Social Media as a Political Platform in Africa: A Bibliometric Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study employs bibliometric analysis to scrutinize the pivotal journals, institutions, and countries at the nexus of social media and political discourse in Africa. Utilizing VOSviewer, a dataset of 123 publications from 2013 to 2023 was culled from Scopus Database. The analysis encompasses diverse methodologies, each tailored to the specific nature of bibliometric investigation. "Information, Communication and Society" emerged as the foremost journal in this domain, while South Africa spearheaded contributions, followed by the United States and the United Kingdom. The National Research Foundation played a prominent role as an influential institution. Notably, four distinct thematic clusters emerged, illuminating significant research areas such as the role of political platforms on human rights, the influence of social media on community engagement, the impact of media platforms on African conflicts, and social media's contribution to freedom through discourse. This study represents a pioneering bibliometric endeavor in comprehensively gauging the landscape of social media and politics in Africa, offering valuable insights for scholars and policymakers navigating this dynamic terrain.

Keywords: Social Media, Politics, Africa, Bibliometric Analysis, Research Trends

ABSTRAK

Studi ini menggunakan analisis bibliometrik untuk meneliti jurnal, institusi, dan negara penting yang berhubungan dengan media sosial dan wacana politik di Afrika. Memanfaatkan VOSviewer, kumpulan data 123 publikasi dari tahun 2013 hingga 2023 diambil dari Database Scopus. Analisis ini mencakup beragam metodologi, masing-masing disesuaikan dengan sifat spesifik penyelidikan bibliometrik. "Informasi, Komunikasi dan Masyarakat" muncul sebagai jurnal terkemuka dalam domain ini, sementara Afrika Selatan mempelopori kontribusinya, diikuti oleh Amerika Serikat dan Inggris. Yayasan Riset Nasional memainkan peran penting sebagai lembaga yang berpengaruh. Empat kelompok tematik yang berbeda muncul, menyoroti bidang-bidang penelitian penting seperti peran platform politik terhadap hak asasi manusia, pengaruh media sosial terhadap keterlibatan masyarakat, dampak platform media terhadap konflik di Afrika, dan kontribusi media sosial terhadap kebebasan melalui wacana. Studi ini mewakili upaya bibliometrik perintis dalam mengukur secara komprehensif lanskap media sosial dan politik di Afrika, menawarkan wawasan berharga bagi para akademisi dan pembuat kebijakan dalam menavigasi medan dinamis ini.

Kata Kunci: Media Sosial, Politik, Afrika, Analisis Bibliometrik, Tren Penelitian

130

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the advent of social media has revolutionized the global communication landscape, offering unprecedented avenues for individuals and communities to connect, share information, and engage in discourse. In the African context, where diverse political landscapes intersect with a rapidly evolving digital sphere, the role of social media in shaping political narratives and mobilizing populations has become a subject of increasing interest and scrutiny (Barrett-Maitland & Lynch, 2020; Daly et al., 2019; Srinivasan & Diepeveen, 2019). With the proliferation of the Internet and its increasing accessibility, the global population of social network users has experienced a remarkable surge. Presently, approximately 3.2 billion individuals actively engage with various social media platforms. Through these websites and applications, users are afforded the means to interact, communicate, and exchange information seamlessly. Additionally, social media has emerged as an invaluable wellspring of real-time information, representing a veritable goldmine of current events and insights. It serves as a dynamic tool for staying abreast of ongoing developments, allowing interested parties to track individual users' perspectives and commentary on live events, participate in activities, and stay connected with friends and family. This transformative medium is reshaping public discourse, setting trends, and establishing agendas across a wide spectrum of subjects, spanning from environmental issues and politics to technology and the entertainment industry (Cailian, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Nguyen & Hekman, 2022).

This bibliometric analysis seeks to systematically explore the scholarly literature on the utilization of social media as a political platform in Africa. By employing bibliometric methods, we aim to dissect the trends, patterns, and key thematic areas that have emerged within this burgeoning field of study (Rejeb et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2023). Bibliometric analysis, as a quantitative assessment of academic publications, provides a robust framework for discerning the intellectual evolution of a given subject, highlighting seminal contributions, identifying emerging research directions, and suggest intellectual trends in this field (Han, 2020). This methodology can provide a more contextual, holistic, relational, and intellectual landscape concerning specific topics (Cen & Paul, 2001). Africa, with its multitude of cultures, languages, and political systems, presents a unique and dynamic landscape for the study of social media's impact on political discourse (Perez et al., 2023; Akram et al., 2022). The continent's history of political movements, democratic transitions, and socio-economic disparities underscores the importance of understanding how digital platforms are wielded as tools for political expression and mobilization.

The influence of social media on political dynamics in Africa is particularly pronounced in light of its potential to amplify voices that were traditionally marginalized or underrepresented. Moreover, the rapid dissemination of information through platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp have demonstrated the capacity to galvanize collective action, as exemplified by the various youth-led movements and advocacy campaigns that have gained traction across the continent (Armitage et al., 2020; Cheeseman et al., 2020; Katz & Nandi, 2021). Despite the growing body of literature in this domain, a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of the field is notably absent. This study fills this gap by employing a rigorous methodology to systematically assess the existing body of research, thereby providing a panoramic view of the current state of scholarship on the intersection of social media and politics in Africa (Rejeb et al., 2022; Goyal & Kumar, 2021; Haba et al., 2022).

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines the methodology employed for data collection and analysis. Section 3 presents the results, including key bibliometric indicators, prominent authors, and influential works. Section 4 offers a thematic synthesis, identifying prevalent research trends and emerging areas of inquiry. Finally, Section 5 concludes with reflections on the implications of this bibliometric analysis for future scholarship and policy considerations. In sum, this study endeavors to shed light on the evolving scholarly discourse surrounding social media's role as a political platform in Africa. By leveraging bibliometric analysis, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the intellectual landscape, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between technology, politics, and society on the African continent (Kolade et al., 2022; Mansfield et al., 2023).

METHODS

The first step in conducting this bibliometric analysis involved systematically collecting relevant scholarly literature. This was achieved through comprehensive searches across Scopus databases (Linnenluecke et al., 2020; Chakraborty et al., 2021). The search strings were carefully crafted to capture a wide spectrum of publications addressing the intersection of social media and politics in the African context. To ensure the relevance and reliability of the collected data, a set of inclusion criteria was established. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and books/chapters were considered for inclusion. Additionally, publications were required to be in English, reflecting the dominant language of academic discourse in this field (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019; Ergas & Hadar, 2019). The time frame for inclusion was set from 2013 to 2023, allowing for a comprehensive examination of contemporary scholarship (Tully et al., 2022; Hyland & Jiang, 2021). In phase One, the researchers use comprehensive keywords regarding the publication of social media as a political platform (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("social media" AND "Politics") 2013-2023, 4,911 documents found. In phase two, the researchers focus on social media as a political platform in Africa (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Social Media" AND "Politics" AND "Africa")) AND PUBYEAR > 2013 AND PUBYEAR < 2023 AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English") 123 documents were found and been analysis.
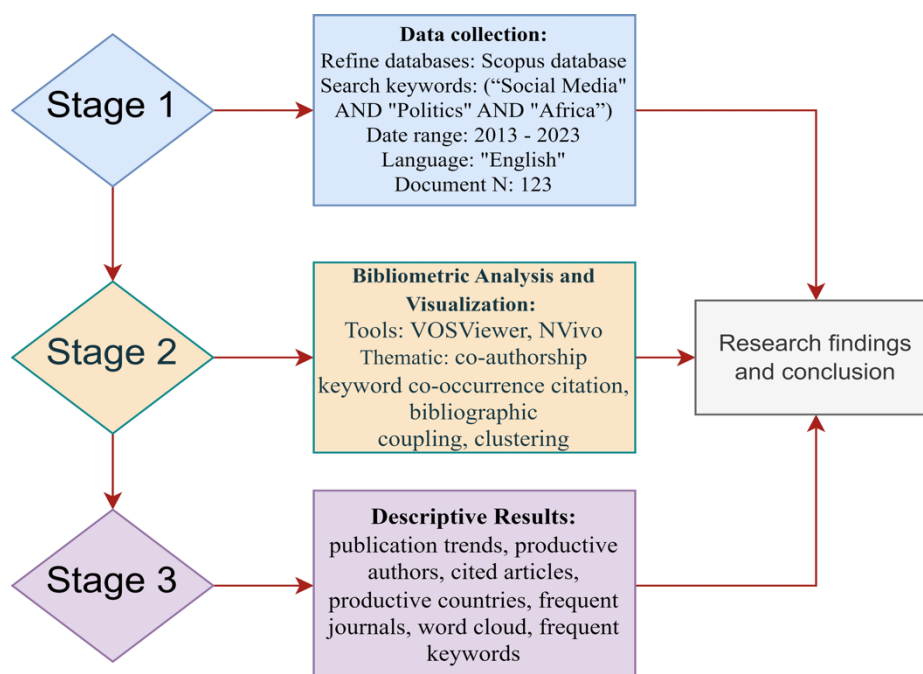

Figure 1. Authors Developed Methods

For each identified publication, pertinent bibliographic information was extracted, including title, author(s), publication year, journal/conference/book source, keywords, and abstract (Aggarwal & Wang, 2011; De Rezende et al., 2018; Lee, Jung, & Song, 2016; Mallik & Mandal, 2014). Additionally, citation counts were recorded to facilitate the assessment of the impact and influence of individual works (Tomaszewski, 2023; Gilyarevskii et al., 2022). The collected data underwent a series of quantitative analyses using Vosviewer and NVivo. Key bibliometric indicators, such as publication trends over time, authorship patterns, citation frequencies, and keyword co-occurrences, word cloud were generated. These metrics were instrumental in identifying influential authors, seminal works, and prevailing research themes within the field. To uncover relationships and connections within the body of literature, network analysis techniques were employed. Co-authorship networks were constructed to visualize collaborations among researchers, while keyword co-occurrence networks were generated to identify clusters of interrelated research topics. The qualitative aspect of the analysis involved a thematic synthesis of the extracted keywords and abstracts. This process allowed the identification of recurring themes, emerging research areas, and notable gaps in the existing literature (Newington et al., 2021; Zygouri et al., 2021; Halvorsen et al., 2020). To ensure

132

the reliability of the data and the robustness of the analysis, a random sample of publications was cross-checked by a second researcher. Any discrepancies or uncertainties were resolved through discussion and consensus (Sharma et al., 2021; Mahanty, 2021). This study strictly adhered to ethical guidelines governing academic research. All data collected and utilized in the analysis were sourced from publicly available academic publications, and no personal or sensitive information was involved. The bibliometric analysis is focused mostly on author or citation information and assesses their intellectual flow and most significant publications (Feeley, 2008; Calero-Medina & Noyons, 2008). Additionally, proper citation and acknowledgment protocols were followed to respect the intellectual property rights of authors and publishers (Perez et al., 2023; Praja et al., 2023). By employing this rigorous methodology, this bibliometric analysis aims to provide a comprehensive and objective overview of the scholarly discourse surrounding social media's role as a political platform in Africa. The combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses offers a multifaceted understanding of the field, paving the way for informed insights and future research directions (Pellegrino, 2023; Hoang et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The bibliometric analysis conducted on the topic of "Social Media as a Political Platform in Africa" encompassed a comprehensive examination of scholarly articles, books, and conference proceedings from Scopus databases. The analysis sought to reveal key trends, influential authors, and the evolution of research in this domain over time.

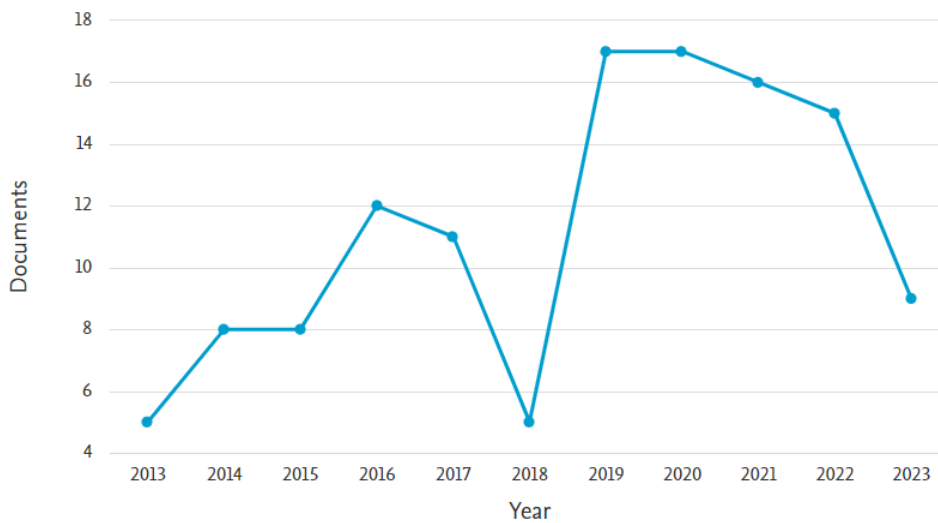**Yearly Growth Output of SM as Political Platform Publications**
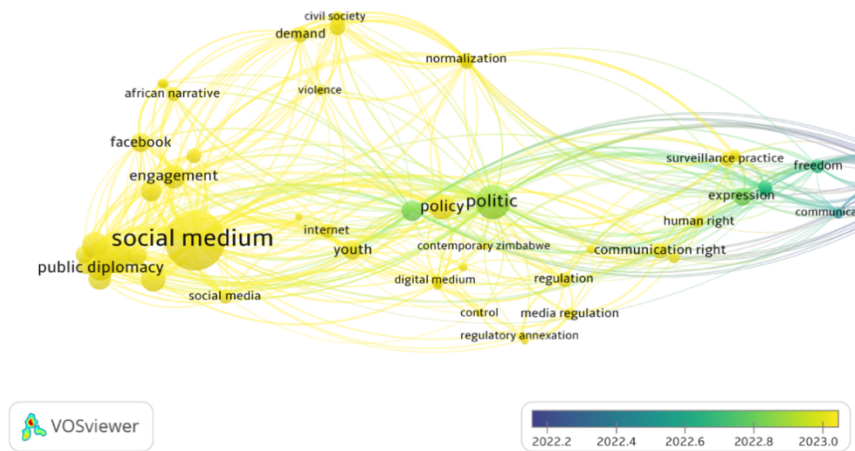

Figure 2. Growth Over Time

Figure 3. Research Trends by Year

Figure 2 and 3 depicts the temporal evolution of research in the realm of "Social Media as a Political Platform in Africa," as analyzed through bibliometric methods. In 2018, there was a notable surge in publications, with approximately 17 documents focusing on the intersection of social media and politics in Africa. This represented a significant increase compared to 2013, when there were only about five relevant publications. However, by 2022, the number of publications experienced a slight decline, settling at around 14 documents.

Figure 3 indicates a shift in research focus around 2022, where a predominant emphasis was placed on themes such as freedom, communication rights, expression, regulations, media regulations, and human rights. However, in 2023, there was a notable pivot towards different areas of interest, with a surge in studies centered on youth, public diplomacy, African narrative, violence, civil society, normalization, and engagement.

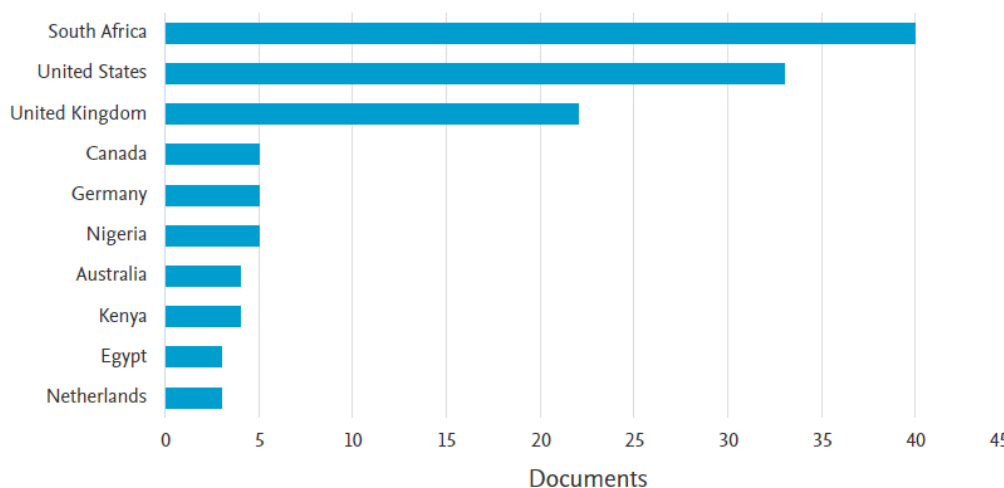**The Most influential Countries in SM and Politics Publication**

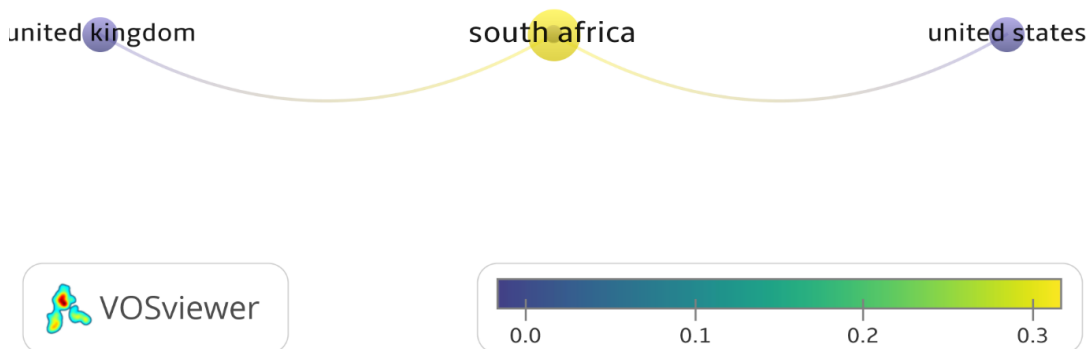**Figure 4**. The Most influential countries

134

Figure 5. The Most Productive Country

Figures 4 and 5 show that the research on social media and politics in Africa is not evenly distributed across the continent. South Africa takes the lead in publications concerning social media and political topics, boasting a substantial 40 documents. Following closely behind is the United States, with approximately 33 publications indicating a significant research interest in this intersection. The United Kingdom also exhibits a notable presence in this field, with around 22 publications. In contrast, the Netherlands has a comparatively smaller footprint, contributing about four documents to the body of research in this area. This distribution highlights the prominent role of African and Western nations in the discourse surrounding social media and African politics. Also, there is a noticeable gap in research from other regions, particularly those in North Africa.

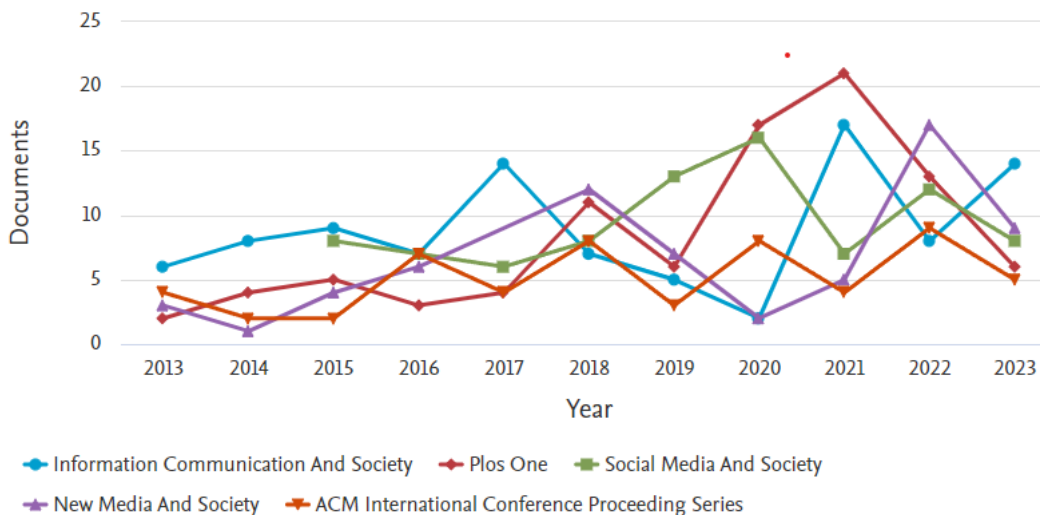**Top Most Influential Journals in SM and Politics Publications**

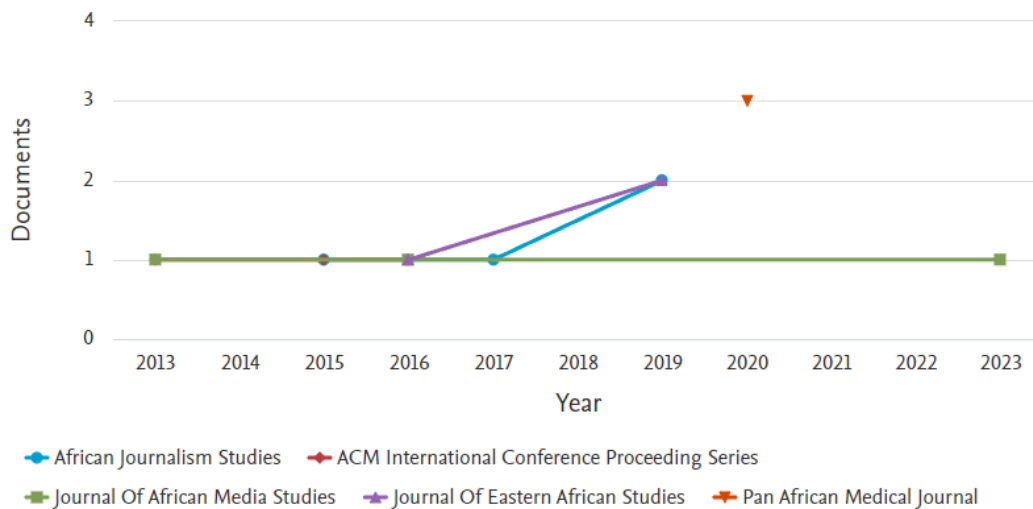**Figure 6**. Social Media and Politics 2013-2023

Figure 7. Top Journals and Yearly Publications

Figure 6 highlights the top influential journals in this field globally from 2013 to 2023. Notably, "Information, Communication, and Society" emerged as the most prolific journal, featuring 97 documents in the Scopus database over this period. A significant surge in publications in 2021 is worth noting, with an impressive tally of 17 documents. Following closely behind, "Plos One" also stands out, boasting 92 documents from 2013 to 2023, with a peak of around 22 documents in 2021. Figure 7, focusing on social media and political publications within the African context, presents intriguing trends. The ACM International Conference Proceeding Series demonstrated a substantial uptick in publications in 2020, suggesting a growing interest and engagement in this area. Additionally, the Journal of Eastern African Studies emerged as a noteworthy contributor in 2019, particularly during the challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic, alongside the African Journalism Studies journal. This indicates the continued scholarly dedication to understanding the relationship between social media and politics in the African context, even during times of global upheaval.

Distribution of SM and Political Publications in the Most Influential Institutions
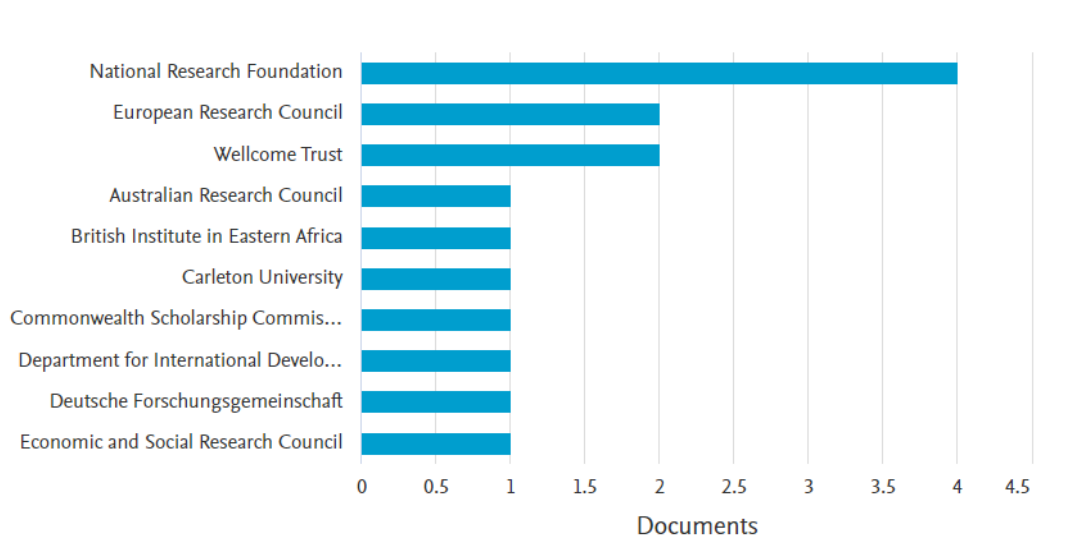

Figure 8. The Most Influential Institutions

Figure 8 provides a snapshot of social media distribution and political publications across influential institutions. Notably, the National Research Foundation, representing South Africa, stands

out with a substantial contribution of 4 documents. This suggests a noteworthy dedication to researching the intersection of social media and politics within the South African context. On the other hand, the remaining institutions, such as the European Research Council, Wellcome Trust, Australian Research Council, British Institute in Eastern Africa, Carleton University, and Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, predominantly hail from Western countries. This indicates a strong interest and involvement from Western institutions in this field. Overall, this distribution highlights the global nature of research in social media and politics, with contributions coming from both African and Western institutions. It also suggests a potential opportunity for further collaboration and knowledge exchange between institutions from different regions.

The Top SM and Politics Research Area Categories
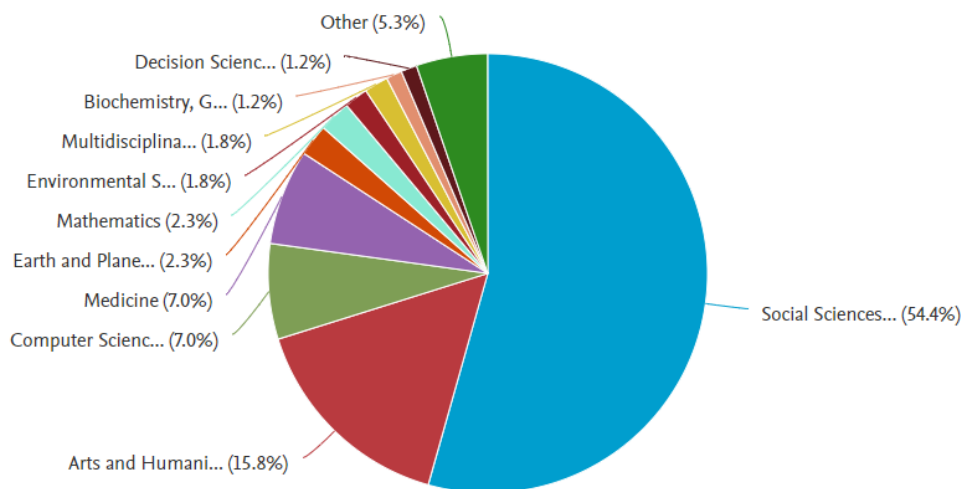
Figure 9. The Top SM and Politics Research Area Categories

Figure 9 provides a comprehensive overview of Africa's top subject area categories for social media and political research between 2013 and 2023. This distribution emphasizes that the majority of research in this domain falls within the realm of Social Sciences, with a substantial number of 93 publications. This indicates a significant focus on the societal and political implications of social media within the African context. Following closely, Arts and Humanities also demonstrate considerable interest in exploring this intersection, with 27 publications. Furthermore, the presence of research in fields like Computer Science, Medicine, Earth and Planetary Sciences, Mathematics, and Environmental Science underscores the interdisciplinary nature of social media and political studies in Africa. This suggests a holistic approach to understanding the multifaceted impact of social media on various aspects of African society and beyond.

Co-occurrence and Emerging Trends

Figure 10. Emerging Trends

The final objective of this study involves conducting a thematic analysis of 123 publications about social media and politics in Africa. This analysis is conducted by identifying co-occurring keywords present in the titles, keywords, and abstracts of the gathered publications. This cartography aims to delineate significant research areas in which social media and politics intersect in African contexts and to group them systematically. For this analysis, we employed the co-occurrence type of analysis and selected "All keywords" as the unit of analysis in VOSviewer. We set a threshold level of a minimum of 10 occurrences for a keyword to be considered. Subsequently, a keyword network visualization map was generated, incorporating the co-occurrence frequencies of the top 40 keywords selected from a pool of 501 retrieved keywords, as demonstrated in Figure 10. The results of this analysis have unveiled four prominent thematic clusters, further expounded upon in Figure 10. These clusters represent cohesive areas of research interest, providing valuable insights into the key focal points within the social media domain and politics in Africa.

Figure 11. The Word Cloud of Social Media and Politics in Africa's

138

Table 1. Themes in SM and Politics Publications in Africa

Cluster Name	Theme	Sub-Theme Examples
Red Cluster	The Role of Political Platforms on Human Rights	Communication rights, contribution, control, digital medium, discourse, human rights, internet content, knowledge, media practice, media regulation, mena region, policy
Blue Cluster	The role of social media in Community Engagement	Engagement, fake news, group idea, instance, international co-existence, mass media, Middle East, public diplomacy, relationship, social medium, soft power, use voice.
Yellow Cluster	The effect of media platforms on African conflicts	Civil society, demand, government, insecurity, normalization, peace, policymaker, role scholar, violence
Green Cluster	Social media Role in freedom through Discourse.	Expression, Representation, African narrative, contemporary, freedom, Zimbabwe, Facebook, medium platform, sentiment, youth, Discourse.

Red Cluster: The Role of Political Platforms on Human Rights
This cluster centers on the impact of political platforms on human rights. It delves into aspects like communication rights, control over information dissemination, digital medium usage, and policies governing media practices (Cong & Thumfart, 2022). Additionally, it considers the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) a significant focus area. The presence of terms such as "discourse," "knowledge," and "contribution" suggests a broader exploration of how political platforms influence human rights-related discussions.

Blue Cluster: The Role of Social Media in Community Engagement
This cluster revolves around the influence of social media in fostering community engagement. It addresses themes like fake news dissemination, public diplomacy, and the use of social media as a medium for international co-existence (Kaleem, 2023) (Upadhayay & Prathapagiri, 2023). Additionally, terms like "soft power" and "voice use" indicate an interest in understanding how social media platforms can be harnessed to shape public discourse and relationships on a global scale.

Yellow Cluster: The Effect of Media Platforms on African Conflicts
This cluster investigates the impact of media platforms on conflicts within the African context. It touches upon factors such as civil society involvement, government policies, and the role of scholars in understanding and influencing conflict dynamics. Additionally, terms like "insecurity," "peace," and "violence" suggest a focus on how media platforms intersect with issues of security and peacebuilding in Africa (Maseno, 2023) (Simangan et al., 2023).

Green Cluster: Social Media's Role in Freedom through Discourse
This cluster centers on the role of social media in promoting freedom of expression and discourse. It explores the representation of various narratives, with a specific emphasis on the African context. Terms such as "African narrative," "Zimbabwe," and "youth" indicate a focus on contemporary issues and the role of platforms like Facebook in enabling discourse. The term "medium platform" suggests an exploration of different communication channels (Sihlongonyane, 2020).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the bibliometric analysis offers a comprehensive overview of the research landscape surrounding "Social Media as a Political Platform in Africa". The identified trends, influential countries, journals, institutions, and research areas provide critical insights for scholars, policymakers, and stakeholders seeking to navigate this dynamic and rapidly evolving field. Future research must attempt to build upon these foundations to address emerging challenges and leverage the potential of social media for positive political transformation across the African continent.

The analysis of publication trends revealed a notable increase in research output related to social media and politics in Africa from 2013 to 2018. However, there was a slight decline in the number of publications by 2022, indicating potential shifts in research focus or external factors influencing scholarly activity. South Africa emerged as a leading contributor to research in this field, followed closely by the United States and the United Kingdom. The National Research Foundation in South Africa played a significant role, underscoring the prominence of local institutions in shaping the discourse on social media and politics in Africa. "Information, Communication and Society" and "Plos One" were identified as the most prolific journals in this area, with a substantial number of publications. These journals serve as important platforms for disseminating research on the intersection of social media and politics. Various funding sponsors from both African and Western contexts have played a crucial role in supporting research endeavors in this field. The National Research Foundation, European Research Council, and Wellcome Trust were among the notable contributors, reflecting a diverse range of organizations investing in this area of study.

The thematic analysis highlighted four significant clusters of research themes: The Role of Political Platforms on Human Rights, The Role of social media in Community Engagement, The Effect of Media Platforms on African Conflicts, Social Media's Role in Freedom through Discourse, these clusters provide a comprehensive understanding of the various dimensions through which social media interacts with political dynamics in Africa.

This research underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of the relationship between social media and politics in Africa. It illuminates the diverse perspectives, interests, and contributions of researchers, institutions, and countries in this field. The identified thematic clusters offer a roadmap for future studies, providing valuable insights into the key areas of focus and potential directions for further exploration in the intersection of social media and politics in Africa.

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