




intersectionality in digital content creation

Understanding its impact on women content creators in Cameroon

POLLICY



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Executive Summary

Digital content creation has emerged as an influential mode of self-expression for women in Cameroon, enabling them to share narratives around gender equality and political participation. This study aimed to shed light on how the intersection of gender, socioeconomic status, training, and geographic location impacts the production and reception of digital content created by Cameroonian women.

Employing a multi-pronged analytical approach, including narrative, thematic, intersectional, and comparative analysis, the research team used a Google Form and conducted in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of 11 women digital content creators, to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The findings reveal that these women face a complex web of barriers that transcend simple gender discrimination. Women from rural areas and those with limited financial resources encounter heightened challenges in building high-quality, visually appealing digital content. They struggle to access the necessary tools, technologies, and training compared to their more privileged counterparts living in urban areas. A cocktail of challenges that seriously hamper their online visibility, types of content they produce, and audience engagement. Additionally, the women reported grappling with online gender-based violence (OGBV), a difficulty compounding the initial resource challenges.

To foster a more inclusive and equitable digital landscape in Cameroon, the report recommends targeted interventions. These include promoting affordable internet access, investing in digital infrastructure, enacting gender-specific protective legislation, making reporting in tech platforms more context-based, and providing capacity building in digital literacy, video editing, and skills training; fostering collaborative action and coordination among civil society organizations (CSOs) to amplify their collective impact, and mentorship programs tailored to the needs of women facing intersectional marginalization. Only by adopting an intersectional lens can meaningful progress be made in empowering all women digital content creators and get their voices heard for a ground change.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ANTIC: National Agency for Information and Communication Technologies

CSO: Civil Society Organization

DM: Direct Message

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

GDPR: General Data Protection Regulation

MNO: Mobile Network Operator

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

OGBV: Online Gendered-Based Violence

PWD: Person With Disabilities

UNFPA: United Nations Fund for Population Activities

Definition of key terms

Digital content creation: It is defined by Andrew Stapelton as "the process of generating topic ideas that appeal to your audience and then creating written or visual content around those topics. It is about making information and your expertise obvious to anyone consuming your content. To really gain the benefits of Digital content creation you have to make that information as accessible as possible to your audience as a blog, video, infographic, or other formats".

Gender stereotyping: A gender stereotype is a generalized preconception about the qualities, characteristics, and social roles that are typically attributed to individuals based solely on their gender or biological sex.

Intersectionality: A term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality is a prism for seeing and telling different kinds of stories about what happens in societies and to whom it happens. She introduced the idea of intersectionality as a framework for understanding how multiple dimensions of identity like race, gender, and class intersect and interact to shape individuals' experiences and social positioning.

Online visibility: simply implies the ability of a post to attract views, reach the target audience, and generate online engagement in terms of likes, comments, and shares.

Online gender-based violence: OGBV is targeted prejudice, harm, and harassment perpetrated through technology against people, mostly women, based on their gender. It includes doxxing, cyber-stalking, threats, cyber-bullying, online harassment, trolling, hate speech, and sexual remarks.

Introduction and background

In the modern digital era, women's participation in content creation has emerged as a dominant mode of self-expression and a highly effective way to connect with global audiences.¹ The world of digital content creation has experienced an unprecedented surge, enabling individuals to freely² express their creativity, share their stories, and engage with vast online communities.³ With more than 5 billion mobile phone users, 4 billion internet users which is 63.2% of the global population, and 3 billion active social media users worldwide with a majority accessing the internet via mobile devices, online content has become truly impactful worldwide.⁴

Importantly, intersectionality shapes the content that women creators produce and the audiences they reach. Their digital content often reflects their personal experiences, beliefs, and cultural context. For example, women content creators in diverse regions like Cameroon may leverage digital technologies to amplify their voices, share underrepresented perspectives, and advocate for social change in ways that are specific to their intersecting identities. Also, the broad spectrum of content creation encompasses influencers, bloggers, digital storytellers, photographers, artists, writers, filmmakers, podcasters, activists, and many other creators who actively produce and share content through online platforms.

Digital content creation: A powerful cyber tool for self-expression that intersects identities

In Africa, outstanding TikTokers and Facebookers like Mumzy⁵ and Nyambe⁶ use TikTok to create powerful narratives that carry the voice of underprivileged children's education and women.⁷ Being written or through graphic designs, Laetitia Ky⁸ exploits the digital space to share shocking paints to advocate for women's identity and cry out for help as gender-based violence (GBV) statistics⁹ are becoming alarming. Within this digitized landscape, women content creators in Cameroon

1 Social Native. (2024, March 8). Celebrating women in the creator economy. Social Native. <https://www.socialnative.com/articles/from-passion-to-profession-women-shaping-the-creator-economy/>

2 Though this idea of freedom is more and more complex to understand specially in a world where your freedom is not mine

3 Stapleton, A. (2022, April 6). What is digital content creation? [INSIDER TIPS and more]. Dr Andrew Stapleton. <https://andrewstapleton.com.au/what-is-digital-content-creation/>

4 Digital around the world — DataReportal – Global Digital Insights. (n.d.). DataReportal – Global Digital Insights. <https://datareportal.com/global-digital-overview>

5 TikTok - Make your day. (n.d.). <https://www.tiktok.com/@mumzyschildren/video/7229399298708999467>

6 TikTok - Make your day. (n.d.). <https://www.tiktok.com/@mumzyschildren/video/7229399298708999467>

7 These female African content creators are using TikTok for more than just dance videos. (2021, April 27). Everand. <https://www.everand.com/article/505182115/These-Female-African-Content-Creators-Are-Using-Tik-Tok-For-More-Than-Just-Dance-Videos>

8 Rédaction, L. (2023, May 22). Laetitia Ky : From art to activism, there is only a hair ! ON ART MEDIA. <https://www.onart.media/portraits-of-contemporary-african-artists/laetitia-ky-from-art-to-activism-there-is-only-a-hair/>

9 Facts and figures: Ending violence against women. (n.d.). UN Women – Headquarters. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

have emerged as powerful voices, leveraging digital technologies to amplify their messages of peacebuilding but also, to advocate for women's rights¹⁰ and raise awareness on issues like gender equality and GBV as the country has experienced an unprecedented increase of violence against women in 2023, with 56¹¹ women killed by their partners.

As we said above, human beings are the result of genetics, society, and cultural upbringing. Cameroonian content creators' experiences and trajectories in the digital space are not solely shaped by their gender but are also profoundly influenced by the concept of intersectionality. Intersectionality, a framework developed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw¹² recognizes that individuals hold multiple intersecting identities, such as race, age, gender, culture, class, and sexuality, which collectively shape their lived experiences and the systems of privilege and discrimination they navigate through.

Cameroon is a rich culturally diverse country that hosts people from various socioeconomic, educational, and religious backgrounds: Anglophones, Francophones, rich, humble, Christians, Muslims, and animists, with more than 238 tribes inhabiting the country. With 12.73 million¹³ internet users, it is home to a vibrant community of women content creators like Caroline Mveng,¹⁴ Fawoh Nancy¹⁵, Zoneziwoh Mbongdulo,¹⁶ and Pertulla Ezigha¹⁷ who are using X, Facebook, and LinkedIn, to shape narratives on women, share their political opinions, challenge societal norms, and foster connections. However, their journeys are complex, as their backgrounds intersect with the digital realm, influencing not only their creative output but also their opportunities, access, and reception within the online space.

Indeed, intersectionality is a prism for seeing and telling different kinds of stories about what happens in societies and to whom it happens. It attends to the things that happen to us because of who we are and because of the way societies have been structured.

For instance, a young woman from a rural area may face barriers in terms of limited access to digital infrastructure, lack of financial resources and training in both online visibility and opportunities, hindering her ability to fully embrace technology and participate in the digital content creation sphere, while her counterpart from a privileged background may not face it. Another example could be the educational background. Well-educated women may face online bullying for their feminist or political positions only because they are educated. Also, the culture women are brought up within turns to be their judge whenever they attempt to voice themselves against some discriminatory practices. Thus, some identity factors may influence the type of content women produce and the perception they receive from their content.

10 ACCORD. (2024, May 28). *The digital dimension of peacebuilding in Cameroon – ACCORD*. <https://www.accord.org/za/analysis/the-digital-dimension-of-peacebuilding-in-cameroon/>

11 *Alarming rate of Gender-Based Violence: Gov't reveals 56 women killed this year!* (n.d.). *Alarming Rate of Gender-Based Violence: Gov't Reveals 56 Women Killed This Year!* <https://theguardianpostcameroon.com/post/1971/en/alarming-rate-of-gender-based-violence-govt-reveals-56-women-killed-this-year>

12 Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, *More than Two Decades Later*. (n.d.). Columbia Law School. <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later>

13 Kemp, S. (2024, February 23). *Digital 2024: Cameroon – DataReportal – Global Digital Insights*. *DataReportal – Global Digital Insights*. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-cameroon?rq=cameroon>

14 X.com. (n.d.). X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/mvengcaroline?t=B4P4HPskXrzh961cBVK-EQ&s=09> (consulted 17 August, 2014)

15 X.com. (n.d.-c). X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/FawohN?t=gXDM8RohKpZe4TLgup8qpw&> (consulted August 17, 2014)

16 <https://cm.linkedin.com/in/zoneziwoh> (consulted August 17, 2014)

17 *Log in or sign up to view*. (n.d.-b). <http://facebook.com/pertulla.ezigha> (consulted August 17, 2014)

An overview of the literature review on the intersectionality approach in content creation in Africa

Intersectionality has emerged as a prominent concept in academic literature, specifically within the fields of gender studies, sociology, and media studies. Crenshaw introduced the idea of intersectionality as a framework for understanding how multiple dimensions of identity intersect and interact to shape individuals' experiences and social positioning. By adopting an intersectional perspective, we gain a deeper understanding of the intricate nature of content creators' identities and how the convergence of these identities influences their approaches, themes, and strategies in content creation. It allows us to explore the multifaceted dimensions of their identity and its impact on their creative processes of content creation.

Content creation has become an undeniable channel for self-expression that has taken unlimited proportion with the advancement of technology and ICT tools.¹⁸ The interconnectivity of the world, and the socioeconomic opportunities behind it, make digital content creation more and more influential. As the world holds some power dynamic based on things we cannot always control, Africa has joined the trend of digital content creation firstly to enjoy the socioeconomic benefits but also, to reframe and share narratives as they see and experience them, as the intersection of their identities connects with their stories.

Many scholars and researchers in Africa including Cameroon, have studied the relationship between intersectionality and online engagement. Nyabola¹⁹ in her contribution to digital democracy²⁰ examined the impact of technologies on the political landscape of Kenya. Using an intersectional approach, she accentuated how historically marginalized groups like women and persons with disabilities are leveraging digital tools for political mobilization and civic engagement.

Mardiya and Iyer²¹ documented in a report titled *The (In)Visible*, the threats that Muslim women's rights defenders face in the Greater Horn of Africa. Attacked by political and religious leaders, and men from their communities, they experience various forms of online gender-based violence (OGBV) like trolling, doxing, sexual language, and verbal insults in advocating for women's rights and sexual violence survivors.²² The challenges they face result from the intersection of their gender, location, and religion. Their research gave birth to a set of community-driven initiatives that could reduce the harm Muslim women digital activists experience online.

In a similar dynamic, Clark and Mohammed²³, adopting theoretical frameworks like intersectionality, digital activism, and postcolonial feminism, offer a deeper understanding of the digital engagement

18 Wikipedia contributors. (2024, July 13). *Content creation* - Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Content_creation

19 Nyabola, Nanjala. *Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics: How the Internet Era is Transforming Politics in Kenya*. Zed Books, 2018.

20 Berg, S., & Hofmann, J. (2021, December 20). *Digital democracy*. *Internet Policy Review*. <https://policyreview.info/articles/analysis/digital-democracy>

21 *(In)Visible* - Pollicy. (n.d.). Pollicy. <https://pollicy.org/projects/invisible/> Mardiya, S., Y., and Iyer, N. (2022) *(In)Visible: The Digital Threats Muslim Women Human Rights Defenders Face in the Greater Horn of Africa*.

22 Ibid

23 *View of African Women in Digital Spaces Redefining Social Movements on the Continent and in the Diaspora* by Msia Kibona Clark and Wunpini Fatimata Mohammed. *Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers Ltd, 2023*. (n.d.). <https://journals.ug.edu.gh/index.php/fa/article/view/3121/1557>

of African women and its wider socio political significance.²⁴ Their book explores the impact of digital activism and online communities on real-world experiences and movements, illustrating how they intersect and influence offline activities.

Diving to Cameroon, the ongoing anglophone crisis in Cameroon has also opened the way to literature on social media's importance in mitigating the crisis, fostering change, and participating in peacebuilding. Nkongho²⁵ acknowledges the importance of online activism but highly recommends ground action, as online activists often face backlash. On their side, Nganga and Elonge²⁶ analyze the potential of e-democracy and digital engagement to enhance political participation, particularly in terms of empowering marginalized groups, such as youth and women, to engage with the political process.

Though the number of social media users is increasing, cyberspace in Cameroon is not always a safe and joyous one. Indeed, a 2019 study by Internet Sans Frontières in Cameroon and other Central and West African countries reported that online violence is a significant issue that is still ignored. In a GDPR-compliant manner²⁷, they carried out a survey that revealed that 45.5% of female Twitter and Facebook users in 18 countries had experienced a form of online gender-based violence, while only 15% reported these negative experiences.²⁸ Also, they could not be reported in some countries due to the vacuum of law and the inefficiency of the existing ones.

In addition to that, the cost of the internet and digital illiteracy are variables to be considered too. A report in 2023 by UNFPA/Cameroon on their commitment to leveraging digital technology to promote inclusive development and gender equality, acknowledges the persistent challenges, such as cultural norms and socioeconomic barriers, that hinder women's full participation in the digital space.²⁹

More recently, Nsaidzedze³⁰ examines the impact of the digital gender divide on the political participation of women in Cameroon. The study explores how unequal access to and use of digital technologies compounds the existing barriers to women's political engagement, limiting their ability to voice their concerns and participate in decision-making processes effectively. The study offers policy recommendations to bridge the digital gender divide, protect women content creators online, and amplify their voices on issues that raise awareness in Cameroon.

24 *View of African Women in Digital Spaces Redefining Social Movements on the Continent and in the Diaspora* by Msia Kibona Clark and Wunpini Fatimata Mohammed. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers Ltd, 2023. (n.d.). <https://journals.ug.edu.gh/index.php/fa/article/view/3121/1557>

25 *Social Media and Small Media use during the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon*, Salome Agborsangaya Nkongho 2018 <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1482549/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

26 Ngange, K. L., & Elonge, M. E. (2019). *E-Democracy in Africa: Assessing Internet Use by Major Political Parties during Elections in Cameroon*. *Advances in Journalism and Communication*, 07(03), 55–73. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ajc.2019.73004>

27 *School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics*. (n.d.). <https://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/happ/subject-area/history/research/ethics/GDPRandResearchEthics/#:~:text=Your%20research%20should%20comply%20with,any%20personal%20information%20with%20confidence>.

28 Boujaddada, A. (2019, March 8). #IWD2019: Online gender-based violence affects 45% of women on social media in West and Central Africa. *Internet Sans Frontières*. <https://internetwithoutborders.org/iwd2019-online-gender-based-violence-affects-45-of-women-on-social-media-in-west-and-central-africa/>

29 UNFPA Cameroon strives to achieve gender equality by bridging the digital divide. (n.d.). Cameroon. <https://cameroon.un.org/en/226203-unfpa-cameroon-strives-achieve-gender-equality-bridging-digital-divide>

30 *Digital Gender Divide and Political Participation of Women in Cameroon*, Sakah Bernard Nsaidzedze, 2023 <https://nkafu.org/digital-gender-divide-and-political-participation-of-women-in-cameroon/>

Why this study?

Based on the non-exhaustive literature we explored, it is evident that digital content creation can have a significant impact on addressing sociopolitical issues and cultural norms. This study aligns with existing literature on intersectionality and digital content creation in Africa. It will provide valuable insights into digital content creation in Cameroon. By examining digital content creation in Cameroon through the lens of intersectionality, we aim to contribute to the understanding of digital content creation and the challenges resulting from it. Also, we want to identify strategies of protection by content creators and propose a set of targeted community-driven initiatives to improve women's content creator visibility, access, and safety. Our ultimate goal is to create a safe and inclusive digital landscape that benefits everyone and ensures no one is left behind.

This research aimed to shed light on how intersecting identities influence the production and reception of online content creation related to politics and gender equality. By understanding these dynamics, we can work towards empowering and amplifying the voices of women content creators, fostering a more inclusive and equitable digital landscape in the country.

The specific objectives involve:

1. Explore the lived experiences of women content creators in Cameroon, focusing on how their intersecting identities (e.g. gender, geographical location, and socioeconomic status) shape their content creation journeys and challenges.
2. Identify the main barriers and challenges encountered by women content creators in Cameroon, including issues such as access to resources, training, visibility, and safety.
3. Assess the existing support systems, initiatives, and policies (if any) aimed at empowering and uplifting women content creators in Cameroon, and identify areas for improvement.
4. Identify the strategies and interventions necessary to create an inclusive and supportive digital environment for women content creators

By addressing these objectives, the research can contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how intersecting identities impact the experience of women digital content creators in Cameroon, and how their online content impacts their societies. It will provide valuable insights into the experiences, social and financial challenges, and opportunities they encounter. Finally, the work will inform efforts to promote inclusivity, diversity, and empowerment within the digital content creation sphere.

Methodology

To study the complex relationship between intersectionality and digital content creation in Cameroon, an exploratory qualitative research approach was used. A combination of heterogeneous purposive³¹ and snowballing³² sampling techniques were used to identify and recruit 11 women digital content creators based in both urban and rural areas of the country. To ensure the sample was representative of the Cameroonian context, it included six English speakers, three Muslims, and two French speakers. The size of the sample and the unequal repartition of groups is due to the sampling techniques which are non-randomized ones meaning that participants did not have an equal chance to be selected so data are skewed towards a particular demographic because of the unequal repartition of each segment of the population. Also in the snowballing method, participants are recruited until data saturation, meaning there are enough insights to conduct the study.

To safeguard participants' privacy and autonomy, participation in this research study was voluntary, and each participant was provided informed consent before the interview. All data were securely stored, with access limited to the research team. Furthermore, the findings have been thoroughly anonymized to prevent the identification of participants.

As there were English and French-speaking content creators, the interviews were conducted in both English and French. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with the participants using an in-depth interview guide which was sent to them through Kobo collect to familiarize themselves with the interview questions. A link to access the Kobo collect questionnaire was sent ahead of the interview. Interviews were conducted through online platforms including Google Meet and WhatsApp. To ensure consistency in responses provided by the study participants and collect additional data, a Google form with close and open-ended questions was equally sent to participants.

Participants' responses that were gathered in French, were translated into English for analysis and interpretation for the report writing. The overall report is written in English and for inclusion purposes, it will later be translated into French for dissemination to the Francophone audience. More data was obtained from social media accounts of participants to corroborate some of their

31 Bisht, R. (2024, July 14). *What is Purposive Sampling? Methods, Techniques, and Examples* | Researcher.Life. <https://researcher.life/blog/article/what-is-purposive-sampling-methods-techniques-and-examples/>

32 Snowball sampling. (2024, July 30). *Division of Research and Innovation*. <https://research.oregonstate.edu/ori/irb/policies-and-guidance-investigators/guidance/snowball-sampling>

responses and to have an idea of their visibility online. Study participants were asked to share their different social media accounts with the researcher to aid this process.

The data gathered are women's personal narratives highlighting the impact of the intersection of their identities in the production and reception of their work, the way they protect themselves online, as well as, the financial and technical challenges they interface within digital content creation. Besides sharing responses on the impact of intersectionality on their work, participants further provided recommendations on how to amplify the voices of women online.

To analyze the data, a multi-pronged analytical approach was used where narrative, thematic, intersectional, and comparative approaches were combined. This was done because the study sample was diverse, so a comparison was used to understand how the themes identified varied among participants. First, data from interviews was transcribed. Together with responses that were gathered through Google Form, the common responses were highlighted. Then, data was coded, compiled, and labeled under themes. From that, five thematic areas were identified: gender discrimination, accessibility, online visibility, online safety, and OGBV. Later, the intersectional approach was used to understand how the participants' intersecting identities interplay with the topics they choose, the stories they narrate, the manner they shape their contents, how they access resources, and work on their visibility. Lastly, comparison was used to see how the five themes identified varied among participants.

Findings and Discussion

The findings are given according to the objectives mentioned in the introduction.

Lived experiences of women content creators in Cameroon, with a focus on how their intersecting identities shape their content.

The findings from the data reveal that participants have experienced gender stereotyping and discrimination since birth. Many expressed the feeling that they are already at a disadvantage in life just because they are women, as most parents are more excited when a male child is born.

Indeed, ten out of the eleven participants reported issues of gender discrimination within their communities, which seriously affected their sense of worthiness. This feeling was more pronounced and evident in the communities of Muslim women and some Northwestern Anglophones, where some parents are deeply rooted in religion and culture.

One participant shared her experience, saying,

“ Parents are always excited when a male child is born (...) When I completed my primary education, elementary school, my father, who is deeply rooted in our customs and traditions, questioned why I needed to continue my studies. He said ‘You’re a girl, why should you continue studying? As a woman, you don’t need to do much. Just learn a trade and let your brothers go to school’. This made me realize how deeply women are marginalized because of African cultures and traditions where it is believed that women’s place is solely in the home, being married (...) without having to go an extra mile. _Blogger Journalist_

To amplify this sense of not being good enough, a participant painfully voiced,

“ My experiences! (...) They compel me to create content focused on gender equality because I’ve experienced situations where I was denied opportunities just because I am a woman. There is also the moral dilemma that comes with being a woman where certain actions or words are restricted because they might be seen as disrespectful or as violating the gender norms that have been imposed on us. _Journalist and activist_

Furthermore, a lack of sufficient women’s political participation, limited awareness of gender-based violence (GBV), and patriarchal attitudes further fuel their continuous fight for women’s rights and political inclusion. In Cameroon, women who experience sexual abuse or violence often feel ashamed and are hesitant to report these incidents, as people do not yet understand what GBV is and its different forms. Besides, in politics, women’s participation is minimal and sometimes figurative.

One participant shared an example from her community, saying,

“ In my community, a young girl was raped but the shame was put on her and nothing happened to her rapist who was a male from the same community, and her mother didn't do anything, saying she doesn't want problems. _Feminist Digital Storyteller_

Another participant expressed her motivation to join the advocacy, saying,

“ I'm just looking at a kind of representation of women and young girls in politics, especially Muslims; from it, it was really very important for me to join so that I can at least voice my thoughts and my worries out. And then begin to see how I can also shape the future of the country, especially in relation to adolescent girls and young women. _Woman Political Activist_

Identify the key barriers and obstacles faced by women content creators in Cameroon, including issues related to access to resources, visibility, and safety.

Ranging from infrastructural barriers to OGBV, there are many barriers hindering women's journey online.

Internet connectivity, affordability, and quality

A significant barrier is the lack of reliable internet connectivity, which is both costly and inconsistent. As one participant pointed out,

“ One of the ways, which I think is possible, is through internet access. Limited internet access is one of the challenges we are constantly facing just like you and I are experiencing right now. _Blogger_

Women content creators in Cameroon often face significant financial challenges that prevent them from acquiring high-quality equipment and paying for stable and high-quality internet access. This infrastructural barrier restricts their capacity to produce and distribute content effectively, as consistent and reliable connectivity is crucial for their work. Furthermore, the absence of monetized options for their online accounts poses additional obstacles.

All the eleven women interviewed reported difficulties in accessing the internet, as internet bundles in Cameroon are quite expensive. While some participants reported using Wi-Fi from their workplace which provides them with tools and resources for content creation, women in rural areas face far greater challenges. As one urban-based participant noted,

“ There are many tools and software now available online either free or purchasable, while others may be accessible through workplaces or affiliated institutions. In my case, I get access to my equipment and tools through my organization that provides resources such as capacity building or mentorship programs. _Blogger Journalist_

However, a participant from a rural area highlighted the difficulties faced by women outside urban centers and mentioned:

“ My financial challenges are access to funding limiting my ability to acquire high-quality equipment, high cost of internet and internet connectivity issues. Additionally, most social media platforms are not eligible for monetization in Cameroon. _Woman Political Activist_

This disparity is also evident between urban and rural participants. One participant acknowledged the relative advantage of living in an urban area compared to rural women, saying,

“ Internet is super expensive. Right now, I’m using the MTN data to talk to you. I have another SIM card that is not working and at home, I have Yoomee. So I have at least three different subscribers just to maintain internet access. Now, there is this woman in one rural community who has done a very beautiful thing and wants to post on social media. If she has only one internet subscriber, she may not be able to post at a particular time. This shows how Internet accessibility is a significant issue. _Communicator_

The issue of poor internet quality was a common concern among all the eleven participants and the struggle we experienced during the interviews with them, corroborates it. Without adequate resources to invest in the necessary technological tools and infrastructure, many women face significant hurdles in maintaining a strong online presence and reaching their target audiences, as one participant expressed,

“ If we can just have the internet. _Feminist Digital Storyteller_

Moreover, when assessing the availability of funding or sponsorship opportunities to support women content creators in Cameroon, Seven participants indicated that they were unaware of any, indicating a broader issue of limited access to information and to such support systems.

Education and Training

Women content creators in Cameroon often struggle to access specialized programs and resources that could help them improve their skills in digital content creation, social media management, and digital security. The lack of targeted education and training opportunities hinders their professional development, making it difficult for them to create engaging, high-quality content that connects with their audience. Besides, the few organized are held in urban areas with women from rural communities not benefiting from them.

Some participants have shared their experiences in accessing relevant education and training in digital storytelling: “I have attended and participated in several training workshops and conferences to build my capacity. I was able to attend a one-day training on web content writing in Yaounde organized by the Cameroon Association of Bloggers”. Another one added

“ I am a member of the Cameroon Association of Bloggers. And this association organizes capacity-building sessions for content creators. _Communicator & Blogger_

For those in rural areas or not informed about these training or who cannot pay for them, they learn by themselves, via YouTube just like this participant replied to the question related to training:

“ No one, self-taught from YouTube and other platforms. _Blogger_

The gaps identified by the participants highlight the need for more women-specific programs and resources. Additionally, the need for basic digital security knowledge, and media and information literacy (MIL) support is emphasized to help women sustain their online work and stay relevant. The underrepresentation and lack of visibility of successful women content creators, particularly those from rural areas, is also noted as a significant challenge.

“ The main gap is the lack of women-specific programs to train and build their capacities. For example, a housewife can be trained in creating content to teach ways to manage a home (household chores, cooking, children...ways to even organize and do laundry) which content can be monetized and generate income. Basic knowledge of digital security too is required because those who venture online, immediately they face attacks or hacks, are obliged to abandon. Also, MIL needs to support women who are already making ways online to sustain their work and innovate. _Blogger_

visibility

In addition to the barriers around access to resources, connectivity, education, and training, we have visibility that somehow appears as a barrier resulting from the first ones we identified.

Verily, women content creators in Cameroon also face significant challenges when it comes to visibility and representation, with women from rural communities suffering the most. These women mostly post on platforms like Facebook, X, and LinkedIn, and their diverse backgrounds are reflected in their online visibility. Indeed, we noticed that the type of content they produce echoes the obstacles they face and affects the number of likes, comments, and shares the post receives and even the number of followers.

The data revealed that all the eleven participants produced at least written content with three participants posting written content exclusively. Among these three, two receive very little engagement (0-50 likes), while another receives just 0-10 comments per post, particularly on topics related to politics and gender issues. This suggests that the type of content, its context, and its quality significantly influence the reach and impact of a message as one participant admitted:

“ (...) sometimes if not for most times, the poor will always listen to the rich in setting the tone to what is supposed to be a norm or an unspoken language. So people perceive me traveling more right now, engage more with my posts, and give more likes. When I compare the engagement with my posts when I was not traveling before, I see the difference. I know these observations might seem odd but then it is the reality. People are more eager to hear from you and get your opinion when they think you have a certain lifestyle. I also recognize that is a privilege, and yeah is going to work on how expensive you put out. _Feminist Digital Storyteller_

Women content creators in urban areas, with relatively easy access to financial, infrastructural, and training opportunities, have been producing content for an average of 64 months, with about 9 posts per month. Their content receives an average of 125 likes, 38 comments, and 19 shares, particularly when it relates to women's rights, gender equality, or politics. Some of these urban-based creators have more than 6,000 followers on Facebook and are also gaining an audience on X.

However, there are disparities even among the participants living in urban areas, and even more accentuated for their rural counterparts. The low internet quality and affordability in rural areas significantly affect the visibility of women content creators from these communities. While one rural-based participant managed to have up to 1,000 followers and receive substantial online engagement, the other two rural participants reported an average of 2 to 5 posts per month with poor image quality, and one of them shared that she had learned everything by herself on YouTube, without any formal training.

Furthermore, the urban-based participants highlighted that women content creators from rural areas suffer from even greater online visibility challenges when attempting to voice their experiences. This rural-urban divide compounds the visibility issues, as the perspectives and contributions of women outside of major cities tend to receive less attention and support if they are not beautifully set out as posts with high-quality photos and videos will foster more discussion than only written posts.

Safety and online harassment

“ Yes, one of my accounts was hacked and one was banned. _Blogger_

Despite the gradual impact that women content creators in Cameroon are having on their communities, they often face substantial challenges and obstacles in their digital activism. Nine out of eleven participants shared that their content is fostering positive change, as evidenced by this quote:

“ It has helped a lot because I received this feedback frequently, and also there is behavioral change because people that are interested in social justice are beginning to ask questions like ‘ if I want to know more, where can I go? is there an organization where can volunteering so that I can support people in my community? this is happening in my community too.’ So there’s this behavioral change and there’s also been an eye, people in my audience have shared that they’re beginning to see gender-based violence, for example in their communities. _Feminist Digital Storyteller_

However, these women content creators also experience a significant amount of backlash and violence online. Nine out of the eleven women reported experiences of cyberbullying, harassment, and misogynistic comments, as exemplified by these two quotes:

“ Because they can say they know better, “women don’t know anything, and moreover. Do you even have the chest? “ Imagine, and you have to go out there to have your voice heard,... sometimes, these are the kinds of challenges we experience: we get insulted, we get minimized, we get belittled. But as a woman you need to keep pushing forward regardless of the challenges that you go through and...you just need to push through. _Journalist_

“ Yes, they send you nude pictures of themselves and saying ‘you are writing all of that. Can you resist this?’. _Blogger_

The harassment is even more extreme for women who openly identify themselves as feminists or come from Muslim communities, often leading to the deletion of posts, changes in content themes, and the need to take breaks from online activity to reduce the risks and consequences of their empowering content, as expressed in this quote:

“ Unfortunately, misogyny is quite widespread in Cameroon, both within our families and in our society. (...) As I am a feminist and I openly identify as one, I sometimes experience a lot of cyberbullying across all my accounts. People harass me, report my accounts, and are very verbally abusive online. So what I often do now is either disconnect completely, taking a period like a week where I don’t connect and am not visible. _Blogger_

Despite the significant impact and challenges faced by women content creators in Cameroon, the existing support systems and initiatives to empower and protect them appear to be quite limited.

Existing support systems, initiatives, and policies for empowering women content creators in Cameroon

Based on the data collected, it appears that the existing support systems and initiatives for empowering women content creators in Cameroon are quite limited. Though there are existing networks like the Cameroon Association of Bloggers, that help with training sometimes, when asked about funding or sponsorship opportunities available to support this demographic, the majority of respondents either stated that they are unaware of any such opportunities (6 out of 9) or directly confirmed that there are none (3 out of 9).

Similarly, when inquiring about the presence of specific government programs or initiatives catering to the needs of women content creators, the responses were equally discouraging. Three participants admitted that they do not know of such offerings, while the majority (7 out of 10) directly stated that no initiatives were tailored to this content creation.

This need for more awareness and availability of targeted support systems suggests that women content creators in Cameroon face an uphill battle in accessing the resources and assistance they require to thrive in their respective fields. The absence of funding, sponsorships, and specialized programs indicates a significant gap in the infrastructure needed to empower and enable these creators to reach their full potential.

Recommendations

The participants provided several recommendations during the interviews, addressing various stakeholders. To foster an inclusive digital landscape, especially for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), and to amplify the voice of women digital content creators in Cameroon, they provided a set of context-based recommendations to policymakers, tech platforms, and other stakeholders like civil society organizations.

Recommendations for Policymakers

- Promote internet access, affordable and of good quality for everyone by investing in infrastructure and support services, digital literacy training, capacity-building programs, and boot camps to empower women digital content creators, throughout the country
- Provide material support, such as equipment procurement, to facilitate the content creation efforts of women who are already actively creating online content.
- Develop robust data protection and cybersecurity regulations to safeguard women's digital rights and privacy, and ensure the timely and effective implementation of policies and laws addressing online violence against women.
- Indeed, the national agency ANTIC (National Agency for Information and Communication Technologies) claims to protect against online harassment, but the process of reporting and getting cases resolved is very slow, often taking up to 6 months. There is a need for more efficient and responsive solutions to address online violence and harassment faced by women in a time-effective manner.

“ to make sure that whenever a woman is being maybe marginalized or body shamed or insulted or even violated on social media, she should have the possibility to report or to signal it” and get a solution. *_Feminist Digital Storyteller_*

- Create specialized bodies or commissions that can focus on online safety and security, with a particular emphasis on addressing the challenges faced by women content creators.
- The goal here should be to provide a dedicated mechanism to monitor, follow up, and support women creators in navigating online safety issues, rather than leaving them to handle these challenges themselves.

- Adopt a green line measure:

“ We need to have a green line where on social media whenever I feel like I am not comfortable with this person I can signal it and block the person. _ Blogger_

- Organize skill-building boot camps to introduce girls and women to web development, online marketing, and other internet-related skills to expand their knowledge and comfort with the internet beyond just basic messaging and social media applications.
- A need to closely examine the implementation and effectiveness of the various existing laws and legislation related to cybersecurity, terrorism, and the general use of online platforms laws and policies in addressing the gendered nature of online harassment and violence against women.
- Implement gender-based laws and policies that promote equality and protect women from discrimination and violence but also, from online harassment and bullying, and make sure the laws are repressive and lead to physical punishment.

“ policymakers to really recognize the online space as a space that can cause a lot of harm. And as such put in place policies and laws that can move beyond that online space to a physical punishment because there are a lot of people who have committed suicide because of hate speech; for example, people’s images have been used online without their consent. So can we have policies and laws that are very specific to those online discriminations, to that online violence? _Feminist Digital Storyteller_

- Policymakers need to ensure that women human rights defenders are adequately protected, both online and offline when collecting data for their content as they often face threats, harassment, and intimidation when working in the field.
- Provide assistive tools and Apps. Indeed, the government should ensure that digital platforms and tools are designed to be accessible and inclusive for PWDs, such as those with visual impairments.
- Government to implement policies that mandate the inclusion and accessibility of digital platforms for PWDs as we noticed that digital platforms and services provided in Cameroon are not sufficiently inclusive for PWDs, who often require assistance to navigate them.

Recommendations for tech platform

Participants admitted they are there to make their money as they are into business and are fishing for more and more subscribers and cannot easily ban certain things. However, the women interviewed insisted on the following measures.

- Transparency from tech platforms

“ I keep feeling like they are not transparent about their data policies what they do with the data, they collect. because you find yourself in a situation where it just suffices now in Cameroon to go to an agency and they ask for your phone number and With your phone number they have your full name date of birth and all of that. So where did they get that information from? So it should surely be from these Communication companies so all of that means they sell these data. _Journalist_

Participants expressed concerns about the lack of transparency from tech platforms regarding their data policies and how they use the data they collect from users. They felt that tech platforms need to be more transparent about their data practices.

- Contextual policies and processes

“ For tech platform, can it be more contextual? because most of these I’m just remembering how my last page went down and I wrote to Facebook. Facebook Was like I need to send him a registration of taxpayers number, I need to send him a location, I need to send a lot of things that were not contextual to Cameroon realities and I could not get those documents in Cameroon, so I could not recover that page and that was lost because they cannot help me if I don’t provide all of that documentation. So having procedures for Europe or America and to bring into Africa that is struggling to first of all understand how things work and see exploring all of the features of these platforms, how does that even help us so connecting where things are evolving. _Feminist Digital Storyteller_

Participants highlighted the need for tech platforms to have more context-aware policies and processes, especially for users in regions like Cameroon.

- On-the-ground presence and understanding:

“ (...) can we have those offices who can come on understand our laws and understand our digital telecommunication and embedded into their platform and tech laws? _Feminist Digital Storyteller_

Participants suggested that tech platforms should have local representatives or advisors who can better understand the laws, regulations, and digital/telecommunication landscape in Cameroon and different regions. This would help platforms develop more appropriate and responsive policies and processes.

- Timely and appropriate responsiveness when reporting an issue of online harassment:

“ And reporting too should be timely when you signal a page when you report it, the timely response, you don’t get it. And when you get a response, you have to explain and explain and explain before they even recognize if that is violence in that place or it is violence in the Western World. So they need to compare and compare before. So they should have people on the ground, be it advisors or something like that will be really great on how this works and for. _Communicator_

Participants emphasized the need for timely and appropriate content moderation by tech platforms. They felt that current reporting and response mechanisms are often slow and lack contextual understanding, leading to delayed or ineffective action against harmful content.

- Regulation and monitoring of emerging technologies:

“ So I think regulation is very most important on social media. I mean, we already see they have the coming of AI. AI is this the tool that has coming now and you never know who is actually doing what before you see anything you have graphics coming out in front of you, You don’t know their sources or origin as much as we know that it is and a tool that has come out which can be positive or negative. But again, it is good that we regulate this as well. We monitor these. _Blogger Journalist_

Participants recognized the importance of regulating social media and other tech platforms, particularly in light of the rise of AI and other emerging technologies. They felt that these technologies should be monitored and regulated to ensure they are not misused or causing harm.

- Promoting inclusivity: Participants recommended that tech platforms should actively support and feature content from women creators, as well as create safe online spaces where people can express themselves without fear of harassment or discrimination.

To complete these recommendations to tech platforms, we, the research team, noticed a general issue related to connectivity so we recommend:

- Mobile network operators (MNOs) to lower costs, increase quality and access, and come up with better packages.

For example, tech companies are very unlikely based on precedence to open an office in Cameroon or to take issues with priority given the low profit margins for them. With the increased number of social media users and vibrant community of digital content creators, it would be interesting for them to provide training on content creation, and video editing, especially if they want more users.

- Local digital media to strengthen their skills in digital storytelling and innovate in the type of content they produce to make their content more attractive. Also, they should organize trainings for women interested in digital media.

Recommendations for other stakeholders like Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), community-based organizations, and NGO

These are mostly around training, advocacy, synergy of action, sharing their work, and pushing for accountability from various institutions. Participants suggested to these stakeholders to :

- Offer training programs to women on online visibility, content creation, fact-checking, video editing, tagging, context analysis before posting, and the importance of posting high-quality content both in urban and rural communities.

The goal is to help women to learn how to effectively create and share content online.

- Advocacy efforts by CSOs to push for accountability from relevant institutions and stakeholders.

This includes advocating for better internet infrastructure, quality, and accessibility, especially in rural areas.

- More education and training programs for community-based organizations, civil society groups, and other stakeholders on digital security, media and information literacy (MIL), and supporting women content creators.
- Regularly evaluating the impact of policies and initiatives related to women's content creation to ensure they are effective and suited to the local Cameroonian context.
- Addressing representation gaps and lack of visibility for women in the content creation field through targeted training and support.
- Exploring alternative low-bandwidth or offline content-sharing platforms to better reach women, especially in rural areas.
- Encouraging responsible online behaviors and practices from the start to reduce negative experiences for women content creators.
- Increased investment and support from international organizations to improve internet access, infrastructure, and affordability.
- Promoting collaboration and synergy among different organizations working on issues of online violence and support for women content creators.
- Creating safe place where women harassed online can come and share their stories and have mental support
- Establishing more media outlets created and led by women, for women, to increase representation and visibility.

Limitations

In this study, there are a few limitations that we have highlighted. The list is non-exhaustive.

- The participants of the study were only digital content creators. However, it could have been good if we had included insights from policymakers, Civil Society Organizations, telecommunications companies, and tech platform developers. Their perspectives could have complemented the participant-centered data and informed a more comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand. This could have strengthened the collaborative and action-oriented aspects of the research, ensuring that the findings are translated into meaningful and impactful interventions.
- Despite exploring participants' social media accounts to understand how audience engagement evolved, using longitudinal study designs where data could have been collected repeatedly over a period of time would have yielded more meaningful results.
- Also, no persons with disabilities (PWD) were interviewed. There is no doubt that their lived experiences would have brought additional insights to the study and the recommendations given by the participants.

Conclusion

This research shed light on the intricate relationship between intersectionality and digital content creation in Cameroon. The findings emphasize how gender, geographical location, socioeconomic status, and cultural background influence the motivation, experiences, challenges, and types of content created by women in the digital sphere as they advocate for gender equality and women's political participation.

The exploration of the participants' lived experiences has unveiled the complex web of barriers they face due to their intersecting identities. They encounter challenges such as entrenched social norms, limited internet connectivity and affordability, especially in rural areas, scarcity of resources for content creation tools, training and skills development, lack of monetization opportunities and support policies, online harassment and sexual testing, as well as power dynamics that privilege certain identities over others, globally influencing their online visibility. Despite these obstacles, these women content creators demonstrate remarkable resilience and determination in creating digital spaces for self-expression and advocacy.

The recommendations from the participants provide valuable insights for creating a safer and more inclusive digital environment. They call for increased digital literacy, capacity building, training in fact-checking, storytelling, and online visibility. They also emphasize the importance of collaboration among CSOs, affordable universal internet access, effective gender-based laws for both online and offline spaces, and policy reforms at the tech platform level. These highlight the crucial need for a comprehensive, intersectional approach to empower women and other marginalized voices in the digital sphere.

However, the research presents some limitations. The absence of key stakeholders such as policymakers, tech platforms, and PWDs, as participants limited the breadth of insights and recommendations collected. Additionally, a longitudinal research design could have unveiled further information on the evolving behaviors of content creators and their audiences.

As a developing country, Cameroon's digital ecosystem and the experiences of its content creators provide valuable insights that can help shape policies and initiatives to unleash the potential of the digital space. This can help in challenging dominant narratives, fostering communities, and advocating for social change. The digital content created by Cameroonian content creators, fueled by their personal experiences and a mix of struggles, serves as a powerful tool for amplifying women's voices. It is essential to understand the barriers and obstacles faced by women content creators to promote a more inclusive and equitable digital landscape, where diverse voices and perspectives can be amplified.

As the technology revolution continues to reshape the global landscape, this research underscores the importance of gaining a deeper understanding of intersectionality and its implications for digital content creation and consumption in developing countries like Cameroon. Only through such a comprehensive and contextual approach can we strive for a future where individuals with diverse intersecting identities can truly prosper in the digital age.

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