

Google, Indian billionaire launch budget smartphone

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A shopkeeper poses with the new JioPhone Next smartphone in the Indian city of Ahmedabad.

Online giant Google and Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani opened advance orders in India on Monday for an entry-level smartphone billed as the world's most affordable, joining the race to tap into the booming budget market.

Ambani's conglomerate Reliance Industries announced in July last year that it would partner with Google to launch the 4G smartphone, competing with Chinese and South Korean manufacturers that already have a strong foothold in the South Asian nation.

The JioPhone Next will offer content in 10 Indian languages and has a price tag of 6,400 rupees (\$87), with customers able to put down an initial 1,999 rupees (\$27) and the rest payable in instalments.

Ambani said in a statement that the handset was a "breakthrough device" that would "empower common Indians... and take their digital journeys to the next level".

But Emkay Global Financial Services analysts Naval Seth and Sonali Shah said in a note that the [price tag](#) was currently not yet "lucrative enough for (the) masses".

They said Reliance's telecoms arm Jio had cut [prices](#) of previous phones multiple times "which accelerated acceptance".

"We believe that there is a possibility of it doing the same through various promotional schemes, if the sales are not up to expectations," they added.

Jio is India's biggest mobile network operator with 398.3 million subscribers, having upended the market with free calls and ultra-cheap data when it launched in 2016.

The launch of the new phone comes in the run-up to Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights later this week, which is traditionally the biggest shopping period of the year in India.

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