

Disruptions in Indian Telecom Sector: A Qualitative Study on Reliance Jio

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to analyze the impact of RJio (Reliance Jio) on Indian Telecom Industry and to examine the factors influencing customer churn from other telecom operators towards Reliance Jio.

Design: Theoretical study of previous research papers, Newspapers and online reports were used for first objective. The second objective was explored through qualitative research analysis using semi structured interviews to systematically collect and analyze the data in order to generate a model for Factors analyzing customer churn towards Reliance Jio. For this, 87 customers were randomly selected who were Reliance Jio users. Further grounded theory approach has been used to code the verbatim (indicates recording of interviews in the exact same manner as responded by the interviewee) and further propose a model.

Findings: Impact of Reliance Jio on Indian telecom industry were analyzed through theoretical study and factors influencing customer churn were analyzed. Seven factors arose through axial coding which are tariff, speed of internet data, brand endorsement, value added services, image of service provider, brand image and innovative company.

Originality/Value: Reliance Jio is a relatively new operator in the market which has taken the market by surprise and has brought a revolution in the Indian markets. Not a lot of work has been done on this, and this study provides new insights and literature.

Keywords: Reliance Jio, Churn, Qualitative study, Indian telecom Industry. Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

The Inclination of the Customer to leave the services of one service provider in lieu of services offered by other is termed as churn (Phadke et.al. 2013) and that is what has happened in recent past after the introduction of Reliance Jio in Indian telecom Industry. Reliance Jio Infocomm (RJio), a part of Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) started its operation on 1st September 2016, and launched its services through internet using 4G (Fourth-Generation) technology to transfer voice and data services. RJio, in a statement, said that they hope to get 100 million subscribers in the shortest period of time (Khanna and Pathak, 2016), which has as per the company's expectations. As per the recent report published by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) the subscriber base of telecom companies in India in

October, 2017 for Bharti Airtel stood at 285 million followed by Vodafone at 208 million, Idea Cellular at 191 million, and Reliance Jio at 145.9 million making Reliance Jio the fourth largest telecom operator in India within a span of one year. At present, in India, Reliance Jio is the only telecom operator that offers fully data centric services, entirely based on voice over long-term evolution (VoLTE) technology, which enables voice to carry over an internet protocol (IP) network at a higher speed than earlier 2G and 3G traditional networks. Anupam Srivastava stated that Reliance Jio's existence has posed a challenge of survival to other telecom operators in India by sharply reducing the tariffs (Bhatia and Palepu, 2016).

India is the world's third largest market of Internet Users and is also ranked second in terms of the number of mobile

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phone users and telecommunications market (IBEF, 2018). In the past ten years, the Indian telecom industry has changed drastically, where it was only at 14.6% tele density in mobile segments in Financial year 2007 but has reached 90.7% in the financial year 2017 (IBEF, 2018). In the year 2017, the telecom sector witnessed immense job losses of 40,000. This trend is expected to increase with job loss reaching 80,000-90,000 in the year 2018 (Online, 2019). This is because the Indian telecom industry is facing financial difficulty because of lower profit margins and increased competition (CIEL HR, 2018).

The purpose of this paper is: 1. to analyze the impact of RJio (Reliance Jio) on Indian Telecom Industry, 2. to examine the factors influencing customer churn from other telecom operators towards Reliance Jio, 3. To study the impact of Reliance Jio on Indian telecom industry. An empirical study was done and data was collected through various reports, research publications, and other internet sources to achieve the 3rd objective. To explore the 2nd objective, in-depth interviews of Customers who were using Reliance Jio services were done and a conceptual model was generated using grounded theory approach. Grounded Theory Approach is a qualitative methodology which gives systematic guidelines on collecting and analyzing the data. The theory was originated by Glaser and Strauss (1967), proposing that researcher should engage in simultaneous collection and analysis of data. The process of Grounded theory starts with "concrete data and ends with rendering them in an explanatory theory" (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2007). The Qualitative Interviews of the respondents were examined using Grounded theory approach to identify factors influencing Customer Churn in Telecom Industry.

Literature Review

Reliance Jio Infocomm Private Limited (RJio)

Reliance Jio Infocomm, is a part of Reliance Industries Limited. Reliance Industries Limited which is headed by Mukesh Ambani is India's second largest company as per Fortune 500 list of Indian companies with total revenue of Rs. 4102.95 billion (Fortuneindia.com, 2019). Reliance Jio Infocomm launched operations on 1st September 2016 to provide voice and data services using 4G technology to customers. Reliance Jio is said to be the biggest startup in

the world with a total investment of Rs. 1,50,000 Crores (Khanna and Pathak 2016). Reliance Jio initially had Prime Minister Narendra Modi endorsing its services which were termed as "revolutionary". After shaking the telecom industry with the initial free voice calling and data services, Reliance Industries Chairman and managing director Mukesh Ambani announced, at the 40th annual general meeting of Reliance Industries, that its subsidiary Reliance Jio will be launching 4G Volte Phones and these phones will cost Rs. 1500, refundable after 36 months on return of the phone at any Jio store. This offer sounded a death knell to the existing 2G and 3G phones available in the market at that time (Financial Express e-newsletter, July 2017).

Indian Telecom Industry

India is the second largest customer base in terms of telecommunication market and is also the third largest in terms of number of Internet using customers across the globe. Indian telecom sector has a great potential of serving people and improving services day by day. This sector is facing hard times as it has seen loss of around 40,000 Jobs in 2017 and this trend is likely to continue in 2018 with Job losses to reach around 80,000-90,000 (CIEL HR, 2018). Telecom minister Manoj Sinha, as per a report (Kudikala, 2018), has said that the telecom sector is likely to create around four lakh new jobs over the next five years and will significantly contribute towards Indian GDP. He further added that Union Budget for 2018-19 would also enhance the telecom sector as the government has allocated Rs. 10,000 crores towards telecom infrastructure in the country. TRAI (Telecom regulatory authority of India) was established on 20th February 1997 through an act of parliament to regulate and monitor telecom services in India which include fixation and revision of tariffs in telecom sector of India which were earlier authorized to be done by Central government of India and its main objective is to provide a fair and transparent policy environment which promotes a level playing area and ensures fair competition among various telecom operators (Trai.gov.in, 2018). Indian telecom sector at present is one among the fastest growing telecom sectors of the world and as per the industry estimates out of the total India's GDP telecom sector's contribution was at 6.5% and also providing employment to four million people in 2015 (TRAI, 2018). In early 1990's Indian government

announced market liberalization. In effect the post-liberalization Indian telecom sector has been shaped through four policies (i). National telecom policy, 1994, (ii). New telecom policy, 1999, (iii). Broadband policy, 2004 and (iv). National telecom policy, 2012.

Research Methodology

There has been very little studied about the impact of Reliance Jio on Indian Telecom Industry and the manner in which customers are leaving other telecom operators and moving towards Reliance Jio. This paper provides insights on both these questions,. This study is purely qualitative in nature and uses grounded theory to analyze the second objective. This is to analyze the factors responsible for customer churn towards Reliance Jio from other telecom operators. The first objective has been analyzed through a thorough analysis of Newspapers, Research papers and Internet sources. For the second objective, 87 customers from J&K, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi were analyzed and in-depth interviews were done in order to obtain data and a grounded theory approach was used through systematic analysis and collection of data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The interviews were conducted by the authors. In this study 87 customers who were Reliance Jio users were interviewed till the attainment of data saturation. Data saturation is a point where no new information is generated and repetition of data starts occurring (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Each interview was then converted into a verbatim, which means it was recorded in the same manner as interviewee responded. The interview started by asking their willingness to participate and were done one at a time when they were ready to answer. The interviewees were told about the objectives of the study and were informed that why this interview is happening.

Analysis of Data

The interviews were converted into a verbatim and then the transcripts were studied by three individual investigators and they performed open coding of the transcripts which generated general statements showing general behavior of customers towards telecom industry and their preferences after that a round of axial coding was done and these statement were narrowed down and similar statements made one factor and like this total seven

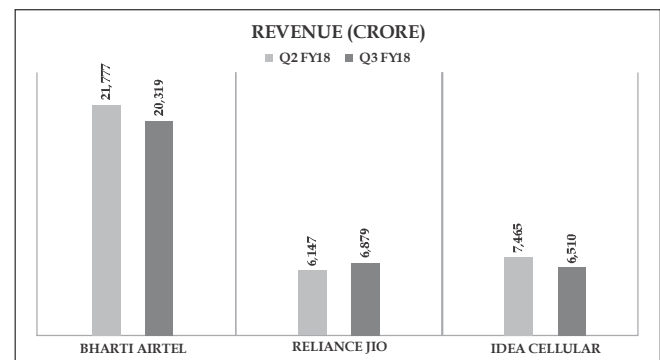
factors were generated which shows customer churn behavior and why customer switch from other telecom operators towards Reliance Jio.

The emerged conceptual model is given in Figure 3 and all the factors have been summarized below.

Discussion of the Study

Effect of Reliance Jio on Indian Telecom Industry

Reliance Jio started its operations on 1st September 2016 with Mukesh Ambani, CEO and Managing director of Reliance Industries officially announcing launch of Reliance Jio and quoting that “No Jio Customer will ever have to pay for voice calls again” The effect of Reliance Jio on Indian telecom sector started showing from that day only as Bharti Airtel which is Number 1 telecom operator in India lost its share price by 6.4% on Bombay stock exchange, not only Bharti Airtel, other telecom operators like third ranked Idea cellular and Reliance communications also saw Share prices falling on Bombay stock exchange by 10.5% and 8.8% respectively (The Economic Times, 2016).



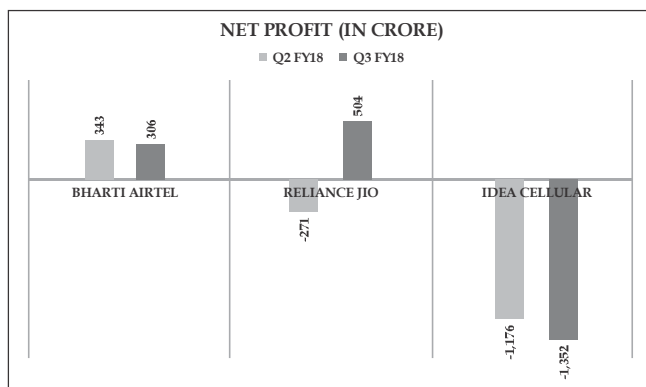
Source: Financial Express Bureaus, January 24, 2018

Figure 1. Figure Showing revenues of different telecom operators for Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 of Financial Year 2018.

The October-December quarter came up with some major changes as Bharti Airtel the Number 1 player in telecom industry in India witnessed decline in its revenues from Rs 21,777 Crores to Rs 20,319 Crores and the reason behind decline of revenues by Rs 1,062 crores was because of reduction in termination rates and further, the cut in international mobile termination which is effective from 1st February, 2018, from 53 Paisa to 30 Paisa will once again

affect the revenues of all telecom operators, but Jio’s Revenues will not be much affected as its international call rates are already lower than Bharti’s Airtel, Idea and Vodafone. So Reliance Jio’s revenues will not be much affected but others might see further fall in their revenues (Financial Express, 2018)

Another change which came up in October-December, 2018 quarter is that Reliance Jio posted higher revenues of Rs 6,879 crores than Rs 6,510 of Idea cellular making Reliance Jio the second largest telecom operator in terms of Revenues.



Source: Financial Express Bureaus, January 24, 2018

Figure 2. Figure Showing Net Profits of different telecom operators for Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 for financial year 2018.

Idea Cellular in Quarter 3 (October-December) showed a wider net loss from Rs 1,176 crores in Quarter 2 it reported a loss of Rs 1,352 crores in Quarter 3 of financial year 2018 whereas Reliance Jio which showed a loss of Rs 271 crores in Quarter 2 became profitable in Quarter 3 and showed huge growth and net profit of Rs 504 crores which is even more than Number 1 telecom operator Bharti Airtel whose net profit fell from Rs 343 crores in Quarter 2 to Rs 306 crores in Quarter 3.

Another effect that Reliance Jio has made on telecom industry is the merger of Idea cellular with Vodafone. The two companies are in process to merge as India’s most complex mergers of all time and this merger will create world’s second largest and India’s largest telecom operator surpassing Bharti Airtel Ltd. The two companies have got

approval from Competition commission of India (CCI) and Securities and Exchange board of India (SEBI) in July, 2017 and have also taken approval from National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on 12th January 2018, now the two companies only require approval from Department of Technology (DOT) and the companies may start operating as one entity from April, 2018 (Livemint, 2018).

Reliance Jio has affected employment in India as there have been over 75,000 job losses in telecom sector so far. According to A Ramachandran, Partner at search firm Ema Partners quoted that “About a year ago, there were three lakh employees, 25% of which have moved out of the sector in the last 12 months,” The remaining 2.25 lakh employee will also face hard times after the Vodafone-Idea merger takes place as overlapping areas will also see slashing of Jobs and it will become difficult for those who have got niche skills (The Economic Times, 2017).

Reliance communications has decided to shut most of its wireless operations and the employees of Reliance communications have been put on notice period and Reliance communication has blamed Reliance Jio quoting that it has brought “creative destruction” by offering free voice and data services and not only this Aircel is also believed to wind up its business and concentrate only on some niche circles and also Reliance communication and Aircel scrapped their merger in September, 2017 (Economic Times, Nov 15, 2017).

Factors Influencing Customer Churn from other telecom operators towards Reliance Jio

Customer switching behaviour is common in every industry but it varies from industry to industry and in service industry there is negative association among profitability and customer churn. So, in service industry it is very important for telecom operators to retain their customers so as to maintain their profitability and become market leader (Keaveney, 1995). Churn rate in India is between 3.5%-6% which is highest in Asia-Pacific region and due to these Indian telecom operators are losing more than \$94.03 Cr every year (Gartner, 2012). We investigated some factors that has led to further increase in Churn in telecom industry in India.

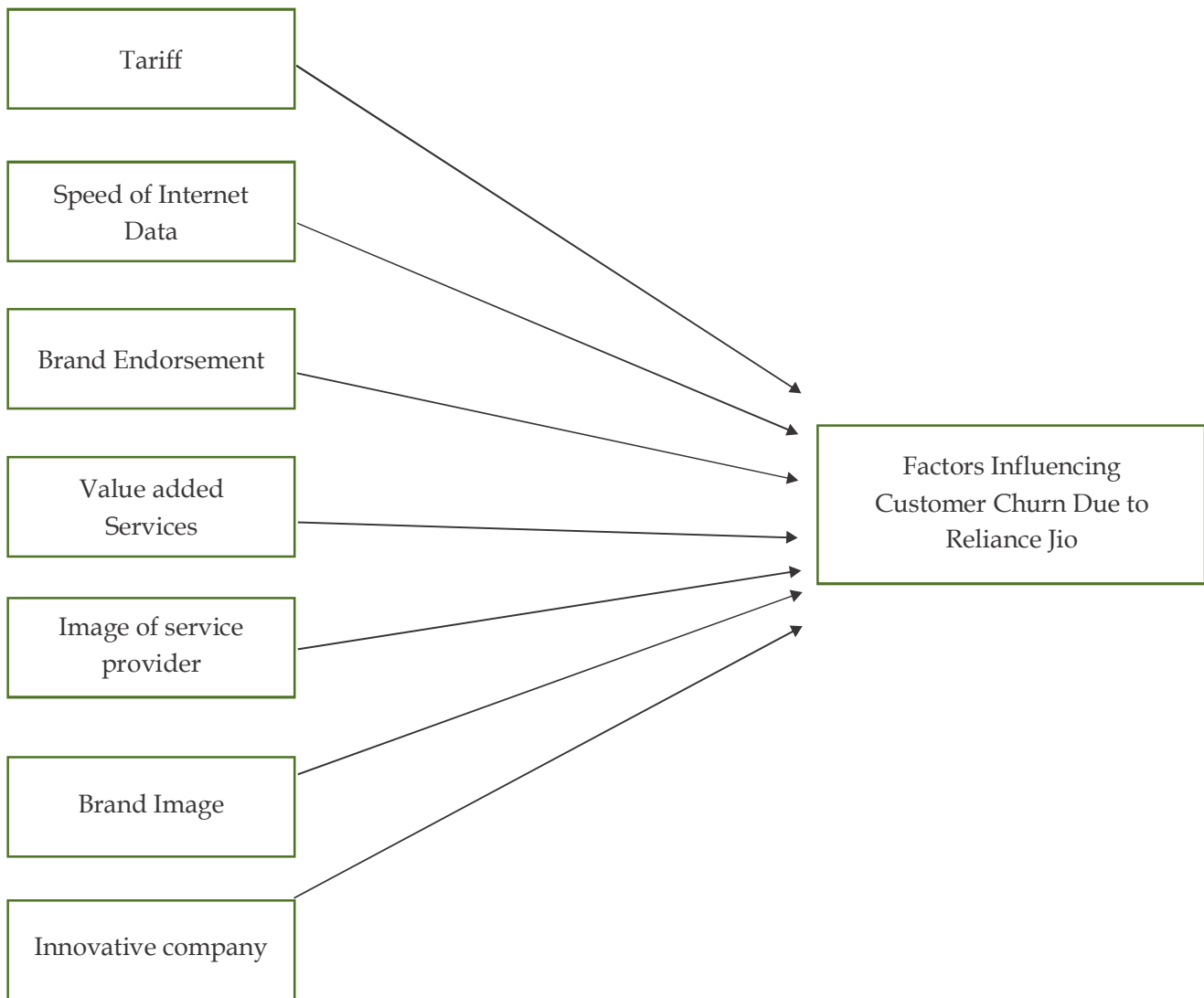


Figure 3. Figure Showing Customer Churn from other telecom operators towards Reliance Jio.

Tariff/Fixed Price

Indian customer are very price sensitive (Mahajan et.al, 2017). Price is a key factor in developing and emerging markets like telecom sector market in India (Srivastava et.al. 2006). Reliance Jio has brought a revolution in Indian telecom market by introducing free 4G data and voice calling leading to gain huge Indian market and reaching 100 million subscribers within one year of incorporation.

Customer: "Reliance Jio offer services at twenty percent of the tariff which I was paying earlier and my monthly bill on mobile has declined leading to more savings".

"After getting subscribed to Reliance Jio my monthly spending on mobile has come down from Rs.400 to Rs.100 which is a good change"

"Reliance Jio's 4G data packs are even cheaper than 2G and 3G data packs offered by other operators"

Customer while interviewing were very biased towards price and they were of the feel that Reliance Jio is offering the cheapest services in India and has slashed the voice calling and data tariff to such extent that their competitors are getting stiff competition and due to this factor they have shifted from other operators towards Reliance Jio.

Speed of Internet data:

The demand for Internet is continuously growing at a dramatic rate and the access speed to internet has become very important factor for the users (Kridel et.al, 2002). High speed internet is the demand of every customer but they also need to pay higher price to obtain high-speed internet data (Rappoport et.al, 2003).

Customer: "Reliance Jio provide high speed internet data as compared to other operators that was the main reason for me to shift towards Reliance Jio"

"Reliance Jio is effective as 4G high speed data is provided at cheaper rate than other telecom operators"

"I shifted towards Reliance Jio because there was a lot of waiting time for a page to load on internet while using Internet of Idea and Aircel but Reliance Jio's Internet is quick and reliable"

Reliance Jio brought a change by providing high speed internet data at cheaper and affordable rates which was not a trend, earlier telecom operators use to charge more prices in order to have access to high speed data. Reliance Jio with a vision that they should be their clients "first call" are working very dedicatedly towards that. Customers said that they used to pay high for 2G and 3G internet services but Reliance Jio has made them 4G services available at lower rate than 2G services which is revolutionary in India.

Brand Endorsement

Endorser and its message increase liking of customer towards a product and will lead to positive cognitive relations towards that brand (Mowen, 1980).

Customer: "PM Modi was endorsing Reliance Jio's ad initially and I see him as my idol so I shifted towards Reliance Jio"

"Seeing PM Modi Ji in Advertisement of Reliance Jio made me feel that it is his initiative towards a better India and to provide cheap services to Indian citizens which made me shift towards Reliance Jio"

Reliance initially used PM Modi in its advertisements which influenced customers as he is a public figure and Prime minister of India which took Reliance Jio to gain word of mouth publicity and achieve more subscribers.

Value added Services

Value-added services are common in telecom industry and these services are provided at excessive cost which affects

the customer's adoption of these services (Schultz, 2001).

Customer: "Reliance Jio is offering various Value-added services like caller tunes, access to all Jio Applications like Jio TV, Jio Music, Jio News and many other services and that too without charging any extra cost"

"Reliance Jio don't have any hidden charges and no-extra money is deducted for use of any value-added service unlike other telecom operators"

"I can have access to many complementary services which is a great additional feature offered by Reliance Jio"

"Cashback is provided to me whenever I recharge my Jio sim from Jio app which is making Jio services cheaper to me"

Customers in their interview were very favorable towards value-added services offered by Reliance Jio and they were of the view that other telecom operator use to charge extra money on use of any extra service and even use to deduct money if any service is selected by them mistakenly which is not there in the case of Reliance Jio as they are offering these services free of cost.

Image of service provider

Image of service provider is a very important factor which lead to customer satisfaction and there exists a positive relationship between image of service provider and customer satisfaction (Sandhu et.al, 2013).

Customer: "Reliance Jio is a subsidiary of Reliance Industries limited led by Mukesh Ambani whose name is trustworthy in India being the owner of Number one Company Reliance Industries limited in India"

"Mukesh Ambani is one who always thinks of development and works for society which makes me have trust on the service which he is offering"

Mukesh Ambani runs India's largest CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) network and Reliance industries contributed Rs. 652 Crores towards CSR activities in 2016 (India CSR, 2016). These activities has created a public image of Reliance Industries which is helping them to attract customer easier than compared to its competitors.

Brand Image

Positive brand image of a company is an indicator and also results in customer satisfaction (Malik et.al, 2012).

Customer: "Over the years Reliance Jio has emerged as a brand

name which is familiar to every individual for the type of services they are offering which made me to use Reliance Jio and have its services"

"My friend advised me to use Reliance Jio as he was using it and described me the benefits of it"

"I bought a new 4G phone only to have access to the services offered by Reliance Jio"

Another major factors influencing customer to use Reliance Jio was its Brand Image which it has built within a span of one and a half year and customers have started doing word of mouth publicity for Reliance Jio and it has got such a great brand image that people have started buying 4G phones who were not having a 4G phone only to have access to Reliance Jio's Services.

Innovative Company

Innovativeness is one of the factor that constitute service providers factors (Paulrajan and Rajkumar, 2011).

Customer: "Reliance Jio is very innovative in its operations as they are providing very unique services like access to all television channels through Jio Tv app and that too free of cost"

"Reliance Jio has come up with very innovative schemes like offering cashback on recharges, Dhan Dhana Dhan plans offering unlimited voice calling and data packs at cheaper prices, subsidized monthly charges and free value-added services"

Reliance Jio has come up as an innovative company bringing a revolution in telecom sector and forcing other telecom operators to slash their prices so that they can survive in market. Jio has come up with the idea of offering additional value-added services at free of cost which were used to be heavily charged by other telecom operators.

Conclusion

Reliance Jio has shown its impact from very first day of its incorporation as Bharti Airtel which is Number 1 telecom operator in India lost its share price by 6.4% on Bombay stock exchange, not only Bharti Airtel, other telecom operators like third ranked Idea cellular and Reliance communications also saw Share prices falling on Bombay stock exchange by 10.5% and 8.8% respectively. The impact of Reliance Jio on telecom industry is so severe that it may be termed as a revolution in Telecom Industry in India. Reliance Jio within a span of one and a half year has become the second largest telecom operator in India as it posted

higher revenues than Idea cellular in Quarter 3 of Financial year 2017-18 and in terms of Net-profit it has shown even higher Net-profit than Number one telecom operator Bharti-Airtel in quarter 3 of financial year 2017-18. Reliance Jio has severely affected employment in India as there have been 75,000 job losses so far since the inception of Reliance Jio in telecom industry and even more of Job losses are expected in 2018 and this is all because of the stiff competition that Reliance Jio has brought in telecom industry leading to scrapping off major players like Reliance communications and Aircel from most parts of the country and even it has forced two major telecom operators Idea cellular and Vodafone to merge as these operators are having losses due to Reliance Jio.

The factors were analyzed which are leading the customers to shift from other telecom operators towards Reliance Jio and through interviews it was analyzed that there are seven major factors influencing the customers. The first and major factor which was influencing the customer was the tariff, Reliance Jio is providing the customers with the cheapest ever services or even free of cost services which has influenced the customers to a greater extent, the other factors to be analyzed were speed of Internet data, brand endorsement, value-added services, image of service provider, image of brand and innovative company. Reliance Jio brought a change by providing high speed internet data at cheaper and affordable rates which was not a trend, earlier telecom operators use to charge more prices in order to have access to high speed data and initially they used PM Narendra Modi in their promotions which was a major influential factor to customers. Earlier telecom operator use to charge extra money on use of any extra service and even use to deduct money if any service is selected by them mistakenly which is not there in the case of Reliance Jio as they are offering these services free of cost which has also influenced the customer to move towards the services of Reliance Jio and also the customers were familiar with the Reliance Jio and also Mukesh Ambani who is a famous name in India with the largest Industry in India was also the influential factor behind customer churn towards Reliance Jio and the innovation of providing free services also made a positive impact on the customers.

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