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In 2020, Pay TV in Uganda still appeared firmly rooted in the country's entertainment culture.

Satellite dishes hung above rooftops across Kampala, Wakiso, Mbarara, and Gulu, while football matches, soaps, and evening news bulletins continued to pull families to television sets every evening.

By December 2020, Uganda had 1.61m active Pay TV subscriptions, a recovery from earlier Covid-19 disruptions and registering a 6 percent quarterly rebound.

But UCC data tracked since 2020 shows that even as Pay TV maintained a strong presence in Ugandan households, the foundations of the market were already beginning to shift under the pressure of rapid internet growth and changing consumer behaviour.

The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) 2020 Market Performance Report noted the growing prominence of video-on-demand and online streaming services within the Pay TV space, specifically pointing to Netflix's expanding footprint across Africa as internet connectivity improved.

At the same time, internet access in Uganda was growing at an extraordinary rate. Active internet subscriptions had reached 21.4 million by the end of December 2020 after the market added more than 1.2 million new connections within a single quarter.

The significance of those numbers extended far beyond telecommunications. As smartphones became cheaper and data bundles more accessible, entertainment consumption started migrating from the television screen to the mobile phone.

Ugandans increasingly discovered that movies, football highlights, music videos and live streams could all be accessed through internet-enabled devices without maintaining expensive monthly Pay TV subscriptions.

In 2021, Pay TV still showed signs of resilience. UCC reported that active Pay TV subscriptions rose to 1.65 million subscribers by December 2021, up from 1.51 million in September of the same year.

The rebound was largely attributed to the return of major sports leagues following Covid-19 disruptions, reinforcing the continued importance of premium sports programming in sustaining subscriber demand.

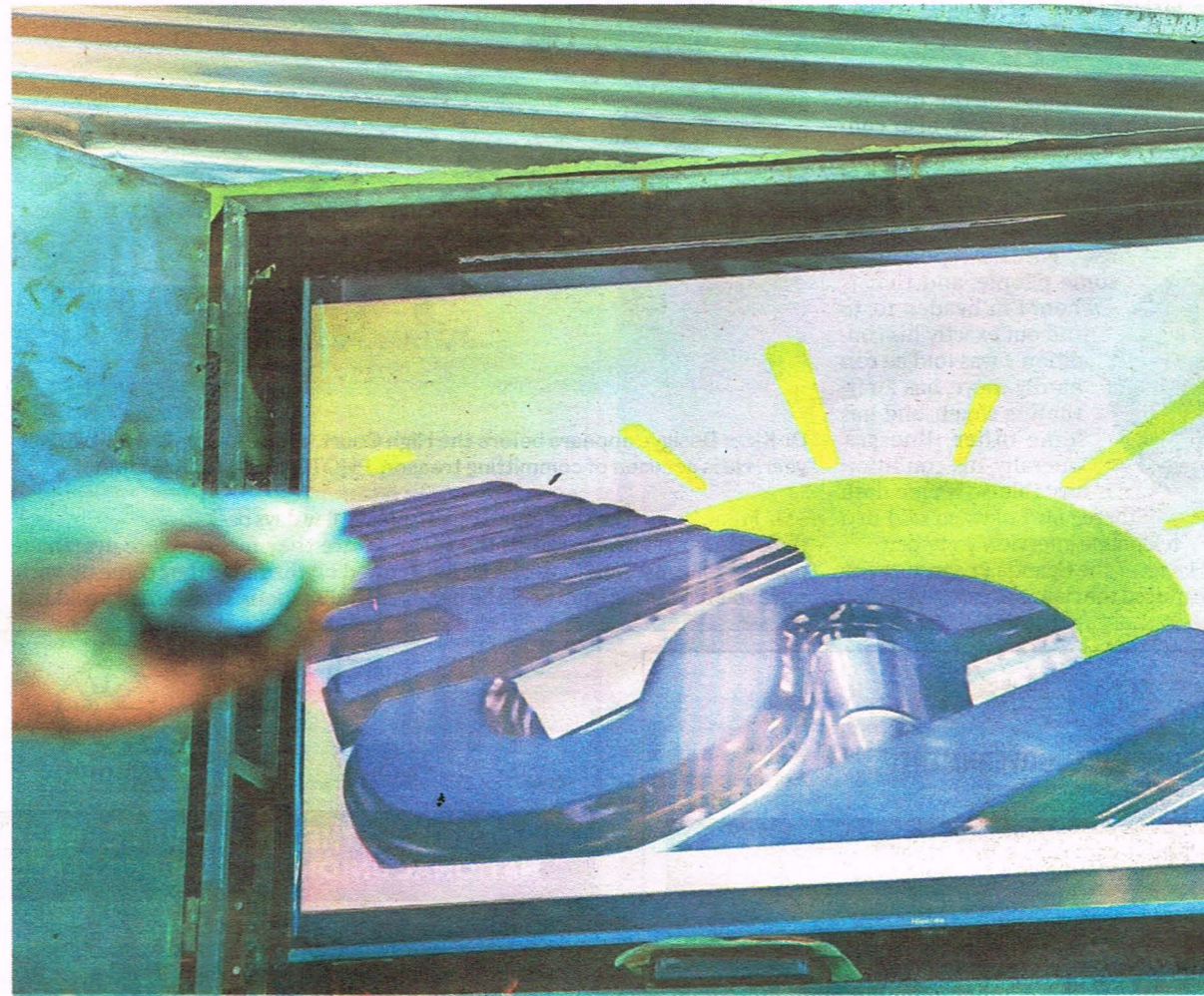
Yet the broader direction of the market was already changing. Internet-driven entertainment platforms were expanding faster than traditional television services could adapt.

Consumers increasingly preferred the flexibility of streaming platforms and social media video content over fixed television schedules. Instead of waiting for prime-time broadcasts, audiences were consuming content on demand through YouTube, Netflix, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp video sharing.

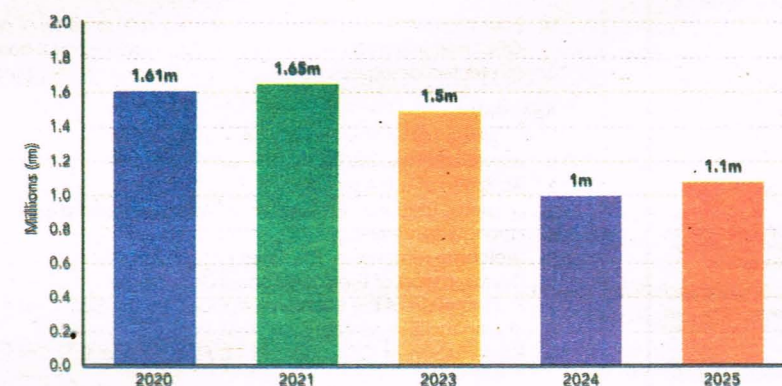
By December 2023, UCC data shows that active Pay TV subscriptions had declined to 1.5 million.

Compared to the 2021 peak of 1.65

# From 1.65m to 1m: UCC data shows sharp drop in pay TV subscriptions



Graphic representation of movements in pay TV subscriptions since 2020



million subscriptions, the market had lost 150,000 subscribers, representing a 9.1 percent decline in two years.

The decline coincided with continued expansion in smartphone usage and internet traffic across the country.

Telecommunications companies were increasingly positioning data services at the centre of their business models as internet consumption became the primary driver of digital engagement.

Entertainment habits were no longer organised around shared family television viewing but around personalised mobile experiences accessed at any time and from any location.

The sharpest decline came in 2024, with UCC data showing that active Pay TV subscriptions fell to just 1 million subscribers by December 2024.

That represented a loss of 500,000 subscribers within a single year, equivalent to a 33.3 percent annual decline. Compared to the 2021 peak of 1.65 million subscriptions, the Pay TV market had contracted by nearly 39.4 percent.

At the same time, UCC data showed that smartphone usage had reached 18.2 million devices while quarterly internet traffic climbed to 226.5 million gigabytes downloaded by December 2024 alone.

These figures reflected the growing

UCC data shows that pay TV subscriptions have fallen from 1.65m in 2021 to 1.1m in 2025 as internet streaming, smartphones and on-demand digital entertainment reshapes consumer habits. PHOTO / MICHAEL KAKUMIRIZI

#### Key highlights

- By December 2023, UCC data shows that active Pay TV subscriptions had declined to 1.5 million. Compared to the 2021 peak of 1.65 million subscriptions, the market had lost 150,000 subscribers, representing a 9.1 percent decline in two years.
- The numbers declined further and by 2025, UCC reported that Pay TV subscriptions declined to 1.1 million subscribers. Compared to the 2020 level of 1.62 million subscriptions, the market had dropped by more than 33 percent, representing a loss of over half a million subscribers within five years.
- Meanwhile, internet consumption continued to expand rapidly, with UCC data showing that by December 2025, Uganda had reached 20 million smartphones in use, while internet traffic volumes surged to 332.4 million gigabytes during the quarter. Streaming services, social media, have been highlighted as part of the reasons behind the surge.

dominance of internet-based consumption within the communications and entertainment landscape.

By 2025, the market registered only a slight recovery. UCC reported that Pay TV subscriptions had risen modestly to 1.1 million subscribers by December 2025.

While this reflected a 10 percent increase from 2024 levels, the overall trend remained significantly below earlier years.

Compared to the 2020 level of 1.62 million subscriptions, the market was still down by more than 33 percent, representing the loss of over half a million subscribers within five years.

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Streaming services, social media, and digital video applications have become deeply integrated into everyday life, reinforcing the migration away from traditional Pay TV viewing.

UCC data does not show which pay TV lost what, but data tracked since 2020 paints a structural transformation, with the decline in the Pay TV subscriptions space mirroring the rise of internet penetration, smartphone adoption, and on-demand digital entertainment.

UCC data also shows that Ugandans are increasingly spending more of their telecom budgets on internet data, reflecting how deeply digital connectivity has become embedded in people's everyday lives.

The December 2025 UCC Market Performance Report shows that the average telecom consumer in the three spent Shs16,253 per month, up from Shs15,721 in the previous quarter.

Of this, mobile data alone accounted for Shs11,145, representing 68.6 percent of total telecom spending.

The figures suggest that consumers are increasingly spending on internet access to support streaming, social media, mobile payments, online business, entertainment, learning, and communication.

The trend is being driven by rapid smartphone adoption and growing internet consumption.

UCC data also suggest that social media and streaming platforms have become central to daily internet use, with UCC reporting 11.4 million WhatsApp subscriptions, 11.3 million TikTok subscriptions, and 7.2 million YouTube subscriptions by December 2025.

The data indicates that internet connectivity is increasingly viewed not as a luxury, but as an essential part of economic and social participation, pushing telecom operators to prioritise data ecosystems as the future of sector growth.