

The State of SMS in Kenya 2026

Volumes, costs and rules for business messaging — based on Communications Authority of Kenya data to 30 June 2026

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By the **Connect Media Editorial Team** · Published 30 September 2026 · Data to 30 June 2026 · [Methodology](#) · [Sources](#)

Kenyans send fewer text messages per person every quarter, yet the country still moved **57.1 billion SMS** in the year to June 2026, almost exactly as many as the year before. This report sets out what the regulator's figures actually show, why SMS keeps its place in business communication even as chat apps take over personal conversations, what it costs, and what businesses need to do to use it well and within the law.

Key findings

57.1 bn

SMS sent in Kenya in FY 2025/26, down only 0.3% on the previous year

53.5

SMS per subscription per month (Apr–Jun 2026), down from 61.1 six months earlier

88.0 m

active mobile subscriptions at 30 June 2026 — a 165% penetration rate

93.07%

Safaricom's share of domestic SMS traffic (Apr–Jun 2026); Airtel carried about 6.9%

27.4 m

feature phones on Kenyan networks — about a third of all connected devices

30×+

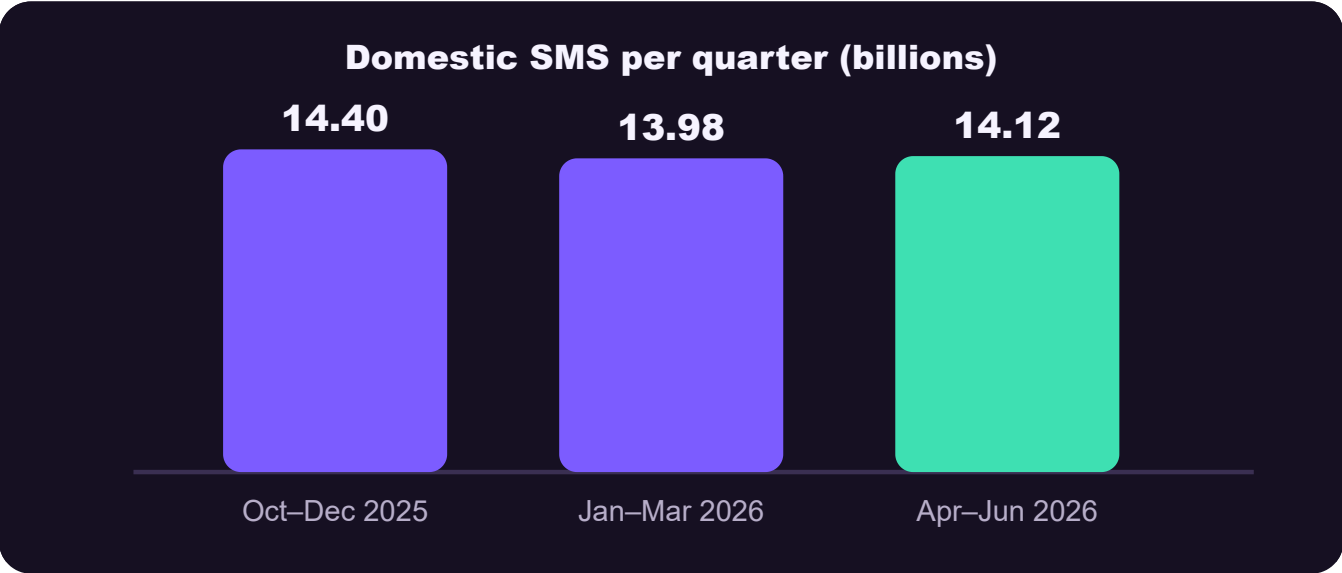
price gap between a global API's rate to Kenya (USD 0.3134) and local bulk SMS rates (about KES 1)

1. SMS volumes: flat in total, falling per person

The Communications Authority of Kenya (CA) publishes quarterly sector statistics based on operators' returns. Kenya's financial year runs from July to June, so "Q4 FY 2025/26" means April to June 2026. The last three quarters show total SMS traffic holding at around 14 billion messages a quarter:

Quarter	Domestic SMS	SMS per subscription per month	Active mobile subscriptions
Oct–Dec 2025 (Q2 FY 2025/26)	14.4 bn	61.1	78.4 m
Jan–Mar 2026 (Q3 FY 2025/26)	13.98 bn	55.4	—
Apr–Jun 2026 (Q4 FY 2025/26)	14.12 bn	53.5	88.0 m
Full year FY 2025/26	57.1 bn (–0.3%)	—	+4.6% year on year

Source: Communications Authority of Kenya, Sector Statistics Reports Q2, Q3 and Q4 FY 2025/26 [1][2][3]. Q4 total computed from CA Table 2 (14,116,643,568 messages).



Two trends are pulling in opposite directions. Each subscription sends fewer messages: CA attributes the decline to growing use of internet-based messaging such as WhatsApp and Telegram [1][3]. At the same time the number of active subscriptions keeps rising, and total traffic barely moves. In the most recent quarter it actually rose slightly, from 13.98 billion to 14.12 billion messages.

What the data does not show. CA reports total SMS traffic; it does not separate person-to-person (P2P) messages from application-to-person (A2P) messages such as bank alerts, M-Pesa confirmations, one-time passwords and bulk SMS. Claims that A2P traffic is "booming" cannot be proven from public data. What can be said is that total volume has held steady while per-person texting has fallen, which is consistent with business and system-generated messages making up a growing share of traffic.

2. Who carries Kenya's SMS traffic

Operator	Share of domestic SMS, Oct–Dec 2025	Share of domestic SMS, Apr–Jun 2025
Safaricom PLC	91.55%	91.55%
Airtel Networks Kenya	8.41%	8.41%
Telkom Kenya, Finserve (Equitel), Jamii Telecommunications	<0.1%	<0.1%

Sources: CA Sector Statistics Reports [1][3]; The Star and Techweez reporting of CA data [5][6].

Safaricom's share of SMS traffic is far larger than its share of subscriptions. The most likely explanation is M-Pesa: Safaricom holds 88.8% of Kenya's 54.0 million mobile money subscriptions [3], and mobile money transactions generate confirmation messages. For businesses this has a practical consequence: any bulk SMS route must deliver reliably on Safaricom first, while still reaching Airtel and Telkom customers.

3. Why SMS still reaches people other channels miss

At the end of June 2026, 79.7 million devices were connected to Kenyan mobile networks. Of these, **52.3 million were smartphones and 27.4 million were feature phones** [3]. Feature phones cannot run WhatsApp or most apps, but every one of them can receive an SMS. Mobile data subscriptions stood at 64.3 million against 88.0 million mobile subscriptions [3], so a large group of lines has no data plan at any given time.

That is the core reason SMS remains the default for messages that must arrive: payment confirmations, one-time passwords, fee and loan reminders, appointment reminders and emergency notices. It needs no app, no data bundle and no internet connection on the customer's side.

4. What SMS costs in Kenya

Channel	Typical price per SMS	Notes
Consumer pay-as-you-go SMS (market average)	KES 1.18	CA average PAYG tariff across operators [3]
Local bulk SMS providers	about KES 0.25 – 1.20	Published rates, varying with volume, sender ID and route [7][8]
Global CPaaS (Twilio, outbound to Kenya)	USD 0.3134 ($\approx$ KES 40)	Twilio list price, international numbers [9]; converted at about KES 129 per USD

Global API platforms are convenient for companies already using them elsewhere, but for Kenyan traffic they cost more than thirty times as much per message than local aggregators with direct operator connections, and they bill in dollars. For a business sending 20,000 reminders a month, that is the difference between roughly KES 20,000 and KES 800,000.

Operators' own SMS revenue is under pressure: The Star, analysing CA data, estimated that operators lost about KES 354 million in messaging revenue in the October–December 2025 quarter alone as volumes dipped [10].

5. How Kenyan organisations use SMS

SACCOs and microfinance

Deposit confirmations, share and loan balances, loan application and disbursement alerts, and repayment reminders a few days before the due date. Reminders are one of the cheapest tools a SACCO has for keeping repayments on track.

Schools and colleges

Fee balances and payment receipts, closing and opening dates, exam results notices and urgent announcements to parents and guardians, many of whom use basic phones.

Clinics and hospitals

Appointment reminders and "results ready" notices. A Cochrane systematic review found that mobile phone text-message reminders improve attendance at healthcare appointments compared with no reminder [11].

Retail and e-commerce

Order confirmations, dispatch and delivery updates, pickup codes and time-limited offers to customers who have opted in.

Property management

Rent reminders and receipts, water and power interruption notices, security updates and residents' meeting notices.

6. The rules businesses must follow

- **Consent for marketing.** Under the Data Protection Act, 2019, a phone number is personal data. Promotional messages need a lawful basis, which for direct marketing generally means the customer's consent, and every marketing message should offer a simple way to opt out [12]. The Office of the Data Protection Commissioner (ODPC) enforces the Act.
- **Registered sender IDs.** Branded sender names (such as MYSCHOOL) are registered with the mobile networks before use, which helps recipients trust messages and reduces impersonation.
- **Sending hours.** Operators and aggregators restrict promotional sends to daytime hours; check your provider's current policy before scheduling campaigns.
- **Tax invoices are separate.** KRA's eTIMS system governs how businesses issue electronic tax invoices. It does not require invoices to be delivered by SMS; businesses may choose to text customers a receipt or invoice link, but that is a service choice, not an eTIMS requirement.

7. Outlook

These are Connect Media's interpretations of the trends above, not findings from the data:

- **Per-person texting will keep falling** as smartphone ownership grows and feature phone numbers decline [3].
- **Total SMS volume is likely to stay broadly stable** for as long as payments, banking, SACCOs, schools and health services depend on a channel that reaches every phone.
- **More businesses will combine channels:** SMS for messages that must arrive, and WhatsApp or other rich channels where customers are online and have opted in.
- **Consent and sender ID enforcement will tighten**, favouring senders with clean, opted-in lists and registered brands.

Methodology

- **Traffic, subscription, device and market-share figures** are taken from the Communications Authority of Kenya's Sector Statistics Reports for Q2, Q3 and Q4 of FY 2025/26, which compile operators' quarterly returns [1][2][3]. Where CA gives raw counts (for example the April–June 2026 SMS total), we quote them directly; percentages are CA's own or computed from CA tables and rounded.
- **Market-share figures for October–December 2025** are as reported by CA and quoted in Techweez and The Star [5][6][10].
- **Prices** were checked on providers' public websites on 29–30 September 2026 and reflect list prices before discounts or tax [7][8][9]. The USD–KES conversion uses an approximate rate of KES 129 per USD.
- **Limitations.** Public data does not split person-to-person from business (A2P) SMS, or promotional from transactional traffic, so statements about business messaging are interpretations rather than measurements. This edition does not include Connect Media platform data.
- **Corrections.** If you spot an error, email info@connectmedia.co.ke and we will correct it and note the change here.

Sources

1. Communications Authority of Kenya, *Sector Statistics Report Q2 FY 2025/2026* (Oct–Dec 2025). ca.go.ke

2. Communications Authority of Kenya, *Sector Statistics Report Q3 FY 2025/2026* (Jan–Mar 2026). ca.go.ke
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11. Gurol-Urganci I, de Jongh T, Vodopivec-Jamsek V, Atun R, Car J. "Mobile phone messaging reminders for attendance at healthcare appointments." *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2013, Issue 12. doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD007458.pub3
12. Republic of Kenya, *Data Protection Act, 2019*, and Connect Media's guide to SMS marketing under the Act. connectmedia.co.ke

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For interviews or the underlying tables, email info@connectmedia.co.ke.

About Connect Media

This report was prepared by the Connect Media Editorial Team. Connect Media is a Nairobi-based provider of bulk SMS, USSD, IVR and messaging APIs serving Kenyan businesses, schools, SACCOs and NGOs.

Connect Media delivers SMS to Safaricom, Airtel and Telkom networks with branded sender IDs, delivery reports, no minimum top-up and credit that never expires, plus [SDKs for PHP, Python and Node.js](#). Learn more about [bulk SMS](#) or [the SMS API](#).