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Global shipments of smartphones are expected to reach a little over 1.49 billion units this year, up from 1.47 billion in 2017 — a growth of 1.4 per cent, a report showed on Sunday.

The smartphone shipment numbers are likely to rise at a faster clip from 2019 onwards once the real-world 5G network is introduced, according to an industry consulting firm Strategy Analytics (SA), Yonhap news agency reported.

The poor showing is a repeat of numbers for 2016 and 2017 when annual growth was tallied at 1.8 per cent and 1.2 per cent, respectively.

This is in stark contrast to double digit growth posted in the years after 2007, when Apple first launched its iPhone.

The global research and consulting firm said the drop in shipments and sales is mainly due to overall improvements in the capabilities of the latest handsets and a longer replacement cycle for recent phones.

Greater smartphone penetration across the globe and higher unit cost also may be having effect on consumer demand, it said.

SA, however, predicted that, starting in 2019, there may be an upshift in demand for smartphones as the much quicker and more stable 5G networks come online, requiring new mobile devices to fully take advantage of the new developments.

It said that in 2019, the worldwide market for smartphones may expand 3.5 per cent on-year followed by 4.4 per cent growth in 2020 and 4.9 per cent in 2021.

By 2023, it said growth will be around 4.1 per cent, with companies churning out 1.86 billion phones per year.

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