

Covid-19 is the push we need to embrace the Gig Economy

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Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the world.

Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the world. Economies have been put on hold, people have been forced into self-isolation while fighting the spread of the pandemic, and industries have come to a grinding halt.

South Africa is still trying to measure the impact that the pandemic has had on the economy, industry, and society. While this is taking place, the country is in a unique position to allow Covid-19 to be catalyst of the growth of the ICT industry.



Managing the spread patterns of the pandemic

While Government's efforts to manage the spread of Covid-19 is highly commendable, the effective use of digital technologies remains a big question mark.

"While testing for Covid-19 is gaining momentum, the use of technology to measure social distancing and manage spread patterns seems to be more tactical and case by case instead of strategic and comprehensive. Big Data and machine learning with artificial intelligence (AI) fabric have the possibility to help governments better manage spread patterns in an open economy, "said Mobax Group Chairperson Vuyani Jarana

Telecommunications data and Covid-19 clinical testing data ingested into the platforms will not only give better visibility in terms of spread patterns and geographic hotspots, but could give a Covid-19 risk score up to individual level. Most importantly, it can warn citizens who have been unknowingly exposed to Covid-19.

This would enable Government to encourage citizens to respond appropriately to Government's programme for managing Covid-19.

Opt-in Apps, and blue-tooth solutions remain subscale and will never cover mass adoption among of mobile users. South Africa still has a significant number of non-smart phone users, hence the need to ramp up the intervention by using Telco data at a mass scale.

"Countries such as South Korea and Taiwan are proven case studies of how nations can flatten the Covid-19 curve, and manage spread patterns using large scale telco data , Big Data and AI engines," said Jarana

Massive casualties

A global problem associated with Covid-19 has been unemployment.

South Africa was facing a major unemployment crisis before Covid-19, the game has completely changed now. A survey by Statistics South Africa points out that the South African workforce could decrease by at least 19% in the wake of Covid-19.

"South Africa is facing a major unemployment crisis that has been complicated by Covid-19. However, this does not necessarily need be the case. Before the pandemic, South Africa was contemplating how we were going to make the transition towards the Gig Economy. To do this, there needs to be a significant investment in the infrastructure backbone when it comes to fixed broadband. Small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) can add a lot of value to the industry if they are used as strategic partners when developing this infrastructure. This is something that Mobax is committed to," said Jarana.

If SMMEs are engaged as strategic partners, then South Africa can create jobs and lessen the blow of the crisis. One of the major challenges that businesses large or small will face during this period is liquidity. As they begin to restart their operations, working capital constraints are going to hinder progress and will determine those who will survive from those who will not. "Technology enabled supply chain financing linking suppliers and buyers through a trusted digital supply chain platform augmented by third party transaction financing is going to be even more important," said Jarana.

A new way of living

There is a significant demand for digital technologies as it will be the way of living in the future. As with any product cycle, there is a significant chasm between early innovators and adoption, and it is sometimes hard to find ways to cross this chasm. Covid-19 may be the push that South Africa needs.

In the past, digital technology was a luxury. It has now become a necessity with the delivery of certain essential services dependent on technology to be effective.

"There are two essential services where we are seeing the role of ICT taking centre stage. The first is in the delivery of healthcare services. Hyper connectivity and intelligent health analytics platforms will make it possible for healthcare delivery to move from doctors' rooms and hospitals to in home delivery. We need reforms in South Africa's healthcare systems and protocols enable the country's healthcare systems to exploit digital technologies to improve health outcomes. It was encouraging to see the Health Professionals Council of South Africa beginning to review the rules of doctor patient consultation to include digital health platform or telemedicine." said Jarana.

The second essential service where ICT is having a major influence is in education. "If we look at what is happening in education today, we are starting to see massive potential in flattening the cost of delivering education bridging the gap between the rich and the poor of our society, urban and rural. Broadband rollout, and access to devices by all children one tablet per child are critical to eliminate inequality and normalise access to education. The days of huge libraries with impressive book collections are numbered. Think of how Amazon changed the game with Kindle, this is the future of education. In addition, the jobs of the future will be vastly different to the jobs of today and we will see robotics and coding being taught as school subjects," said Jarana.

Major investment

The major challenge with this adoption is that it will require a significant capital investment and a major policy change from government.

"Telecommunication providers are always looking to supply their shared services at the lowest possible cost. In the future, we will see the price of broadband, fibre and data services decrease significantly. For this to happen, there needs to be a collective effort from the whole ecosystem to facilitate this. Consolidation of the underlying telco infrastructure, provision of power as a service and infrastructure maintenance programmes has become both critical and urgent if telecommunication

companies must ensure affordable access to broadband services without shedding margins. This is where companies like Mobax come into play leveraging their scalable engineering capabilities to unlock infrastructure supply side economics for the telco sector thus creating a win-win situation," said Jarana.

Mobax is an African Company that is the leading supplier of Telco infrastructure and managed services to Africa's Telecommunications Industry.

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