

Net expansion driven by mobile presents risks and opportunities for marketers

January 29 2015, by Chris Archer-Brown



Internet growth shows no sign of slowing. Credit: WeAreSocial.com

A study of 30 major world economies reveals how worldwide internet use continues to expand to more than three billion users, but it also demonstrates also how this growth is being driven by mobile phones and social media, particularly in the developing world.

The [report](#), from marketing agency We Are Social, contains fascinating details comparing countries worldwide. Canada, for example, has the world's highest penetration of [internet users](#) at 93%, while South Koreans enjoy the fastest internet speeds – which, at 25.3Mb/s, are almost six times the global average of 4.5Mb/s.

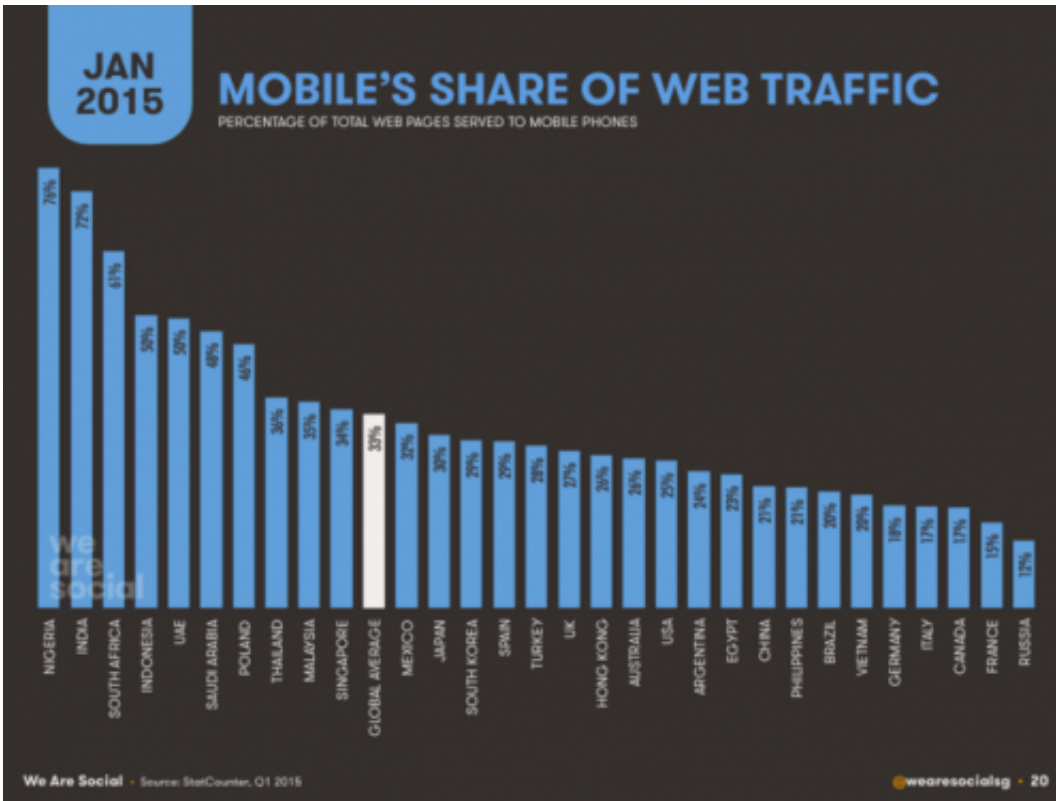
Many individuals own more than one device – total mobile subscriptions top seven billion, while the number of unique users is just over half that (3.65 billion). Of these, 39% of the [mobile phone](#) connections are classed as broadband, meaning 3G or 4G.

This growth means there are 185m additional mobile users compared to 2014. Given this trajectory it's easy to predict that quite soon there will be a mobile subscription for every man, woman and child on the planet.

Mobile in the driving seat

Globally, in the past five years alone the proportion of web pages served to [mobile devices](#) – phones and tablets rather than laptop or desktop computers – has grown from 0.7% to 33%. In the same period the data downloaded per user to mobile devices has risen from roughly 4MB to 900MB per month.

In India, more than 70% of web pages served are to mobile devices, perhaps explained by the roll-out of mobile rather than fixed-line networks across the vast country. This "leapfrogging" of a technological generation – from no phone services, skipping past landlines directly to mobile networks – is common across the [developing world](#). However, cultural and social reasons also play a part: take Hong Kong, which has mature fixed-line telephony but a mobile social networking rate twice the global average. Or Russia, where only 12% of [web pages](#) are served to mobile devices.



Developing countries eschew fixed line for mobile telecoms. Credit: WeAreSocial.com

But while [peaks](#) can be caused by new product releases – such as Apple's iPhone 6 causing [record-breaking profits](#) – mobile subscriptions generally follow a pattern of [maturity and decline](#). In the UK, mobile subscriptions are at 117% of population (74.8m) which is a decline of 9% since January 2014. However, our reliance on them has increased, where usage per device has risen by 20 minutes per day to 1hr 52m. One explanation is that the increasing availability of free Wi-Fi in cafes, shops, stations and other public places has allowed users to get by without a mobile data subscription for their second devices.

Risks and opportunities

Roughly a quarter of us regularly use mobile phones for watching videos, managing our money, or researching products we might purchase. And this presents a massive opportunity for marketers – when we are considering a purchase we might be open to an offer that can be used when in an actual shop. We might also have given access, through an app, to personal information. The fact that 18% of us bought something online from a mobile device in the past month suggests there's potential. But there are complications.

First, according to [recent research](#), 68% of smartphone use is at home – not, ironically, taking advantage of mobility when away from laptop or desktop computers, but even when in the same room. So while mobiles are key elements of how we research and shop for products, it is often as a "second screen" while we are at home watching television or using laptops, not in a shop preparing to purchase.



More people are online, more of the time, buying stuff. Credit:
WeAreSocial.com

Second, while [trust in mobile advertising](#) as a source of information has increased in recent years, in comparison with others – personal recommendations, for example – it still ranks among the lowest.

In the We Are Social report there's evidence that [mobile location-based search](#) was used by 15% of respondents in the past month. This is where the search engine algorithm includes location data in its response: we search for the latest film release and the times for our local cinemas are included in the result.

This marks the approach of [semantic search](#) which resolves the meaning of search requests, rather than simply keyword matching. Better semantic search boosts the usefulness of [mobile](#) devices even more, which firms can use with personalised offers to try and overcome their consumers' trust issues.

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