

COMPANY UPDATE

2026. 7. 15

Tech Team

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▶ AT A GLANCE

BUY		
Target price	KRW44,000	26.6%
Current price	KRW34,750	
Market cap	KRW15.4t/USD10.2b	
Shares (float)	442,981,070 (75.7%)	
52-week high/low	KRW67,700/KRW33,150	
Avg daily trading value (60-day)	KRW89.9b/USD59.8m	

▶ ONE-YEAR PERFORMANCE

	1M	6M	12M
Kakao (%)	-16.3	-41.4	-42.1
Vs Kospi (%pts)	-0.1	-59.6	-73.0

▶ KEY CHANGES

(KRW)	New	Old	Diff
Recommend.	BUY	BUY	
Target price	44,000	60,000	-26.7%
2026E EPS	1,538	1,564	-1.7%
2027E EPS	1,959	2,208	-11.3%

▶ SAMSUNG vs THE STREET

No of estimates	17
Target price	65,235
Recommendation	4.0
※ Rating: 4 <→ BUY, 3 = HOLD, 2 > → SELL	



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Kakao (035720)

Challenges to growth strategy

- We believe Kakao’s 2Q sales grew only 1.2% y-y due to the divestiture of several subsidiaries. However, the resulting improvement in profitability likely drove an 18% y-y increase in operating profit.
- Reflecting underwhelming AI services, waning restructuring momentum amid labor-management tensions, and a lack of new growth drivers, we cut our target price by 26.7% to KRW44,000.

WHAT’S THE STORY?

2Q preview—Profitability improves following subsidiary divestitures:

Following the May divestiture of AXZ, the operator of Daum, Kakao is likely to see a decline in portal sales from 2Q. Consolidated sales likely grew just 1.2% y-y following the divestiture of portal, gaming, and healthcare businesses, but operating profit likely rose 18.3% y-y to KRW231.1b on related cost reductions. KakaoTalk ad sales likely increased 17% y-y, supported by strong growth in brand message ads, while Kakao Pay’s sales likely jumped 40% y-y, fueled by higher securities trading volumes. We believe the commerce, mobility, and music segments maintained stable single-digit sales growth, while story sales likely fell 9.6% y-y amid continued weakness in the webtoon market.

KakaoTalk ad sales still growing: KakaoTalk ad sales continued to grow strongly, driven by the expansion of brand message ads launched in May 2025 and additional ad inventory from new tabs such as Feed and Short Form. Kakao expects ad sales to grow more than 10% this year, supported by ad product launches. However, nearly 60% of consumers report discomfort with receiving promotional messages according to a Seoul YMCA survey, while user feedback on the Feed and Now tabs remains largely negative. To sustain ad sales growth, Kakao must first deliver greater value to consumers.

SUMMARY FINANCIAL DATA

(Continued on the next page)

(KRWb)	2025	2026E	2027E	2028E
Revenue	8,099	8,311	8,981	9,702
Operating profit	732	961	1,130	1,280
Net profit (adj)	518	703	817	955
EPS (adj) (KRW)	1,527	1,538	1,959	2,222
EPS (adj) growth (% y-y)	nm	0.7	27.4	13.4
EBITDA margin (%)	19.4	21.2	22.1	22.7
ROE (%)	4.6	5.0	6.0	6.6
P/E (adj) (x)	39.4	22.6	17.7	15.6
P/B (x)	2.3	1.3	1.2	1.1
EV/EBITDA (x)	16.4	8.3	7.6	7.2
Dividend yield (%)	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.3

Source: Company data, Samsung Securities estimates

AI strategy requires a complete reset: Kakao is pursuing a dual-track AI agent strategy centered on Kanana and ChatGPT, but both services are underperforming. Kanana suffers from weak model capabilities and a design misaligned with conversational context; ChatGPT for Kakao offers little differentiation from standalone AI apps and has failed to generate meaningful traffic. Although Kakao plans to expand Kakao Tools from an internal service into an external platform to foster an agent ecosystem, its current functionality remains limited to basic conversational search and information retrieval—far short of the experience users expect. Kakao needs to redesign its AI services from the ground up, beginning with consumer needs rather than provider-driven assumptions.

Labor dispute threatens restructuring momentum: The union representing employees across five Kakao entities, including Kakao itself, continues to take industrial action, including partial strikes, in pursuit of performance-based bonuses, wage increases, and greater job security. Although the dispute has yet to significantly disrupt operations, Kakao may need to offer wage increases or slow subsidiary restructuring to reach an agreement. Restructuring-led profitability improvement has been the company's most compelling investment thesis this year, but prolonged labor tensions threaten to undermine that momentum.

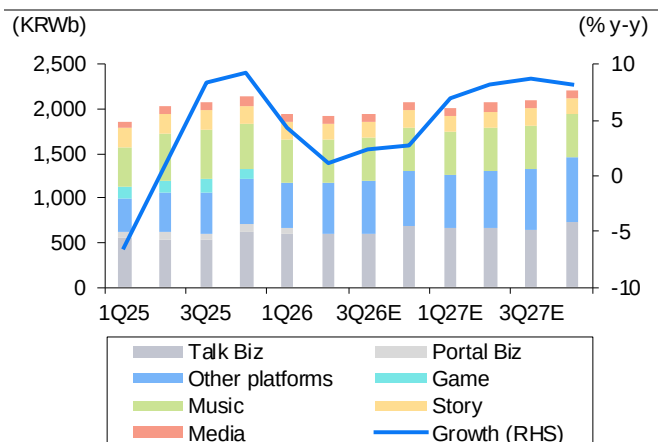
Digital Asset Basic Act offers potential upside: We have shifted our valuation methodology for Kakao from a P/S-based approach to a P/E-based approach. This leads us to cut our target price by 26.7% from KRW60,000 to KRW44,000. Our new target is based on a P/E multiple of 22.4x applied to our 2027 EPS forecast, which reflects improved profitability following subsidiary divestitures. The target multiple is the 2027 average P/E multiple of global mobile-platform, stablecoin, and mobility companies. Kakao's AI agent initiatives, positioned as a key growth driver, have yet to deliver measurable results, while union resistance has weakened restructuring momentum. Kakao therefore lacks sufficient grounds to command a valuation premium to peers. Nevertheless, we maintain our BUY rating, noting that Kakao Pay and Kakao Bank stand to gain from new business opportunities if Korea's won-pegged stablecoin market gains traction. Market activation, however, hinges on passage of the government's proposed Digital Asset Basic Act. Investors should closely monitor legislative developments.

Forecast and consensus

(KRWb)	2Q26			Diff (%)		2Q25	1Q26	Chg	
	Actual	Samsung	Consensus	Samsung	Consensus			(% y-y)	(% q-q)
Sales	2,048.3	2,005.7	2,056.0	2.1	(0.9)	2,024.2	1,942.1	1.2	5.5
Platform	1,190.3	1,159.6		2.6		1,051.1	1,182.7	13.2	0.6
Talk Biz	606.9	623.0		(2.6)		542.1	608.6	12.0	(0.3)
Portal Biz	20.3	0.0		nm		78.3	67.6	(74.1)	(70.0)
Other platforms	563.1	536.6		4.9		434.8	506.5	29.5	11.2
Content	858.0	846.1		1.4		973.1	759.4	(11.8)	13.0
Game	0.0	0.0		nm		142.6	0.0	nm	nm
Music	564.1	548.6		2.8		517.5	484.6	9.0	16.4
Story	197.8	198.6		(0.4)		218.7	182.4	(9.6)	8.4
Media	96.1	98.9		(2.8)		94.2	92.4	2.0	4.0
Operating expenses	1,817.2	1,787.8		1.6		1,828.9	1,730.7	(0.6)	5.0
Labor costs	440.7	439.7		0.2		482.5	444.9	(8.7)	(0.9)
Cost of sales	732.9	707.0		3.7		713.0	701.2	2.8	4.5
Marketing costs	86.0	90.3		(4.7)		87.3	72.5	(1.4)	18.6
Outsourcing/infra	251.9	250.7		0.5		232.2	208.2	8.5	21.0
D&A expenses	200.8	190.9		5.2		221.2	196.8	(9.2)	2.0
Other	104.9	109.2		(3.9)		92.8	107.1	13.1	(2.0)
Operating profit	231.1	217.9	223.4	6.1	3.5	195.3	211.4	18.3	9.3
Pre-tax profit	302.4	254.9	255.0	18.6	18.6	145.7	286.6	107.6	5.5
Net profit	229.8	193.7	200.4	18.6	14.7	171.8	226.8	33.7	1.3
Net profit (controlling)	195.3	164.6	170.6	18.6	14.5	161.2	171.7	21.1	13.8
Margins (%)									
Operating profit	11.3	10.9	10.9			9.6	10.9		
Pre-tax profit	14.8	12.7	12.4			7.2	14.8		
Net profit	11.2	9.7	9.7			8.5	11.7		
Net profit (controlling)	9.5	8.2	8.3			8.0	8.8		

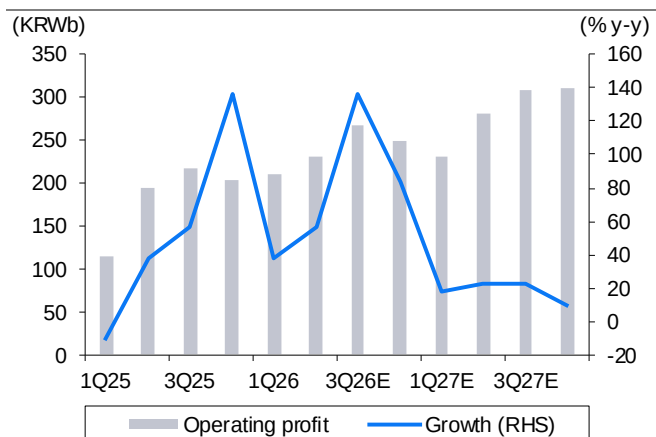
Source: Company data, FnGuide, Samsung Securities estimates

Quarterly sales, by division



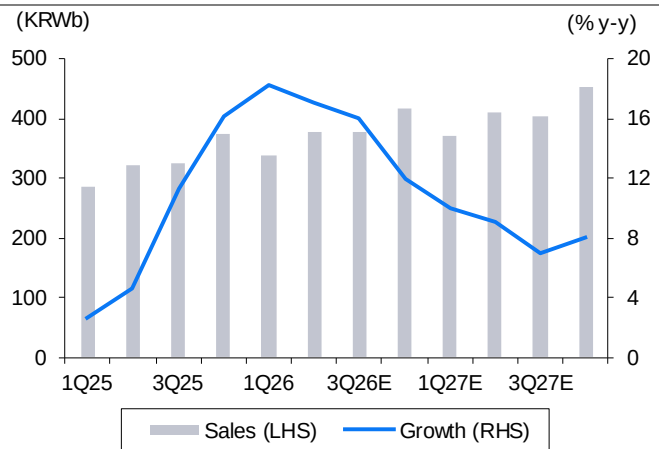
Source: Company data, Samsung Securities estimates

Quarterly operating profit



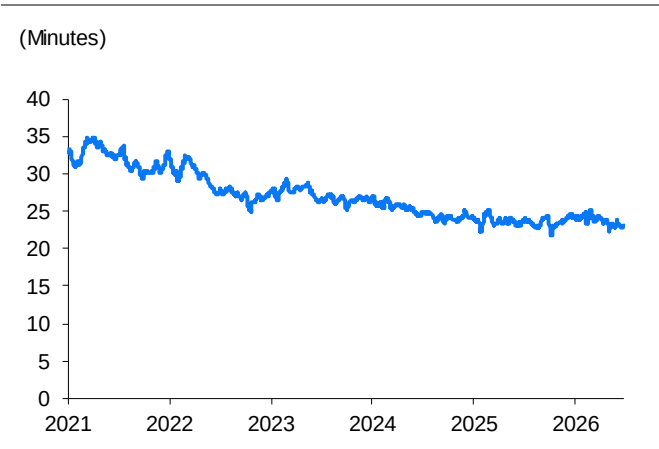
Source: Company data, Samsung Securities estimates

Talk Biz: Ad sales



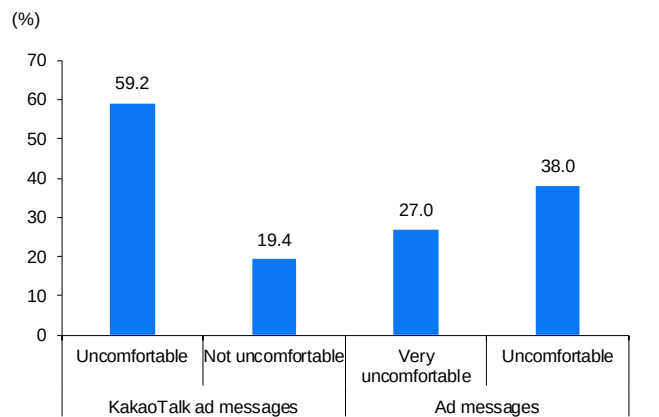
Source: Company data, Samsung Securities estimates

KakaoTalk: Average daily time spent



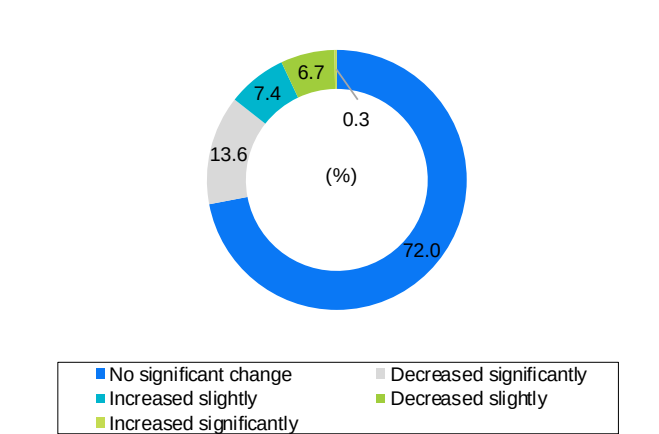
Source: Sensor tower

KakaoTalk brand message ads: User perception



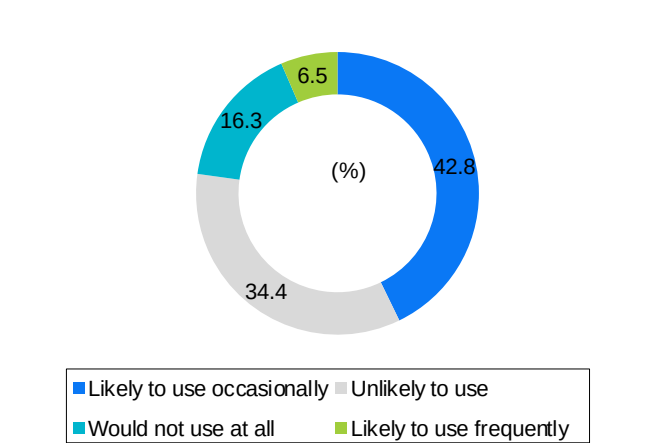
Note: Survey of 2,000 KakaoTalk users
Source: Seoul YMCA

Impact of Short-Form tab on KakaoTalk usage time



Note: Survey of 1,000 respondents aged 20-60
Source: Media Research Center, Korea Press Foundation

ChatGPT for Kakao: User response



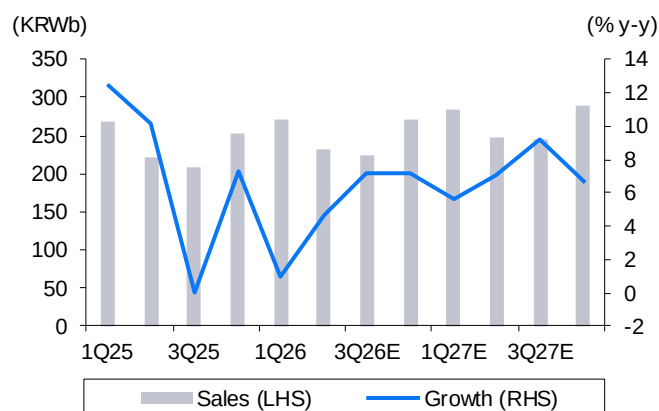
Note: Survey of 1,000 respondents aged 20-60
Source: Media Research Center, Korea Press Foundation

Kakao: Key labor union demands

Category	Key labor union demands
Management reform & accountability	Strengthening management accountability and establishing check-and-balance systems for management failures
Job security & safety net	Alleviating job insecurity caused by reorganization, divestments, spinoffs, and restructuring
Performance reward & profit sharing	Performance bonus pool linked to operating profit (approx. 13-14%), excluding RSU bonuses
Working environment & welfare	Improving working hours, fairness in evaluation and recruitment, and welfare/office settlement

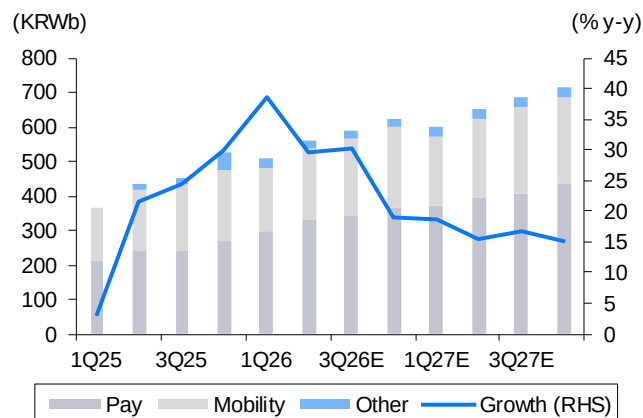
Source: Company data, Samsun Securities

Talk Biz: Commerce sales



Source: Company data, Samsung Securities estimates

Other platforms: Sales



Source: Company data, Samsung Securities estimates

Kakao: Valuation

(KRWb)

12-month forward sales	1,959
Target P/E* (x)	22.4
Fair market value	43,888
Target price (KRW)	44,000
Current price (KRW)	35,350
Upside (%)	24.5%

Note: *Peer group's 2027 P/E;

Based on Jul 10 closing price

Source: Samsung Securities estimates

Peers: P/S and P/E valuations

(x)	P/E		P/S	
	2026E	2027E	2026E	2027E
Alphabet	25.2	23.5	10.2	8.5
Meta Platforms	14.7	15.2	5.8	4.9
Tencent	12.4	11.2	4.1	3.8
LY corporation	16.3	16.6	1.5	1.3
Circle	64.1	37.1	5.2	3.9
Gojek	71.8	30.7	2.8	2.5
Target multiple	34.1	22.4	4.9	4.2

Note: As of Jul 10 close

Source: Bloomberg

Income statement

Year-end Dec 31 (KRWb)	2024	2025	2026E	2027E	2028E
Sales	7,864	8,099	8,311	8,981	9,702
Cost of goods sold	0	0	0	0	0
Gross profit	7,864	8,099	8,311	8,981	9,702
Gross margin (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
SG&A expenses	7,369	7,367	7,350	7,851	8,422
Operating profit	495	732	961	1,130	1,280
Operating margin (%)	6.3	9.0	11.6	12.6	13.2
Non-operating gains (losses)	-498	-119	-48	-55	-24
Financial profit	405	393	384	420	423
Financial costs	368	398	379	431	462
Equity-method gains (losses)	56	90	147	125	140
Other	-592	-204	-199	-169	-125
Pre-tax profit	-3	613	913	1,076	1,257
Taxes	160	95	196	258	302
Effective tax rate (%)	-5,701.5	15.5	21.5	24.0	24.0
Profit from continuing operations	-111	527	763	817	955
Profit from discontinued operations	-51	-9	-60	0	0
Net profit	-162	518	703	817	955
Net margin (%)	-2.1	6.4	8.5	9.1	9.8
Net profit (controlling interests)	55	491	576	728	853
Net profit (non-controlling interests)	-217	26	128	89	102
EBITDA	1,331	1,572	1,764	1,983	2,204
EBITDA margin (%)	16.9	19.4	21.2	22.1	22.7
EPS (parent-based) (KRW)	124	1,110	1,300	1,644	1,926
EPS (consolidated) (KRW)	-365	1,170	1,588	1,845	2,156
Adjusted EPS (KRW)*	-193	1,527	1,538	1,959	2,222

Cash flow statement

Year-end Dec 31 (KRWb)	2024	2025	2026E	2027E	2028E
Cash flow from operations	1,250	1,405	3,050	1,630	1,630
Net profit	-162	518	703	817	955
Non-cash profit and expenses	1,462	1,014	814	949	1,046
Depreciation	576	583	572	619	671
Amortization	260	258	231	234	253
Other	627	174	10	95	122
Changes in A/L from operating activities	-4	-106	1,543	-58	-245
Cash flow from investments	10	-478	-763	-1,184	-1,293
Change in tangible assets	-348	-465	-558	-681	-738
Change in financial assets	164	-843	313	-300	-335
Other	194	830	-517	-202	-221
Cash flow from financing	-521	-708	37	-58	-69
Change in debt	-36	-404	1,116	184	179
Change in equity	71	-108	-158	0	0
Dividends	-43	-39	-33	-44	-44
Other	-513	-158	-888	-198	-204
Change in cash	781	204	1,346	-429	-817
Cash at beginning of year	5,389	6,170	6,374	7,720	7,291
Cash at end of year	6,170	6,374	7,720	7,291	6,474
Gross cash flow	1,300	1,532	1,517	1,766	2,001
Free cash flow	871	926	2,488	949	893

Note: *Excluding one-off items;

**Fully diluted, excluding one-off items;

***From companies subject to equity-method valuation

Source: Company data, Samsung Securities estimates

Balance sheet

Year-end Dec 31 (KRWb)	2024	2025	2026E	2027E	2028E
Current assets	10,722	12,374	17,340	18,124	18,721
Cash & equivalents	6,170	6,374	7,720	7,291	6,474
Accounts receivable	549	569	557	602	652
Inventories	81	77	85	92	99
Other current assets	3,922	5,354	8,978	10,138	11,495
Fixed assets	15,051	15,409	14,495	15,543	16,890
Investment assets	5,750	6,066	6,514	7,477	8,732
Tangible assets	1,363	1,557	1,574	1,636	1,703
Intangible assets	5,171	5,228	3,859	3,882	3,908
Other long-term assets	2,768	2,559	2,547	2,547	2,547
Total assets	25,773	27,784	31,835	33,666	35,611
Current liabilities	8,545	8,780	12,952	13,932	14,889
Accounts payable	228	228	129	139	149
Short-term debt	1,458	938	894	894	894
Other current liabilities	6,859	7,613	11,929	12,898	13,845
Long-term liabilities	3,285	3,779	2,986	3,064	3,140
Bonds & long-term debt	328	991	354	354	354
Other long-term liabilities	2,957	2,788	2,632	2,710	2,787
Total liabilities	11,830	12,559	15,938	16,996	18,029
Owners of parent equity	10,141	11,276	11,893	12,578	13,388
Capital stock	44	44	44	44	44
Capital surplus	8,911	8,803	8,645	8,645	8,645
Retained earnings	1,943	2,685	3,327	4,012	4,822
Other	-758	-256	-123	-123	-123
Non-controlling interests' equity	3,802	3,949	4,003	4,092	4,194
Total equity	13,943	15,225	15,897	16,671	17,582
Net debt	-3,384	-4,792	-4,766	-4,433	-3,752

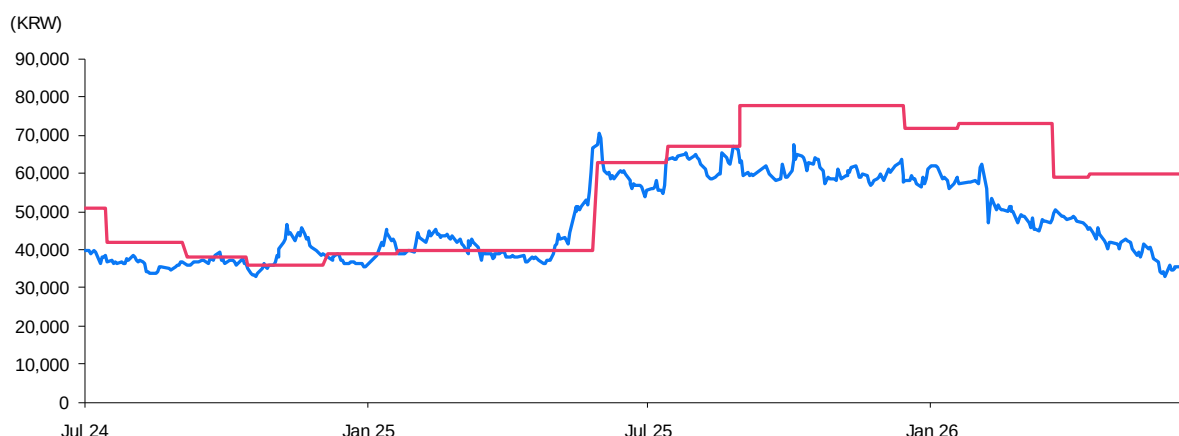
Financial ratios

Year-end Dec 31	2024	2025	2026E	2027E	2028E
Growth (%)					
Sales	4.1	3.0	2.6	8.1	8.0
Operating profit	7.5	47.8	31.3	17.6	13.3
Net profit	nm	nm	35.8	16.2	16.8
Adjusted EPS**	nm	nm	0.7	27.4	13.4
Per-share data (KRW)					
EPS (parent-based)	124	1,110	1,300	1,644	1,926
EPS (consolidated)	-365	1,170	1,588	1,845	2,156
Adjusted EPS**	-193	1,527	1,538	1,959	2,222
BVPS	23,100	25,625	26,911	28,460	30,292
DPS (common)	68	75	98	98	98
Valuations (x)					
P/E***	n/a	39.4	22.6	17.7	15.6
P/B***	1.7	2.3	1.3	1.2	1.1
EV/EBITDA	13.0	16.4	8.3	7.6	7.2
Ratios (%)					
ROE	0.6	4.6	5.0	6.0	6.6
ROA	-0.6	1.9	2.4	2.5	2.8
ROIC	-22.5	16.0	23.3	26.4	27.2
Payout ratio	54.0	6.7	7.6	6.0	5.1
Dividend yield (common)	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.3
Net debt to equity	-24.3	-31.5	-30.0	-26.6	-21.3
Interest coverage (x)	2.4	4.1	5.0	5.7	6.3

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Target price changes in past two years



Rating changes over past two years (adjusted share prices)

Date	2024/7/12	8/9	9/30	11/8	12/30	2025/2/14	6/23	8/8	9/24	2026/1/9	2/13	4/15
Recommendation	BUY	HOLD	HOLD	HOLD	HOLD	HOLD	HOLD	HOLD	BUY	BUY	BUY	BUY
Target price (KRW)	51000	42000	38000	36000	39000	40000	63000	67000	78000	72000	73000	59000
Gap* (average)	-22.09	-13.99	-2.04	9.84	-0.25	5.22	-6.72	-6.11	-22.40	-17.97	-30.41	-18.29
(max or min)**	-17.84	-7.86	3.68	29.44	16.15	66.50	-14.13	0.00	-13.21	-13.61	-14.66	-14.24
Date	5/8	7/10										
Recommendation	BUY	BUY										
Target price (KRW)	60000	44000										
Gap* (average)	-34.76											
(max or min)**	-23.42											

Note: * [(average, maximum, or minimum share price over duration of target price minus target price) / target price] x 100%

** Maximum/minimum share price if new target is higher/lower than market close on the business day prior to target price change

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BUY	Expected to increase in value by 15% or more within 12 months and is highly attractive within sector
HOLD	Expected to increase/decrease in value by less than 15% within 12 months
SELL	Expected to decrease in value by 15% or more within 12 months

Industry

OVERWEIGHT	Expected to outperform market by 5% or more within 12 months
NEUTRAL	Expected to outperform/underperform market by less than 5% within 12 months
UNDERWEIGHT	Expected to underperform market by 5% or more within 12 months

* Note: Effective Jul 27, 2023, BUY, HOLD, and SELL criteria are based on expectations of share-price moves of 15% or more within 12 months

Percentage of ratings in 12 months prior to 2026.06.30

BUY (85.5%)-HOLD (14.5%)-SELL (0%)

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