

Telecommunication Services

India

Sector View: Attractive NIFTY-50: 24,427 August 29, 2025

Subtly raising the floor

R-Jio and Bharti recently discontinued their entry-level recharge plans, nudging subscribers to upgrade to premium plans. While we do not expect this step to result in a substantial ARPU hike per se, we see this channel strategy as a step in the direction of premiumization and data monetization. The market construct appears favorable to monetize the explosion in data consumption, and we believe such non-tariff measures would play a crucial role in aiding the ARPU uptrend going forward. We estimate ~11% ARPU CAGR over FY2025-28E, with the next hike in 4QFY26E.

R-Jio/Bharti discontinue entry-level plans

R-Jio discontinued its entry-level plan of Rs249 for 1 GB/day with a 28-day validity. The existing plan for 1.5 GB/day with a 28-day validity at Rs299 now becomes the entry-level plan, implying 20% higher price for 0.5 GB/day extra data. Bharti has also discontinued its entry-level Rs249 plan for 1 GB/day with a 22-day validity, making the existing Rs299 plan (28 days, 1 GB/day) entry-level, with 3% higher price. Although the price hike for the entry-level R-Jio plan is substantial, we do not expect a meaningful spike in APRU per se from these changes, given it is not the most popular plan. Leakages from recharge delays further dilute any upside.

Premiumization and data monetization to aid in ARPU growth

Data consumption has exploded in the Indian market, exhibiting 16%/53% CAGR in the past 5/10 years. Telcos are yet to monetize this, as data ARPU has seen a mere 1% CAGR in the past five years (-29% CAGR in the past 10 years). Management commentary across telcos highlights that data monetization has become an immediate strategic priority. Going forward, we expect the ARPU uptrend to come from a combination of (1) headline tariff hikes, (2) data monetization and (3) premiumization, with the industry gradually moving toward a multi-tier tariff construct. We expect constant nudges to customers from telcos toward bulk data plans, plans with OTT bundles and other custom channel strategies to subtly aid ARPUs between two headline tariff hikes.

ARPU growth to come from a combination of tariff and non-tariff measures

The three private telcos have witnessed a 9-12% CAGR in ARPU in the past five years. This was aided by three rounds of tariff hikes in FY2019/22/25 of \sim 30-35%/20%/12-19%. We build in \sim 11% ARPU CAGR over FY2025-28E, with headline tariff hikes of \sim 12%/10% in 4QFY26/27. This implies two-thirds of ARPU growth from tariff measures and the balance from non-tariff measures (data monetization and premiumization) over FY2025-28E.

Market construct to remain favorable

We expect the market construct for the telecom operators to remain favorable over the medium term. Reduction in capex intensity and a gradual uptrend in ARPU should aid strong earnings and FCF growth for the telcos. Vi's funding shortage and R-Jio's upcoming IPO make for a strong case of continuous tariff repair through a mix of hikes and non-tariff measures. Bharti is the best direct play. Maintain ADD with an FV of Rs2,100.

Company data and valuation summary

Ticker	CMP (Rs)	FV (Rs)	Rating	Upside (%)
BHARTI	1,889	2,100	ADD	11%
IDEA	6	6	SELL	-8%
INDUSTOW	339	365	SELL	8%
TCOM	1,549	1,665	SELL	8%
	P/B (x)		EV/EBI	TDA (v)
				IDA (X)
Ticker	2026E	2027E	2026E	2027E
Ticker BHARTI				
	2026E	2027E	2026E	2027E
BHARTI	2026E 8.3	2027E 7.0	2026E 11.0	2027E 9.2

Growth in key metrics, CAGR (%)

	Last 5Y	Next 3Y
Wireless subs		
Bharti	5.0	2.7
Vodafone Idea	(7.4)	0.1
R-Jio (inc. FTTH)	4.7	6.7
Wireless ARPU (Rs/sub/month)		
Bharti	11.6	10.6
Vodafone Idea	10.3	10.6
R-Jio (inc. FTTH)	8.6	11.8
Wireless EBITDA		
Bharti	27.8	17.0
Vodafone Idea	4.1	14.4
R-Jio	22.8	23.8

Source: Bloomberg, Company data, Kotak Institutional Equities estimates

Prices in this report are based on the market close of August 29, 2025

Full sector coverage on KINSITE

Bharti/Vi continue to stay at premium versus Jio in most of the plans

Exhibit 1: Tariff comparison for telco players (Rs), Bharti versus Jio premium (Rs and %), August 2025

						Bharti/Jio	Bharti/Jio	
Plans	Validity	Bharti	Jio	VI	BSNL	premium (Rs)	premium (%)	Comments
Voice only plans								
Unlimited calls**	365	1,849	1,899	1,849	NA	(50)	(2.6)	
Unlimited calls**	84	469	448	470	410	21	4.7	
Bundled data plans								
1 GB/day data	28	299	NA	299	NA			
1.5 GB/day data**	28	349	299	349	132	50	16.7	Includes hotstar subscription for Jio
2 GB/day data**	28	398	349	399	158	49	14.0	Includes hotstar subscription for all private telcos
2.5 GB/day data**	28	400	399	409	NA	1	0.4	
3 GB/day data	28	449	449	449	NA	_	_	Includes Sony Liv subscription for Bharti
2 GB Total data	28	199	189	199	NA	10	5.3	
25 GB Total data	30	355	355	345	153	_	_	BSNL plan offers 26 GB for 26 days
1.5 GB/day data	56	579	579	579	NA	_	_	
2 GB/day data**	56	649	629	649	360	20	3.2	Includes hotstar subscription for Jio
1.5 GB/day data	84	859	889	859	NA	(30)	(3.4)	Includes Saavn pro subscription for Jio
2 GB/day data	84	1,029	859	994	NA	170	19.8	Includes hotstar subscription for all private telcos
3 GB/day data	84	1,798	1,799	NA	NA	(1)	(0.1)	Includes Netflix subscription for all private telcos
2 GB/day data	365	3,599	NA	3,599	1,859			
2.5 GB/day data	365	3,999	3,599	NA	NA	400	11.1	Includes hotstar subscription for Bharti
Data Top-ups								
12 GB data		161	139	139	NA	22	15.8	
50 GB data		361	359	348	NA	2	0.6	

Notes:

Source: TRAI, Kotak Institutional Equities

Incremental ARPU from subscriber migration for Jio/Bharti stands at 20%/3%

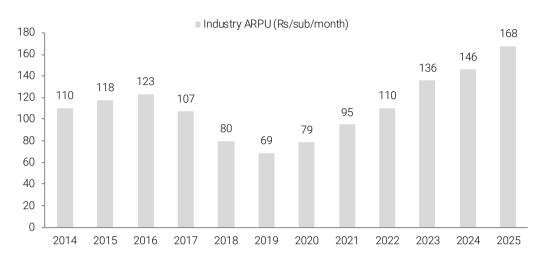
Exhibit 2: Discontinued plans and next lowest cost available option for Jio/Bharti and change in offerings

			Jio			Bharti	
	Discontinue	ed plans	Next best option	Change (%)	Discontinued plans	Next best option	Change (%)
Plans (Rs)	209	249	299	20	249	299	20
Validity (days)	22	28	28	_	24	28	17
Data (GB/day)	1.0	1.0	1.5	50	1.0	1.0	_
ARPU (Rs/month)	285	267	320	20	311	320	3
Additional benefits	NA	NA	Jio-Hotstar mobile subscription		NA	NA	

^{**} plans for some operators have been adjusted for number of days to make them comparable.

Industry ARPU grew at 16% CAGR over FY2019-25, led by multiple tariff hikes

Exhibit 3: ARPU (Rs), March fiscal year-ends, 2014-25



Source: TRAI, Kotak Institutional Equities

Exhibit 4: Tariff hikes and ARPU changes for private telcos, with 3/4/5Q lag from pre-hike prices

		ARPU (Rs)	ARPU change	from pre hike	level (%)	
Tariff hike	Pre hike	3Q lag	4Q lag	5Q lag	3Q lag	4Q lag	5Q lag
July 2024							
Bharti	211	245	250		16.3	18.8	
R-Jio	174	197	199		13.2	14.6	
Vi	186	196	203		5.4	9.5	
December 2021							
Bharti	153	183	190	193	19.3	23.7	26.1
R-Jio	141	171	172	173	21.7	22.4	22.8
Vi	123	143	149	153	16.2	20.8	24.0
December 2019							
Bharti	128	157	162	166	22.5	26.7	29.7
R-Jio	128	141	145	149	10.3	14.0	17.2
Vi	115	124	130	134	8.7	13.9	17.1

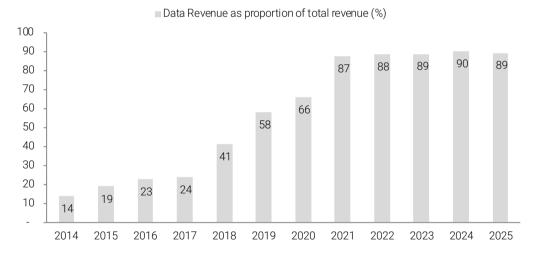


Source: TRAI, Kotak Institutional Equities

Category	Company	Quarter	Comment
Tariff repair	Bharti	1QFY26	The revenue will come from incremental ARPU, the revenue will come from more volume growth of customers and finally, it will come from tariff repair.
Tariff repair	Bharti	4QFY25	Industry does need further tariff repair for sustained financial health and to support continued investments and deliver a respectable ROCE to the business.
Industry construct	Bharti	4QFY25	The current telecom tariff structure in India is broken, with a one-size-fits-all pricing model, which is not appropriate for upgradation, nor is it in line with any other market.
Data monetization	Bharti	4QFY25	Entry level pricing should potentially not go upbut the next level pricingthat data allowance should dramatically reduce and then there should be a reason for people to upgrade to higher plan.
Tariff hikes	Vi	4QFY25	To ensure a fair return on significant investments and support future capital expenditure in the telecom industry, further tariff increases are essential.
Data monetization	Vi	4QFY25	Industry needs to move towards a pricing model where heavy data users contribute more proportionally to their higher usage, than the current pricing structure where incremental data usage comes at an extremely low unsustainable price.
Tariff hikes	Vi	3QFY25	In a normal situation, a 12-month period is ideal to kind of make any changes on tariffs. But given where the industry is today, a faster tariff change is probably a possibility and the need of the hour.
Industry construct	Vi	3QFY25	We used to have an ARPUs which were maybe in Rs. 10-20 to a range of Rs. 5,000 for many normal consumers without international roaming. Today, almost everybody can fulfill their requirements by buying a plan of Rs. 400-500.
Tariff hikes	Vi	Investor update, Sep 2024	We have factored in the next tariff increase of a similar size to happen somewhere after a 15-month timeframe from the last price increase.

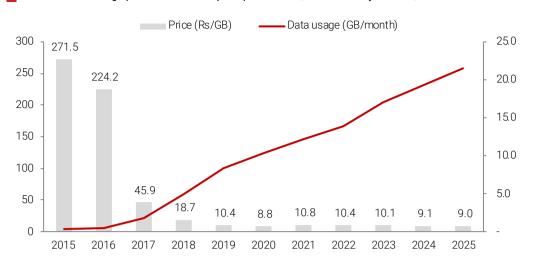
Data revenue share increased to ~90% of industry revenues from sub-25% share pre-Jio launch

Exhibit 6: Data revenue as a proportion of total wireless revenues, March fiscal year-ends, 2014-25



Data usage exploded with the launch of Jio while prices continued downward trajectory

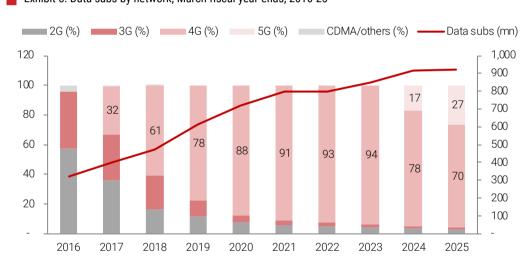
Exhibit 7: Data usage per subscriber and price per GB trend, March fiscal year-ends, 2015-25



Source: TRAI, Kotak Institutional Equities

5G subs are now nearly a quarter of total industry data subscribers

Exhibit 8: Data subs by network, March fiscal year-ends, 2016-25





Bharti/Jio are the biggest gainers on RMS/SMS during 1QFY26

Exhibit 9: Comparison of private telcos on key operational and financial parameters, March fiscal year-ends, 1QFY24-26

	Jun-23	Sep-23	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	qoq	yoy
Wireless subs, EOP (mn)											
Bharti	339	342	346	352	355	352	357	362	363	0.3	2.3
Vodafone Idea	221.4	219.8	215.2	212.6	210.1	205.0	199.8	198.2	197.7	(0.3)	(5.9)
R-Jio (inc. FTTH)	448.5	459.7	470.9	481.8	489.7	478.8	482.1	488.2	498.0	2.0	1.7
Wireless ARPU (Rs/sub/month)										
Bharti	200	203	208	209	211	233	245	245	250	2.1	18.8
Vodafone Idea	139	142	145	146	146	156	163	164	165	0.6	13.0
R-Jio (inc. FTTH)	181	182	182	182	182	195	203	206	209	1.2	14.9
Wireless EBITDA (Rs bn)											
Bharti	112	115	119	122	125	142	155	158	163	3.3	29.9
Vodafone Idea	42	43	44	43	42	45	47	47	46	(1.0)	9.7
R-Jio	126	130	133	136	139	150	155	159	167	5.3	19.9
Wireless EBITDA margin (%)											
Bharti	54.8	54.9	55.1	55.1	55.6	57.1	58.8	59.2	59.4	22 bps	379 bps
Vodafone Idea	39.0	40.0	40.8	40.9	40.0	41.6	42.4	42.3	41.8	(47)bps	183 bps
R-Jio (inc. FTTH)	52.3	52.3	52.3	52.4	52.6	53.1	52.8	52.8	54.0	124 bps	147 bps
Wireless revenue market share	e among pr	ivate telco	s								
Bharti	38.9	39.0	39.4	39.6	39.8	40.7	41.5	41.5	41.8	24 bps	194 bps
Vi	17.8	17.5	17.2	16.8	16.4	15.9	15.6	15.3	14.9	(34)bps	(143)bps
R-Jio	43.3	43.5	43.4	43.6	43.8	43.4	42.9	43.2	43.3	10 bps	(51)bps
Wireless paying subs market s	hare amon	g private t	elcos								
Bharti	33.9	33.8	33.8	34.0	34.0	34.4	34.9	35.1	34.9	(17)bps	91 bps
Vi	22.2	21.7	21.1	20.5	20.2	20.1	19.6	19.2	19.0	(21)bps	(113)bps
R-Jio	44.0	44.5	45.1	45.4	45.8	45.5	45.5	45.7	46.0	38 bps	22 bps

Notes:

(a) R-Jio (ex-FTTH) metrics are KIE estimates.

Source: Companies, Kotak Institutional Equities estimates



Wireless churn increased qoq for Bharti in 1QFY26 (flat for peers); data volume growth robust at 8-12% qoq

Exhibit 10: Comparison of telcos across other key metrics, March fiscal year-ends

	Jun-23	Sep-23	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	pop	yoy
Minutes of Usage (min/month	/sub)										
Bharti	1,138	1,123	1,127	1,158	1,128	1,135	1,160	1,163	1,143	(1.7)	1.4
Vodafone Idea	627	613	614	627	607	587	593	598	590	(1.3)	(2.8)
R-Jio (inc. FTTH)	1,002	979	981	1,008	974	977	1,013	1,024	1,007	(1.6)	3.4
Data traffic (bn GB)											
Bharti	14.9	15.7	16.4	17.4	18.8	19.3	20.2	21.1	22.8	8.4	21.6
Vodafone Idea	5.9	6.0	5.9	5.9	6.0	5.9	5.7	6.0	6.6	9.4	10.4
R-Jio (inc. FTTH)	33.2	36.3	38.1	40.9	44.1	45.0	46.5	48.9	54.7	11.9	24.0
Data subs (mn)											
Bharti	238	246	253	261	267	271	278	281	285	1.3	6.6
Vodafone Idea	136	137	137	137	137	135	134	134	135	0.5	(1.5)
R-Jio (inc. FTTH)	449	460	471	482	490	479	482	488	498	2.0	1.7
Data usage per data sub (GB/r	month)										
Bharti	21.1	21.7	21.9	22.6	23.7	23.9	24.5	25.1	26.9	7.0	13.4
Vodafone Idea	14.4	14.6	14.2	14.3	14.5	14.4	14.2	15.0	16.3	9.2	12.6
R-Jio (inc. FTTH)	24.9	26.6	27.3	28.6	30.3	31.0	32.3	33.6	37.0	10.1	22.2
Blended churn (% per month)											
Bharti	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.4	2.8	3.2	2.5	2.3	2.7	37 bps	(14)bps
Vodafone Idea	3.9	4.1	4.3	3.9	4.0	4.5	4.5	4.1	4.1	_	10 bps
R-Jio (inc. FTTH)	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.5	1.7	3.1	2.0	1.8	1.8	_	10 bps

Notes:

(a) R-Jio's data usage and per sub data usage metrics are boosted by contribution from FTTH.

Source: Company, Kotak Institutional Equities estimates

Exhibit 11: Comparison of private telcos on key operational and financial parameters, March fiscal year-ends, 2020-28E

										yoy (%)		CAGR (%)		
	FY2020	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026E	FY2027E	FY2028E	FY2026E	FY2027E	FY2028E	Last 5Y	Next 3Y
Wireless subs, EOP (mn)														
Bharti	284	321	326	335	352	362	372	382	391	2.8	2.8	2.4	5.0	2.7
Vodafone Idea	291	268	244	226	213	198	198	198	199	(0.3)	0.3	0.4	(7.4)	0.1
R-Jio (inc. FTTH)	389	426	410	439	482	488	525	559	593	7.5	6.5	6.1	4.7	6.7
Wireless revenues (Rs bn)														
Bharti	460	556	631	759	850	1,003	1,130	1,300	1,468	12.7	15.0	13.0		
Vodafone Idea	360	345	342	372	376	387	403	450	506	4.3	11.7	12.4		
R-Jio (inc. FTTH)	543	699	770	908	1,001	1,141	1,311	1,601	1,894	14.9	22.1	18.3		
Wireless ARPU (Rs/sub/month	1)													
Bharti	135	153	162	191	206	234	257	287	316	9.7	11.9	10.1	11.6	10.6
Vodafone Idea	96	103	112	132	143	157	170	190	212	8.2	11.7	12.1	10.3	10.6
R-Jio (inc. FTTH)	130	143	153	178	181	196	216	246	274	10.0	14.2	11.3	8.6	11.8
Wireless EBITDA (Rs bn)														
Bharti	170	243	313	401	468	579	678	801	928	17.1	18.1	15.9	27.8	17.0
Vodafone Idea	148	169	160	168	171	181	194	229	272	7.2	18.0	18.4	4.1	14.4
R-Jio	216	309	376	467	524	603	709	918	1,143	17.6	29.5	24.4	22.8	23.8
Wireless EBITDA margin (%)														
Bharti	37	44	50	53	55	58	60	62	63	225 bps	160 bps	160 bps		
Vodafone Idea	33	40	42	40	40	42	43	46	48	126 bps	267 bps	265 bps		
R-Jio (inc. FTTH)	40	44	49	51	52	53	54	57	60	128 bps	327 bps	298 bps		
Wireless revenue market shar	e among p	rivate telc	os											
Bharti	34	35	37	38	39	41	42	42	41	85 bps	-14 bps	-33 bps		
Vi	26	22	20	19	17	16	15	14	14	-88 bps	-48 bps	-18 bps		
R-Jio	40	43	43	43	43	43	43	44	44	3 bps	62 bps	51 bps		
Wireless paying subs market s	share amoi	ng private	telcos											
Bharti	29	32	33	34	34	35	35	35	35	-21 bps	-11 bps	-17 bps		
Vi	30	26	25	23	21	19	19	18	18	-69 bps	-51 bps	-44 bps		
R-Jio	40	42	42	43	45	46	47	47	48	90 bps	62 bps	61 bps		

Source: Company, Kotak Institutional Equities estimates

Exhibit 12: Indian telecommunication services coverage: Valuation snapshot

	Market cap.	CMP (Rs)	Fair			EV/EBI	TDA (X)			P/E	(X)			P/B	(X)			RoAC	E (%)	
Company	(US\$ bn)	28-Aug	value (Rs)	Rating	2025	2026E	2027E	2028E	2025	2026E	2027E	2028E	2025	2026E	2027E	2028E	2025	2026E	2027E	2028E
Bharti Airtel	128.6	1,889	2,100	ADD	14.3	11.0	9.2	7.8	53.8	36.8	27.0	21.0	9.6	8.3	7.0	5.7	13.6	17.0	21.9	27.1
Vodafone Idea	8.0	6.5	6.0	SELL	16.3	15.3	13.5	11.8	(1.7)	(2.7)	(2.9)	(3.0)	(0.7)	(0.7)	(0.6)	(0.5)	(3.4)	(2.4)	(0.4)	2.8
Indus Towers	10.1	339	365	SELL	5.7	5.2	4.9	4.6	14.6	13.6	12.3	11.5	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.6	21.0	21.9	23.0	23.7
Tata Communications	5.0	1,549	1,665	SELL	12.0	10.7	9.0	7.5	47.3	30.2	22.4	16.7	14.6	11.8	8.7	6.4	10.6	11.9	15.6	19.4

Source: Bloomberg, Kotak Institutional Equities estimates

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Source: Kotak Institutional Equities

As of June 30, 2025

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