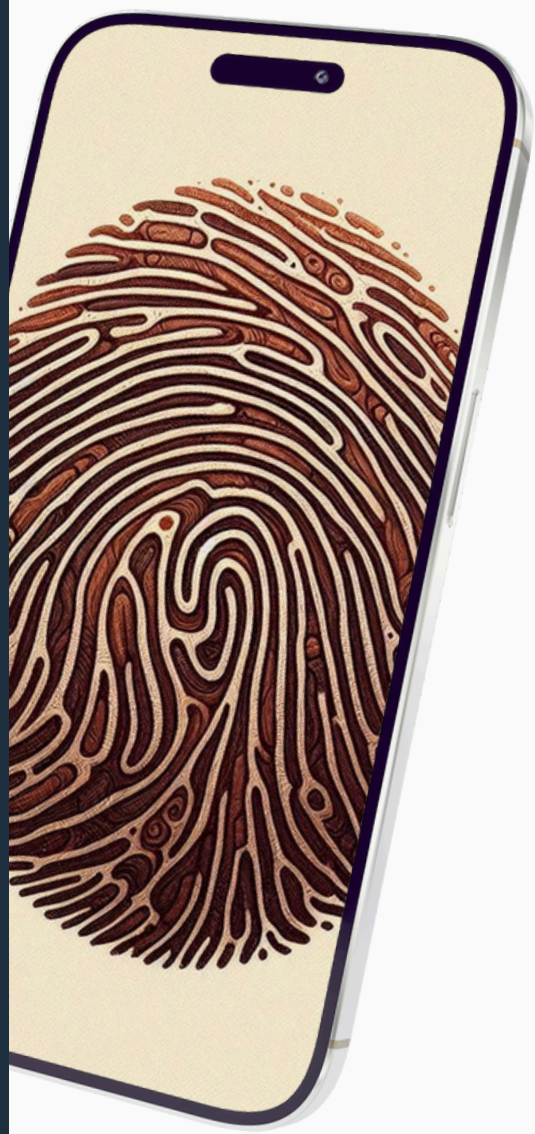
JANUARY 2025 ISSUE

THE DIGITAL AGENDA

INSIGHTS

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

THIS ISSUE:



Welcome to the First Edition of The Digital Agenda Insights Monthly Newsletter

We are delighted to introduce the very first edition of **The Digital Agenda Insights**, our monthly newsletter dedicated to open and meaningful discussions about the fast-changing world of digital technology. As a community of tech professionals, experts, and enthusiasts, we embrace innovation and appreciate the ways technology makes life easier. We are not against progress; in fact, we enjoy technology and the possibilities it brings.

However, we have also seen how technology is sometimes portrayed as self-sufficient, independent, and even above God. More concerning, it is increasingly used as a tool of control rather than one of service. In this ever-evolving digital space, we believe it is crucial to examine the motives behind technological advancements. Our focus is to advocate for technology that respects human values, ensuring ethics, accountability, transparency, and rights remain at the core of its development and use.

Through this newsletter, we will share insights, updates from our events, progress on key initiatives, and perspectives from thought leaders in digital governance and ethical technology. Our goal is to promote a digital future that prioritises people, safeguards freedoms, and serves the common good.

Thank you for being part of this journey. We look forward to engaging with you as we explore technology's role in shaping our world.

Warm regards,

Lilian Agaba Nabwebale
Team Leader, Digital Agenda Forum

S Stewardship

P Purpose

A Authenticity

D Dignity

When Big Tech Calls Truth Misinformation: Meta Drops Its Fact-Checkers

BY DIGITAL AGENDA

For years, social media platforms have taken it upon themselves to "protect" us from misinformation. But time and again, we've seen a troubling pattern—truth is often the first casualty. The moment an inconvenient fact threatens the prevailing narrative, it's swiftly labeled as "misinformation," suppressed, and discredited.

But who gets to decide what's true and what's not? The so-called independent fact-checkers? The same ones who have repeatedly been exposed for bias and political influence? The reality is that these labels have not been about truth but about control—controlling what we see, what we believe, and ultimately, how we think.

Mark Zuckerberg's recent revelation that Meta was pressured by the US government to enforce content controls only confirmed what many already suspected. The lines between "fact-checking" and censorship blurred long ago. Then, on January 7, 2025, Meta announced it was ditching its fact-checkers in favor of Community Notes, a shift that puts power back into the hands of users rather than centralised gatekeepers.

This marks the first step toward undoing this digital stronghold on speech. But the question remains: if truth can be labeled as misinformation and suppressed at will, who's really fooling who? The people who question narratives, or the institutions that demand blind trust while manipulating reality?

> If truth can be labeled as misinformation and suppressed at will, who's really fooling who? The people who question narratives, or the institutions that demand blind trust while manipulating reality?

It's time for other platforms to follow Meta's lead. Social media should be a marketplace of ideas, not a walled garden where only approved opinions are allowed to thrive. The truth doesn't need protection from open discussion—it needs protection from those trying to bury it. Let's continue to embrace this change and work toward a future where tech serves us —not controls us.

Meta's AI Profiles Are Gone—But What If AI Becomes You?

BY DIGITAL AGENDA

AI is everywhere. From voice assistants to facial recognition, it's rapidly integrating into our daily lives, shaping how we interact, work, and even prove our identity. But while its advancements are celebrated, a critical question lingers—what happens

when AI stops assisting us and starts impersonating us?

Meta just gave us a glimpse into that future. After rolling out AI-generated profiles designed to interact like real users, the backlash was swift and overwhelming. People didn't want artificial personas blending into their online spaces. They wanted authenticity, not digital puppets. And so, in January 2025, Meta quietly deleted its AI profiles.

But here's the real concern—what happens when AI doesn't just exist alongside us, but starts becoming us? Today, it's chatbot-like profiles that raise eyebrows. Tomorrow, it could be AI using our digital identities, biometrics, and personal data to create an online version of us—one we never authorised, one we don't control.

The push for Digital IDs, linked to fingerprints, iris scans, and facial recognition, is making this future even more dangerous. What if AI gains access to your biometric data? Imagine an advanced AI system using your own fingerprint or iris scan to log into your bank account, authorise transactions, or even take out loans in your name. Unlike a stolen password, you can't change your biometric data—it's you. And once it's compromised, it's compromised forever.

Meta's decision to delete its AI profiles is a victory for now, but it also serves as a warning. If we don't push back against the reckless rollout of biometric-linked Digital IDs, we

> What happens when AI doesn't just exist alongside us, but starts becoming us? Unlike a stolen password, you can't change your biometric data—once it's compromised, it's compromised forever.

may soon find ourselves competing with versions of ourselves—ones created, controlled, and manipulated by the very systems we were told would "protect" us.

The question is no longer if AI will impersonate us, but when. And when that day comes, will we still have the power to stop it?

The AI War of 2025—Take on DeepSeek vs. OpenAI

BY DIGITAL AGENDA

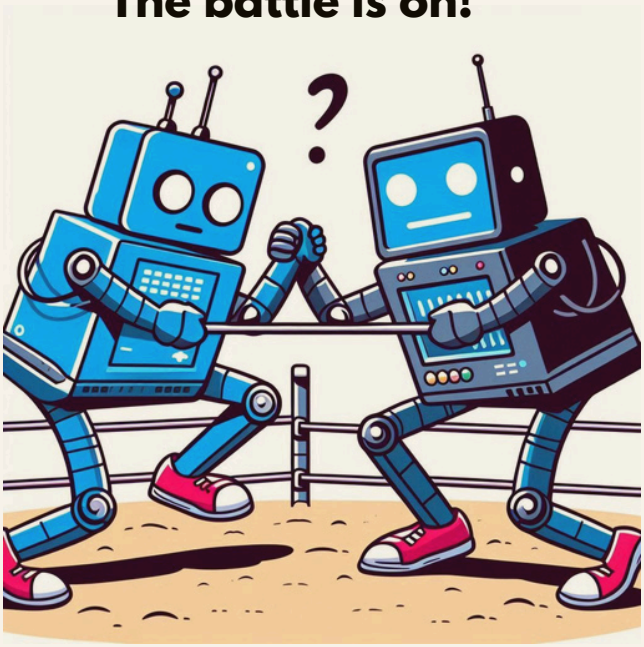
In the grand theater of technological one-upmanship, January 2025 delivered a plot twist worthy of a Shakespearean comedy. Mere days after President Donald Trump unveiled the $500 billion "Stargate AI" initiative—a project so ambitious it seemed poised to teach machines not just to think, but perhaps to run for office—a new player took the stage.

Enter DeepSeek, a Chinese startup that, with the dramatic flair of an underdog in a sports movie, released its R1 reasoning model. This model didn't just rival OpenAI's o1; it did so at a fraction of the cost, leaving tech giants gasping as their stock values took a nosedive. The tech world watched in astonishment as DeepSeek's app soared to the top of the U.S. App Store charts, dethroning the likes of ChatGPT. It was as if a new kid had arrived in Silicon Valley's playground, and suddenly, everyone wanted to be their friend—or at least understand how they managed to outsmart the class.

Meanwhile, in the corridors of power, President Trump hailed DeepSeek's rise as a "positive development", perhaps envisioning a future where American and Chinese AIs would engage in friendly debates, leaving human politicians to simpler tasks.

As the dust settled, industry leaders like Satya Nadella and Sam Altman couldn't help but applaud DeepSeek's efficiency, acknowledging that sometimes, the most unexpected players can change the game.

DEEPSEEK or OPENAI?
The battle is on!



In this unfolding drama, one thing became clear: the race for AI supremacy had taken an unexpected turn, reminding everyone that in the world of technology, today's underdog could be tomorrow's trailblazer.

As AI grows more powerful, so does its grip on our identities. A future where algorithms decide who you are and what you can access isn't science fiction—it's the silent reality creeping in. In the rush to digitise identities, governments must tread carefully—what begins as convenience can quickly become control. In enforcing digital IDs in this era of AI, governments must ask: Are we empowering citizens, or programming their dependence?

Deep Seek and the AI Revolution: How Open-Source Innovation Can Empower Uganda

Harnessing breakthrough technology to solve local challenges and join the global race for smarter machines

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Imagine a world where your computer isn't just for games or browsing the internet, it can help you plan a business, offer advice on staying healthy, or even lend a hand with your homework, just like a trusted friend who knows everything! This isn't a scene from a science fiction movie; it's happening right now. On January 20th, 2025, a Chinese company called DeepSeek made headlines worldwide by launching DeepSeek R1,an amazing new AI system. DeepSeek R1 is special becauseit lets
computers "think" step by step, much like how you solve a tricky puzzle or math problem by working through it one piece at a time. This breakthrough technology is set to change the way we live and work, opening up a world of exciting possibilities for people of all ages.

Understanding AI and How It Learns

At its simplest, artificial intelligence is about building computer systems that can learn from data and make decisions. Early computers were like simple calculators; they followed exact instructions. But modern AI, especially large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT and DeepSeek R1, are more like seasoned storytellers. They learn by reading enormous amounts of text and then "predict" what comes next. In doing so, they pick up on language patterns and can even reason through problems in a process that researchers now call "chain-of-thought" reasoning. Researchers explain that while these models originally learned by spotting patterns in data, they now can generate intermediate steps in their reasoning. Think of it like explaining your math problem "step by step" rather than simply giving the final answer. This development is a major breakthrough because it helps reduce errors and makes AI output more reliable.

The Breakthrough of Transformers

A major turning point in AI came in 2017 with the publication of a paper called "Attention is All You Need." This study introduced the transformer architecture a design that allowed AI models to process information more efficiently by "attending" to many parts of a text at once rather than one by one. The result was faster, more efficient training and better performance compared to older methods that used sequential models (like Recurrent Neural Networks "RNNs"). DeepSeek's R1 model builds on these principles. By using the ideas from "Attention is All You Need," DeepSeek was able to train its model with much lower computational costs. This efficiency means that even with fewer expensive Graphics

processing units GPUs), DeepSeek R1 achieved performance comparable to some of the top U.S. models. In simple terms, it's like getting the same high-quality dish from a modest kitchen instead of a gourmet restaurant an approach that makes advanced AI more accessible.

A condensed detailed summary explanation of the DeepSeek scientific paper publication "DeepSeekMath: Pushing the Limits of Mathematical Reasoning in Open Language Models" https://arxiv.org/pdf/2402.03300

Imagine you're training a smart math robot, a computer program that tries to solve math problems just like you solve homework. To help this robot become a better mathematician, scientists first feed it billions of examples and solutions, almost like giving it an enormous math textbook to study from. The robot practices by trying to solve problems and gets rewarded when it does so correctly, like earning gold stars at school. Sometimes, it even tries several different methods to solve the same problem and then compares its answers to choose the best one.To make this learning process even more efficient, a special technique called Group Relative Policy Optimization (GRPO) is used; it acts like a super-smart coach that looks at groups of the robot's attempts to decide which answers are the strongest, saving computer memory in the process. Additionally, the robot learns not just from math problems but also from computer code that solves math, which helps it improve even more. All these methods are part of a project called DeepSeekMath, where scientists teach the robot to solve math problems nearly as well as the best computer systems, showing that just like you, the robot gets better with practice, rewards, and learning from its mistakes.

Data: The Core Ingredient of AI

No matter how smart a computer becomes, it is only as good as the data it learns from. Data is the raw material from which AI models draw their knowledge. When a model is trained, it learns statistical patterns from the data whether that's language from books, images from websites, or numbers from spreadsheets.

However, if the data is biased or incomplete, the model's "knowledge" will also be biased. For example, if most of the training data comes from Western, English-language sources, then the model might not understand local Ugandan languages or cultural nuances. In Uganda, data scarcity is a real challenge: local languages, traditions, and even specific sector data (like agriculture or health) are not always well represented in global datasets. This gap can lead to models that give inaccurate or unfair results for Ugandan users.

To address this, it is essential that local institutions, governments, and businesses work together to collect and curate high-quality, locally relevant data. This local data can be used to fine-tune existing AI models so that they understand and reflect Ugandan realities.

Making AI Work for Uganda: Efficient Adaptation Through PEFT

One way to tailor these powerful models for local use without starting from scratch is through Parameter-Efficient Fine-Tuning (PEFT). Traditional model fine-tuning means adjusting every parameter in a large model process that requires massive computing resources. PEFT, on the other hand, lets developers "freeze" most of the model's pre-learned knowledge and adjust only a small subset of parameters. This is like tweaking a few spices into a well-cooked dish to suit local tastes without having to prepare the meal all over again.

For Ugandan innovators, this approach is especially promising. With limited resources, the ability to efficiently adapt a model using a small, locally curated dataset means that advanced AI can be customised for local languages, cultural contexts, and specific needs be it for agriculture, healthcare, or education.

Overcoming AI's Reasoning Limitations with External Knowledge

Even the smartest models sometimes make mistakes. Because LLMs learn from statistical patterns rather than true understanding, they can sometimes "hallucinate" or produce incorrect answers.

Researchers have found that encouraging models to "think out loud" (chain-of-thought prompting) or to check their answers against external data (using Retrieval-Augmented Generation, or RAG) can greatly improve accuracy.

RAG works by allowing the model to pull in information from verified, external sources, much like consulting a reference book before answering a question. In more advanced forms, models use structured data from knowledge graphs (an approach known as Graph RAG) to map out relationships between information in a clear, logical manner. This not only reduces mistakes but also makes the model's reasoning more transparent and understandable.

Open-Source: Empowering Local Innovation

One of the most important lessons from global AI developments is the value of open-source technology. Open-source models provide full access to their code and training methods, allowing anyone to inspect, modify, and improve them. This transparency contrasts sharply with closed- source models, which are often expensive, opaque "black boxes" accessible only via costly cloud services.

For Uganda, open-source models mean that local developers and researchers can build on the work of international experts without prohibitive costs. Initiatives like Hugging Face's Open-R1 project allow developers to study and replicate the training techniques used in models like DeepSeek R1. This democratises AI development and paves the way for homegrown solutions.

Local initiatives are already emerging in Uganda. For example, Sunbird AI a Ugandan non-profit uses AI to address social challenges, while the Science, Technology and Innovation (STI)

Secretariat supports local innovation and research. By leveraging these collaborative, open-source approaches, Uganda can develop its own AI models that reflect local needs, languages, and cultural contexts.

Data Availability in Uganda: A Key Challenge and Opportunity

Despite the exciting developments, Uganda faces a significant challenge: data availability. High-quality, representative data is crucial for training AI models. Unfortunately, in many parts of Uganda, the digital data needed especially in local languages and contexts is scarce. This scarcity not only limits model performance but can also lead to bias if models rely on international datasets that do not represent local realities.

The solution lies in a coordinated effort to collect, digitise, and curate local data. Universities, government agencies, and private companies must work together to create digital archives of local information from agricultural statistics to healthcare records and local languages. By integrating this locally sourced data into AI models through techniques like PEFT, Ugandan innovators can reduce bias and ensure that AI systems are effective and relevant for local use.

Conclusion: A Call to Action for Uganda

DeepSeek's quantum leap and the underlying technological advances like the transformer architecture from "Attention is All You Need" illustrate that cutting-edge AI does not always require enormous resources. With efficient methods such as PEFT, retrieval augmentation, and open-source collaboration, even countries with limited resources can participate in the global AI revolution.

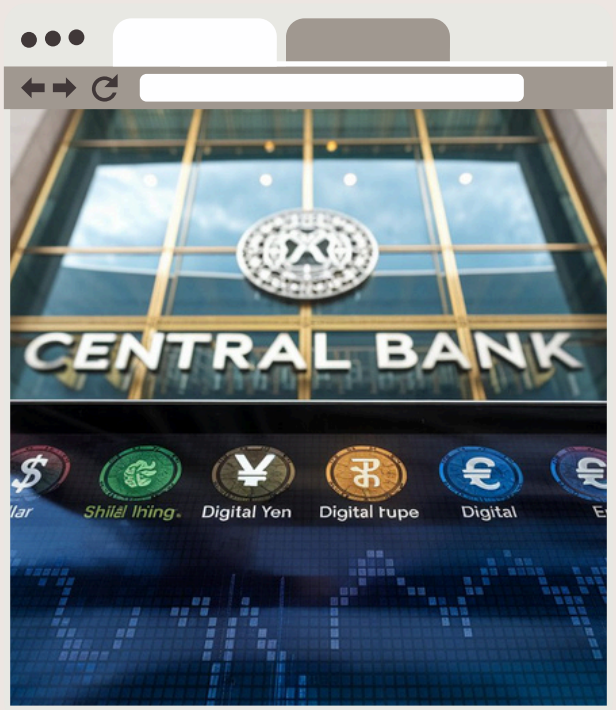
For Uganda, this is a call to invest in local data collection, training, and collaboration. By harnessing these innovative techniques and tailoring them to the unique needs of Ugandan communities, the country can not only keep pace with global developments but also transform local sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, and education.

I call upon Ugandan policymakers, educators, and tech innovators now is the time to embrace open-source AI. Invest in building local data repositories, and empower local developers to adapt and customise advanced AI models. In doing so,Uganda can join the global AI race developing smart, reliable,and fair AI solutions that drive economic growth and improve everyday life.

Kenya's Virtual Assets Policy and Bill a Likely Foundation for Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) and Digital ID Control

BY DIGITAL AGENDA

Kenya is moving in step with nations such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Singapore, Switzerland, and the United States in regulating virtual assets, including cryptocurrencies, non-custodial wallets, NFTs, and P2P transactions.



Notably, the UAE has established a dedicated government body, the Virtual Assets Regulatory Authority (VARA), to oversee and enforce these regulations, while countries like Singapore and Switzerland have implemented comprehensive legal frameworks to govern the sector.

> Kenyans must carefully examine the agenda, review every clause, and ensure it is presented with complete clarity, leaving no room for ambiguity.

In December 2024, the Kenyan Treasury introduced a policy on Virtual Assets (VAs) and Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASPs), followed by the Virtual Assets Service Providers Bill 2024 on January 9, 2025. This bill requires VASPs to maintain local offices, a move that could enhance government oversight of digital financial transactions.

This is more than regulation—it's preparation for a Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC). Having registered success in Mobile Money through M-Pesa, Kenya is positioned for CBDC rollout, integrating it into existing financial systems. The next step? A central digital ID system linking every transaction to state surveillance.

This isn't just innovation; it's control. With cash phased out, every transaction will be tracked, and financial freedom eroded. Restrictions on spending could become the norm, dictated by the government. Kenyans must recognise that this is not about inclusion but total financial oversight. It remains essential to remain informed and consider the broader implications of these regulatory changes. Kenyans must carefully examine the agenda, review every clause, and ensure it is presented with complete clarity, leaving no room for ambiguity. Stay vigilant!

No Digital Dollar! Trump's Executive Order bans Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)

BY DIGITAL AGENDA

On January 23, 2025, President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 14178, titled "Strengthening American Leadership in Digital Financial Technology," which prohibits federal agencies from establishing, issuing, or promoting central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) within the United States or abroad. The order also mandates the immediate termination of any ongoing plans or initiatives related to the creation of a U.S. CBDC.

In addition to the CBDC ban, the executive order establishes a presidential working group tasked with developing a federal regulatory framework for digital assets, including stablecoins, and evaluating the creation of a strategic national digital assets stockpile. This working group is expected to propose guidelines for market structure, oversight, consumer protection, and risk management within 180 days.
This move represents a significant shift in U.S. digital asset policy, contrasting with previous explorations into developing a U.S. CBDC. While the Federal Reserve had not shown strong interest in a digital dollar, the European Central Bank and China continue their CBDC initiatives, which could influence global standards in privacy and cybersecurity for digital currencies.

Overall Impact:

- The U.S. is rejecting state-controlled digital currency while still preparing for a regulated digital asset economy.
- It signals that the U.S. government is interested in crypto's potential for financial markets and national security but doesn't want full state control over money, like some CBDCs would enable.

In the long run, this could shape global crypto regulations and influence how other countries manage digital financial systems.

The future of money is at a crossroads—one path leads to financial freedom, the other to total surveillance. With Digital IDs linking every transaction to government oversight, Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) could become tools of control, dictating how, when, and where you spend. Trump's ban on CBDCs is a crucial safeguard against this centralised grip, ensuring that money remains a tool of individual power, not state control. But the fight isn't over—vigilance is key to protecting financial independence in the digital age.

South Africa's Cashless Future: Are We Ready?

BY EVELYNE NAIKOBA
Governance & Strategy Specialist

In a world rapidly embracing digital convenience, South Africa is taking significant steps toward reducing reliance on cash. With the government pushing reforms through Operation Vulindlela, introducing a digital wallet, and reviewing regulations to allow non-banking institutions to process payments, the country appears to be laying the groundwork for a financial landscape dominated by digital transactions. These initiatives are framed as a way to promote efficiency, inclusion, and security, yet beneath the surface, there are deeper questions about whether this shift aligns with the realities of South Africa's diverse economy.

South African Reserve Bank (SARB) Governor Lesetja Kganyago has acknowledged the growing influence of digital payments but remains cautious about the extent to which people truly want to move away from cash. Despite technological advancements, cash continues to play a crucial role in everyday transactions, particularly among lower-income communities, informal businesses, and rural populations. Recent data indicates that demand for cash has remained steady, even as digital payment solutions like PayShap—a real-time, low-cost payment system—gain traction. While PayShap enables seamless transactions without the need for traditional bank accounts, its adoption has yet to make a significant dent in the use of physical currency.

The push toward a more digitized economy includes regulatory reforms that would allow non-banking institutions to process payments without the need for traditional banks. This could open the door for telecom companies, fintech startups, and even retail businesses to facilitate digital transactions, potentially increasing competition and driving innovation. On paper, this sounds like a positive step—greater financial accessibility, lower transaction costs, and reduced dependency on cash-heavy banking infrastructure. But what happens when financial transactions are no longer within people's direct control, dependent instead on corporate policies, digital platforms, and network availability?

South Africa is not alone in its efforts to modernise payment systems. Countries like Sweden, China, and India have made significant strides toward reducing cash use, each with different experiences and outcomes. Sweden, often cited as the most cashless society, has seen bank branches eliminate cash services, leaving some communities struggling with basic transactions. While urban areas adapted quickly, older citizens and those in remote regions found themselves excluded. The Swedish government was eventually forced to intervene, mandating that banks continue offering cash withdrawal services.

China, with its dominant WeChat Pay and Alipay systems, has created a near-cashless urban economy where QR codes are used for everything from street food to hospital bills. However, this centralization of financial transactions has raised concerns about surveillance, data privacy, and financial control. The Chinese government has since introduced regulatory measures to curb monopolistic practices, highlighting the risks of placing too much power in the hands of digital financial giants.

India's demonetization policy in 2016 was another bold experiment in reducing cash dependence. While it did accelerate the adoption of digital payments, the abrupt removal of high-value currency notes caused widespread disruptions, particularly in rural areas where digital infrastructure was weak. Years later, cash remains a crucial part of India's economy, demonstrating that deeply ingrained financial habits cannot be changed overnight.

> Cash remains a fundamental part of financial resilience. It provides an immediate, tangible means of exchange that does not rely on power grids, internet access, or corporate policies.

So, what does a reduced-cash South Africa look like? Digital transactions could enhance security by lowering cash-related crime. They could streamline business operations, making payments faster and more efficient. Small businesses might benefit from broader access to financial services without the need for expensive point-of-sale equipment. But there are also significant challenges.

For one, financial inclusion is not just about access—it's about agency. Millions of South Africans still operate in a cash-based informal economy, and many lack the digital literacy or technology needed to participate fully in a digital payment ecosystem. A rapid move away from cash could deepen financial exclusion rather than solve it. While fintech solutions claim to empower individuals, reliance on digital platforms also introduces risks—service disruptions, cyber fraud, data privacy concerns, and the potential for increased transaction costs over time.

Another critical issue is the loss of financial independence. In a digital-only system, every transaction is recorded, monitored, and subject to regulatory oversight. While this may help combat illicit activities, it also raises concerns about personal privacy and the power of financial institutions to restrict access to funds. In times of political or economic uncertainty, digital controls over transactions could be used in ways that limit individual freedoms.

The reality is that cash remaina fundamental part of financial resilience. It provides an immediate, tangible means of exchange that does not rely on power grids, internet access, or corporate policies. In crisis situations—whether natural disasters,

cyberattacks, or economic instability—cash serves as a reliable fallback. The assumption that digital transactions will always be available and functional is an optimistic one, but history has shown that financial systems can and do experience disruptions.

Perhaps the most pressing question is not whether South Africa can reduce cash use, but whether it should—and at what cost. The push toward digital payments is often framed as inevitable progress, but it is worth considering who truly benefits from a reduced-cash society. Are these shifts designed to serve the everyday South African, or are they primarily driven by the interests of financial institutions, technology companies, and policymakers eager to streamline the economy?

> The success of any financial transformation should not be measured solely by technological adoption but by whether it truly enhances financial inclusion, resilience, and personal choice.

Africa has already demonstrated that hybrid financial models—such as Kenya's M-Pesa system, which blends mobile money with cash transactions—can work effectively. Instead of forcing a transition toward digital exclusivity, perhaps the focus should be on creating a balanced ecosystem where cash and digital payments complement each other, allowing individuals and businesses to choose the most practical payment method for their circumstances.

As South Africa moves forward with its digital finance initiatives, it is essential to ensure that progress does not come at the expense of those who still depend on cash. The success of any financial transformation should not be measured solely by technological adoption but by whether it truly enhances financial inclusion, resilience, and personal choice. Digital payments may be the future, but a world without cash raises questions that deserve careful consideration. The real debate is not whether we can go cashless—but whether we should.

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Loss of Value of Digital Money in the Individuals' or Holders' Hands

BY SAM NOWAMAANI
Computer Scientist

With digital payment transactions, there's great rate of loss of value of money with each completed transaction, something that is not experienced with the use of cash to make payments.

Whereas cash/bank notes lose value over time due to inflation, this is only very slight compared to what happens to digital value after several payments have been made for different services/ goods by different individuals over a very short time time. This is attributed to charges per payment or transaction whenever digital transactions/ payments are made.

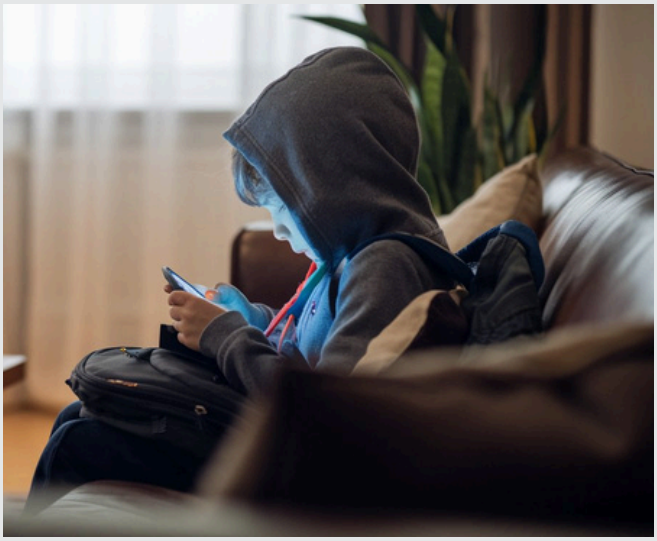
THE COST OF DIGITAL TRANSACTIONS

Release any amount of digital money into circulation where it will be used by different people to make payments for different things and surely the central bank (or payment platform) will retain up to 70% (and even more in transaction charges) of this value while the rest is reduced even further while in the possession of owner(s).

THE DARKSIDE OF SCREEN TIME: How Digital Content is Affecting Children's Mental Health

BY MARIAGORRETI BATENGA
Director at Dopamine Ace Ltd, Incorporator & Writer

Many parents are increasingly using screens as substitutes for interaction and supervision, leaving children with phones, tablets, or TVs at a young age while they attend to other matters. This has resulted in excessive screen time, depriving children of crucial social, emotional, and physical development. Embracing the digital era in parenting has its benefits, but excessive screen time is taking a toll on children's mental



health, increasing cases of anxiety, ADHD, and OCD, even as it offers more learning and entertainment opportunities.

The American Academy of Pediatrics links over two hours of TV to attention span issues, while the World Health Organisation warns early screen exposure causes speech delays and reduced focus. Yet, many parents medicate these symptoms while ignoring the root cause, allowing excessive screen time as a distraction.

Digital content creators are more obsessed with making money than they are concerned about anyone's wellbeing, not even your child's. The content on these devices is made in a way that it keeps one coming back for more. Shows like CoComelon are designed to be highly engaging and addictive, with stimulating visuals and music that keep kids hooked. Parents on YouTube and TikTok report speech delays and low attention spans linked to the show. Worse, when it's taken away, children exhibit withdrawal symptoms—tantrums, meltdowns, and refusal to eat or engage in other activities—due to overstimulation, making everything else seem dull.

While many parents and caregivers put emphasis on protecting their children from explicit content, the rest of the content isn't automatically safe because of innocent characters like dancing dolls. Tools like color combinations, frames, shot lengths and many more are used to play on the children's minds, stimulating dopamine, keeping them hooked and throwing them into a pit of brain rot.

Screens aren't the enemy, but using them as a parenting substitute is. Instead of endless gadget time, balance is key—play, talk, and read with your kids. Technology is useful, but it shouldn't replace parenting.

Breaking Barriers: Prioritising Skills Over Bureaucratic Hiring

BY CLAIRE BABIRYE
Data Scientist

The traditional hiring process is in dire need of change. In a world propelled by technology and innovation, companies continue to prioritise degrees, years of experience, and rigid qualifications over actual skills.

This outdated approach has long acted as a gatekeeper, limiting opportunities for talented individuals who may not fit conventional stereotypes but have the potential to excel.

Elon Musk's post on X, on January 15th, calling for hardcore software engineers to showcase their code—regardless of their educational background—signals a transformative shift in hiring. His perspective challenges the norm, emphasising that performance and ability should outweigh academic credentials and tenure. It's a reminder that talent, skill, and passion exist beyond traditional boundaries.

Could this be a forerunner on the future of hiring, especially in the tech sector?

The paradox of experience as a primary hiring criterion is evident—how can one gain experience without being given an opportunity? This cycle often excludes fresh graduates, self-taught professionals, and career changers who possess the right skills but lack traditional credentials. Consequently, many companies miss out on promising talent simply because of rigid hiring structures.

Businesses should embrace skills-based hiring. Tech companies, in particular, should focus on practical skills through portfolios, coding challenges, and real-world problem-solving rather than relying solely on resumes filled with credentials. Open-source contributions and independent projects now hold greater weight, reflecting a shift towards a more meritocratic recruitment approach.

Is the Push for Digital IDs in Online Age Verification Focused on Safety or a Path to Mass Surveillance and Control?

By DIGITAL AGENDA

In the digital age, protecting children online has become a top priority. Bill Ready, CEO of Pinterest, recently advocated for digital IDs to verify children's ages during the 2024 Aspen Ideas Festival. He emphasized the need for national standards for age verification to prevent minors from accessing inappropriate content. Ready's proposal calls for operating systems to share age-validation data with apps, improving safety.

Ways it can be implemented

- Digital Identity Verification

Digital IDs linked to verified ages could be issued by trusted third parties, allowing platforms to authenticate users quickly while respecting privacy.

- Biometric Authentication

Methods like facial recognition or fingerprint scanning could be used alongside digital IDs to ensure accuracy and prevent fraud.

- Verified Age-Validation Systems

Cross-checking users' ages using online banking or national ID databases would allow apps to validate ages before granting access to age-restricted content.

- Government-Issued IDs

Users might need to submit government IDs, such as a passport or driver's license, for verification before accessing certain platforms.

What This Means for Implementation

While these systems could create a safer online environment, implementing them would require significant collaboration between governments, tech companies, and financial institutions. The infrastructure needed for such widespread verification would be complex and costly. Also, age verification definitely requires collection of sensitive personal data.

The Risks

The push for digital IDs centralises power, with a few organisations controlling online identities, paving the way for mass surveillance. Platforms could collect not just age data but also personal preferences, browsing habits, and biometric information, raising privacy concerns. Big data could amplify these risks, leading to targeted marketing, behavioral profiling, and political control. Centralised data also makes individuals vulnerable to privacy breaches and hacking.

A Double-Edged Sword?

Digital IDs could make online spaces safer for children, but they also pose privacy risks. While they can block inappropriate content, data centralization and mass surveillance raise concerns. As we move toward a digital future, it's vital to balance safety, privacy, and freedom to protect personal rights.

Believers and the Digital Agenda: Are We Seeing Through God's Lens?

BY LILIAN AGABA NABWEBALE
Information Scientist and Minister of the Gospel

Recently, I came across a video of a believer working in a car company in Japan. Standing on the pulpit, they passionately testified about how God had lifted them from the dust to sit with kings. Their career had taken them to one of the Big Tech companies, and they spoke of how job opportunities kept chasing after them. The congregation erupted in applause, celebrating this milestone. But what came next left me unsettled.

The believer vowed to do everything possible to ensure Uganda is fully digitised by 2030. They declared their intent to install digital systems in agriculture, the military, and every sector, promising that face recognition technology would be used to catch thieves. The church cheered. However, beyond the shouts and claps, I couldn't ignore a nagging question—why did their vision align so seamlessly with the UN Agenda 2030 and the World Economic Forum's digital transformation plans?

The Danger of Unquestioned Agendas

As believers, do we remember that our first identity is in Christ, before our professions, accolades, and societal positions?

Do we view life through the lens of God's word and prophecy?

Have we paused to scrutinise which agenda we are pushing?

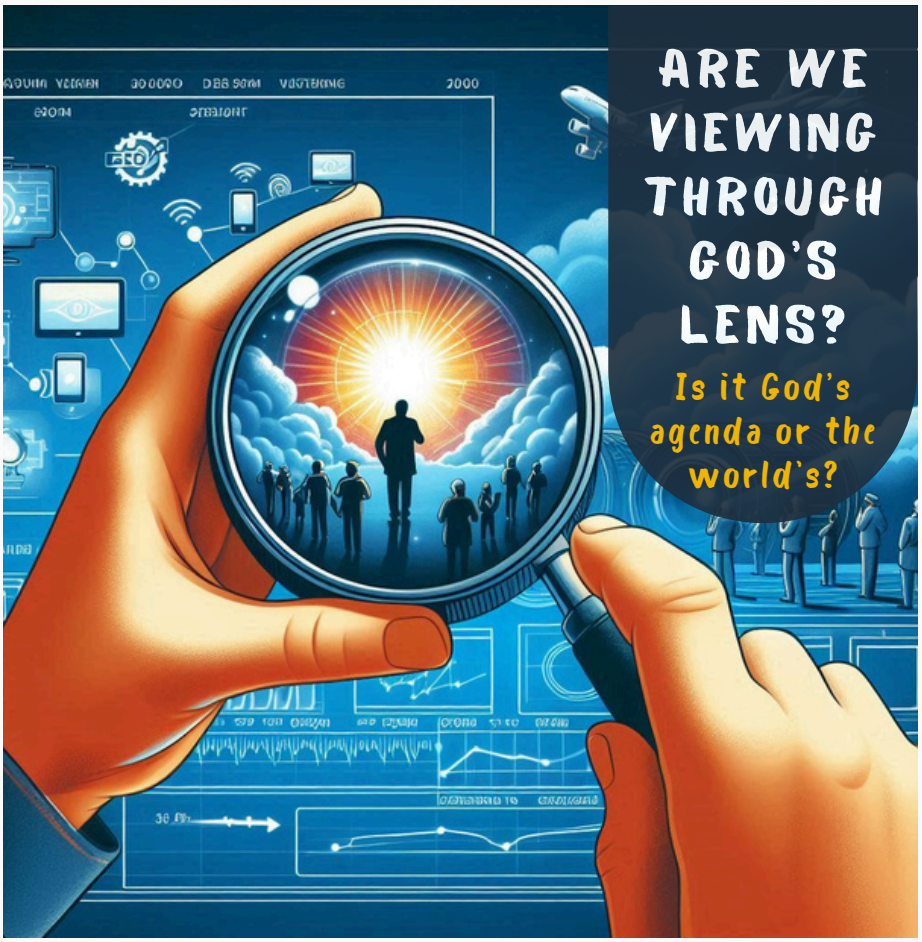
> Are we advancing God's kingdom or unwittingly becoming accomplices in accelerating the agenda of the prince of this world?

Are we advancing God's kingdom or unwittingly becoming accomplices in accelerating the agenda of the prince of this world (John 12:31, 2 Corinthians 4:4)? It is crucial to ask: is a fully digitised Uganda really the priority? While technology can be a tool for good, we must ask why the rush to implement systems of control rather than those that serve and empower? Shouldn't we first focus on building infrastructure, digital literacy, and innovation before submitting ourselves to global digital mandates

Priorities Before Globalisation

Uganda, like many developing nations, still lacks foundational industries. Instead of jumping headfirst into digital surveillance, wouldn't it be wiser to first establish a strong industrial base—car factories, Big Tech giants of our own, and locally built technology hubs? Developed nations did not start with surveillance and control systems; they prioritised manufacturing, infrastructure, and economic independence. They built roads, hospitals, and education systems before implementing mass digitization. Why are we so eager to put the cart before the horse? Digital transformation can

bring efficiency, but if introduced with the primary aim of tracking and monitoring citizens, it becomes a tool for control rather than progress. Is that the Uganda we want? Are we thinking critically, or are we merely echoing global directives without discernment?



The Call for Spiritual Discernment

We celebrate the brother in Christ on his achievements, but we also caution him and every believer: we must wear the hat of a believer before anything else. Our faith should shape our worldview—not the other way around. The enemy's agenda often comes disguised as progress, but its ultimate goal is control (Revelation 13:16-17).

We must remain spiritually alert, questioning and testing everything (1 John 4:1) to ensure we are not unknowingly advancing a system designed to enslave rather than liberate.

Moreover, why have we shifted from addressing the root causes of crime—morality and values—to relying on technology like facial recognition and biometrics to catch thieves? Have we lost sight of the importance of character development and ethical upbringing? Those who have traveled will testify that in some nations, theft is virtually unheard of, not because of excessive surveillance, but because of a deeply ingrained culture of integrity. As believers and as a nation, we need to return to instilling strong moral foundations, rather than assuming that technology—particularly digital IDs—will be the ultimate solution to social issues.

As Uganda moves toward digitisation, let us first ask: who benefits? What is the cost? And most importantly, is this God's will for our nation at this time? Let us be builders before we become digital dependents. Let us think before we integrate. And above all, let us remain spiritually awake before we unknowingly walk into a trap labeled 'progress.'

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