

Six days without internet, we did not perish...

Flashback. Just before and after presidential elections came an internet shutdown...

BY DAVID MIRINGA

January 13, began like any other ordinary day. By most calculations, it was the 13th day of the year. By the emotional and financial calendar of Ugandans, however, it was the 32nd day of the infamous "65 Days of January"—a month that always feels longer than it should.

At my workplace, the atmosphere was charged with debate. Two clear schools of thought had emerged. The former, optimists by nature or newcomers to the Ugandan political reality believed there would be no internet shutdown. They cited a viral clip of the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) boss, who had publicly reassured citizens that the internet would remain intact.

The latter group, held the opposing view. Their argument was simple: these people are capable of anything. The debate ended abruptly when UCC released an official communication announcing that internet services would be suspended until further notice. The government, had decided to help Ugandans save the money they normally spend on data—forcefully and without consultation.

Day One: Denial sets in

The earliest and most stubborn stage of change management. Across the country, citizens scrambled to download content at record speed. YouTube videos, podcasts, music playlists, documentaries, anything that could survive offline. If you did not do the same, you are invited to cast the first stone. Most of us were still convinced that the directive would not be fully effected. Surely, reason would prevail.

At exactly 6:03pm, reality arrived. WhatsApp message ticks went silent—suddenly and completely—like the communication frequency of an ex who has "found peace." It was unsettling, but optimism lingered. After all, Uganda has survived worse.

That night, sleep was interrupted repeatedly by the instinctive urge to check phones, refresh apps, and hope for connectivity. I woke up at least six times, each time disappointed. The

ka thing simply refused to work. By 2am, in a moment, I resorted to reading old newspapers.

Day Two: Innovation, Rumours, and Selective Connectivity

Ugandans are nothing if not resourceful. Applications rumoured to bypass internet restrictions were quickly downloaded. One such app, Bitchat, came highly recommended. Unfortunately, what we were not told is that the app appeared to have been designed exclusively for students of computer science in terms of complexity. For the rest of us, it simply did not work.

As confusion grew, Naalya FM—also known as Area Code Gossip—circulated information that a group of individuals in Kireka were reconnecting people to the internet for as little as Shs10k. I rushed there as fast as my legs could carry me. The connection favoured Android users. In denial, I attempted to argue that the iPhone X I was holding was technologically equivalent to an Android device. The technician looked at me with a face that said, *You love fancy things. Suffer.* Those who succeeded in bypassing the system rushed online, shared screenshots and experts responded swiftly.

Day Three: TV and shock

With no alternatives left, TV became the primary source of information. This shift came with an unexpected revelation: I could no longer recognise the people on TV. Who are these presenters? When did they join? Why have we never seen them before?

The answer was uncomfortable. Social media had quietly replaced traditional media as my main source of public engagement. The few faces that seemed familiar were those that had occasionally appeared on a reel or TikTok. The shutdown caused Biometric Voter Verification Kits (BVVKs) to reportedly fail to

TIP

The internet has become our workplace, our newsroom, our stadium, and our social space. My name is David. I do not drink. I do not smoke. I am an internet addict.

operate effectively. This was particularly ironic given that the project reportedly cost over shs150b. Operators insisted that the machines had worked perfectly during training. Authorities maintained that the failure had nothing to do with the internet shutdown.

Entertainment, boredom, and forced adaptation

Even the boldest declarations of "I can live without the internet" began to collapse. Out of desperation, I visited a movie centre. The attendant asked which movie I wanted. I did not know. She asked which VJ I preferred. I still did not

know. Eventually, she recommended a series translated by VJ Junior. When I asked for a non-translated version, she informed me that such luxury was unavailable. I accepted the new normal.

Everyone becomes a journalist

By the fourth day, Uganda had become a nation of analysts. From boda boda stages to phone conversations to the lady selling chips, everyone had an opinion. Who was winning, who was losing, who had cheated—every version was presented with confidence.

Printed newspapers regained relevance. Holding a physical copy of *Truth Everyday* felt grounding in a sea of speculation. The shutdown also forced introspection. I discovered clothes in my single-bedroom apartment that I did not know I owned. My curtains had not been washed in over a month. I found rice untouched since August 3, 2025. Boredom led to cleaning. Cleaning led to reading. I read a book for hours—without interruption.

Days Four and Five: Reconnecting with reality

Phone calls returned. I respected one for 45 minutes. I reconnected with an old friend, Uncle Mark, who informed me that his football-related video was the most viewed content of AFCON 2025. He is also writing a new book. How would I have known any of this when my mornings used to begin with TikTok lives of people I do not know? Perhaps, we needed the break.

Day Six: Football, pain, and digital expression

Manchester United, the biggest club in the world, beat Manchester City in a derby match. And we could not post about it.

We wanted to celebrate. We are not like the small team in London that gets chances every week. We are out of every cup. If there was love for the people, we should have been allowed to post: Cunha-Bruno-Cunha-Bruno-Shaw.

Nation of addicts

We are internet addicts. If there were recovery centres for internet addiction, many of us would attend.



What the internet shut down meant for Uganda in January.