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Why 4G thinking won't work in a 5G world

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The ability to share collective and individual experiences through media will connect people at an emotional level that was not possible before: they will feel as if they were part of the action.

There are a wealth of articles, papers and pundits offering the traditional opinions and comparisons of 4G and 5G. Pick up any industry trade publication and you are sure to find dozens of valid viewpoints. The problem is that most are based on a very '4G' way of thinking. And that means they might be missing the point about the value of 5G. Yes, 5G offers extraordinarily low latency, unprecedented data rates and network capacity. But by focusing only on these technical aspects, we may be missing the forest for the trees. Instead of the technical or business view, let us view it from the customers' perspective, and think about what telecom operators really do every day: enable people to communicate.

Why do humans bother communicating in the first place? The academics will tell you there are three levels to human communication. At the first level, our most base level, we communicate to share needs and important information. The second level adds more sophisticated language and comprehension, allowing us to share thoughts and ideas. The most sophisticated thing humans can do with communication is to share feelings and emotions, which is on the third level.

For the most part, humans use language as a way of 'coding' and 'decoding' messages — for communicating those base needs and ideas on the first and second layer respectively. But our language often fails us when we try to communicate or share our feelings and emotions.

Monetizing human communication

Now, let us think about the various generations of network functionality that have been developed over the past few decades. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the world was fairly content with 2G mobile technologies. Voice and SMS allowed humans to achieve that first level of communication — sharing needs and important information. And telecom operators found ways to monetize that communication and add value to their businesses as a result.

By 2008, the internet was seeping into the far corners of the world and the information age was in full swing. By connecting us to each other via the web, 3G and 4G networks empowered the world to share ideas and views. Mobile broadband allowed people to share all sorts of thoughts and ideas — that second level of communications need that is so typical of the internet — on their devices, sometimes through speech, but increasingly through pictures, video and music. Again, telecom operators found ways to monetize that communication and add value to their businesses as a result.

With this context, one can understand that regardless of whether 5G is a technological revolution or not, what is certain is that we are on a path towards communicating in richer and richer ways through our telecom networks. Wherein 5G will be the next step towards enabling humans to truly move into that last level of the human communication hierarchy — sharing truly immersive and emotional connections. We are certain that, once again, telecom operators will find ways to monetize that communication and add value to their businesses as a result.

You don't need to squint to see it

Indeed, the move towards monetizing shared experiences and feelings through 5G is already underway. Viewers of the most recent Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang will certainly have enjoyed the extraordinarily rich experience that came from the multitude of cameras worn by competitors and participants. Powered by a test 5G network being showcased by KT Corp, this was not just about providing yet another camera angle; this was about allowing viewers to actually experience — in real time and high definition — exactly what the athletes themselves experience. What was interesting was that, all of a sudden, the verbal descriptions and event commentators that we had been so dependent on for decades didn't seem to matter as much; they could never explain in words what viewers were able to experience themselves.

For tech enthusiasts, the spectacle of the show in Pyeongchang may have been slightly overshadowed by the spectacle of the technology being demonstrated. How would this change the way people consume content in the future? What will be the next big consumer of the bandwidth that we're unlocking? How will viewers be 'participating' in the big sporting events of the 2020's? Will telecom operators be able to bring us even closer to the action and immerse us even deeper into the experience and the content?

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The excerpt was taken from the publication entitled Why 4G thinking won't work in a 5G world.

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