



Information on Quality of ICT and Media Service Monitoring and Tariffs

With reference to the Kuensel story titled “**PAC says BICMA needs to do more**” covered on Tuesday, 21st December 2021, the Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority would like to share the following:

1. Regulation of Internet Charges

Internet tariffs are proposed and implemented by the telecom service providers or other internet service providers as per their business plans and market dynamics. However, by regulation, any tariffs of the ICT services and in particular, the tariffs of the telecom services, are implemented by the operators only upon review and approval by BICMA. The approved tariffs are shared to the public by the operators on their websites for information to the public as required by BICMA. And it has been already ongoing as the approved tariffs are publicly shared by the operators in their websites. The BICMA also regularly checks whether the service providers publish the approved tariffs on their website and implement them as approved. BICMA ensures that the approved tariffs are widely published in public domain like in their website and also monitors their implementation by purchasing a sample tariff every month and ensures it is implemented correctly.

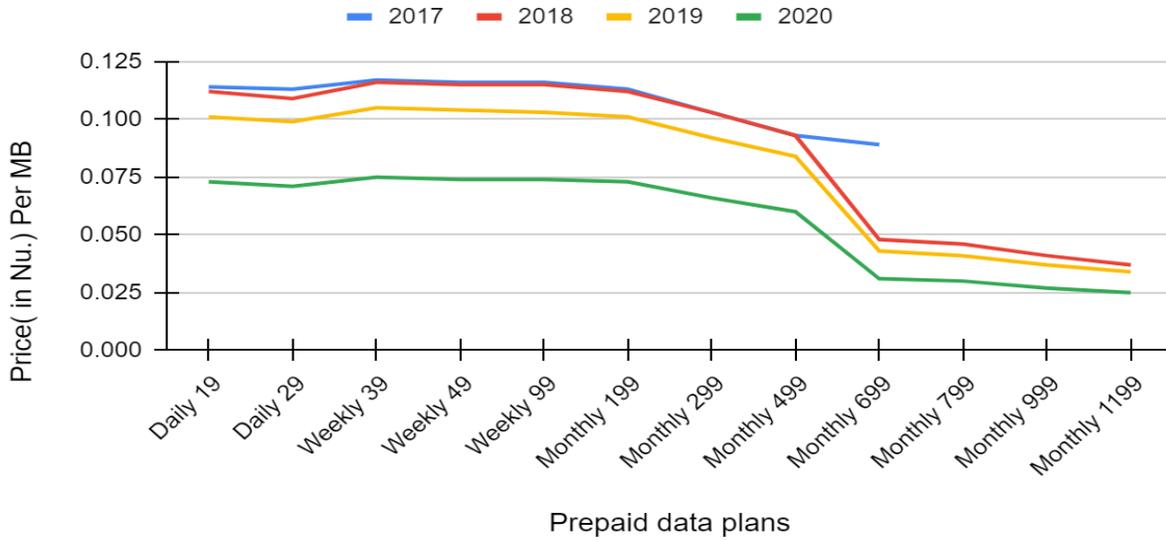
In addition, with constant market interventions through cost modeling and benchmarking methods, despite rising prices of all essential items, significant reduction in tariff of voice, data and SMS has been achieved. From 2017 to 2020 (12 FYP) the internet data tariff has been reduced by 40% and voice rate 10% and SMS by 20.95 %. BICMA shall continue to regulate tariffs and when feasible shall ensure reduction based on market situation.

The decrease in price (in Nu.) per MB of both B-mobile and TashiCell prepaid services from 2017 to 2020 (12 FYP) has been evaluated by the Authority and this is one of the outcomes of tariff reduction initiatives carried out by the Authority.

The tariff reduction (price per MB) of both B-mobile prepaid plan and postpaid plan is represented in the following graph:

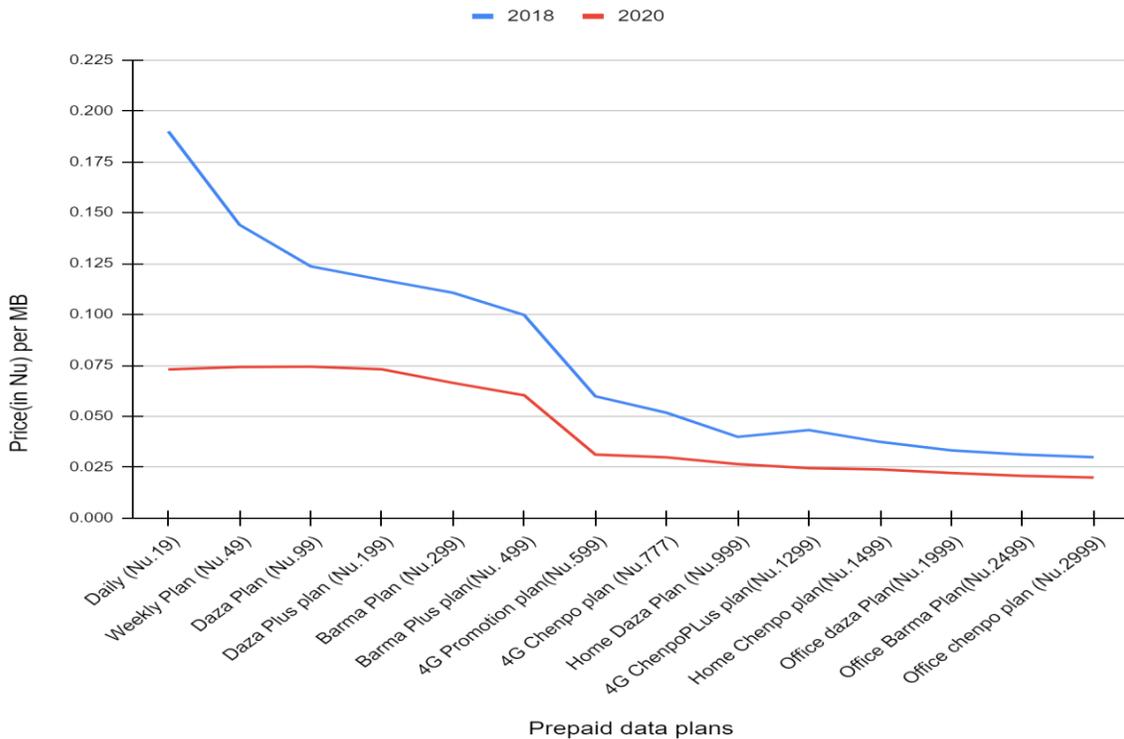
(i) Decreasing trends in price per MB (Nu./MB) of B-mobile's prepaid data plans:

Decreasing trends of price(Nu.) per MB of BTL's Prepaid plan from year 2017-2020



(ii) Decreasing trends in price per MB (Nu./MB) of TashiCell's prepaid data plans:

Decreasing trends of price(Nu.) per MB of Tashicell's Prepaid plan from year 2017-2020



The outcome of our constant market interventions and support Bhutan has achieved significant tariff reductions. In terms of affordability as per the recent International Telecommunication Union (ITU) study report, Bhutan is ranked 64th in the world and third in the South Asian region after Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Therefore, Bhutan is performing well in comparison to many other regional countries with huge populations which could take advantage of larger markets.

Further, in order to ensure universal access to mobile connectivity, BICMA has implemented Five Rural Communication Projects (RCP) since 2009 connecting 739 villages in all the 20 Dzongkhags, where it is commercially not feasible to provide mobile connectivity by the telecom operators.

2. Evaluation of data quota for broadband and mobile services

In order to assess whether actual data quota for broadband and mobile services are provided to the customers, BICMA has instituted the tariff monitoring mechanism to verify whether the telecom operators are providing the voice and data services as per the approved tariff rates. The tariff monitoring team on a frequent basis checks to ensure that the telecom service providers provide the voice, broadband data and SMS services as per the approved rates.

The monitoring report is compiled and published as quarterly reports which are available on the BICMA website https://www.bicma.gov.bt/bicmanew/?page_id=168.

3. Assessment of quality of cable television services

To improve the quality of cable services, BICMA has licensed two Multi Service Operators (MSOs) to provide High Definition (HD) quality of cable services with uniform channels throughout the nation. The MSOs are connecting the Cable Operators in all the Dzongkhags phase wise and are expected to complete by the end of 2022. However, the transition to digital cable television is faced with daunting challenges such as lack of technical expertise and awareness on the benefits of digital over the analogue system. Given the remoteness of many places, connecting with cable television services is a huge challenge for the small Cable Operators. The lack of fiber connections in remote places is currently the biggest challenge. Currently, the Cable Operators are using bandwidth leased from Telecom operators to digitize the Cable television service in the Gewogs which is not only costly but also faced with inadequate required bandwidth to carry the HD channels.

Meanwhile, the Cable Operators are required to maintain the log of customer complaints received and resolved and submit regularly to BICMA. Any lapses from the Cable TV service providers shall be dealt as per the Rules and Regulations including suspension and revocation of license. Our officials are also active in social media to track any complaints raised and address it in consultation with the cable operators.

4. Grievance redressal mechanism

For handling consumer complaints related to ICT and media services, BICMA has established a grievance redressal mechanism made accessible through BICMA website (www.bicma.gov.bt), to lodge consumer and licensees' complaints. Moreover, BICMA has dedicated contact numbers of the officials mentioned in its website to lodge any complaints. The BICMA also receives customer complaints through emails and formal letters from the public and gewog administrations.

In order to address complaints and other challenges to ensure quality cable television viewing, a Telegram group was created amongst the Local Cable Operators and officials from BICMA. Issues and complaints are being discussed in this group through sharing the know-how and skills particularly on the technicalities for the digitization of the CATV.

In addition, to enhance the customer grievance redressal mechanism, BICMA has also engaged its officials to scan the social media pages on a daily basis to see if there are any complaints and issues related to the ICT and Media services provided by the Service providers.

BICMA also developed the Consumer Protection Code for ICT and Media Services 2021 which the ICT and Media Service providers have to abide by. These regulations are specifically developed and published to protect the consumers from the ICT and Media service providers.

The Authority prepared videos on the awareness program on the importance of mobile broadband Quality of Services and the public's participation in sharing complaints to the Authority on such quality of services in addition to the awareness created by the telecom operators. Besides, BICMA has also developed awareness videos on the safety of Electromagnetic Field Radiation emissions from the telecom towers and the importance of digitalisation of Cable Television Services in Bhutan. These videos can be

found on the BICMA website as well as we have shared in various Social Medias. The videos are available on the BICMA website.

BICMA also requires the service providers to give public awareness about their new services. Both BT and TashiCell have been constantly doing this through various platforms to reach the consumers.

While sharing the above information, BICMA shall contribute towards creating a conducive environment through collaboration with relevant stakeholders in harnessing the power of ICT to transform Bhutan into a smart and inclusive society. For this, the BICMA shall continue to strive in enhancing and strengthening its regulatory roles in ensuring quality ICT and Media services in the country.