

CloudTV Operating System

Smart Television Operating System Provider

WRITTEN COMMENTS

On

TRAI Consultation Paper No. 02/2026

Formulation of a Regulatory Framework for Application-based Linear Television Distribution (ALTD) Services (Including Free Ad-Supported Streaming Television (FAST) Services)

Submitted to:

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Date of Submission: 4th May 2026

1. About CloudTV

CloudTV is an India-based Smart Television Operating System provider. Our platform powers connected television devices for over 300 registered and white-labelled television brands across India, representing a significant share of the smart TV ecosystem in the country. We partner with Indian and international content owners, broadcasters, and application developers to deliver a rich, free, ad-supported content experience to millions of Indian households without imposing any subscription costs on consumers.

Our business model is built on a revenue-share arrangement with broadcasters and content owners, where advertising revenues generated through content viewed on our platform are shared equitably with the content originator. This model enables Indian broadcasters — many of whom already hold valid MIB uplinking and downlinking permissions — to reach a rapidly growing audience of connected TV users without any additional infrastructure investment.

CloudTV operates at the intersection of technology and broadcasting. We have closely observed, and participated in, the global evolution of Free Ad-Supported Streaming Television (FAST) across multiple markets including the United States, United Kingdom, European Union, South Korea, and Australia. We bring to this consultation a perspective grounded in both the practical realities of the FAST ecosystem in India and the regulatory approaches that have succeeded internationally.

We submit these comments in the spirit of helping TRAI and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) arrive at a framework that is balanced, forward-looking, and does not inadvertently impede an emerging industry that is delivering meaningful value to Indian consumers.

2. Executive Summary

Our Core Submission: Any regulatory framework for FAST/ALTD services must begin from first principles — internet-based content delivery is fundamentally different from satellite or cable broadcasting and merits a proportionate, forward-looking approach. India has a unique opportunity to lead the world in FAST content distribution, and a well-calibrated framework will unlock this potential while ensuring content accountability and consumer protection.

The following are our key positions, each elaborated in detail in subsequent sections:

- FAST channels delivered over the internet are not analogous to satellite or cable broadcasting in their economics, infrastructure, or regulatory risk profile.
- Indian broadcasters who already hold valid MIB permissions are using FAST platforms as an additional distribution channel — they should not face duplicative regulatory requirements.
- The “level playing field” argument advanced by the cable industry must, if accepted, be applied equally to all internet-based platforms that carry any form of linear and live content — including YouTube, Meta, broadcaster-owned OTT applications and websites, JioCinema, Hotstar, and similar services (collectively referred to hereafter as “**Streaming Platforms**”). Any framework that targets dedicated FAST platforms while leaving Streaming Platforms unaffected would produce the opposite of its intended result.
- Imposing Entry Fees, Bank Guarantees, Authorisation Fees, Net Worth requirements and Roll-Out Obligations — designed for capital-intensive DTH operations — on internet-based FAST platforms may not be proportionate and could constrain the growth of domestic Indian players in this space.
- Light-touch registration with meaningful content compliance obligations is the appropriate approach — not licensing.
- If the government concludes that internet-based linear TV distribution requires a license, the same requirement must apply to every Streaming Platform carrying linear feeds or streams — without exception.

3. The Fundamental Policy Context: Why FAST Cannot Be Regulated Like Cable

3.1 The Two Paradigms: Broadcast vs. Internet

The existing regulatory framework for television distribution in India was built for a specific technology paradigm: spectrum-scarce, infrastructure-heavy, gated distribution networks (satellite, cable, microwave) where the government had compelling reasons to license operators. The principal rationale included spectrum scarcity — satellite transponder capacity and cable head-end infrastructure is finite and requires government allocation — and signal integrity, where physical transmission of satellite/cable signals requires technical standards and interference management.

Neither of these rationale applies to internet-based content delivery. The internet is a shared, open, IP-based network. Bandwidth is not allocated by the government — it is purchased commercially. There is no spectrum to protect. Any broadcaster with an internet connection and a CDN can reach any user in India at near-zero marginal cost. Any consumer with a broadband connection or mobile data plan can access content from anywhere in the world, whether through a FAST application, a broadcaster’s own website, or simply by opening a streaming URL in a web browser.

This is not a regulatory gap — it is an inherent characteristic of the internet. India’s own Net Neutrality regulations (which TRAI itself championed and the DoT implemented) explicitly prohibit discriminatory treatment of internet content. Regulating FAST channels on the internet as if they were cable channels would be at odds with the spirit and intent of India’s net neutrality framework.

3.2 The Streaming Platforms Benchmark

For the purposes of this submission, we define “**Streaming Platforms**” to mean all internet-based services that carry any form of linear, live, or scheduled television content to Indian consumers — including but not limited to YouTube, Meta (Facebook/Instagram), JioCinema, Disney+ Hotstar, SonyLIV, Amazon MiniTV, broadcaster-owned OTT applications and websites, and any similar platform. We use this term to refer to the broader class of internet-based services that perform a functionally equivalent role to FAST platforms in distributing linear television content.

A Question of Consistency: Streaming Platforms carry hundreds of live, linear TV channels from the same Indian broadcasters, on the same devices, to the same consumers, without any distribution licensing obligation. For any ALTD framework to be effective and equitable, it would need to apply consistently across all internet-based platforms performing a functionally equivalent role. We respectfully submit that this consistency principle should guide the Authority’s approach.

This is not a rhetorical point — it is a fundamental question of regulatory consistency and practical effectiveness. Consider the following:

- Streaming Platforms carry live, linear 24x7 streams of dozens of India's most-watched news and entertainment channels — the same channels that appear on FAST platforms.
- These platforms serve content free of charge to Indian consumers, supported by advertising, with revenues often flowing to entities headquartered outside India.
- No Streaming Platform pays any MIB license fee, authorisation fee, entry fee, or bank guarantee to the Indian government for carrying these linear channels.
- No Streaming Platform registers as a Distribution Platform Operator (DPO), IPTV operator, or any other category of regulated broadcaster in India.
- No industry representation or regulatory consultation to date has proposed that Streaming Platforms be regulated as DPOs or required to obtain downlinking permission for the Indian channels they carry.

If TRAI and MIB conclude that distributing linear TV channels over the internet constitutes a regulated broadcasting activity requiring a license, this conclusion must apply with equal force to all Streaming Platforms carrying the same channels. A framework that cannot be applied symmetrically cannot be applied at all without creating the very regulatory arbitrage it seeks to eliminate — but in reverse, where the regulated entity becomes the small domestic FAST platform and the unregulated entity is the global Streaming Platform carrying the same channels.

3.3 The Need for a Differentiated Regulatory Approach

The representations from the AIDCF and MSO associations compare FAST services directly to cable distribution and request identical regulatory treatment. We understand this concern and acknowledge that the cable and DTH industries have operated within a structured regulatory framework for decades and have made significant investments under that framework. However, we respectfully submit that applying the same framework to internet-based services may not produce the intended outcome, given the fundamental differences in the underlying technology and economics.

The cable and DTH industries pay government fees because their services are constituted through government-allocated spectrum (DTH) or government-regulated cable rights-of-way and conditional access systems (Cable). These regulatory privileges justify the corresponding regulatory obligations. FAST platforms do not use government-allocated spectrum. They operate on the commercial internet, where bandwidth is purchased at market rates. The quid pro quo that justifies cable/DTH regulation does not exist in the FAST context.

Moreover, the very same broadcasters who carry their channels on cable and DTH have also chosen to make their channels available on FAST platforms. This reflects a natural evolution in content distribution — broadcasters are leveraging new technology to extend their reach, much as they did when DTH emerged alongside cable. A regulatory framework that recognises this evolution and supports the growth of new distribution models alongside existing ones will best serve the interests of all stakeholders.

3.4 The Importance of Proportionate Regulation for an Emerging Industry

India's FAST services sector generated approximately USD 63.69 million (INR 590 crore) in revenue in 2023. While the growth trajectory is impressive — projected to reach USD 104 million by 2027 — this remains a fraction of India's total TV sector revenue of INR 617 billion. The industry is in the emergence phase of its lifecycle.

A FAST platform is, fundamentally, a software platform operating on the commercial internet. Its infrastructure consists of cloud computing, content delivery networks, and software engineering — a fundamentally different cost structure from satellite transponders, cable head-ends, and set-top box manufacturing. We respectfully submit that the financial conditions for ALTD authorisation should reflect this reality, calibrated to the economics of internet-based services rather than the capital requirements of physical distribution infrastructure.

India's strength in the global digital economy has been built on the principle that domestic entrepreneurs and technology companies can innovate and scale without prohibitive regulatory barriers. The same principle that enabled India's IT services industry, its mobile internet revolution, and its fintech ecosystem should guide the approach to FAST regulation — ensuring that homegrown Indian platforms can compete and grow alongside larger international players.

4. Benefits of FAST: What Is at Stake

4.1 Universal Access to Free Content

India has 193 million television households. The government's DD Free Dish platform has been a remarkable success in bringing free television to 64 million households across the country. FAST services represent the natural digital extension of this same vision — bringing free, high-quality television content to Indian households over the internet, leveraging India's world-leading broadband infrastructure.

FAST services, delivered over broadband (which at Rs. 8–10 per GB is among the cheapest in the world), complement and extend the reach of existing television services. The Ormax Media data in the consultation paper shows that 75.8 million CTV viewers are in small towns and villages. Just as the smartphone revolution brought the benefits of computing to hundreds of millions of Indians who had never owned a personal computer — leapfrogging an entire generation of hardware — FAST services are enabling a similar transformation in television. Consumers who may not have had access to a wide variety of television content can now access hundreds of channels on any internet-connected device, without the need for additional hardware such as set-top boxes, satellite dishes, or cable connections. This is a powerful extension of India's digital infrastructure story.

A supportive regulatory environment for FAST will accelerate this transformation, ensuring that the benefits of India's digital infrastructure reach every household. We respectfully submit that the framework should be designed to nurture this growth rather than impose conditions that may constrain it.

4.2 New Revenue for Indian Broadcasters

FAST platforms are creating net new advertising revenue for Indian broadcasters. A broadcaster's content that would previously have reached only cable or DTH audiences is now, through FAST, also reaching the 102 million-plus CTV households — many of whom have cord-cut or never subscribed to cable. This is incremental audience, not cannibalised audience.

CloudTV's revenue-sharing model means that the majority of advertising revenue generated on our platform flows back to the broadcaster or content owner. The fact that leading Indian broadcasters — including news networks, entertainment channels, and regional language channels — have chosen to appear on FAST platforms reflects their commercial judgment that FAST delivers net positive revenue.

4.3 Employment, Technology, and the Digital India Vision

India's FAST ecosystem employs software engineers, content operations teams, advertising technology specialists, and data analytics professionals across the country. The government's Digital India vision explicitly aims to build India's digital economy — imposing unnecessary regulatory barriers on a digital-native, internet-based industry runs counter to this vision.

The global FAST market is valued at approximately USD 6 billion and is projected to exceed USD 15 billion by 2030. India — with the world's largest English-and-regional-language content market and over 1 billion internet subscribers — has the potential to become a global leader in FAST content creation and distribution. A supportive regulatory environment at this stage will signal to domestic entrepreneurs and global investors alike that India welcomes innovation in digital content distribution, positioning the country to capture a meaningful share of this growing global market.

5. International Regulatory Experience: What Works

The consultation paper references international regulatory approaches, including the Italian AGCOM model. We would respectfully submit that even the most active regulators internationally have adopted a measured, light-touch approach to FAST.

5.1 United States

The United States, the world's largest FAST market with platforms like Pluto TV, Tubi, The Roku Channel, Samsung TV Plus, and Amazon Freevee, has chosen not to impose any specific licensing regime on FAST. The FCC does not require FAST platforms to obtain any authorization, pay any entry fee, or comply with cable/satellite rules. Internet-based services are regulated by general internet law rather than broadcaster-specific licensing regimes.

5.2 United Kingdom

Ofcom has conducted a detailed review of FAST and the Future of TV Distribution. The UK's current approach is that FAST channels delivered over the open internet are not subject to the same licensing requirements as traditional broadcast channels. Ofcom has proposed a tiered framework where obligations are proportionate to the service's scale and impact.

5.3 Australia

Australia's ACMA is still in the observation phase regarding FAST regulation. The Australian government has adopted a platform-neutral approach that focuses on content obligations (Australian content quotas, child safety) rather than distribution licensing. No authorisation fees or entry fees are proposed for FAST platforms.

5.4 The Pattern: Content Obligations, Not Distribution Licensing

The global regulatory consensus is that FAST channels should be subject to content obligations (programme codes, advertising standards, child safety rules) and transparency requirements but should not be subject to the same distribution licensing, fee, and financial guarantee frameworks designed for satellite and cable operators.

6. Proposed Regulatory Framework: The CloudTV Position

6.1 Light-Touch Registration (Not Licensing)

FAST/ALTD platforms should be required to register with MIB, not obtain a license. Registration should be a simple, online process with minimal paperwork; require disclosure of the entity's identity, principal place of business in India, and basic service characteristics; and carry no entry fee, no bank guarantee, and no authorisation fee.

6.2 Content Compliance Obligations

All FAST/ALTD platforms should comply with the following, which we consider reasonable and enforceable:

- Ensure that Indian-licensed channels carried on the platform have valid MIB uplinking/downlinking permissions (existing channels that already hold permissions need no additional approval) — and apply such requirement equally to all Streaming Platforms carrying the same channels.
- Comply with the Programme Code and Advertising Code under the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995.
- Maintain a content monitoring mechanism proportionate to the platform's scale.
- Provide a designated Grievance Redressal Officer (GRO) accessible to Indian consumers.
- Comply with ASCI advertising standards and the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

6.3 Indian Presence Requirement for Accountability

For foreign-headquartered entities providing FAST services to Indian consumers, we agree that an Indian representative entity should be mandatory for regulatory accountability. This should be structured as a registered Indian entity or authorised representative for legal accountability (not necessarily a full-fledged Indian majority-owned company, which would be unduly restrictive and inconsistent with India's FDI liberalisation in broadcasting), with obligations to respond to MIB/TRAI notices within defined timelines and to designate a grievance redressal officer accessible to Indian consumers.

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6.4 No Extension of DPO-Style Financial Conditions

We respectfully submit that the application of Entry Fees, Bank Guarantees, Net Worth requirements comparable to DTH/Cable operators, Authorisation Fees linked to subscriber base or revenue, Roll-Out Obligations, and Security Deposits to FAST/ALTD platforms may not be proportionate to the nature of these services. These conditions were designed for capital-intensive physical distribution infrastructure and may not translate meaningfully to internet-based content delivery.

6.5 The Pay Channel Issue Must Be Addressed Symmetrically

We understand the concern regarding pay channels available free on FAST platforms. This is a legitimate issue — but it must be resolved at the broadcaster level through the commercial agreement, not through distribution platform regulation alone. This issue is discussed in detail in our response to Q10 below.

7. Responses to Specific Questions in the Consultation Paper

Question 1: *What should be the appropriate definition and scope of Application-based Linear Television Distribution Services (ALTD Services) in the Indian broadcasting context?*

We propose the following definition:

‘Application-based Linear Television Distribution (ALTD) Services’ means the distribution of pre-scheduled, linear television programming over the public internet through software applications, whether pre-installed on connected television or mobile devices, downloadable from application stores, or accessible through web browsers, and offered to consumers primarily on a free, ad-supported basis, including any value-added on-demand services offered in conjunction with such linear programming.

Key definitional principles we recommend:

- The definition must be technology-neutral in terms of device form factor (smart TV, mobile, web, laptop) but technology-specific in terms of delivery medium (internet-based, as distinguished from satellite or cable-based delivery).
- The definition should explicitly exclude: (a) Streaming Platforms that primarily offer on-demand content with incidental live/linear features; (b) social media platforms that carry live streams; (c) broadcasters’ own websites or apps that carry their own channels. However, a Streaming Platform may qualify as an ALTD if it provides a dedicated linear television programming service that is functionally equivalent to an ALTD offering.
- The definition should not capture individual broadcasters who stream their own channels on their own apps — those broadcasters are already regulated through MIB’s existing permission framework.

We further recommend that the regulatory framework adopt a **tiered compliance approach** rather than a binary registration/exemption model. Smaller platforms (for example, those in the early stage of operations with limited channel portfolios or user bases) should be subject to a simplified compliance tier — consisting of self-declaration, basic content compliance, and a grievance mechanism — rather than the full suite of obligations applicable to large-scale ALTD platforms. The specific thresholds for tiered compliance should be determined through

stakeholder consultation, but the principle of proportionality should be embedded in the framework from the outset.

We respectfully suggest that the definition be crafted carefully to ensure that the resulting framework can be applied consistently and equitably across all platforms performing similar functions.

Question 2: *Should the Application Provider be designated as the primary stakeholder responsible for obtaining authorisation for provisioning ALTD Services?*

We agree that the Application Provider (or platform aggregator) is the appropriate entity to bear primary regulatory responsibility, for the following reasons:

- The application provider is the entity that the consumer interacts with — it controls the user interface, the EPG, the channel selection, and in some cases the advertising experience.
- The application provider has commercial agreements with both broadcasters (for content) and advertisers (for revenue), making it the logical accountability point.

We also recommend that foreign entities providing ALTD services in India be required to designate an Indian representative entity as the accountable party for regulatory purposes.

Question 3: *What should be the terms and conditions including fees or charges for the grant of service authorisation to ALTD application providers?*

a. Service Area: Pan-India service area should be the default. No geographic restrictions are appropriate for internet-based services.

b. Validity Period: 10-year validity with automatic renewal on compliance confirmation, to provide business certainty.

c. Eligibility Conditions: For Indian entities: incorporated under Indian Companies Act with primary business in India. For foreign entities: an Indian representative entity registered in India.

d. Minimum Net Worth: We respectfully submit that no minimum net worth requirement should apply to FAST/ALTD registration. Such a requirement would exclude startups and small Indian FAST operators while having no impact on large foreign platforms. If any net worth requirement is prescribed, it should be nominal — not exceeding INR 1 crore — and should not be structured as a precondition for registration.

e. Processing Fee: A nominal, non-refundable processing fee of up to INR 50,000 to cover administrative costs.

f. Entry Fee: Zero. There is no rational basis for an entry fee for an internet-based service that uses no government-allocated spectrum and requires no government infrastructure.

g. Bank Guarantee: Not applicable. Bank guarantees were designed to ensure performance of infrastructure build-out obligations. FAST platforms have no comparable infrastructure obligations.

h. Authorisation Fee: We propose a nominal annual authorisation fee of INR 5 lakhs per annum for large platforms (above 10 million monthly active users) and INR 1 lakh for smaller platforms. It should not be linked to revenues or subscriber numbers.

i. Security Deposit: Not applicable. Security deposits in broadcasting are linked to the risk of abandonment of licensed spectrum or infrastructure — a risk that does not exist for internet-based services.

j. Roll-Out Obligations: Not applicable. FAST services are inherently pan-India from day one, requiring no physical roll-out.

k. For Foreign Entities: Foreign entities providing ALTD services to Indian consumers must: (a) designate a registered Indian entity as their Indian representative; (b) maintain an Indian grievance officer; (c) comply with Indian content codes; (d) participate in TRAI's regulatory consultation processes.

Question 4: *What should be the common terms and conditions applicable for the authorised entities provisioning ALTD Services?*

a. Renewal of Authorisation: Renewal should be automatic upon compliance, with a simplified compliance audit every 5 years.

b. Renewal Fee: Equivalent to the annual authorisation fee, without escalation.

c. Equity Holding and Management Control: ALTD services should enjoy FDI treatment at least comparable to the existing broadcasting sector liberalisation (49% for news, 100% for entertainment).

d. Cross-Holding Restrictions: We submit that unduly restrictive cross-holding regulations between broadcasters and ALTD platforms would be counterproductive. Vertical integration between a broadcaster and its own FAST distribution platform is commercially efficient and should be permitted. Horizontal restrictions between multiple ALTD platforms may be considered to prevent market concentration.

e. Infrastructure Sharing: Not directly applicable to FAST platforms, which operate on shared commercial internet infrastructure.

Question 5: *What should be the specific terms and conditions for authorised ALTD entities regarding channel capacity, platform services, monitoring, and obligations?*

Reservation of Channel Capacity: We do not oppose a requirement that ALTD platforms carry DD Free Dish channels as a must-carry obligation, analogous to the must-carry provisions applicable to DTH and cable platforms. However, must-carry obligations should extend to DD channels only, not to private commercial channels.

Mandatory Sharing of Sports Signals with Prasar Bharati: If ALTD platforms carry sporting events of national importance, the same sharing obligations applicable to DTH and cable should apply. However, this obligation should be linked to actual carriage of such events, not to ALTD registration in general.

Compulsory Channel Transmission: We respectfully submit that ALTD platforms should not be required to carry specific private commercial channels. Channel selection on an ad-supported platform is a core editorial and commercial decision. Mandated carriage of commercial channels would distort the advertising market and may constitute an infringement on the platform's editorial discretion.

Monitoring and Inspection: ALTD platforms should maintain content logs for a minimum of 90 days (channel schedules and advertising content). Inspection by TRAI or MIB should be with prior notice and for specific, documented regulatory purposes. These monitoring obligations should apply equally to all Streaming Platforms carrying the same linear channels.

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Question 6: *What type of assurance or certification mechanism should be prescribed for television manufacturers and OS providers to ensure ALTD applications are duly authorised?*

The OS Provider and the ALTD Provider are distinct roles and must be treated as such. A Smart TV Operating System provider and an ALTD Application Provider perform fundamentally different functions within the ecosystem, even where the same entity may participate in both capacities. The OS provider licenses a software platform to television manufacturers, enabling applications to run on devices. The ALTD Application Provider curates linear television channels, manages the Electronic Programme Guide, operates the consumer-facing content experience, and in many cases serves advertising. These two roles can and do function independently of each other — an OS may host multiple ALTD applications from different providers, and an ALTD application may operate across multiple operating systems.

The regulatory accountability for ALTD service provisioning — including channel curation, content compliance, advertising standards, and consumer grievance redressal — rests squarely with the **Application Provider**, which is the entity that exercises editorial and commercial control over the FAST service. The OS provider's role is analogous to that of any software platform (such as Android or any other operating system) on which applications run — it is an intermediary, not a publisher or distributor of content. Conflating these roles would create regulatory confusion and impose obligations on entities that have no editorial control over the ALTD content in question.

With this distinction established, we propose a self-declaration model for certification, not a government certification model:

- ALTD applications seeking pre-installation on smart TVs or inclusion in OS-level app stores should provide a self-declaration that they have obtained (or applied for) ALTD registration from MIB.
- TV manufacturers and OS providers should maintain a publicly accessible list of ALTD-registered applications on their platforms.
- A simple API-based verification system, maintained by MIB, against which manufacturers and OS providers can verify registration status, would be efficient and scalable.

We respectfully caution against a model where TV manufacturers or OS providers are made jointly liable for content violations by ALTD applications that operate on their platforms. The Information Technology Act, 2000's intermediary liability framework provides the appropriate model: an intermediary that does not exercise editorial control over content should have safe harbour protection. Regulatory liability should follow editorial control, not software platform provision.

Question 7: *What assurance mechanisms should ensure that authorised ALTD providers carry only MIB-permitted channels? What penalties for non-compliance?*

We propose a two-tier compliance mechanism:

Tier 1 — Platform-level self-regulation: ALTD platforms should conduct pre-onboarding verification of each channel's MIB permission status. A database of permitted channels, maintained and updated by MIB in machine-readable format, would enable automated verification. We recommend that MIB establish and maintain such a database as a regulatory infrastructure measure.

Tier 2 — Complaint-based enforcement: Rather than attempting to proactively monitor thousands of channels across hundreds of platforms, MIB should establish a complaint mechanism where any stakeholder can report non-permitted channels. ALTD platforms should be required to remove flagged channels within 48 hours of notification from MIB, pending verification.

Penalties: Penalties for carrying non-permitted channels should be proportionate, graduated, and focused on remediation:

- First offence: Written warning with a 48-hour correction window.
- Repeat offence: Financial penalty of INR 1 lakh per instance.
- Persistent violation: Suspension of ALTD registration.

Penalties should not include criminal liability for platform operators for channels carried in good faith — criminal liability should be reserved for deliberate circumvention of the regulatory framework.

Question 8: *Are specific terms and conditions needed for value-added services (on-demand content) offered by ALTD providers?*

On-demand content on ALTD platforms that does not involve linear television channels is already governed by India's existing OTT regulatory framework under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. We see no need for an additional layer of ALTD-specific regulation for on-demand content.

If an ALTD platform carries both linear television channels (subject to ALTD registration) and on-demand content (subject to the IT Rules), these two regulatory regimes should operate independently without creating duplicative obligations.

Question 9: *Should broadcasters/content owners providing channels on ALTD platforms be mandated to obtain additional authorisation for satellite-based or ground-based broadcasting?*

Our answer is no, and we consider this one of the most consequential questions in the consultation paper.

For channels with existing MIB permissions: Indian broadcasters who already hold valid MIB uplinking and downlinking permissions have already complied with all content obligations, programme code requirements, and ownership/FDI conditions. Their channel content is regulated at the source. Requiring them to obtain an additional 'Ground-based Broadcasting' authorisation simply to make their already-permitted channel available on a FAST platform would constitute double regulation — regulating the same content, produced by the same entity, through the same permission framework, twice. No additional authorisation should be required for these channels.

For FAST-native channels without existing MIB permissions: We recognise that a meaningful category of channels on FAST platforms are "internet-native" — channels that have been created specifically for internet distribution and have never held traditional satellite uplinking/downlinking permissions. These include curated entertainment channels, thematic content channels (cooking, music, kids, lifestyle), and aggregated content channels that exist only in the FAST ecosystem. These channels represent a genuinely new content category and require a regulatory approach that acknowledges their distinct nature.

We propose that MIB create a new, lightweight 'Internet Channel Registration' category for such channels, with the following characteristics:

- A simple online registration process (not a full uplinking/downlinking permission application, which is designed for satellite-based technical architecture that these channels do not use).
- Mandatory compliance with the Programme Code and Advertising Code.
- Disclosure of the content owner's identity, Indian presence (or authorised Indian representative), and content genre.
- A nominal registration fee (not exceeding INR 25,000 per channel) to cover administrative costs.
- Annual renewal through self-declaration of continued compliance.
- Enforcement provisions consistent with those applicable to MIB-permitted channels (content takedown, penalties for Programme Code violations, etc.).

This approach would bring FAST-native channels within the regulatory fold without forcing them through a permission process designed for satellite broadcasting — achieving the Authority's objective of content accountability while preserving the conditions for innovation in internet-native content.

Recommendation: Broadcasters with existing MIB permissions should face no additional authorisation requirement to distribute on ALTD platforms. A new, simple 'Internet Channel Registration' process should be created for channels that originate exclusively for internet distribution.

Question 10: *What pricing methodology should be adopted for price parity of pay television channels on ALTD platforms?*

We respectfully submit that this question requires careful contextualisation before it can be answered meaningfully.

The Tariff Order was designed for addressable distribution platforms, not the open internet. The existing TRAI Tariff Order framework for pay and FTA channels was designed specifically for 'addressable distribution platforms' — a term that encompasses DTH and digital cable, where the operator has a direct subscription relationship with the consumer and charges a monthly fee. The Tariff Order's pay/FTA distinction was intended to prevent discrimination between DD Free Dish subscribers and DTH/cable subscribers. It was not designed to regulate how a broadcaster deploys its content on the open internet.

The value exchange on FAST is different, not absent. When a broadcaster makes a channel designated as 'pay' on DTH available on a FAST platform without a subscription fee, the broadcaster is not giving the channel away for free. The broadcaster is exchanging one form of monetisation (subscription revenue from DTH) for another (advertising revenue share from the FAST platform). The consumer receives the channel, and the broadcaster receives compensation — the mechanism of payment is different, but value is being exchanged. This is analogous to a newspaper that charges for a print edition while making digital content free online with advertising support — a widely recognised and legally uncontested business model.

The same channels are already available free on Streaming Platforms. The consultation paper and AIDCF's representations focus on pay channels appearing free on FAST platforms. However, many of these same pay channels are already available free on Streaming Platforms — as live streams, or embedded within OTT applications, or on the broadcaster's own website. Several DPOs themselves offer their subscribers free access to linear channels through

companion apps and web portals. If price parity is to be enforced, it must apply consistently across all internet-based distribution points for the same channel — not selectively to FAST platforms alone.

If TRAI concludes that tariff parity between ALTD platforms and traditional DPOs is warranted, we propose:

- A clear and explicit amendment to the Tariff Order that prospectively applies to internet-based platforms — not a retroactive interpretation of existing provisions.
- Such amendments must apply equally to all Streaming Platforms carrying the same channels.
- TRAI should require broadcasters to make a transparent declaration of their monetisation model per distribution platform (subscription vs. ad-supported), enabling the Authority to assess whether the channel's pricing treatment is consistent across platforms.
- Broadcasters should retain the freedom to choose their channel designation (pay vs. FTA) per distribution platform, subject to TRAI's general anti-discrimination framework.

Question 11: *What consumer protection obligations are required for authorised ALTD entities?*

We support reasonable consumer protection obligations, including:

- A designated and publicly accessible Grievance Redressal Officer (GRO) with response timelines: acknowledgment within 24 hours, resolution within 15 working days.
- Clear display of the GRO's contact details on the ALTD application's 'About' or 'Contact Us' page.
- Escalation to TRAI Consumer Complaint Centre for unresolved grievances.
- Transparency in content labelling (parental advisory, language of content, channel source).
- Compliance with the Personal Data Protection framework once enacted for viewer data.

We do not support importing the full consumer protection framework applicable to DTH and cable (which includes QoS standards for signal strength, set-top box interoperability, etc.) into the ALTD context. These QoS standards relate to physical distribution infrastructure and do not apply to internet-based services.

Question 12: *What is the right methodology for integrating ALTD service data into the television ratings framework?*

We consider this one of the most commercially important questions in the consultation paper. The integration of ALTD/CTV viewership data into India's audience measurement framework is critical for the health of the entire broadcasting ecosystem — broadcasters, advertisers, and platforms alike.

Currently, BARC India's audience measurement is based on a panel of set-top boxes that captures only cable and DTH viewership. This means that the 102 million-plus CTV households in India — and the growing FAST audience within them — are entirely absent from India's primary audience measurement system. This creates a serious market distortion: advertisers cannot value FAST inventory against BARC-equivalent metrics, broadcasters

cannot demonstrate the full reach of their channels across platforms, and FAST platforms cannot compete fairly in the advertising marketplace.

We propose the following:

- **Phased integration:** A phased integration of CTV/FAST viewership data into the national audience measurement framework over 18–24 months, open to all ALTD platforms.
- **Standardised data format:** ALTD platforms should be required to provide anonymised, aggregated viewership data to the measurement agency in a standardised format. No PII-based data should be required.
- **CTV Home Screen measurement:** We submit that audience measurement on CTV devices should include time spent on the TV's Home Page in addition to time spent within ALTD applications. On connected televisions, consumers spend significant time browsing and selecting content on the OS Home Screen before entering any application. This navigation and discovery time represents real audience engagement and content exposure (including promotional placements, channel recommendations, and advertising) that is not captured by any current measurement system. Excluding Home Screen engagement from CTV measurement would undercount actual viewer attention on CTV devices and create an incomplete picture of the CTV advertising opportunity.
- **International standards:** International standards (such as those developed by the IAB Tech Lab or similar bodies) should be adopted for ALTD viewership measurement to ensure consistency with global advertiser requirements.

The provision in the TV Ratings Policy 2026 allowing distribution platforms to publish their own viewership data without registration is a positive step. ALTD platforms should be encouraged to publish standardised viewership data on their platforms as an interim measure while the unified measurement framework is developed.

Question 13: *How should the enablement for TV distribution platforms to publish viewership data be aligned with the proposed authorisation framework for ALTD providers?*

We support a regime where registered ALTD platforms may publish viewership data of channels on their platforms on their websites and in industry reports, provided such data is anonymised and aggregated. The format and methodology for such publication should be standardised by TRAI in consultation with industry, to enable comparability across platforms.

For large platforms (above 20 million monthly active users), self-published viewership data should be supplemented by independent audit from a registered measurement agency. Viewership data publication should not require separate permission or registration beyond ALTD platform registration itself.

Question 14: *How should ALTD services be regulated if they adopt hybrid free/paid business models?*

If ALTD platforms introduce subscription-based or hybrid revenue models in the future, the regulatory framework should evolve accordingly. We propose:

- **Pure FAST (free, ad-supported) platforms:** Light-touch registration only, as proposed above.

- **Ad-free premium access:** It is possible to introduce an ad-free business model within a FAST platform, where access to content itself remains free and the subscription is charged purely to remove advertisements for paying customers. This should not be confused with subscription-based platforms where payment is mandatory to access content, and should remain under the light-touch registration framework.
- **Hybrid platforms (some free, some paid channels):** Subject to relevant tariff and interconnection regulations only with respect to the paid component — the free component should remain subject only to registration requirements.
- **Fully subscription-based ALTD platforms:** Subject to a framework comparable to IPTV, including tariff regulations — but calibrated for the economics of internet-based delivery.

Any transition from a free to a paid model should not trigger automatic application of the full cable/DTH regulatory framework. A proportionate, graduated approach based on the nature and extent of subscription services offered is appropriate.

Question 15: *Are there other issues relevant to the regulatory framework for ALTD services, including channel positioning, EPGs, revenue sharing, and interconnection?*

Electronic Programme Guides (EPGs)

EPG management on FAST platforms is a commercial and editorial decision of the platform. We submit that regulation of EPG channel placement for commercial channels is not warranted. However, public service channels (DD News, DD National, etc.) should have a guaranteed EPG position as part of any must-carry obligation.

Revenue Sharing

Revenue sharing arrangements between ALTD platforms and broadcasters should be governed by commercial agreements between the parties. We respectfully submit that TRAI should not prescribe minimum or maximum revenue sharing ratios for FAST platforms. The market, competition, and the relative bargaining power of the parties are sufficient to produce efficient outcomes. Regulatory intervention in revenue sharing would create significant unintended consequences and reduce the attractiveness of FAST as a distribution model for broadcasters.

Interconnection

We recognise that the commercial relationships between ALTD platforms and broadcasters involve meaningful terms — including content licensing, ad-inventory allocation, EPG placement, and content windowing — that go beyond a simple technical integration. However, the nature of these commercial arrangements is fundamentally different from the complex conditional access, signal handshake, and infrastructure-sharing arrangements that govern satellite/cable interconnection and which the current interconnection regulations were designed to address.

We propose that any interconnection framework for ALTD be limited to the following:

- **Transparency requirements:** ALTD platforms should be required to maintain written agreements with each broadcaster/content provider whose channels they carry, and to make the broad commercial terms (not proprietary pricing) available to TRAI upon request.
- **Non-discrimination:** ALTD platforms should not unreasonably discriminate between broadcasters in terms of access to the platform, provided the broadcaster's channel holds valid MIB permissions and complies with content standards.

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- **Dispute resolution:** A lightweight dispute resolution mechanism (mediation before TRAI adjudication) for commercial disagreements between ALTD platforms and broadcasters, to avoid protracted litigation.

A full-fledged Reference Interconnect Offer (RIO) regime, as applicable to DTH/MISO interconnection, would be disproportionate at this stage of the ALTD industry's development. However, establishing basic transparency and non-discrimination principles now would provide a foundation that can be built upon if the market matures to a point where more detailed regulation is warranted.

8. The Critical Question of Regulatory Parity with Streaming Platforms

We wish to draw the Authority's attention to a fundamental inconsistency that underlies this entire consultation paper and which must be addressed before any framework is finalised.

We respectfully note that this consultation refers to FAST/ALTD as creating 'regulatory arbitrage.' However, Streaming Platforms also distribute the same linear channels, on the same devices, to the same consumers, without comparable distribution obligations. For the framework to achieve its stated objective of parity and fairness, it would need to address all platforms performing a functionally equivalent role. We submit this observation in the spirit of helping the Authority design a framework that is comprehensive and sustainable.

We respectfully urge TRAI to consider a principle of 'functional equivalence' in regulation: if a service is functionally equivalent to another service (delivering the same channels, to the same consumer, on the same device), the regulatory treatment should be consistent, regardless of the business model or entity type. This principle, applied thoughtfully, would ensure that the framework achieves genuine parity across the ecosystem.

We recognise that applying a consistent framework across all Streaming Platforms is a complex undertaking. We respectfully submit that this complexity should inform the design of the ALTD framework itself — a proportionate, light-touch approach that can realistically be applied to all internet-based linear TV distribution will be more effective and sustainable than a comprehensive framework that can only be applied to a subset of platforms.

9. Proposed Regulatory Principles: A Summary

We respectfully propose that TRAI adopt the following principles in framing its recommendations to MIB:

- **Principle of Proportionality:** Regulatory obligations must be proportionate to the nature of the service and its risk profile. Internet-based services have a fundamentally different risk profile from capital-intensive physical distribution networks.
- **Principle of Functional Equivalence:** Entities performing the same function should face the same regulatory treatment, regardless of ownership structure, headquarters location, or business model. Streaming Platforms must be subject to the same obligations as FAST platforms.
- **Principle of Non-Duplication:** Broadcasters already licensed by MIB should face no additional authorisation for distributing their permitted channels on ALTD platforms.
- **Principle of Innovation Preservation:** The regulatory framework must not impose barriers to entry that would prevent new FAST platforms from emerging and competing, consistent with the government's Startup India policy.

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- **Principle of Consumer Interest Primacy:** FAST services are extending the reach of free, high-quality television content to hundreds of millions of Indian consumers across all demographics and geographies. A supportive regulatory environment will ensure this benefit continues to grow.
- **Principle of Domestic Industry Protection:** A well-calibrated framework will enable domestic Indian FAST platforms to compete and grow alongside global Streaming Platforms, supporting the government's vision of a self-reliant digital economy.

10. Conclusion

CloudTV welcomes this consultation as an opportunity for the Indian FAST/ALTD ecosystem to engage constructively with the regulatory process. We have endeavoured to provide detailed, reasoned, and fair-minded responses to each of the 15 questions posed by the Authority, informed by our direct experience operating a FAST platform in India and our knowledge of international regulatory approaches.

Our core submission is that India's FAST industry is at the beginning of what could be a transformative chapter for Indian broadcasting, Indian consumers, and the Indian digital economy — much as the smartphone revolution transformed India's relationship with computing and the internet. The policy choices made in the coming months will shape whether India leads this transformation globally. We are confident that a thoughtful, proportionate framework will achieve the Authority's objectives of content accountability and consumer protection while enabling India's FAST ecosystem to flourish.

We urge the Authority to recommend a framework that:

- Requires registration (not licensing) with proportionate compliance obligations.
- Ensures content quality and consumer protection through meaningful but proportionate obligations.
- Calibrates financial conditions to the economics of internet-based services rather than physical distribution infrastructure.
- Applies the same framework equally to all platforms distributing linear TV over the internet — whether dedicated FAST platforms or Streaming Platforms.
- Creates a stable, predictable regulatory environment that attracts investment into India's FAST ecosystem.

We are committed to working constructively with TRAI, MIB, and fellow stakeholders to build a regulatory framework that serves India's interests — consumers, broadcasters, technology companies, and the broader digital economy. We stand ready to present our views at any open house or stakeholder consultation that the Authority may convene.

Yours faithfully,

For and on behalf of CloudTV Operating System

Smart Television Operating System Provider, India

Date: 4th May 2026

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