

# The use of internet and mobile phone and anxieties of mobility in urban Cameroon

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**This dissertation project aims at making a contribution to an understanding of intersections of New Media use and mobility/migration. The focus lies on transforming patterns of sociality and solidarity, related to interpersonal social relations mediated through internet and mobile phone. Main attention is directed to urban youth in Bamenda, in Cameroon's North West Province.**



Cybercafé interior in Bamenda, Cameroon

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## Research questions and background

New Media technologies offer opportunities of sociality in physical absence, negotiated between desire for closeness or distance, under constraints of economic drawbacks, access to communication technologies and related skills. Patterns of solidarity are negotiated relating to claims for financial support and facilitating migration, vis-à-vis relatives and friends abroad - negotiations, which are as well shaped by images of a promising realm of „the West“. Research questions therefore relate to how practices of New Media use among youth in Bamenda contribute to their aspirations and notions of “a good life” and “success”, which can guide as orientation for social practices of networking, linking up and reaching out to opportunities. Through the lens of the concept of “liveness” (Auslander 1999, Couldry 2003, 2004), it will be addressed, how internet and mobile phone are used in the setting in order to negotiate positionality vis-à-vis imagined potentials, how they reproduce and transform notions of sociality and solidarity, and how New Media communication is adding to overall sociality in the setting.

## Methodology

Narrative interviews and informal conversation with New Media users were conducted, background information about the development of ICT in the setting was collected and participa-

tory observation was systematically carried out in youth's social spaces related to their use of internet and mobile phone. Additionally, prevalent “narratives” related to youth's aspirations on a local level were collected and analysed. Interviews were also conducted with Cameroonian migrants in Switzerland. The collaboration with a „PhD-tandem partner“, asking similar questions from a different perspective, offers opportunities for exchange and reflection.

## First Results

Enhanced opportunities of taking part in each other's lives and involvement of migrants on a local level, enable negotiations of contested forms of sociality and solidarity, which are reflected again in local appropriation of New Media, various social practices and narratives.

## Relevance

Aims are to better understand migrant's social relations to their communities of origin, and impacts of mediated social relations and New Media use on youth in urban social spaces. In the view of the exceptional growth of New Media in many African countries, and the ongoing importance of migration issues, it will be interesting to examine the role of internet and mobile phone related to these dynamics of mobility from a local perspective.