China driving development of 'Internet of Things'

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This picture taken on May 14, 2014 shows visitors playing with robots during the 17th China Beijing International High-Tech Expo (CHITEC) in Beijing

China is in the forefront of the development of an "Internet of Things", leading the way with the number of machine-to-machine connections and opening a new market for operators, a study showed Monday.

In the past four years the number of machine-to-machine connections

via mobile networks has grown by 35 percent annually and now accounts for more than 3 percent of total mobile connections, according to the GSMA association of mobile operators.

China has lead the way and accounts for 40 percent of the total mobile machine-to-machine connections, ahead of the United States and Japan combined.

Hooking up machines via mobile networks has already allowed for deployment of systems which allow for real-time monitoring of the location of buses, systems which direct drivers to free parking spots, and energy meters which report consumption automatically.

Regulatory uncertainty has held back the deployment of machine-to-machine applications in some countries, while in China support from the government which has made development an "Internet of Things" a top priority has led to the market quickly reaching a critical mass, said the GSMA.

"A rapidly developing and urbanising country, China is looking to use information and communications technologies to make its fast expanding cities smarter and enable a better quality of life for their citizens," said the report.

Chinese customers check out the computers at a Lenovo shop in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province on February 2, 2014

The Chinese government plans to invest more than $600 billion (440 billion euros) in the sector through 2020, it added.

China's three mobile operators see the rapid growth in the segment continuing and are looking at rolling out applications in the agriculture, healthcare, automotive, retail and consumer electronics sectors.

With growth in traditional voice subscribers having slowed in many developed countries, mobile operators have been looking at developing other services to expand their businesses.

This picture taken on May 14, 2014 shows a child looking at a domestic robot during the 17th China Beijing International High-Tech Expo (CHITEC) in Beijing

The GSMA study found that China's three mobile operators were using machine-to-machine technology to develop new revenue streams and move up the value chain as they are usually developing the systems in cooperation with clients instead of just selling connectivity.

The GSMA expects the number of mobile machine-to-machine connections to hit 242 million by the end of this year, which excludes consumer electronic devices using mobile networks like smartphones, tablets, and e-readers.

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