

How the Internet shut down silenced the art industry

Losses. Artists who scheduled music with distributors to release this weekend missed the key first days of streaming and probably five days; with an artists making at least 10,000 – 50,000 streams on the first day of release and about 100,000 – 200,000 streams in the first five days. Local artists may lose about Shs12m in the dark.

BY ANDREW KAGGWA

On Tuesday, different people were receiving text messages making final pleas for President Museveni, a candidate in the general election

which took place on Thursday.

“...free education, graduate funding, cheap Internet. Vote Museveni,” said the tail end of the message.

Exactly six hours after the message had been delivered, the cheap Internet in the context was shut down, nationwide.

Naturally, the absence of Internet affects many businesses such as the health sector, banking, real estate and in the situation of Uganda, the transport and food sector where delivery has been growing steadily.

But this is a campaign where artistes decided to stand up and get counted; they may not have been on the ballot, but they, however, showed their support to the incumbent, President Museveni and became vocal about it.

In return, Museveni had artistes on all his rallies, either it was Bebe Cool, Eddy Kenzo, Jose Chameleone or Catherine Kusasira, it has been a full house through the campaigns. Most of the artistes also argued that during the re-

2025

But the biggest losers in all these are local streaming start-ups such as Gandaflix, Kwisomu Cinema, Play It Loud and Stream East. Most of these platforms were built to serve the world with films and drama made in Uganda by Ugandans. Some have most of their set ups including servers in Uganda.

An Internet blackout sets the streaming and content creation journey walked 10 steps backwards. PHOTO/ COURTESY

gime, they have managed to work and create a livelihood and thus were returning the favour.

In fact, during the campaigns, an extra Shs5 billion was given to the Uganda National Musicians Federation to help with some of their activities.

This was all happening at a time when the music industry has been moving towards digitising; where most business analysts believe is where the actual music business thrives. Therefore, in such an environment, artistes don't have to perform all the time but can make money when people watch their music videos, and stream their music online.

These are platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, YT Music, and YouTube among others. For a million streams on a single platform, some artistes have been paid between \$20,000 (Shs71m) and \$30,000 (Shs106m). With most of the platforms paying artistes for their music being played, one can argue that an artist would not need to wait for the Shs5 billion handout given to the federation.

Yet, even when data has clearly shown that streaming has been growing in Uganda over the past three years, a 98 percent growth in the past two years, Internet remains incredibly expensive in Uganda.

Shutting it down means Ugandan artistes who scheduled music with distributors to release this weekend missed the key first days of streaming and probably five days; with an artiste making at least 10,000 – 50,000 streams on the first day of release, and between 100,000 and 200,000 streams in the first five days. Local artistes may be losing

about Shs12m in the dark.

In 2024, Joshua Baraka's *Wrong Places* was the most streamed song by a Ugandan, with 14 million streams. It was closely followed by Aya Peace and Dax Vibe's *Tabbu*, Tojo's *In Da Bar*, Fyno's *CheChe* and Elijah Kitaka's *Good Idea*, among others. All these managed to put up formidable numbers.

With most forward thinking artistes looking at getting the attention of their audiences through the phone, an Internet blackout sets the journey walked almost a mile behind.

However, it is not only music that has been left in the dark, the content creator sector, which basically thrives on consistency, has been left in the dark as well. And this is after the President even hosted TikTokers in a sitdown dubbed “Jazz with Jajja”.

Over the past few years, streamers on TikTok and YouTube have built a cult audience they update regularly. Taking a number of days out of their routine sets them back, especially in a cut-throat competitive sector where their competition includes Ugandans operating in the UK, Saudi Arabia, and America who still have the luxury of continuing to create uninterrupted.

But the biggest losers in all these are local streaming start-ups such as Gandaflix, Kwisomu Cinema, Play It Loud and Stream East. Most of these platforms were built to serve the world with films and drama made in Uganda by Ugandans. Some have most of their setups, including servers, in Uganda, but serving the world. With the internet off for an unknown period, these platforms are not only losing currency but both face too.

