

Research Article

Social Media on Election Campaigns: Bibliometric Analysis of Global Research Trends and Future Directions

Rayns Keneth Ampon¹

1. King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Thon Buri, Thailand

This study employs bibliometric analysis to investigate the evolving research landscape of social media's impact on elections from 2010 to 2024, using Scopus data. Social media has profoundly altered political communication, taking rigorous examination of its influence. This analysis identifies key authors, publications, and trends, and maps the intellectual structure of the field. Additionally, this explores communication research evolution, focusing on misinformation, algorithmic influence, and voter behavior. By analyzing co-authorship, co-occurrence, and citations, we address research questions concerning this domain's current state, emerging trends, key contributors, and core topics. This research aims to provide a comprehensive overview, highlighting knowledge gaps and informing future studies and policy development in the digital age of elections.

Correspondence: papers@team.qeios.com — Qeios will forward to the authors

Introduction

Social media has revolutionized political campaigns, from delivering and designing to receiving messages. Politicians are no longer limited to traditional tactics such as face-to-face campaigns, public speeches, and media appearances. According to Zhuravskaya et al.^[1], the accessibility of the internet and social media enables public participation in the political discourse and increased accountability, making it a tool for good candidate-to-electorate communication. It is also helpful in surveying public opinion; a simple election poll using social media reactions or comments can gauge a candidate's popularity. Politicians even deploy influencers or key opinion leaders to shape the public discourse^[2].

The message dissemination channel is vital in reaching the electorate, specifically regarding their preferred social media. Scholars worldwide have studied platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. To illustrate, using Facebook as a political platform is beneficial for dialogue with sympathizers and potential voters^[3]. The potential of content to 'go viral' and reach the desired voting demographic is important to attract attention (Larsson, 2014). Facebook posts can also evoke emotions using controversial topics (Blassnig et al.^[4].

On the other hand, Twitter research focuses on users' sentiments toward the candidates. Creating buzz during a campaign allows the electorate to see the 'backstage' moments of candidates that are otherwise neglected by mainstream media^[5]. While electoral tweets appeared more harmful than positive, they focused on genuine sentiments such as 'to criticize,' 'to vent,' and 'to ridicule.' This creates a space for public discourse about the candidate's personal and government work capabilities^[6]. Thus, using sentiment analysis on Twitter has provided valuable knowledge for campaign strategists worldwide for monitoring social conversations for political forecasting^[7]. Oikonomou and Tjortjis (2018) used sentiment analysis to report the views on Twitter related to the 2016 US elections, limiting it to geography. They found that the sentiments in three states predicted Donald Trump's victory, showing much accuracy compared to traditional polls.

Scholars now include new social media and internet players like TikTok and Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in election campaign research. TikTok, a well-known entertainment platform, has engaged users through humor and personalized messaging. As a video-based platform, it has the potential to fit the narrative of politicians either engaging in confrontation or attacks between one another's beliefs through speeches^[8]. Candidates are using TikTok to attract younger voters; they need to sway the opinion of these voters to alter their voting behavior. The main strength of the platform is its capability to create a bubble (#foryoupage) that allows the candidate to occupy the minds and hearts of the voting public using emotional currency^{[9][10][11]}. Also, humanizing the conservative or traditional politician increases their chance of persuading the general public. Joining trends and communicating with the youth through TikTok is another way to reach a diversified demographic that can change the election outcome^[12].

With the growing literature on social media in election campaign studies, this research aims to explore the trends in the field using bibliometric analysis. This quantitative research method seeks to identify the influential authors, publications, and keywords in the field. Mapping the intellectual structure is beneficial in guiding future research directions by looking at the trends and gaps in previous research.

Using Scopus as the database for research, this bibliometric analysis focuses on election campaigns in social media research from 2010–2024.

In this paper, the research goals are presented through the following research questions:

1. What is the present status of the research structure of using social media in election campaigns?
2. What recent trends can be observed in publications regarding social media and election campaigns?
3. Which key players, namely sources, authors, countries, and institutions, have contributed to driving progress in social media research in election campaigns?
4. What are the research gaps underlying the development and growth of the adoption and use of social media in election campaigns?

Literature review

Social media and elections

In the age of political communication on social media, many scholars have analyzed the roles of these platforms in changing the election landscape. For instance, in Spain, Baviera et al. (2021) studied the potential of Facebook advertising to use targeted messaging to attract a specific demographic. They found that candidates are using the platform to create their public image more than using it to share their policy. Emojis also serve as a programmatic communication tool; politicians use them to fit their desired message. Similarly, Fenoll^[13] studied the potential of Facebook posts to communicate populist rhetoric. Engaging the public is essential to generate likes and shares on the platform, showing dominance of opinion, and acknowledging users' predisposition in sharing anti-elite rhetoric to captivate voters' beliefs. While it is true that the content of Facebook posts is an effective tool in persuading the public, the danger of disinformation persists. Campaigners using misleading statements and falsehoods, often targeting political rivals, could affect the country's democratic process^[14].

If we talk about political discourse, Twitter is the top-of-mind platform. There are numerous studies using tweets to predict election results. Drawing on a corpus of 1.2 billion tweets, Chen et al. (2021) applied computational techniques to capture the political discourse on Twitter during the 2020 US Presidential elections. They unveiled that people are talking mainly about parties, debates, riots, and the transition of the President. Furthermore, Heredia et al.^[15] said that focusing on tweet volume alone in predicting 2016 election results ended up with inaccurate predictions compared to traditional polls and the election results. They suggested that looking into sentiment significantly improves accuracy. Oikonomou and

Tjortjis (2018) used sentiment analysis to report the views on Twitter related to the 2016 US elections, limiting it to geography. They found that the sentiments in three states predicted Donald Trump's victory, showing much accuracy compared to traditional polls.

The advent of social media also allowed the incorporation of multimodal materials and platforms. Politicians now use YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to vlog their way to public office. Litvinenko^[16] examined political videos on Russian YouTube during the 2018 elections. The platform served as an alternative media platform where the opposition could communicate with the public for votes, knowing that the mainstream media were state-sponsored. The use of YouTube allowed critical insights and a space for dissent, which is important for balancing the controlled political narratives in the country. In Tokyo, Japan, YouTube played a significant part in the 2024 Gubernatorial election; intense online campaigning revealed that the platform's capability to deliver varied political content is helpful in reaching a wider audience. It also allowed individuals to post independently and disseminate information, reaching the younger generation more efficiently^[17]. Consequently, videos from YouTube and Instagram were used in Bahrain to assist the public image of politicians to appear as either strong-willed or sympathetic. Though they lacked discussion on socio-political issues, they were successful in building their image. Women politicians also utilize social media more than their male counterparts^[18].

Cross-platform strategies are also present in the ever-changing social media landscape. Social media platforms may differ in functionality, algorithm, and model. Bossetta^[19] studied the digital architecture of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, which provide different affordances for politicians. He found that in the recent elections, there was an increase in social media ad spending in the United States. Facebook's large user base is the dominant platform, while more informal engagements are used on Snapchat, Twitter (X), and Instagram. Reuter & Szakonyi's (2013) case study on Russian Parliamentary elections proves that social media can be a powerful tool in political communication, explicitly raising political awareness. While government intervention and control might affect the effectiveness of the message, social media can still find a way to disseminate information.

The ubiquity of social media in our contemporary democracy underscores its importance in shaping our elections. Platforms like Facebook can help politicians connect to the electorate more effectively through targeted messaging and advertisements. While Instagram and Twitter offer different affordances, they can be helpful in image-building and political discourse. However, the public must also acknowledge the risk of disinformation and misuse of the platforms, as social media is susceptible to unverified information. In some countries, social media can function as an alternative media and a way to challenge

the state-sponsored traditional media environment. These studies provided information on the implications of social media in elections, the growing function of social media, and the threats that we might encounter in the future of election campaigns.

Bibliometric Analysis Overview

The use of bibliometric analysis to map the intellectual structure of articles published in known databases like Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, Dimensions, etc., has grown in recent years. It can be a helpful tool to understand the impact of publications in the field, the leading authors, citation networks, keywords, and the trends of the published materials. Al-Khoury et al.^[20] utilized Scopus to navigate the historical development of intellectual capital research, focusing on core principles, trends, and key contributors. This approach allowed for identifying key networks and evolving research themes within the field. Their study provided insights into practical applications for organizations aiming to leverage intellectual capital for competitive advantage.

Furthermore, looking at co-occurrences, either of keywords or authors, can provide a network of relationships. These are concepts, ideas, and relationships in the field of study, an important cognitive framework that shapes how researchers communicate, collaborate, and coordinate their thoughts in a particular field^{[21][22]} (Bornmann et al., 2017). Bibliometric analysis can also guide the future directions of the field; Alsharif et al.^[23] reported the increasing growth of neuromarketing research that deals with consumer insights rather than traditional marketing and suggested that publications are still lacking in election campaigns, advertising, and affordable neuromarketing tools.

Despite its practical implications, Subekti et al.^[24] explored the lack of publication in political communication on social media. Their study revealed that key themes in the field are information dissemination, campaigns, and strategic use. As a growing field, new terms could rise in the coming years. Obreja^[25] investigated the popular social media and elections keywords and found that words such as 'COVID-19' are associated with disinformation, fake news, and infodemic. Donald Trump's presidency also brought new terms such as meme, migration, and refugees.

In Turkey, Özkaynar^[26] suggests that in the past 40 years, only 14 studies related to political marketing and elections can be found under the Turkish authors category. Using a comparative view of international publications in Turkey, we see that there are gaps in knowledge at the local level since the data is scarce. On the other hand, Indonesian authors have published research on social media in elections for the past decade. The interest in using social media for presidential elections has garnered 63 publications recently

(Widayat et al., 2021). Likewise, African researchers closely follow the United States and the United Kingdom in publishing research articles on social media in elections. The topics included in the African scientific map are social media in community engagement, the effect of social media on African conflicts, freedom discourse, and human rights^[27].

Indeed, bibliometric analysis is essential in mapping the intellectual research structure, revealing trends, gaps, influential authors and institutions, and themes. In social media in election campaigns, bibliometric analysis has been used comparatively in Turkey, Indonesia, and Africa. These are vital findings that can address the lack of innovation in the field. While it is true that using one database for bibliometric analysis can limit the amount of study, it can be very beneficial in providing clear insight into the acceptable themes related to that database.

Below, using the data from Scopus, this table provides a clear overview of bibliometric analysis in social media and election campaign research. Table 1 contains the authors, search strategy, number of examined documents, and attributes. The data in Scopus revealed two significant things: 1) Bibliometric analysis in social media in election campaigns is a new field with the oldest publication dated 2022, and 2) The examined documents are highly reliant on the search strategy, so using the proper keywords leads to the desired results.

Author/s	Search Keywords	Number of Documents	Examined Attributes
Sanofi et al. ^[28]	Adopt Use Web 2.0 (etc.) Election Campaign	1117	Publication Trend Citation Analysis Leading Authors and Sources Countries and Institutions Subjects and Themes
Ranjan & Upadhyay ^[29]	Political advertising Political advertisers Political adverts Political advertisement	114	Bibliometric Performance Intellectual structure Objective and source Message dissemination channel Decoding behavioral patterns/receiver and its consequences
Pellegrino ^[30]	Social media Social networking sites Facebook Instagram Twitter Political Campaigns	265	Volume, Growth Trajectory, and Geographic Distribution of the Literature Analysis of Influential Authors Intellectual Structure Most Influential Source Title in the Field of Social Media about the Promotion of Political Campaigns Co-occurrence Analysis
Prakash & Dwivedi ^[31]	Political campaigning Election campaigning	1090	Authors Journal Most relevant keyword Country-level analysis and affiliations Highly globally cited document
Subekti, Nurmandi, & Salahudin ^[32]	Social media elections	1555	Trends in Global Publication Contributions of Countries Journal Analysis Research Type Institution Output Author Co-authorship Analysis Co-occurrence Analysis Contribution of Social Media in Elections

Table 1. Overview of social media in election campaign studies

Note: Only Scopus and Articles in English are included.

Methodology

The data were acquired from the Scopus database on March 25, 2025. Scopus is a widely known database of peer-reviewed articles and is highly regarded in research. While there are other databases, such as Web of Science, PubMed, and Dimensions, the Scopus website is user-friendly, specifically for young researchers. It provides an easy navigation feature that allows researchers to look for basic information such as authors, keywords, journals, citations, etc., and an opportunity to quickly search outside one's discipline^[33]. Researchers are using Scopus in different fields to navigate the multitude of data in their field of study, mainly to look at trends and potential research gaps^{[34][35][36][37]}.

Strategic search is important in bibliometric analysis as it can reveal accurate data for the study. Farooq et al.^[38] suggest strategic search space selection, using varied spaces for different keywords and a "crisscross union" strategy to capture a broader range of relevant articles since databases are sensitive to keywords. Identifying a pattern from previous research can help design and contrast the search flow strategy in bibliometric analysis^[39].

To make the search results as desired, the keywords used were classified into two sections, namely "social media" and "election campaigns." To capture the latest trends in research on the adoption and use of social media in election campaigns, the search for publication years was refined from 2010 to 2024. The initial data search results amounted to 2,023 articles. After excluding years, document types, and irrelevant documents, the remaining data amounted to 1,417 articles for further analysis, as shown in Figure 1.

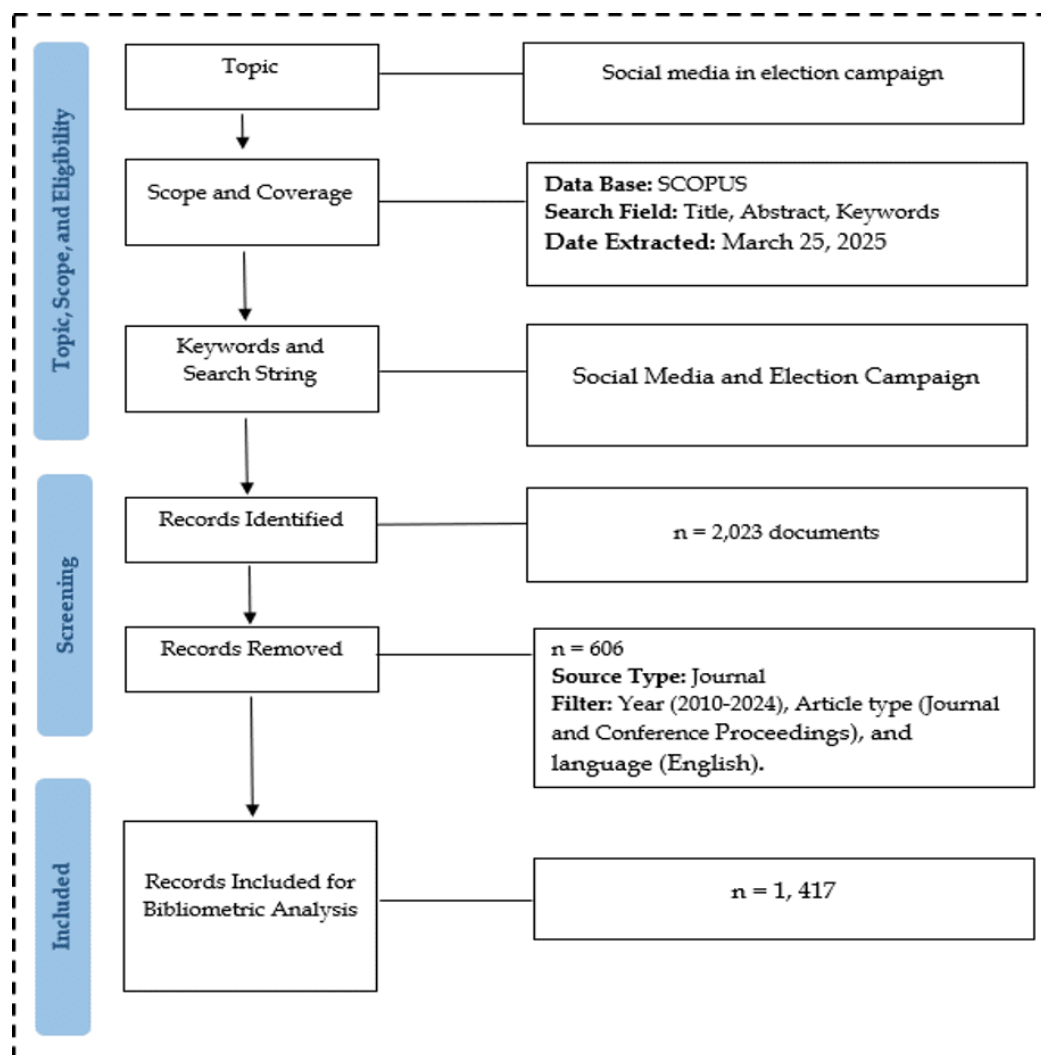


Figure 1. Search Strategy Flowchart

The structured framework of bibliometric analysis should have inclusion and exclusion criteria to refine the search strategy. Setting a review system to pre-screen data characteristics such as population, sample, design, and outcome helps determine the field's trends^[40]. The table below shows the criteria pre-set in Scopus, such as year, document type, language, and topic. This bibliometric study will look into published articles from 2010–2024, journal articles, and conference proceedings in English relevant to social media and election campaigns.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Year	2010 – 2024	–
Document Type	Journal Article, Conference	Book Reviews, Book Chapters, and Book
Language	English	Non-English
Topic	Relevant to social media and election campaigns	Irrelevant to social media and election campaigns

Table 2. *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Then, after retrieving the data from Scopus, it was processed through VOSviewer, a software that could analyze the co-occurrence of keywords and create a map based on bibliographic data. The Excel file generated 4,326 keywords. Since this research aim is to identify the leading keywords in the field, a minimum frequency of 30 occurrences in the data was used; 34 keywords appeared from the corpus, which was then cleaned for duplication, leading to 25 keywords.

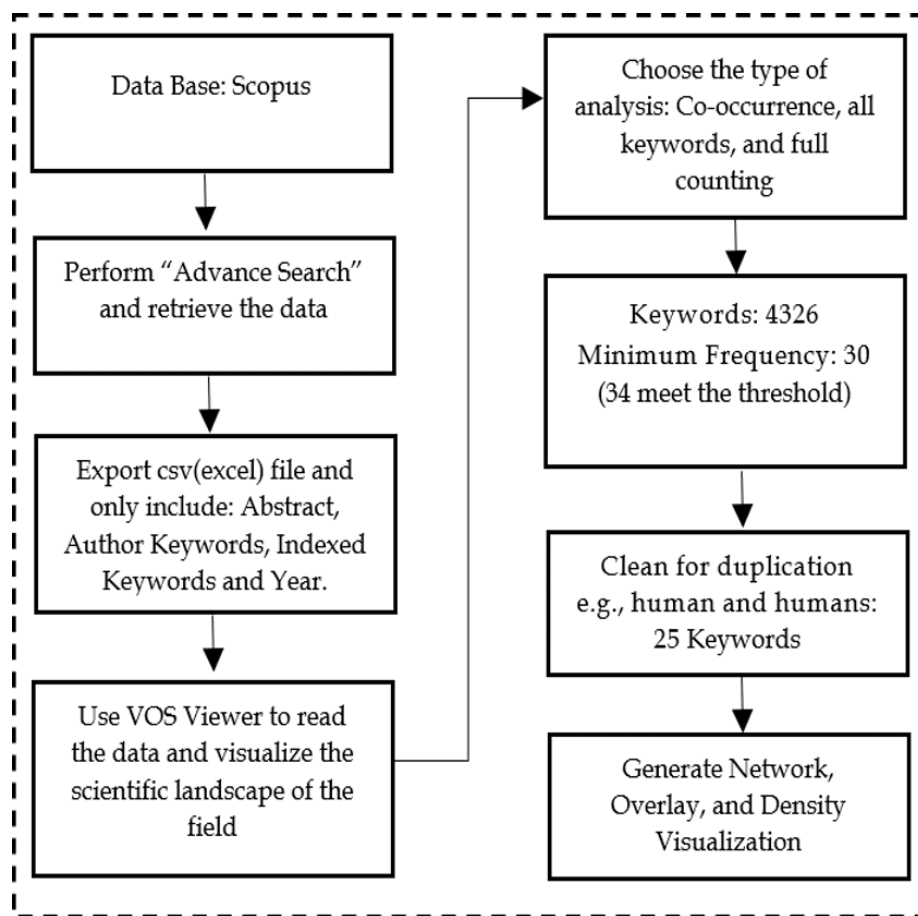


Figure 2. VOSViewer for Data Analysis Flowchart

Results and Discussion

The Scopus database contains two types of documents related to social media in election campaigns: 1,198 (84.5%) journal articles and 219 (15.4%) conference papers/proceedings. These documents were verified by year, source type, and language (English). The results are presented based on the research questions.

Growth trajectory, leading authors, and sources

There has been a growing trend in topics over the years as social media constantly changes the election landscape. Fig. 3 reveals that research from 2010-2016 was relatively low, and there is a gradually increasing interest as new social media players enter the market. There was a massive flow of articles when global elections started using Facebook and Twitter. In 2021, publications seemed to peak in Scopus, highlighting the introduction of more advanced applications like TikTok and Generative AI.

To illustrate, Gullati and Williams^[41] studied the early adopters of YouTube in election campaigns. They found that better-financed candidates are more likely to use new technology to communicate with their voters. Even though the content on their YouTube channel fits more into traditional media, they are still using the platform to disseminate information. In 2016, researchers recognized social media's power to shape democracy. People can post online and influence their circle of friends without filters; they can also engage in the comment section and drive the political conversation online^{[42][43]}. During the pandemic, research on social media in election campaigns rose. Scholars are looking at the impact of information related to COVID-19, the pandemic, and vaccination and its impact on election campaigns online^[44] ^[45] (Linda et al., 2021). They also looked at the challenges of the infodemic, highlighting fake news and disinformation. This growing literature is important to analyze as it can reveal that there is currently good momentum in researching the impacts of social media on election campaigns.

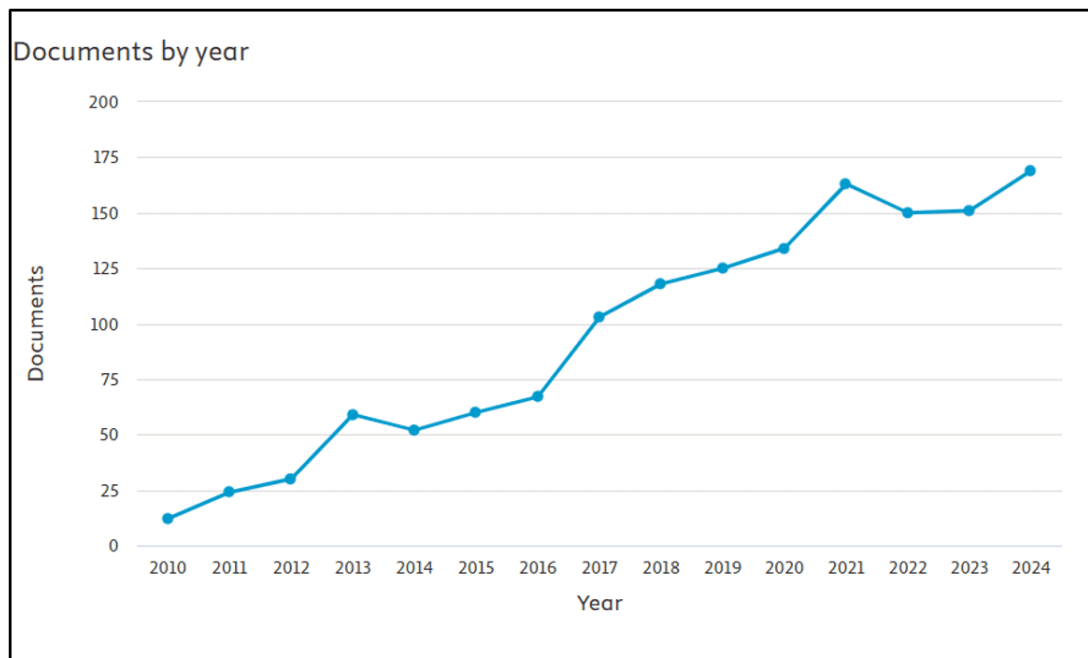


Figure 3. Documents by year in Scopus

Knowing the leading authors would provide a better view of the field since we are talking about the impact of articles in this section. This part provides scholars with insight into knowledge generation and article dissemination. Table 3 features the rank, author, number of articles, and citations of their research on social media in election campaigns. Larsson is ranked as the most published (19 articles) and most cited (861 citations) author in the field of election campaigns on social media. It is also noticeable that

most authors in the top 10 are from Western countries, specifically the United States (3) and Norway (2), a call for Asian scholars to look into this phenomenon and note the diverse Asian democracies.

Larsson's prominence in the field is rooted in his works on Twitter and Facebook usage in election campaigns. His early work on Twitter as a microblogging tool in online campaigning and deliberation in Sweden (Larsson & Moe, 2010) has been the framework for many researchers worldwide. He then studied the potential of Facebook to play an important role in long-term campaigning and not just during the election period, studying the political actors in Norway and Sweden^[46].

Rank	Authors	Country	Articles	Citations
1	Larsson, A. O.	Norway	19	861
2	Bene, M.	Hungary	10	306
3	Vaccari, C.	United Kingdom	10	686
4	Hemsley, J.	United States	9	90
5	Stromer-Galley, J.	United States	9	91
6	Ceron, A.	Italy	8	647
7	Fenoll, V.	Spain	8	21
8	Ferrara, E.	United States	8	789
9	Samuel-Azran, T.	Israel	8	232
10	Skogerbo, E.	Norway	8	606

Table 3. *Leading authors in social media in election campaigns research*

Another important area for aspiring scholars is to look at the top journals publishing in your field of study. Most of the journals listed in the Top 10 are in Scopus Quartile 1, meaning that social media in election campaign research is being published in top-quality journals in media, communication, and politics. There are also various fields encompassing the interdisciplinary nature of this field of research, publishing in information technology, marketing, social science, political science, and communication studies.

The Journal of Information Technology and Politics' most cited publication, "Algorithms, bots, and Political Communication in the US 2016 Election: The Challenge of Automated Political Communication for Election Law and Administration," focuses on the changing election landscape due to Internet intervention.

Rank	Source	Documents	Quartile	Publisher
1	Journal of Information Technology and Politics	40	Q1	Taylor & Francis
2	Information Communication and Society	35	Q1	Taylor & Francis
3	New Media and Society	33	Q1	SAGE
4	ACM International Conference Proceeding Series	32	-	Association for Computing Machinery
5	Journal of Political Marketing	32	Q1	Taylor & Francis
6	Social Media and Society	31		SAGE
7	International Journal of Communication	25	Q1	University of Southern California
8	Political Communication	22	Q1	Taylor & Francis
9	International Journal of Press and Politics	21	Q1	SAGE
10	Social Science Computer Review	20	Q1	SAGE

Table 4. *Top journals publishing social media in election campaigns*

Keyword occurrence and Network Visualization

The number of keywords used in a research field helps other authors to identify trends and the gaps that need to be filled. In the case of social media in elections, the data heavily favored platform usage, such as the appearance of Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, it is noticeable that "social media" vs. "social networking" and "political communication" vs. "election campaign" are interchangeable in many research studies. Sentiment analysis is a standout research method in this field that deals with the reactions and discussions of social media users.

Rank	Keywords	Occurrences	Link Strength
1	Social Media	762	1748
2	Social Networking	262	899
3	Twitter	269	687
4	Election	178	575
5	Facebook	175	458
6	Political Communication	170	378
7	Election Campaign	132	362
8	Presidential Election	98	327
9	Sentiment Analysis	74	246
10	Human	54	284

Table 5. Frequency of occurrence of Top 10 keywords

This network graph provides the prominent keywords, clusters, and connections to each other. This graph presents the top 25 keywords in the field of social media in election campaigns. Firstly, blue-clustered keywords showcase political processes as they connect to political communication, marketing, and participation while engaging with political parties and democracy. Secondly, red, on the other hand, focuses on social media platforms commonly used in elections, such as Facebook and Twitter. At the same time, this trend is expected due to the nature of these platforms, which attract discussion; this also opens the possibility of using other growing platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Finally, green-clustered words lean toward information-related challenges such as misinformation and disinformation.

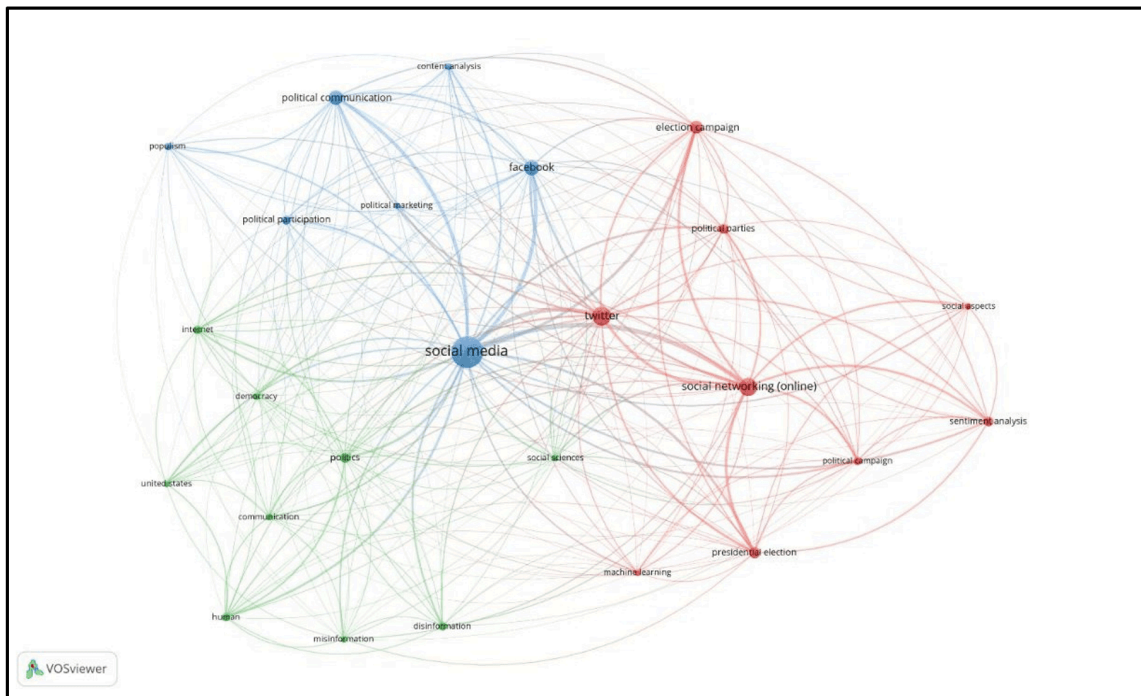


Figure 4. *Network Visualization of social media in election campaigns*

Trends and Future Directions

Understanding the field trends helps researchers build on the key concepts in social media usage in election campaigns. Fig. 5 shows a noticeable evolution of terms and research focus. The field started heavily on platform usage. However, scholars are now looking into political processes in social media and communication dynamics, explicitly the voters' sentiments. Recently, there has been a growing interest in disinformation and misinformation on social media. The interest in machine learning applied to social media in election research is the future of the field.

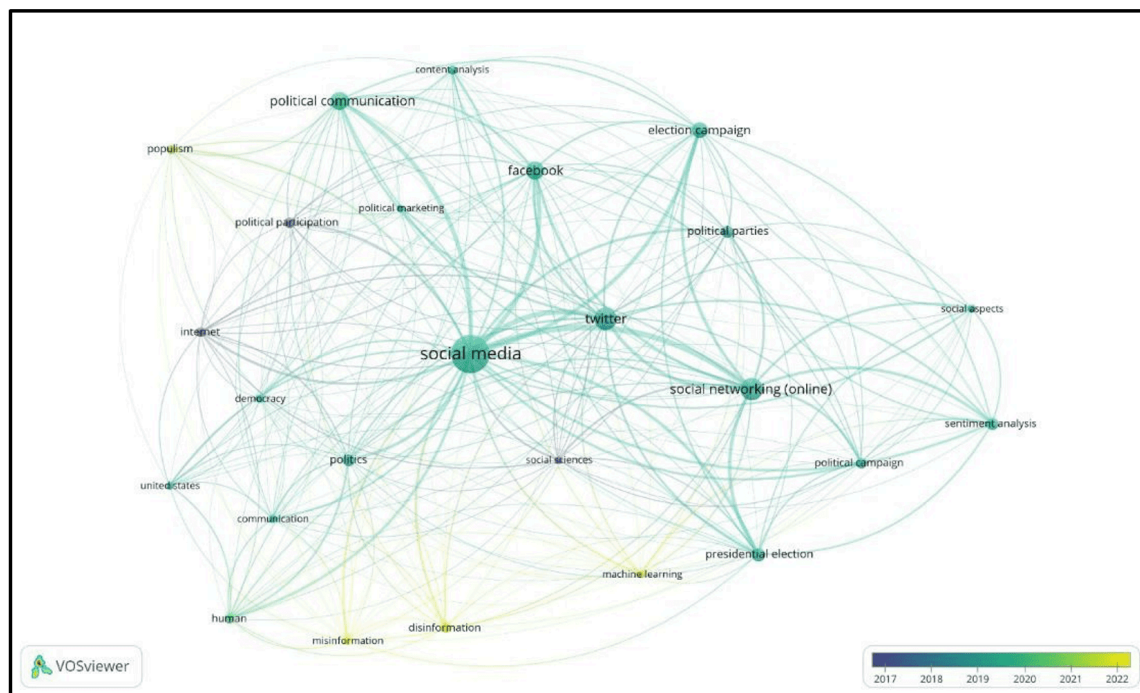


Figure 5. *Overlay Visualization of social media in election campaigns*

Conclusion and Limitations

This bibliometric analysis has provided a comprehensive overview of the research landscape concerning the adoption and use of social media in election campaigns from 2010 to 2024. By examining publications indexed in the Scopus database, this study has addressed key questions regarding the current status, recent trends, influential contributors, and underlying research topics within this communication field. The findings reveal an expanding area of scholarly inquiry that has significantly grown alongside the increasing prominence of social media in political processes worldwide.

Recent trends observed in the publications point towards an evolution in research focus. Initially, studies concentrated on political actors' adoption and usage of specific platforms like Facebook and Twitter. However, the field has broadened to encompass the political processes facilitated by social media, including public opinion surveying, influencer marketing, and cross-platform strategies. More recently, there has been a surge in research examining the challenges posed by misinformation and disinformation and the application of advanced technologies like TikTok and Generative AI in political campaigning. The increasing interest in sentiment analysis underscores the importance of understanding voter reactions and shaping political discourse effectively.

Key players driving progress in this field include influential authors, prominent sources, and contributing countries and institutions. Anders Olof Larsson emerges as the most prolific and highly cited author, whose early work on Twitter and Facebook laid the groundwork for much of the subsequent research. The dominance of authors from Western countries, particularly the United States and Norway, suggests a potential gap in research from other regions, especially considering the diverse democratic landscapes in Asia and Africa. The leading journals publishing in this area are primarily in media, communication, and political science, with the *Journal of Information Technology and Politics* being a significant contributor.

The important research topics underlying the development and growth of this field can be categorized into several key themes. Platform-specific studies, mainly focusing on Facebook and Twitter, have been foundational. However, the field is increasingly engaging with broader themes such as political communication strategies, voter engagement, the impact of social media on democratic processes, and the challenges of online manipulation. The emergence of keywords related to misinformation, disinformation, and the application of machine learning signifies the evolving concerns and future research directions. Network visualization of keywords reveals clusters around political processes, social media platforms, and information-related challenges, highlighting the interconnected nature of these research areas.

Looking ahead, the overlay visualization of keyword occurrences over time suggests several future research directions. While platform-specific studies remain relevant, there is a clear trend towards investigating the complexities of political processes within social media environments. The growing emphasis on disinformation and misinformation indicates a critical area for future research, particularly in understanding its impact on election outcomes and potential mitigation strategies. Furthermore, the nascent interest in machine learning applications in analyzing social media data for political forecasting and campaign optimization presents a promising avenue for future scholarly inquiry.

Despite the valuable insights gained from this bibliometric analysis, several limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the study's reliance solely on the Scopus database inherently restricts the scope of the analyzed literature. While Scopus is a comprehensive and reputable source, it does not index all scholarly publications. This analysis did not include research published in other databases like Web of Science, PubMed, or regional databases, as well as grey literature such as white papers and reports. This could overlook relevant studies and skew the overall representation of the field. Furthermore, while carefully designed with relevant keywords, the search strategy might not have captured every single

publication related to social media in election campaigns. The inherent ambiguity and evolving terminology within this interdisciplinary field could have excluded some pertinent articles.

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