.

*Original Article*

# E-Engaging on Electoral democracy in Uganda: A Correlational Study

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**ABSTRACT**

Limited citizen participation in elections, politics, and leadership remains a governance challenge globally especially in Low developed countries like Uganda. Citizens have over time through traditional methods, been encouraged to participate in elections; however, without internet use, no meaningful participation may be achieved. Electoral democracy has been one of the cornerstones of democracy all over the world. Without free, inclusive, fair, transparent, open, and credible elections being conducted, with meaningful representation of the people, the power of the people cannot be achieved. The objective/ purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the effect of E-Engaging on Electoral democracy in Uganda. This study took both the quantitative paradigm and qualitative approach, thus the adoption of mixed methods research in order to capture the conflicting ideas of reality with more focus on the quantitative approach. A correlational research design was adopted and a sample size of 472 respondents was selected. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient tests were used for the hypotheses. The results show that there exists a statistically significant and positive association between E-engaging and electoral democracy, based on Pearson's correlation coefficients. The study recommends that there is a need to design easily downloadable mobile applications that can be utilised for online campaigns, online voter education and online voting. These should however, be first sampled like in a university election before being used in a general election to rule out their effectiveness and efficiency. These should also have internal security systems designed for the security of the ballot papers if it is for online voting in order to reduce the levels of voter bribery, ballot stuffing, delayed delivery of electoral materials and vote rigging.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the decades, the emergence of new information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as interactive cable communications and multimedia personal computers, has generated optimistic expectations of a more politically engaged public. Since the mid-1990s, the widespread diffusion of the Internet, along with an accumulating set of highly publicised Internet-enabled events, from Web-orchestrated protests at the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO), ministerial meetings in Seattle to Howard Dean's unsuccessful 2003 Web-centred campaign for the Democratic Party primary elections in the United States have renewed optimism over the role that ICTs might play in helping to reinvigorate political participation. Therefore, faced with the steady decline in electoral turnout, politicians and political scientists alike have pointed to new communication technologies as possible remedies. Simplifying the voting process and offering new, easy-to-use voting modes, such as internet voting, was expected to foster political participation or at least to put a halt to further turnout decline (Alvarez et al., 2000; Krueger, 2002; Norris, 2005; Trechsel, 2007).

In Africa, political communication during election periods has long been subject to various forms of regulation despite the fact that freedom of expression is fundamental, and political speech is the most protected form of speech in human rights and constitutional law (McClendon & Riedl, 2019). Most member states of the African Union have rules on paid political advertising such as limits on electoral campaign spending, the amount of airtime that can be purchased for campaigning, contributions of individuals, corporations, or foreign entities, etc (Adu & Badaru, 2020). In Nigeria particularly, the Independent National Electoral Commission, as an electoral management body, has since 1959 been a subject of contention as a biased, government-influenced commission that has failed to deliver Nigeria to credible elections. Their election processes have always been questionable, outcomes contested, and the process characterised by allegations of unfair media coverage. Nigeria's Electoral Commission has also been reported to be unbalanced; it sends out untranslated voter education messages to the populace that are difficult for citizens to understand, has had counter allegations with the government, has accepted the incumbents to bribe Commissioners and Electoral Commission staff in order to influence election results and declare them winners leading to electoral conflicts among voters or political candidates (Yimovie, 2017).

In East Africa, Kenya, a multi-party democratic state founded on the national values and principles of governance referred to in Article 10 of her constitution, has viewed Electoral democracy as highly related to the conduct of elections as a process (Oxford Analytica, 2020). Unfortunately, having democratic elections and voter choices during the conduct of the competitive elections as a pre-requisite for electoral democracy in those economies has been influenced by one's ethnic and partisan ideologies instead of whether the government in power has performed in the interest of the citizens or not (Lacatus, 2023). Ethnic

differences, social ties and political disintegration among Kikuyus and Kalenjin, coupled with limited voter education, a state-dependent Electoral Commission, and unregulated campaign financing, have not only been manipulated by political elites in elections, reducing political deliberations to "bread and butter issues" but have also caused voter apathy that has limited citizen participation leading to low voter turnout (Lacatus, 2023).

In Uganda, though, electoral democracy has had a tune of multi diversity ranging from prioritising the electoral process in its three stages to the other contributing concepts like continuous conduct of voter education, desire to have a competitive electoral process and conducting of election observation to ensure that national and international election management guidelines and standards are being followed to attain a free, fair, credible, and transparent election (Blattman et al., 2019). Unfortunately, for the last five constitutionally conducted general elections in Uganda, the opposite is what has been happening in 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, and 2021 general elections (Lacatus, 2023). These have been marred with voter bribery, continuous military intervention in campaigns, voting and the entire electoral process; citizen-driven electoral reforms have continuously been rejected by the government and Parliament, limited voter education has been done, and even that done, Electoral Commission has not done nationwide and locally transmitted voter education messages, thus leading to a low voter turnout (Kwaku, 2018).

For any country to have democracy, it must conduct free, fair, credible, and transparent elections in general (Yimovie, 2017) and observe electoral democracy in particular, which most countries especially emerging democracies, have not yet thoroughly done (Helmut *et al*., 2018; Madueke *et al.,* 2018; Kwaku, 2018). This case is similar to that of Uganda's Democracy. In particular, Kwaku (2018) notes that conducting free and fair elections, as the key tool for Electoral democracy, makes politicians act in the interest of voters, become

accountable and promote democracy and good governance. He also observed that 83% of the youth, women, men, PWDs, and public institutions staff have not only failed to hold their leaders accountable because they do not participate in free and fair elections but have also failed to engage in a competitive electoral process where all candidates can freely campaign and speak to the electorate. This has been coupled with the continuous lack of voter education in the electoral cycle but also a denial of the Electoral Commission's approval of election observers to observe the election, and worsened by the government and parliament's failure to pass electoral reforms that would facilitate a free, fair, credible, and transparent election (Astrid, 2021). In emerging or infant democracies like Uganda, Electoral democracy provides a direct relationship between voters and leaders if online political engagement platforms are provided in pursuit of free, fair, and credible elections.

## Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study was to critically analyse the relationship between e-engaging and electoral democracy in Uganda.

The Specific objective of the study is as follows,

- To examine the relationship between e-engaging and electoral democracy in Uganda.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Review

This study was guided by two theories, namely, Uses Gratification Theory developed by Blumler et al. in 1964 and General Systems Theory developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy's & Ross Ashby in 1940.

Blumler et al. (1964) state that citizens utilise the media to fulfil their own needs and only get satisfaction when their interests or desires are fulfilled. It therefore, contends that citizens should do what they want with their media instead of the media doing what it wants to the people. Using the

User or Audience centred approach, people refer to media for specific topics of discussion amongst themselves if they are their preferred topics of discussion and are in their interest. Uses Gratifications Theory conceptualises and theorises the study, especially in regards to the IV (E-engaging) since its one of the most crucial parts/ components of Online Political Participation. This theory is associated with the work of Madueke et al. (2017) and Abubakar (2012) and it is associated with the indirect effect theories of Mass Communication and Social Sciences. The theory seeks to establish why people utilise social and traditional media and what they use it for.

In this study, the second theory was the General Systems Theory which was promulgated by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy & Ross Ashby (1940) as first introduced to social analysis in Western social sciences in their study. It states that there is gradual unity and interdependence between component parts of the system, in that any change in one part definitely causes changes in the other parts and in the entire system ultimately. This automatically resonates with the election process, whereby a change in one part or failure to have voter education could automatically affect having a free and fair election in its entirety. Ludwig Von Bertalanffy & Ross Ashby's (1940) General Systems Theory conceptualises a system as something composed of elements or parts (sub-systems as something composed of sub-systems/ parts or elements, which function as a whole). In regards, there is automatic interdependence among the various parts of the system, in that any change in one part automatically causes changes in other parts and the entire system (Udu, 2015; Yimovie, 2017).

## Relationship between E-engaging and electoral democracy

Studies like Madueke et al. (2018), Isidoropaolo & Pieczka (2018), KaraKaya (2005), Helmut (2018), and Aichholzer & Allhutter (2011) relating e-engaging and electoral democracy can be found. For example, Leke (2015) in his qualitative study

utilising secondary sources of data based on documents and legal frameworks review, used the lack of an enabling policy environment to explain why women in Nigeria have not been fully engaged in political participation, especially in regards to democracy. A state cannot be truly democratic when women are not given the opportunity to engage in, consult, discuss, and take responsibility for their own lives and choices before, within, and after the conduct of an election. Unless all citizens are able to fully participate in the issues in their country both online and offline, the achievement of Electoral democracy may just be a dream. The study therefore, wanted to establish whether engaging women, men and voters online could promote an inclusive and transparent election.

Karakaya (2005) in his study on exploring the Internet's role in influencing political participation styles and levels, reported that E-engaging through political discussion forums online and groups was a very important factor in political participation and in enhancing electoral democracy. In particular, he reportedly found that citizens choose or prefer direct dialogue (online political discussions) with their leaders instead of dialogue with fellow citizens. All the citizens who engaged with their leaders through online discussion political forums by use of technologies have made the right political choices when it comes to elections and selecting which candidates to vote for as well as which policies to support, thereby influencing or contributing to political participation. This study therefore, suggested that online engagement with the use of the Internet between political leaders and citizens positively related to political participation. I therefore, wanted to conduct another study to find out if political leaders having online engagements in Uganda could contribute towards promoting a free and fair election.

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study took both the quantitative paradigm and qualitative approach, thus the adoption of mixed methods research in order to capture the conflicting ideas of reality with more focus on the quantitative approach. The study was also correlational -cross-sectional because data was collected once from all the respondents that could respond to the entire research questions for the study. It was, therefore, correlational in that it was interested in investigating the association/ relationship between online political participation and electoral democracy in Uganda.

### Target Population

The total population was 170 Youth, 150 Women, 100 registered voters (Men, People Living with Disabilities), 100 CSO Staff and online media, and 110 staff from public institutions as adapted from Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for determining the sample size. Due to the time and cost, however, it was more convenient to study part of the target population that was more accessible, thus becoming the "sample population". These are the 118 youth, 108 women, 80 registered voters (Men & PWDs), 80 CSO Staff, and 86 staff from public institutions, respectively (Sample).

### Sample Size

This study utilised the Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table for determining a sample size from a given population, as quoted in Gay et al. (2003) and Bakkabulindi (2011), because it was highly recommended for use in social sciences, especially in management courses. It is objective, gives out a representative sample of the entire population, brings out a sample that is not biased and can approximate the attitudes of the entire population as a whole. (Education and Psychological Measurement, (1970) Vol. 30 pp. 607- 610 & the NEA Research Bulletin, Vol. 38. (Dec 1960) pp. 99)

### Sampling Techniques

To obtain the respective sample size from the five subpopulations, the researchers used two-stage (stratified - cluster) sampling, where, in the first stage, the districts where the study was conducted were stratified into four. A purposive sampling strategy was also utilised to select the rural and urban civil society organisations as well as the national, international, and local NGOs and academic staff that have continuously engaged in online political campaigns to enhance democracy. All governance NGOs, local and district NGOs, political analysts, or those academicians that publish online and are political commentators were purposively selected due to their continuous engagement in online campaigns and political activities for the enhancement of democracy.

### Data Collection Methods

the study being more of a quantitative survey that involved a large number of respondents. Therefore, a 'survey method' was employed. This involved the usage of self-administered questionnaires (SAQs) that enabled the researcher to cover all study respondents quickly and at a fair and reasonable cost. Furthermore, the SAQs-based survey method was very suitable for the sampled respondents due to their proficiency in the language that was used in the SAQs (namely English) and their literacy levels (ability to read and write). This method has also been recommended by authors like Bakkabulindi (2011), Arnstein (1969) and Barber 1984) since it covers a large number of respondents for the study.

An interview method for key informants through an interview guide and some focus group discussions was utilised to collect data from other respondents that do not understand the English language and need interpretation, or even those with low literacy levels (not able to read and write). This was done by the researcher and the research assistants who understand their local language and can interpret for them. More to note, it gives an opportunity to the citizens and other respondents to react to the study

and provide first-hand information that relates to current political affairs and political terrain/ environment.

An online opinion poll and online political survey (e-survey) were used to collect information from the study respondents to assess the effects of the internet on political participation and to establish whether online political participation, through e-polls and e-surveys, can contribute to or enhance electoral democracy. This method was also recommended by Abubakar (2012), Cristian (2018), and Gibson et al. (2003) because it is easily accessible by the respondents no matter where they are and how far they are. It was easy to fill or respond to; it did not take a lot of time to respond to the study and would give instant online feedback and response on whether online political participation can influence or promote electoral democracy.

**Data Analysis**

*Quantitative Data Analysis*

Data in this study were analysed at three levels, which include the uni-variate level, bi-variate level, and multivariate level. At uni-variate frequencies and percentages were utilised to describe the respondents' descriptive characteristics, which are age, gender, education level, marital status, and place of residence, among others, to be able to show the distribution of respondents. Standard deviation and mean were utilised to find out the levels of e-engaging as part of online political participation and electoral democracy in Uganda.

Bivariate analysis was applied in order to achieve the objectives of the study by carrying out correlational analysis and simple regression analysis. Correlational analysis was utilised to find out the correlation between electoral democracy (dependent variable) with e-engaging as one of the constructs of online political participation (independent variable) using Pearson's linear correlation coefficient.

A simple regression analysis was applied to investigate the average level of electoral democracy for e-engaging as one of the constructs of online political participation. To investigate the association between gender, marital status and electoral democracy, an independent sample t-test was used since each variable has two categories. On the other hand, to investigate the association between ages (18 -30), 31-50 and 51 and above), an education level (no education (never gone to school at all), primary education level, secondary education level and higher education), and district (Kampala, Mbarara, Jinja and Gulu) and electoral democracy, one way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) was used since each of these variables has more than two categories.

Multivariate analysis was used to investigate the overall average change in Electoral democracy considering all the constructs of Online Political Participation. Here, a Multiple Linear Regression model was fit.

ED = a + b (E-Enabling) + c (E-engaging) + d (E-Empowering) + e (SD) + Error term,

where 'ED' was electoral democracy and 'SD' is socio-demographic characteristics. 'a' was the average value of electoral democracy keeping other factors constant. 'b' was equal to the average rate of change in electoral democracy to a unit change in e-enabling, keeping other factors constant. 'c' was equal to the average rate of change in electoral democracy to a unit change in e-engaging keeping other factors constant. 'd' was equal to the average rate of change in electoral democracy to a unit change in e-empowering, keeping other factors constant. 'e' was the average rate of change in electoral democracy to change in socio-demographic characteristics, keeping other factors constant. Data analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version twenty-one (21).

*Qualitative Data Analysis*

Qualitative data analysis in this study was done using thematic analysis. This took the reflexive thematic analysis type under the inductive approach, where the researcher did analysis without a prior idea of which themes would emerge.

**RESULTS**

**Socio-demographic Characterisation of the Respondents**

The marital status of different respondents is shown in *Table 1* for respondents' demographic characteristics. The results reveal that the majority of the respondents (242, 50.2%) were married, while those who were single were 240 (49.8%). It was vital to get the opinions and ideas of both the married and unmarried respondents in order to establish whether marital status had an implication on e-engaging under online political participation and electoral democracy in Uganda. It was vital to establish whether marital status can influence one's engagement in the electoral process or even whether it has an impact on their utilisation of technology in elections.

It was vital to establish the age of respondents as part of the demographic characteristics. The majority of the respondents were those aged 31 – 50 years with 206 (42.7%), followed by those aged 18-30 (38%), and then those aged 66 years and above with 60 (12.4%) and the least were those aged 51 – 65 years with 33 (6.8%). Based on the fact that the majority of the respondents in the study (42.7% and 38% making 80.7% where young people is an affirmation by UBOS 2020 that the majority of Uganda's population are young people (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2020) who were very instrumental in the 2021 General Elections and have swiftly adapted the use of technology and Internet

in elections as asserted by Micheal Clouser et al. (2014).

It was important to institute the education level of the respondents to find out if the levels of education of a given voter or electoral stakeholder may have an influence on the way they vote or participate in the electoral process. Regarding the education level of respondents, most of the respondents had higher education with 328 (68.2%), followed by those in secondary level with 72 (15%), then primary level, 47 (9.8%), and the least were no education at all with 34 (7.1%). Having the majority of respondents (68.2%) having attained higher education level (ranging from Diploma, Degree, Master's degree, Postgraduate Diploma and or PhD) in turn makes the use of technology and the Internet in elections easier to use and be adopted because the majority can develop their own applications, or even use the available applications to engage in online chat rooms, e-Activism, E-campaigning and online consultations in elections as well as utilise technology in voting and election observation in order to have a free and fair election (Perry & May, 2011).

By category, most of the study respondents were categorically youth (18-30 years) with 205 (42.7%), as proclaimed in the 2010 National Youth Policy and the 1995 Constitution of Uganda, followed by males (31 years and above) with 170 (35.4%), females (31 years and above) with 94 (19.6%) and the least were those persons living with disabilities (PWDs) with 11 (2.3%). It was vital to separate the People living with Disabilities as key respondents in the study in order to ensure inclusivity, collect views of all the people including the minorities and promote the participation of the same as well as draw lessons on how they can participate in the electoral process in a bid to Leave No-one Behind.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

| Characteristics | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Marital Status | Single | 240 | 49.8 |
| | Married | 242 | 50.2 |
| | Total | 482 | 100 |
| Age of respondents | 18 - 30 years | 183 | 38 |
| | 31 -50 years | 206 | 42.7 |
| | 51 – 65 years | 33 | 6.8 |
| | 66 & above | 60 | 12.4 |
| | Total | 482 | 100 |
| Education level of respondents | No education at all | 34 | 7.1 |
| | Primary level | 47 | 9.8 |
| | Secondary level | 72 | 15 |
| | Higher education | 328 | 68.2 |
| | Total | 481 | 100 |
| Respondent's Category | Youth (18- 30 years) | 205 | 42.7 |
| | Male (31 years and above) | 170 | 35.4 |
| | Female (31 years and above) | 94 | 19.6 |
| | People living with Disabilities (PWDs) | 11 | 2.3 |
| | Total | 480 | 100 |
| If Female, which position | Woman Member of Parliament | 3 | 1.5 |
| | Woman councillor | 28 | 13.2 |
| | Women political leader | 31 | 14.7 |
| | Women in political parties | 12 | 5.7 |
| | Corporate Women | 18 | 8.5 |
| | Women (No political leadership role) | 106 | 50.2 |
| | Young women | 10 | 4.7 |
| | Others | 3 | 1.5 |
| | Total | 211 | 100 |
| If youth, which position | Youth Member of Parliament | 2 | 2.1 |
| | Male/Female Youth councillor | 17 | 17.7 |
| | Youth political leader | 12 | 12.5 |
| | Political party youth | 7 | 7.3 |
| | Religious youth leader | 24 | 25 |
| | Youth (No leadership role) | 20 | 20.8 |
| | Others | 14 | 14.6 |
| | Total | 96 | 1000 |
| If Male, which position | Directly elected MP | 9 | 5.4 |
| | Male councillor | 19 | 11.3 |
| | Mayor | 9 | 5.4 |
| | LC3 Chairperson | 2 | 1.2 |
| | Political party leader | 10 | 6 |
| | Men (No leadership role) | 106 | 63.1 |
| | Others | 13 | 7.7 |
| | Total | 168 | 100 |

| | Characteristics | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Your Institutional Categorisation/ Designation | NGO | 36 | 8.6 |
| | Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) | 26 | 6.2 |
| | Public Institution | 144 | 34.4 |
| | Media | 79 | 18.9 |
| | Academia (Students, teachers, Lecturers etc.) | 52 | 12.4 |
| | Informal sector | 38 | 9.1 |
| | Private sector(formal) | 38 | 9.1 |
| | Others | 5 | 1.2 |
| | Total | 418 | 100 |
| Voter Registration Status | Registered voter | 459 | 95.4 |
| | Non- Registered voter | 22 | 4.6 |
| | Total | 481 | 100 |
| Area of the Respondent | City | 316 | 65.6 |
| | District | 160 | 33.2 |
| | Diaspora | 6 | 1.2 |
| | Total | 482 | 100 |
| Specific area of the Respondent | Kampala | 99 | 20.5 |
| | Jinja | 161 | 33.4 |
| | Gulu | 60 | 12.4 |
| | Mbarara | 122 | 25.3 |
| | Others | 40 | 8.3 |
| | Total | 482 | 100 |
| Type of Place of residence | Urban | 358 | 74.3 |
| | Rural | 124 | 25.7 |
| | Total | 482 | 100 |
| Accessibility to the Internet | Always | 343 | 71.2 |
| | Sometimes | 116 | 24.1 |
| | Never | 23 | 4.8 |
| | Total | 482 | 100 |
| Do you own an Internet-enabling Device? | Yes | 425 | 88.36 |
| | No | 56 | 11.64 |
| | Total | 481 | 100 |

**Source**: Researcher's Primary Data (2021)

Among the females, those without leadership roles were (50.2%), those in political leadership were 31 (14.7%), female councillors were 28 (13.2%), while the least number of females in leadership were the Women Members of Parliament with 3 (1.5%). Among the youth, most of the respondents were religious youth leaders with 24 (25%), followed by those who were youth that was not in leadership positions with 20 (20.8%), then those who were youth councillors with 17 (17.7%) and the least were Youth Members of Parliament with 2 (2.1%). Among the males, most of them were those not in any leadership role with 106 (63.1%), followed by

councillors with 19 (11.3%), then other with 13 (7.7%), followed by both mayors with 9 (5.4%) and directly elected MPs with 9 (5.4%) and the least were LC3 chairpersons with 2 (1.2%).

We included this to find out the different types of leadership that the youth, women, and men actively engage in and at what levels since leaders have an influence on their followers, and they can easily influence their people/ voters/ citizens and followers to adopt and utilise technology and Internet in the electoral process in case they have adopted it themselves (Madueke et al., 2017).

One hundred forty-four respondents making, 34.4% came from public institutions, 18.9% (79 respondents) were from the media, 12,4% with 52 respondents from academia such as students, lecturers, and teachers, 9.1% (38 respondents) were from the informal and private sector, 8.6% (36 respondents) were from NGOs, and 6.2% (26 respondents) were from CSOs as also noted by Kamp (2016) that many social media users in governance are civic actors. 05 respondents (1.2%) were from other organisations. The institutional categorisation was meant to dig deeper into the role of the different key electoral stakeholders in the electoral process and how they would conceptualise the adoption and utilisation of the Internet and technology in elections and the electoral process since each one of them has a role to play.

In terms of voter registration status, most of the respondents were registered voters, with 459 (95.4%) fully registered with the Electoral Commission and National Identification Registration Authority (NIRA) and only 22 (4.6%) non-registered voters. This was important to be included among the demographics in order to establish whether one's registration status would influence one's attitude or perception towards the use of the Internet and technology in elections. Indeed, even those unregistered voters proved to us otherwise when they were also in the affirmation that the use of the Internet through E-engaging in platforms like E-chat rooms can influence one's need to participate in the electoral process as long as they can access the Internet through the Internet enabling devices.

Most of the respondents were from cities with 316 (65.6%), followed by those from districts with 160 (33.2%), and the least were from the diaspora with 6 (1.2%). Due to the recent development of the government creating 15 new cities where 10 of them (Arua, Mbarara, Gulu, Jinja, Fort Portal, Mbale, Masaka, Lira and Soroti) were to become operational with effect from 1st July 2020 (Astrid, 2021), operating under the 1997 Local Government Act and the 2017 Uganda National Urban Policy, we decided to engage and have respondents from both the city and the districts in order to have a representative sample that can represent the different dynamics of the entire country. This was in a bid to establish how the Internet can be easily adopted in the urban cities and rural districts in order to drive the urbanisation agenda identified as a force for socio-economic transformation as recognised by the Uganda Vision 2040 and the National Development Plan III.

Regarding the type of place of residence, most respondents were from urban areas with 358 (74.3%) and from rural areas only 124 (25.7%). It was vital to engage people from both the rural and urban areas due to the differences in coverage of internet networks in both rural and urban and also capture their views towards the adoption and utilisation of Internet and technology in elections while establishing the challenges they may also encounter.

Concerning accessibility to the Internet, most respondents opined that they always had access to the Internet (343, 71.2%), others accessing it sometimes were 116 (24.1%), while 23 (4.8%) never had access to the Internet. Before we make any recommendations to the Government, Electoral Commission, or other key electoral stakeholders, it is vital to establish the level of people's accessibility to the Internet from wherever they are and also establish the bottlenecks to access for those who do not have it in order to understand the internet dynamics and how best it can be adopted, utilised, and easily accessed for use in the electoral process.

In terms of whether the respondents owned an Internet-enabled device, 425 (88.36%) opined that they did, while 56 (11.64%) did not have an Internet-enabled device. Considering the fact that the Internet, without one's ownership of an Internet-enabling device like a smartphone, laptop, desktop, MiFi, or iPad is useless, and having it utilised in the electoral process is a dream that may never come true. The researcher found it worth establishing

whether the respondents owned any devices. This would inform our policy recommendations to the government and other key electoral stakeholders on how to practically approach internet use in elections.

**E-engaging under Online Political Participation**

The interpretation of means was guided by this scale: 5 – 4.3 interpreted as "Very High", 4.2 – 3.5 interpreted as "High", 3.4 – 2.7 interpreted as "Moderate", 2.6 – 1.90 interpreted as "Low", and 1.8 – 1.00 interpreted as "Very Low". The results are shown in *Table 2* below.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of E-engaging as a construct to Online Political Participation**

| E – Engaging | Mean | SD | Rank | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Using the Internet to organise opinion polls has the potential to raise my interest in participating in politics. | 3.92 | 1.18 | 1 | High |
| Conducting online political investigations enables me to participate in politics and Presidential elections. | 3.91 | 1.22 | 2 | High |
| Taking part in online political opinion polls raises my potential to engage in politics and competitive elections. | 3.79 | 1.18 | 3 | High |
| Participating in panel sessions online helps me engage in key political issues and solve electoral conflicts & disputes. | 3.77 | 1.36 | 4 | High |
| I participated in answering political questions online about campaigns and Presidential elections. | 3.57 | 1.38 | 5 | High |
| I participated in panel sessions using the Internet for different Presidential candidates and elections. | 3.35 | 1.51 | 6 | Moderate |
| Consulting me online helped me participate in political discussions and democracy. | 3.27 | 1.35 | 7 | Moderate |
| I gave my views/ ideas on radio and online to the Presidential Candidate in the campaigns and elections. | 3.22 | 1.40 | 8 | Moderate |
| Presidential candidates consulted me online during campaigns and elections. | 2.78 | 1.52 | 9 | Moderate |
| Average | 3.51 | | | High |

**Source**: Researcher's Primary Data (2021)

One of the constructs used to measure online political participation (iv) was e-engaging (iv2). E-engaging was conceptualised and consisted of five constructs that include (i) e-consultation, (ii) online opinion polls/e-polling, (iii) online political surveys, (iv) e-panels, and (v) online discussion forums. This was measured by nine five-scaled items/sub-constructs (E-Eng1 to E-Eng9). The results reveal that subconstruct one (E-Eng1) about whether *using the Internet to organise opinion polls helps to raise one's interest to participate in politics* was ranked the highest with ($M = 3.92, SD = 1.18$) interpreted as high. Online opinion polls are not limited to the number of individuals by area of residence they can cover. Individuals, locals, and those in the diaspora can easily participate and give

their views on issues regarding politics and elections using the opinion polls published and shared online, thus raising their interest in democratic issues of a given country. This was later confirmed by the qualitative data from the key respondents where Respondents 1, 2, 9, 10, 15, FGD 3, 4, and 5 and 16 Public Institutions all agree to that.

Concerning subconstruct two (E-Eng2) about whether individuals consider online political investigations as an enabling factor in participating in politics and Presidential elections was ranked 2nd with ($M = 3.91, SD = 1.22$) interpreted as high. Subconstruct three (E-Eng3) about whether taking part in online political opinion polls raises my

potential to engage in politics and competitive elections was ranked third with ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.18$) interpreted as high.

In terms of E-Eng4 about whether participating in panel sessions online helps individuals to engage in key political issues and to solve electoral conflicts and disputes, this was ranked 4th under the E-engaging construct with ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.36$) interpreted as high. Regarding item E-Eng5 about whether the individuals have ever participated in answering political questions online about campaigns and Presidential elections, the study revealed that this was ranked 5th under the E-engaging construct with ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.38$) interpreted as high.

Concerning whether the respondents participated in panel sessions using the Internet for different presidential candidates and elections, this was ranked 6th with ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.51$) interpreted as moderate. Regarding whether individuals being consulted online helped participants to participate in political discussions and democracy, gave their views on radio and online to presidential campaigns and elections, and whether they were consulted by presidential candidates online during elections, these three items were ranked 7th, 8th, and 9th with ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.35$, $M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.40$ and $M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.52$) respectively interpreted as moderate.

Specifically, the overall average of e-engaging constructs was ($M = 3.51$), interpreted as high. This means that, on average, the extent to which e-engaging (online political participation) leads to citizens' engagement in the political affairs of this country- Uganda, is high. By implication means that the use of the internet to consult voters/ citizens through e-consultation, conduct opinion polls and surveys online, as well as conducting panel sessions online can contribute towards citizens' participation/engagement in a free and fair election.

**Table 3: Correlations between e-engaging (online political participation) and electoral democracy**

| Variables | | E-engaging |
|---|---|---|
| Voter Education | Pearson Correlation | .519** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |
| | N | 479 |
| Electoral Reform Advocacy | Pearson Correlation | .372** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |
| | N | 479 |
| Election Observation | Pearson Correlation | .405** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |
| | N | 480 |
| Competitive Electoral Process | Pearson Correlation | .408** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |
| | N | 478 |
| Effective Electoral justice and Dispute Resolution | Pearson Correlation | .412** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |
| | N | 480 |
| Press Freedom Availability | Pearson Correlation | .417** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |
| | N | 480 |
| Electoral democracy | Pearson Correlation | .547** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |
| | N | 476 |

*\*\*correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*
**Source**: Primary Data, 2021

One of the objectives of the study was to investigate the relationship between e-engaging and electoral democracy. The results from correlation analysis are shown in *Table 3* above; those of simple linear regression analysis are shown in *Table 4,* while those multiple regression analyses are shown in *Table 5*. In addition to investigating the relationship between e-engaging and electoral democracy, the research investigated the associations between e-engaging and constructs of electoral democracy. These results are also shown in *Table 3*.

The results show that there exists a statistically significant and positive association between e-engaging and electoral democracy, based on Pearson's correlation coefficients. The results reveal that the relationship between E-engaging and voter education was ($r = 0.519$, sig. = 0.000), and

with electoral reform advocacy was ($r = 0.372$, sig. = 0.000) while that with electoral observation was ($r = 0.405$, sig. = 0.000). The results also reveal that the relationship between e-engaging and the competitive electoral process was ($r = 0.408$, sig. = 0.000), while that with electoral justice was ($r = 0.412$, sig. = 0.000) and that with press freedom was ($r = 0.417$, sig. = 0.000). These results show that as e-engaging is increasing, also electoral democracy is increasing. In other words, they move in the same direction. The relationship between e-engaging and electoral democracy was also investigated. The results reveal that there exists a significant, positive association between e-engaging and electoral democracy ($r = .547$, sig. = 0.000). This implies that overall, as e-engaging increases, electoral democracy also increases. This is because the association is positive.

**Table 4: Multiple linear regression analysis of e-engaging and electoral democracy**

| Variables | Unstandardised Beta | Standardised Beta | *t*-values | Adjusted $R^2$ | *F*-Value | *p*-values |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **E-engaging and electoral democracy** | | | | | | |
| E-engaging | 0.32 | 0.55 | 14.24 | 0.298 | 202.65 | 0.000 |
| Constant | 3.05 | | | | | |

**Source**: Primary Data, 2021.

The results from simple regression analysis, *Table 4* above, show that, based on standardised coefficients, the average rate of change in electoral democracy for every unit increase in e-engaging was (beta = 0.55). This implies that for every unit increase in e-engaging increases electoral democracy by 0.55. This value is statistically different from 0 (or statistically significant) since (*t*

= 14.24, p-value = 0.000) and the overall model is statistically significant ($F = 202.65$, *p*-value = 0.000). It also shows that the 29.8% (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.298$) of the variation in electoral democracy is explained by e-engaging. These results imply that e-engaging significantly influences electoral democracy regardless of other factors (e-enabling and e-empowering) by 30%.

**Table 5: Multiple linear regression analysis of e-engaging and electoral democracy**

| Variables | Unstandardised Beta | Standardised Beta | *t*-values | *p*-values | Adj. $R^2$ | *F*-Value | *p*-values |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | 2.35 | | | | 0.456 | 133.387 | 0.000 |
| E – Engaging | 0.08 | 0.139 | 2.755 | 0.006 | | | |
| E – Engaging | 0.08 | 0.139 | 2.755 | 0.006 | | | |

**Source:** Primary Data, 2021

## DISCUSSION

One of the objectives was to investigate the effect of e-engaging on electoral democracy. E-engaging was conceptualised as e-consultation, online opinion polls/e-polling, online political surveys, e-panels, and online discussion forums. Therefore, discussion on all these constructs was considered in this study.

E-consultation was positively associated with electoral democracy in this study. Such findings concur with studies like those from Japan (Holt et al., 2013) and India (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010) who applaud the democratic potential of social media as a platform for online civic and political participation through continuous online consultations, especially with initiatives to engage the young people, voters, and other electoral stakeholders. More studies from German (Rommele & Copeland, 2013) further confirms that social media has provided unprecedented opportunities for opinion leaders to consult with people before they share political content with them for non-political reasons has enabled them to engage in politics and elections, yet they would otherwise not have engaged or went out to seek political information on their own, as confirmed in the USA by Bimber et al. (2015).

Online political surveys were also positively associated with electoral democracy. Similar findings were found in other studies from the USA (Gainous et al., 2013), whose survey confirmed that social media users are civically and politically engaged citizens that continuously engage in online surveys that influence the conduct of a fair election, just like Bakker and De Vreese (2011). More from the USA to confirm this is Bode et al. (2014) and Hsieh and Li (2014) that confirmed that online civic talk and political expression of citizens in exchange with their leaders/ candidates is a positive predictor of offline and online political participation that contributes to a fair and inclusive election.

In this study, online discussion forums under e-engaging were positively associated with having a fair and inclusive election. Such findings were also seen in other studies. In the USA, Vitak et al. (2014) affirm the significant relationship that interactions promoted in digital social media platforms can influence the political and electoral participation of voters and electors online and offline. In Nigeria and Malaysia, Abdulraf (2016) also confirmed that the use of Twitter and Facebook for cognitive engagement and online political participation provides voters with political knowledge that increases their political involvement in key electoral and governance issues. In the USA, again, another study by Rainie et al. (2012) investigated social media and political engagement in 2012 and found that 39% of adults in the USA used social media and that out of every eight adults in the USA used social media for political and civic purposes.

In this study, conducting e-panels under e-engaging was positively associated with electoral democracy. To support these findings, studies from Germany by Heblich (2016) confirm that the emergence of social media created new participation, dissemination, and engagement platforms where a panel of experts and key electoral stakeholders are hosted to discuss election-related matters that facilitate an inclusive and fair election. In the USA still, Bode (2012), Gil de Zuniga et al. (2014), Towner (2013), Valenzuela et al. (2012), and Vitak et al. (2011) positively related the use of social media for political discussions, expressions, and conversations to online political participation. In the United States of America, Larisa Doroshenko et al. (2019) affirm that the Internet enables individuals to get involved in campaigns more quickly with less effort as they listen in and follow online political panel discussions in accordance with their political interests and abilities thus expansion of new democratic opportunities including fair and credible election.

While the study found out that conducting online panels under e-engaging was positively related to

electoral democracy, similar studies confirmed this from Sweden Gauja (2021) confirms the significant relationship that social media through the internet has facilitated the emergence of digital natives (many online political groups) like getup and change.org, and advocacy organisation like 38 degrees in the UK that facilitated over thirty-nine million (39 million) individual political and non-political actions across sixteen thousand (16, 000) campaigns (home.38degrees.org.uk). New political parties like the pirate party and Italy's five-star movement that embraced online platforms and digital technologies utilised the internet to engage citizens in campaigns, mobilise and consult them online, as well as ascertain the electoral stakeholder's views and political policy priorities.

## CONCLUSION

Results from the co-relational analysis/ study illustrate a significant relationship between e-consultation and electoral democracy, between online opinion polls and electoral democracy, online political surveys, and electoral democracy, between e-panels and electoral democracy, as well as between online discussion forums and electoral democracy among voters, and citizens in Uganda. Developing and implementing laws and policies to support the availability of the internet and platforms for e-engaging acts as an effective intervention to increase citizens' participation in leadership, politics, and elections (electoral democracy) in Uganda.

### Recommendations

There is a need to design easily downloadable mobile applications that can be utilised for online campaigns, online voter education and online voting. These should however be first sampled like in a university election before being used in a general election to rule out their effectiveness and efficiency. These should also have internal security systems designed for the security of the ballot papers if it is for online voting in order to reduce the levels of voter bribery, ballot stuffing, delayed delivery of electoral materials and vote rigging. These apps will act as political participation and political mobilisation tools that open up Uganda's democracy to the diaspora and the world and will enable the voters to access different perspectives that better define citizen-driven democratic objectives in a free electoral space.

There is a need to organise Live streaming of political talk shows online as well as have intensive coverage of political talk shows with key stakeholders as they happen live. Adoption of online Live reporting of the news as it happens, political and electoral stories, instantly tweeting as the political events and activities happen instantly with their live coverage as well as sharing instant results from the polling stations as the voting happens. These results can be shared on WhatsApp groups and on Facebook pages live.

There is a need for the adoption and Utilisation of the Internet in the electoral process to avoid the limited coverage of some traditional media houses like radios and TVs that can only be accessed in a small limited radius but cannot be accessed by the majority of Ugandans including those in the rural areas as well as those in the diaspora, yet the Internet can enable everyone from wherever they include rural, urban areas or abroad to follow and actively engage in the electoral process.

There is a need for political candidates and leaders to utilise the Internet in the electoral process in a bid to reduce their lack of visibility and limited exposure of their work by the traditional media, which is controlled by editors, producers, and media managers. Internet usage in elections will also help to reduce the high cost of mobilisation of support from voters to attend political campaign rallies, reduce the control and limitations on the freedom of speech for some candidates by their opponents who are the owners of a given radio station or TV but also candidates who may not be allowed to speak or even opposition candidates who will not be allowed to talk on state-owned traditional media houses,

thereby facilitating a fair and inclusive competent election.

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