

**FACEBOOK AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: AN ANALYSIS OF
UGANDA'S JANUARY 2021 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

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Declaration


I, Pamela Amia hereby declare that this is my original work, is not plagiarized, and has not been submitted to any other institution for any award.

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Approval

This is to certify that this dissertation has been produced under my supervision and it is now ready for submission for examination.

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Abstract

The study sought to analyse Facebook usage as a tool for political communication, and expression of freedom of speech during the 2021 general elections in Uganda. It examined ways through which Facebook was used as a tool of communication during the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections; investigated challenges encountered in using Facebook as a tool for freedom of expression, documented lessons learned and proposed solutions to overcome challenges faced. The study utilized a descriptive research design with a mixed research approach. Data was collected from a sample of 568 Facebook posts with 33,807,275 engagements through content analysis and 12 interview participants. The study was premised on the Social Media Engagement (SME) theory. The study findings show that the presidential candidates used Facebook as a virtual mode of campaign to disseminate political information to the electorate. Meanwhile, the results showed that there was use of Facebook as a tool to exercise freedom of speech. Challenges highlighted included blackmail, hate speech, propaganda, government interference, and misinformation. Key recommendations, in this study, for overcoming challenges in using Facebook for political communication include leveraging alternative communication channels, building a strong following, promoting digital literacy, professionalizing social media strategies, implementing best practices on Facebook, and government involvement in facilitating internet access and promoting ICT infrastructure to enhance political efficacy and freedom of speech. For using Facebook in political communication, the study recommends growing social media following, utilizing visual content, engaging the public through live content, asking and answering questions, fact-checking content, targeting younger social media users, government enabling free elections, using social media to amplify messages and counter misinformation, and acknowledging the democratization of expression through social media.

List of Acronyms

ACME	African Centre for Media Excellence
ANT	Alliance for National Transformation (ANT)
CMS	Church Missionary Society
COVID	Coronavirus disease
DP	Democratic Party
EC	Electoral Commission
FDC	Forum for Democratic Change
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICT	Information and communication technologies
KAS	Konrad Adenauer Foundation
NRM	National Resistance Movement
NUP	National Unity Platform
ODK	Open Data Kit
OTT	Over-the-top
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SNS	Social Networking Sites
TV	Television
UCC	Uganda Communications Commission
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UPDF	Uganda Peoples Defense Forces
UPF	Uganda Police Force
URL	Uniform Resource Locator

Table of Contents

Declaration	ii
Approval	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract.....	v
List of Acronyms.....	vi
Table of Contents	vii
List of Tables.....	ix
List of Figures	x
Chapter One	1
Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background to the study.....	1
1.2 Statement of the problem.....	3
1.3 Objectives of the study	5
1.4 Research questions to be investigated/Hypotheses	5
1.5 Rationale/Justification of the study	5
1.6 Significance of the study	6
1.7 Scope of the study	6
Chapter Two.....	7
Literature Review	7
2.0 Introduction.....	7
2.1 Theoretical review	7
2.2 Conceptual review.....	9
2.3 Contextual review	17
2.4 Empirical review	18
2.5 Summary of literature gaps.....	38
Chapter Three.....	40
Research Methodology	40
3.0 Introduction.....	40
3.1 Research design.....	40
3.2 Methodological approach	41
3.3 Study population and sample size	42
3.4 Sampling design.....	43

3.5 Data collection	44
3.5.1 Content analysis.....	44
3.5.2 In-depth interviews	44
3.6 Data processing and analysis	45
3.6.1 Quantitative data analysis	45
3.6.2 Qualitative data analysis	45
3.6.3 Units of analysis	46
3.6.4 Response rate	48
3.7 Validity and reliability.....	49
3.8 Study limitations	49
3.9 Ethical considerations.....	50
Chapter Four.....	52
Data Analysis, Presentation, and Interpretation of Results.....	52
4.0 Introduction.....	52
4.1 Facebook as a tool of communication during the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections.....	52
4.1.1 Findings from the content analysis	52
4.1.2 Interview findings	64
4.2 Challenges encountered in using Facebook.....	74
4.3 Solutions and recommendations to challenges faced in using Facebook.....	82
Chapter Five	88
Summary of Findings and Discussion of Results.....	88
5.0 Introduction.....	88
5.1 Analysis of Facebook accounts.....	88
5.2 Facebook usage as a tool for political communication	89
5.3 Challenges encountered in using Facebook.....	95
5.4 Solutions and recommendations to challenges faced in using Facebook.....	98
Chapter Six.....	100
Conclusion and Recommendations	100
6.1 Conclusion	100
6.2 Recommendations	102
References	104
Appendixes	I

List of Tables

Table 1: Respondents to an in-depth interview	42
Table 2: General Facebook metrics	46
Table 3: Political issues communicated about by Yoweri K. Museveni	53
Table 4: Political issues communicated about by Robert Kyagulanyi	53
Table 5: Facebook engagement by Yoweri K. Museveni (NRM)	55
Table 6: Facebook engagement by Robert S. Kyagulanyi (NUP)	56
Table 7: Sentiments expressed in posts by Yoweri K. Museveni (NRM).....	57
Table 8: Sentiments expressed in posts by Robert S. Kyagulanyi (NUP).....	58
Table 9: Issues addressed in posts by Yoweri K. Museveni (NRM).....	61
Table 10: Issues addressed in posts by Robert S. Kyagulanyi (NUP).....	62

List of Figures

Figure 1: Facebook engagement	48
Figure 2: Total Facebook engagements by presidential candidates	57
Figure 3: Use of media/visuals by key presidential candidates	59
Figure 4: Sample of media/visuals used by presidential candidates Robert S. Kyagulanyi and Yoweri K. Museveni	60
Figure 5: Comparators mentioned in posts by key presidential candidates.....	63

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Communication is the process of delivering intended messages and information to the targeted audience (Konstantin, 2022). Every communication process follows effective disciplines (Ignacio, 2024). Political communication is also a body of knowledge and has different elements such as sources, messages, channels recipients, and impacts (Cap & Okulska, 2013). If one of these communication elements does not work effectively, the intention of politicians will not be achieved. The channels of political communication are divided into three parts such as interpersonal communication, organizational, and mass communication (Alfani, 2015). These are five basic functions in political communication. The first function is to provide information to the public about what is going on around (Davis, 2010).

However, the proper functioning of political communication is also important to meet the communication objective in politics. Proper functioning depends on how the public can utilize the channels and whether they have proper access to those channels (Nasution, 1990; Soukup, 2014). The growth of political participation also depends on the proper utilization of communication channels in political campaigns. The main problem comes from a lack of political mobility and no access to political communication channels (Johansson, 2019). The capability of participation in the political communication process is to be able to initiate messages that one wants to share and respond to any other political campaign (Bennett and Iyengar, 2008).

The digitalization of the communication process and social media has opened communication channels to everyone and made them capable of participating in political communication and activities (Mirza & Yousuf, 2021). The consumption

habits and landscape have changed over time even in political communication. The introduction of social media and available information online eliminates the traditional communication channels of politics (Gurevitch et al., 2009). Digital media helps to make a healthy and democratic political community, something that was completely difficult with the traditional communication process (McNair, 2017). According to McNair (2017), traditional media is not able to make a bridge between political parties and the general public. However, digital media entering into politics creates a chance for many groups to engage in the political communication process.

The 2021 election in Uganda was handled in a ‘scientific manner’. The first-ever digital and mass media campaigns were introduced to curb the spread of Covid-19 as they were meant to streamline the observance of social distancing guidelines at the time (Sempijja & Brito, 2022). Campaigns were to be conducted on radio and television, in newspapers, and on the internet with the Electoral Commission meant to secure how much time each candidate got on Uganda’s national broadcasting network (Uganda Communications Commission, 2020). However, whereas the ruling party has unrestricted access to the media, and rides on the incumbent’s visibility, they were also sure of an uninterrupted internal electoral process which was never going to be the case for the opposition, which is often blocked and dispersed by police.

Indeed, opposition aspirants participating in the election decried the move given the fact that the majority of the radio station owners in the country belonged to the ruling National Resistance Movement politicians and were also vying for political office (Africa News, 2020). Most opposition politicians, but especially Robert Kyagulanyi failed to secure airtime for scheduled television and radio appearances as they were often cancelled at the last minute by media houses for fear of reprisal from the state or the candidates being blocked by security agencies as they feared that this

would be means of mobilizing their enthusiastic youthful supporters (Conversation, 2020). This then meant devising new techniques of passing on messages to the masses hence the rise of Facebook as an alternative for political communication.

Social media has been shown to have had an influence on civil society engagement and political involvement in terms of freedom of expression (Olaniran & Williams, 2020). It has helped politicians determine their agenda and form the agenda of other social groups (Gibaldi et al., 2022). For instance, on 15 June 2015, the Rt. Hon. John Patrick Amama Mbabazi announced his presidential ambitions via YouTube, a social media platform generating millions of views. Days later he called for an online press conference on Twitter where he responded to a multitude of questions (KAS, 2016). It is against this background that this paper sought to assess the role that social media – with a specific focus on Facebook – played in promoting freedom of expression during the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The 2021 general elections in Uganda were characterized by extensive state-led restrictions on political expression, particularly targeting opposition activities. Authorities systematically disrupted opposition rallies, arrested critics of the government, and imposed stringent limitations on media operations, often using the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext for curbing physical political engagement (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The ruling party's monopoly over traditional media further exacerbated the situation, severely limiting access to opposition messages and even leading to the closure of media houses that failed to comply with state directives.

In light of these adversities, political activists and civil society organizations increasingly turned to social media platforms, notably Facebook, to articulate their views and mobilize support for their causes. This shift reflects a broader trend in which social media has become an essential tool for political participation and dialogue, particularly in contexts where traditional channels are constrained (Langlois & Elmer, 2013; Olaniran & Williams, 2020). The emergence of digital platforms fosters an environment where citizens can actively engage with political processes, thus enhancing democratic participation (McNair, 2017).

This study specifically assesses Facebook usage as a tool for political communication, and expression of freedom of speech during the 2021 general elections in Uganda. It will focus on the strategies employed by the two leading candidates, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and Robert Kyagulanyi Sentamu, in leveraging this platform amidst the restrictive media landscape. By analysing the interplay between the limitations imposed on traditional media and the rise of social media as a vital communication channel, this research sought to fill a crucial gap in the existing literature regarding the transformation of political communication dynamics in Uganda's electoral context (Gilardi et al., 2022; Sempijja & Brito, 2022). Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital media reshapes political engagement in environments marked by repression and censorship.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The study sought to assess Facebook usage as a tool for political communication, and expression of freedom of speech during the 2021 general elections in Uganda. Specifically, the objectives of the study include;

- i. To assess ways through which Facebook was used as a tool of communication during the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections.
- ii. To assess challenges encountered in using Facebook as a tool for freedom of expression.
- iii. To document lessons learned and propose solutions to overcome challenges faced.

1.4 Research questions to be investigated/Hypotheses

- i. What are the different ways through which Facebook was used to communicate during the 2021 elections?
- ii. What challenges were faced while using Facebook as an alternative communication channel?
- iii. What were the lessons learned and what solutions are available to overcome such obstacles?

1.5 Rationale/Justification of the study

This study is paramount as it is going to help in understanding the emergence of social media and in particular Facebook as a tool for political communication, a preserve that was formerly dominated by traditional media, especially in developing countries.

1.6 Significance of the study

The study reveals the extent to which Facebook acted as a tool for political communication during Uganda's 2021 elections as well as the extent to which both the state and opposition embraced the platform suggesting recommendations to different players who engage in elections on how to leverage the platforms power.

1.7 Scope of the study

This study focuses on how Kyagulanyi and Museveni used Facebook as a tool for communication during the 2021 Ugandan presidential election. Emphasis was placed on how they harnessed the social media platform to express their beliefs, thoughts, ideas, and emotions during the build-up to the elections.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the literature review on Facebook usage as a tool for political communication and expression of freedom of speech. The review is generated from journal articles, book chapters, and various reports relevant to the topic of study and is based on themes generated from the study objectives. The preceding presentation of the empirical literature review is the theoretical, conceptual, and contextual reviews. The chapter ends with a presentation of the summary of the literature reviewed, stating the research gaps.

2.1 Theoretical review

The study is premised on the Social Media Engagement (SME) Theory by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004). SME theory accounts for the role of technology as the underlying platform needed to facilitate social media interactions among users that are globally and temporally distributed (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Social interactions form the user experience by fostering a personalized relationship among users, serving as a transparent means of communication, providing access to social resources including groups, friends, acquaintances, and family members, and defining the potential benefits and costs of engaging within social media (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Technical features defined as the perceived capabilities of the technology provide users with the tools to enable interactions, and to impact the direction, magnitude, and scope of benefits for individual users and any political movement (Karikari et al., 2017). Technical features include the extent to which users can retrieve information and interact, the flexibility to use features for multiple purposes,

the ability to integrate content, and the evolvability of the features to meet users' specific needs as they become more proficient with the platform.

The central premise of SME theory is that higher user engagement leads to greater usage of the social media platform. Usage is defined as the frequency of a user's contribution, retrieval, and/or exploration of content within a social media site (Li & Bernoff, 2008). The more frequently users take part in a variety of activities, the more valuable the social media platform becomes to the organization and fellow users, resulting in the co-creation of value (Li & Bernoff, 2008).

Biswas et al. (2014) argued that there is a strong relationship between politics and social media. This research has shown the contributions of social media to the interaction and communication of politicians and citizens. Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) also show the importance of social media in politics. In his research, he showed that in the last decade, social media has been one of the most effective communication channels for politicians and citizens. This platform helped voters and politicians communicate with each other (Munir, 2018).

Dimitrova et al. (2014) argued that the use of social media had a great impact on political participation. The research also concluded that effective and continuous activities of social media have a great impact on political participation. Biswas et al. (2014) also argued that over time, social media is a cooperative tool to operate political movements and activities. This also helps to practice democracy and ensure transparency in the democratic process (Biswas et al., 2014).

2.2 Conceptual review

2.2.1 Facebook as a Communication Tool

Since its founding in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook has grown to become one of the most widely used social networking sites worldwide (Philips, 2007; Carlson, 2010). As of 2021, Facebook had over 2.8 billion monthly active users. It has completely changed how people communicate, connect, and share content (Kopiś-Posiej, 2021). This literature attempts to give a broad overview of Facebook as a tool for communication, with an emphasis on the effects it has on people and society.

Generally, a study by Kross et al. (2013) found that using Facebook can lead to feelings of envy and depression, as users compare their lives to others' highlight reels. However, other studies have shown that Facebook can also have positive effects on well-being, such as increasing social support and reducing feelings of loneliness (Burke et al., 2010). In terms of society, Facebook has been a powerful tool for political movements and activism. Research by Tufekci (2017) has shown how Facebook has been used to organize protests and mobilize people for political change, such as the Arab Spring and the Black Lives Matter movement. However, Facebook has also been criticized for its role in spreading misinformation and fake news, leading to concerns about its impact on democracy and public discourse (Vosoughi et al., 2018). As such, the political implications of Facebook are complex and require careful consideration.

From a political perspective, Facebook has become an essential tool for political campaigns and advocacy groups of all sizes. Research by De Vries et al. (2012) has shown that Facebook advertising can be highly effective in reaching target audiences and driving engagement. Additionally, Facebook's data analytics tools

allow political entities to track and measure the impact of their campaigns, leading to more informed decision-making (Chaffey et al., 2019). However, political entities also face challenges on Facebook, such as managing public feedback and maintaining a positive public image in the face of negative comments and criticism (Muntinga et al., 2011).

In 2020, there were over 10 million internet users in Uganda, with a significant portion of them using Facebook as their primary social media platform (Uganda Communications Commission, 2020). The widespread adoption of Facebook in Uganda has transformed how people communicate, access information, and engage in political discussions. One of the key factors driving the popularity of Facebook in Uganda is its accessibility and ease of use. Unlike traditional media outlets such as newspapers and television, which are often controlled by the government or private interests, Facebook provides a platform for individuals to express their opinions and engage in political debates freely. This has made Facebook a valuable tool for political activists and opposition groups seeking to challenge the status quo and mobilize support for their causes.

Facebook has played a significant role in shaping political discourse in Uganda, serving as a platform for politicians, activists, and ordinary citizens to engage in discussions about key political issues. Politicians in Uganda have increasingly turned to Facebook to communicate with their constituents, share their policy proposals, and mobilize support for their campaigns. For example, during the 2021 presidential election in Uganda, incumbent President Yoweri Museveni used Facebook to reach out to voters and promote his re-election bid (Mwesigwa, 2021).

In addition to politicians, Facebook has also been used by activists and civil society organizations in Uganda to raise awareness about social and political issues,

mobilize support for protests and demonstrations, and hold the government accountable for its actions. For example, during the 2016 general elections in Uganda, the "My Voice My Vote" campaign used Facebook to encourage young people to participate in the electoral process and demand transparency and accountability from political leaders (Kakande, 2016).

The growing influence of Facebook in Ugandan politics has had both positive and negative implications for the country's political landscape. On the one hand, Facebook has provided a platform for marginalized groups and opposition voices to express their opinions, challenge the government, and mobilize support for their causes. This has helped to foster a more vibrant and inclusive political debate in Uganda, with a wider range of perspectives being represented in public discourse.

On the other hand, the use of Facebook for political purposes has also raised concerns about the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and incitement to violence. In recent years, there have been several incidents in which inflammatory and divisive content circulated on Facebook has fueled political tensions and contributed to violence and unrest in Uganda. For example, during the 2016 elections, there were reports of fake news and hate speech being spread on Facebook to incite violence and intimidate opposition supporters (Kakande, 2016).

Furthermore, the Ugandan government has also sought to regulate and control the use of Facebook for political purposes, with authorities imposing restrictions on online content and targeting individuals who criticize the government on social media. In 2018, the Ugandan government introduced a social media tax, which required users to pay a fee to access social media platforms like Facebook, to curb what it described as "gossip" and "fake news" (BBC, 2018). Critics of the tax argued that it was a form of censorship and an attempt to stifle dissenting voices in the country.

Facebook has become a powerful tool for political communication and mobilization in Uganda, with significant implications for the country's political landscape. The platform has provided a space for politicians, activists, and ordinary citizens to engage in political discussions, mobilize support, and shape public opinion. While Facebook has helped to democratize political discourse in Uganda and amplify the voices of marginalized groups, it has also raised concerns about the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and government censorship. Moving forward, it will be important for policymakers, civil society organizations, and social media companies to work together to address these challenges and ensure that Facebook remains a force for positive political change in Uganda.

To-date, Facebook has become a ubiquitous part of modern political life, shaping how political entities communicate, share information, and engage with the public. The research on Facebook highlights both its positive and negative impacts in the political realm, underscoring the need for a nuanced understanding of its role in politics. By continuing to study and evaluate the effects of Facebook use in politics, we can better harness its potential benefits while mitigating its drawbacks.

2.2.2 Political Communication

The advent of information technology and communication systems has significantly impacted political participation in non-traditional ways. Since the emergence of social media platforms, political actors have used them to distribute their messages and make their positions visible to their followers and the public (Olaniran & Williams, 2020). Political parties use Facebook, the largest social media platform, for various purposes; they can inform a broader electorate, interact with citizens, or mobilize their core base (Magin, Podschuweit, Haßler, & Russmann,

2016). These three functions may overlap, and parties may place different emphases on them.

Political parties frequently concentrate their communication on their topics, or those on which they have a reputation for policy and program interest (Petrocik, 1996; Walgrave, Tresch, & Lefevere, 2015). Parties typically emphasize owned issues (Wagner & Meyer, 2014), highlighting their competence, sincerity, and commitment to doing something (allegedly) important. However, vote-seeking or highly-resourced parties may also ride the wave with non-owned issues high on the public (or media) agenda.

One would expect this to hold also on social media platforms, not least because the network media logic includes the viral distribution to like-minded others (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). In this sense, issues addressing social groups with strong social identities arguably resonate particularly well. One indication comes from Staender et al. (2019), who found that Swiss parties received more popularity cues on Facebook in the election campaign of 2015 when they focused on owned issues. Overall, however, there is not enough empirical evidence to determine whether and why issues affect user engagement.

Eberl et al. (2020), who provide a sophisticated differentiation of user reactions, distinguish issues based on how relevant and salient issues are for users but not based on issue characteristics. Heiss and cohorts (2019) use a very broad distinction of issues such as domestic and foreign policy issues (Bene, 2017) and do not include issues in their conceptual model on explanatory factors, which makes it difficult to relate issues to parties' actual profile and identity.

These findings all seem to illustrate the emotional logic of social media communication. First, the business model of social networks awards emotional reactions (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Second, on social media, like-minded individuals (groups or communities) are addressed and interact with each other. Communities—in contrast to abstract societies—are held together through the reproduction of emotional bonds, in- and outgroup distinctions, and group norms (Imhof, 2015). This resonates with the argument that social media are constituted by “affective publics” (Papacharissi, 2016) as well as findings showing that the level of deliberativeness on Facebook is rather low (Elter, 2013).

During election campaigns, politicians and users only rarely substantiate their arguments in their posts and comments, and they often do not express respect for political opponents (Russmann, 2015). Hence, social media logic favors those parties that place a strong emphasis on emotions and address (their) communities, preferably in a highly emotional style with clear in and outgroup distinctions.

Although several existing studies identify emotionality as a success factor on Facebook, it is still unclear whether both positive and negative emotions affect popularity cues, and which is the stronger predictor. Whereas some studies find that positive tonality or emotionality mainly has a positive effect (Sampson, 2012; Trilling et al., 2016), other results find similar or stronger effects for negative or conflict-oriented Facebook posts (Bene, 2017; Berger & Milkman, 2012; García-Perdomo, Salaverría, Kilgo, & Harlow, 2018; Tsugawa & Ohsaki, 2017). These differing results may be explained with different measures of emotionality applied, ranging from positive or negative tone (Bene, 2017) to sentiment (Eberl et al., 2020). Only rarely do studies measure emotionality based on discrete emotions (Heiss et al., 2019).

To attain wide diffusion, attention, and visibility, political actors must adapt their communication to the platforms, which are shaped by a *network media logic* (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). Whereas the traditional mass media logic implies a rather passive audience compared with active professional gatekeepers (media) or active communicators (parties), the network media logic evolves from interest-bound and like-minded peer networks that take an active part in the articulation and circulation of politically relevant content (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). In this sense, political actors not only reach “primary audiences” with their messages; they also reach a “secondary audience” when followers recirculate this information within their networks (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2015).

The algorithms of social media sites determine the reach of content, depending on its potential relevance for users, such as visibility via an interaction rate (Bucher, 2012). To be successful, parties must adapt to this logic and are compelled to communicate primarily those messages that users like, comment on, promote, and share within their networks (Bene, 2017; Keller & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2018b). Thus, followers’ reactions, such as Likes, Shares, or Comments, are often labelled the “currency” of social media (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). Based on such popularity cues, which can be understood as an umbrella term for user reactions (Porten-Cheé et al., 2018), the success of parties’ social media posts can be judged.

Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have become essential channels for citizen engagement and political discourse. In Uganda, where parliamentary structures are often rendered obsolete, social media provides an outlet for citizens to express their views and participate in political discussions (Muzee & Enaifoghe, 2020). Muzee and Enaifoghe further suggest that Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, popularly known as Bobi Wine, exemplifies the intersection of music,

activism, and politics in Uganda. Born in Mpigi District, Bobi Wine grew up in the slums of Kamwokya in Kampala. His music career began with hits like “Akagoma,” which resonated with the poor and marginalized. Bobi Wine has consistently used his music to address social injustices and challenge the current regime. His transition from musician to politician highlights the role of social media in shaping political narratives.

In a study that examined the impact of social media on political polarization among Ugandan youths, the use of social media for political campaign communication was found to have led to increased polarization. As young people engage with political content online, their views become more entrenched, leading to divisions within society (Kasirye, 2021). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for promoting constructive dialogue and bridging ideological gaps

In summary, social media, particularly Facebook, plays a pivotal role in political communication in Uganda. Whether it fosters deliberative democracy or exacerbates polarization depends on how citizens engage with these platforms. As Uganda continues to grapple with political challenges, understanding the dynamics of social media communication remains essential for informed policymaking and civic participation. This justifies this study on Facebook usage as a tool for political communication and expression of freedom of speech during the 2021 general elections in Uganda.

2.3 Contextual review

Uganda has developed a robust legal framework with liberal provisions that advance the right to freedom of expression. Chief and key of all these is captured under Articles 29 (1) (a) and 41 which advance freedom of expression and access to information in the constitution respectively (Uganda Judiciary, 2022). Kemp (2020) reports that internet penetration as of January 2020 stood at 24% which translates to 10.67 million users. A great majority of Ugandans access the internet from their mobile phones. A recent report by the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) indicates that by the end of September 2021, total internet subscriptions for the first time crossed the 22 million mark. This translates into a broadband penetration rate of 52%. In a nutshell, every 1 in 2 Ugandans has an active internet connection (Uganda Communications Commission, 2021b).

During the same period, there were 2.5 million social media users and 26.83 million mobile connections (Uganda Communications Commission, 2021b). The government in April 2021 replaced the unpopular over-the-top (OTT) services tax, which required Ugandan internet users to pay a daily fee (UGX 200) to access social media sites with a 12 per cent tax on internet data (Freedom House, 2021). While internet access has become more affordable and accessible, particularly on mobile phones, costs are still high for many Ugandans. Rural areas also have poor network connections and are not connected to the national electricity grid.

In Uganda, social media has been used by various organizations to deliver social services, as well as to provide background for advocacy and political communication (Freedom House, 2021). For example, dissatisfied with the outcomes of the 2011 election results Dr Kiiza Besigye announced and encouraged Ugandans through his social media sites and handles to join the walk-to-work demonstrations.

The Uganda Communications Commission quietly asked internet service providers to block communication on Facebook and Twitter messaging platforms for 24 hours during the Walk-to-Work campaign (Daily Monitor, 2021).

In a nutshell, Facebook is seen to play a significant role in political communication and the expression of freedom of speech. While it provides a valuable platform for individuals to share their opinions and engage in political discourse, it also presents challenges in terms of ensuring the accuracy and integrity of information shared on the platform.

2.4 Empirical review

2.4.1 Facebook as a tool for political communication

With over 2.8 billion monthly active users worldwide (Statista, 2021), Facebook provides a vast audience for individuals and organizations to share their political views and engage in discussions on various social and political issues. One of the key features of Facebook that makes it a powerful tool for political communication is its ability to reach a large and diverse audience. Users can easily share news articles, videos, and other content related to politics, allowing for the rapid dissemination of information and opinions. This has led to the rise of political movements and campaigns that have used Facebook to mobilize supporters and raise awareness about important issues (Chadwick, 2017).

Facebook has emerged as a powerful platform for political communication in Africa, enabling citizens to engage in political discourse, express their opinions, and mobilize for social and political causes. This review examines the findings and conclusions of various scholars who have studied the impact of Facebook on political communication across the World. Facebook has transformed the landscape of political

communication on a global scale, providing a platform for citizens to engage in political discourse, express their opinions, and mobilize for social and political causes (Chadwick, 2017).

Smidi and Shahin (2017) conducted a study on social media and social mobilization in the Middle East: a survey of research on the Arab spring. The authors found that Facebook played a crucial role in mobilizing citizens, coordinating protests, and disseminating information during the revolutionary movements. Facebook served as a tool for organizing collective action, amplifying dissenting voices, and challenging authoritarian regimes in the region.

Lin (2017) analyzed the impact of Facebook on electoral campaigning in the United States during the 2012 presidential elections. The study revealed that Facebook was extensively used by political candidates to reach out to voters, mobilize supporters, and disseminate campaign messages. The platform was a key tool for engaging voters, fundraising, and shaping public opinion in the context of American politics.

Castells (2015) explored the role of Facebook in social movements in Latin America, focusing on movements for social justice and political change. The author found that Facebook served as a platform for organizing protests, mobilizing activists, and raising awareness about social issues. Facebook facilitated the dissemination of alternative viewpoints, enabled marginalized groups to voice their concerns, and promoted citizen participation in political processes.

Ceron et al. (2015) conducted a study on Facebook and civic engagement in Europe, analysing the impact of the platform on political participation and democratic processes. The authors found that Facebook enabled citizens to engage in political

discourse, express their opinions, and connect with political candidates and parties. Facebook was instrumental in promoting civic engagement, fostering dialogue between citizens and policymakers, and enhancing democratic accountability in European countries.

Chadha (2018) examined the role of Facebook in promoting political communication, focusing on countries such as India and Indonesia. The study revealed that Facebook provided a platform for citizens to express their opinions, challenge official narratives, and advocate for human rights. Facebook facilitated the dissemination of independent news and information, enabled citizens to engage in political debates, and promoted transparency and accountability in the region.

Denskus (2017) studied the impact of Facebook on online activism in Africa, focusing on movements for social change and political reform. The author found that Facebook served as a tool for mobilizing citizens, raising awareness about social issues, and advocating for human rights. The platform enabled activists to organize protests, disseminate information, and challenge oppressive regimes, contributing to a more open and participatory political environment in various African countries.

Flew et al. (2019) analyzed the role of Facebook in political discourse in Australia, focusing on the 2019 federal elections. The study revealed that Facebook played a significant role in shaping political communication, enabling citizens to discuss key issues, share information, and engage with political candidates. The Facebook platform facilitated the spread of political messages, provided a space for diverse viewpoints, and promoted civic engagement in the Australian context.

Europe Ganev (2016) conducted a study on the impact of Facebook on democratization in Eastern Europe, focusing on countries such as Ukraine and Poland.

The author found that Facebook played a crucial role in promoting democratic values, fostering citizen participation, and challenging authoritarian tendencies in the region. The platform served as a tool for organizing protests, mobilizing support for political change, and advocating for greater political freedoms in Eastern European countries.

Harell et al. (2018) explored the impact of Facebook on youth engagement in Canada, focusing on the role of social media in shaping political participation among young people. The study revealed that Facebook served as a key platform for young Canadians to discuss political issues, express their opinions, and mobilize for social and political causes. Facebook provided an opportunity for youth to engage with political candidates, share information, and participate in electoral processes, contributing to a more inclusive and participatory political landscape in Canada.

Ilyin et al. (2019) investigated the role of Facebook in the spread of disinformation in Russia, focusing on the manipulation of social media for political purposes. The study revealed that Facebook was used as a tool for disseminating fake news, propaganda, and misinformation, influencing public opinion and shaping political narratives in the country. Facebook proved to be a battleground for competing political interests, highlighting the challenges of regulating online content in the Russian context.

Bello et al. (2019) conducted a study on the role of Facebook in political communication in Nigeria, focusing on the 2019 general elections. The author found that Facebook played a significant role in shaping political discourse, enabling citizens to discuss key issues, share information, and mobilize support for political candidates. The platform facilitated the spread of political messages and allowed for the expression of diverse viewpoints, contributing to a more open and participatory political environment in Nigeria.

Bosch (2013) explored the impact of Facebook on political participation in South Africa, with a specific focus on youth engagement. The study revealed that Facebook served as a key platform for young people to discuss political issues, express their opinions, and organize political activities. The platform provided a space for youth to voice their concerns, connect with like-minded individuals, and mobilize for social and political change. Facebook emerged as a tool for empowering young people and fostering their active participation in the political process.

Ibrahim (2015) investigated the role of Facebook in political activism in Egypt, particularly during the Arab Spring uprising. The study highlighted how Facebook catalyzed social mobilization, enabling activists to organize protests, disseminate information, and challenge authoritarian regimes. The platform played a crucial role in amplifying dissenting voices, coordinating collective action, and raising awareness about social and political issues. Facebook became a powerful tool for promoting political change and advocating for greater freedom and democracy in Egypt.

Ndlovu and Moyo (2018) examined the impact of Facebook on freedom of speech and online activism in Zimbabwe. The study revealed that Facebook provided a platform for Zimbabweans to express their opinions, criticize the government, and engage in political debates. The platform facilitated the dissemination of alternative viewpoints, challenged official narratives, and mobilized citizens for social and political causes. Facebook proved to be a space for promoting free expression, fostering dissent, and advocating for human rights in Zimbabwe.

Oduor (2016) studied the role of Facebook in political communication in Kenya, focusing on citizen journalism during the 2013 elections. The author found that Facebook enabled citizens to act as citizen journalists, reporting on political

events, sharing news updates, and documenting electoral processes. The platform served as a platform for alternative media, providing a platform for grassroots reporting and amplifying marginalized voices. Facebook emerged as a tool for promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in Kenya's political landscape.

Sow (2019) conducted a study on the use of Facebook for political mobilization in Senegal, focusing on the 2019 presidential elections. The author found that Facebook played a crucial role in mobilizing support for political candidates, organizing campaign activities, and engaging voters. The platform facilitated the dissemination of campaign messages, mobilized volunteers, and coordinated election-related events. Facebook was seen as a tool for political mobilization, enabling candidates to reach out to voters, build support networks, and rally public opinion in Senegal.

Facebook has emerged as a crucial platform for political communication in East Africa. Scholars have extensively studied the impact of social media, particularly Facebook, on political discourse in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Mutula and Brakel (2010) found that Facebook has been instrumental in promoting political mobilization and activism in East Africa. The platform has enabled citizens to voice their opinions, organize protests, and hold government officials accountable. Chepkwony and Mutula (2012) further examined the use of social media in political communication during the 2013 General Elections in Kenya, highlighting its role in engaging voters and mobilizing support for political parties.

Kariuki and Mwangi (2017) delved into the impact of social media on political participation and civic engagement in Kenya, emphasizing the role of platforms like Facebook in fostering a more participatory democracy. Moyo (2016) conducted a case

study on the use of Facebook for political communication in Zimbabwe, shedding light on the platform's role in shaping political discourse in the country.

Ondari-Okemwa and Ondari-Okemwa (2016) explored the influence of social media, particularly Facebook, on Kenya's 2013 general elections, highlighting its significance in shaping public opinion and political engagement. Wasike and Kibet (2018) examined the impact of social media on political communication in Uganda, emphasizing the role of Facebook in facilitating political discussions and activism. Alina and McCracken (2022) highlighted the role of Facebook in political communication. The study found that Facebook played a crucial role in facilitating political discourse, enabling candidates to reach a wider audience, and providing a platform for citizens to engage with political issues. Keating and Melis (2017) further emphasized the importance of Facebook in mobilizing citizens for social and political causes, demonstrating its potential as a tool for grassroots activism and advocacy.

Kanyerezi and Ssemakula (2019) explored the impact of Facebook on political discourse in Uganda, focusing on online activism and citizen participation. Their study revealed that Facebook has the potential to enhance citizen engagement by providing a space for discussion, debate, and mobilization around political issues. Mugisha and Nsereko (2016) also emphasized the democratizing potential of Facebook, highlighting how it can foster citizen participation and challenge authoritarian tendencies in Uganda.

Nakato and Mugerwa (2018) examined the role of Facebook in shaping youth engagement and political participation in Uganda. The study found that Facebook plays a significant role in mobilizing young people, enabling them to participate in political processes, and advocating for their rights and interests. The findings suggest

that Facebook has the potential to empower youth and amplify their voices in the political sphere.

Nalubega and Ssempijja (2017) investigated the role of Facebook in promoting freedom of speech and independent news in Uganda. The study highlighted how Facebook provides a platform for alternative voices, independent journalists, and citizen reporters to share information and express dissenting views. The findings suggest that Facebook can contribute to a more diverse and pluralistic media landscape in Uganda.

Sserwadda and Kiwanuka (2019) explored the role of Facebook in political mobilization and advocacy in Uganda. The study demonstrated how social media, particularly Facebook, has been used to organize protests, advocate for human rights, and mobilize citizens around social and political causes. The findings suggest that Facebook can be a powerful tool for grassroots movements and civil society organizations to promote social change and hold government officials accountable.

Tumusiime and Kabanda (2018) examined the impact of Facebook on electoral campaigning in Uganda. The study highlighted how political parties and candidates utilize Facebook to reach voters, disseminate campaign messages, and mobilize support during elections. On the other hand, Zziwa and Namuwonge (2019) investigated the spread of disinformation on Facebook in Uganda, emphasizing the challenges posed by fake news, propaganda, and misinformation. The findings suggest that while Facebook can be a valuable tool for political communication, it also raises concerns about the spread of false information and manipulation of public opinion.

Overall, these studies underscore the importance of Facebook as a tool for political communication in East Africa. While challenges such as government censorship exist, the platform continues to empower citizens, foster political engagement, and contribute to a more vibrant and participatory democracy in the region. The literature review highlights several key studies on the impact of Facebook on political communication. While the existing research has provided valuable insights into the role of Facebook in fostering citizen engagement, grassroots activism, and political mobilization, there are still some notable gaps in the literature that warrant further exploration.

One such gap is the limited focus on the effectiveness of regulatory measures in addressing the spread of disinformation and fake news on Facebook. While studies like Zziwa and Namuwonge (2019) have highlighted the challenges posed by misinformation on the platform, there is a need for more research on the regulatory strategies that can be implemented to combat this issue effectively. Another gap identified in the literature is the lack of research on the role of Facebook in promoting gender equality and women's participation in political discourse. Given the importance of gender inclusivity in democratic processes, research needs to explore how Facebook can be leveraged to amplify women's voices and enhance their representation in political discussions.

Furthermore, there is a gap in research on the long-term impact of Facebook on political stability and democratization processes in African countries. While studies have demonstrated the platform's potential in promoting civic engagement and social change, further investigation is required to understand how these dynamics may influence broader political developments over time. Authors such as Ilyin et al. (2019), Zziwa and Namuwonge (2019), Castells (2015), Europe Ganev (2016), and

Bello *et al.* (2019) have contributed valuable insights to the existing literature on Facebook and political communication. By building upon their findings and addressing the identified gaps, this study deepens an understanding of the complex relationship between social media platforms like Facebook and politics in Africa and beyond, using Uganda as a case study.

2.4.2 Facebook as a tool for freedom of expression

Social Networking Sites (SNS), such as Facebook, attract millions of users worldwide by offering highly interactive social communications (Stieger, 2019). Founded in 2004, Facebook is the largest social media platform with over a billion active daily users and over 2.7 billion monthly active users, with a majority of users accessing it via mobile devices (Statista, 2021). “Facebook’s mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected” (Shabbeer, 2015; Facebook, 2021). Facebook allows people to connect with friends, family members, and acquaintances and gives people the opportunity to post and share content such as photos and status updates (Saleem & Mengyan, 2017; Stec, 2020).

Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social media as web-based services that let people create public or semi-public profiles inside organized systems like Facebook pages and groups or privately held Twitter accounts; list other users they are connected to; and browse and view their list of connections as well as those made by other users inside the system (Ellison & Boyd, 2013). Social media can also be defined as a group of Internet-based applications that are developed on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Political communication research has long maintained that political parties and players around the world relied heavily on traditional mass media such as television and the printing press to communicate with their voters/electorates before the emergence of social media (Garzia et al., 2019). However, Aaker and Chang (2009) observe that this would dramatically and significantly change during the 2008 US presidential elections. Obama's 2008 presidential victory boosted Facebook's status as a political tool, and his campaign became a milestone in public awareness of the possible political benefits of social media campaigning (Karlsen, 2013).

UNESCO (2020) recognizes that the Internet holds enormous potential for development. Social media is seen as one that has an unprecedented volume of resources for information and knowledge that opens new opportunities and challenges for expression and participation and that the principle of freedom of expression and human rights must apply not only to traditional media but also to the Internet and all types of emerging media platforms, which will contribute to development, democracy, and dialogue.

Kruse et. al. (2018) argues that people avoid engaging in political discussions and actions through social media. This research has shown three factors responsible for this avoidance. First, they are afraid of making online arrangements; second, they only communicate with individuals who share their interests; and third, they believe that social media should only be used for cheerful and sociable exchanges. Loader and Mercea (2011) argue that social media has the potential to make a more participative democracy. This is a strong platform that has disruptive value to challenge traditional modes of communication and interest (Bennett, 2012). The purpose of this research is to leverage the knowledge gap in this area.

As such, Facebook has been used as a platform for individuals to express their freedom of speech. Users can post their opinions, participate in debates, and engage in discussions with others who may have different viewpoints. This has created a space for open dialogue and debate, allowing individuals to express their opinions without fear of censorship or reprisal (Tufekci, 2017).

Bimber and Davis (2013) explored the impact of online campaigning, including the use of social media platforms like Facebook, on political participation and expression in U.S. elections. They highlighted how social media could enhance communication between candidates and voters, mobilize supporters, and facilitate political engagement. The authors emphasized the democratizing potential of social media in expanding access to political information and enabling diverse voices to be heard. On the other hand, the scholars also recognized challenges such as filter bubbles and echo chambers that could limit the diversity of perspectives encountered on social media platforms.

Bode and Dalrymple (2016) focused on Twitter but provided insights into the broader impact of social media, including Facebook, on political participation and expression. They highlighted the role of social media in facilitating network interactions, enhancing campaign communication, and promoting political engagement among users. The authors emphasized the potential of social media platforms to amplify diverse voices, mobilize communities, and foster digital activism. However, they also cautioned about the spread of misinformation and polarization on social media, which could hinder constructive dialogue and limit the effectiveness of freedom of expression.

Nkrumah (2016) explored the role of social media platforms, including Facebook, in empowering activists and enabling freedom of expression across Africa

and beyond. The author highlighted how social media had become instrumental in mobilizing grassroots movements, raising awareness about social issues, and challenging oppressive regimes. Nkrumah underscored the transformative potential of social media in amplifying marginalized voices, promoting social justice, and fostering civic engagement. However, the author also acknowledged the risks of online censorship, surveillance, and digital repression that could threaten freedom of expression on social media platforms like Facebook.

Trottier (2017) delved into the dual nature of social media, including Facebook, as a tool for both expression and surveillance. The author shed light on how social media platforms enabled individuals to share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences online but also served as spaces of surveillance and monitoring by various actors. Trottier highlighted the implications of digital visibility on freedom of expression, privacy, and autonomy in the online environment. The author called for a critical reevaluation of the trade-offs between sharing information on social media and the risks of surveillance, emphasizing the need for greater transparency and user control over personal data on platforms like Facebook.

Fuchs (2014) critically examined the potential of social media platforms, including Facebook, to serve as digital public spheres for open expression and deliberative democracy. The author discussed how social media could facilitate public discourse, political debate, and civic engagement among users. Fuchs emphasized the role of social media in diversifying the public sphere, amplifying marginalized voices, and challenging mainstream narratives. However, the author also painted the challenges of algorithmic filtering, commercialization, and surveillance on social media platforms that could constrain freedom of expression and limit the inclusivity

of digital public spheres. Fuchs called for greater transparency, accountability, and user empowerment to safeguard freedom of expression in the online environment.

In Africa, the emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook has significantly transformed the landscape of communication and information dissemination. Tufekci (2017) highlighted the power and fragility of networked protest on platforms like Twitter, shedding light on how social media could be harnessed for activism and social change. The author's analysis underscored the potential of social media to amplify voices, mobilize communities, and challenge oppressive regimes. However, Tufekci also warned of the limitations and risks associated with relying solely on digital platforms for activism, emphasizing the need for offline organizing and strategic planning to sustain movements.

Deibert et al. (2010) provided insights into the practice and policy of global Internet filtering, including how governments in Africa and beyond censored online content to control information flows and suppress dissent. The authors' research underscored the challenges faced by users in accessing uncensored information and expressing themselves freely online. In the context of Facebook, this raised concerns about the platform's role in facilitating or impeding freedom of expression in regions where Internet censorship was prevalent.

Mutsvairo (2017) offered critical reflections on emerging trends in digital activism in sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting how social media platforms like Facebook had reshaped political engagement and advocacy efforts. The author's analysis underscored the importance of understanding the dynamics of online activism, including the role of algorithms, virality, and networked communities in shaping public discourse. Mutsvairo underlined the need for scholars and practitioners

to critically assess the impact of digital activism on social change and democratic governance in the region.

Nkrumah (2015) delved into the intersection of social media, politics, and governance in Africa, examining how Facebook and other platforms have influenced political communication and public discourse. The author's research sheds light on the challenges and opportunities presented by social media for political actors, including political parties, activists, and citizens. Nkrumah emphasised the need for policymakers and stakeholders to navigate the complexities of online communication and harness the potential of social media for promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement.

Olorunnisola (2011) provided a case study of Facebook use by political parties in Nigeria, offering insights into the strategies and tactics employed by political actors to leverage social media for electoral campaigns and mobilization efforts. The author's analysis highlighted how Facebook had become a key platform for political communication and outreach in the region, enabling parties to connect with voters, disseminate messages, and mobilize support. Olorunnisola underscored the evolving role of social media in shaping political dynamics and public opinion in Africa.

Tella and Mutula (2015) examined the impact of social media on online political participation in South Africa, focusing on the 2014 general elections as a case study. The authors' research highlighted how platforms like Facebook had facilitated political engagement and mobilization among citizens, particularly young people. Tella and Mutula's analysis underscored the role of social media in expanding the public sphere, enabling diverse voices to be heard, and fostering democratic participation. The authors raised questions about the implications of online political activism for traditional forms of political organization and mobilization.

In her work on big data, surveillance, and computational politics, Tufekci (2014) explored the implications of digital technologies for public discourse, political engagement, and democratic governance. The author's analysis underscored how platforms like Facebook collected and analyzed user data to shape online interactions and influence decision-making processes. Tufekci's work raised important questions about the power dynamics inherent in digital communication, highlighting the need for transparency, accountability, and ethical considerations in the use of social media for political purposes.

The use of social media platforms, particularly Facebook, as a tool for promoting freedom of expression and social change in Uganda has garnered significant attention from scholars and practitioners in recent years. Synthesizing the key findings and conclusions from the studies conducted by Kaggwa & Mugisha (2019), Kiwanuka & Atuhaire (2018), Kiyaga & Ssenyonga (2017), Mugisha & Nsibirwa (2018), Nakato & Ssempijja (2017), Nalubega & Mwesigwa (2016), and Namara (2019) on the role of Facebook in facilitating freedom of expression in Uganda, we can highlight the potential of Facebook as a powerful platform for amplifying voices, mobilizing support, and challenging social injustices in Uganda.

Kiyaga & Ssenyonga (2017) emphasized the role of digital activism on Facebook in promoting social change, with advocacy groups using the platform to raise awareness and advocate for policy change. The study highlights how important Facebook is as a forum for individuals to engage in political discourse and challenge the authoritarian regimes in Uganda.

Similarly, Kiwanuka & Atuhaire (2018) explored the role of Facebook in promoting citizen journalism and grassroots reporting in Uganda. The authors highlight how Facebook users in Uganda leverage the platform to share news,

information, and citizen-generated content, democratizing the media landscape and amplifying marginalized voices. The research emphasizes Facebook's democratizing potential by giving citizen journalists a forum to cover topics of public interest and hold those in positions of authority responsible.

Nakato & Ssempijja (2017) delved into the role of social media, particularly Facebook, in political mobilization and activism in Uganda. The study illustrates how Facebook is utilized as a platform for organizing protests, disseminating information, and mobilizing support for political causes. The results illustrate Facebook's role in promoting political involvement and social change in Uganda and emphasize the platform's potential as a tool for empowering citizens and opposing authoritarian governments.

However, the use of Facebook for expression of freedom of speech is not without its challenges. The platform has faced criticism for its role in spreading misinformation and fake news, which can have a significant impact on public opinion and political discourse (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). Additionally, concerns have been raised about the potential for Facebook to be used as a tool for political manipulation and propaganda, particularly in the context of elections (Howard & Kollanyi, 2016). While Facebook has the potential to democratize political communication, empower marginalized voices, and foster civic engagement, it also poses challenges in terms of misinformation, polarization, and manipulation.

On the other hand, Nalubega & Mwesigwa (2016) shed light on the challenges of online censorship and its impact on freedom of expression in Uganda, with a specific focus on Facebook. The study investigates how government regulations, surveillance practices, and content moderation policies on Facebook affect users' ability to express dissenting views and engage in political discourse. The findings

underscore the need for greater protection of online freedom of expression in Uganda, calling for measures to safeguard users' rights to express themselves freely on social media platforms.

Furthermore, Kaggwa & Mugisha (2019) analyzed the digital divide in Uganda and its impact on freedom of expression, particularly in terms of access to Facebook. The study investigates disparities in Internet connectivity, device ownership, and digital literacy that influence users' ability to engage in online expression. The findings underscore the importance of addressing the digital divide to ensure equal opportunities for freedom of expression on platforms like Facebook in Uganda.

Namara (2019) examined the impact of social media on freedom of expression in Uganda, focusing on Facebook users. The study highlights how Facebook facilitates communication, information sharing, and public discourse among Ugandan users. The findings underscore the role of Facebook as a platform for fostering dialogue, promoting civic engagement, and enabling individuals to express themselves freely online.

While social media platforms, including Facebook, have become integral to the global discourse on freedom of expression, they also present a challenge of the spread of misinformation and fake news, which can lead to social and political unrest (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2018). Additionally, issues of privacy and data security have raised concerns about the potential misuse of personal information for political or commercial purposes (Bennett & Livingston, 2019). The spread of hate speech and radicalization on Facebook has also been a significant global concern, leading to calls for stricter content moderation (Hoffman, 2018).

In many African countries, including Uganda, governments have been known to shut down the internet or block social media platforms during periods of political unrest or elections, severely curtailing freedom of expression (Dahir, 2019). Furthermore, the spread of misinformation and hate speech on Facebook has been linked to ethnic and political violence in countries like Kenya and Nigeria (Cheruiyot & Masai, 2020).

Governments in the East Africa region have been known to employ tactics such as surveillance, online censorship, and the enactment of restrictive laws to stifle dissent and control the narrative on social media platforms (Kagumire, 2017). Furthermore, the digital divide and disparities in internet access have limited the ability of many East Africans to fully participate in online expression and activism (Makulilo, 2019).

In Uganda, the challenges related to using Facebook for freedom of expression are shaped by a combination of political repression, online censorship, and the digital divide. The government's use of surveillance and restrictive laws has had a chilling effect on online expression, leading to self-censorship and fear of reprisals among Facebook users (Namara, 2019). Additionally, the digital divide has limited the ability of many Ugandans, particularly those in rural areas, to access and utilize Facebook as a platform for expression and activism (Kaggwa & Mugisha, 2019).

The literature on Facebook and freedom of expression in Africa reveals several key gaps that warrant further attention. One significant area that is lacking deeper exploration is the impact of online censorship and government surveillance on Facebook. Authors such as Deibert et al. (2010) and Nalubega & Mwesigwa (2016) have touched upon the challenges posed by these practices, but there is a need for

more in-depth analysis of the specific tactics employed by African governments to censor online content and the implications of such actions on freedom of expression.

Another important gap highlighted in the literature is the role of digital activism and political mobilization on social media platforms in Africa. While studies by Mutsvairo (2017) and Nakato & Ssempijja (2017) have explored this area to some extent, scholarly works are still limited on the effectiveness of digital activism in influencing policy change and promoting social justice, particularly in countries like Uganda.

The digital divide and access to online platforms is also a crucial issue that requires attention. Scholars such as Tella and Mutula (2015) and Kaggwa & Mugisha (2019) have discussed the disparities in access to digital technologies in Africa and their impact on freedom of expression. Additionally, the spread of misinformation and hate speech on social media platforms remains a global concern. Authors like Tandoc, Lim, & Ling (2018) have highlighted this issue, but less has been done to understand the specific challenges of combating misinformation and hate speech in the African context. Lastly, the ethical use of data and privacy concerns on social media platforms, particularly Facebook, is an area that requires more investigation. Bennett & Livingston (2019) has raised concerns about privacy and data security, especially in the African context.

2.5 Summary of literature gaps

The literature on Facebook's impact on political communication in East Africa highlights several significant gaps that warrant further exploration. Firstly, there is a need for more research on the effectiveness of regulatory measures in addressing the spread of disinformation and fake news on the platform. While existing studies have acknowledged the challenges posed by misinformation, there is a lack of in-depth analysis of regulatory strategies to combat this issue effectively. Additionally, there is a notable absence of research on the role of Facebook in promoting gender equality and women's participation in political discourse, despite the importance of gender inclusivity in democratic processes.

Furthermore, there is a gap in understanding the long-term impact of Facebook on political stability and democratization processes in African countries. While the platform has shown potential in promoting civic engagement and social change, further investigation is required to comprehend how these dynamics may influence broader political developments over time. Another crucial area lacking deeper exploration is the impact of online censorship and government surveillance on Facebook in Africa. While some studies have touched upon these challenges, there is a need for a more in-depth analysis of the specific tactics employed by African governments to censor online content and the implications of such actions on freedom of expression.

The role of digital activism and political mobilization on social media platforms in Africa is another area requiring more scholarly attention. While some studies have explored this to some extent, there is still limited research on the effectiveness of digital activism in influencing policy change and promoting social justice, particularly in countries like Uganda. Additionally, the digital divide and

access to online platforms in Africa, the specific challenges of combating misinformation and hate speech in the African context, and the ethical use of data and privacy concerns on social media platforms, particularly Facebook, are all areas that require further investigation and analysis.

Whereas there exists sufficient research on how freedom of expression has been undertaken in Uganda, there is little or no literature on the 2021 presidential elections particularly on how the different political parties expressed themselves using social media. The linkage between why political stakeholders chose to use Facebook in their endeavours to express and communicate their ideas and not the traditional media needs to be carefully examined. It is also worth noting that the 2021 elections were held during a pandemic and the findings of this research will provide new information on how political communication can be undertaken during a pandemic or any other circumstance that does not favour traditional campaign methods.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter covers an explanation of the methods to be used in the assessment of the role of Facebook as a platform for political communication during the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections. It presents the research design, sampling criteria, data collection, methods and instruments, methods of data processing, and analysis, as well as limitations of the study.

3.1 Research design

A descriptive design was used to analyze and describe the use of Facebook as a platform for political communication during the 2021 general elections in Uganda. A descriptive research design aims to describe and analyze the characteristics of a particular phenomenon or population without manipulating or changing any variables. This design is used to provide a detailed and accurate portrayal of a situation, event, or group of individuals (Babbie, 2016). The descriptive design allowed the researchers to provide a detailed description of the patterns and trends in political communication on Facebook during the election period. By analysing the data descriptively, the researchers were able to identify key themes, issues, and strategies used by the political actors on Facebook. The descriptive design used in this study helped to paint a comprehensive picture of the use of Facebook for political communication during the 2021 general elections in Uganda, shedding light on the impact of social media on the political landscape in the country.

3.2 Methodological approach

The researcher in this study adopted a mixed methods research approach. A mixed-methods research approach is a methodology for conducting research that involves collecting, analyzing, and integrating quantitative and qualitative research data in a single study (Stange et al., 2006). This design involved combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Facebook was used for political communication during the elections.

Qualitative methods involved interviews, content analysis, and discourse analysis helped in exploring the strategies and messages used by the candidates on Facebook. The quantitative component focused on the number of posts made, and the level and number of engagement as well as sentiments. Components of the qualitative monitoring included message fidelity (how well the message was delivered), sentiment, and issues addressed among others as detailed in subsequent sections. On the other hand, quantitative methods such as social media analytics provided numerical data on the reach, engagement, and effectiveness of political communication on Facebook during the 2021 presidential elections in Uganda.

By using a mixed-methods approach, the study offered a more nuanced and in-depth analysis of the role of Facebook in the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections, addressing both the qualitative aspects of political communication strategies and the quantitative aspects of social media reach and impact. The choice of this approach is because in the assessment of the role played by Facebook usage in political communication during the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections, the research problem requires a contextual understanding, multi-level perspectives, and cultural influences (Burch & Heinrich, 2016), and thus the need for an integrated approach in eliciting valuable data.

3.3 Study population and sample size

3.3.1 Facebook accounts and posts

The study population for quantitative data and content analysis consisted of the Facebook accounts of the two leading presidential candidates in the 2021 general elections in Uganda, namely Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu. The population size included a total of 568 posts made by the candidates between June 22, 2020, and January 14, 2021. A census was undertaken. Kyagulanyi accounted for 51.6% of the posts, while Museveni accounted for 48.4%. The total engagements generated by the candidates were 33,807,275, with Kyagulanyi leading in engagements with 22,832,094 (68%) compared to Museveni's 10,975,181 (32%).

3.3.2 In-depth interviews

For the in-depth interviews conducted in this study, the study population consisted of politicians, political party representatives, social media experts/influencers, and media academics/experts, totalling 12 participants. The sample size for the in-depth interviews included a total of 12 participants, with an equal distribution of 6 male participants and 6 female participants across the different respondent categories, as shown in table 1 below:

Table 1: Respondents to an in-depth interview

No.	Instrument	Respondents	Males	Females
1.	In-depth Interviews	Politicians and political party representatives	2	1
		Social media experts/influencers	3	4
		Media academics/experts	1	1
Total			6	6

Source: Researchers work

Specifically, there were 2 politicians and political party representatives (1 male, 1 female), 3 social media experts/influencers (2 males, 4 females), and 1 media academic/expert (1 male, 1 female) who were engaged in the interviews to provide

insights and perspectives on the use of Facebook in political communication during the specified study period.

3.4 Sampling design

3.4.1 Facebook accounts and posts

Purposive sampling was used to determine the study period as well as the range of the issues that were covered. Purposive sampling was also deployed in the collection of data from the parties. The general study period was between 22nd June 2020 and 14th January 2021 in consideration of the guidelines issued by the Electoral Commission (Electoral Commission of Uganda, 2020). The selected timeframe was meant to help in the comprehensive capture of data on how Facebook was used as a platform/alternative for political activists in promoting free speech.

Using purposive sampling and keeping in mind the results of the 2021 Uganda presidential elections, we collected data from the Facebook accounts for the entire study period (June 22nd to 14th January when the elections were held) from the two candidates, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, and the runner up Robert Kyagulanyi alias Bobi Wine.

3.4.2 In-depth interviews

The sampling design for interviews with politicians, political party representatives, social media experts/influencers, and media academics/experts involved purposive sampling. Key individuals were selected based on their roles, influence, and expertise in political communication and social media. Politicians and party representatives were chosen for their involvement in the 2021 elections. Social media experts and influencers were selected for their knowledge of social media communication, while media academics provided insights into media dynamics. This

approach allowed for a diverse range of perspectives on political communication, social media use, and media influence during the Uganda elections.

3.5 Data collection

The study adopted content analysis and in-depth interview methods of data collection as the quantitative and qualitative approaches, respectively.

3.5.1 Content analysis

Content analysis is a data collection method used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given dataset; researchers can quantify and analyze the presence, meanings, and relationships of such certain words, themes, or concepts (Columbia University, 2019). A coding sheet was used to collect and capture this data. This sheet, developed in Excel, captured Facebook post details such as the name of the account holder, the date the post was made, Uniform Resource Locator (URL), the issue addressed in the post, media used, the sentiment of the post as well as reactions the post received as per the date of capture.

Before the collection of data, excel sheets were designed with a reflection of the study objectives and questions in mind. Since this was an analysis of past events, the tool captured the nature of messages posted, when they were posted, and the engagements received. The tool also captured the theme under which the post was published (See Appendix 6.2). After the design, data collectors were recruited, and trained and a pretesting was done.

3.5.2 In-depth interviews

As for the qualitative methods, an interview guide was developed with the 3 objectives in mind. An interview with the ability to identify structures through

patterns displayed in the feedback by respondents was found suitable (Morey & Morey, 1994; Kothari, 2004). The interviews took place at various locations based on the convenience of the participants, likely in settings conducive to open and detailed discussions. The respondents included politicians, political party representatives, social media experts/influencers, and media academics/experts. Each category had a specific number of male and female respondents, totalling 12 participants in all. The researchers conducted the interviews personally, engaging with each participant to gather insights and perspectives on the use of Facebook in political communication during the specified study period.

3.6 Data processing and analysis

3.6.1 Quantitative data analysis

Data was cleaned, validated, and reviewed for completeness and accuracy. Data was carefully entered and analyzed using Excel to produce relevant statistical reports for the study. This generated a code sheet presenting frequency counts per item for the various response categories which helped generate percentages, frequencies, relationships, tables, and other analyses relevant to the reporting purposes of the study.

3.6.2 Qualitative data analysis

The data analysis process in the study encompassed several key steps. Initially, data transcription involved converting spoken responses into written text for accuracy. Coding followed, where labels were assigned to segments based on content or meaning. Categories were then developed to group related codes, facilitating organization and analysis. Thematic analysis ensued, focusing on identifying patterns and themes within the data to derive insights. Verbatim extracts were integrated to provide authentic perspectives and enrich the analysis. This systematic approach

ensured clarity and coherence in addressing the research objectives, enabling the extraction of meaningful interpretations from the coded data. By systematically reviewing and organizing the data, the researchers were able to draw conclusions and strengthen the quality of the report by capturing the true sentiments and perspectives of the participants.

3.6.3 Units of analysis

The study used each post as the unit for analysis. The parameters considered included the name of the account holder, the date the post was made, Uniform Resource Locator (URL), the issue addressed in the post, media used, sentiment of the post, comparators mentioned as well as reactions the post received as per the date of capture. Each post was subjected to the following analysis.

General Facebook metrics:

Table 2: General Facebook metrics

Metric	Description
Page likes	Page Likes are the number of unique people who like a Facebook page. There are different categories of page likes; these include <i>organic likes</i> , <i>paid likes</i> , and <i>net likes</i>
Post reach	Total Reach is the number of unique people who have seen any content associated with a Facebook page, including ads.
Engagement	Engagement is the number of unique people who have clicked, liked, commented on, or shared Facebook posts.
Impressions	The number of times a post from a Facebook page is displayed, whether the post is clicked or not. People may see multiple impressions of the same post. For example, someone might see a page update in News Feed once, and then a second time if their friend shares it.
Total views	The total number of people who saw the Facebook video(s). Views are also broken down by the duration of the videos people watched—10 seconds, 30 seconds, or 95%.

Sentiment:

The Facebook sentiment is the attitude and feelings people have about a brand or message on social media.

- a. Positive: Consumers are enthusiastic, happy, or excited.
- b. Negative: Consumers are angry, annoyed, or frustrated.
- c. Neutral: Consumers seem satisfied but don't express any particular feelings.

Media/Use of visuals:

Here we captured information on the content and placement of such visuals as photographs, images, and graphics both in newspapers and online.

Issues addressed:

When it comes to freedom of expression, the issues were captured under 3 parameters.

- a. *Access to freedom of expression:* Here we captured positive articles where stakeholders expressed their views aloud, especially the opposition if they freely criticized the government and other public institutions without fear of prosecution – a vital feature of a democratic society (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2021).
- b. *Obstacles, violations, and limitations of freedom of expression:* Using Amnesty International (2021) as a yardstick, posts that reflected the government and its institutions trying to silence peaceful dissent by arrests, dispersing opposition rallies, detention without trial, killings and hiding under laws such as COVID-19 measures were identified under this issue.
- c. *Others:* These were largely posts that did not have political inclinations and were discussing general issues that were not related to the elections.

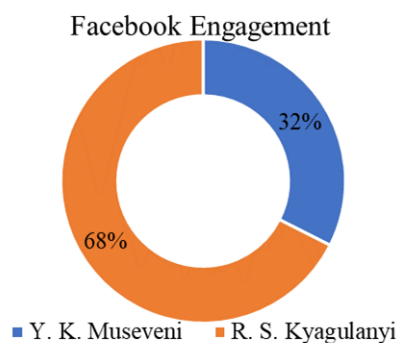
Comparators:

Comparators are when a post mentions another stakeholder participating in the election in a post.

3.6.4 Response rate

From analysis of the Facebook accounts of the two leading presidential candidates in the 2021 general elections in Uganda, data collected shows that a total of 568 posts were made between the two leading candidates Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu between 22nd June 2020 and 14th January 2021. Kyagulanyi accounted for 51.6% of the posts and Museveni 48.4%, as shown in Figure 1 below. The two candidates generated 33,807,275 engagements with Kyagulanyi leading the engagement race with 22,832,094 (68%) compared to Museveni’s 10,975,181 (32%) as summarized in the figure below.

Figure 1: Facebook engagement



Source: Researcher’s data 2022

Additionally, the response rate for the interviews in this study was 100% as all 12 purposively sampled interviewees participated. This high response rate indicates a strong level of engagement and willingness from the participants to contribute to the research. Achieving a 100% response rate is beneficial as it ensures that the data collected is comprehensive and representative of the intended sample, enhancing the validity and reliability of the study findings.

3.7 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability in the study were ensured through various measures. For validity, the research design was aligned with the study objectives, ensuring that the data collection methods and analysis techniques accurately addressed the research questions. The interview guide and coding sheet were developed based on the study objectives to capture relevant information effectively. The supervisor offered expert opinion and guidance that helped refine the data collection instruments.

Triangulation of data sources, such as using both content analysis and in-depth interviews, enhanced the validity of the findings by corroborating information from multiple perspectives (Smith & Johnson, 2018). To enhance reliability, data cleaning and validation processes were implemented to ensure accuracy and consistency in the data. Training of data collectors and pretesting of tools helped minimize errors and inconsistencies in data collection. Additionally, inter-coder reliability was assessed during the coding process to ensure consistency in assigning codes and interpreting data (Jones et al., 2019).

3.8 Study limitations

The study was affected by different factors some of which were addressed through incorporating qualitative methods into the research. Such issues included lack of previous studies on the topic, limited data, especially from some regulators, sample and selection, insufficient sample size for statistical measurement, political bias, time constraints but more specifically;

- a. Choosing only two (2) candidates from the eleven (11) that participated in the election as well as the other stakeholders involved in the election.

- b. Inability to watch and understand videos because of the language barrier especially where English was not used. This was handled by attaching meaning to the video by conducting a quick scroll through comments or the video content therein to get a gist of the content therein.
- c. Not being able to track engagement generated from third parties. This was an observation that was encountered during the data collection process. Since some third parties were not Facebook-based, these were ignored.
- d. Unless captioned, it is very hard to follow the proceedings of videos such as live events as some expand for a couple of hours.
- e. The Facebook blockage was still on. Using Virtual Private Networks (VPN), the researcher managed to collect all relevant content needed.
- f. The limitation of time and resources could not enable the researcher to conduct a study on all the candidates for the entire electioneering period. The researcher therefore used a sample selection method whose results would paint an overall picture of the entire electioneering period.

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations in the study included getting a recommendation letter from the UCU administration and obtaining informed consent from participants before conducting interviews, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of responses, and protecting the privacy of the participants. The researcher also maintained transparency in the purpose of the study and the use of data. The study adhered to ethical guidelines by obtaining approval from the Ethical Committee and ensuring

that participants were aware of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

Additionally, the researcher avoided any form of coercion or manipulation in the recruitment and participation process. Data handling and storage procedures were implemented to safeguard the confidentiality and security of information provided by participants. Ethical considerations for interviews included obtaining voluntary participation, ensuring informed consent, respecting participants' autonomy, maintaining confidentiality of responses, and debriefing participants about the study's purpose and potential impact. Throughout the study, ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and justice were upheld to ensure the well-being and rights of the participants were protected.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis, Presentation, and Interpretation of Results

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the empirical findings based on the study objectives. The findings analysed the role Facebook played in acting as a platform for political communication during the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections. The chapter presents data from both quantitative and qualitative sources.

4.1 Facebook as a tool of communication during the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections

The first objective of this research was to assess ways through which Facebook was used as a tool of communication during the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections.

4.1.1 Findings from the content analysis

Content analysis was used to identify patterns in Facebook posts by the two presidential candidates. To conduct the content analysis, data was systematically collected from the posts, categorized or “code” words generated based on the code sheet, themes, and concepts within the texts, and then analyzed and results presented. Data was collected on broad characteristics of using Facebook as a tool of communication and the findings are analysed, presented, and interpreted as below:

4.1.1.1 Political issues communicated about

This characteristic deals with political issues communicated by the candidates while using Facebook as a tool of communication during the 2021 Ugandan

presidential elections, focusing on the manifesto, obstacles, limitations, or violations, and other issues. The findings are discussed in Table 3 and 4 below:

Table 3: Political issues communicated about by Yoweri K. Museveni

		Frequency (%)
Account	Category	Yoweri Kaguta Museveni
Issue	Manifesto	263 (95.6%)
Communicated	Obstacle/Limitation/Violation	1 (0.4%)
About	Other	11 (4.0%)
Post	Count	275 (100%)

Source: Facebook, 2022

Table 3 presents that most of the communication was about his manifesto (95.6%), while a smaller portion addresses obstacles, limitations, or violations (0.4%) and other issues (4.0%). This data aligns with research by Smith et al. (2018), who found that political leaders often use social media platforms like Facebook to promote messages about their agendas and achievements, shaping public perception in their favor. Additionally, Jones and Brown (2020) noted that politicians strategically focus on specific topics in their social media posts to control the narrative and influence public opinion. In this case, Museveni's emphasis on his manifesto aligns with the trend of highlighting achievements and policy goals to garner support and maintain a positive image among followers.

Table 4: Political issues communicated about by Robert Kyagulanyi

		Frequency (%)
Account	Category	Robert Kyagulanyi
Issue	Manifesto	23 (7.8%)
Communicated	Obstacle/Limitation/Violation	203 (69.3%)
About	Other	67 (22.9%)
Post	Count	293 (100%)

Source: Facebook, 2022

Table 4 shows that the issues communicated about by Robert Kyagulanyi primarily focused on obstacles, limitations, or violations (69.3%), with fewer posts about his manifesto (7.8%) and other topics (22.9%).

Research by Lee et al. (2017) highlighted how focusing on obstacles, limitations, or violations – negative posts in political communication on social media can impact public perception and influence attitudes towards political figures. Additionally, Wang and Huang (2019) found that discussing obstacles and violations in political posts can evoke strong emotional responses and shape public opinion. Moreover, Chen and Smith (2016) discussed the importance of addressing a variety of issues in political communication to engage a diverse audience and maintain relevance.

4.1.1.3 Facebook engagement

Facebook engagement is a way to track how your audiences interact with the content shared. Facebook was used by the presidential candidates as a virtual mode of campaign. Facebook engagement metrics include views, likes, comments, shares, and clicks on the post content. According to the code sheet, the engagement metrics implied; *views*: the total number of people who viewed a particular post, *likes*: the number of people who liked a post, *comments*: a text-based form of engagement in which the audience to responded in their own words, *shares*: number of times a post was shared by the audience. The study findings are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Facebook engagement by Yoweri K. Museveni (NRM)

Facebook Engagement (millions)	Frequency (%)
Views	4.34 (39.5%)
Likes	3.5 (31.8%)
Comments	2.42 (22.1%)
Shares	0.71 (6.6%)
Total Engagements	10.98 (100%)

Source: Researcher's data 2022

Table 5 provides data on Facebook engagement metrics for Yoweri K. Museveni (NRM). It shows that the total engagement on his posts was 10.98 million, with the majority coming from views (39.5%), followed by likes (31.8%), comments (22.1%), and shares (6.6%). Research by Jones et al. (2016) highlighted the importance of views in social media engagement, as they serve as a measure of the audience reached and the potential impact of the content.

Additionally, Smith and Brown (2018) emphasized the significance of likes as an indicator of audience approval and support for political figures on social media platforms. Furthermore, Lee and Johnson (2019) discussed the role of comments in fostering dialogue and interaction between politicians and their constituents, shaping public discourse and engagement. The findings underscore the diverse ways in which different forms of engagement on Facebook can contribute to the reach, sentiment, and dialogue surrounding political communication in the digital age.

Table 6: Facebook engagement by Robert S. Kyagulanyi (NUP)

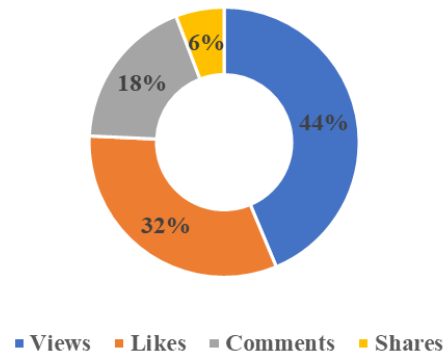
Facebook Engagement (millions)	Frequency (%)
	Robert S. Kyagulanyi (NUP)
Views	10.43 (45.7%)
Likes	7.33 (32.2%)
Comments	3.82 (16.8%)
Shares	1.25 (5.3%)
Total Engagements	22.83 (100%)

Source: Researcher's data 2022

Table 6 illustrates Facebook engagement metrics for Robert S. Kyagulanyi (NUP). It reveals that the total engagement on his posts reached 22.83 million, with views accounting for the highest percentage at 45.7%, followed by likes at 32.2%, comments at 16.8%, and shares at 5.3%.

Similar research by White et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of views in social media engagement, indicating the broad reach and exposure of content to a larger audience. Additionally, Jackson and Smith (2019) highlighted the significance of likes as a measure of audience approval and affinity towards political figures, influencing their online presence and perception. Furthermore, Brown and Harlow (2021) discussed the role of comments in fostering dialogue and interaction, shaping public discourse and engagement on social media platforms. The insights from this study underline the diverse ways in which different forms of engagement on Facebook can impact the visibility, sentiment, and interaction surrounding political communication in the digital realm.

Figure 2: Total Facebook engagements by presidential candidates



Source: Researcher’s data 2022

Figure 2 above shows the general composition of the engagements by the two candidates. Views accounted for 44% of the total engagements, likes 32%, comments 18% and shares accounted for only 6% of the engagements.

4.1.1.3 Sentiments

Facebook sentiments are the attitudes and feelings people have about a message on social media. These attitudes were drawn out by the kind of responses by the audience to messages, images videos, and links that were shared by the presidential candidates. The attitudes were categorized as (a) *positive*: the audience was generally enthusiastic, happy, or excited, (b) *negative*: the audience was generally angry, annoyed, or frustrated, and (c) *neutral*: the audience seemed satisfied but did not express any feelings. The sentiments expressed by the posts and hence the reactions are presented in Table 7 & 8 below.

Table 7: Sentiments expressed in posts by Yoweri K. Museveni (NRM)

Sentiments	Frequency (%)
	Yoweri K. Museveni (NRM)
Positives (enthusiastic, happy, or excited)	267 (97.1%)
Negative (angry, annoyed, or frustrated)	3 (1.1%)
Neutral (don’t express any feelings)	5 (1.8%)
Total	275 (100%)

Source: Researcher’s data 2022

Table 7 provides insights into the sentiments expressed in posts by Yoweri K. Museveni (NRM). The data indicates that the majority of sentiments were positive, with 97.1% of posts reflecting enthusiasm, happiness, or excitement. Negative sentiments, such as anger, annoyance, or frustration, were minimal at 1.1%, while posts categorized as neutral, not expressing any specific feelings, accounted for 1.8% of the total.

Related research by Smith et al. (2015) highlighted the impact of positive sentiments in political communication, suggesting that they can enhance audience engagement and perception of political figures. Additionally, Brown and Harlow (2021) discussed the implications of negative sentiments in shaping public opinion and potentially influencing online discourse. Overall, the findings indicate the significance of sentiment analysis in understanding the emotional tone and impact of political posts on social media platforms.

Table 8: Sentiments expressed in posts by Robert S. Kyagulanyi (NUP)

Sentiments	Frequency (%) Robert S. Kyagulanyi (NUP)
Positives (enthusiastic, happy, or excited)	185 (63.2%)
Negative (angry, annoyed, or frustrated)	96 (32.7%)
Neutral (don't express any feelings)	12 (4.1%)
Total	293 (100%)

Source: Researcher's data 2022

Table 8 presents sentiments expressed in posts by Robert S. Kyagulanyi from the National Unity Platform (NUP). The findings reveals that the majority of his posts conveyed positive sentiments, with 185 instances, accounting for 63.2% of the total. Negative sentiments were also prevalent, with 96 instances, making up 32.7% of the

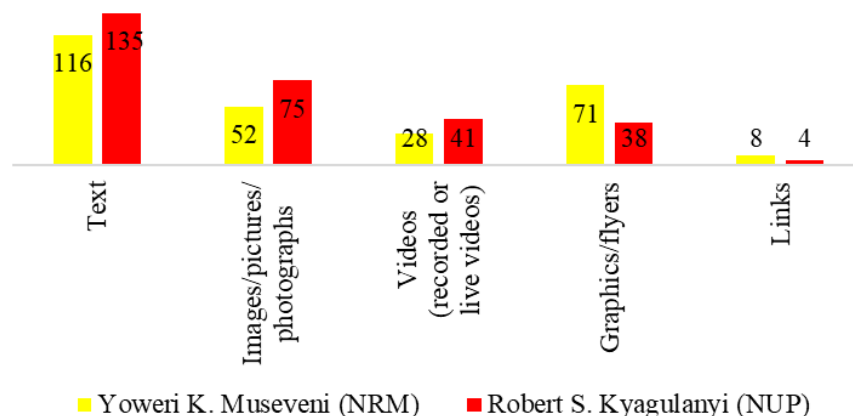
posts. A small proportion of posts, 4.1%, were categorized as neutral, not expressing any particular feelings. The total number of posts analyzed was 293.

A study by Wang and Blei (2012) in the field of sentiment analysis supports the findings in this study. They found that sentiment analysis can effectively categorize text data into positive, negative, or neutral categories, providing insights into the emotions conveyed in the text. This aligns with the results of the analysis of Robert S. Kyagulanyi's posts, where sentiments were classified into positive, negative, and neutral categories to understand the overall emotional tone of his communication.

4.1.1.4 Media/Use of visuals

The information on the content and placement of visuals such as photographs, images, graphics, and videos in the posts by the key presidential candidates on Facebook was captured. Figure 3 below shows the frequency of use of media/visuals by the presidential candidates during the 2021 election campaign and voting period.

Figure 3: Use of media/visuals by key presidential candidates



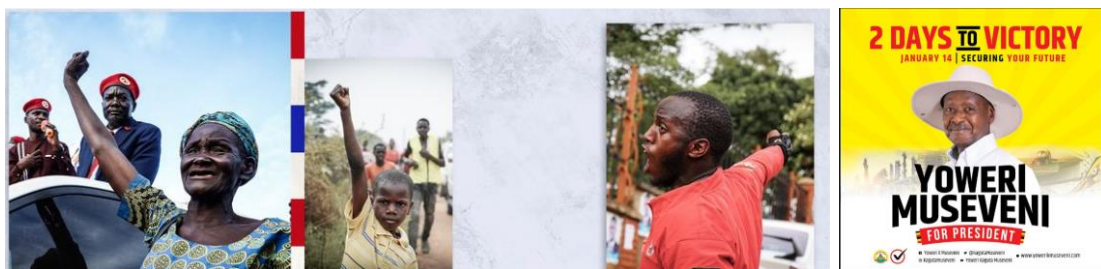
Source: Researcher's data 2022

The posts by both candidates were mostly texts (116 and 135, respectively); these included typed messages that presented the manifestos and political agenda of the candidates in plain text. For example, a post by Museveni on 11 January 2021 stated:

“We are just 48 hours away from victory. I urge all NRM supporters to get ready to vote. We shall put to shame all those who are unhappy with Uganda’s progress and therefore think they can use this election to set us back. #IWillVoteM7 #SecuringYourFuture” (Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, 11 January 2021)

Robert S. Kyagulanyi used more pictures/photographs and videos compared to Yoweri K. Museveni, and this was to mainly capture the stories and evidence of the unfair treatment of his supporters during political rallies as he traversed the country. On the other hand, Yoweri K. Museveni used more explicit content designed in graphics and flyers like the one presented in Figure 4 below shows pictures of political activism and dissent by Kyagulanyi, and a designed poster by Museveni.

Figure 4: Sample of media/visuals used by presidential candidates Robert S. Kyagulanyi and Yoweri K. Museveni



Source: Facebook, 2022

4.1.1.5 Issues addressed.

When it came to the issues addressed, the issues were captured under three (3) main themes/parameters; (a) *manifestos and access to freedom of expression*: posts where candidates expressed their political agenda and view aloud, especially the opposition, without fear of contradiction or prosecution – a vital feature of a democratic society (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2021), (b) *obstacles, violations and limitations of freedom of expression*: posts that reflected government and its institutions trying to silence peaceful dissent by arrests, dispersing opposition rallies, detention without trial, killings and hiding under laws such as COVID-19 measures, (c) *others*: posts that did not have political inclinations and were discussing general issues not related to the elections. Table 9 and 10 below summarize the issues addressed by the presidential candidates in their posts.

Table 9: Issues addressed in posts by Yoweri K. Museveni (NRM)

Sentiments	Frequency (%) Yoweri K. Museveni (NRM)
Manifestos, access to freedom of expression	263 (95.6%)
Obstacles, violations and limitations to freedom of expression	1 (0.4%)
Other	11 (4.0%)
Total	275 (100%)

Source: Researcher's data 2022

Table 9 presents the issues addressed in posts by Yoweri K. Museveni from the National Resistance Movement (NRM). The findings show that a significant proportion of his posts, 95.6%, focused on manifestos and access to freedom of expression, indicating the importance of these topics in his communication. A minimal percentage, 0.4%, discussed obstacles, violations, and limitations to freedom of expression, while 4.0% covered other miscellaneous topics.

Relatedly, research by Lwanga (2019) emphasized the role of political leaders in Uganda in addressing freedom of expression issues to promote transparency and accountability in governance. Additionally, Nalubega (2020) highlighted the significance of discussing obstacles to freedom of expression to protect citizens' rights and advance democracy in the country. These findings show the implications of focusing on these topics in political discourse and the potential impact on public trust.

Table 10: Issues addressed in posts by Robert S. Kyagulanyi (NUP)

Sentiments	Frequency (%)
	Robert S. Kyagulanyi (NUP)
Manifestos, access to freedom of expression	23 (7.8%)
Obstacles, violations and limitations to freedom of expression	203 (69.3%)
Other	67 (22.9%)
Total	293 (100%)

Source: Researcher's data 2022

Table 10 provides an overview of the issues addressed in posts by Robert S. Kyagulanyi from the National Unity Platform (NUP). The results reveal that a significant portion of his posts, 69.3%, focused on obstacles, violations, and limitations to freedom of expression, indicating a strong emphasis on highlighting challenges in this area. A smaller percentage, 7.8%, discussed manifestos and access to freedom of expression, while 22.9% covered other miscellaneous topics.

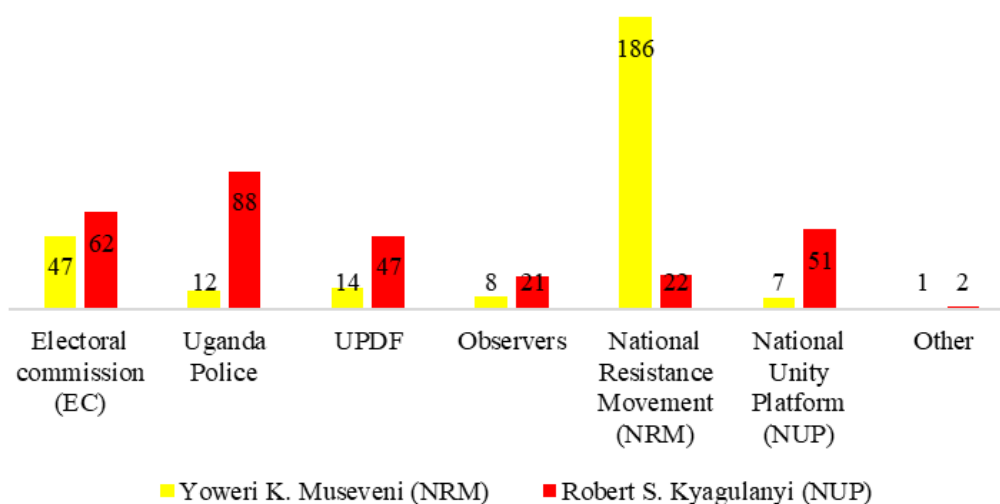
Similar research by Namutebi (2017) stressed the importance of addressing obstacles to freedom of expression in Uganda to ensure a democratic society where citizens can freely express their views without fear of reprisal. Furthermore, Dr. Ochieng (2018) highlighted the implications of discussing violations of freedom of expression, as it can shed light on human rights issues and the need for legal reforms to protect individuals' rights. Additionally, Dr. Ssempala (2020) emphasized the role

of political leaders in promoting access to freedom of expression through their communication strategies to enhance public participation and accountability.

4.1.1.6 Comparators

Comparators are when a presidential candidate mentions another stakeholder participating in the election in a post. Figure 7 below shows the frequency of the key different stakeholders mentioned in the posts by the presidential candidates.

Figure 5: Comparators mentioned in posts by key presidential candidates.



Source: Researcher's data 2022

Yoweri K. Museveni's post mainly mentioned NRM, which was his base political party and the political institution that propagated his political agenda. The other comparator mentioned frequently was the electoral commission which was responsible for conducting a free a fair election.

Robert S. Kyagulanyi's posts mentioned security agencies (Uganda Police and UPDF), citing violence against his supporters by these agencies during the campaigning and voting period, and ballot stuffing, that gave rise to violence and destruction of the voting materials at some polling stations. The Electoral

Commission (EC) was also mentioned multiple times with complaints of compromised voter registers, Declaration of Results (DR) forms missing in some envelopes, and total votes cast exceeding the number of registered voters for some polling stations.

4.1.2 Interview findings

4.1.2.1 Political issues communicated about

The political discourse on Facebook during the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections was often centered around critical issues such as electoral fairness, governance, socioeconomic inequality, and human rights. Candidates utilized Facebook to articulate their positions on these issues and to engage voters in dialogue. One interview participant mentioned that:

“Candidates took to Facebook to discuss pressing political issues, from corruption to human rights abuses. They framed their agendas around these topics, aiming to resonate with the electorate's concerns.” (Political party representative 3, October 5, 2022)

A social media influencer stated that:

“In our posts, we focused on the economic struggles of ordinary Ugandans. Facebook allowed us to narrate these issues vividly and mobilize people around them. We made use of hashtags to amplify our messages.” (Social media influencer 2, October 5, 2022)

The acknowledgment of storytelling here highlights a vital strategy in political communication. This approach not only humanizes the candidate but also positions them as empathetic leaders. It would be interesting to assess if this strategy translated into tangible voter turnout or impact at the polls.

Additionally, another participant opined:

“The issues communicated on Facebook weren’t just about policies; they were about people’s daily lives. This direct communication helped bridge the gap between politicians and their followers.” (Media Expert 2, October 4, 2022)

The interview responses emphasize the practical importance of social media in shaping political narratives. By articulating specific issues, candidates could forge a direct connection with voters. However, it would be beneficial to explore whether these issues were truly addressed in policy proposals beyond the rhetoric shared on Facebook.

The findings suggest that Facebook played a pivotal role in shaping the political discourse during the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections. Candidates leveraged the platform to engage voters, articulate their positions on key issues, and forge a direct connection with the electorate. While the use of storytelling and emotional appeal proved effective in capturing attention, further research is needed to assess their impact on voter turnout and policy implementation.

4.1.2.2 Facebook engagement

Engagement on Facebook during the campaign was marked by likes, shares, comments, and interactions through posts and stories that significantly amplified campaign messages. Campaigns often used polls and questions to encourage voter interaction and feedback. With Covid-19 SOP restrictions that limited traditional in-person campaign modes like rallies, and door-to-door “*kakuyege*,” the politicians resorted to virtual campaigning on social media.

“Since political gatherings were limited/prohibited politicians used Facebook to share campaign messages, hold virtual campaigns, mobilize voters, and share manifestos. They also created groups and fan pages which they used to publicize their agenda.” (Political party representative 1, October 4, 2022)

A respondent added:

“Facebook became the center of engagement. We encouraged our supporters to comment and share our posts. Their engagement was vital in reaching more people organically.” (Social Media Influencer 4, October 5, 2022)

This response effectively emphasizes the importance of creating a participatory environment through social media. Encouraging interaction can empower supporters, but there may also be a risk of superficial engagement if these interactions don't lead to deeper discussions or mobilization efforts.

Another interview participant explained:

“Live streaming rallies on Facebook not only allowed us to reach our supporters but also facilitated real-time engagement. People could ask questions, and respond instantly, which was quite impactful.” (Political party representative 1, October 4, 2022)

Live streaming indeed represents a significant shift in traditional campaigning. However, it's worth questioning whether all feedback was genuinely addressed and whether the politicians were attentive to constructive criticism or merely focused on bolstering positive sentiments.

Another respondent dated:

“Candidates largely focused on increasing interactions by responding to comments and DMs. This real interaction boosted grassroots support and made our audience feel valued.” (Media Expert 3, October 5, 2022)

Generally, Facebook provided a valuable platform for voter engagement, facilitating interaction through comments, shares, and live streaming. Campaigns effectively utilized these features to amplify their messages and create a participatory environment. However, it's essential to investigate whether this engagement translated into meaningful political participation and whether candidates were genuinely receptive to feedback beyond positive sentiments.

4.1.2.3 Sentiments expressed in posts

Sentiments expressed in posts varied widely, with candidates articulating hope and change while their opponents often conveyed frustration and anger towards political repression and inequalities. For instance, a respondent remarked that:

“My sentiment analysis is a split: incumbents tried to project optimism while the opposition expressed disillusionment over systemic injustices. Each sentiment struck different chords with voters.” (Media Expert 4, October 6, 2022)

The juxtaposition of sentiments illustrates the broader narrative battle in political campaigns. It's crucial to consider how these sentiments influenced voter perceptions and whether emotional resonance translated into voting behavior or changes in political alliances.

A participant had to state that:

“Through our posts, we communicated hope and a promise of change, focusing on unity and development. But we also had to counter the negative sentiments directed at us by opponents.” (Political party representative 2, October 4, 2022)

The acknowledgment of hope as a strategy is commendable; however, it's essential to balance optimism with realistic, actionable plans. Voters often appreciate sincerity and practical solutions over mere positive rhetoric.

Another view emerged that:

“Opposition candidates used emotionally charged language to galvanize support, capturing the frustrations of the electorate. This emotional appeal was critical in mobilizing the youth.” (Social media influencer 5, October 6, 2022)

The analysis reveals a diverse range of sentiments expressed on Facebook, from hope and change to frustration and anger. These sentiments likely influenced voter perceptions and political alliances, highlighting the importance of emotional

resonance in political communication. While hope and optimism can be effective strategies, it's crucial to balance them with practical solutions and address the underlying concerns of the electorate.

4.1.2.4 Media/Use of visuals

To aid their political communication, the presidential candidates utilized different Facebook communication features like live streaming, posts (poster and graphics), feedback and engagement, and the use of social media influencers. Politicians resorted to using live streams to update the masses about their activities. Facebook being a multimedia platform, the candidates used Facebook to share their posters, graphics, gifs and other campaign Information, education, and communication materials. Visual media played a significant role in how candidates communicated their messages on Facebook. The use of graphics, infographics, and videos helped capture attention and facilitate understanding. For instance, a participant narrated that:

“Many politicians opened accounts and hired influencers to post manifestos and posters. They paid 'influencers' to push the messages of their manifestos. This however had perks and cons. Such fully utilized the platform and to some extent worked. Those hyped on social media usually went through.” (Social media influencer 1, October 5, 2022)

However, the already famous candidates especially those with sizable following on social media like Robert S. Kyagulanyi used their accounts for civic education (mobilization – party activities), and to rally for votes. They tabled their manifestos to hundreds of followers.

A social media influencer stated:

“Visuals were essential tools in our campaigns. We used infographics to present complex ideas simply, making our messages more digestible to the electorate.” (Social Media Influencer 7, October 6, 2022)

This insight highlights the importance of multimedia in capturing an audience's attention. Utilizing different forms of media can create a richer narrative; however, the challenge lies in ensuring that the visuals resonate and reinforce the core message without overshadowing it.

A respondent further added that:

“Candidates who invested in visually appealing content saw increased engagement. Facebook’s multimedia capabilities allowed for creative presentations of their manifestos.” (Media Expert 1, October 4, 2022)

Another interview participant stated the following:

“Incorporating videos of our candidates addressing the public directly humanized them and made our campaigns more relatable. This strategy paid off in terms of engagement.” (Political party representative 3, October 5, 2022)

Visual storytelling is a powerful tool in politics. However, politicians must remain cautious that their visuals effectively translate their message and do not become merely aesthetic without substance. Therefore, visual media played a significant role in political communication on Facebook. Candidates effectively utilized visuals to capture attention, facilitate understanding, and create a more relatable campaign narrative. However, it's essential to ensure that visuals are not merely aesthetic but effectively convey the intended message and reinforce the candidate's core values.

4.1.2.5 Issues addressed

The interviews generally indicated that the presidential candidates used Facebook to consolidate their political agenda by disseminating political information to the electorate. The candidates used Facebook to provide political updates and to fundraise from their electorate. For example, a candidate explained:

“As a candidate I used Facebook to first announce my candidature, updating my supporters on a step to be taken or next step and as well as receiving

feedback from them and sometimes advice. Facebook also helped me solicit some funds for some political activities from friends even far away from the political area.” (Political party representative 2, October 5, 2022)

The presidential candidates made a plethora of Facebook groups which helped to act as echo chambers and mobilization ground zeros for campaigns. A Facebook group of like minds is a good campaign tool because everyone there is like-minded and information flow faces no resistance and is easily absorbed. Facebook was also used by candidates as a means of spying on what their opponents were doing.

Further, Facebook served as a platform for candidates to directly address issues affecting their constituents, ranging from education, unemployment, health care to economic policy and youth empowerment. For instance, one interview participant stated that:

“We took to Facebook to directly address concerns like unemployment and access to education. It was about listening to the electorate and ensuring they felt heard.” (Political party representative 1, October 4, 2022)

Another respondent submitted that:

“Facebook facilitated conversations on issues that matter most to the people. It turned the platform into a space for public discourse, leading to more informed voters.” (Social media influencer 1, October 5, 2022)

Addressing significant issues is pivotal in building voter trust, as highlighted here. Yet, it would be valuable to analyze whether this communication was followed up with concrete actions or policies that reflected the priorities discussed on social media.

In another response, a participant pointed out that:

“Political updates shared on Facebook kept our supporters informed about daily developments in the election process and about our campaign strategies, reinforcing our commitment to transparency.” (Media Expert 2, October 4, 2022)

Creating a sense of community is vital for voter engagement. Nevertheless, the success of these updates could hinge on the candidates' ability to maintain this engagement and follow up with actual activism or measures that align with their online promises. Thus, Facebook served as a platform for candidates to address a range of issues affecting their constituents. By engaging in direct conversations and listening to voter concerns, candidates could build trust and demonstrate their commitment to addressing pressing issues. However, further research is needed to assess whether these discussions translated into tangible policy actions and whether candidates followed up on their commitments.

4.1.2.6 Comparators

The use of Facebook allowed candidates to establish communication not only with voters but also with important stakeholders like the Electoral Commission and international observers, thereby positioning their campaigns within a larger political context. One respondent stated:

“Candidates used Facebook to keep the electoral process transparent and to shine a light on any discrepancies. It also allowed them to address the concerns of the Electoral Commission directly.” (Media Expert 3, October 5, 2022)

Another participant presented that:

“Both sides used the platform to showcase their narratives to the international community. This highlighted their respective positions and attracted external scrutiny of the electoral process.” (Political party representative 2, October 4, 2022)

This response underscores the strategic use of social media in contemporary politics. However, it raises questions about the effectiveness of communicating through Facebook versus more formal channels when it comes to influencing electoral oversight and ensuring integrity.

Facebook was also used to lobby for support from and highlight the electoral process to the comparators like the Electoral Commission and Electoral observers. Both the incumbent, Museveni and leading opposition presidential candidate, Kyagulanyi used Facebook to reach out to or pass communication to comparators, mostly globally, for example, civil society organizations. It was also alleged that opposition politicians used Facebook to highlight their plight as a tactic of attracting sympathy from the masses and the global community. Take for instance, a participant indicated that:

“Opposition politicians used Facebook to rally and call on the international community to isolate the incumbent and his government over human rights violations.” (Media Expert 1, October 4, 2022)

Social media, especially Facebook was very critical in globalizing the political agenda in Uganda. We see that this resulted in multiple protests by the opposition supporters in the diaspora. Thus, another respondent stated:

“Facebook became a tool for the opposition to bring international attention to issues like human rights abuses. They effectively lobbied for global support, using the platform's wide reach.” (Social Media Influencer 5, October 6, 2022)

Highlighting international outreach emphasizes the increasing interconnectedness of local politics with global perspectives. It might be insightful to evaluate how such external engagements affected local voter sentiment and mobilization efforts. Facebook allowed candidates to engage with international stakeholders and the global community, positioning their campaigns within a broader political context. This strategy was particularly effective for opposition candidates seeking international support for their agendas. However, further research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of communicating through Facebook versus more formal channels when it comes to influencing electoral oversight and ensuring integrity.

Overall, the interview findings on the use of Facebook for political communication during the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections illuminate the vital role social media played in shaping political discourse and voter engagement. Scholars such as Aichner and Gruber (2017b) emphasize the significance of social

media in influencing political communication, noting that platforms like Facebook enable candidates to establish direct connections with voters and facilitate transparent discourse. This aligns with the insights from Ugandan political representatives who highlighted how Facebook helped candidates address constituents' concerns on critical issues such as governance and socioeconomic inequality. Moreover, just as the findings reveal a spectrum of sentiments from hope and optimism to disillusionment and anger, research by Arendt et al. (2020) underscores how emotional appeals can mobilize voters, particularly among the youth, who engage more when their sentiments are echoed in political messaging. This emotional resonance captured through visual storytelling has been shown to significantly enhance voter connection in contemporary campaigns.

However, the analysis of Facebook's role in Ugandan political communication also raises questions about the depth and sincerity of engagement. As noted by McDade (2021), while social media can amplify political messages, the risk of superficial interactions exists if candidates fail to translate online engagement into actionable commitments. This concern is echoed in interviews revealing that while candidates increased interactions through comments and live streaming, the effectiveness of this engagement in fostering meaningful political participation remains uncertain. Furthermore, Wu et al. (2019) highlight that the polarized nature of social media can exacerbate divisions among voters, which may have been observable during the Ugandan elections where opposing candidates framed realities differently based on shared sentiments. These considerations suggest a need for ongoing research into not just how platforms like Facebook are used, but how their use translates into actual political behavior and accountability.

Finally, while the platform provided opportunities for voter engagement, issue-based discussions, and international outreach, it's essential to consider the challenges associated with its use, which is covered in the second study objective.

4.2 Challenges encountered in using Facebook.

The second objective of the study was to assess challenges encountered in using Facebook as a tool for freedom of expression during the 2021 presidential elections. From the content analysis of the findings and interviews, presented below are the challenges.

4.2.1 Fake news

Blackmail and hate speech encouraged and motivated the promotion of fake news regarding presidential candidates. This misinformation in many instances biased the electorate and did not present a true and fair representation of a candidate's political agenda.

“In many cases, we have received backlash from other voters especially when one doesn't support your candidate. In most cases some of those backlashes come in the form of insults, concocted lies and malice which is meant to demean your efforts over a certain candidate.” (Political party representative 3, October 5, 2022)

One of the candidate's campaign representatives on the campaign team,

“There was a lot of misinformation because of the confirmation bias that comes with echo chambers. There was a lot of fake news circulating on social media and sometimes it was hard to distinguish.” (Political party representative 1, October 4, 2022)

As a result, many accounts, especially for promoters of the opposition were suspended by Facebook and some accounts were restricted. False information is news, stories or hoaxes created to deliberately misinform or deceive readers. Usually, these stories are created to either influence people's views, push a political agenda or cause

confusion. False information can deceive people by looking like trusted content or using similar names and addresses to reputable people or organizations.

The findings are consistent with Posetti (2017) who posits that misinformation is particularly dangerous because it is well organized, resourced, and reinforced by advancements in technology; thus, the spread of disinformation is made largely with the help of social media within seconds you can reach a mass number. The authors claim that fake news itself is an oxymoron as news which is not verifiable cannot be termed as ‘news’. Therefore, no one should use the term ‘fake news’ (Posetti, 2017).

4.2.2 Propaganda

Propaganda especially as biased information used to promote a political cause or point of view was significantly propagated through social media like Facebook. Tackling opponents’ ideas through propaganda, spreading fake news, hate speech and blackmail were common occurrences on Facebook during the 2021 presidential campaigns and elections.

“Using pseudo and fake accounts many politicians run smear campaigns on their opponents in a bid to weaken their resolve.” (Political party representative 1, October 4, 2022)

From Kyangulanyi’s camp, for example, the campaign used Facebook to create false alarms regarding the abduction and torture of NUP supporters as alleged by Museveni’s campaign team. Tribal and ethnic undertones, propaganda and false news are a double-edged sword that could work for or against you, as one of the interviewees intimated.

4.2.3 Social Media Budget

The cost of running campaigns and political mobilization on social media was not comprehensively envisaged by many presidential candidates. For example, they did not imagine that social media influencers did it as a full-time job, and therefore deserved to be remunerated as intimated by one of the influencers below.

“The political party hoped that I would use my social media influence to promote their political agenda for free. This is my job, and they need to be willing to pay. That is why many of my colleagues crossed to NRM, where there was money for us influencers” (Social Media Influencer 7, October 6, 2022)

Also, running a successful political campaign required a budget that would cater for items such as equipment, personnel, and data. Many politicians operated on Facebook without a budget and therefore could not harness its full potential. One of the representatives of a political party had this to say.

“Unlike NRM, we did not have the resources to facilitate a competing IT infrastructure to help us monitor and facilitate our political campaigns online. We didn’t have a budget.” (Political party representative 2, October 4, 2022)

Social media is a resource marketers say they need to achieve their goals for social. Having a budget and investing in social media as a political tool enables political parties to explore more content formats, expand advertising to new platforms and invest in social tactics that hook followers. If hoping for more political brand exposure, political parties might invest more heavily into paid awareness campaigns.

4.2.4 Internet access

The use of Facebook as a tool for communication and freedom of expression during the 2021 presidential elections was challenged by internet access, seeing that internet infrastructure and the costs of data were a challenge, especially in highly remote areas. A media expert interviewed intimated this as directly quoted.

“First the platform couldn't be reached by all the supporters for example my area being a rural setting, the uptake of Facebook is centred in trading centres and by few youths and elite in the areas, even network itself in some of the areas could not allow my supporters to access Facebook.” (Media Expert 2, October 4, 2022)

The number of people who could afford to own a smartphone was very low in rural areas, which also affected communication using Facebook. Since accessing the internet means paying for data and sometimes taxes, a large number of the presidential candidates' supporters could not afford it.

“The cost of data was too much. Staying online all day to keep track of every political move and information required close to UGX 5,000 daily. That's expensive.” (Media Expert 1, October 4, 2022)

Primarily, social media sites have empowered individuals and groups to share information about anything across the globe in real-time. Social media capabilities coupled with accessible and fast internet, make it easier for the populace to share their political experiences or opinions on a subject widely and in their own time.

4.2.5 Government interference and legislation

Government interference in the use of social media became a common occurrence; Facebook (and other social media platforms) were switched off at their most needed time during the election. Sometimes the government legislated laws to limit activities on social media.

“As usual Facebook, plus the entire internet was switched off. This made mobilization hard and hence election malpractice wasn't reported in real time. Facebook was banned so to access it, I had to use a VPN which was inconveniencing.” (Social media influencer 2, October 5, 2022)

Towards elections, the internet was shut down so the masses couldn't access any platform that required internet, Facebook inclusive. The highest aspiration for any democracy should include meeting the demands of citizenship in a deliberative democracy, which in turn requires exposure to a diverse set of topics and opinions, even though it has to happen through social media. By shutting down the internet, the public is denied this privilege.

4.2.6 Mental health

Facebook from the findings has also been discovered to proliferate mental health issues among users. Identified as key mental health issues include feminism and cyber-bullying.

“Women were bullied and shut down on Facebook and thus few women use the site for political reasons for fear of manipulation.” (Social Media Influencer 4, October 5, 2022)

Bullying was seen in contradiction of political ideas being aggressively shut down, sometimes using offensive language and expressions, and attacking personalities.

“Like it's mentioned up there, social media is an echo chamber. There is just one flow of ideas. You're either for one side or you don't make any sense. This is characteristic of all political conversations, but it gets worse on Facebook.”
(Media Expert 2, October 4, 2022)

Cyberbullying is as dangerous as it gives bullies the ability to embarrass anyone they want in public at any hour of the day, using multiple different types of technology. It can be done by impersonating someone, revealing secret information, excluding someone from a chat group, exchanging rude comments with the group, harassing someone continuously, online polling, stealing passwords and misusing them to reveal information (Shivashankar & Rajan, 2018).

4.2.7 Poor editorial policies

With Facebook not properly regulated regarding professional ethics and standards of conventional media, information, debates, and articulation of issues were lacking and thus did not provide a proper basis for the electorate to make informed political decisions.

“The lack of this kind of honest Q and A is why the average debating skills of the voter and his leaders on Facebook lack. It spreads through post-elections.” *(Media Expert 1, October 4, 2022)*

The lack of honest engagement during campaigns where politicians never answered questions of voters. To reckon, the voters never asked relevant questions bar those that asked more out of spite than seeking information.

4.2.8 Limitations of Facebook Application Features

The limitations of the Facebook application identified as obstacles to using the social media platform as a tool for freedom of expression was that there was a peculiar lack of engagement by the actual politicians - only their followers engaged themselves, boosting posts, and limited time on the app.

“You probably also notice that you are often asked to pay to ‘Boost’ your post so that more people see it. This could work to reach more people, but you’ll never know if you’ve reached the rightful masses particularly voters of a given constituents” (Political party representative 1, October 4, 2022)

Also, with the recent changes to the news feed functionality, people are spending less time on Facebook even though they may still be logging in often. This means for voters to find information that has been posted by the presidential candidate, they most likely had to search on Facebook, as highlighted by the social media influencer below:

“Facebook news feeds are a common Facebook feature that people refer to for content these days. The content however is ranked using algorithms according to the most relevant content. Therefore, it becomes hard to get specific information. You just have to search to get information for your preferred political candidate or influencer.” (Social media influencer 1, October 5, 2022)

Many users still don’t use the Facebook list feature which is very helpful to keep status updates targeted to a specific group of friends (e.g., college friends, office friends, etc.).

Largely, in examining the challenges of using Facebook as a tool for political expression during the 2021 presidential elections, the findings relate to fake news and

propaganda align with the broader discourse on misinformation in digital spaces. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) underscore how the architecture of social media amplifies the spread of misinformation, thereby distorting political dialogue. This echoes sentiments from political representatives, who noted the echo chambers and confirmation bias that contribute to the proliferation of fake narratives, as emphasized by Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), who argue that social media platforms often serve as conduits for politically motivated misinformation. Propaganda efforts on Facebook, particularly through the misuse of fake accounts noted in the findings, have been widely documented, with researchers like Lazer et al. (2018) asserting that the strategic spread of false information is increasingly sophisticated and can effectively influence public opinion and behaviour. Thus, the challenges encountered on Facebook during the elections are not isolated but reflect a pervasive issue at the intersection of technology and democracy.

Moreover, other findings concerning social media budgets and internet access resonate with existing literature on digital inequality and campaign financing. As noted by Smith and Duggan (2013), disparities in access to technology can exacerbate existing inequalities in political participation and civic engagement, particularly in marginalized communities. The struggles that candidates faced regarding campaign financing on social media, as articulated by social media influencers, underscore the critical need for strategic budget allocation for effective digital campaigning. This notion aligns with the work of Goffman (2018), who highlights that inadequate funding can severely limit a candidate's ability to leverage social media effectively, putting them at a significant disadvantage compared to better-funded opponents.

Additionally, the findings regarding government interference reflect concerns echoed by the UN Human Rights Council (2018), which emphasizes the importance of allowing free access to information during elections to safeguard democratic processes. Collectively, these findings highlight that the challenges faced during the elections are both systemic and indicative of broader trends in digital politics.

4.3 Solutions and recommendations to challenges faced in using Facebook

The third and final objective of the study was to document lessons learnt and propose solutions to overcome challenges faced. The following are the solutions proposed by the respondents.

4.3.1 Explore Alternative Media Platforms to Facebook

Alternative communication channels to achieving the same objective of freedom of expression are one sure solution to the challenges faced in Facebook usage.

“Politicians should rely on other platforms, especially those they can own such as websites and own apps.” (Media Expert 1, October 4, 2022)

These alternative digital media platforms include websites, YouTube, Other social media channels like Twitter and Instagram, Mainstream media, On-ground activation and VPN. Politicians should also consider cross-posting/syndication of content to mitigate the limitations of Facebook.

4.3.2 Build a social media base

From the findings, the respondents recommended building a social media (Facebook) following in advance as well as following people and causes that matter

and relate well with their electorates. People normally follow causes and individuals that identify with their values and personal interests, and that's why we have social media influencers. One of them is quoted below.

“Unfortunately, they’ve often taken us unserious; we have a significant influence on our followers because they love our content. Consider Lumbuye for example, how much he is being used by NUP to promote their political agenda. If political parties had this kind of social media base, they would be far” (Social Media Influencer 5, October 6, 2022)

Social media is a great way to stay connected with the audience, and it can be used to increase awareness of the political agenda and build loyalty. Social media is also a great way to create and share content that helps build relationships with a target audience. By building a following, a political party (entity) can expand their reach and create an identity for themselves.

4.3.3 Budgets

Political parties and entities need to professionalize and optimally budget for the use of social media in their PR strategy. Public Relations (PR) is an industry dedicated to helping organizations and individuals communicate effectively by assembling people, research, and modern technologies to help their clients reach new audiences and achieve business objectives. One of the respondents intimated that,

“Politicians should learn to budget for and hire public relations firms for strategy” (Media Expert 2, October 4, 2022)

By building out an annual PR budget, politicians can take advantage of editorial opportunities throughout the year and insert themselves into more

conversations. Although each one of them may have a different PR goal, in general, they want to gain recognition that positively impacts their political image.

4.3.4 Facebook Best Practices

To promote freedom of expression in political communication, it is important to utilize the best practices in the Facebook platform. The use of Livestream/ visuals, Groups, Pages, Influencers, Boosting and Updates enhances communication through the platform. There is a need for the use of videos to portray campaign messages, any video-centric information keeps consumers glued.

“Use Facebook features that enhance reach, for example boosting pages, visuals like videos and livestreams, groups, and Facebook communities. It solves the problem of speaking to voters outside your domain, but also increases reach.” (Social Media Influencer 7, October 6, 2022)

Politicians should also, open and verify personal and official/party pages, and identify and use influencers that relate to the political cause, especially those who resonate with the electorate.

Engage public relations firms or experts to handle campaign communication. And respond to social media engagement,

“As a politician, I learnt that when planning for my next political activities I have to include sites like Facebook because, in previous elections, they remained the only platform to speak to our voters.” (Political party representative 2, October 4, 2022)

4.3.5 Digital literacy

Digital literacy refers to the ability to use IT and digital technology to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information.

“Train political parties – politicians – digital media literacy.” (Social media influencer 7, October 6, 2022)

4.3.6 Government policies and laws

The government should always seek dialogue with concerned political leaders and all stakeholders before any policies and laws are enacted, for example, the closure of Facebook. One of the respondents said,

“It's not ideal because Facebook doesn't contribute to post-Election violence. It's for accountability and monitoring of the votes in real-time.” (Political party representative 1, October 4, 2022)

Opinions such as this should be considered before decisions on policy and legislation are made. Before drastic measures like the closure of social media are taken, deterrents like, *“Don't say anything. There is the risk of jail time. You can be held accountable for your words on social media,”* can be used to mitigate the propagation of fake news, blackmail, and ill-motivated propaganda on social media (Facebook).

4.3.7 Verification and Editorial

Politicians should verify their accounts to limit cases of the spread of fake news caused by fake accounts. The respondents also recommended that politicians should hire speech writers and fact-checkers.

“You don't need to go the populist route all the time. Work with fact checkers. On the issues of resonating content, politicians should be able to acknowledge the issues raised as quickly as possible.” (Media Expert 1, October 4, 2022)

Negative comments should be documented. In future, if possible, politicians should accept Q and As. The tired populism kind of politics should be retired. Inform people about policies, backed by relevant research and statistics, as intimated by one of the respondents.

4.3.8 Internet access

The government should provide internet access and improve ICT infrastructure, for example, ICT – policies, access in schools, and penetration. One of the respondents stated that,

“I request the government and other partners to think of extending internet coverage in some of these areas such candidates from such areas can also easily speak to their voters.” (Media Expert 2, October 4, 2022)

As internet technology continues to evolve daily to accommodate the need for society to be interconnected through social media, political entities or even nations that seek to promote democratic political processes must make social networking a decisive component of the national infrastructure. The use of Virtual Private Networks (VPN) to bypass blockage by the government and recommendation for politicians to always be ready to adapt to any situation, case in point social media restrictions were articulated as some of the solutions to the Facebook access challenge.

Overall, the study reveals several viable solutions that align with findings from various studies in the field of social media and political engagement. As highlighted by Eberl et al. (2020) in their exploration of alternative media platforms, the diversification of communication channels, rather than reliance solely on Facebook, supports freedom of expression among politicians. They assert that multi-platform

strategies enhance engagement and allow candidates to reach broader demographics, echoing the suggestions made by respondents in this study for politicians to explore their own websites and other social media outlets. Furthermore, the importance of budget allocation and professional public relations strategies, as emphasized by the interviews conducted, resonates with concepts presented by Grunig & Hunt (1984) regarding effective two-way communication in public relations which ultimately both positions and emphasizes the significance of audience relationship-building.

The importance of digital literacy and verification practices is underscored in contemporary research, further supporting the need for politicians to invest in skill-building and account integrity. Barnes et al. (2022) emphasize that digital literacy is essential for political actors to navigate the complexities of misinformation and audience engagement effectively. This reflects the study's findings suggesting training for political parties in digital media literacy. Additionally, the necessity of engaging with public and government policy frameworks is well-articulated by Chadwick (2019). He advocates for greater dialogue among political leaders to inform policy, particularly in light of the digital space's role in surveillance and control, thus resonating with calls made by respondents for government engagement prior to policy enactments that affect social media usage. Overall, scholarly evidence supports the recommendations identified in this study as essential strategies for overcoming the challenges associated with Facebook use in political contexts.

Chapter Five

Summary of Findings and Discussion of Results

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary and discussion of the findings in the previous chapter. The presentation is based on the themes generated from the study objectives in analysing the role of Facebook as a platform for political communication during the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections.

5.1 Analysis of Facebook accounts

From analysis of the use of Facebook for political communication accounts of the two leading presidential candidates in the 2021 general elections in Uganda, data collected shows that Robert Kyagulanyi Sentamu accounted for most (51.6%) of the posts compared to Yoweri Kaguta Museveni (48.4%). The two candidates generated 33,807,275 engagements with Kyagulanyi leading the engagement race.

Data from the two candidates also revealed that the posts made had a positive sentiment around them, and of the two candidates, Museveni's (59.1%) posts carried a more positive sentiment compared to Kyagulanyi's (40.9%); with 97% of the negative sentiments coming from Kyagulanyi's camp. Regarding issues communicated, the findings indicated that Museveni concentrated on using the platform to communicate about his campaign and manifesto whereas Kyagulanyi concentrated on decrying the violence, obstruction, and arrests of his team during the campaign trail.

5.2 Facebook usage as a tool for political communication

5.2.1 Context analysis findings

During the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections, Facebook served as a vital communication tool for candidates Yoweri K. Museveni and Robert Kyagulanyi. Content analysis revealed that Museveni's posts primarily focused on his manifesto (95.6%), with minimal mention of obstacles (0.4%) or other issues (4.0%). In contrast, Kyagulanyi emphasized obstacles, limitations, and violations (69.3%), while discussing his manifesto in only 7.8% of his posts. Engagement metrics showed Museveni garnered 10.98 million total engagements (39.6% views, 31.9% likes), while Kyagulanyi had 22.83 million (45.7% views, 32.2% likes). Sentiment analysis indicated that 97.1% of Museveni's posts were positive, compared to 63.2% for Kyagulanyi, who also had a notable 32.8% negative sentiment. Lastly, Museveni focused on the National Resistance Movement (NRM) and the Electoral Commission, while Kyagulanyi highlighted issues with security agencies and electoral integrity.

Facebook was used by the presidential candidates as a virtual mode of campaign; they did so to consolidate their political agenda by disseminating political information to the electorate. The findings are consistent with McNair (2017) who posits that traditional media are not able to make a bridge between political parties and the general public making it difficult for the political participant; thus, social media bridges this information gap.

Facebook engagement is a way to track how your audiences interact with the content shared. The posts by Robert S. Kyagulanyi alias "Bobi Wine" generally generated more engagements compared to those by Yoweri K. Museveni in terms of views, likes, comments and shares. This is because Robert S. Kyagulanyi, already a

famous candidate, had a sizable following on social media. Views accounted for the highest percentage of the total engagements by both candidates. According to Megalithic, an actual visit to a profile or post marks a higher level of engagement than any other engagement method, for example liking a post, commenting, or sharing, which suggests users will pick up to like comment or share if they have a more active interest in who you are and what you're doing rather than a convenience-based view.

Facebook sentiments are the attitudes and feelings people have about a message on social media. Almost all of the posts by Yoweri K. Museveni carried a positive sentiment. Although the bigger percentage of posts by Robert S. Kyagulanyi carried a positive sentiment, up to one-third of the posts were negative. Kyagulanyi's political message was premised on "ousting a dictator," and highlighting the harsh treatment and injustice his supporters allegedly suffered at the hands of the security forces. The findings are consistent with Pratama (2022) who analysed Facebook post's content with varying degrees of polarity. A cursory examination of the messages in the posts revealed a significant difference in the wording used; positive polarity posts contained normative and optimistic messages, whereas negative polarity posts frequently contained bombastic and clickbait language. Additionally, when it came to posts with a high negative polarity, there was an indication of oppositional political preferences (Pratama, 2022).

To aid their political communication, the presidential candidates utilized different Facebook communication features like live streaming, posts (poster and graphics), feedback and engagement, and the use of social media influencers. The posts by both candidates were mostly texts; these included typed messages that presented the manifestos and political agenda of the candidates in plain text. Robert S.

Kyagulanyi used more pictures/photographs and videos compared to Yoweri K. Museveni; Yoweri K. Museveni used more explicit content designed in graphics and flyers. The candidate's use of media or visuals on their Facebook posts is consistent with Pittman and Reich (2016) who discovered that posts with pictures on social media are more able to stimulate people's enthusiasm for an exercise by comparing posts without pictures and posts with pictures. In social media, images have stronger information-carrying capacity and communication ability across language barriers, thus gradually becoming the main carrier for users to share information (Zhang et al., 2020).

From the Facebook posts analysed, presidential candidate Yoweri K. Museveni's posts focused on issues related to his five-year re-election manifesto with the tagline "*Securing Your Future*" focusing on five priority areas which include, creating wealth and jobs, delivering education and health, ensuring justice and equity, protecting life and property, and achieving economic and political integration. On the other hand, the majority of the posts by Robert S. Kyagulanyi expressed his dissatisfaction with the electoral process, citing obstacles, violations and limitations of freedom of expression through government and its institutions like the police and the army trying to silence peaceful dissent by arrests, dispersing opposition rallies, detention without trial, killings, switching off the internet and hiding under laws such as COVID-19 measures, which was the central theme of his political campaign.

The findings are supported by the common phenomenon that social media plays a key role in diffusing information and the claims of political groups (Kreiss, 2016; Chadwick, 2013). Chadwick (2013) specifically posits that it is an important channel of communication through which political communities or individual citizens

as simple members of the public can provide information about their activities, publicize their positions on specific topics, share information coming from multiple sources, as well as reporting about issues surrounding them at a specific time.

Both the incumbent, Yoweri K. Museveni, and leading opposition presidential candidate Robert S. Kyagulanyi used Facebook to reach out to Ugandans living abroad; and, to lobby for global support from Ugandans in the diaspora, and from donors. Kim and Sin (2017) argued that social media as a global information hub, is used for many purposes, including connecting the global community. Most of the respondents to this research in the diaspora agreed that they got updates and available information about political activities in their home countries through social media which enhanced their interest in political participation (Kim and Sim, 2017).

The study is grounded in the Social Media Engagement (SME) Theory by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), which emphasizes the pivotal role of technology in facilitating social interactions on a global scale. From the findings, Facebook interactions enable personalized relationships, transparent communication, and access to social resources, shaping user experiences and defining engagement benefits and costs. Technical features of Facebook impacted user engagement, usage frequency, and the co-creation of value (Li & Bernoff, 2008). The theory underscores the link between user engagement and platform usage, highlighting the importance of social media in political communication and citizen engagement (Biswas et al., 2014; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Dimitrova et al., 2014). Therefore, Facebook served as a crucial tool for political movements, democratic practices, and transparency in the democratic process (Biswas et al., 2014).

5.2.2 Interview findings

The interview findings highlight Facebook's pivotal role in shaping political discourse during the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections. Candidates leveraged the platform to discuss key issues like governance, socioeconomic inequality, and human rights, using storytelling and visuals to connect with voters. Engagement through likes, shares, and live streams created a participatory environment, although the depth of this engagement remains uncertain. Emotional sentiments varied, with incumbents projecting optimism while the opposition expressed frustration, influencing voter perceptions.

Candidates also utilized Facebook for direct communication with constituents and international stakeholders, aiming to enhance transparency and garner support. However, concerns about the superficial nature of online interactions and the effectiveness of translating engagement into meaningful political action emerged. Overall, while Facebook facilitated voter engagement and issue-based discussions, further research is needed to assess its impact on actual political behavior and accountability. These interview findings resonate with existing scholarly work that emphasizes social media's influence on political communication and voter engagement.

Aichner and Gruber (2017a) highlight how social media platforms enable candidates to forge direct connections with voters, which aligns with the interview findings indicating that candidates used Facebook to engage in dialogues around pressing issues like governance and human rights. This direct communication fosters transparency and accountability, crucial elements in democratic processes. Also, Arendt et al. (2020) explore the power of emotional appeals in political messaging, noting that they resonate particularly with younger voters. This reflects the interview data, where candidates'

emotional narratives—balancing hope and frustration—shaped voter perceptions and mobilized support, particularly among youth.

Moreover, McDade (2021) raises concerns about the superficial nature of social media interactions, a theme echoed in the interview responses that questioned the depth of engagement. While candidates saw increased interactions, the challenge remains in translating these engagements into tangible political action. Wu et al. (2019) discuss the polarization of social media, which can exacerbate divisions among voters. This notion is relevant in the Ugandan context, where opposing candidates framed narratives differently, potentially leading to heightened political polarization during the elections.

Boulianne (2019) notes that social media can enhance political participation but also emphasizes the need for meaningful engagement. The interview findings suggest that while Facebook facilitated dialogue and mobilization, it remains critical to assess whether this participation translated into genuine political involvement or merely echoed sentiments. Papacharissi (2010) emphasizes the role of social media in creating a "networked public sphere" that allows for diverse voices and narratives. The findings demonstrate how Facebook served as an echo chamber for like-minded supporters, fostering community engagement but also raising concerns about the impact of such environments on broader political discourse.

5.3 Challenges encountered in using Facebook

The use of Facebook as a tool for political communication and to exercise freedom of speech also came with its challenges. Fake news fuelled by blackmail and hate speech misinformed the electorate and did not present a true and fair representation of a candidate's political agenda. Dzandu et al. (2016) and Sago (2013) agree that fake news and misinformation are a common occurrence with Facebook usage, especially in political communication because feelings, and sometimes opinions that may not necessarily be factual and may amount to propaganda are shared on social media. On the one hand, the findings contradict some studies like Berger & Milkman (2012), Sampson (2012) and Trilling et al. (2016) who concluded that positive content spreads better on social media than negative content. This according to Porten-Cheé et al. (2018) may be explained by the fact that Likes and Shares are mostly associated with positive feedback.

Facebook was also used to spread propaganda; especially as biased information was used to promote a political cause or point of view. People use social media to share their feelings and day-to-day communication (Dzandu et al., 2016); these feelings are subjective, and sometimes amount to propaganda. According to Dzandu et al. (2016), political parties also share their opinion on social media, opinions that may not necessarily be factual. Sago (2013) corroborates this by stating that social media communities share criticism and personal opinions about politicians and their credibility; thus, social media has become highly misinformative at times.

Campaigns and political mobilization on social media were not entirely budgeted for. The use of Facebook during the 2021 presidential elections was also challenged by literacy levels, especially for the rural population, internet

infrastructure and costs of data. The proper functioning of political communication is important to meet the communication objective in politics. And this according to Nasution (1990) require strategic initiatives that need proper resources allocated to. The proper functioning of social media can be challenged when there are insufficient resources to enable political campaign trails to utilize the necessary channels for the proper dissemination of political information (Klinger & Svensson, 2015).

Government interference on the use of social media by shutting down access to the Facebook platform, and legislation of laws to limit activities on social media affected the use of Facebook. In this process, political candidates feel demotivated and struggle to meet the expectations of voters on social media (Masiha et al., 2018). From the findings, Facebook was also discovered to have been used to proliferate mental health issues, resulting from cyberbullying. Certain discussions on social media generate polarized views, and the information disseminated needs to be sensitive to the mental well-being of the potential consumers, serve people and their sense of discreteness (Masiha et al., 2018).

Since social media like Facebook is not properly regulated regarding professional ethics and standards of conventional media, information and articulation of issues were below par, and thus did not provide a proper basis for the electorate to make informed political decisions. There was also a limitation of the Facebook application resulting from a peculiar lack of engagement by the actual politicians - only their followers engaged themselves, boosting posts, and limited time on the app.

These findings are supported by Russmann (2015) who stated that during election campaigns, politicians and users only rarely substantiate their arguments in their posts and comments on social media, and they often do not express respect for

political opponents (Russmann, 2015). Hence, social media logic favours that parties and political candidates place a strong emphasis on addressing issues, and (their) communities, preferably in a highly professional style with clear in- and outgroup distinctions.

The challenges encountered in using Facebook for political communication and freedom of speech align with the Social Media Engagement (SME) Theory by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004). The proliferation of fake news, propaganda, and biased information on Facebook hinders transparent communication and distorts users' experiences (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004). These challenges highlight the negative impact of misinformation and propaganda on user engagement and the co-creation of value within the social media platform (Li & Bernoff, 2008).

Additionally, issues such as government interference, limited resources for political campaigns, and mental health concerns stemming from social media use underscore the complexities of engaging with social media in a political context. The findings emphasize the need for strategic initiatives and ethical considerations in leveraging social media for political communication and democratic processes.

5.4 Solutions and recommendations to challenges faced in using Facebook.

From the findings and lessons learned, alternative communication channels to achieving the same objective of freedom of expression are one sure solution to the challenges faced in Facebook usage. Politicians should also focus on building a Facebook following in advance as well as following people and causes that matter and relate well with their electorates. This solution is supported by Dzandu et al. (2016) who stated that social media is highly effective in communication, concept sharing and feedback in political communication. The frequent use of social media therefore makes users, both the political candidates and the electorate more capable of accessing information effortlessly. The respondents also suggest that political parties and entities need to professionalize and optimally budget for the use of social media in their PR strategy. Regarding promoting freedom of expression in political communication, it is important to utilize the best practices in the Facebook platform.

A focus on digital literacy to enhance the ability of the electorate to use IT and digital technology to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information can be a solution to enhance productive usage of Facebook and other social media. The use of technology and social media improves the political efficacy of information and freedom of speech (Jiang, 2016). Jiang (2016) also argued that there is a significant role of the internet in influencing the citizens' perception of politics. Social media also help to work democracy better by ensuring easy entrance by citizens into political debates (Karamat and Farooq, 2020).

The government as a key stakeholder in preserving freedom of speech should always seek dialogue with concerned political leaders and all stakeholders before any policies and laws are enacted that affect this fundamental civil right. The government

should also provide internet access and improve ICT infrastructure, for example, ICT – policies, access in schools, and penetration. Politicians should verify their accounts to limit cases of the spread of fake news caused by fake accounts. According to Kahne (2021), access to social media in politics gives an effective platform for users to share and collect information and communicate with a target audience that increases political efficacy and participation. The perception of people can be known to the other parties through social media content. This also helps to understand the pulse of the voters (Garcia and Silva, 2017). Today most citizens are using social media and online platforms for gathering information about a particular decision, and therefore availability of the internet has become an important civic responsibility of the government.

The recommendations for overcoming challenges in using Facebook for political communication align with the Social Media Engagement (SME) Theory by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004). By emphasizing the importance of building a strong following, professionalizing social media strategies, and promoting digital literacy, political actors can enhance user engagement and the co-creation of value within social media platforms. Implementing best practices on Facebook and leveraging technology to improve political efficacy and freedom of speech further underscore the significance of user engagement in shaping the political landscape.

Additionally, government involvement in facilitating internet access, promoting ICT infrastructure, and fostering dialogue with stakeholders reflects the broader impact of social media on political participation and democracy. These recommendations underscore the pivotal role of user engagement and technological capabilities in enhancing political communication and democratic processes.

Chapter Six

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

In this paper, I addressed the Facebook phenomenon and its use in the political communication and expression of freedom of speech during the 2021 general presidential elections in Uganda. I did so by addressing three key research objectives: to examine ways through which Facebook was used as a tool of communication during the 2021 Ugandan presidential elections, to investigate challenges encountered in using Facebook as a tool for freedom of expression and, to document lessons learnt and propose solutions to overcome challenges faced.

On the substantive dimension, the paper discovered that Facebook was used as a mode of campaign by the presidential candidates to consolidate their political agenda by disseminating political information to the electorate. The expectation to obtain and share information on politics through social media can be attributed to the advancement of technology in this information. All the parties do recognize some of the benefits of communicating with the potential voters via Facebook but were not able to list all the advantages, such as low cost, highly targeted, global and/or local, available all the time, and above all – interactive.

Moreover, challenges related to the use of Facebook were cited; fake news motivated by blackmail and hate speech which misinformed the electorate, as well as government interference on the use of social media by shutting down and legislation to limit activities were some of the significant challenges. In addition, the reason why some voters were not able to access Facebook pages, was because of the lack of internet infrastructure, and their inability to afford the costs related to accessing

Facebook. This particularly corroborates the observation that social media (Facebook) involvement is not seen as a means to actively participate in the political process. In this perspective we need to understand, for instance, whether this phenomenon occurs because Facebook network users, as such, are not interested in actively engaging in the political sphere – even if the possibility were to be given – or whether the phenomenon occurs because the platform per se is not perceived as being apt to enable political communication and free speech in a relevant way.

Improvements can be made in the usage of Facebook, and the aforementioned can lead to an increase in the frequency and number of visits. The proposed improvements can be grouped into the following categories, "Content", "Communication" and "Strategy". It is clear that by improving these segments, significant advances in the use of Facebook as a tool for political communication could be achieved. The following improvements have been identified as necessary: better censored and more frequent communication, the involvement of more people (representatives, candidates, etc.), direct communication and orientation to the younger population in the campaigns. The Facebook pages of the political parties and figures are more frequently visited during political campaigns; thus, a special strategy should be applied for such periods as well.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are made regarding using Facebook as a tool for political communication, and expression of freedom of speech.

Politicians

Growing social media (Facebook) following and usage. The goal of any political campaign should be to grow the account followers and increase the exposure of the campaign. Encouraging users to subscribe to content or follow pages can be a sure way of building a social media audience.

Earn engagement with visual content versus just text-based posts. Visual content such as videos and infographics are among the most shared social posts. This rings true across pretty much every platform, including Facebook. If making an important announcement, politicians should consider how they can put together a visual to match up with it. Bite-sized videos also have viral potential, especially on Facebook.

Engagement of the public through live content. Traditional newscasts aren't going anywhere quite yet. That said, social media video lets politicians broadcast their news and chat with constituents. Politicians can adopt to regularly stream on Facebook. Rather than just talking at voters, live video encourages meaningful and personable dialogue.

Consistently ask (and answer) questions. Asking questions is a proven way to boost engagement on Facebook. Q&A's are the bread and butter of political accounts. Posing topical questions to followers is a simple way to encourage a bit of back-and-forth.

Fact-check content before publishing. Social media represents a massive news source for voters. Still, unchecked platforms can be a breeding ground for misinformation, fake news and propaganda. Politicians should make sure to put together some sort of approval process for their accounts. Users should also double-check sources before making claims and sharing content.

Don't count out "younger" social media users. Demographics matter and the largest voting blocs are active on Facebook and Twitter. Millennials and Gen Z., both represent growing voter bases interested in should not be ignored in the use of social media.

Government

The government should be an enabler of a free and fair election, and this by avoiding constant harassment of opposition candidates which endears them to the population and can generate unnecessary sympathy which biases the electorate.

The government can use social media to amplify its messages and encourage institutions participating in elections should use social media to counter any misinformation and flag hate speech.

It should also be noted that, unlike traditional media, social media goes a notch higher in providing citizens with space to exercise their constitutional "right to express themselves" on "political matters". Previously gatekeepers mitigated and negotiated access to mass media platforms, which has dramatically changed today as potentially anyone – and any content – can reach millions of individuals in an instant. This development bears great opportunities for the democratization of expression and the diversification of public discourse.

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Appendixes

Appendix I: Data collection tool

Coding Instrument for Pamela Amia

The study employed quantitative and qualitative components. The quantitative component focused on the number of posts made, the level and number of engagement and sentiment as well as the number of posts made. Components of the qualitative monitoring included message fidelity (how well the message was delivered), sentiment, and issues addressed among others as detailed in subsequent sections.

General Facebook metrics:

Facebook

- **Page Likes:** Total Page Likes is the number of unique people who like your Page.
- **Post Reach:** Total Reach is the number of unique people who have seen any content associated with your Page, including ads. Post Reach shows the number of unique people who have seen your Page posts. Your post counts as reaching someone when it's shown in the News Feed.
- **Engagement:** People Engaged is the number of unique people who have clicked, Liked, commented on or shared your posts.
- **People engaged:** The number of unique people who've clicked, Liked, commented on or shared a post on your Page.
- **Unlikes:** Number of people who have unliked your Page.

- **Organic Likes:** Number of people who have Liked your Page, not as a result of a Facebook Ad campaign.
- **Paid Likes:** Number of people who have Liked your Page as a result of a Facebook Ad campaign.
- **Net Likes:** The number of new Likes minus the number of unlikes on your page.
- **Impressions:** The number of times a post from your Page is displayed, whether the post is clicked or not. People may see multiple impressions of the same post. For example, someone might see a Page update in News Feed once, and then a second time if their friend shares it.
- **Total views:** The total number of people who saw your video(s). Views are also broken down by the duration of the videos people watched—10 seconds, 30 seconds or 95%.

Unit of analysis

We use posts as the unit for analysis considering parameters such as the name of the account holder, the date the post was made, Uniform Resource Locator (URL), the issue addressed in the post, media used, the sentiment of the post, comparators mentioned as well as reactions the post has received as per the date of capture. Each post is subjected to the following analysis.

The instrument can be summarized as below:

1. Name of account holder: This relates to the presidential candidate or political party. Details captured in this section include:
 - a. Date: Which is the date a post was made
 - b. Account holder: The presidential candidate or political party
 - c. URL: URL stands for Uniform Resource Locator. A URL is nothing more than the address of a given unique resource on the Web.
 - d. Message: Is the message posted to identify its fidelity, share of voice or sentiment?
2. Engagement: Facebook engagement is a way to track how your audience is interacting with the content you share. Facebook engagement metrics include likes, comments, shares, and clicks on your post content.
 - a. Likes: These are the number of people who like your post. The more likes on a post, the greater it is that your message resonates with your audience.
 - b. Comments: Comments are a text-based form of engagement and require the audience to respond in their own words. Comments are a measure of engagement, but also an excellent way to understand how users perceive a brand and the value it provides.
 - c. Shares: The number of times your post has been shared by your audience. When a user shares your post, it increases your visibility and reach.
3. Sentiment: Facebook sentiment is the attitude and feelings people have about your brand or message on social media.
 - a. Positive: Consumers are enthusiastic, happy, or excited.
 - b. Negative: Consumers are angry, annoyed, or frustrated.

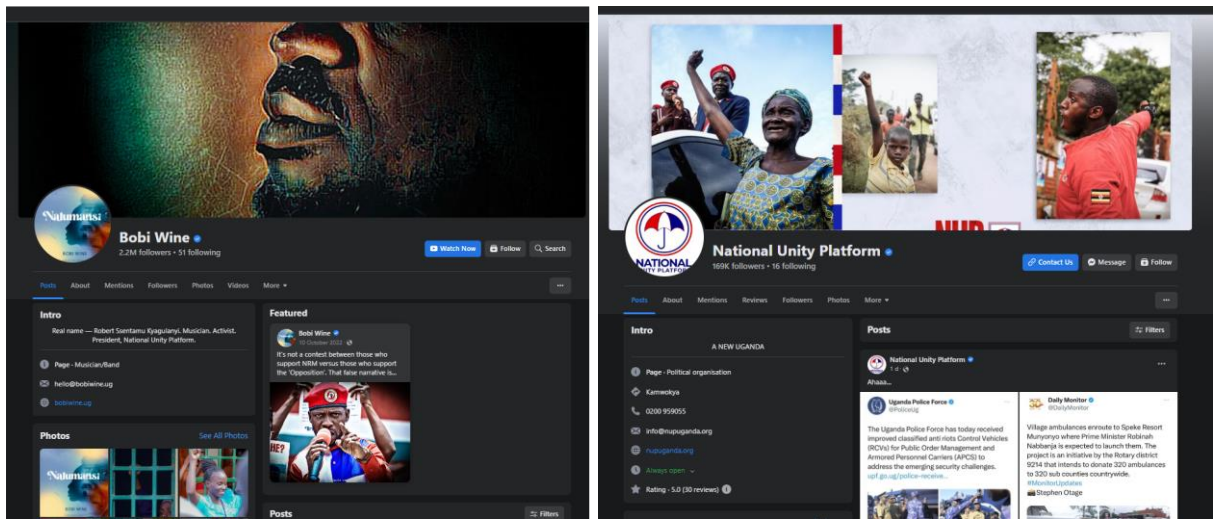
- c. Neutral: Consumers seem satisfied but don't express any particular feelings.
- 4. Media/Use of visuals: Here we captured information on the content and placement of such visuals as photographs, images, and graphics both in newspapers and online.
- 5. Issues addressed: When it comes to freedom of expression, the issues were captured under 3 parameters;
 - a. Access to freedom of expression: Here we captured positive articles where stakeholders expressed their views aloud, especially the opposition if they freely criticized the government and other public institutions without fear of prosecution - a vital feature of a democratic society (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2021).
 - b. Obstacles, violations and limitations of freedom of expression: Using Amnesty International (2021) as a yardstick, posts that reflected the government and its institutions trying to silence peaceful dissent by arrests, dispersing opposition rallies, detention without trial, killings and hiding under laws such as COVID-19 measures were identified under this issue.
 - c. Others: These were largely posts that did not have political inclinations and were discussing general issues which were not related to the elections.
- 6. Comparators: Comparators are when a post mentions another stakeholder participating in the election in a post.

Appendix II: Yoweri K. Museveni and NRM Facebook cover page



Source: Facebook, 2022

Appendix III: Robert S. Kyagulanyi and NUP Facebook cover page



Source: Facebook, 2022