

5G is coming. Here's what it could mean for SA

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The rollout of 5G in South Africa's urban centres is likely to be one of the most significant technology events of 2021. Where 3G and 4G LTE technology provided increased speeds compared to their predecessors, 5G will establish an entirely new innovation platform upon which many of the technologies and day-to-day conveniences of the future will be built.



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It's less of an iteration on previous technologies and more of a total digital transformation in how we connect to virtual and physical worlds. The number of connected devices will grow exponentially, linking previously static infrastructure - cars, clothes, parking meters - to a smart network that constantly generates and processes vast amounts of data.

In line with this, the 5G services market is expected to grow at an astronomical rate, from just over \$41bn in 2020 [to more than \\$414bn in 2027](#). Research by MIT indicates that between 2020 and 2035, [5G's contribution to global GDP will be roughly the size of India's entire economy](#).

These changes will impact consumers, businesses and industries in ways we are yet to fully understand, but early signs already point to a number of expected benefits.

Supercharged media consumption

Media and entertainment companies stand to benefit greatly. With movie theatres closed and ongoing restrictions on large-scale events, consumers seeking an escape from the pressures of lockdown are flocking to streaming services such as Netflix and Multichoice's Showmax.

The higher speeds - enabling ultra-HD or 4K streaming quality - and lower costs associated with 5G could completely transform consumer habits in terms of home entertainment.

Technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) could finally see the mass adoption they've been promising for nearly a decade. With international travel still severely restricted in many countries, consumers could 'visit' game reserves and tourist destinations via virtual experiences and enjoy a sense of escapism without the need to hop on a flight, thereby improving the much-depleted tourism market.

A win for remote work

Office workers, newly liberated from the confines of corporate headquarters, could be among the first to experience the power of 5G in their day-to-day work.

Expect to see major advances in the quality of video calling and innovation as collaboration platforms - already experiencing record growth due to the shift to remote work - introduce richer employee experiences made possible by the higher speeds.

The connected everything

With lower latency, increased reliability and increased spectrum available, 5G is expected to turbocharge the rollout of the Internet of Things (IoT). Forbes estimates the number of IoT devices will increase from seven billion in 2018 to 22 billion by 2025.

In which industries will 5G-enabled IoT make an impact? The short answer is: likely all of them.

- Mass digitisation of public services could support the building of smart cities where key infrastructure is connected to a central network, enabling predictive maintenance and improved traffic management, for example.
- In healthcare, junior doctors could be trained for surgery via AR or VR delivered via 5G, and telemedicine – which has become even more vital in light of the pandemic - is set to experience what some analysts describe as a tsunami of growth.
- In manufacturing, 5G could achieve cost optimisations by enabling virtual control of machines and telemetry or information exchange between large numbers of connected devices in real-time.

These benefits won't be realised simply through the deployment of 5G, however. Organisations will need robust digital transformation strategies supported by systems such as enterprise resource planning platforms that can process, store and analyse vast amounts of data from huge numbers of disparate sources.

Integrated business applications that can harness the power of exponential technologies such as artificial intelligence will help organisations find hidden value in their data, and help bring to light new opportunities for commercialisation and process improvements through things like predictive maintenance.

The arrival of 5G is likely to transform the way we live, work and play. Organisations that can think big and put in place the technology tools and processes needed to harness the power of advanced connectivity could position themselves for an era

of near-limitless innovation and growth.

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