



AI summary

5G and Future Connectivity

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Participants

Dr Zhang Kai

Vice President, China Unicom (Singapore)
Operations Pte. Ltd.

David Soldani

SVP Innovation & Advanced Reseach, Rakuten
Mobile Inc.

Edwin Lin

Consulting Director, Omdia

Luke O'Kelly

VP Sales, Ceragon Networks

Summary

The session explored the current state of 5G, its proven use cases, and the industry's preparation for 6G. Panellists highlighted two key 5G use cases: enhanced mobile broadband services for consumers and applications in vertical industries like manufacturing and public safety. While consumer use cases were described as more mature, enterprise use cases were still evolving, with challenges in meeting performance requirements and achieving large-scale deployment. Dr Zhang Kai discussed the significance of 5G's consumer and enterprise models, while Dr David Soldani from Rakuten Mobile emphasised the cost-efficiency of 5G for rural connectivity and the need for deterministic performance to unlock enterprise adoption.



Monetisation challenges were a central theme, as panellists debated whether enterprises are ready to buy outcomes or still experimenting with 5G capabilities. Smart manufacturing, mission-critical communications, and logistics emerged as promising verticals. However, concerns were raised about the slow pace of enterprise monetisation compared to consumer connectivity. Luke O'Kelly from Ceragon Networks suggested that private 5G networks offer a viable path for monetisation, albeit with a need for scalable and standardised deployment models. Some panellists argued that network slicing and AI-driven automation could address monetisation gaps by enabling customised services for industries.

The discussion also touched on policy and infrastructure priorities for 5G and 6G. Participants called for predictable and affordable spectrum allocation, with a "use it or lose it" approach to prevent spectrum hoarding. They highlighted the importance of cross-border harmonisation, particularly for mid-frequency bands critical for 6G. Japan's investment in low-earth-orbit satellites and platinum band frequencies was cited as an example of innovative policy enabling full national coverage. However, there was criticism of governments overvaluing spectrum in auctions, which could stifle innovation and strain operators' financial models.

Looking towards 6G, panellists envisioned a shift from connecting people and devices to connecting intelligence. Dr David Soldani articulated a vision of 6G built around guaranteed outcomes, deterministic enterprise performance, and new service models like sensing-as-a-service. The need for programmable networks and open APIs was also emphasised to facilitate enterprise adoption. Another speaker underscored the significance of building an expansive ecosystem involving app developers, AI specialists, and other stakeholders to drive innovation and collaboration in 6G.



Operational efficiency and cost reduction strategies were discussed as immediate priorities for operators. Suggestions included infrastructure sharing, hybrid public-private networks, and advancements in AI-driven network maintenance to optimise performance. Panellists also recommended leveraging existing assets and exploring neutral-host models to reduce capital expenditure. They stressed that operators must balance delivering high-quality services with maintaining sustainable business models as they navigate 5G and prepare for 6G.

In closing, the panel identified critical success factors for the next three years: efficient spectrum utilisation, ecosystem alignment, and economic viability. They agreed that 6G must transcend faster speeds to deliver transformative experiences and sustainable business models. The session concluded with a call to action for the industry to focus on innovation, monetisation, and collaborative ecosystems to ensure the success of future connectivity technologies.

Takeaways

5G Monetisation and Enterprise Applications Are Key to Future Growth

The session highlighted that telecom operators globally are grappling with monetising 5G, particularly in enterprise applications like smart manufacturing, logistics, and mining. While consumer connectivity remains the primary revenue source, private 5G networks and vertical-specific solutions represent emerging opportunities, though challenges around scalability and regulatory compliance persist.

6G Will Shift Focus from Connectivity to Intelligence

Panellists agreed that 6G will not merely be an evolution of 5G but a paradigm shift towards connecting intelligence rather than just people and devices. The ecosystem will require integration of AI, sensing-as-a-service, and programmable networks to deliver guaranteed outcomes and enable advanced enterprise use cases.

Spectrum Allocation and Infrastructure Sharing Are Crucial to Address Economic Challenges

Discussions underscored the importance of predictable and affordable spectrum allocation, as well as infrastructure-sharing models, to manage the high capital expenditure associated with 5G and future 6G deployments. Cross-border harmonisation, utilisation of neutral hosts, and government policy support were identified as critical enablers for sustainable growth.

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