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# Consumer Preferences: Airtel vs Reliance Jio

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**Abstract**

This report summarizes a comparative survey study of consumer preferences between Airtel and Reliance Jio in India. Based on 106 questionnaire responses, it assesses factors such as network signal strength, internet speed, pricing, customer service, and loyalty, and examines overall market leadership. The analysis finds that Jio leads market preference (≈43%) compared to Airtel (≈36%), driven mainly by low pricing and high internet speeds, while Airtel is credited for strong network coverage and service quality. Survey data show most users (61.3%) are satisfied with current pricing, but Jio's entry has substantially shifted consumer choice (57.5% say Jio changed their preference). Despite Jio's lead, Airtel retains a loyal segment. These findings align with industry data (Jio ~40.4% vs. Airtel ~33.5% market share) and highlight intense competition. Recommendations include strategic improvements in pricing and service quality. Limitations include the small, youth-skewed sample and regional focus.

**INTRODUCTION**

India's telecom sector is vast and growing rapidly. For example, wireless subscriber totals rose from about 1,154.05 million in February 2025 to 1,156.99 million in March 2025 (Figure 1), reflecting continual expansion. Such scale provides context for fierce competition. The major private carriers – Reliance Jio Infocomm and Bharti Airtel – vie for leadership, along with Vodafone-Idea and state firms. Reliance Jio entered in 2016 with disruptive low-cost, high-speed 4G plans, rapidly gaining subscribers and challenging incumbents. By late 2019 it had overtaken Airtel in subscribers and by 2024 held roughly 40–41% of the market vs. Airtel's ~33–34% Airtel, on the other hand, is renowned for its longstanding network coverage and service quality.

*Figure 1. Total wireless (mobile) subscribers in India (by area) for Feb–Mar 2025.* Government data show incremental subscriber growth nationwide. This rapid growth underscores the large consumer base and the entry opportunities (e.g. 5G rollout) that carriers are pursuing. The present study asks: *What drives consumers to prefer Airtel versus Jio?* It compares the two brands on key attributes and assesses overall preference trends and market leadership. The objectives are to gauge consumer satisfaction with each carrier's services (signal, internet speed, pricing, customer support), to measure brand preference and loyalty, and to analyze how Jio's market entry has affected consumer attitudes.

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**Literature Review**

Consumer preference in telecom hinges on multiple factors. Prior research emphasizes that network quality (coverage and signal strength), pricing, and service quality are critical determinants. Reichheld and Schefter (2000) note that customer satisfaction strongly influences loyalty, which in turn shapes repeat choice. Empirical studies of Airtel and Jio confirm these factors. For example, Balalla (2024) found that network coverage and pricing were top reasons respondents favored Jio, whereas Airtel's users cited network reliability. Tomer (2025) reports that in late 2024 Jio had the fastest median mobile data speeds (158.6 Mbps vs. Airtel's 100.7 Mbps) and the widest 5G availability, while Airtel excelled in video streaming and gaming experiences. Such findings suggest Jio's technical performance and cost advantage drive its appeal.

Jio's market impact has been profound. Majumdar and Das (2019) describe how Jio's 2016 launch with very low tariffs "detonated" the market: within three years it claimed the top subscriber position in India- . By early 2024, TRAI data show Jio at about 40.4% market share and Airtel at 33.5%. This industry trend aligns with survey reports: in Mathur & Dubey's (2024) study, 62% of respondents were Jio subscribers and 53% explicitly considered Jio "better" than Airtel. Other studies similarly report higher overall satisfaction among Jio users, largely due to pricing and coverage. Conversely, Airtel's established brand loyalty and network stability keep a significant customer base satisfied – for instance, 62% of Airtel customers rate its coverage as "excellent"

In sum, the literature indicates (1) Jio's aggressive pricing and technology have shifted consumer preferences heavily in its favor, (2) Airtel retains strengths in perceived quality and service, and (3) consumer preferences are multifactorial, involving price, speed, coverage, and customer service. This study builds on such insights to quantify these factors via a fresh survey.

**Methodology**

The study employed a quantitative survey of 106 individuals (collected via an online questionnaire) to assess preferences between Airtel and Jio. Participation was voluntary and respondents were largely students and young adults, reflecting convenience sampling. The survey included questions on demographic details, current service provider, and ratings/preferences regarding specific attributes: network signal strength, internet speed, pricing, postpaid vs. prepaid plans, and customer service quality. It also asked which operator the respondent prefers (Airtel, Jio, other, or none) and whether Jio's entry changed their preference. Respondents could select the primary reason for liking each chosen operator.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and visual graphs. Percentage distributions were computed for each question. Graphical analysis (with Power BI) highlighted contrasts in responses. A chi-square test was also applied to test hypotheses (e.g. "consumers can afford Jio over Airtel" or "satisfaction with Jio's 4G vs. Airtel's") – as noted by Rakhraj (2025), the results did not find statistically significant differences, implying some neutrality in overall preferences. However, the graphical outcomes provided clearer insight into trends. The approach emphasizes survey interpretation rather than inferential causality; no control group or longitudinal tracking was used.

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**Results and Discussion**

**Demographics:** The majority of respondents (≈44%) were under 18, with ≈37% aged 18–25. This youth skew means findings reflect younger users' views.

**Current provider and brand liking:** Table analysis shows 62.3% of respondents used Jio and 37.7% Airtel, indicating Jio's higher penetration among this sample. When asked which brand they **liked most**, Airtel held a slight edge (32.1%) over Jio (30.2%), with the remainder split among Vodafone-Idea (15.1%) and others (22.6%). This suggests Airtel's brand goodwill still resonates (perhaps due to legacy users), even though more participants were Jio subscribers.

**Preferred operator:** Crucially, when asked which operator they **prefer** overall (Airtel, Jio, or none), a plurality chose Jio (43.4%), compared to 35.8% for Airtel; 20.8% chose none. Thus, nearly twice as many respondents favored Jio as favored neither, and Jio's preference lead (7.6 percentage points over Airtel) is substantial. This mirrors industry data (Jio ~40.4% vs. Airtel ~33.5% share) and confirms Jio as the market leader in consumer minds. Reasons given reinforce Jio's strength in value: among those who preferred Jio, 34.0% cited **network strength**, 25.5% cited **high-speed internet**, and 20.4% cited **low prices**. In contrast, for Airtel's preference reasons, **network strength** (44.3%) and **speed** (35.8%) dominated, while low price was only 8.5% and customer service 11.3%. Thus, both networks' core appeal is technical (signal, speed), but Jio's low pricing attracts more users. These patterns align with Balalla (2024) and Gadgets360 (Tomer, 2025), which similarly note network quality and price as prime factors.

**Prepaid vs. Postpaid:** 55.7% of respondents used prepaid plans, 44.3% postpaid. Competition is intense in both segments. When asked which postpaid plans are better, only 42.5% said Jio was better, while the majority favored Airtel's postpaid (implying ~57.5%). Respondents suggested Airtel's longer market presence gives it an edge in postpaid value. In prepaid, Jio was only about 3.8% ahead of Airtel indicating a very tight race in prepaid offerings. This hints that Airtel remains competitive on pricing/plans when not considering bundled 4G freebies.

**Customer service:** On customer support quality, 53.8% preferred Airtel's service vs. 46.2% for Jio. Longtime Airtel customers may find its support more reliable, whereas Jio's newer network has yet to fully establish service infrastructure. This corresponds with Rakhraj's finding that Airtel's support is considered superior (Airtel "known for its good customer services") and his recommendation that Jio improve its service centers.

**Price satisfaction:** When asked if current prices are satisfactory, 61.3% said **yes**, 38.7% **no**. Respondents commented that while prices have fallen dramatically since pre-Jio days, some still feel costs are high. Overall, however, a majority are content with post-Jio price levels, reflecting the industry norm of aggressive pricing.

**Impact of Jio on preference:** Notably, 57.5% of respondents agreed that "Jio changed their telecom service preference" vs. 42.5% who disagreed. This indicates that Jio's market entry has indeed reshaped choices for a majority – consistent with its known disruptive effect

**Summary of findings:** Overall, the survey shows **Jio as the current favorite brand**, echoing Rakhraj's conclusion that "Jio is the market leader" and is preferred mainly for speed and low prices. Airtel retains strengths in network reliability and older-user loyalty. The competition is "cut-throat" even though Jio is ahead, "Airtel is trying to increase its market share rapidly" Indeed, official data confirm Jio's lead: as of

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Dec. 2024 Jio had ~465 million wireless subscribers vs. Airtel's ~385 million (market shares ~40.4% vs. 33.5%).

**Discussion:** These results make intuitive sense in context. Jio's strategy of free/data-rich plans and investment in network rollout made it attractive to cost-conscious, data-hungry users. The survey's high satisfaction with Jio's speed reflects Ookla findings that Jio was the fastest network in late 2024. Meanwhile, Airtel's legacy of broad coverage helps explain why some users (especially the more experienced ones) still "like" Airtel and praise its coverage (62% called it excellent in a related study). Brand loyalty may partly underlie Airtel's support among older demographics. Rakhraj's analyses suggest that if more consumers were surveyed or if analysis focused by plan type, Airtel's position might improve ("with more respondents… Airtel might be the preferred brand"). In other words, results could shift with sampling or segmentation. Nonetheless, current attitudes clearly favor Jio.

In terms of market dynamics, the findings imply an ongoing tug-of-war: Jio must leverage its strengths (low price, high speed) to expand, while shoring up weaknesses (e.g. service quality). Airtel should emphasize its network reliability and loyalty base, possibly by offering targeted promotions or improving affordability to counter Jio (as Rakhraj recommends via more advertising and win-back campaigns). The fact that 5G rollout is imminent adds urgency: whoever executes a compelling 5G strategy first may swing market share.

**Conclusion**

This comparative study of Airtel and Jio preference shows that Reliance Jio currently leads in consumer appeal. About 43% of surveyed consumers prefer Jio (versus 36% for Airtel), largely due to Jio's high internet speeds and aggressive pricing. Airtel is recognized for stronger network coverage and better customer service, which helps it remain competitive among a significant minority. The majority of users (57.5%) acknowledge that Jio's market entry shifted their preferences, reflecting Jio's disruptive impact noted in industry reports. In sum, Jio is affirmed as the market leader, but Airtel retains a close runner-up position and could reclaim share by addressing its weaknesses. Both companies face intense competition and must continuously innovate (e.g. in 5G services) to win consumers.

**Implications:** The findings suggest that pricing and speed remain crucial for winning subscribers, but service quality and brand loyalty also matter. Telecom providers should thus balance competitive pricing with network investments and customer support. For marketers and managers, the study underscores that consumer attitudes in India's telecom are dynamic; ongoing feedback (as recommended by the survey's respondents) is vital.

**Limitations**

Several limitations temper these conclusions. The sample size (106) is modest, limiting statistical power and representativeness. The respondents were mainly young and likely urban (as indicated by the large under-18 cohort), so results may not generalize to older or rural populations, who might have different priorities. The survey's regional scope was narrow, and data collection relied on self-reported questionnaires, introducing potential bias. Rakhraj (2025) notes that the young demographic skews the findings ("information is widely collected from youngsters"). Additionally, the telecom market evolves quickly; this cross-sectional snapshot may not capture future shifts (e.g. post-5G launch). Finally, some respondents interpreted survey questions differently (as implied by the chi-square neutrality), suggesting that more nuanced scales or qualitative follow-up could add depth. Future research with larger, randomized samples and segmentation by user type (prepaid/postpaid) would strengthen validity.

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