

# **Social media practices during the political change in Sub-Saharan Africa**

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## **Abstract**

This paper aims to understand the political impact of social networking services (social media) in period of political transformation in Sub-Saharan African countries. This paper focuses on how political actors in Sub-Saharan African countries have practiced social media at the political crossroads while examining posted texts on Twitter and Facebook by some major political leaders in Sub-Saharan African countries.

This paper also examines political practices of social media through the concept of “extraversion” which has been intensively discussed by Jean-François Bayart. After reflection on this concept, case studies are conducted on Côte d’Ivoire and Mali in politically turbulent situations, such as post-electoral violence and confusion after a coup d’état. Then, the article examines social media practices in African politics from a more comparative approach.

Social media is still a minor approach in the political activities of Sub-Saharan African countries. Therefore, we should not over-estimate the impact of social media or expect drastic political reform to be brought about solely by online activities. However, social media projects political changes. Despite the limited case studies which are examined in this article, we could observe instances in which social media has made significant impacts on African politics. Social media will make African countries more democratic in long term, though it may do so through a “zigzag” political progress. As social media use continues to expand, it will become more difficult for authoritarian regimes to conceal or to monopolize politically crucial information.

In terms of the correlation between internet technology and political activities, e-politics have become a more important research subject in African political studies due to the drastically changing internet landscape.

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## 1. Introduction

This article aims to examine the political impact of social networking services (SNS or social media) in the recent period of political transformation in Sub-Saharan African countries.

Social media has unveiled political problems, movements, and changes in Sub-Saharan African countries as well as other regions of the world. Political change has been clearly observed through social media activities at critical moments, such as the election or political violence caused by coup d'état, post-electoral conflict, and rebel attack.

In 2011, the eyes of the world were remarkably attracted to social media by the political phenomenon in some North African and Middle Eastern countries that was called the "Arab Spring." During this set of events, social media made a large impact on protest movements that were pushing for regime change in countries where authoritarian leaders had kept power for decades. After the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, social media's political impacts have been focused on politics in other Arab countries. Sub-Saharan Africa is not an exceptional region in terms of social media's political impact. In critical political situations, social media practices have arisen among political actors, conventional media, and ordinary citizens.

This article aims to examine how political actors in Sub-Saharan Africa have tried to employ social media at the political crossroads and what consequences were brought about in the political realities of their countries. This article focuses on posted texts on Twitter<sup>1</sup> and Facebook because these applications have become familiar to political actors in contemporary African countries<sup>2</sup>.

At the present moment, we found few Sub-Saharan African countries where mobile data communication networks were sufficiently broadened for daily use. Use of 3G or more advanced mobile networks is limited due to insufficient coverage of data communication infrastructure. It is still difficult to cover an entire national

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1. The author of this article collected posted tweets of African political actors by using the application "All My Tweets" (<http://www.allmytweets.net/connect.php>). This application can trace up to 3,200 recent tweets. Although the author could not necessarily retrace all tweets of specific African politicians due to this limitation, the results are sufficiently meaningful for the purposes of this article.

2. This article principally retraces texts which were posted on Twitter and Facebook under African political actors' accounts. However, to enact more efficient political practices, it is very important to be connected with other internet tools, such as websites, blogs, and particularly movie services like YouTube. I have communicated repeatedly with African politicians regarding internet practices during my fieldwork in Benin and Burkina Faso.

territory with a wireless network. Another reason for limited social media use is the low alphabetization rate in peoples of Sub-Saharan African countries<sup>3</sup>; because social media is principally conducted through “written text”-based communication. Due to these above-mentioned conditions, the political impact of social media remains partial in Sub-Saharan African countries.

This article tries to reflect the political impact of social media while applying the concept of “extraversion,” which has been intensively discussed by Jean-François Bayart (Bayart 1989, 2006). The article examines the posted texts that have been launched on social media by political actors.

## 2. Social media practice and extraversion in African politics

The concept of extraversion in African politics has been intensively discussed by Jean-François Bayart. He has focused on the concept of extraversion to understand the features of politics and international relations in African countries. In the context of African politics, extraversion means that (political) leaders act to achieve their objectives while seeking strong ties and consciousness outside their countries (Bayart 1999, 2000, 2006). Bayart has repeatedly emphasized the importance of this concept in better understanding the behavior of political actors in Africa.

In his most successful but controversial book, *State in Africa (l'Etat en Afrique: la politique du ventre*, originally published in French in 1989, second edition in 2006)<sup>4</sup>, Bayart focuses on extraversion, as well as “*manducation*” (the act of eating) (Bayart 2006: 11-12), as the core concept in understanding both daily and counter political practices (“*le politique par le bas*”, meaning politics from below) in African politics. Bayart emphasized the significance of this concept in grasping a crucial political pattern: that African political actors have struggled to survive while establishing and changing linkage outside of their countries. Political actors are always conscious of “extraversive” relationships in their political and personal activities. The Europeans’ colonization created and rooted political strategies of extraversion in African societies (Bayart 2006:46). Since

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3. UNDP website, Human Development Index, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries> (accessed March 21, 2013).

4. In the second edition, Bayart mentioned that it was impossible to update his arguments to account for political events that had been taken place after the publication of the first edition in 1989. He added one chapter that particularly focused on extraversion for the second edition (Bayart 2006: I-II).

their achievements of independence, African countries have deepened extraversive relationships in the multilateralization of dependence while receiving massive amounts of foreign aid (Bayart 2006:49).

We need to understand that the “border between inside and outside” in African states and societies is not an impermeable barrier, but rather is like a porous membrane. The dichotomous relationships, such as dominant - dominated, patron - client, and rich – poor, that are presupposed in “dependence theory” have not been static in the political reality of Africa. Extraversive behavior seems to be a strategic political practice that allows political actors to survive while communicating with outside actors.

In the 1990s, the “international community” focused on “democratization” and “conflict” (or civil war) as being the most eminent political events on the African continent. We could find common character between these two contrastable events because stakeholders have maintained the strong, extraversive ties with foreign actors to ensure the availability of the cultural, economic, financial, military, and political resources necessary for survival (Bayart 2006: XIX).

The internet is the cheapest and most efficient tool to connect and communicate massively and instantly outside of a country. In comparison to other internet tools or applications, social media’s characteristic advantage is to enable the direct and dual communication between operating users (political actors) and visiting users (potential voters and supporters, even opposing actors). It is a useful tool in extraversion strategy for political actors. Political actors in African countries understand well that social media brings them tools that enable them to have direct online communication with their supporters (sometimes receiving and ignoring opponents’ attacks) and to multiply the effects of online announcements through interconnection with more conventional internet media tools, such as websites, blogs, and uploaded videos (e.g. via YouTube).

However, we should recognize that social media is not only an efficient tool for political actors but also for political watchers and actors in civil society. For example, the internet giant Google has attentively watched several elections held in African countries in recent years. This company seems to recognize that the democratization process will grant them business opportunities in Africa.

Kenya is one of the leading countries in Sub-Saharan Africa in terms of the experience of social media in political activities, and would be a good market for Google’s business<sup>5</sup>. Because of bloody incidents that occurred after Kenya’s 2007

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5. Markham Nolan, the editor “Storyful,” a partner of Google, mentioned on his blog, “Election of 2013 in Kenya will be most focused in Kenyan history and the first one with YouTube.” Ory

presidential election, the country is obviously a likely place to watch for them.

### 3. Social media in political turbulence

#### 3-1. Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire was considered one of the most politically stable regimes among African countries since its independence. Its first president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, passed away in 1993 after holding power for 33 years, the longest regime in any African country up to that time. His founding political party, the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (*Parti démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire*, PDCI) had been dominant in the political scene of Côte d'Ivoire since its independence despite the political transition from a one-party to a multiparty system and its founder's death.

Henri Conan Bedié rose to the leadership of the PDCI and won presidential and legislative elections while practically excluding political opponents. In December 1999, Bedié was ousted by a coup d'état. It was the first successful regime turnover through military coup d'état in Côte d'Ivoire. This coup d'état surprised the world and reversed the common understanding of African politics. The military regime, led by Robert Guéi, caused political tension due to his electoral fraud. General Guéi finally stepped down after strong popular protests and pressure from the international community. Following this, Laurent Gbagbo came to power.

Despite the return to a civilian regime, Côte d'Ivoire has been divided by an armed rebel force (La Force Nouvelle), which dominated the northern region under the leadership of Guillaume Soro (Soro 2005). Peace agreements, such as the Marcoussi Agreement of 2003, have been repeatedly reached and broken between the Gbagbo administration and the rebel force. Peacekeeping forces and military interventions have been dispatched by ECOWAS, France, and the African Union into Côte d'Ivoire.

The Gbagbo administration repeatedly violated agreements to organize a presidential election. Elections were finally held in October (first round) and November (second round) 2010. After the election, Côte d'Ivoire again fell into

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Okolloh, a Google staff member who specializes in political relations with Sub-Saharan Africa, mentioned "We encourage electors not only to be observers in this election, but also to involve themselves in political process in democratic fashion while using tools such as YouTube, Google Maps and Google Plus." Mathieu Olivier, "Élections au Kenya : un 'geek' à la présidence?" *Jeune Afrique* (website), <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20130219151919> (accessed February 22, 2013).

violence because President Gbagbo refused the unfavorable results and tried to negate the election. Rival candidate Alassane Ouattara, the former Prime Minister in Houphouët-Boigny's administration, declared victory. The international community recognized and supported Ouattara. After repeated battles across the country, Gbagbo was arrested in Abidjan, economic capital city of Côte d'Ivoire, by Ouattara's force in March 2011. Finally, he was sent to the international criminal court in the Hague<sup>6</sup>.

In the post-electoral conflict of 2010, social media was much used as a tool, not only for political campaigning, but also for legitimizing political activities in the extraversive approach. This part of the study will focus on the social media practices and strategy of Alassane Ouattara (@ADO\_Solutions, his twitter account), who is currently President of the Republic.

His social media team has successively tweeted appeals pointing out how Ouattara's regime was recognized and accepted as the sole legitimate authority of Côte d'Ivoire by the international community.

"La communauté internationale réaffirme son appui à ADO <http://t.co/oyTiXEHv> #civ#civ2010 #civnext<sup>7</sup>"

(The international community reaffirmed its support to Ouattara.)

"Les élections en Côte d'Ivoire ont été libres et transparentes (CEDEAO) <http://t.co/wk4CPaXg> #civ2010 #civ2011 #civ #civnext<sup>8</sup>"

(Election in Côte d'Ivoire was free and transparent according to ECOWAS<sup>9</sup>.)

"Alassane Ouattara au G8 : 'Je vous demande d'apporter un soutien massif au financement de mon programme' <http://bit.ly/iVuh1g> #civ2010 #civ<sup>10</sup>"

(Alassane Ouattara at G8 summit: "I ask you to bring massive financial support to my program.")

Ouattara's tweets emphasized how his administration had received massive

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6. CIA the World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iv.html> (accessed October 15, 2013).

7. Tweet of Alassane Ouattara (@ADO\_Solutions), January 5, 2012.

8. Tweet of Alassane Ouattara (@ADO\_Solutions), December 14, 2011.

9. The Economic Community of West African States was founded in 1975. Now, it is composed of 15 West African member countries.

10. Tweet of Alassane Ouattara (@ADO\_Solutions), May 30, 2011.

support from outside, especially from France, its former colonial master and traditionally the most influential foreign power in Côte d'Ivoire.

“Soutien’ de la France pour le retour de la sécurité en Côte d'Ivoire [#civ](http://t.co/LajH4qw5#civ) [#civnext](http://t.co/LajH4qw5#civ) [#civ2010](http://t.co/LajH4qw5#civ)<sup>11</sup>”  
(“Support” of France to regain security in Côte d'Ivoire.)

However, France hesitated to immediately recognize Ouattara’s victory at the beginning of post-electoral conflict. The French government’s ambiguous attitude frustrated Ouattara’s camp.

“Chère Françafrique ! [#civ2010](http://bit.ly/e64bXj)<sup>12</sup>”  
(Dear Françafrique !)

“Gbagbo arrêté. Mais pas par les forces spéciales françaises’ (AFP) [#civ2010](http://bit.ly/eUrPXb)<sup>13</sup>”  
(Gbagbo was arrested. But not by French special forces.)

“Françafrique” is the satirical neology which expresses the complex feelings criticizing the close and corrupt relationship between France and former French colonies established through very personal connections among leaders and elites<sup>14</sup>. It is also a symbolic neology which demonstrates the extraversive relationship between African countries and France. Ouattara’s camp criticized France for not strongly demanding that Gbagbo accept the results of election and step down from office peacefully.

In terms of political actor’s extraversion in social media, it was significant that Ouattara’s side was eager to show China’s support for Ouattara. Ouattara’s social media team tweeted frequently regarding its close relationship with China.

“La Chine soutient que l'ONUCI joue un rôle actif en Côte d'Ivoire [#civ2010](http://bit.ly/hEzUjP)<sup>15</sup>”

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11. Tweet of Alassane Ouattara (@ADO\_\_Solutions), November 8, 2011.

12. Tweet of Alassane Ouattara (@ADO\_\_Solutions), January 13, 2011.

13. Tweet of Alassane Ouattara (@ADO\_\_Solutions), April 11, 2011.

14. See Verschave François-Xavier (2000), *La Françafrique: le plus long scandale de la République*, Stock, Paris.

15. Tweet of Alassane Ouattara (@ADO\_\_Solutions), January 12, 2011.

(China supports ONUCI playing an active role in Côte d'Ivoire.)

“La #Chine ‘soulagée de la fin de la guerre’ <http://bit.ly/kXaXDJ> #civ2010 #civnext”<sup>16</sup>

(China “relieved by the end of war.”)

“Coopération bilatérale : La Chine et de l’Australie aux portes de la Côte d’Ivoire <http://t.co/F18uRS0> #civ #civ2010 #civnext”<sup>17</sup>

(Bilateral cooperation: China and Australia at doors of Côte d'Ivoire.)

“La Chine annule une partie de la dette, et octroie un prêt et un don à la Côte d’Ivoire <http://t.co/2GxFBM4> #civ #civ2010 #civnext”<sup>18</sup>

(China cancelled some parts of debt and offers loan and donation to Côte d'Ivoire.)

Ouattara called for Ivorian refugees who had escaped from Côte d'Ivoire to neighboring countries due to post-electoral violence to return into their country. He also appealed its political tolerance in order to promote its “healthy” image in the international community.

“ADO aux ressortissants ivoiriens au Nigeria: ‘Nous aurons 10.000 milliards pour vous mettre au travail’ <http://bit.ly/jpAFfx> #civ2010”<sup>19</sup>

(Ouattara to Ivorian citizens in Nigeria: ‘We will have 10 trillion to give you jobs’)

“Le président Ouattara aux Ivoiriens du #Togo: ‘Rentrez au pays, vous aurez du travail’ <http://bit.ly/iwg3Xj> #civ2010 #civ #civnext”<sup>20</sup>

(President Ouattara to Ivoirians in Togo: ‘Return to your country, you will have jobs’)

“Le président Ouattara aux Ivoiriens du Benin: ‘Revenez au pays, il y a du

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16. Tweet of Alassane Ouattara (@ADO\_\_Solutions), May 5, 2011.

17. Tweet of Alassane Ouattara (@ADO\_\_Solutions), June 30, 2011.

18. Tweet of Alassane Ouattara (@ADO\_\_Solutions), June 30, 2011.

19. Tweet of Alassane Ouattara (@ADO\_\_Solutions), June 2, 2011.

20. Tweet of Alassane Ouattara (@ADO\_\_Solutions), June 2, 2011.

travail pour vous' <http://t.co/JbdDVO2S> #civ #civnext #benin”<sup>21</sup>

(President Ouattara to Ivoirians in Benin: ‘Come back to your country, there is a job for you’)

Ouattara’s media team did not forget to conduct a “negative” extraversion campaign against Gbagbo through social media.

“CRISE POST-ELECTORALE : Quand L'Angola lâche Laurent Gbagbo <http://bit.ly/gcaH44> #civ2010”<sup>22</sup>

(Post-electoral crisis: When Angola abandons Laurent Gbagbo.)

“Etranglé économiquement et financièrement : Gbagbo mendie de l'argent en Angola et en Guinée-Equatoriale <http://bit.ly/h9VgOu> #civ2010”<sup>23</sup>

(Economically and financially strangled: Gbagbo begs money to Angola and Equatorial Guinea.)

Part of a new generation of national leaders, Guillaume Soro has been obviously accelerating his online activities<sup>24</sup>. In addition to basic web tools, such as websites, blogs<sup>25</sup>, and YouTube<sup>26</sup>, Soro has thoroughly accelerated his social media campaign. He was a leader in *la Force Nouvelle* against the Gbagbo administration in early 2000s. After the peace agreement, Soro served as Prime Minister. In Ouattara’s administration, he was appointed Prime Minister and then President of the National Assembly. He was slow to join Facebook, signing up at the end of 2012, but has rapidly been increasing his followers and “likes.” He had acquired 51,000 “likes” on his Facebook page in September 2013<sup>27</sup> and 303,000 by September 2014<sup>28</sup>. He also launched his “e-book” in July 2014 to show

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21. Tweet of Alassane Ouattara (@ADO\_\_Solutions), November 17, 2011.

22. Tweet of Alassane Ouattara (@ADO\_\_Solutions), March 25, 2011.

23. Tweet of Alassane Ouattara (@ADO\_\_Solutions), February 8, 2011.

24. See Soro’s Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/GuillaumeKsoro>).

25. See Soro’s blog (<http://www.blogguillaumesoro.com/index.php>).

26. See Soro’s YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/user/sorokguillaume/featured>).

27. Olivier Mathieu, “Côte d'Ivoire : Guillaume Soro, passion geek,” *Jeune Afrique* (website), <http://www.jeunefrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20130920124324/internet-facebook-guillaume-soro-assemblee-nationale-ivoirienne-reseaux-sociaux-cote-d-ivoire-guillaume-soro-passion-geek.html> (accessed September 25, 2013).

28. See Soro’s Facebook account (<https://www.facebook.com/GuillaumeKsoro>, accessed September 15, 2014).

that his glorious image was ensured by traditional authorities<sup>29</sup>.

Given Soro's very aggressive activities in social media and other web applications, it seems that he has already practically launched his campaign for the 2020 presidential race. That year will mark the end of the Ouattara's second (final) term, to which he is limited by the Ivoirian Constitution (article 35). The election may come earlier, considering President Ouattara's health condition and his age: he will turn 72 in 2014. In fact, according to the constitution, he is positioned next in line for the presidency<sup>30</sup>.

### 3-2. Mali

After 23 years of dominating Mali with a military dictatorship regime, President Moussa Traoré was ousted by a military coup d'état led by Amani Toumani Touré in 1991. During the democratic transition process, Mali organized the National Conference<sup>31</sup> as a forum for national dialogue and established a new, transitional regime while adopting new constitution, laws, and institutions. After a one-year transition, presidential and legislative elections were organized in 1992. Alpha Oumar Konaré was elected peacefully and democratically.

General Touré voluntarily stepped down one year after the transition, and Alpha Oumar Konaré took office. It was the first peaceful political turnover in Mali since its independence. While Mali had many economic and political problems at that time, such as poverty and separatist movements in its northern region, the country has respected and tried to promote the process of

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29. Guillaume Kigbafori Soro, *le Chef traditionnel* (eBook, No.4), <http://guillaumesoro.ci/fr/index.php/fr/art-et-culture/le-ebook6-guillaume-kigbafori-soro,-le-chef-traditionnel> (accessed July 17, 2014).

30. The Constitution of Côte d'Ivoire (adapted in 2000) stipulated "In case of vacancy of the Presidency of the Republic due to death, resignation, [or] absolute incapacity, the interim of the President of the Republic is assured by the President of the National Assembly, for a period of forty-five days to ninety days in the course of which it proceeds to the election of the new President of the Republic." (Article 40). U.S. Embassy to Côte d'Ivoire website, [http://abidjan.usembassy.gov/ivoirian\\_constitution2.html](http://abidjan.usembassy.gov/ivoirian_constitution2.html) (accessed August 24, 2014).

31. In the beginning of 1990s, many nation-wide dialogue forums were held in African countries, especially in Francophone countries such as Benin, Gabon, Mali, Togo, Niger, Chad, Zaire, and Congo (Brazzaville). The idea of the National Conference derived from the "Convention Nationale" held during the French Revolution in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. National Conferences declared sovereignty as the states' temporary conductors and tried to reduce the president's power within ritual matters. The international community, or western donor countries, recognized National Conferences as the provisory sovereign representative state bodies during democratic transition. However, the process of democratization that started by National Conferences brought various outcomes, from the consolidation of democratization to civil war. See Iwata (2004).

democratization. After ten years, at the end of his second term, President Konaré respected the constitution and voluntarily stepped down from power. In 2002, Touré returned to presidential palace through a peaceful election.

Through two decades of experience in democratization, Mali has gradually established its positive reputation in the international community regarding its democratization process. President Touré declared his retirement, respecting the constitution, in the last year of his second term. Electoral campaigns were launched among potential candidates for following year's election, which would be held on the 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2012. Just one month before the election, a coup was attempted by Lieutenant Amadou Sanogo's military force. This force brutally attacked the presidential palace (Koulouba) in Bamako using heavy firearms, attempting to kill President Touré. After one day of battle at the palace, Touré barely escaped. He then moved to Senegal. Sanogo took power by force and definitively damaged Mali's two decades of painstaking dedication to democratization. This coup d'état in March 2012 greatly shocked and disappointed both the Malian people and the world.

Sanogo claimed that his coup was due to President Touré's lack of consideration for Malian soldiers in fights against the forces of the northern separatist movements. According to Sanogo, Touré had forced the national army to fight without sufficient logistical support, particularly with regard to ammunition supplement, and without sufficient special remuneration to soldiers undertaking high-risk missions. However, Sanogo could not legitimize his own political regime. He failed to gain support in Mali and from the international community. He faced strong domestic and international protests against his coup. It was not "elaborated" coup, which is a coup that is coordinated with crucial actors inside and outside of the country in advance. This is the one of the most traditionally important conditions for the "successful" coup d'état in African countries. Sanogo had to dedicate his efforts to establishing his influence in the national army. However, he failed to establish his power base in the army. During the national political vacuum that was created by this coup, the northern regions were occupied by Islamist groups that took control of them from the central government. A provisory government was formed by Dioncounda Traoré in April 2012.

The African Union and the international community strongly condemned this violent turnover and demanded that Mali normalize its political situation and organize the presidential election that had been suspended by Sanogo's coup. The provisory Malian government accepted the aid of foreign troops, including those of

France, its former colonial master, to regain its territories from rebel forces. These military interventions temporarily pushed out rebels. In July and August 2013, the presidential election was organized after more than a year of delay. In the second round of elections, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita<sup>32</sup> (generally called by his initial, IBK) won, defeating Soumaïla Cissé<sup>33</sup>. After this, the provisory regime ended its role. Mali returned to a civil-led political system under Keita's leadership<sup>34</sup>.

This part of the paper will examine social media practices during the political changes in Mali, such as the coup d'état and the post-coup democratic re-transition in 2012-13. I would like to focus on two major presidential candidates in the election of 2013: Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and Soumaïla Cissé. Both of these candidates were very conscious of the importance of social media in the latest election. They used it eagerly during their political campaign.

Both candidates have maximized the use of social media in their electoral strategies. Social media is a definitively appropriate tool for presidential election campaigns in African countries, and is very suited to an extraversion-oriented strategy. Social media might be more necessary in a country like Mali, which has specific geographical and demographical features, a huge land territory (1,240,192km<sup>2</sup>), and a very low population density (about 12 persons per km<sup>2</sup>) than in a country with a smaller territory and a higher population density, such as Rwanda. Geographical conditions must not be ignored when we consider internet and social media practices.

Major candidates have tried to maximize their connections with outside countries and, thus, their images as highly qualified national leaders. They have posted and tweeted about the massive support they have received from other countries on the African continent and elsewhere.

“IBK et le Président Blaise Compaoré échangent sur la situation au Mali”<sup>35</sup>.

(IBK and President Blaise Compaoré communicate about the situation in Mali.)

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32. He was the former prime minister and foreign minister and is current President of the Republic following the presidential election of 2013.

33. He was the former minister and president of the commission of UEMOA (Union of Economic and Monetary of West Africa).

34. The CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html> (accessed October 15, 2013).

35. Facebook of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, May 17, 2013.

"Conférence de Soumaïla Cissé à SciencesPo de Paris - 1ère partie" : <http://t.co/025WoWsBQf> via @YouTube"<sup>36</sup>

(Conference of Soumaïla Cissé at SciencesPo of Paris.)

In traditional presidential races, major candidates have usually published an autobiographical book or booklet before or during the electoral campaign period to impress their glorious image onto voters. Candidates have continued to use this traditional strategy while also adopting social media and other internet tools,.

"Vidéo de la tournée du candidat @Soumailacisse en Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre: <http://t.co/cdcnuwOSxs> #Mali #Election2013"<sup>37</sup>

(Video of candidate Soumaïla Cissé's tour in West and Central Africa.)

"Présidentielle de 2012 : Soumaïla Cissé en pôle position <http://t.co/pP4PR4yJ>"<sup>38</sup>

(Presidential Election 2012: Soumaila Cissé at pole position.)

"Présidentielle Malienne: Soumaïla Cissé courtise les électeurs de Yamoussoukro, <http://t.co/19RCnuuE>"<sup>39</sup>

(Malian Presidential Election: Soumaila Cissé courts electors of Yamoussoukro.)

"Mali-Présidentielle: Soumaïla Cissé à la rencontre de ses militants de Côte d'Ivoire <http://t.co/TTT6CQ8w>"<sup>40</sup>

(Soumaila Cissé meets his supporters in Côte d'Ivoire.)

"Soumaïla Cissé a fait sa valise pour le Mali : La communauté malienne vivant à Bobo lui a dit au revoir <http://t.co/SZGVU9oD>"<sup>41</sup>

(Soumaila Cissé prepared to return to Mali: Malian community in Bobo-Dioulasso tell him goodbye.)

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36. Tweet of Soumaïla Cissé (@Soumailacisse), April 7, 2013.

37. Tweet of Soumaïla Cissé (@Soumailacisse), July 13, 2013.

38. Tweet of Soumaïla Cissé (@Soumailacisse), March 9, 2012.

39. Tweet of Soumaïla Cissé (@Soumailacisse), March 5, 2012.

40. Tweet of Soumaïla Cissé (@Soumailacisse), January 20, 2012.

41. Tweet of Soumaïla Cissé (@Soumailacisse), December 28, 2011.

“J’ai publié 71 photos sur Facebook, dans l’album Meeting de Soumaïla Cissé à Bobo Dioulasso au Burkina Faso <http://t.co/eWhCNod7>”<sup>42</sup>

(I uploaded 71 photos on Facebook in the album Meeting of Soumaila Cissé in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso.)

“Meeting de Soumaïla Cissé à Bobo Dioulasso (Burkina Faso), le 04 décembre 2011, Accueil chaleureux par les... <http://t.co/jTq3yV3i>”<sup>43</sup>

(Meeting of Soumaila Cissé in Bobo-Dioulasso, December 4, 2011. Enthusiastic welcome by...)

“Rentrée politique de la section URD du Gabon pour soutenir la candidature de Soumaïla Cissé à l’élection... <http://t.co/VBKl3Gzu>”<sup>44</sup>

(Political launching of URD in a section of Gabon for support of Soumaila Cissé’s candidate.)

“Les maliens de Bissau ont réservé un accueil chaleureux à So <http://t.co/xt4cSsn>”<sup>45</sup>

(Malian people in Bissau enthusiastically welcomed in So.)

They are very vigorous to in bolstering their glorious images and capacities as the “national” leaders by courting and ensuring support from foreign countries and Malian diaspora populations living outside of the country. This extraversion trend is not a new phenomenon in the African political scene. The relationships of leaders and elites between Francophone African countries and France, their former colonial master, have been criticized with the aforementioned term “Françafrique.” However, this relationship of extraversion has been changing, or decreasing, in African countries. For the Malian presidential candidates, it is now necessary to show a close relationship not only with France, but also with China. It is symbolic change in the progress of international power disposition in Africa.

Like the leaders of Côte d’Ivoire in their post-electoral confusion, Malian leaders have shown their expectation of China’s support at the most critical moment.

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42. Tweet of Soumaïla Cissé (@Soumailacisse), December 16, 2011.

43. Tweet of Soumaïla Cissé (@Soumailacisse), December 13, 2011.

44. Tweet of Soumaïla Cissé (@Soumailacisse), November 2, 2011.

45. Tweet of Soumaïla Cissé (@Soumailacisse), September 9, 2011.

“Présence de Son Excellence M. CAO, Ambassadeur de #Chine au #Mali à la cérémonie d'investiture d' #IBK. #livetweet #Mali2012 #IBK2012”<sup>46</sup>

(Presence of H.E. Chinese Ambassador to Mali at the ceremony with IBK.)

“Élection présidentielle du 29 avril 2012 : Les Maliens de Chine adoptent #IBK <http://t.co/yel2R38a> #mali #mali2012 #koulouba #diaspora”<sup>47</sup>

(Presidential Election of April 29, 2012: Malian people in China adopt IBK.)

“Chers amis, de retour de Chine, j'ai fait escale à Paris où j'ai rencontré l'équipe de campagne de France. Nous... <http://t.co/pWND7Ube>”<sup>48</sup>

(Dear Friends, while returning from China, I stopped in Paris where I met our campaign team in France.)

“La Chine renforcera ses relations avec l'URD du Mali: Un haut responsable du département de la discipline du... <http://t.co/JCHn7cal>”<sup>49</sup>

(China will strengthen relation with URD of Mali. A higher responsibility of department of the discipline of...)

“Chers amis, sur invitation du Parti Communiste Chinois, je suis en Chine depuis le 29 février à la tête d'une délégation de l'URD”<sup>50</sup>

(Dear Friends, accepting the invitation of the Chinese Communist Party, I have been in China since February as the head of the delegation of URD.)

Although we have been examining the social media practices in the electoral campaigns of Côte d'Ivoire and Mali, we cannot generalize the social media use in African politics through the cases of only two countries. Their unique circumstances have created specific, sometimes unstable situations that may not be broadly representative. We need to examine other, additional cases in order to better understand social media practices in African politics.

Even now, Francophone African countries maintain the legacy of closer ties with France, their former colonial master, in both positive and negative senses. We can find this trend in social media practices, as is mentioned above.

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46. Tweet of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (@IBK\_2012), January 14, 2012.

47. Tweet of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (@IBK\_2012), December 7, 2011.

48. Tweet of Soumaïla Cissé (@Soumailacisse), March 9, 2012.

49. Tweet of Soumaïla Cissé (@Soumailacisse), March 3, 2012.

50. Tweet of Soumaïla Cissé (@Soumailacisse), March 1, 2012.

In comparison to Côte d'Ivoire and Mali, we do not find any significant "extraversion" in tweets of political leaders in "non-Francophone" African countries, such as Kenya<sup>51</sup> and Ghana<sup>52</sup>. Leaders in Anglophone African countries do not seem to often use social media in order to show their legitimacy and glorious images through their connections with foreign superpowers.

We might modestly conclude that the trend of extraversion is still stronger in Francophone African countries than other parts of Africa. The legacy of "Françafrique" in those countries seems to still be influential in political actor's behavior regarding social media practices.

## 4. Comparative studies

### 4-1. Trends in social media use by political actors

The situation in social media practice in African politics does not only depend on political actors' will and strategy, but also heavily on the infrastructure conditions of wireless internet and mobile data communication networks (Wi-Fi, 3G, or more advanced networks). In order to use social media more efficiently and on a larger scale in the political scene, mobile data communication is an indispensable technological condition. Given the current limited access to wireless internet connections in most Sub-Saharan African countries, leaders are unable to mobilize populations on a mass scale through social media.

A major part of the population in Sub-Saharan African countries still has to go to internet cafés to access the internet. Although the cost of internet access has been decreasing year by year, it is not yet "cheap" for the majority of African people. As 3G networks have gradually spread, more smartphones have been purchased by African consumers year by year. However, 3G has spread more slowly in Sub-Saharan Africa than its previously expected pace. It is costly to set up antennas for a 3G wireless network. Telecommunication operating companies do not invest in additional infrastructure equipment unless it is profitable for them. In addition, low population density obstructs data communication development in African countries. It is not profitable for telecommunication companies to invest in such large and sparsely populated areas.

The population density of Africa is still lower than that of other developing

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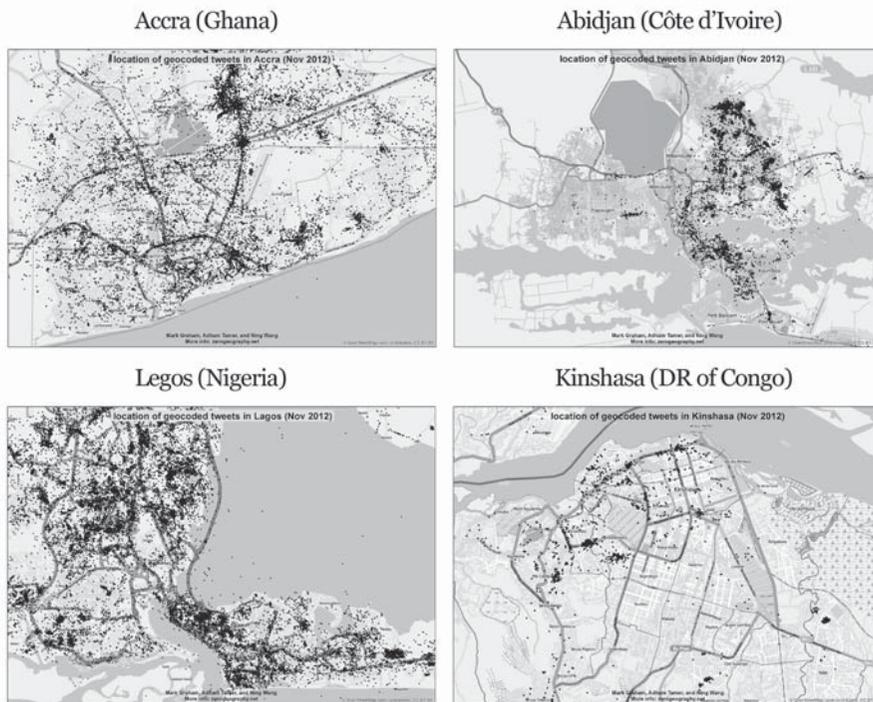
51. See President Uhuru Kenyatta's twitter (<https://twitter.com/@Ukenyatta>) and presidential candidate Raila Odinga's twitter (<https://twitter.com/@RailaOdinga>) (accessed April 29, 2013).

52. See President Mahama's Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/JDMahama>).

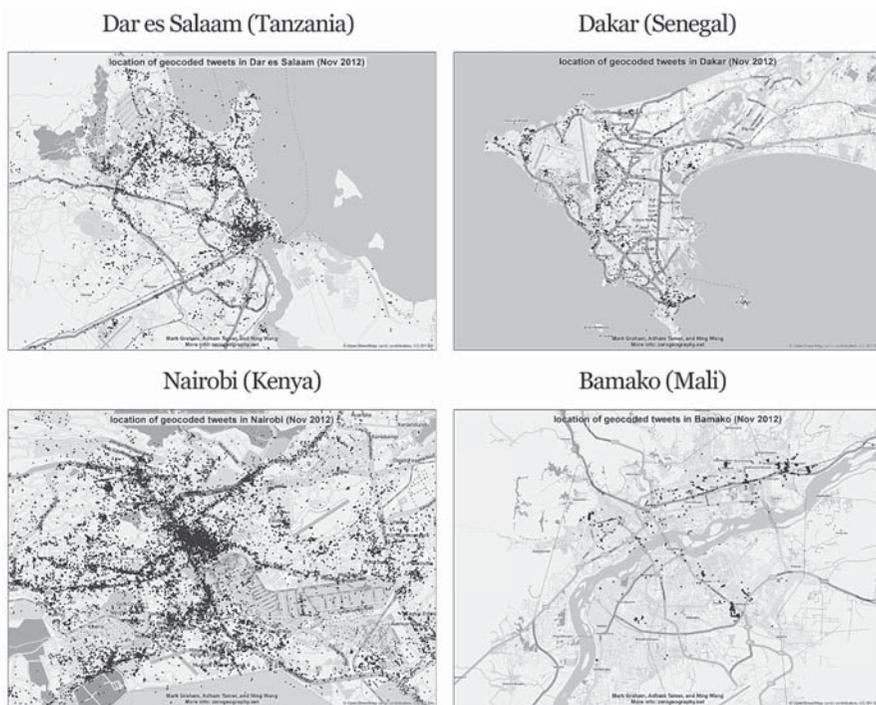
regions. There are only 13 African countries with a population density of more than 100 persons per km<sup>2</sup> (about 24%, excluding South Sudan), compared to 19 Asian countries (about 53%)<sup>53</sup>. This makes it more difficult for telecommunication companies to profit while providing data communication services. Despite such disadvantages, rapid urbanization in African cities is encouraging investments in 3G networks in urban areas.

Here, we will try to compare the frequency of social media use among African capital cities through the following maps.

**Figure 1 : Maps of density of Twitter users in African capital cities**



53. Population density is based on the data of the year 2012. Index Mundi website, <http://www.indexmundi.com/Map/?t=0&v=21000&r=af&l=en> (accessed January 13, 2014).



(Source) Jeune Afrique website<sup>54</sup>

Because the above-shown topographic maps were made in November 2012, the circumstances of social media use are likely much different nowadays. Trends in social media change month by month. However, these maps are still useful in grasping the general trends or character of social media practices in Sub-Saharan African countries. The cities on the left side in the above columns are the principal cities of former British colonies' administration, which keep English as the official language. The cities on the right side are the principal cities of former French colonies' administration, which keep French as the official language.

Language characters might partially influence the frequency of social media practices. In Sub-Saharan African countries, in general, social media is principally conducted in the countries' official languages, usually European languages. Social media practices among African politicians in Francophone countries seem less active than those in Anglophone countries. One reason is that the French

54. "Réseaux sociaux : les capitales africaines de Twitter, quartier par quartier," [http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Articleimp\\_ARTJAWEB20130215165826\\_reseaux-sociaux-les-capitales-africaines-de-twitter-quartier-par-quartier.html](http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Articleimp_ARTJAWEB20130215165826_reseaux-sociaux-les-capitales-africaines-de-twitter-quartier-par-quartier.html) (accessed February 16, 2013, *Jeune Afrique* quoted these maps from the website of Mark Graham et al., <http://www.zerogeography.net>).

language principally needs a larger volume of characters to express the same contents than does English. Twitter limits users to 140 characters per tweet<sup>55</sup>. This technical arrangement has frustrated and discouraged Francophone users, despite the creation of shorter, tweet friendly slang, while also deforming authentic French grammar<sup>56</sup>. This might be an important factor in politician's social media use, although we will not over-evaluate it.

In African and other continents, many politicians have joined social media during electoral campaign periods only to immediately stop as soon as the election ends. Thus, they reveal that the election victory was their only hope in joining. It seems that social media is still unfamiliar to the traditional type of African politicians. *Jeune Afrique* pointed out the symbolic example of Joseph Kabila's (Congolese president) legendary "one" tweet<sup>57</sup>.

#### **4-2. Social media's impact on African politics**

In recent years, many African political leaders have become aware of social media's power to gain them political influences or to threaten their political superiority.

On the one hand, in ordinary political periods, political actors are likely to share in a more familiar fashion with their followers, tweeting about their political activities, meetings, hobbies, and private activities, as well as to comment on domestic and international affairs. They do all of this in order to impress their glorious but familiar images onto people through social media.

On the other hand, in periods of political stimulation, such as elections or during violent turmoil, political actors are likely to accelerate their social media use, hoping to receive maximum support from citizens and foreign resident compatriots. They are conscious that social media is becoming a more important tool to appeal to voters and gain political legitimacy and influence. They also need

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55. However, many Francophone users started using shortened expressions while breaking authentic French language spelling and grammar to adapt to Twitter's alphabetic volume. Radio France Internationale website, "Francophonie: «Bescherelle ta mère» !" [http://m.rfi.fr/mfi/20140321-france-reseaux-sociaux-semaine-francophonie-bescherelle-mere-twitter/?ns\\_campaign=reseaux\\_sociaux&ns\\_source=FB&ns\\_mchannel=social&ns\\_linkname=editorial&aef\\_campaign\\_ref=partage\\_aef&aef\\_campaign\\_date=2014-03-24](http://m.rfi.fr/mfi/20140321-france-reseaux-sociaux-semaine-francophonie-bescherelle-mere-twitter/?ns_campaign=reseaux_sociaux&ns_source=FB&ns_mchannel=social&ns_linkname=editorial&aef_campaign_ref=partage_aef&aef_campaign_date=2014-03-24) (accessed March 25, 2014).

56. Olivier Mathieu, "Twitter : pourquoi les dirigeants africains francophones sont-ils si nuls?" *Jeune Afrique* (website), August 28, 2013, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20130821183201> (accessed September 25, 2013).

57. *Ibid*, He tweeted only one time, on October 8, 2010 (revisited by author on September 11, 2014).

**Table 1: Followers' ranking of African heads of state on Twitter**

Name of President	Country	Started	Number of followers (December 20, 2012)	Number of followers (October 8, 2014)	Number of tweets
M. Morsi	Egypt	November 2011	797,204	2,100,000	1,196
J. Zuma	South Africa	May 2011	187,855	337,000	99
M. Marzouki	Tunisia	March 2011	100,260	223,000	1,537
P. Kagame	Rwanda	May 2009	92,971	607,000	2,394
G. Jonathan	Nigeria	July 2011	48,497	78,600	125
J. Kikwete	Tanzania	March 2011	43,126	196,000	1,547
Y. Museveni	Uganda	March 2010	10,694	60,900	68
J. Mahama	Ghana	July 2012	6,943	76,400	490
M. Sall	Senegal	October 2010	6,655	37,600	784
A. Ouattara	Côte d'Ivoire	October 2009	5,834	42,500	3,869

(Source) Facebook page of Jeune Afrique (<https://www.facebook.com/jeuneafrique>), accessed on February 19, 2013.

Author translated from French to English and added updated information.

to ensure international support to legitimize their positions and activities. The typical character of extraversion in African politics is mirrored in social media use.

This figure originally introduced the ranking of follower numbers to African political leaders' Twitter accounts in December 2012. Such rankings have been radically changing month by month. So, today's ranking might be completely different compared to one year ago. In particular, social media activities have been drastically changed and activated through crucial political events, such as elections.

These are Facebook cover pages of principal candidates in Kenya's presidential election in 2013. The map indicates the location of one tweeting point during the presidential election in Nairobi two months before the polling day. Kenya is one of the most social media-actively countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

This figure compared two finalist candidates' social media use during the last presidential campaigns in Ghana, Kenya, and Senegal, held in 2012-13. This figure clearly shows the huge gap in social media users' numbers between Anglophone (Ghana and Kenya) and Francophone countries (Senegal), though we should consider the gap in the population size among these countries. The user numbers might be partially explained by the French language feature previously mentioned in this article.

**Figure 2, 3: Social media practice in Kenya's presidential election in 2013**



(Source) Jeune Afrique website<sup>58</sup>

Even among Anglophone countries, we observe different and characteristic progress. As in the above-shown figure, in Ghana, both finalist presidential candidates in 2012 made efforts to increase their number of Facebook “likes” rather than Twitter followers. In Kenya, we cannot find such clear strategic tendency between Twitter and Facebook practice among presidential candidates. We might explain this difference from the experience of social media in the two countries. Kenya is known as one of the most active social media-using countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, Wi-Fi or 3G (4G) network-covered areas and spots have been rapidly spreading in the Kenya’s daily life: even in the commuter

58. Facebook cover pages of Kenyan Presidential candidates in election of 2013, quoted by *Jeune Afrique* website, “Élections au Kenya: un “geek” à la présidence ?” <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20130219151919/internet-facebook-raila-odinga-googleelections-au-kenya-un-geek-a-la-presidence.html> (accessed February 22, 2013, *Jeune Afrique* quoted these maps from the website of Mark Graham et al., <http://www.zerogeography.net>).

**Table 2: Social media use by presidential candidates**

	Kenya	Ghana	Senegal
Number of internet users	12,000,000	3,500,000	2,200,000
Number of Facebook users	2,000,000	1,600,000	685,000
Number of voters	14,300,000	14,700,000	5,000,000
Population	41,600,000	25,000,000	12,800,000

Country	Candidate name	Number of Twitter followers	Number of Facebook fans
Senegal (Feb 2012)	M. Sall	8,503	31,381
	A. Wade	970	---
Ghana (Dec 2012)	J. Mahama	11,610	143,608
	A. Addo	10,940	195,465
Kenya (March 2013)	R. Odinga	111,775	64,679
	U. Kenyatta	102,353	392,194

(Source) Jeune Afrique website<sup>59</sup> (Data was collected on February 21, 2013, translated by author)

bus from and to Nairobi<sup>60</sup>. In consequence, Kenyan users might have been more familiar with various social media tools than Ghanaian users in 2012-13.

At the last presidential election, organized in December 2012, Ghanaian users and political leaders did not seem to be very familiar with social media operations compared to Kenyan political leaders (campaign teams). Candidate John Mahama, the current Ghanaian president, created his twitter account recently, in July 2012. He did so upon his unexpected promotion to interim President from Vice-President due to the sudden death of then-President Mills. In general, two major social media applications, Twitter and Facebook, are regarded differently by political actors. They feel that tweeting is something useful for speaking to unknown masses of people on the internet. In contrast, they feel that Facebook is principally useful as a virtual site to address their own supporters. So, in a less experienced situation, Ghanaian presidential candidates might have chosen, as a safer strategy, to concentrate their online campaign mainly to Facebook. This situation might have brought more than ten times the gap between Twitter and Facebook

59. *Jeune Afrique* (website), "Élections au Kenya : un 'geek' à la présidence ?" <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20130219151919/internet-facebook-raila-odinga-googleelections-au-kenya-un-geek-a-la-presidence.html> (accessed February 22, 2013).

60. BBC website, "The technology modernising Kenya's matatus," <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-24426676> (accessed March 20, 2014). Cellular News website, "Safaricom Offering Free Wi-Fi in Kenyan Buses," <http://www.cellular-news.com/story/60516.php> (accessed March 20, 2014).

followers' numbers for Ghanaian presidential finalist candidates. In Kenya, as social media practice has already been made familiar to population and political actors, we do not find any significant trend between Twitter and Facebook practices. Kenyan candidates tried to maximize their use of both tools.

However, social media users' behavior has been changing as the time has passed. So, in terms of political features, the social media situation at current moment might be different than that of the period (2012-13) that has been analyzed here.

## **5. Conclusion**

This article aimed to examine social media's meaning and influence on African politics. The concept of extraversion has been applied as the basic character of political behavior in order to understand social media practices in African politics. We found that extraversion is significantly reflected in political actors' behaviors, especially at the critical moments which might bring radical political change in Africa.

Then, this article examined social media practices after serious nationwide violence, focusing on Tweeted or posted text contents by principal political actors during the turbulent moment. Social media practices in African politics have also been influenced by political extraversion. China's increasing influence in Africa has certainly impacted African political actors' social media practices. Political leaders in Francophone countries are eager to display their close relationship with China while keeping special ties with France. Such relationships, which have been satirically called "Françafrique," continue to influence African leaders.

In its final part, this article conducted a comparative analysis of the social media practices in elections through case studies that were not threatened by serious, widespread violence. Social media practices in African politics are not only affected by political actors' wills and strategies but also heavily by internet infrastructure conditions and, to a degree, to language characteristics. In general, political practices in social media seem more active in Anglophone countries than in Francophone countries. However, even among Anglophone countries, internet infrastructure conditions make a difference in the social media landscape in political practices.

Social media practices have progressed not only in the political lives of countries, but also in daily lives of their people. We have observed evolution in social media every month. Therefore, it is not easy to grasp social media activities

through a static image. We must be satisfied with describing certain tendencies in social media use in African politics.

In general, social media practices in African politics have to be reflected by real political actions. Despite the limited case studies conducted in this modest article, we can clearly observe how social media has continued to increase its influence over political actors as they adapt to the political situation.

What will social media bring to African politics in long term? Social media is not sufficiently diffused yet in African political activities to be comparable to western countries. Social media is still a minor approach in Sub-Saharan African politics<sup>61</sup>. Therefore, in the short term, we should neither expect social media to drastically change African politics, nor to be the sole means by which democratization is carried out.

However, social media has shown significance in terms of the diversification of information sharing around the world, especially in developing countries. This is because politically sensitive information has been strictly limited and controlled by authoritarian regimes before the time of social media came to these countries. Tunisian and Egyptian peoples were the eyewitnesses of this phenomenon during the Arab Spring. In the time of social media, it has become much more difficult to monopolize crucial information and especially for incumbent regimes to conceal troublesome information.

In general, this liberation of information might make African countries more democratic in the long term, even though political reform never progresses straightaway. As social media practices have expanded, it has obviously become more difficult to monopolize information than it was in pre-social media times. This situation might discourage new coup attempts by military force because information control is the essential condition to ensure a successful coup d'état and to keep power after the coup. Although it does not mean social media can prevent all coup attempts, as we saw in Egypt in 2013, it causes soldiers to expect the release of more difficult-to-control information before and during the coup attempt, and its unsuccessful result. Coup d'état seems less likely to be successful due to social media.

Practices in social media also depend on the conditions of internet infrastructure. Social media use in African politics is a good subject to consider

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61. Jeune Afrique website, "Burkina Faso : une révolution 2.0, vraiment ?" <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20141031144747/internet-blaise-compaore-reseaux-sociaux-revolution-burkinabe-reseaux-sociaux-burkina-faso-une-revolution-2-0-vraiment.html> (accessed November 1, 2014).

when exploring how technology influences political behavior in Africa, as well as in other parts of the world. In terms of the correlation between internet technology and political activities, e-politics has become a more important research subject in studies on African politics due to the drastically changing internet landscape.

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