

# FreeFACTS

No 05/2023 | May 2023 | Issue 61

Find us online at [www.irr.org.za](http://www.irr.org.za)

## Communications revolution has not passed South Africa by

**One of the biggest innovations over the past twenty or thirty years has been the spread of cellphones and smartphones and the access that people now have to data. The smartphone that a vast majority of people have, from all walks of life, across the world, would seem like a magical device to people only a few decades ago. But this miraculous technology is now widespread and it will probably only be future historians who can truly determine the effect it has had on the world.**

This edition of *FreeFACTS* looks at how smartphones and cellphones have become more common in South Africa. It also looks at the how access to the internet and social media has grown since the beginning of the century.

The growth in the number of people with some sort of mobile phone has been almost exponential. For example, in 2000 there were about eight million cellphone subscribers in South Africa, compared to just below five million fixed line subscribers. By 2019 the number of people with fixed line subscriptions had more than halved, to just above two million. However, the number mobile subscriptions in South Africa had grown to nearly 100 million. This meant that there were about 1.7 mobile subscribers for every South African.

There has also been growth in the proportion of people who use social media and who use the internet to access data, such as the news.

This phenomenon tells us two things. The first is that the private sector is often (not always) better placed to help a country's development. For example, if South Africa had only had a single government owned mobile line provider it is very unlikely that we would have seen this explosion in access.

In addition, the way people receive information has changed, and the sources of information has changed. People in rural areas, for example, no longer have to rely on the radio or a single newspaper to find out what is happening in the world.

South Africa has not been left behind by the communication revolution, the consequences of which we still do not know.

— **Marius Roodt**

## JOIN US

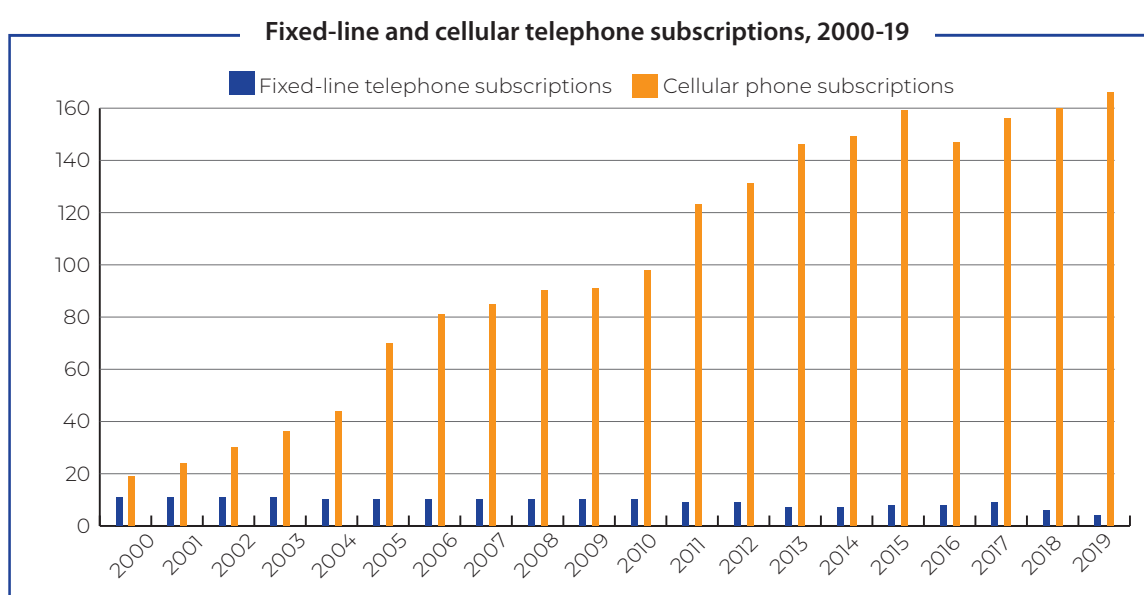
The IRR is an advocacy group that fights for your right to make decisions about your life, family and business, free from unnecessary government, political, and bureaucratic interference. FreeFACTS publishes evidence that communities are better off when individuals are free to make decisions about how they want to live, be educated, work, access healthcare, think, speak, own property, and protect their communities. If you agree with the issues we stand for, welcome to the team. There are millions of people just like you who are tired of South African politicians, activists, and commentators attempting to rein in your freedom to decide. Take control and make sure your voice is heard by becoming a friend of the IRR.

**SMS YOUR NAME  
TO 32823  
SMS costs R1.  
Ts and Cs apply.**

## Communication

Fixed-line and cellular phone subscriptions, 2000-19				
Year	—Number—		—Number per 100 people—	
	Fixed-line telephone subscriptions	Cellular phone subscriptions	Fixed-line telephone subscriptions	Cellular phone subscriptions
2000	4 961 743	8 339 000	11,1	18,6
2001	4 924 458	10 787 000	10,8	23,7
2002	4 917 000	13 702 000	10,7	29,7
2003	4 910 000	16 860 000	10,5	36,0
2004	4 903 000	20 839 000	10,3	43,8
2005	4 896 000	33 959 958	10,2	70,4
2006	4 889 000	39 662 000	10,0	81,1
2007	4 882 000	42 300 000	9,8	85,3
2008	4 875 000	45 000 000	9,7	89,5
2009	4 868 000	46 436 000	9,6	91,3
2010	4 861 000	50 372 000	9,5	97,9
2011	4 854 000	64 000 000	9,3	123,2
2012	4 847 000	68 394 000	9,3	130,6
2013	3 875 582	76 865 278	7,3	145,6
2014	3 647 770	79 280 731	6,9	149,2
2015	4 131 055	87 999 492	7,7	159,3
2016	4 522 850	82 412 880	8,1	147,1
2017	4 810 074	88 497 610	8,5	156,0
2018	3 345 440	92 427 958	5,8	159,9
2019	2 024 730	96 972 459	3,5	165,5
<b>2000-19</b>	<b>-59,2%</b>	<b>1062,9%</b>	<b>-68,5%</b>	<b>789,8%</b>

Source: International Telecommunications Union (ITU), [www.itu.int](http://www.itu.int), *Time series by country (2000-2019)*, accessed 10 November 2020



## Communication

Internet users, 2000-20	
Year	Per 100 people
2000	5,4
2001	6,4
2002	6,7
2003	7,0
2004	8,4
2005	7,5
2006	7,6
2007	8,1
2008	8,4
2009	10,0
2010	24,0
2011	34,0
2012	41,0
2013	46,5
2014	49,0
2015	51,9
2016	54,0
2017	56,2
2018	54,0
2019	59,0
2020	55,0

Source: ITU, [www.itu.int](http://www.itu.int), *Time series by country (2000-2017)*, accessed 25 April 2019; *We are social, Digital 2019: South Africa*, accessed 2 June 2019; *We are social, Digital 2020: South Africa*, accessed 7 July 2020

Internet users <sup>a</sup> by age, 2016-19						
Age group	July 16- June 17	Jan-Dec 17	Jul 17-Jun 18	Jan-Dec 18	Jul 18- Jun19	Jan-Dec 19
15-24	67,0%	71,0%	77,0%	79,0%	82,0%	85,0%
25-34	60,0%	64,0%	69,0%	72,0%	74,0%	78,0%
35-49	48,0%	52,0%	56,0%	59,0%	62,0%	64,0%
50-64	26,0%	30,0%	33,0%	37,0%	38,0%	40,0%
65+	13,0%	16,0%	19,0%	21,0%	21,0%	22,0%

Source: BRC, [www.brcsa.org.za](http://www.brcsa.org.za), *The Establishment Survey: March 2019 release*, March 2019, p61, *The Establishment Survey: March 2020 release*, June 2020, p66  
<sup>a</sup> Past 7-day internet usage by age

## Communication

### Active mobile broadband<sup>a</sup> subscriptions by world region, 2010-19

Region	—Per 100 people—									
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 <sup>b</sup>	2019
Africa	1,7	2,7	5,9	10,5	13,1	19,0	21,8	24,8	29,7	33,1
Arab States	7,8	13,4	17,0	25,9	34,3	43,6	47,0	54,9	62,7	60,0
Asia & Pacific	7,3	10,9	14,6	18,7	29,3	37,8	46,5	60,3	68,3	76,6
Commonwealth of Independent States (Russia etc.)	25,7	36,3	41,5	48,6	53,7	60,5	65,3	72,0	79,2	87,7
Europe	28,7	37,8	46,2	53,1	64,0	71,6	79,8	85,9	93,6	99,9
The Americas (North and South)	25,4	36,2	46,2	55,5	67,9	78,4	85,1	89,5	97,1	99,2

Source: ITU, www.itu.int, *Global and regional ICT data (2005-19)*, accessed December 2020

<sup>a</sup> Wireless data connection that uses mobile connections such as portable modems, mobile phones or other mobile devices.

<sup>b</sup> Estimates.

### Weekly online activity<sup>a</sup> by device, 2019

Device	Using a search engine	Visiting a social media platform	Playing games	Watching videos	Looking for product information
Smartphone	17,0%	30,0%	3,0%	7,0%	4,0%
Computer	5,0%	7,0%	1,0%	3,0%	2,0%

Source: We are social, *Digital in 2019 in Southern Africa: Essential insights into internet, social media, mobile, and ecommerce use across the region*, accessed 1 July 2020

<sup>a</sup> For example, over an average seven-day period in 2019, 4% of people in South Africa used their smartphones to look for product information.

### Digital device usage<sup>a</sup>, 2015-20

Device	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
	—Proportion—					
Mobile phone (all types)	92,0%	92,0%	95,0%	95,0%	94,0%	98,2%
Smart phone	60,0%	69,0%	60,0%	60,0%	94,0%	98,0%
Laptop/Desktop Computer	18,0%	20,0%	24,0%	24,0%	76,0%	85,4%
Tablet device	7,0%	10,0%	12,0%	12,0%	43,0%	43,2%
TV streaming device	3,0%	3,0%	3,0%	3,0%	N/A	16,7%
E-reader device	1,0%	1,0%	1,0%	1,0%	N/A	N/A
Wearable tech device	1,0%	3,0%	2,0%	2,0%	N/A	N/A

Source: Google Consumer Barometer 2015, www.consumerbarometer.com, accessed 2 May 2017; Google Consumer Barometer 2017, accessed 15 May 2018; We are social, www.wearesocial.com, *Digital 2019 South Africa*, accessed May 2019, *Digital 2020 South Africa*, accessed July 2020, *Digital 2021 South Africa*, accessed 19 August 2021

<sup>a</sup> Ownership by people aged 16 and above.

## Communication

Social media network subscribers, 2019-21							
Date	Facebook	Pinterest	Twitter	YouTube	Instagram	Reddit	LinkedIn
—Proportion—							
Jun-19	43,79	43,49	7,85	2,58	1,13	0,16	0,22
Jul-19	39,64	46,64	8,30	2,48	1,91	0,15	0,24
Aug-19	43,63	43,65	8,26	2,02	1,58	0,10	0,19
Sep-19	46,92	37,22	9,82	2,22	2,93	0,09	0,23
Oct-19	42,07	28,07	20,00	2,16	6,85	0,13	0,20
Nov-19	41,56	28,39	19,56	2,20	7,55	0,11	0,17
Dec-19	43,98	28,73	16,54	1,97	8,16	0,14	0,13
Jan-20	42,87	27,74	17,95	1,93	8,87	0,15	0,16
Feb-20	41,38	27,28	18,04	2,35	10,30	0,14	0,17
Mar-20	41,88	24,01	19,12	2,90	11,39	0,11	0,22
Apr-20	34,06	27,39	22,35	3,54	11,85	0,19	0,18
May-20	41,44	42,86	9,44	3,05	1,94	0,33	0,25
Jun-20	44,49	40,06	9,40	3,04	1,52	0,31	0,24
Jan-21	41,39	39,98	12,14	3,24	2,23	0,27	0,31
Feb-21	48,34	31,46	12,50	3,46	3,01	0,34	0,41
Mar-21	45,97	32,73	12,81	3,74	3,46	0,39	0,36
Apr-21	52,64	24,79	13,29	3,82	3,44	0,45	0,41
May-21	53,83	23,02	12,52	3,62	4,33	0,68	0,44
Jun-21	56,59	19,27	11,72	3,94	5,16	0,54	0,46

Source: Statscounter Globalstats, [www.gs.statcounter.com](http://www.gs.statcounter.com), *Social media stats South Africa (June 2019-June 2020)*, accessed 7 July 2020; *Social media stats South Africa (June 2020-June 2021)*, accessed 18 July 2021