

what in the 1900!



Internet blackout: They say there are stages of depression; from denial all the way to acceptance but when UCC announced the Internet shutdown last week, somehow we experienced all of them in one evening ...**P.20-21**

Totally Random.
Canary got off his
sick bed for some
'oliwa' vibe / P.18

In 1900-2026: A forced trip back to the Stone Age era...

Knowledge is power, but power is power. Because knowledge aside, I honestly do not think a lot of it was used to arrive at the decision to switch off the Internet. But again, when you have power, you do not need explanations. Even after assuring us that the Internet would not be tampered with, they went ahead and did the exact opposite like a typical African parent.

BY MARK PETER SSEGIRINYA

Last week, UCC woke up and chose violence. With one announcement, they packed Uganda into a time machine and sent us straight back to the Stone Age. For the first time in my life, I experienced what it truly means to live without the Internet. Now before you clear your throat to remind me that people survived before the Internet was invented, a kind reminder that 'those are theirs'. But since you are already here, come with me as we unpack how Ugandans coped when the Internet was switched off.

Every time I meet someone who was alive before social media, I always ask them how life was back then. Their stories are always wild. I once attended a wedding anniversary where the couple proudly confessed that they were vibing through Yahoo Mail. Yahoo Mail, please. I can only imagine the patience sending an email, waiting, refreshing, waiting again. But at least they had Internet. Zuckerberg and his friends had not yet woken up one day and decided to redesign human interaction. This time, however, UCC decided that every citizen should touch grass, by force. A compulsory timeout.

Now, knowledge is power, but power is power. Because knowledge aside, I honestly do not think a lot of it was used to arrive at the decision to switch off the Internet. But again, when you have power, you do not need explanations. Even after assuring us that the Internet would not be tampered with, they went ahead and did the exact opposite like a typical African parent.

The announcement

Starting with the communication itself because that one deserves its own paragraph, it caught us completely off guard, like a Bad Black falling in love. Of course, as is tradition, the self-appointed gatekeepers of inside information were already in the streets. Everyone suddenly had a cousin who works somewhere close to UCC.

Nothing verified, just vibes. By the time the actual UCC letter reached us, declaring 6pm as the ultimate cut-off time, it genuinely felt like *The Purge* had been activated. If you have watched the movie, you understand the tension. The message was passed around different WhatsApp groups at lightning speed, and immediately, panic shopping started. Supermarkets were under attack as if it was Covid-19 lockdown again. People were buying things they do not even know how to cook, just in case.

The announcement found me at my office desk, and the atmosphere shifted instantly. There were mixed emotions, some people were excited about the unexpected extension of the holiday, while others were quietly panicking about the unknown. It felt like we were being sent into something serious, and no one had packed

I guarantee you that by the time that letter landed, everyone's work mood turned into full *kunyuka* mode. Productivity packed its bags and left. People started refreshing the UCC X page like their lives depended on it, trying to confirm whether the document was real.

And as usual, with government failing to walk the talk, there was absolutely nothing on their page. No confirmation. No disclaimer. Dead silence. Until the Internet was switched off. That is when they finally posted. Now please help me understand, what is the purpose of posting communication to people you have already put in the dark? Uganda is a very interesting country. Extremely interesting.

The acceptance

They say there are stages of depression, from denial all the way to acceptance and somehow, we experienced all of them in one evening. But as expected, Ugandan timing refused to disappoint. The Internet was supposed to go off at exactly 6pm but of course it went at 6:05pm. Five minutes late, just

to remind us that we are Ugandans, always give a Ugandan those five minutes.

At first, people were still hopeful. Maybe it was a joke. Maybe they would change their minds. Maybe it was just Airtel and MTN misbehaving. Then reality slapped us gently but firmly.

People started reporting Visa card failures. Online payments declined. Banking apps froze. That is when it truly hit me. I tried transferring money from the bank to my mobile money and it failed. I retried. Failed again. It was at that moment, I realised we had officially entered *The Hunger Games*, and this time there was no exit strategy. One-way ticket only.

Money existed, but it was unreachable like that friend who is always almost there. Plans collapsed instantly. People started calculating how long the food in the house could last. Others began mentally reviewing their family relationships to see who they could safely visit without stress. It was in that moment we remembered the importance of community. We blessed the Lord for family. Because in Uganda, when systems fail, relatives become the real emergency fund.

Snapchat & the GenZs

I asked around what my friends struggled with most during the shutdown, and trust me, the answers were surprising. The Gen Zs were not angry about banking apps, work emails, or news, no. Their pain was far deeper. Snapchat. For context, all Gen Zs were born when President Museveni was already president, and fun fact; he was already old even 25 years ago. Talk about consistency. High maintenance? He is him.

Now, for those hearing about Snapchat for the first time, allow me to educate you. Snapchat is a social media platform where people keep up with each other's lives through pictures and short videos-snaps. There is also something called streaks, which is when two people send each other a snap

...FREE
AT LAST!



every single day. Miss one day, and the streak dies. No forgiveness. No second chances. Here is where it gets serious.

There are young people with streaks of up to five years. For context, that is sending a photo daily to the same person for half a decade. Sometimes a stranger. And people still want to say this generation is not social just because we do not attend village meetings and funerals? Please. So when the Internet went off, the biggest fear among Gen Zs was not hunger or boredom, it was losing streaks. This issue alone could have pushed Gen Zs onto the streets. Revolution postponed, streaks first.

I spoke to my friend called Divine, who casually decided to fly to Nairobi during the tension. She and her friends woke up randomly, booked flights, and boom touched Nairobi. Reports from Nairobi suggest there was a temporary migration of Ugandans, with Bandali briefly relocating but the party had to be partied. According to her, it was during the blackout that she realised Ugandans view her content more. Divine is big on Snapchat, and honestly, if government was compensating people affected by the shutdown, Divine deserves payment. Her snap views dropped by a shocking 90 percent during the blackout.

Even while she was online and living her best life in Nairobi, she was stressed because she could

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not communicate with her family back home. Now before you attack people like Divine for flying out instead of staying to vote, remember one word: priorities. If there is anything Gen Zs take seriously and I mean the real Gen Zs, not the Sevo kind, it is priorities.

Luckily, Snapchat read the room. Streaks were restored. A big, cold *katunda* to the Snapchat team.

Forced family bonding

During the festive season, people go to the village to bond with family. But let's be honest most of the time, bonding means saying yeah... yeah... while your mind is busy on your phone or the Netflix series playing in the background. Families sit together in the same room, but everyone is silent, scrolling through different lives on different screens. Lunch is not even announced verbally anymore. Someone posts 'Lunch is ready on the family WhatsApp group'. You see it, react with a thumbs up, and continue lying down.

Then government said, Absolutely not! This time, everyone should be present in real time. The blackout was a proper trip back to the Stone Age. You had to be present. You had to listen. You had to intentionally bond with your family.

This was the moment many of us realised that our highly respected uncle cannot pronounce the word characteristics, and no amount of respect can save that. Parents finally got their star moment. They narrated their struggles of back in the day with so much joy, almost like suffering was a badge of hon-

our. Stories of walking long distances, eating one meal, and surviving without Internet were shared proudly, while Gen Zs listened politely, wondering why pain is always presented like motivation.

Families played Ludo, cards, hide and seek, real games. Grandparents learnt why 6v7 was last year's word of the year. Mafia games caused serious arguments. Old grudges resurfaced. Teams were disbanded.

This was also the Stone Age where allergies were cancelled. The 'I do not eat posho' group was humbled immediately. My G, this is the village. You eat what is served or you sleep hungry. No substitutes. No negotiations. Bonding happened. Whether we liked it or not.

The 'fake friends'

We, the fake friends, have suffered the most. People are cutting each other off because you did not call or even SMS me during the blackout. Apparently, if someone truly cared about you, they would have found a way. You people are very strict, by the way.

Suddenly, friendships were put on audit. Some of us realised that certain relationships only survive on WhatsApp replies, Instagram likes, and replying to stories with fire emojis. Once the Internet disappeared, so did the friendship. And that is when it hit that some people are not your friends in real life. They are online friends.

In the Stone Age, you would never have spoken. *Munaye, that's life mwattu*. The realisation that you are not as important as you thought hits differently. But good people, let's relax. It is not that deep. These are small things. We still love you, from a distance. Xoxo from WiFi.

And for the big people with thousands of followers on social media whose only check-in during the

blackout was a MoPesa loan reminder, we see you. To those who stress us with "Please find attached" emails and endless Teams notifications, it must have been a very dark time. But do not worry. The Internet is back. You may resume stressing us.

Stone Age economics prevail

When we said Stone Age, UCC took it very seriously. Because there was no money. None. Zero. Back in the day was either barter trade or raids, and judging by how tense things became, we were dangerously close to the raids.

It is funny how mobile money became so normal in such a short time. Someone reading this might think mobile money has always existed, like dust or potholes. But it is actually a recent innovation, shoutout to the geniuses who created it. These people deserve national medals because once the Internet went off, we realised how dependent we are.

We could not withdraw mobile money. If you wanted actual cash, you had to walk into a banking hall. A real one. With queues. With forms. With pens... worse: that sometimes do not write. That, my friends, is real Stone Age behaviour. Suddenly, barter trade made sense. We started trading jokes, gossip, and interesting stories for food. You would visit a neighbour, drop hot gossip, stretch the story long enough to conveniently overlap with lunch time, and boom you have survived the day.

Others promised their Nnalongo Katogo extra pay once the Internet comes back, just to secure that half rice, half chips deal for supper. Trust became wealth. In those moments, mobile money lost value but connections, stories, and promises gained it. Truly, Stone Age economics at its finest.