

MWC Barcelona 2019 (formerly Mobile World Congress) turned out to be an exciting event. Under the event theme of “Intelligent Connectivity” MWC 2019 highlighted the intersection of “hyper-connectivity”, enabled by 5G and internet of things (IoT), and “intelligence”, delivered by artificial intelligence (AI) and big data. {K2Splitter} MWC Barcelona 2019 (formerly Mobile World Congress) turned out to be an exciting event. Under the event theme of “Intelligent Connectivity” MWC 2019 highlighted the intersection of “hyper-connectivity”, enabled by 5G and internet of things (IoT), and “intelligence”, delivered by artificial intelligence (AI) and big data. In addition to these core elements of intelligent connectivity, various sub-themes around content, mixed reality, blockchain, cognitive computing and futuristic connectivity were explored.

Several new real-time data processing tools with enhanced data visualisation capabilities were on display. These tools promised to improve the ways devices work, transform enterprises in healthcare, retail and entertainment, and enhance consumer experience. A broad trend at MWC 2019 was the focus on ubiquitous connectivity.

5G outshined all other themes as the industry got a glimpse of a 5G-enabled new world with 5G handsets, live demonstrations of telemonitored surgery, remote driving, and highly contextualised and personalised experiences. 5G was not discussed as a stand-alone technology, but in combination with AI and IoT.

In the device domain, MWC 2019 saw the launch of 5G chipsets and 5G-capable devices. The occasion marked a new, vibrant phase in smartphone innovation with foldable phones dominating the conversations at the event. In addition, some highly advanced commercial products were introduced at the event.

A look at some of the key themes of MWC 2019...

### **5G was the flavour of the week**

5G truly dominated the MWC 2019 agenda. The event showcased the progress made by different stakeholders in the 5G ecosystem over the past year. These included 3GPP, device manufacturers, infrastructure support providers and device chipset manufacturers.

At MWC 2019, several potential use cases for 5G were demonstrated, with the industry being most excited about robots, virtual reality, IoT and autonomous vehicles. Besides this, several 5G-capable handsets were announced, 5G base stations were showcased and intelligent network management solutions were demonstrated at the event.

### **AI and IoT**

At MWC 2019, AI went beyond the hype and emerged as an important tool to manage networks more efficiently and autonomously via machine learning. IoT was primarily discussed from a connected sensor perspective. Companies showcased IoT-enabled connected cars, which could become fully autonomous with cloud processing and extremely low-latency signals.

### **Industry 4.0**

MWC 2019 saw discussions around the digital transformation of organisations and how operator assets can be capitalised for the same. According to Naveed Sultan, global head of treasure and trade, Citibank, customer experience is the starting point of digital services, including Industry 4.0 solutions. Throwing light on the challenges of digitalisation, he stated that digital disruption poses an existential threat to some companies. “While traditional companies have to change the old processes to use data, new challengers can build a whole company based on the latest technology,” he said.

### **Blockchain**

MWC 2019 saw some realistic use cases for blockchain, particularly in three areas – supply chain, settlements and data privacy, though these are still in the proof-of-concept phase. Accenture presented blockchain use cases in the supply chain while Clear showcased how to conduct settlement and clearing transactions using high performance blockchain solutions.

### **The Edge**

Edge computing also found a significant mention at MWC Barcelona 2019. While some telcos are looking to build a 5G environment based on the concept of speed, others are focusing on latency related use cases. Here, Edge will play a critical role. Operators across the world are building partnerships and making investments to turn these services into reality. Satya Nadella, CEO, Microsoft, pointed to Edge as one of the most powerful trends over the next couple of years. Joining him was OpenSignal's Ian Fogg who emphasised the importance of low latency in enhancing the gaming experience for users. There can be several other use cases of low latency in the financial sector, smart factories, air traffic control, transport systems, etc.

### Extended reality

At MWC 2019, artificial reality and augmented reality were widely discussed. The launch of Microsoft's HoloLens 2 headset was a key highlight. The second generation headset, HoloLens 2, is a significantly improved version of the previous generation AR headset. The new device is lighter, comfortable to wear, and comes with better battery life. Most importantly, it offers advanced controls and eye tracking.

### Other key themes

There was also some noise around cloud gaming, open and virtual radio access networks, private long term evolution networks and Massive MIMO (multiple input multiple output). Notably, Wi-Fi 6 attracted significant attention, with Cisco CEO lending its weight to the topic. Also, there were discussions around how Wi-Fi and 5G might coexist. "Wi-Fi 6 and 5G are made to work together," Cisco's Chuck Robbins had stated during his keynote at MWC.

### Conclusion

MWC 2019 witnessed a confluence of technologies. It raised the industry's hopes with promising ways to connect more number and more types of devices. 5G, AI and IoT emerged as a new and powerful trinity.

Despite the upbeat tone of the show, there was a fair amount of scepticism regarding the business case and financial feasibility around 5G in the near term. Investments in 5G, AI and IoT are being viewed with great caution by most businesses given the uncertainty around returns. As for 5G handsets, the pricing would determine its uptake among customers. Currently, 5G use cases are more focused on B2B and industrial applications. However, limited or no network coverage for 5G in the near term would hamper the realisation of these use cases. By early 2020, 5G adoption will kick off globally.

The industry has been working to deliver on the promise of a connected society, modelled on superfast 5G networks. With all the excitement and optimism that MWC 2019 has injected into the global telecom industry, it would be interesting to see how and when this technological vision will become a reality.

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