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## From Bandung to X: Africa–Asia Political Communication and the Zimbabwean Digital Afterlives of Solidarity

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Fredrick Rafomoyo<sup>1</sup>, Nereshnee Govender<sup>2</sup>, Sameera B. Hussain<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Public Relations Management, Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Writing Centre, Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa

<sup>3</sup>Department of Sport Studies, Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa

**Abstract:** The Bandung Conference established a communicative framework for Africa–Asia solidarity grounded in anti-colonial diplomacy and state-led dialogue. However, existing scholarship has paid limited attention to how this communicative logic is reconfigured within contemporary digital platforms in the Global South. This paper addresses this gap by examining how Bandung’s legacy is translated into digital political communication in Zimbabwe’s post-2017 re-engagement period. Focusing on X, the study analyses three key hashtags: #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness, #AntiSanctions/#NoToSanctions, and #ZimbabweLivesMatter. It adopts a mixed-methods approach combining sentiment analysis, network analysis, and critical discourse analysis of 100 tweets from 2018 to 2025 enabling both the measurement of affective trends and the interpretation of narrative construction. The paper advances the argument that Africa–Asia solidarity has shifted from elite diplomatic communication to platform-mediated, networked discourse shaped by algorithmic visibility. The findings show that state-driven hashtags function as strategic tools of economic diplomacy and narrative control, while civic hashtags enable bottom-up activism and transnational visibility. However, both forms of communication remain structured by unequal visibility and platform dynamics. The paper concludes that while digital platforms extend Bandung’s anti-colonial communicative project, they also reproduce new forms of communicative inequality, highlighting the need for more inclusive and critically governed digital spaces in Global South political communication.

**Keywords:** digital diplomacy; platform capitalism; political communication; South–south solidarity; X/Twitter

### CORRESPONDENCE

Email: nereshneeg@dut.ac.za

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### Introduction

The Bandung Conference marked not only a geopolitical realignment but a decisive intervention in African political thought, diplomatic practice, and anti-colonial communication. Convened in 1955, the conference brought together twenty-nine Asian and African states and liberation movements to articulate a shared political language of sovereignty, racial equality, and resistance to imperial domination (Appadorai, 1955; Phillips, 2016). The conference was a meeting of

Asian and African countries in Bandung, Indonesia. As expressed by Rothwell and Gerits (2025) “While the objective of Afro-Asian solidarity, espoused at the meeting, has often been conflated with nonalignment, a project linked with the Belgrade Conference of 1961, the conference’s anticolonialism did dovetail with a rejection of the Cold War, which was cast as a new form of colonialism.” These authors explain that the Bandung Conference was an expansive diplomatic convening and a performative, discursive intervention geared towards addressing issues facing newly independent countries. It further aimed to address pressures the participating countries faced as a result of the US–Soviet rivalry during the Cold War. From an African perspective, Bandung was not merely an event of interstate diplomacy; it was embedded in ongoing liberation struggles and represented an extension of political imaginaries forged through anti-colonial resistance, Pan-Africanism, and the demand for land, dignity, and self-rule. Its significance lies in establishing a communicative repertoire grounded in anti-imperialism, solidarity, and developmental autonomy that would shape postcolonial statecraft and diplomatic discourse across the continent (Chakrabarty, 2005; Amin, 2017).

This research addresses how Bandung’s legacy is translated into digital political communication in Zimbabwe’s post-2017 re-engagement period. The emergence of #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness and #Vision2030 should be understood within the longer trajectory of African diplomatic practice and postcolonial political thought, rather than interpreted solely as contemporary digital strategies. The Bandung Conference constituted an early site at which African leaders developed a common language of sovereignty, economic self-determination, and the reconfiguration of Africa’s position in the international order (Appadorai, 1955; Phillips, 2016). From a communicative perspective, Bandung can be understood as a discursive formation that constructed South–South solidarity through dialogue, exchange, and shared narratives of struggle. This was evident in the conference’s deliberations on colonialism and racial discrimination, where African and Asian leaders articulated common positions against imperial rule and affirmed principles of sovereignty, non-alignment, and cooperation (Appadorai, 1955; Phillips, 2016).

The conference represented a proactive attempt to build a new international order grounded in horizontal Afro-Asian cooperation rather than colonial vertical dependencies (Phillips, 2016). This included calls for economic collaboration, cultural exchange, and diplomatic coordination aimed at reversing the fragmentation imposed by imperial divide and rule strategies (Amin, 2017). In this sense, Bandung prefigured later institutional developments such as the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77, embedding solidarity within both discourse and material structures (Wondam, 2016). One of its defining features was the free and frank exchange of ideas among African and Asian participants, signalling the emergence of a communicative space in which formerly marginalised actors could speak collectively (Appadorai, 1955). This aligns with interpretations of Bandung as a South-South conversation that sought to recognise cultural diversity without reproducing imperial hierarchies (Chakrabarty, 2005). At the same time, Bandung was not only reactive but constructive and world-making.

However, Bandung’s communicative project was also shaped by tensions and contradictions. While it articulated a vision of transnational solidarity, it simultaneously reinforced the sovereign nation-state as the primary unit of political organisation, thereby limiting more radical forms of collective emancipation (Hongoh, 2016). As Hongoh (2016) notes, this shift contributed to the prioritisation of national interests over broader Afro-Asian solidarity, revealing the fragility of Bandung’s collective project. Nevertheless, its symbolic and discursive power endured, shaping subsequent efforts at Pan-Africanism and South–South cooperation (Amin, 2017). From a decolonial perspective, Bandung also represented a critical moment in the struggle against the coloniality of knowledge, as participants rejected being defined by external powers and asserted their own epistemic agency (Chakrabarty, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). The then President of Indonesia, Sukarno was one of the most prominent leaders of anti-colonial movements in the mid-20th century. His insistence that Asians and Africans must not become camp-followers of global powers reflects this epistemic break (Appadorai, 1955). In this sense, Bandung inaugurated a broader project of epistemic decolonisation that challenged Western monopolies over knowledge production and political meaning, while simultaneously informing African liberation movements and postcolonial diplomatic practices grounded in sovereignty, anti-imperialism, and South–South cooperation (Santos, 2018; Amin, 2017).

Despite widespread research on Bandung as a historical milestone of Afro-Asian solidarity, not much is known about how its communicative principles have survived, changed, or re-emerged in contemporary digital political communication in Africa. The main problem addressed in this research is therefore how an anti-colonial

diplomatic language developed in the mid 1990's is reworked within platform-based political communication today, and what this shows about solidarity, sovereignty, and visibility in African digital publics.

The central problem is that existing work tends to examine Bandung as diplomatic history, Zimbabwean post-2017 communication as state branding or protest, and African digital activism as platformed participation, but rarely brings these threads together to demonstrate how Bandung-like decolonial solidarity is translated into hashtag politics on X. This article addresses that gap by examining whether, and in what ways, digital communication in Zimbabwe reproduces or revises the political language of Bandung.

Bandung's enduring relevance can only be fully understood when read through the historical experiences of African liberation movements and their postcolonial trajectories. In Zimbabwe, the struggle for independence was centrally organised around questions of land dispossession, racial inequality, and political sovereignty, themes that resonated strongly with Bandung's anti-colonial agenda (Mlambo & Gwekwerere, 2019). The liberation war and its aftermath produced a political language rooted in sacrifice, entitlement, and resistance to external domination, which continues to shape contemporary state discourse. Post-independence rhetoric, particularly during the Fast Track Land Reform Programme, drew explicitly on liberation war narratives to construct binaries of 'patriots' versus 'sell-outs' and to frame sovereignty as a continuation of anti-colonial struggle (Mlambo & Gwekwerere, 2019). This ideological continuity reflects a broader African diplomatic tradition in which political legitimacy is grounded in liberation history and resistance to imperial power.

At the same time, Zimbabwe's postcolonial diplomatic practice has been marked by confrontational engagements with Western powers, particularly around sanctions and governance disputes. The imposition of European Union sanctions in the early 2000s, following the Fast Track Land Reform Programme and contested elections, intensified a diplomatic discourse centred on sovereignty, external interference, and economic justice (Wondam, 2016). The Zimbabwean state has consistently framed sanctions as instruments of neo-imperial control, thereby mobilising anti-colonial rhetoric reminiscent of Bandung-era solidarity politics. This framing reflects a deeper continuity between liberation diplomacy and contemporary foreign policy positioning, in which resistance to Western pressure is articulated as a defence of postcolonial autonomy.

Zimbabwe's political and economic crises since the late 1990s further illustrate how liberation-era discourse has been reworked in postcolonial governance. The crisis period, often described as a 'lost decade,' was shaped by intertwined economic decline, land redistribution, and political contestation, all of which were interpreted through competing narratives of sovereignty and governance (Kufakurinani, 2021, 2024). While the state foregrounded anti-imperial explanations rooted in land restitution and external sabotage, alternative perspectives emphasised internal governance failures and political repression. These competing interpretations demonstrate how the meaning of sovereignty remains contested within African political thought, echoing tensions already present at Bandung between different visions of postcolonial development and autonomy.

Zimbabwe is a particularly appropriate site for exploring this transition because its postcolonial political discourse remains deeply shaped by liberation struggle narratives, decolonising and sovereigntist claims, sanctions politics, and government-driven rebranding efforts. These factors have yielded a complex and debated digital communication environment in which both state and civic actors use hashtags to frame Zimbabwe's political and economic position. As a result, Zimbabwe offers a clear site for observing how Bandung's decolonial communicative logic is reactivated, adapted, and contested within digital platforms.

Against this historical backdrop, this paper examines how Zimbabwe's post-2017 digital political communication rearticulates these longer traditions of African diplomatic and liberation discourse. Specifically, it analyses how social media platforms, particularly X, have become sites where Bandung-era themes of sovereignty, anti-imperialism, and Afro-Asian solidarity are reconfigured into networked, platform-mediated narratives. Hashtags such as #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness, #NoToSanctions, and #ZimbabweLivesMatter draw upon historically sedimented discourses of liberation, entitlement, and resistance while translating them into digital forms of political communication.

This article builds on this historical and theoretical foundation to address two central research questions: 1. How are Bandung's anti-colonial communicative ideals rearticulated, contested, or transformed in Zimbabwe's political communication on X between 2018 and 2025? 2. How do #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness, #Anti-Sanctions/#NoToSanctions, and #ZimbabweLivesMatter differ in sentiment, network structure, and discursive framing, and what do these differences reveal about state-led communication and civic activism? These two

questions work well because the first focuses on the historical and theoretical claim, while the second focuses on the observable evidence in the data. Together, they align directly to the article's mixed-method design of sentiment analysis, network analysis, and critical discourse analysis.

The originality of this research lies in demonstrating that Zimbabwean hashtag politics is not merely a case of digital activism or state communication, but a contemporary reworking of Bandung's communicative ideals within platformed political space. In doing so, the article connects Afro-Asian solidarity, post-2017 Zimbabwean discourse, and African digital activism in a single analytical frame that has not yet been brought together in previous research.

The central argument advanced here is that Africa–Asia solidarity has undergone a structural transformation from state-centric diplomatic discourse to algorithmically mediated, networked communication (Castells, 2009; Papacharissi, 2009). While Bandung-era communication relied on elite-controlled forums, formal declarations, and face-to-face dialogue, these modes are now supplemented and reconfigured by digital platforms, where contemporary solidarity is increasingly produced through networked interaction and where visibility, authority, and discourse are shaped by algorithmic logics rather than solely by diplomatic protocols (Bruns, 2023). Importantly, this transformation does not simply extend Bandung's emancipatory vision, it introduces new forms of inequality and control. Just as colonial power once shaped the conditions of communication, today's digital infrastructures reproduce asymmetries through platform governance and data capitalism (Benkler, 2006; Bruns, 2023). Thus, while Bandung opened a communicative space for the Global South, its digital afterlives, as illustrated in the Zimbabwean case, remain contested terrains where solidarity is both enabled and constrained by technological power structures.

## **Theoretical framework**

This study conceptualises Bandung as having a communicative and anti-colonial political legacy that continues to shape Africa–Asia relations and Global South discourse. Bandung institutionalised a political language grounded in sovereignty, anti-imperialism, and South–South solidarity, providing a shared communicative framework through which newly independent African states articulated their place in the international order (Appadorai, 1955; Amin, 2017). From a decolonial perspective, this moment represents not only a diplomatic convergence but also an epistemic intervention that challenged Western dominance over political meaning and knowledge production (Chakrabarty, 2005; Santos, 2018). In the African context, these communicative traditions were closely intertwined with liberation struggles, where political discourse was shaped by histories of dispossession, resistance, and the demand for self-determination (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). In Zimbabwe, liberation war narratives continue to inform contemporary political communication, particularly in discourses of sovereignty, entitlement, and anti-imperial resistance (Mlambo & Gwekwerere, 2019).

Building on this foundation, the study adopts the digital public sphere and networked communication as a secondary framework to analyse how Bandung's communicative legacy is reconfigured within contemporary platforms. While classical public sphere theory conceptualises communication as rational-critical debate (Habermas, 1989), this study draws on more flexible interpretations that recognise the multiplicity and fragmentation of digital publics (Dahlgren, 2005). Digital platforms such as X enable the circulation of political narratives across state actors, activists, and citizens, transforming political communication into networked, participatory, and real-time interaction (Papacharissi, 2009; Castells, 2009). Within this framework, hashtags, digital campaigns, and online discourse function as contemporary mechanisms through which solidarity, resistance, and political identity are articulated.

However, these communicative processes are not neutral. The study therefore employs platform capitalism and visibility inequality as a critical lens to interrogate the power structures embedded within digital communication. Platforms operate through algorithmic logics that shape what is visible, amplified, or marginalised, thereby reproducing new forms of communicative inequality even as they expand participation (Bruns, 2023). This dynamic is particularly significant in the Global South, where digital communication simultaneously enables the rearticulation of anti-colonial narratives and constrains them through uneven access, language hierarchies, and algorithmic control. As a result, this research argues that the Bandung Conference should be understood not as a closed historical event but as an unfinished communicative project, whose implications evolve across ever-changing technological and political environments (Phillips, 2016; Chakrabarty, 2005). The following section provides details on the methods used in this research.

## **Methodology**

This study is an exploratory qualitative–quantitative case study of hashtag discourse on X aimed at examining how Africa–Asia solidarity is constructed and circulated on X in Zimbabwe’s post-2017 context. In terms of the research design, the study uses a mixed-methods digital methods approach to examine how Bandung’s anti-colonial communicative legacy appears in Zimbabwean hashtag politics. A purposive set of a 100-tweet sample were collected through X advanced search and keyword scraping using the three hashtag clusters. This was followed by cleaning procedures that removed duplicates, spam, and non-relevant content. The analysis draws on a curated dataset of 100 tweets across three key hashtag domains: #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness, #AntiSanctions/#NoToSanctions, and #ZimbabweLivesMatter, for the period January 2018 to December 2025.

In terms of data analysis, sentiment analysis gives broad affective patterns, network analysis maps visibility and actor centrality, and critical discourse analysis interprets meaning, framing, and political language. The dataset primarily consists of English-language and Shona posts, although limited instances of code-switching were retained where analytically relevant. Sentiment analysis was conducted using TextBlob to classify posts as positive, negative, or neutral. Given the limitations of automated sentiment tools in interpreting political language, sarcasm, and local idioms, a manual validation of a 15% sample was undertaken to improve interpretive reliability. Network analysis using NetworkX was employed to map user interactions, identify central actors, and visualise clusters of communication around key hashtags. These quantitative methods are complemented by critical discourse analysis to interpret how narratives of sovereignty, solidarity, and resistance are constructed. This integrated approach enables both structural and interpretive insights into digital political communication, aligning with the study of natively digital data through natively digital methods (Rogers, 2009). It is important to note that the dataset is small and purposive, so the goal is interpretive depth rather than statistical generalisation. This is especially important because this research covers a long period but only 100 tweets. This study is best understood as an interpretive case study of platform-mediated political communication rather than a statistically representative survey of X discourse. This design combines descriptive measurement with interpretive analysis in order to connect discursive patterns to the political and historical meanings of Bandung’s afterlives in Zimbabwean digital communication. Based on the fact that the article’s argument is historical and theoretical, the quantitative tools are supportive, and the main contribution is the explanation of how digital communication transforms older anti-colonial political language into hashtag-based public discourse. The following section provides a critical discussion, analysis and presentation of research findings.

### ***Digital political communication and state rebranding:***

#### ***#ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness and #Vision2030:***

The emergence of #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness and #Vision2030 is situated within longer histories of African diplomatic practice and postcolonial political thought rather than viewed solely as contemporary digital strategies. The Bandung Conference provided an early platform through which African leaders articulated a shared political language of sovereignty, economic self-determination, and international repositioning (Appadorai, 1955; Phillips, 2016). African participation at Bandung was shaped by ongoing liberation struggles and Pan-African currents that emphasised autonomy, development, and resistance to imperial economic control (Amin, 2017; Chakrabarty, 2005). These principles later informed African diplomatic practice, including non-alignment and the strategic use of international communication to assert political legitimacy and attract global recognition.

In Southern Africa, liberation movements developed a distinct tradition of liberation diplomacy, where political communication was closely tied to narratives of land, sovereignty, and anti-imperial resistance (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). In Zimbabwe, this tradition persisted beyond independence, with state discourse drawing on liberation war narratives to frame legitimacy and international engagement (Mlambo & Gwekwerere, 2019). Contemporary digital campaigns such as #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness can therefore be read as extensions of these earlier communicative practices, rearticulated within new technological environments.

The hashtag #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness functions as a performative attempt to reposition Zimbabwe within global political and economic discourse, echoing earlier postcolonial efforts to assert economic sovereignty and attract international partnerships. In line with Foucauldian perspectives, such discourse produces rather than merely reflects reality by constructing regimes of truth around reform and openness (Foucault, 1972). However,

scholars note that structural economic challenges and policy inconsistencies complicate this narrative, generating tensions between state messaging and lived realities (Nyamunda, 2021; Ndakaripa, 2020). This reflects a broader pattern in African postcolonial communication, where aspirational developmental discourse often coexists with critique and contestation.

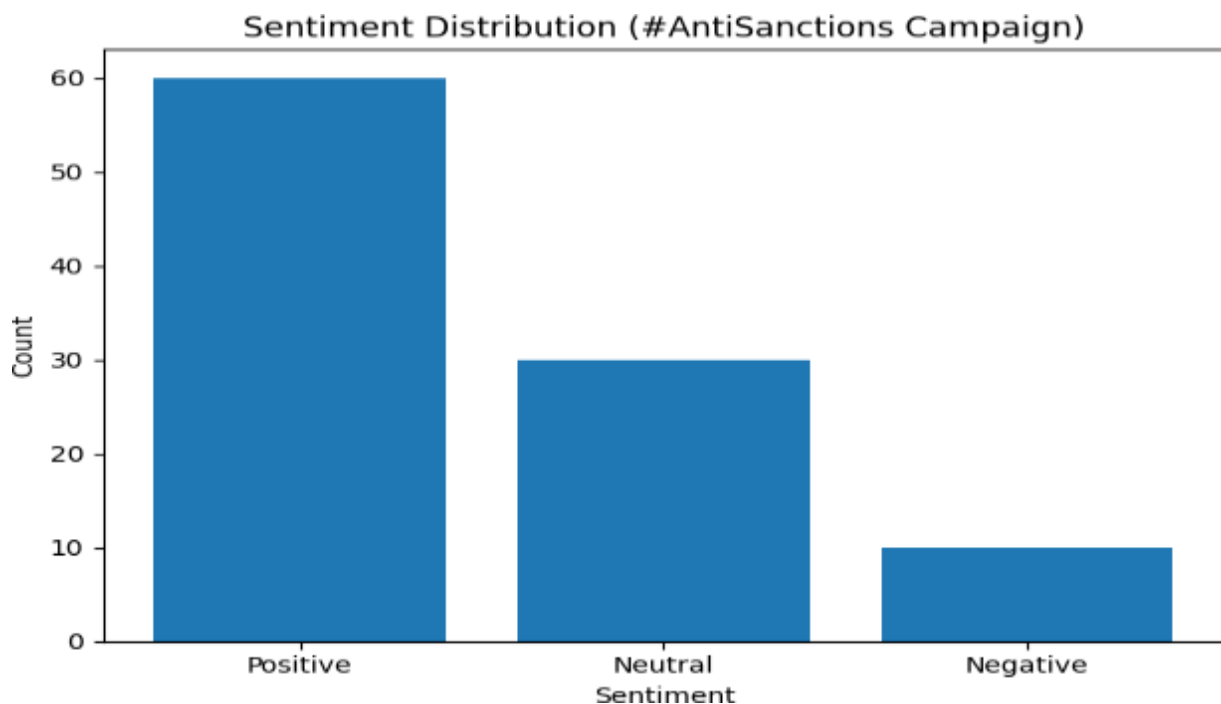
Similarly, #Vision2030 reflects a longer tradition of developmental nationalism in African political thought, where future-oriented narratives are mobilised to legitimise present authority and articulate pathways to economic transformation (Amin, 2017). While framed as a national development agenda, its digital circulation reveals how such narratives are increasingly embedded within platform-mediated communication, where repetition and visibility shape their political impact. As Armstrong (2015) suggests, development discourse can function as a legitimising tool, particularly when linked to promises of prosperity and modernisation.

These hashtags illustrate how Zimbabwe’s digital political communication is rooted in historical trajectories of Pan-African solidarity, anti-imperial resistance, and postcolonial statecraft, while simultaneously being transformed by the logics of digital platforms. In line with the study’s argument, this demonstrates that contemporary communication does not replace Bandung-era diplomacy but reconfigures it, translating earlier forms of African political expression into networked, algorithmically mediated discourse (Bruns, 2023).

### *Sentiment analysis of digital framing of #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness on X*

This section analyses how the hashtag #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness operates within the broader transformation of political communication from Bandung-era diplomatic rhetoric to digitally mediated, networked discourse. The findings demonstrate that contemporary Africa–Asia and Global South communication is increasingly shaped by platform logics, visibility economies, and strategic narrative construction, rather than deliberative public engagement.

The sentiment, hashtag frequency, and network analyses reveal that #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness functions primarily as a digital political–economic branding strategy, through which the Zimbabwean state seeks to reframe its global image. Rather than facilitating open debate about economic policy, the hashtag operates as a discursive tool of state communication, aligning with broader patterns of strategic narrative production within digital public spheres (Castells, 2009; Papacharissi, 2009). As shown in Figure 1, the circulation of this hashtag reflects a coordinated effort to project Zimbabwe as a site of investment, reform, and economic recovery.



**Figure 1.** Sentiment Distribution of #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness

### *Sentiment patterns*

The sentiment analysis of 100 tweets from 2018 to 2025 indicates that 58% of tweets are positive, 30% neutral, and only 10% negative. The predominance of positive sentiment reflects the promotional and performative nature of the discourse, consistent with state-led economic diplomacy following the 2017 political transition. Positive tweets frequently deploy a lexicon of investment, opportunity, growth, and resilience, reinforcing the construction of Zimbabwe as an attractive destination for foreign capital. Neutral posts, which constitute a significant proportion of the dataset, are largely informational, including event announcements, policy updates, and diplomatic engagements. This suggests that the hashtag operates within a communication regime structured by repetition and amplification, rather than critical deliberation (Dahlgren, 2005). The relatively low proportion of negative sentiment indicates limited visibility of counter-narratives, although this may reflect algorithmic filtering or the strategic dominance of state-aligned messaging (Bruns, 2023).

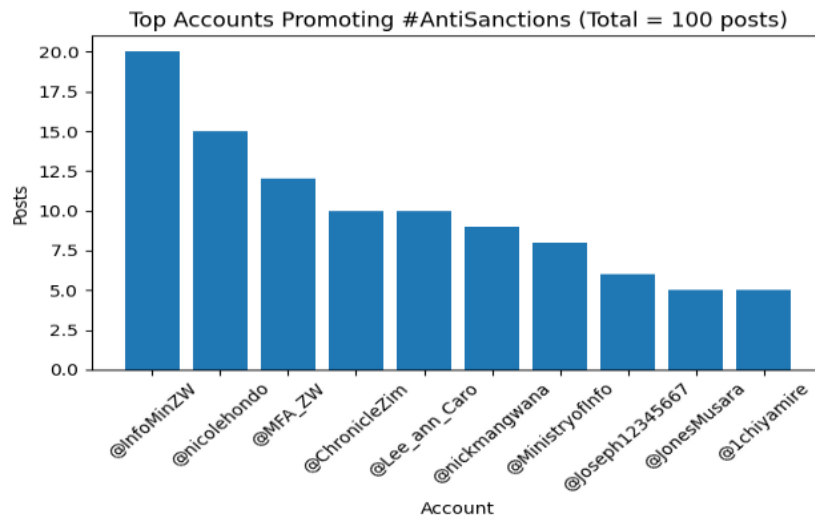
These findings demonstrate how digital platforms reconfigure political communication into a hybrid space of visibility and control, where narratives of economic openness are produced, circulated, and stabilised through networked publics. While the discourse resonates with Bandung-era emphases on sovereignty, development, and international repositioning (Appadorai, 1955; Amin, 2017), it is simultaneously reshaped within the logics of platform capitalism, where communication is structured by algorithmic amplification, strategic framing, and uneven visibility (Bruns, 2023).

As illustrated in Figure 1, the prominence of state-aligned accounts and coordinated messaging reflects a shift from diplomatic persuasion to digitally orchestrated visibility regimes. In this context, #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness exemplifies the digital afterlives of postcolonial communication, where state narratives of development and Global South engagement are not only articulated but actively engineered within platform infrastructures, reinforcing both continuity with and transformation of earlier African diplomatic traditions.

The findings illustrate a significant transformation in political communication from diplomatic discourse to platform-mediated narratives, where digital platforms reshape how state messaging is produced and circulated. Neutral tweets associated with #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness function primarily as institutional communication rather than deliberative engagement, consisting largely of informational updates on diplomatic meetings, trade forums, and participation in global events such as Expo 2025 Osaka and the World Economic Forum. In this sense, the hashtag operates as a routine instrument of state communication, reinforcing visibility through repetition and circulation rather than critical debate, consistent with networked understandings of the public sphere as structured communicative spaces (Dahlgren, 2005; Papacharissi, 2009).

Negative tweets, as shown in Figure 1, remain marginal and typically articulate scepticism toward official economic narratives by highlighting disjuncture between state messaging and lived realities. However, their limited presence suggests constrained visibility within algorithmically structured environments, where dominant narratives are privileged over dissenting voices, reflecting the inequalities embedded in platform capitalism (Bruns, 2023).

Account frequency analysis further demonstrates that discourse is highly centralised around state and state-aligned actors, including @InfoMinZW, @MoFA\_ZW, and @nickmangwana, as illustrated in Figure 2. This concentration reflects the dynamics of networked communication power, where influential nodes shape information flows and control narrative circulation (Castells, 2009). From a decolonial perspective, this pattern also indicates how postcolonial state communication continues to draw on traditions of strategic diplomatic messaging, now reconfigured within digital infrastructures (Amin, 2017). Consequently, the hashtag exemplifies how political communication in the Global South is mediated through platform capitalism, where institutional voices are amplified while broader public deliberation remains uneven and constrained.



**Figure 2.** Top Accounts Promoting the Hashtag

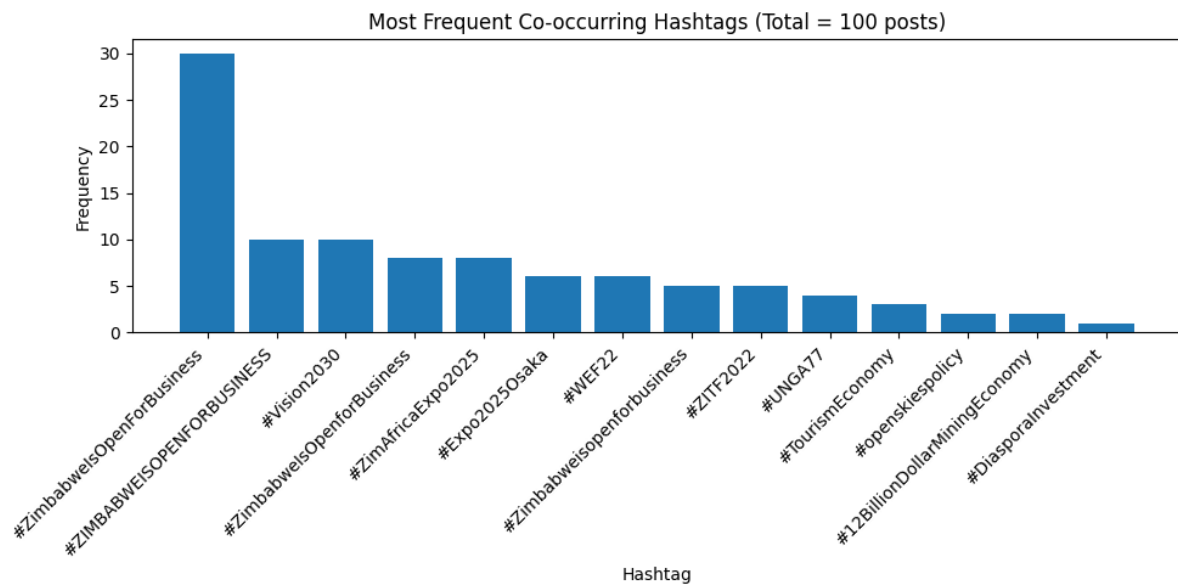
The distribution of activity around #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness indicates that the hashtag is institutionally driven rather than organically generated. The prominence of state actors and affiliated media accounts suggests that the narrative is sustained through coordinated digital strategies designed to project an image of economic openness and reform to both domestic and international audiences. This pattern reflects a continuity with earlier traditions of liberation diplomacy in Southern Africa, where states strategically communicated sovereignty, legitimacy, and international positioning in response to external pressures (Kufakurinani, 2021, 2024). At the same time, it resonates with Pan-African solidarity and anti-imperial resistance, where communication has historically been used to assert autonomy and counter external domination. However, unlike Bandung-era diplomatic engagement, these narratives are now produced within networked publics shaped by platform logics, where visibility and influence are structured through digital amplification (Castells, 2009; Papacharissi, 2009).

### *The hashtag co-occurrence analysis*

The hashtag co-occurrence analysis further demonstrates how this contemporary discourse is embedded within longer trajectories of African political communication. Frequently co-occurring hashtags such as #Vision2030, #ZimAtExpo2025, #ZITF2022, and #WEF22 link economic messaging to Zimbabwe’s developmental agenda and its participation in global economic forums. This reflects a continuation of postcolonial efforts to position African states within international economic systems while maintaining narratives of sovereignty and self-determination (Kufakurinani, 2021).

At the same time, these patterns illustrate how digital communication constructs a multi-layered narrative of legitimacy, combining national development goals with global engagement, echoing earlier Pan-African aspirations for collective advancement and international recognition. However, this alignment is now achieved through coordinated hashtag networks, demonstrating how liberation-era communicative practices are reconfigured within platform capitalism, where narrative coherence and influence are produced through strategic visibility rather than deliberative public discourse (Bruns, 2023).

The co-occurrence of #Vision2030 with #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness demonstrates how economic branding is strategically embedded within a broader state-led narrative of national transformation and modernisation, as shown in Figure 3. The linking of investment messaging to long-term developmental goals constructs a future-oriented narrative of structural renewal that seeks to legitimise the post-2017 political order. This reflects a broader shift in which digital platforms are used not merely to communicate policy but to engineer coherent state narratives within networked publics, where legitimacy is produced through repetition, alignment, and visibility (Castells, 2009; Papacharissi, 2015).



**Figure 3.** Most Frequently Concurring Hashtags

This strategy resonates with longer traditions of developmental nationalism in the Global South, where political authority is anchored in promises of economic transformation and modernisation (Amin, 2017). However, in the digital era, such narratives are increasingly shaped by platform dynamics, where algorithmic amplification and strategic coordination determine their reach and impact (Bruns, 2023; Poell et al., 2019). Similarly, the presence of hashtags associated with international expos and global economic forums, such as Expo 2025 Osaka, signals Zimbabwe’s attempt to position itself within global investment and diplomatic networks. These references function symbolically to project international engagement and economic credibility, reinforcing claims of re-engagement within global circuits. At the same time, they echo broader Global South aspirations for inclusion in international political and economic systems, while demonstrating how such aspirations are now articulated through digitally mediated forms of economic diplomacy (Kufakurinani, 2021, 2024).

### *Network dynamics*

The network analysis further reveals that the circulation of this discourse is highly centralised around state actors. Institutional accounts such as @InfoMinZW, @MoFA\_ZW, and @ChronicleZim occupy key nodes within the network, linking multiple hashtags and amplifying narratives across thematic domains. This centrality illustrates how digital political communication is structured by networked power and strategic amplification, where state actors retain significant control over visibility and agenda-setting (Bruns, 2023). Thus, the findings demonstrate that Zimbabwe’s digital communication is not a decentralised public sphere but a platform-mediated communicative field, where state narratives of development and global engagement are strategically coordinated and disseminated.

The transformation of political communication into platform-mediated, networked discourse reveals a hierarchically structured field of visibility, in which state actors occupy central positions while peripheral users remain marginal, as shown in Figure 4. Peripheral nodes, consisting of individual users and smaller accounts, exhibit limited engagement compared to dense clusters around official government accounts. This pattern indicates that digital discourse is centrally organised, with state actors functioning as primary hubs of information dissemination and narrative control, consistent with theories of networked communication power and algorithmic visibility (Castells, 2009; Bruns, 2023; Poell et al., 2019).

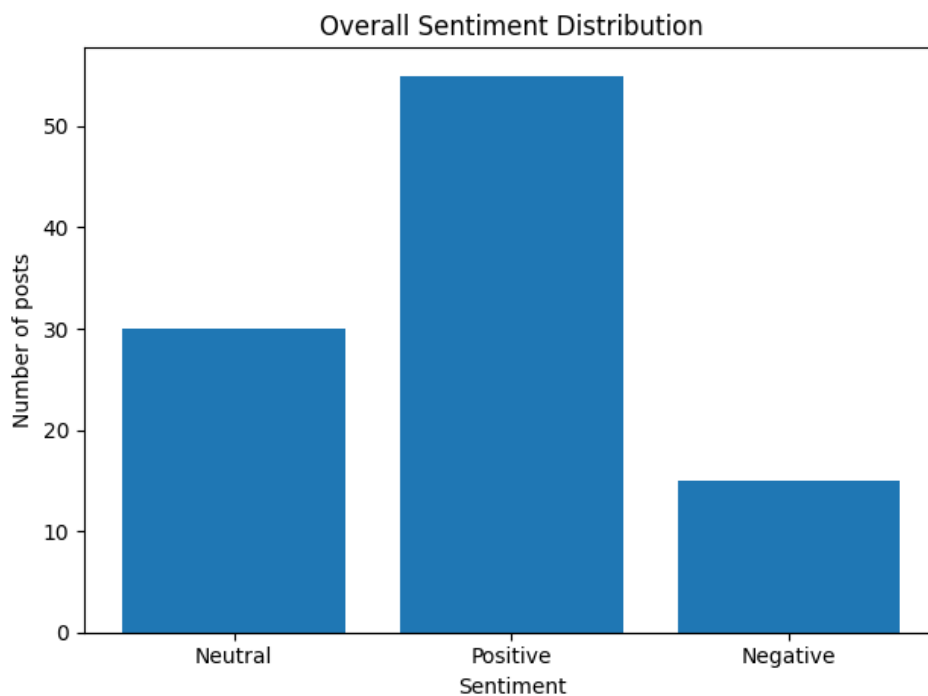


In the Southern African context, liberation movements developed a form of liberation diplomacy that relied on coordinated communication to mobilise regional and international support against colonial and neo-colonial pressures (Kufakurinani, 2021, 2024). Zimbabwe's anti-sanctions narrative draws directly on this tradition by framing sanctions as instruments of external control, thereby invoking a broader discourse of anti-imperial resistance (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). At the same time, the emphasis on regional actors such as Southern African Development Community (SADC) reflects the enduring influence of Pan-African solidarity, where collective political positioning is mobilised to counter global inequalities (Chiumbu, 2017; Santos, 2018).

However, these historical continuities are transformed within digital platforms such as X, where communication is no longer confined to diplomatic channels but is produced, circulated, and amplified through networked publics. In this context, anti-sanctions discourse becomes a form of digitally mediated diplomacy, where narratives of sovereignty and resistance are strategically disseminated through hashtags and coordinated campaigns. Thus, Zimbabwe's digital communication reflects both the persistence of Bandung-era solidarities and their reconfiguration within the logics of platform capitalism and algorithmic visibility (Bruns, 2023; Castells, 2009).

### *Sentiment analysis of #AntiSanctions and #NoToSanctions*

The sentiment distribution in Figure 5, dominated by neutral posts, shows that anti-sanctions discourse is primarily informational and performative rather than deliberative. This reflects traditions of liberation diplomacy and coordinated messaging in Southern Africa (Kufakurinani, 2021, 2024), as well as anti-imperial resistance and Pan-African solidarity (Amin, 2017; Chiumbu, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). In digital contexts, such communication becomes routinised through repetition and visibility, reinforcing narratives through networked amplification rather than critical debate (Dahlgren, 2005; Papacharissi, 2009).



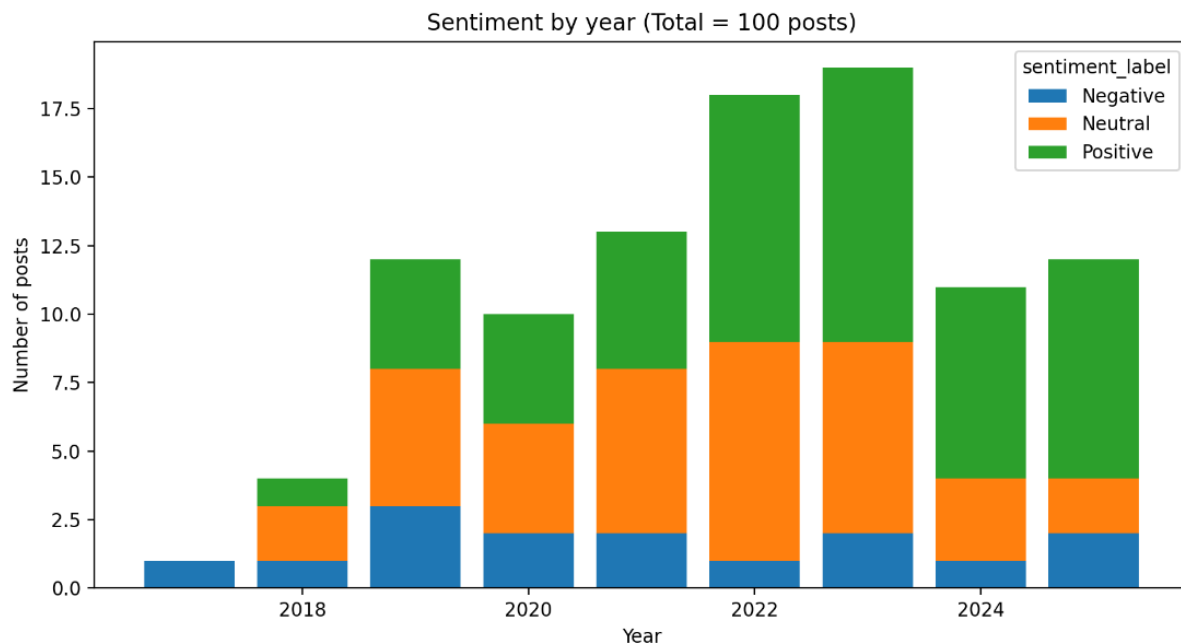
**Figure 5.** Sentiment #AntiSanctions and #NoToSanctions

The presence of positive sentiment, as shown in Figure 5, reflects the continued circulation of sovereignty, resistance, and Global South solidarity narratives, echoing the anti-imperial ethos of the Bandung Conference (Amin, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Limited negative sentiment points to the existence of counter-publics that challenge dominant state narratives. Overall, the discourse reveals a hybrid communicative space where state-aligned messaging dominates but is intermittently contested, illustrating the reconfiguration of postcolonial

communication within networked publics shaped by algorithmic visibility and platform power (Castells, 2009; Bruns, 2023).

### *Temporal distribution of sentiment of #AntiSanctions and #NoToSanctions*

The temporal distribution of sentiment reflects the evolution of platform-mediated political communication in line with the study's framework (Figure 6). Activity remains low immediately after 2017 but increases significantly from 2019, peaking between 2021 and 2023, corresponding with Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy and intensified anti-sanctions diplomacy. This pattern indicates the institutionalisation of digital communication, particularly through recurring campaigns such as Anti-Sanctions Day.



**Figure 6.** Temporal distribution of sentiment of #AntiSanctions and #NoToSanctions

The sustained dominance of neutral and positive sentiment suggests that anti-sanctions discourse is structured through coordinated amplification rather than deliberative engagement, reflecting routinised communication practices within networked publics (Dahlgren, 2005). The limited visibility of negative sentiment further indicates algorithmic privileging and controlled narrative circulation, where dominant perspectives are amplified while dissent remains marginal (Bruns, 2023). These patterns point to the consolidation of a digitally mediated communicative regime, where postcolonial solidarity is continuously reproduced through cyclical, platform-driven messaging.

### *Hashtag analysis of #AntiSanctions, #NoToSanctions*

The hashtag analysis reveals a structured discursive architecture shaped by national, regional, and geopolitical framing. Dominant tags such as #AntiSanctions, #NoToSanctions, #Zimbabwe, and #SADC anchor the discourse in national sovereignty and regional cooperation, echoing earlier traditions of Pan-African solidarity and South-South engagement associated with the Bandung Conference (Appadorai, 1955; Amin, 2017). The prominence of #Zimbabwe reinforces domestic legitimacy, while #SADC extends the narrative to a regional scale consistent with liberation-era diplomatic coordination (Kufakurinani, 2021, 2024). Campaign-specific hashtags such as #AntiSanctionsDay and #25October illustrate the institutionalisation of digital activism, where communication is routinised through recurring, calendar-based events. Geopolitical tags such as #USA and #SanctionsMustGo construct an external adversary, sustaining anti-imperial narratives central to postcolonial political communication (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Santos, 2018).

However, these continuities are reconfigured within digital platforms, where political communication shifts from elite diplomacy to hashtag-driven, networked publics. In this context, visibility is shaped by algorithmic

amplification rather than formal authority, producing a hybrid communicative space marked by both continuity and constraint (Castells, 2009; Bruns, 2023).

### ***Digital activism and the reconfiguration of solidarity: #ZimbabweLivesMatter***

The emergence of #ZimbabweLivesMatter and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter demonstrates how contemporary civic activism rearticulates longer traditions of Pan-African solidarity and anti-imperial resistance, within digital environments such as X. These hashtags emerged during periods of political tension and functioned as digital instruments of resistance, foregrounding issues of state violence, human rights, and governance. In doing so, they resonate with liberation-era communicative practices in which political language was mobilised to expose injustice, assert sovereignty, and challenge external and internal domination (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Kufakuriani, 2024).

Unlike state-driven campaigns such as #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness, these hashtags represent bottom-up communicative practices, enabling citizens to project local grievances into transnational public spheres. Their rapid circulation reflects the enduring logic of Pan-African solidarity, where struggles within individual states are framed as part of broader continental and Global South concerns (Chiumbu, 2017; Santos, 2018). The alignment with global movements such as #BlackLivesMatter further situates Zimbabwean activism within wider networks of anti-imperial resistance and global justice discourse (Poell et al., 2019). These developments illustrate how liberation diplomacy is reconfigured within platform-mediated communication. Where earlier movements relied on coordinated political structures, contemporary activism unfolds through networked, digitally enabled publics, where visibility is contingent on algorithmic amplification and platform dynamics (Castells, 2009; Bruns, 2023). Thus, these hashtags embody both continuity and transformation, sustaining postcolonial solidarities while simultaneously exposing their mediation and limitation within platform capitalism.

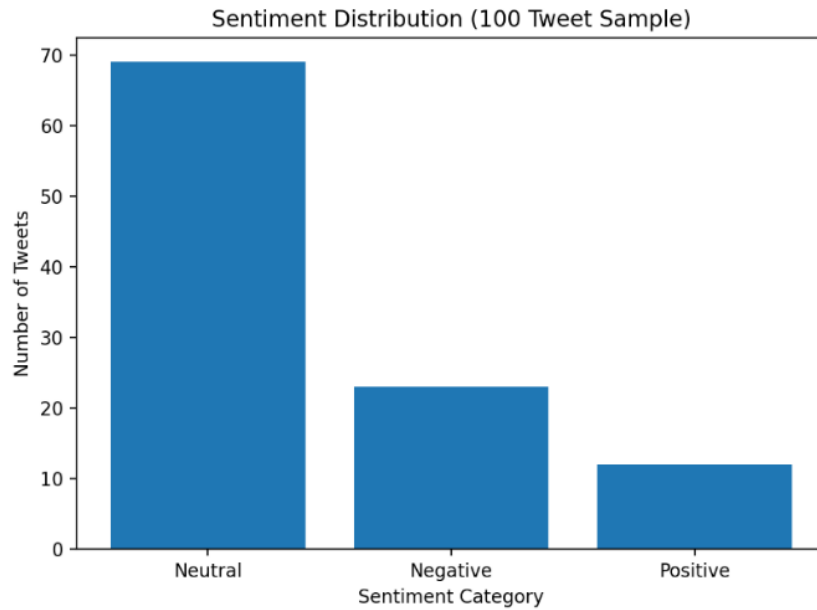
### ***Sentiment and network analysis of #ZimbabweLivesMatter***

The sentiment and network analysis of the 100-tweet sample demonstrates how #ZimbabweLivesMatter functioned as a civic communication mechanism during moments of political crisis, reflecting enduring traditions of anti-imperial resistance and liberation politics in Southern Africa. Unlike state-driven hashtags, this discourse is characterised by affective intensity, urgency, and moral witnessing, echoing historical modes of political expression rooted in resistance and accountability (Tendi, 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; Mpofu, 2021).

The sentiment patterns show that the hashtag operates less as persuasion and more as a mechanism of visibility and accountability, foregrounding repression and democratic fragility. This aligns with traditions of Pan-African solidarity, where local struggles are framed within broader continental and Global South narratives of justice and resistance (Moyo, 2020; Chiumbu & Mutsvairo, 2022). As a bottom-up communicative practice, it enables citizens to document lived realities and challenge dominant state narratives within digital environments. Network analysis further reveals a decentralised and participatory structure, linking activists, diaspora communities, and global audiences. This reflects the transformation of liberation-era communication into digitally networked publics, where solidarity is articulated through transnational engagement rather than formal diplomacy (Wasserman, 2020; Bosch, 2023). However, this space remains shaped by platform dynamics and uneven visibility, underscoring the constraints of platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2017; Bruns, 2023).

The sentiment distribution of #ZimbabweLivesMatter in Figure 7 reflects a discourse dominated by neutral (66.3%) and negative (22.1%) tones, with a smaller proportion of positive sentiment (11.5%). The prevalence of neutral posts indicates that the hashtag functioned primarily as a mobilisational and informational tool, disseminating updates on arrests, court proceedings, and calls to action, consistent with digitally networked activism in African contexts (Moyo, 2020; Chiumbu & Mutsvairo, 2022).

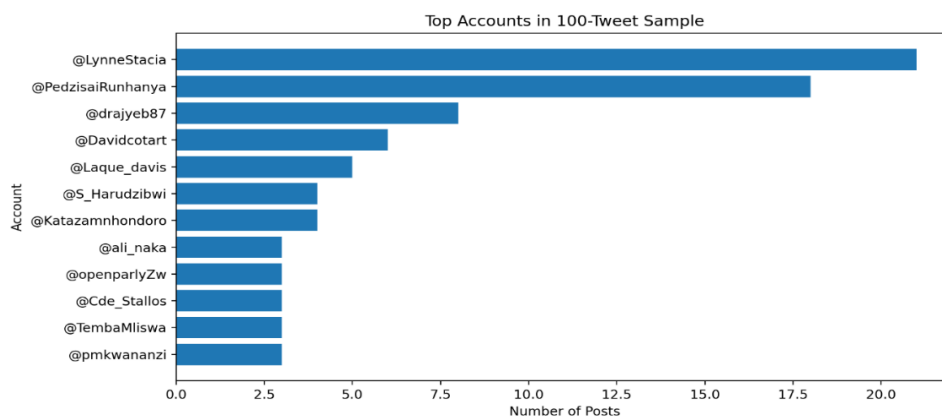
The negative sentiment is particularly significant, reflecting a politics of witnessing, where users document and circulate experiences of violence, repression, and injustice. In this sense, the hashtag operates as a digital archive of grievance, transforming individual experiences into collective visibility, a pattern observed in contemporary African protest communication (Tendi, 2020; Mpofu, 2021). Positive sentiment, although limited, introduces an aspirational dimension centred on solidarity, justice, and democratic possibility, echoing broader traditions of civic resistance (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). Together, these patterns illustrate a hybrid communicative space where protest discourse combines information, resistance, and hope. Consistent with the study, this demonstrates how



**Figure 7.** Sentiment Distribution of #ZimbabweLivesMatter

digital platforms enable bottom-up political communication while simultaneously structuring visibility through platform dynamics (Wasserman, 2020; Bosch, 2023).

The account analysis, as shown in Figure 8, reveals that #ZimbabweLivesMatter was sustained by a relatively concentrated cluster of highly active users rather than a uniformly distributed public. This pattern reflects broader dynamics of digital activism in African contexts, where visibility and agenda-setting are often driven by a small number of influential actors who shape narratives and sustain engagement (Wasserman, 2020; Bosch, 2023). These users function as key nodes within the network, curating information flows and maintaining attention around issues of repression and accountability. Such concentration highlights how digital political communication is structured by uneven participation and hierarchical visibility, even within ostensibly open platforms (Srnicek, 2017; Bruns, 2023).

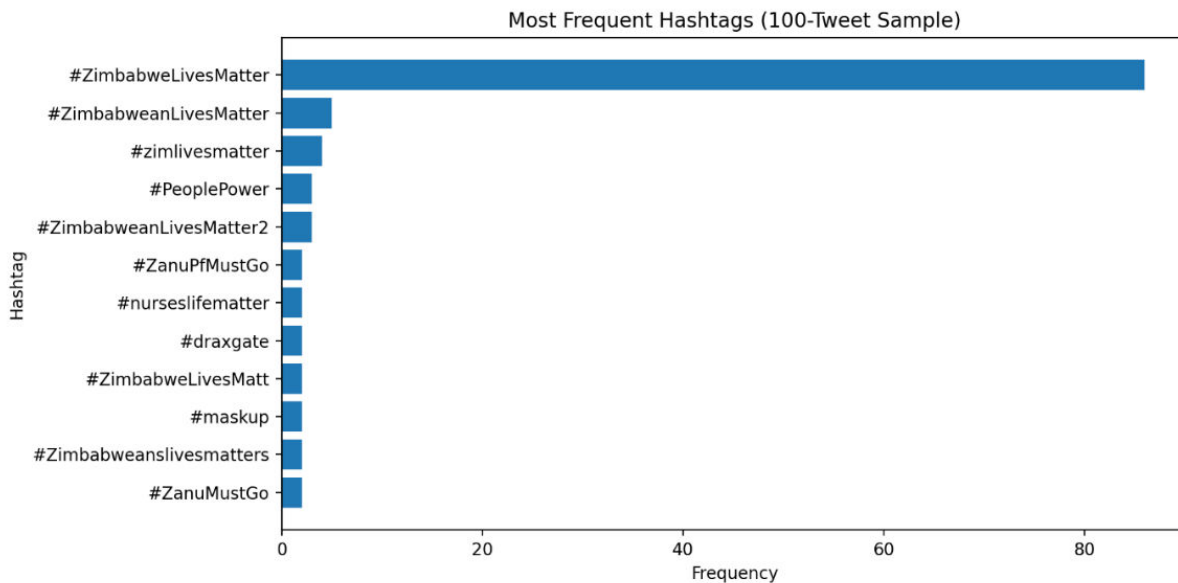


**Figure 8.** Top Account analysis

### *Hashtag frequency analysis*

While the hashtag enables bottom-up mobilisation, its circulation remains dependent on strategic amplification by committed actors, illustrating the interplay between civic engagement and platform dynamics in the digital afterlives of postcolonial communication.

The hashtag frequency analysis as shown in Figure 9 confirms the dominance of #ZimbabweLivesMatter as the central node of the discourse, indicating a highly coherent narrative structured around a unifying frame. The co-occurrence of hashtags such as #PeoplePower, #FreeZimbabwe, #ZanupfMustGo, #draxgate, and #maskup demonstrates a process of discursive convergence, where multiple grievances are articulated as interconnected dimensions of systemic crisis. This reflects how digital platforms enable the construction of layered, networked narratives, consistent with contemporary forms of connective action and digitally mediated protest (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Mutsvairo, 2018). In this sense, activism is not issue-specific but structurally framed, illustrating the reconfiguration of postcolonial political communication into a holistic, networked discourse shaped by hashtag linkages and platform dynamics rather than isolated political claims (Mpofu, 2021; Chiumbu & Mutsvairo, 2022).



**Figure 9.** Hashtag frequency analysis

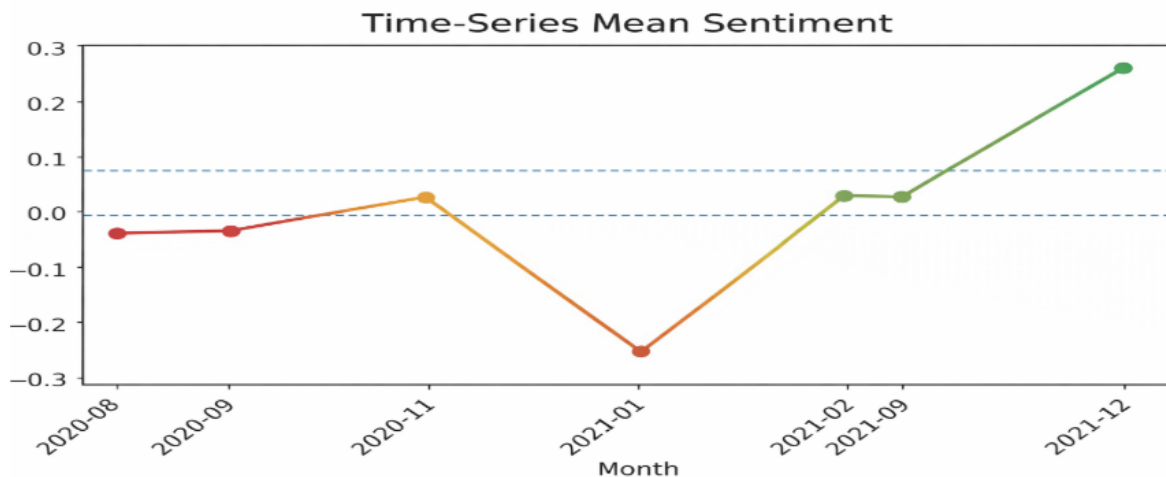
### *Time-series analysis*

The time-series analysis shows that sentiment becomes most negative during periods of intensified political crisis, particularly around August 2020 and January 2021 (Figure 10). These peaks correspond to moments of repression, arrests, and heightened public discontent, indicating that #ZimbabweLivesMatter operates as an event-responsive communicative mechanism.

Rather than sustaining continuous discourse, the hashtag rises in visibility during critical moments, functioning as a reactive digital infrastructure for mobilisation and visibility. This reflects how digital platforms enable the temporal organisation of political communication, where narratives are activated, amplified, and circulated in response to unfolding events, consistent with patterns of networked protest and connective action (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Tufekci, 2017). This pattern highlights the role of hashtags in constructing digital public memory, preserving moments of crisis and facilitating collective denunciation within networked publics (Hoskins, 2018; Mpofu, 2021). However, their episodic nature underscores the constraints of platform dynamics, where attention is cyclical, short-lived, and shaped by algorithmic visibility rather than sustained engagement (Srnicek, 2017; Bruns, 2023).

### *The network analysis*

The network analysis as indicated in Figure 11 demonstrates that #ZimbabweLivesMatter functions as a central hub within a broader oppositional communication network. Rather than circulating as an isolated slogan, the hashtag connects diverse actors, grievances, and political narratives into a coherent digital public. This centralised yet participatory structure illustrates how digital platforms enable the aggregation of dispersed voices into recognisable forms of collective expression (Castells, 2009).



**Figure 10.** Time-series analysis

The findings further indicate that the hashtag operates as a civic language of resistance, through which experiences of repression, injustice, and political exclusion are documented and circulated. In this sense, it transforms individual experiences into collective political meaning, contributing to both domestic and transnational representations of Zimbabwe as a site of crisis and civic contestation (Tendi, 2020; Mpofu, 2021). Consistent with the study, this reflects a shift from elite diplomacy to citizen-driven communicative practices, where solidarity is articulated through digital engagement rather than formal state discourse (Moyo, 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021).

More broadly, digital platforms such as X function as expanded civic spaces, enabling citizens to question authority, mobilise support, and demand accountability. Hashtag campaigns illustrate how political communication is increasingly performed through networked publics and affective engagement, extending participation beyond traditional institutional channels (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Papacharissi, 2015; Wasserman, 2020). These dynamics also facilitate transnational visibility, allowing local struggles to circulate globally and reshape international perceptions (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Castells, 2015; Bosch, 2023). In contrast, political communication in the Bandung era was mediated through diplomatic conferences, official communiqués, print journalism, and elite party networks rather than digital platforms or hashtag activism, nevertheless, it similarly sought to produce solidarity, shape international visibility, and contest dominant geopolitical narratives. This historical continuity suggests that digital political communication does not emerge out of nothing, but rather reshapes older practices of political influence, nation-building, and international repositioning first evident in Bandung and related anticolonial spaces.

This communicative space remains uneven and contested. While digital platforms enable participation, they are also characterised by misinformation, polarisation, and unequal visibility, reflecting the structural constraints of platform capitalism (Tufekci, 2017). In addition, the persistence of hierarchical amplification and selective visibility highlights the limits of digital inclusivity. Thus, in line with the study, Zimbabwe's digital activism illustrates a hybrid communicative field, where postcolonial solidarity and civic resistance are simultaneously enabled and constrained by platform-mediated power structures.

### ***Implications of the digital afterlives of Bandung***

This article has argued that the Bandung Conference should be understood not as a closed historical event but as an unfinished communicative project, whose meanings continue to evolve across changing political and technological contexts (Phillips, 2016; Chakrabarty, 2005). While Bandung institutionalised Africa–Asia solidarity through diplomatic dialogue and anti-colonial rhetoric, its contemporary relevance lies in how these solidarities are rearticulated within digital communication environments (Amin, 2017).



Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Ultimately, the digital afterlives of Bandung reveal a paradox: solidarity is more visible and participatory than ever before yet simultaneously constrained by the structural logics of digital platforms.

## Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the Bandung Conference endures as a living and unfinished African political project, continually rearticulated within digital platforms such as X. The analysis of #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness, #AntiSanctions/#NoToSanctions, and #ZimbabweLivesMatter shows how Africa–Asia and Global South political communication has shifted from elite diplomatic forums to networked, platform-mediated publics, where narratives of development, sovereignty, and resistance are produced and circulated through hashtags (Castells, 2009; Papacharissi, 2009).

From an African perspective, these digital practices illuminate the continuing relevance of Bandung's anti-colonial internationalism. Zimbabwe's discourse on sanctions, development, and civic resistance draws directly on traditions of Pan-African solidarity, anti-imperial resistance, and liberation diplomacy, demonstrating how historical communicative repertoires are not displaced but reconfigured within contemporary media environments (Amin, 2017; Kufakurinani, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). The findings reveal important tensions. State-driven campaigns such as #ZimbabweIsOpenForBusiness coexist with civic-driven activism like #ZimbabweLivesMatter, yet both are shaped by algorithmic amplification, selective visibility, and platform governance (Bruns, 2023). Anti-sanctions discourse similarly reflects the persistence of Bandung's political language while being mediated through coordinated digital communication. The central insight is that the digital afterlives of Bandung reveal both the endurance of anti-colonial imaginaries and the transformation of African political communication under platform capitalism. Zimbabwe's case demonstrates that Bandung's project of Global South solidarity remains active but contested, as digital platforms simultaneously expand communicative possibilities and reproduce new forms of inequality.

## Declarations

**Interdisciplinary Scope:** This research adopts an interdisciplinary approach by integrating postcolonial history, political communication, international relations, and social media analysis to examine the contemporary relevance of the Bandung Conference in the Zimbabwean context.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualisation (Govender and Rafomoyo); literature review (Rafomoyo, Govender and Hussain); methodology (Rafomoyo); analysis (Rafomoyo, Govender and Hussain); drafting and preparation (Rafomoyo, Govender and Hussain); review and editing (Rafomoyo, Govender and Hussain). The published version of the article has been read and approved by the authors.

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