

# Free Basics in Pakistan

Researchers: Faisal Kapadia and Mahnoor Jalil

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*This case study was conducted as part of a research project by Global Voices, an international citizen media organization. The findings described here, along with findings from five other countries and can be found in our final report, "Free Basics in Real Life: Six Case Studies on Facebook's Internet "On Ramp" Initiative from Africa, Asia and Latin America." Read the final report at <https://advox.globalvoices.org/2017/07/27/can-facebook-connect-the-next-billion>.*

*Additional screenshots may be found at:*

*<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B4CiTwxNUEN3aXppM3p4ZW9UMUk>*

## Overview

Free Basics entered the Pakistani market in 2015, under an agreement with Telenor Pakistan (locally owned and operated). It launched with Zong Telecom (owned by China Mobile) in December 2015.

ITU data shows that the percentage of individuals using the Internet climbed from 10.9% in 2013 to 16.6% in 2015. The number of mobile subscriptions per 100 inhabitants has hovered around 70% since 2013.

In Pakistan, the most dominant telecommunication methods include SMS, fixed-line telephony and internet-based messaging apps, with WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and Viber being the most popular. Most people get their news through TV and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and online news channels. WhatsApp and Facebook may be most prominent because they have been adding more features to the apps, making them more of a fun experience.

In 2015, Telenor captured 27% of the market and Zong held 20%.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.techjuice.pk/pakistan-mobile-network-industry/>



*Telenor version of Free Basics.*

### How to buy a Free Basics plan

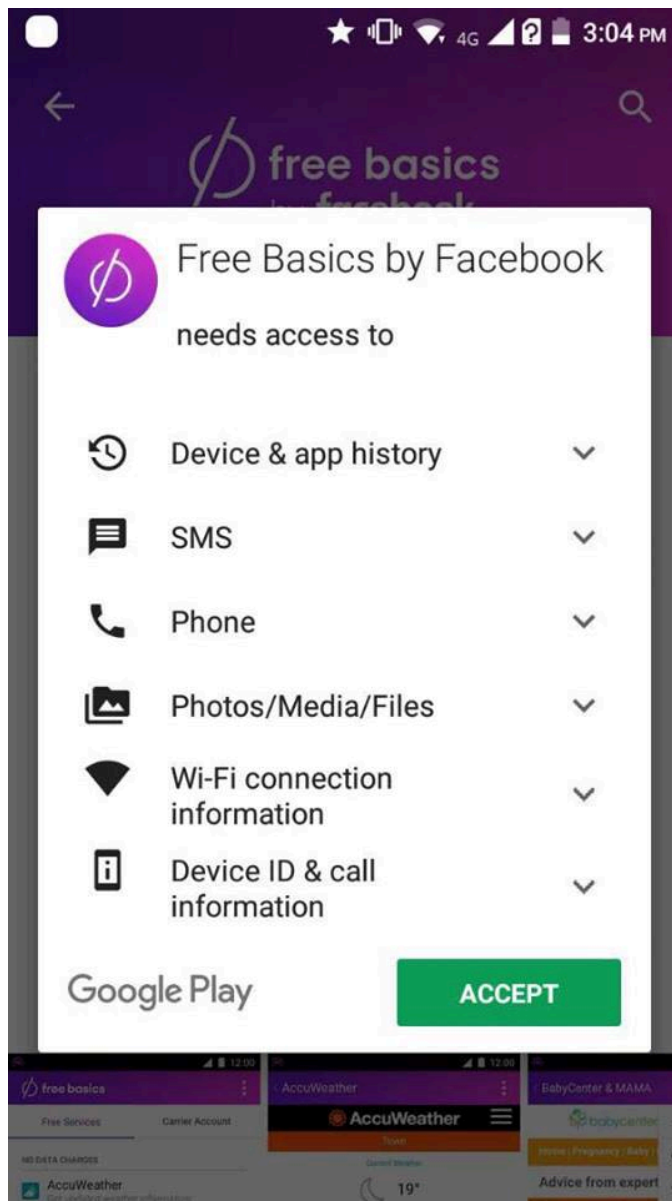
To use Free Basics, a mobile user needs a basic Android smartphone. There is no additional cost to the plan, apart from a baseline subscriber fee that covers talk and text services. These are most commonly obtained via a pre-paid SIM card, which can be purchased at the sales point offices of the telcos.

You must purchase the relevant SIM card from a Telenor or Zong telecommunications operator, at a cost of Rs. 200 (approximately USD \$1.95).

You must also verify your identity using your National Identity Card and get your SIM verified and registered under your legal name.

### How do you set up the app? What information or actions are required?

Once the app is on your phone, asks you to choose a language, either English or Urdu. The app requests your location. It also asks you to provide it with access to device & app history, SMS, phone, photos/media/files, Wi-Fi connection information, device ID & call information.



Screenshot of download page from Google Play Store.

The app does not require you to create a Facebook account, but it does encourage you to do so, or to login with your existing account. You can access other features of the app without using Facebook.

Upon installation, the app asks users to agree to the Terms of Use. These are described in greater detail in a subsequent section.

### **Connection, accessibility and language**

For an experienced Android user, the app is relatively easy to use when the connection is strong. The interface is not overly technical and the free service offerings are presented in a clear manner.

I encountered connectivity issues while navigating the terms of use. The application lost its connection and asked me to turn on wifi or mobile data to continue. It then allows the user to accept the permissions and gives the user the choice of what to see and what not to see (in terms of content which is allowed onto it).



*Free Services page, including Urdu language services.*

The app can be used in either English or Urdu, which is a national language of Pakistan, and it is not just written but spoken and understood widely. However, the user will have to be literate in Urdu and will need to read it in the app, which uses an almost indecipherable font for Urdu script.

The app offers some features for end-users with disabilities. It offers assistive touch -- the phone vibrates when a person touches the screen, and it also has the Google talk back option, if available on the phone. These features were added some months after the launch of Free Basics in Pakistan.

## Terms of Use

The terms of use pop up when you open the app. The terms are long and detailed and would be tough for the first time user. It is only presented to view when the app is launched in the phone. You are not asked to agree to a privacy policy. The app is very easy to use and simple to understand if you follow the instructions.

Once you agree to the Terms & Conditions of the app it remains available in the menu. It also allows you to highlight the text. The terms are written only in English. It asks for whether you have agreed to the Terms & Conditions and privacy policy of Facebook. Further, it asks you to make a Facebook account with your info if you don't have one.

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