very concerned (50%) or moderately concerned (31%) about their safety in digital spaces. When asked whether they feel safe when voicing their opinions in online spaces, 15% were not sure, 15% didn't feel safe, 35% reported that sometimes they felt safe while 35% reported that they feel safe voicing their opinions in online spaces. Blackmail, hacking, lack of privacy, scamming, and hate speech were some of the risks or challenges respondents perceived for persons using the internet in their regions.

A large proportion of participants (92%) reported that their attitude towards safety online has either significantly or slightly changed over the past 5 years. The reasons for this

change in attitude were reported as either having been victims or having witnessed an online attack.

What kind of online harassment have you personally experienced?



Experiences of Online Gender-Based Violence

Seventy-seven percent (77%) of women reported having experienced online harassment. These incidents manifested as stalking (75%) such as repeated contact to cause fear through calls and doxxing, sexual harassment (69%) such as unwelcome sexual advances, purposeful embarrassments (31%) such as revenge porn and offensive name-calling (19%).

Seventy-three percent (73%) of the respondents believe that they were targeted because of their gender. Most victims of cyber blackmail in Cameroon are women (Bonny, 2020).

Responding to Online Gender-based Violence

Eighty-five percent (85%) of the women responded by blocking perpetrators as a means of responding to online violence. Fifty-five percent (55%) ignored the perpetrator whereas 35% reported the perpetrator to the website/platform or adjusted their privacy settings.

Online safety knowledge

Are you aware of any laws to protect internet users against online violence in Cameroon?



Eighty-one (81%) were not aware of any laws in place to protect themselves against online violence and 40% rated their knowledge about digital security tools and practices poor or below average. On digital self-care, 19% reported using the same password for different websites and social media accounts. Twenty-three percent (23%) mentioned never changing their online account passwords. Thirty-one (31%) percent were not aware about two-factor authentication (2FA) was. Only twenty-three percent (23%) reported using VPN and 15% reported using an updated antivirus program.

Conclusion

Based on the needs assessment, a high proportion of women in Cameroon face online violence and are increasingly concerned about their safety in digital spaces. However, many of these respondents are unaware of any legal protections offered to them. Additionally, they believe that they lack the appropriate knowledge to protect themselves in these digital spaces. Results from the needs assessment show that there is a significant need for training programs aimed at building digital security awareness and digital hygiene skills.

We believe that this needs assessment questionnaire is an appropriate tool to rapidly collect information on the knowledge, attitude and practices related to digital hygiene and security in countries across Africa. The data from the questionnaire provides a snapshot which enables the development of digital security training programs.

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