SETTING THE SCENE FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE PACIFIC

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2 Uptake

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Traditional communic-ation techniques

Photo: Giragir Mahana beating the biggest of his three garamuts. Source: A H A Watson.

In some locations in the Pacific, traditional communication techniques continue to be used daily, such as the use of slit-drums to convey messages to surrounding villages, individual family members and specific clans on Karkar Island in Papua New Guinea (Watson, 2011, pp. 98-101; Watson & Duffield, 2016, pp. 276-77).

» Reference: Watson, A. H. A. (2011). The mobile phone: The new communication drum of Papua New Guinea [Unpublished thesis]. Queensland University of Technology.

» Reference: Watson, A. H. A. & Duffield, L. R. (2016). From garamut to mobile phone: Communication change in rural Papua New Guinea. *Mobile Media and Communication*, 4(2), 270-87. doi.org/10.1177/2050157915622658

Access

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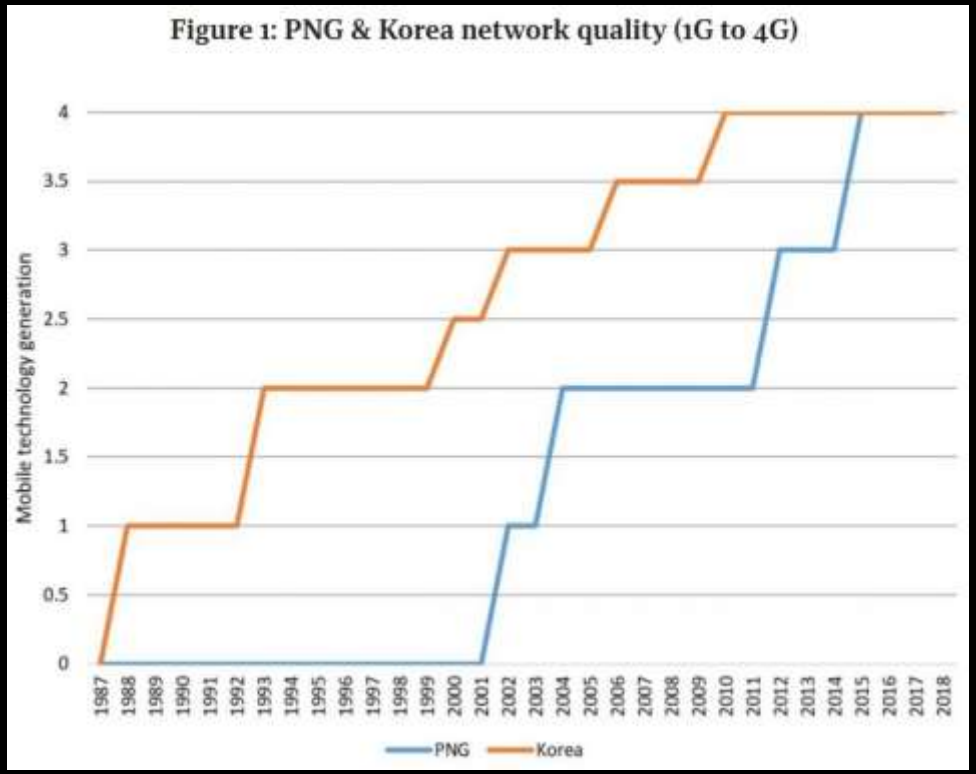


Source: Watson, A. H. A., & Park, K. R. (2019, 13 August). The digital divide between and within countries. https://devpolicy.org/the-digital-divide-between-and-within-countries-20190813/

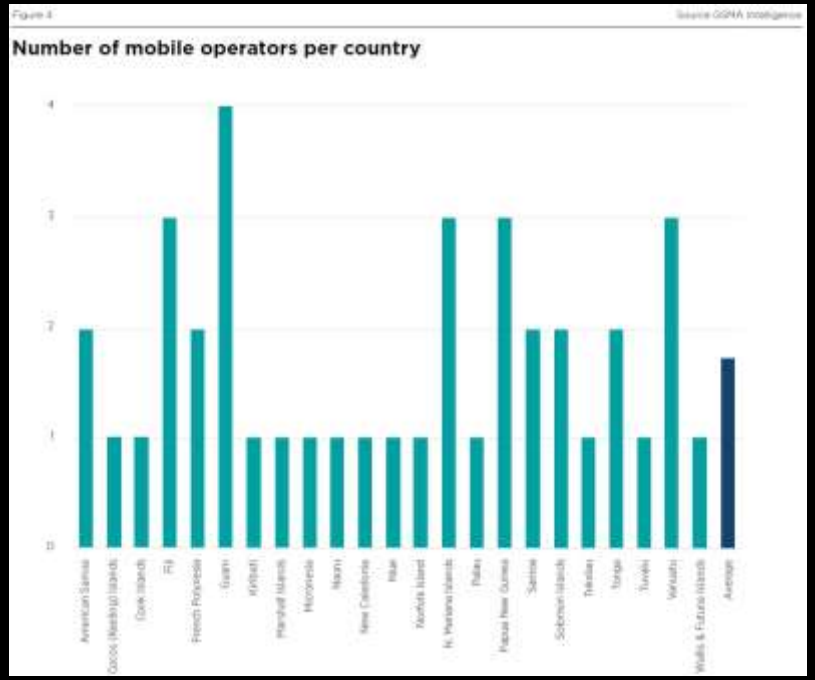
Access

Improvements in terms of access were catalysed by the introduction of competition. For instance, in Samoa (Meese & Chan Mow 2016) and Papua New Guinea (Watson, 2011, pp. 46-52; see also Watson & Sakai 2024).

- Reference: Meese, J., & Chan Mow, I. (2016). The regulatory jewel of the South Pacific: Samoa's decade of telecommunications reform. Mobile Media & Communication, 4(3), 295-309. doi:10.1177/2050157916629707
- Reference: Watson, A. H. A. (2011). The mobile phone: The new communication drum of Papua New Guinea [Unpublished thesis]. Queensland University of Technology.
- Reference: Watson, A. H. A., & Sakai, M. (2024, 20 March). Mobile internet prices falling in Papua New Guinea. https://devpolicy.org/mobile-internet-prices-falling-in-papua-new-guinea-20240320/

Access

However, there are still numerous countries with monopolies.



Source: GSMA (2019). The mobile economy: Pacific Islands. London, United Kingdom: https://www.gsma.com/solutions-and-impact/connectivity-for-good/mobile-economy/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/GSMA_MobileEconomy2020_Pacific_Islands.pdf

Access

It remains the case that “access to, and uptake of, telecommunications varies between Pacific Island nations” (Watson & Chan Mow, 2023, p. 1).

» Reference: Watson, A. H. A., & Chan Mow, I. (2023). Telecommunications in the Pacific Islands region. Canberra, Australia: https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/publication/21532/telecommunications-pacific-islands-region

Access

Guam and Northern Mariana Islands have commenced offering fifth-generation (5G) network coverage (GSMA, 2023) “while some populations in the Pacific remain without any network coverage” (Watson & Chan Mow, 2023, p. 2).

- Reference: GSMA (2023). The mobile economy: Pacific Islands. London, United Kingdom: https://www.gsma.com/mobileeconomy/pacific-islands/
- Reference: Watson, A. H. A., & Chan Mow, I. (2023). Telecommunications in the Pacific Islands region. Canberra, Australia: https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/publication/21532/telecommunications-pacific-islands-region

Access

Internet prices vary between countries (UN ESCAP, 2020).

» Reference: UN ESCAP. (2020). Broadband connectivity in Pacific Islands countries. Bangkok, Thailand: https://www.unescap.org/resources/ap-policy-brief-broadband-connectivity-pacific-islands-countries

Access

Internet speeds vary between countries (Watson & Fox, 2021).

» Reference: Watson, A. H. A., & Fox, R. (2021). Digital divide: Mobile internet speeds in the Pacific. Pacific Journalism Review: Te Koakoa, 27(1 & 2), 215-231. https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v27i1and2.1168

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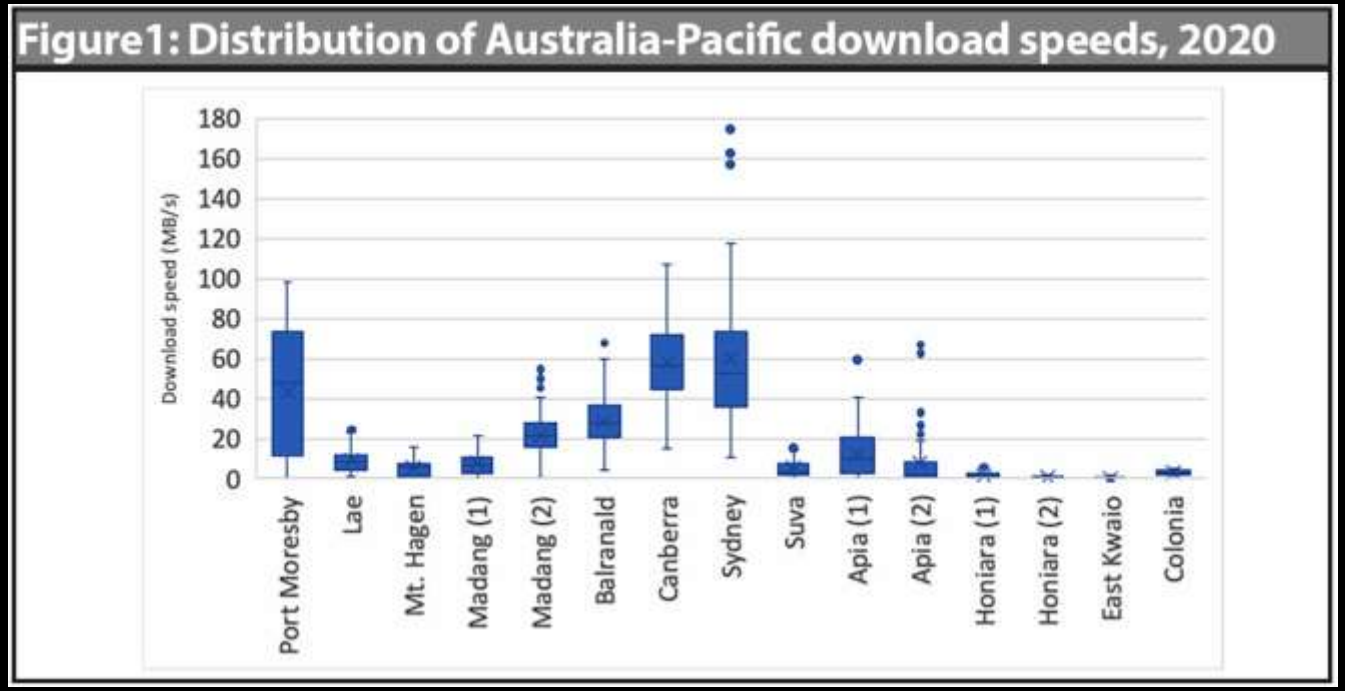

» Reference: Watson, A. H. A., & Fox, R. (2021). Digital divide: Mobile internet speeds in the Pacific. Pacific Journalism Review: Te Koakoa, 27(1 & 2), 215-231. https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v27i1and2.1168

Access

The number of undersea internet cables per country differs (Watson, 2022).

» Reference: Watson, A. H. A. (2022). The Limited Communication Cables for Pacific Island Countries. Asia-Pacific Journal of Ocean Law and Policy, 7, 151–155. doi:10.1163/24519391-07010012

Access

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TABLE 1 International undersea cables for Pacific Island countries

	Current situation	Situation including planned cables
PICs with no cable	Kiribati, Nauru, Norfolk Island, Pitcairn Islands, Tokelau, Tuvalu	Norfolk Island, Pitcairn Islands, Tuvalu
PICs with one cable	Cook Islands, Marshall Islands, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna	Cook Islands, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna
PICs with two cables	American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, FSM, French Polynesia, Papua New Guinea	American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, FSM, French Polynesia, Kiribati, New Caledonia, Palau, Papua New Guinea
PICs with more than two cables	Fiji, Guam, Hawai'i, Samoa	Fiji, Guam, Hawai'i, Samoa

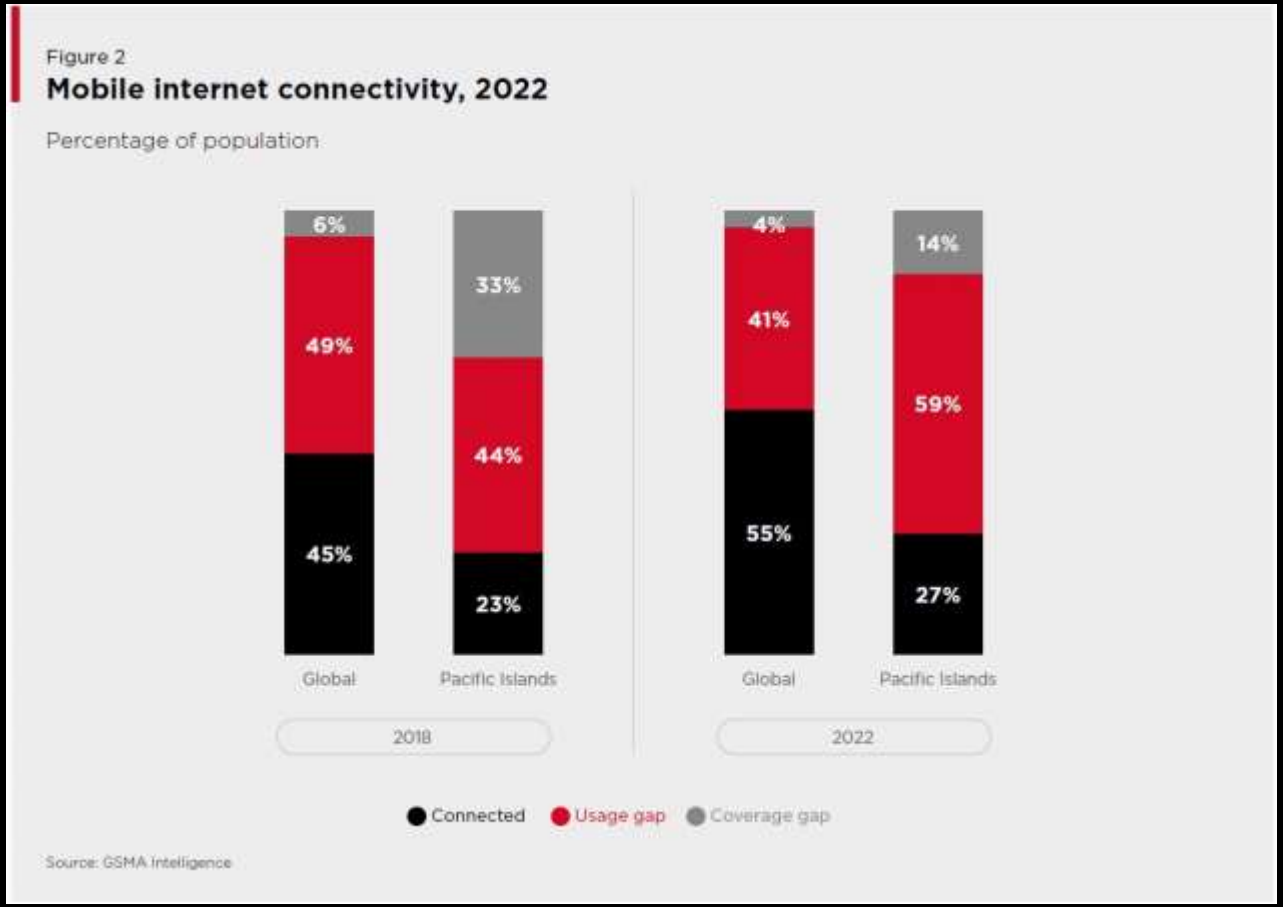
» Reference: Watson, A. H. A. (2022). The Limited Communication Cables for Pacific Island Countries. Asia-Pacific Journal of Ocean Law and Policy, 7, 151–155. doi:10.1163/24519391-07010012

Uptake

In the Pacific region, “uptake of mobile telephones varies greatly, from less than 30 per cent of the population in Federated States of Micronesia and Tuvalu to more than 70 per cent in American Samoa, Fiji, Guam, Niue and Palau” (Watson & Chan Mow, 2023, p. 2).

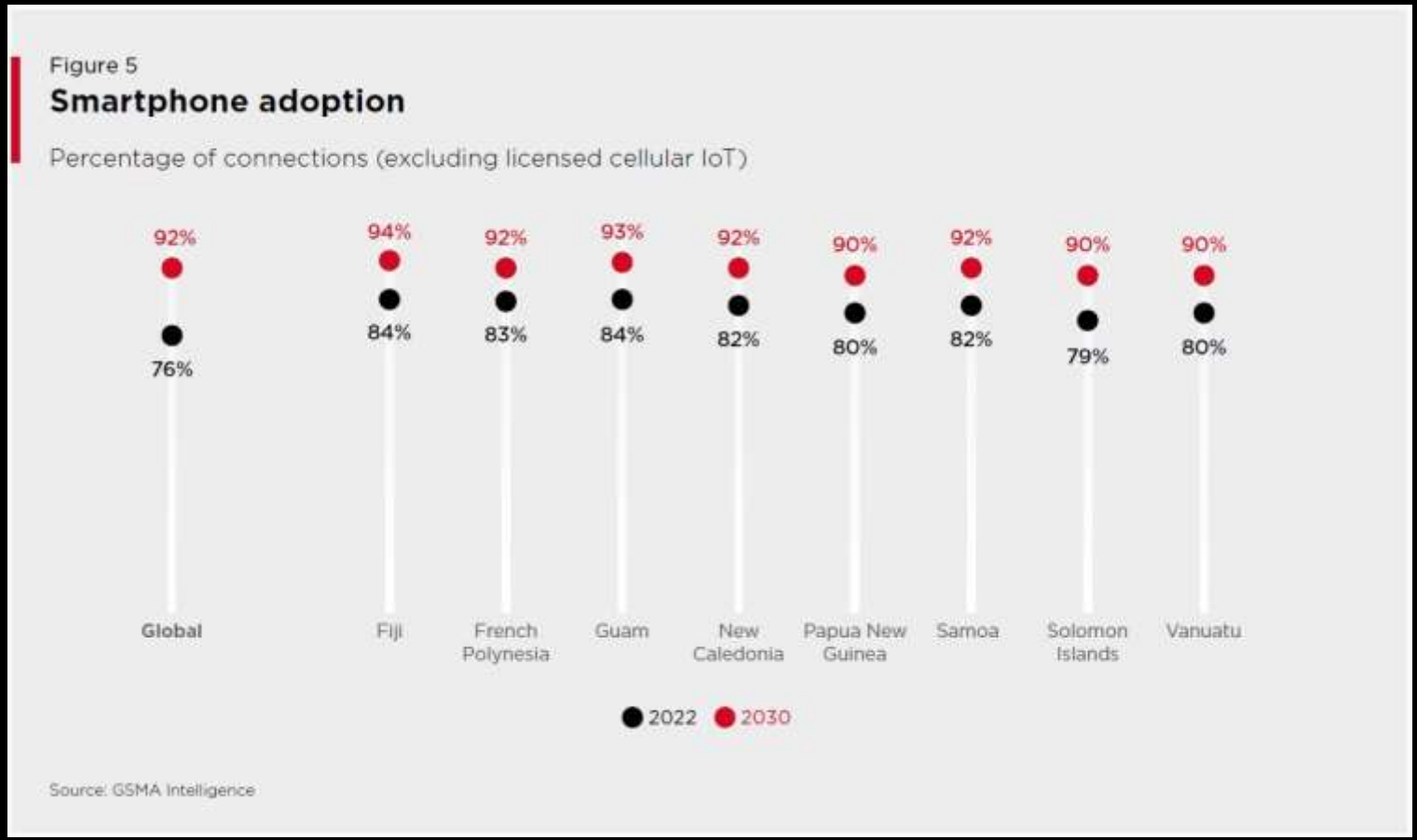
» Reference: Watson, A. H. A., & Chan Mow, I. (2023). Telecommunications in the Pacific Islands region. Canberra, Australia: https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/publication/21532/telecommunications-pacific-islands-region

Uptake



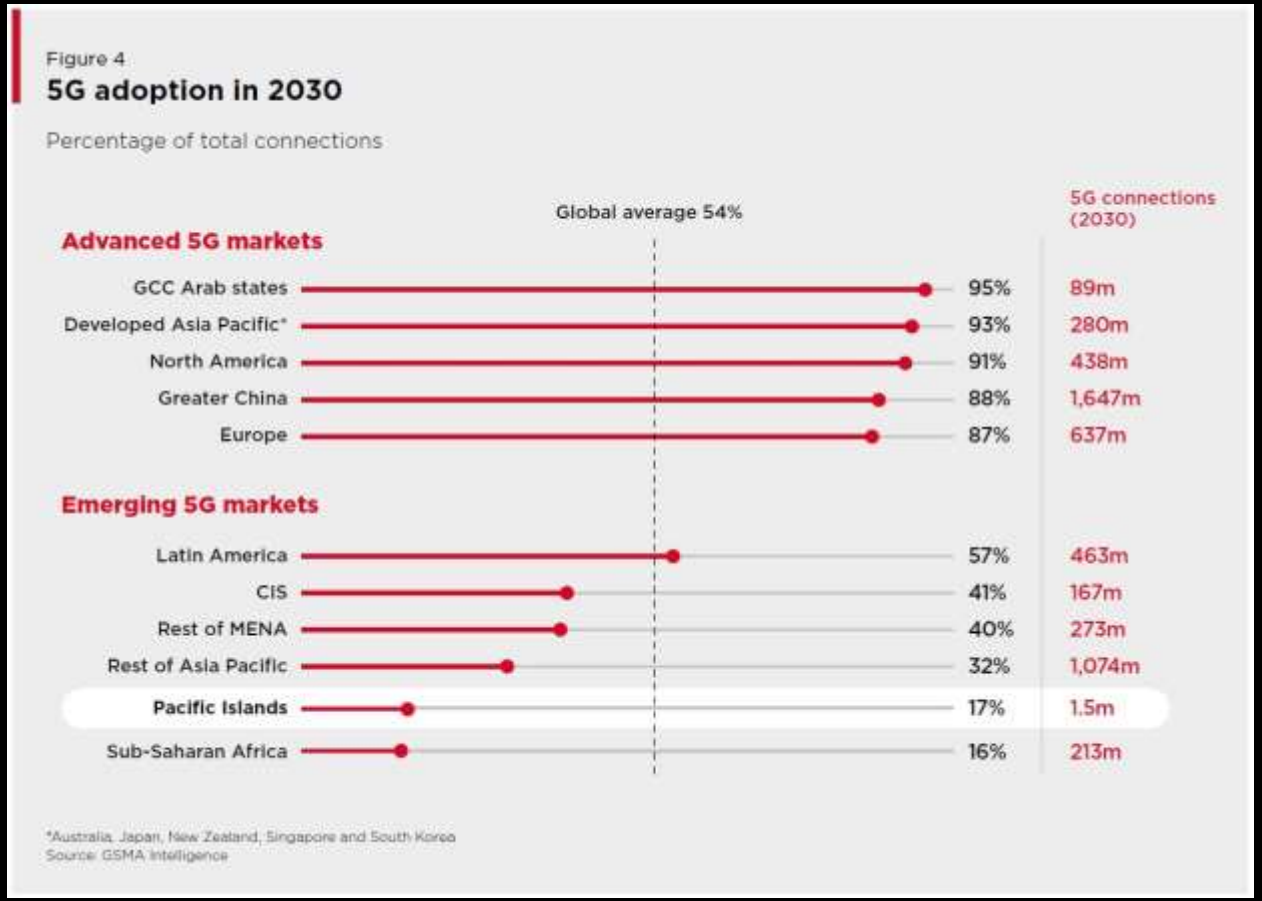
Source: GSMA (2023). The mobile economy: Pacific Islands. London, United Kingdom: https://www.gsma.com/mobileeconomy/pacific-islands/

Uptake



Source: GSMA (2023). The mobile economy: Pacific Islands. London, United Kingdom: https://www.gsma.com/mobileeconomy/pacific-islands/

Uptake



Source: GSMA (2023). The mobile economy: Pacific Islands. London, United Kingdom: https://www.gsma.com/mobileeconomy/pacific-islands/

Challenges

"Three main challenges for digital connectivity in the Pacific Islands region are cyberattacks, natural disasters, and cable protection" (Watson & Chan Mow, 2023, p. 1).

» Reference: Watson, A. H. A., & Chan Mow, I. (2023). Telecommunications in the Pacific Islands region. Canberra, Australia: https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/publication/21532/telecommunications-pacific-islands-region

Efforts aimed at ubiquity

Efforts are being made to strive for ubiquity of access (PIF, 2022; PITA, 2023; Watson & Chan Mow, 2023).

- Reference: Pacific Islands Forum. (2022). 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. Suva, Fiji: https://www.forumsec.org/2050strategy/
- Reference: PITA. (2023, 2 June). Never a dull moment at PITA 27. Suva, Fiji: https://www.pita.org.fj/news/opportunities-never-dull-at-pita-27/
- Reference: Watson, A. H. A., & Chan Mow, I. (2023). Telecommunications in the Pacific Islands region. Canberra, Australia: https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/publication/21532/telecommunications-pacific-islands-region

Efforts aimed at ubiquity

A key aim of the Pacific Islands Forum's strategic plan is "to ensure a well-connected region" (PIF, 2022, p. 10).

» Reference: Pacific Islands Forum. (2022). 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. Suva, Fiji: https://www.forumsec.org/2050strategy/

Efforts aimed at ubiquity

At present, “more could be done to achieve ubiquity and resilience” (Watson & Chan Mow, 2023, p. 1).

» Reference: Watson, A. H. A., & Chan Mow, I. (2023). Telecommunications in the Pacific Islands region. Canberra, Australia: https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/publication/21532/telecommunications-pacific-islands-region

Efforts aimed at ubiquity

And what could be done with that?

THANK YOU

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