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Digital gaming demands smarter rules

GAMING

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With majority of the population under the age of 30, Uganda is not only young, but also digital, and rapidly shaping new patterns of consumption. This is also visible in the gaming sector.

For a generation that has grown up with smartphones, mobile money, and constant internet access, gaming is embedded in everyday digital behaviour, and often influenced by global content, particularly sports.

According to the Uganda Communications Commission, Uganda has over 20 million smartphone users and 18.5 million active mobile internet subscriptions. A 2025 Geo-Poll Africa report further finds that 94 percent of punters use mobile phones to place wagers. According to data, an estimated 93 percent of gaming activity in Uganda now taking place online.

The more important shift is behavioural. Young users are continuously connected engaging with messaging platforms, short-form content, and real-time sports updates throughout the day. This connectivity has created an environment where engagement is constant rather than occasional.



A bettor checks on one of the betting companies online. PHOTO/
MICHAEL KAKUMIRIZI

Decision-making has also become mobile-first. Smartphones are primarily used for communication, payments, and entertainment, meaning participation is often immediate rather than planned. This is reinforced by a real-time consumption culture, where live sports tracking and instant updates shape in-the-moment decisions.

Information and betting trends circulate rapidly through peer networks, making gaming socially reinforced. Combined with a growing preference for fast-paced digital formats, these shifts have made participation more frequent, more immediate, and more embedded in daily routines.

The growth of digital financial

services has further accelerated this shift. According to Bank of Uganda, mobile money transactions reached Shs326.3 trillion in the year to June 2025, with 8.4 billion transactions recorded by the end of December 2025. Uganda also has 36.3 million active mobile money subscriptions, reflecting the scale of financial access beyond traditional banking channels.

Gaming platforms are integrated with these systems, enabling users to deposit, place bets, and withdraw winnings in real time. Participation is therefore instant and cashless, particularly for a young, mobile-first population. These shifts have important implications for regulation.

Traditional regulatory approaches were built for a different environment. One where gaming activity was physical and monitored through inspections and periodic reporting. In a digital ecosystem, that model is no longer sufficient.

In Uganda, this has led to a shift toward technology-enabled regulation. Systems such as the National Central Electronic Monitoring System (NCEMS) now provide visibility into gaming transactions, strengthening oversight, enhancing transparency, curbing money laundering and preventing tax leakage.

Rather than relying on operator self-declaration, we can monitor activity across both online and physical platforms.

Regulation does not operate in isolation, we work through joint inter-agency collaboration with institutions such as the National Information Technology Authority-Uganda, Uganda Communications Commission, Bank of Uganda, Uganda Revenue Authority, and the Uganda Police Force to strengthen coordinated oversight, information sharing, and enforcement across the gaming sector.

The United Kingdom Gambling Commission requires operators to conduct financial risk checks and monitor player behaviour and intervene where there are signs of

harm. Sweden operates a centralised self-exclusion system, while Germany and the Netherlands enforce deposit and loss limits alongside behavioural monitoring. Australia has banned the use of credit cards for online gambling, and in the United States, regulators use geolocation and transaction monitoring to enforce compliance.

Across these markets, regulation is becoming data-driven and integrated with financial systems.

At the same time, the sector still contributes to the economy, creating about 20,000 jobs.

Gaming activity is also closely linked to Uganda's digital economy, driving mobile money usage, supporting fintech platforms, and contributing to increased data consumption among younger users.

But how is that growth structured and supervised? The National Lotteries and Gaming Regulatory Board is in the process of amending the gaming law to ensure the regulatory framework keeps pace with emerging technologies, including online gaming regulations and the use of Artificial Intelligence.

As Uganda's young population continues to shape the digital economy, the strength of regulation will lie not in how effectively it controls, but in how well it adapts in a fast-moving, youth-driven digital environment.

The writer is chief executive officer of National Lotteries and Gaming Regulatory Board.