

**RESPONSE OF
HINDUJA GLOBAL SOLUTIONS LIMITED – NXTDIGITAL
Media Division
TO THE
CONSULTATION PAPER ON
FORMULATION OF REGULATORY FRAMEWORK
APPLICATION – BASED LINEAR TELEVISION
DISTRIBUTION
(ALTD) SERVICES
(INCLUDING FREE AD – SUPPORTED STREAMING
TELEVISION (FAST) SERVICES)**

Submitted on: 11th May 2026

Response of Hinduja Global Solutions Limited to the Consultation Paper on Formulation of Regulatory Framework Application – Based Linear Television Distribution (ALTD) Services (Including Free Ad – Supported Streaming Television (Fast) Services

Opening Remarks: The Indian Broadcasting sector has evolved over the last decade in an accelerated mode. Today the content is seen by the viewers in multiple platforms. Application based Linear Television Distribution Services, i.e., ‘ALTD Service’ is provided through various modes i.e. through Internet connected Television sets. In today’s broadcasting landscape there has been a mismatch in the Regulations applicable for Linear Television channels provided by the Broadcasters and the Application based Linear Television Distribution Services.

In today's world, “**Over-the-top (OTT) platforms**” have revolutionized the way content is consumed globally, and India is no exception. The landscape of OTT platforms in India has seen exponential growth over the past decade, driven by increasing internet penetration, affordable smartphones, and a shift in consumer preferences towards on-demand content.

The journey of OTT platforms in India began in 2008 with the launch of BIGFlix by Reliance Entertainment. This was a significant step as it marked the beginning of digital streaming services in the country. However, the real transformation started around 2015, when the entry of global giants like **Netflix** and **Amazon Prime Video** with other players like **Disney+ Hotstar, SonyLIV, Zee5:** began the evolution of OTT platforms in India.

It is pertinent to point out here that Broadcasters like **Sony Liv, Zee5, Jio Hot star** are OTT platforms having being established by various Broadcaster(s) but the content which is made available to the above mentioned OTT players is by their Broadcaster parent companies, like **Culver Max Entertainment Pvt Ltd, Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd** and **Jio Star**. The rise of OTT platforms has also impacted traditional media, particularly television. The impact of OTT on traditional media has been telling with shows beginning to jump formats or at least have a version on the OTT platform. Many consumers now prefer the flexibility and variety offered by OTT platforms. This shift has induced traditional media companies to have their own OTT to remain afloat in the intense competitive market.

At the present juncture, line between the Broadcaster offering Linear television and OTT/Application based Linear Television Distribution (ALTD) services (including Free Ad-supported streaming Television (FAST) Services) has blurred and there is no enforcing regulations in place to control the non-compliances which are quite blatant on the OTT/ALTD service platforms. Keeping this perspective in mind the Authority/Regulator needs to bring in a slew of regulations to ensure level playing field for all the stakeholders including catering to the subscribers’ need and technological evolution which is galloping by the day.

We welcome the initiative taken by TRAI to elicit views from various stakeholders with a view to bring in parity between the content providers across multiple platforms including “ALTD Service’ from the regulatory and compliance standpoint.

We are now providing our comments/views on the questions posed by the Authority in the Consultation paper. Issued on 6th April 2026, date for submission of comments is 11th May 2026.

Definition and Scope of 'ALTD Services'

Ques. No.1: What should be the appropriate definition and scope of Application based Linear Television Distribution Services, i.e., 'ALTD Service' in the Indian broadcasting context, taking into account terminologies available internationally? Stakeholders are requested to provide their comments with detailed justification

Response: The Indian Broadcasting sector has evolved over the last decade in an accelerated mode. The content is seen by the viewers in multiple platforms. In our view the appropriate definition and scope of Application based Linear Television Distribution Services, i.e., 'ALTD Service' would be as under.

Application based Linear television Distribution Service (ALD) could be defined as:

'Free or Subscription-based Ad-supported Television (Fast) refers to connected TV video platforms that are typically free to watch supported by advertising, providing linear channels and on demand programming together delivered via the internet via IP protocol and therefore accessible exclusively on Internet connected TVs.'

Ques. No. 2: The 'ALTD Services' ecosystem involves multiple entities, including application providers, television equipment manufacturers, operating system providers, broadcasters, content providers, contentment aggregators and other technology or solution providers. However, the application provider appears to play a central role in the distribution of linear television channels across various business models. In this context, should the Application Providers be designated as the primary stakeholder responsible for obtaining authorization for providing 'ALTD Services'?

a. If yes, please provide detailed justification and supporting reasons.

b. If not, please identify the appropriate stakeholder(s) who should be responsible for obtaining such authorisation, along with rationale.

Response: In our view the application provider definitely plays a central role in the distribution of linear television channels across various business models. In this context, the Application Provider be designated as the primary stakeholder responsible for obtaining authorization for providing 'ALTD Services.

It is mandatory for the Broadcasters to obtain permission for up linking and downlinking of any channel. The objective was to permit the delivery of content as approved by MIB with respect to the public viewing. However, with introduction of 'ALTD Services' by TV manufacturers like Samsung, LG etc. there has been a total violation of the permission granted by the MIB. Moreover, there has been non adherence of the following clauses of the up linking and Downlinking Guidelines.

- (i) Clause 4(3)(d): The Grant of permission to a company/LLP under para 1 is subject to the following conditions (d) It uplinks from the permitted teleport only those TV channels which have been permitted /approved by the Ministry and stops up linking a TV channel as soon as permission/approval for such channel is withdrawn or suspended by the Ministry or on specific order of the Ministry to stop such up linking for such time period as may be specified in the order.

The logic behind granting of permission for up linking and downlinking of any channel was to restrict the delivery of content with respect to public viewing. However, with introduction of FAST services by TV manufacturers the concept of permission is altogether violated. Therefore, Downlinking guidelines need to be amended to include FAST services.

- (ii) Clause 8(1)(a): There are special conditions for up linking a satellite TV Channel whereby Up linking may be done in the Frequency Band specified by the applicant, after due approval of the Ministry and other concerned authorities subject to the further condition that up linking in any band (other than C band) shall only be in **encrypted** mode.

The guideline clearly specify the requirement of approval from the Ministry which is conveniently being avoided by FAST channels.

- (iii) Clause 10(1)(viii): At the time of Application for a channel to be broadcast in India, the downlinked channel must be licensed or permitted for being broadcast by the regulatory or licensing authority of the country of transmission, proof of which would have to be submitted at the time of application.

The reality today in our country is that several FAST services are retransmitting foreign channels in India that are up linked from other countries without securing the mandatory downlinking permission from MIB because the required proof of licensing or permission from the regulator in the country of origin is not being submitted to MIB. As a result, unregistered and unverified foreign channels are being transmitted in India without regulatory permission.

- (iv) Clause 11(3)(f): As per the guidelines, grant of permission to a company / LLP shall be subject to the following conditions..... (f) Broadcaster shall provide Satellite TV Channel signal reception decoders to MSOs/Cable Operators registered under the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act 1995 or to a DTH operator registered under the DTH guidelines issued by Government of India or to an Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) Service Provider duly permitted under their existing Telecom License or authorized by Department of Telecommunication or to a HITS operator duly permitted under the policy guidelines for HITS operators issued by the Ministry.

As per the downlinking guidelines the satellite channel decoders can only be provided to DTH, HITS, IPTV and MSOs. Delivery of FAST services/channels without the need for any decoders effectively defeats the purpose and intention behind the relevant clause incorporated in the up linking and down linking guidelines.

- (v) Clause 11(3)(h): The said clause (h) It shall ensure that any of its channels which is unregistered or prohibited from being telecast or transmitted or re-transmitted in India under the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act 1995 or the DTH guidelines or any other law for the time being in force, cannot be received in India through encryption or any other means.

Presently in India several TV channels which are neither registered with MIB nor having license for broadcasting are being illegally broadcast in the country as FAST services. Detailed list of such 'unregistered TV channels' being transmitted illegally in the form of FAST services on prominent platforms such as Distro TV, Yupp TV, Samsung TV Plus, LG WebOS has been highlighted on page no's **84 to 87** of the

Consultation paper, being part of the AIDCF letter dated 24th April 2025 addressed to the Hon'ble Joint Secretary, MIB.

- (vi) Clause 20(1): As per Clause 20(1) the name and logo of a TV channel is concerned, the following provision is stipulated, (1) A company/LLP shall display on the permitted TV channel only that name and logo which has been approved by the Ministry. Provided that display of name/logo other than that permitted or display of dual logo would be treated as a violation of the Guidelines meeting penal action.

The name and logo of a TV channel is approved by MIB and use of the same is a clear violation of the Down linking guidelines. Details of such 'licensed TV channels' being transmitted illegally in the form of FAST services, using the same name and logo on prominent platforms such as Distro TV, Yupp TV, Samsung TV Plus, LG WebOS have already been highlighted in the Annexures of the letter dated 24th April 2025 from AIDCF to the Hon'ble Joint Secretary, MIB forming part of the Consultation Paper.

In view of the above quoted regulations as per the up linking and guidelines The Up linking and down linking guidelines clearly stipulates that individual TV channels which are licensed to broadcasters by the MIB, after being uplinked to satellites in encrypted form, can only be down linked and retransmitted by authorized licensed service providers. Meaning thereby that only 'licensed TV channels' can be distributed in India that too only through 'licensed service providers like MSO, DTH, HITS & IPTV. Any other method of distributing such channels would be illegal and unauthorized and violative of the stipulated guidelines issued by the MIB. Therefore, there has to be an amendment in the Up linking downlinking guidelines.

Terms and Conditions of 'ALTD Services' Authorisation

Ques. No. 3: What should be the terms and conditions including fees or charges for the grant of service authorization to the application providers provisioning 'ALTD Services' in India, under the 'Television Channel Distribution Services' as recommended in Annexure – II of 'Authorisation recommendations dated 21st February 2025'? Stakeholders are requested to provide their detailed comments including but not limited to the following conditions:

- a. Service Area
- b. Validity period
- c. Eligibility conditions
- d. Minimum Net worth
- e. Processing Fee
- f. Entry Fee
- g. Bank Guarantee
- h. Authorisation Fee
- i. Security Deposit
- j. Roll Out Obligations
- k. Any other terms and conditions

Further, what terms and conditions/obligations should be put in place for foreign entities providing 'ALTD Services' in India?

Response: The terms and conditions for the grant of service authorization to the application providers provisioning 'ALTD Services' in India, under the 'Television Channel Distribution Services' will be Pan India in terms of the authorization which may be granted by MIB as in the case of Broadcasters/DPOs .

- a. Service Area: Service area can be Pan India.
- b. Validity period: Validity period can be for 10 years for ALTD services, unless terminated earlier.
- c. Eligibility conditions:
 - (1) The applicant entity shall be an Indian Company or a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP): Provided that no Ministry/Department of the Central Government and State/UT Governments and entities related to them shall be allowed to obtain service authorisation.
 - (2) The applicant entity shall fulfil all the terms and conditions laid down in the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy of the Government of India, as notified by the Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) from time to time, as applicable. For this purpose, the applicant entity shall intimate the Central Government regarding FDI position at the time of application as well as whenever any change in the FDI in the company takes place, within 30 days of effect of such change. Every change in the FDI pattern has to conform to the FDI policy of the Government of India, including wherever required, prior approval of the Central Government.
 - (3) The applicant company/LLP shall make full disclosure of Shareholders Agreements/Capital Contribution, at the time of application, as applicable.
 - (4) The applicant company shall furnish, along with the application, the proposed name and logo of the channel along with the Trademark Registration Certificate regarding the ownership of the name and logo, or the application furnished for such certificate:
 - (5) Provided that if the proposed name and logo are not owned or applied for by the company/LLP, then a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the registered trademark owner, or from a person who has been using the trademark in any class for a continuous period of at least one year immediately prior to the date of NOC and has made an application for registration of the trademark in the relevant class for broadcast, shall be furnished by the company/LLP.
 - (6) The company/LLP shall have complete management control, operational independence and control over its resources and assets and shall have adequate financial strength to operate the channel. (c) The applicant entity shall either own the channel, or shall enjoy, for the territory of India, exclusive marketing/distribution rights for the same, inclusive of the rights to the advertisement and subscription revenues for the channel and shall submit documentary proof at the time of the application:

- d. Minimum Net worth:
- (1) The applicant entity shall have a minimum Net worth of an amount of **Rs. 25.00 Crore** for an Indian Company and for a foreign company, up linking from outside India **Rs. 50.00 crores** as applicable, at the time of application.
 - (2) Provided that Net worth of only the applicant entity shall be considered to determine the eligibility and the Net worth of holding companies or subsidiaries or group companies or interconnected undertakings shall not be taken into account;
 - (3) Provided further that the amount of Entry Fee paid shall not be taken as a tangible asset either in full or in part for the purposes of calculation of Net worth;
 - (4) Provided also that the applicant entity shall submit Net worth Certificate as per the proforma given in **Schedule-I** duly certified by the Statutory Auditor/Chartered Accountant and supported by certified accounts;
 - (5) Provided also that the stipulated minimum Net worth shall be required to be maintained throughout the validity of authorisation.
- e. Processing Fee: A non-refundable processing fee of Rs. 10,000/- may be charged for processing the application for seeking authorization to provide ALTD services in India.
- f. Entry Fee: Rs. 5.00 crores
- g. Bank Guarantee: Rs. 5.00 crores or 50% of the Authorization fee for Six (06) months
- h. Authorization fee: Rs. 1.00 Lakh per channel for each year of the term. Since, the number of channels may vary each year.
- i. Security deposit: Rs. 1.00 Crore
- j. Roll out obligations: within 6 months on receiving the authorization.

Ques. No. 4: What should be the common terms and conditions applicable for the authorized entities provisioning 'ALTD Services' in India, under the 'Television Channel Distribution Services' as recommended in part – I of Annexure – III in 'Authorisation Recommendations dated 21st February 2025'? Stakeholders are requested to provide their detailed comments on the following conditions:

- a. **Renewal of Authorisation**
- b. **Renewal Fee**
- c. **Equity Holding and Management Control**
- d. **Restriction on cross-holding of equity shares/capital contribution between**
 - i. **TV broadcasters and application providers provisioning ALTD Services**
 - ii. **Application Providers provisioning ALTD services and other DSPs**

- e. **Transfer / Surrender of service Authorization**
- f. **Sharing of Infrastructure**
- g. **Any other terms and conditions**

Response: The terms and conditions which are applicable on DTH, HITS and IPTV shall be applicable on ALTD service Provider and FAST channels as provided in section 2, of Annexure III of TRAI's recommendation dated 21st February 2025. For specific conditions, our response for the following terms and conditions may be considered

- a. Renewal of Authorisation: Renewal Period: 10 years
- b. Renewal Fee: Rs. 10,00,000. The Authorised Entity shall apply for renewal of authorisation at least three (03) months before expiry of authorisation.
- c. Equity Holding and Management Control:
 - (i) It should be a Company registered under the Indian Companies Act 2013.
 - (ii) 51 % Equity holding in the company should be held by Indian citizens.
 - (iii) The Applicant company should have majority control on the Board as well as Chief executive officer of the company being a resident Indian.
 - (iv) The technical infrastructure of the company should be located in India.
- d. Restriction on cross-holding of equity shares/capital contribution between
 - (i) TV broadcasters and application providers provisioning ALTD Services
 - 1. No single company / legal entity, either directly or through its associates or interconnected undertakings, **shall have more than 20% equity holding** in ALTD Platform and broadcasters/ advertisers/ advertising agencies This has to be treated mutually exclusive.
 - 2. No single company / legal entity, either directly or through its associates or interconnected undertakings, **shall have more than 20% equity holding** in more than one ALTD Platform.
 - 3. The crossholdings restriction will also be applicable in respect of individual promoters besides being applicable to legal entities comprising of Companies. Partnership firms, LLPs or any other entity covered under any other class or description
 - 4. A promoter company / member of the Board of Directors of the ALTD Platform entity cannot have stakes in any broadcaster / advertiser / advertising agency either directly or through its associates or interconnected undertakings whereby the total holding of such director/shareholder in such broadcaster/advertiser/advertising agency company exceeds 20%.
 - (ii) Application Providers provisioning ALTD services and other DSPs
 - 1. No single company/legal entity providing ALTD services either directly or through its associates or interconnected undertakings, **shall have more than 20% equity holding** in any other DSP Platform / advertisers/ advertising agencies.

2. No single company / legal entity providing ALTD services either directly or through its associates or interconnected undertakings, **shall have more than 20% equity holding** in more than one DSP platform or ALTD Platform.
 3. The crossholdings restriction will also be applicable in respect of individual promoters besides being applicable to legal entities comprising of Companies. Partnership firms, LLPs or any other entity covered under any other class or description for the sake of cross holding in either another DSO or ALTD entity.
 4. A promoter company / member of the Board of Directors of the ALTD Platform entity cannot have stakes in any DSO / advertiser / advertising agency either directly or through its associates or inter-connected undertakings whereby the total holding of such director/shareholder in such ALTD entity/DSO/advertiser/advertising agency entity exceeds 20%.
- e. Transfer Surrender of service authorisation: The ALTD service provider/ authorised DSO can surrender service authorisation by giving 90 days' notice to the Ministry/ Authority and all concerned affected parties comprising of the Broadcaster/DSOs as the case may be. The balance amount of the Bank Guarantee lodged with the Ministry /Authority will be returnable to the applicant after deduction/adjustment of any statutory /outstanding dues.

Further, it is important to ensure that the ALTD service provider/DSO cannot transfer, assign, lease their authorisation for the platform without the written approval of the Ministry/Authority to any third party or enter into any arrangement/agreement to sub-authorise and/or create partnership relating to the Authorisation granted exclusively to the ALD service prover/DSO to any third party. Any such arrangement will be deemed as contravention of the authorisation and shall result in revoking/cancelling the authorisation so granted by the Ministry/Authority.

Ques, No. 5: What should be the specific terms and conditions for the authorized entities provisioning 'ALTD Services' in India, under the 'Television Channel Distribution Services' as recommended in part – II of Annexure – III in 'Authorisation recommendations dated 21st February 2025'? Stakeholders are requested to provide their detailed comments on the following conditions:

- a. **Reservation of operational channel capacity by Vertically Integrated Entity**
- b. **Platform Services (PS) offered by application providers provisioning ALTD services**
- c. **Monitoring and Inspection of facilities**
- d. **Supply of Information to Central Government/TRAI**
- e. **Contravention of terms and conditions of authorization**
- f. **Any other terms and conditions**

Further, whether the mandatory sharing of Sports Broadcasting Signals with Prasar Bharati and the compulsory transmission of certain channels as mandated for DTH, HITS and IPTV services should be applied to the

application providers provisioning 'ALTD Services'. Stakeholders are requested to provide their comments with detailed justification on all such obligations that should be made applicable on such entities.

Response: Our comments on the above issues are as under:

- a. Reservation of operational channel capacity by Vertically Integrated Entity: An Authorised Entity shall not reserve more than 15% of the operational channel capacity for its vertically integrated broadcaster(s). The rest of the capacity can be offered to the other broadcasters on a non-discriminatory basis. RIO agreements to be put in place with other content providers/broadcasters in similar fashion to those that are required for DTH/CATV/HITS/IPTV distributors.
- b. Platform Services (PS) offered by application providers provisioning ALTD services: An Authorised ALTD service provider shall be permitted to provide such value-added services using its service and network, which otherwise doesn't require specific approval from the Central Government.
- c. Monitoring and Inspection of facilities: The authorized officers who may be appointed from time to time by TRAI would have the power to visit the office of the Indian Company providing ALTD services in India
- d. Supply of Information to Central Government/TRAI:
 - (1) The ALTD Service Provider shall provide information with respect to its Application, equipment, network, systems, technical parameters, and any other relevant details as required by the Central Government/TRAI or their authorised representative from time to time in the specified format.
 - (2) The ALTD Service Provider shall provide any information required by the Central Government or its authorised representative regarding Programme Content and Quality, in the specified,
- e. Contravention of terms and conditions of authorization: Any contravention, of the provisions of the Telecommunications Act 2023, The Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995 and the TRAI Act, 1997 and any other Rules made there under, by the ALTD service provider should be dealt with by the provisions contained in such Acts/Rules as may be prescribed by TRAI from time to time.

Further, in our view, the ALTD Service Provider shall ensure that channels carried by, and telecasting sporting events are ensured compliance with the provisions of The Sports Broadcasting Signals (Mandatory Sharing with Prasar Bharati) Act, 2007.

In addition, ALTD service provider should also ensure Compulsory transmission of certain channels of Prasar Bharati, or any other television channel(s) operated on behalf of Parliament, as notified by the Central Government under the provisions of CTN Ac which are required to be compulsorily carried Such notification may contain the numbers and names of channels and the manner of reception and retransmission of such channels.

Due adherence of the above shall ensure level playing field for the Broadcaster as well as the ALTD service provider.

(f) rules around advertising time between, before or during shows should be limited as per the same terms that are there for existing DTV/Cable/HITS/IPTV operators.

(g) ALTD platforms should ensure that they are obliged to follow same TRAI reporting as CATV/HITS/DTV/IPTV platforms, including EPG information, PMR/QMR reporting etc.

(h) ALTD platforms should be restricted to transmitting the same signals as normal broadcasters that meet the same content restriction/standards as per standard broadcasters. There should be similar processes also with respect to managing issues with content being transmitted and capability for the regulator to shutdown/penalise any inappropriate content being transmitted.

Ques. No. 6: What type of assurance or certification mechanism should be prescribed for television manufacturers and operating system providers to ensure that applications provisioning ALTD services, (whether pre-integrated with television sets or made available for download through application stores or web platforms) are duly authorized by MIB.

Response: In our view the ALTD service provider first and foremost should obtain the approval from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) to operate and provide ALTD services in India. In case of foreign ALTD service provider an approval has to be separately obtained from MIB. It is a well-known fact that ALTD services are not limited to smart TV sets only but can also be accessed on other form factors like laptop, smartphones etc., hence the regulator cannot distinguish among such devices and should be form-factor agnostic. Further, ALTD services may also originate from applications that come pre-integrated with Smart TV sets, or from applications that can be downloaded from operating system specific, play store or service provider specific application libraries (standalone applications available on Internet that offer linear channels. Such applications can be installed on televisions and/or mobile devices or accessed directly through web browsers across a wide range of devices.

It is therefore suggested that the MIB approval could be inbuilt in the ALTD application so that whenever the ALTD application is booted, the MIB approval pops up with the term of the approval so that the viewer is aware that the ALTD service provider is a MIB approved service provider. Likewise in Smart TV preloaded with specific Application also should pop up with the MIB approval. For the sake of convenience and saving space on the screen, the MIB approval can be put in a QR code with a description (MIB approval) for the viewer/ user of the App to verify the same and be assured that they are not accessing an illegal Application. Needless, to say, a paper copy of the MIB approval has to be maintained by the ALTD service provider at his office for inspection of authorities as well.

Ques. No. 7: What kind of assurance mechanisms should be instituted to ensure that application providers authorized for provisioning ALTD services carry only those channels which are authorized /permitted by MIB for distribution in India. What kind of penalty/disincentive/deterrent be instituted for non-compliance? Provide your comments with justification.

Response: The assurance mechanism to ensure that application providers authorized for provisioning ALTD services carry only those channels which are authorized/permitted by MIB for distribution in India can be easily ascertained from the MIB approval which will list out the number of channels with the genre and language in the permission letter issued. Permission for any additional channel to be carried on the Network has to be applied additionally and permission sought in addition to the existing permission. Moreover. The permission letter will also reflect the term of the permission as well.

In the event the ALTD service provider fails to comply with regulatory requirement in terms of the permission letter issued by MIB, the authority can levy financial disincentive which is steep. In case of the first instance of non-compliance the ALTD service provider can be penalized with a penalty of Rs. 1,00,000/- per day per channel and on the second instance of non-compliance, the defaulting ALTD service provider should be penalized with Rs. 2,00,000/- per day per channel. This is necessary since, the ALTD service provider cannot be allowed to operate illegally in an unauthorized manner which results in weaning away the subscribers of the DPO's, DTH, HITS operators who are already facing the downturn in their business cycle.

Ques. No. 8: Whether there is a need to prescribe any specific terms and conditions for value-added services offered by ALTD service providers? If yes, what should be the terms and conditions? Stakeholders are requested to provide their detailed comments with justification.

Response: Yes, there is a need to prescribe specific terms and conditions for value added service offered by the ALTD service provider. Basic regulations relating to transparency, consumer protection and data privacy should apply without restricting innovation. The value added services in the form of 'Platform services' are provided by the DPOs which are distinct from the permitted television channels and include features curated or aggregated by the DPO itself. Such as the local or interactive services. The provisions of such services is governed by MIB guidelines and TRAI regulations.

Likewise, the ALTD service provider should categorically state on their electronic program guide (EPG) about such value added platform services along with the rate of each channel/service and it is primary requirement that the ALTD service provider offering such services is also governed by MIB guidelines and TRAI regulations which have to be at par with DPOs. Accordingly, any fresh regulation has to be thought of on the lines of parity for all stakeholders.

Television channels provisioned under 'ALTD Services'

Ques. No. 9: Whether the broadcasters/content owners providing or intending to provide television channels on ALTD platforms operating in India be mandated to obtain authorization either for:

- **Satellite-based Broadcasting and/or**
- **Ground-based Broadcasting**

along with its applicable terms and conditions, before entering into the agreements with authorized entities provisioning ALTD services to consumers? If yes, provide reasons with justifications.

Response: In our view the Broadcaster/Owners or ALTD service provider intending to provide television channels has to be registered as a DPO and have to be treated separately and distinctly from each other. Yes, we are of the view that ALTD platform operating in India has to be mandated to obtain authorization **either** for (i) Satellite-based Broadcasting or (ii) Ground-based Broadcasting. In any case the authorization which may be granted to ALTD platform should be either of the above two modes of transmission. ALTD platform cannot be permitted offer channels through the above two (02) modes of transmission at the same time. A situation may arise wherein a single entity, i.e., a broadcaster /content provider is the one who is providing the content and also running an ALTD distribution platform then in such a scenario, it would be mandatory for such entity to comply with the various restriction which may apply, including cross holding restriction provided in the authorization granted to the ALTD service provider as a distributor.

Ques. No. 10: In view of the availability of pay television channels on ALTD platforms, what pricing methodology should be adopted for price parity of television channels across platforms? Please provide detailed justification for your response.

Response: In our view the pricing methodology should be on the following basis.

- (i) The Maximum Retail Price (MRP) of pay television channels should be uniform across all distribution platforms, including ALTD platforms. Mode of transmission should not be the basis for differential pricing. Uniformity is very much essential to ensure that there is no distortion in price in order to ensure level playing field across all platforms.
- (ii) No Linear satellite pay channel which are designated as pay channels should be permitted to be broadcast or streamed free of charge, via digital or internet-based feeds.
- (iii) An ALTD platform seeking to obtain signals of television channels shall submit a formal written request in the application format prescribed by the broadcaster.

- (iv) No broadcaster shall provide signals of pay channels to any ALTD platform without executing into a written Reference Interconnection Offers (RIOs) with ALTD platform as per the regulatory requirement to ensure non-discrimination and transparency in each and every arrangement/agreement.
- (v) The traditional distributors as well the ALTD service providers should be allowed flexibility in packaging and offering channels, including the formation of bouquet(s). This would enable platform(s) to compete on quality of service, innovation and user experience. At the same time ensuring applicability of regulations uniformly for both the platform(s).

Ques. No. 11: What obligations are required to be specified for the authorized entities provisioning ALTD services, with respect to consumer protection and grievance redressal mechanism, considering the different modes of service access such as smart televisions, websites, mobile applications etc.? Please provide your comments with detailed justification.

Response:

The extant legal and regulatory framework provides multiple rights to the consumers of the Linear TV Industry including the major stakeholder being the Broadcaster, Distribution Platform Operators, Local Cable Operators and the Consumers. Presently, the Linear TV subscribers are protected with all aspects of the relationship between the said stakeholders with the intent to ensure accountability, transparency and fair competition.

In our view the following regulations which are applicable for the Linear TV would also be applicable for ALTD services with certain additional regulations providing checks and balances for ALTD service providers needs to be added. The broad regulations applicable for the linear TV are stated herein below and for the sake of brevity the contents of the said regulations are not reproduced herein again.

- (I) The Telecommunication (Broadcasting and Cable) Services (Eighth) (Addressable Systems) Tariff Order, 2017.
- (II) The Telecommunication (Broadcasting and Cable), Services Standards of Quality of Service and Consumer Protection (Addressable Systems) Regulations 2017.
- (III) Telecommunication (Broadcasting and Cable) Services Interconnection (Addressable Systems) Regulations, 2017.
- (IV) The Telecommunication (Broadcasting and Cable) Services Register of Interconnection Agreements and all such other matters Regulations, 2019.

For ALTD Platform, required regulations from the above mentioned (I) to (IV) regulations should be picked plus ALTD specific regulations should be added to make a comprehensive framework of Regulations applicable for ALTD platform.

It is therefore suggested that there has to be a separate set of Regulations for ALTD platform which can comprise certain Linear TV Regulations coupled with ALTD specific regulations. For Instance, there has to be,

- (i) Separate Compliance officer(s) for addressing consumer issues relating to Linear TV and ALTD Platform – for inappropriate content, misleading advertising. Phone No's and Email ID has to mentioned on the website(s) of Linear tv service provider and ALTD service provider.
- (ii) Separate EPG: Separate EPG for Linear and ALTD platform.
- (iii) Separate Reference Interconnect Offer: Separate Reference Interconnect Offer for Linear TV and ALTD platform.
- (iv) Appointment of a Technical officer for ALTD Planform: Appointment of a Technical officer should be made mandatory for ALTD Platform for attending interruption or degradation of service, malfunctioning of applications, difficulties in accessing content (depending on who is the application provider, content aggregator or any other intermediary involved in service/content provisioning).
- (v) Separate Consumer redressal cell of a brand TV for ALTD services: Any consumer having issues relating to television brand with inbuilt application which is malfunctioning has to contact the consumer redressal cell of the television brand for resolution of any issue. The website of the television brand should state the contact details with Phone number and email id with TAT. If the issue remains unaddressed as per the timeframe, the customer can escalate the issue to the Authority/TRAI for urgent resolution.
- (vi) TAT: The turnaround time (TAT) for any complaint should on the same lines as prescribed for Linear TV with tweaking if required.
- (vii) Penalties & Fines: The penalties/fines should be on the same lines as is applicable for Linear TV.
- (viii) Similar auditing as per current CATV/HITS/DTV/IPTV platforms
- (ix) All content should be sent encrypted using appropriate DRM technologies in similar fashion to IPTV.

Ques. No. 12: With revised guidelines now including multiple viewing platforms in audience measurement, stakeholders are requested to furnish their comments on the right methodology for integrating ALTD service data into television ratings framework, as well as the proposed timelines for implementation, supported by detailed justifications.

Response: The right methodology for integrating ALTD service data into the television ratings framework for audience measurement of content watched as well as the effectiveness of advertisements on ALTD and Linear television platform(s) is suggested herein below.

- (I) **Factor I - Audience Reach:** This Factor establish the foundational question — who is watching, and their numbers. These details can be further broken down into (a) Unique Reach (Deduplicated) Unique reach must be the primary currency of any cross-platform measurement system. (b) **Household vs. Individual Reach** - Measurement must distinguish between household-level and individual-level reach on shared TV sets. (c) **Geographic Reach** - India being a multi linguistic with regional diversity, audience reach must be disaggregated by geography — by state, metro versus non-metro, and tier-I, tier – II and tier – III cities. (d) **Platform-wise and Device-wise Distribution** – Aggregation of numbers thrown up need to be broken down as per OTT platform, FAST channels. This has bearing on advertisement pricing and future planning for investment in a particular platform.
- (II) **Factor - II: Audience Composition and Demographic:** This Factor provide answer to — What is the composition of the audience. (a) **Age** and Gender Profile, (b) Language and Content Preference Segmentation. (c) New vs. Returning Viewer Distinction. (d) Socioeconomic Classification to determine affordability & choice of channels.
- (III) **Factor - III: Viewing Behaviour and Engagement:** This Factor answer the question —frequency/timeframe of an engaging audience. (a) Average Viewing Time (AVT) / Watch Time The total duration for which an individual viewer watches a specific programme, channel, or platform within a defined reporting period. (b) Content Completion Rate - The proportion of viewers who watch a programme or episode from start to finish. (c) Time-Shifted vs. Live Viewing - measurement must differentiate between viewers watching content in real time versus those accessing it through catch-up or on-demand features. This has relevance for pricing premium content and also has a bearing on advertisement slots and their pricing. (d) Binge Viewing Patterns - For OTT platforms specifically, the measurement of sequential episode consumption. This aspect has a bearing on future investments in a particular type of content of a specific genre.
- (IV) **Factor IV: Advertising Effectiveness:** This Factor answer the question as to whether a particular advertisement is effective or not (a) Viewability – Whether it is possible to ascertain as to whether an advertisement was technically capable of being seen & measured against defined standards. (b) Ad Impression Delivery (Verified) - The total number of times an advertisement is served to a viewer. (c) Ad Frequency per Unique Viewer - The average number of times a single unique viewer is exposed to the same advertisement within a defined period to enable advertisers to monitor and control over-exposure of a particular advertisement.

- (V) **Factor-V: Governance and Methodology** : This factor is very much essential to ensure commercial credibility of the reporting done for be it be content on Linear Television, ALTD platforms as well Advertisements which are run on these platforms. (a) Privacy-Compliant Data Collection - All individual-level data collection underpinning the above factor(s) must comply with applicable data protection legislation, including the Digital Personal Data Protection Act. (b) Methodology Transparency and Disclosure -The methodology by which each parameter is calculated — sampling approach, weighting, deduplication logic, device recognition methodology must be publicly disclosed in adequate detail to allow independent enquiry to ensure that logical and accurate data is being reported. (c) Establishment Survey Currency - The demographic universe against which audience data is projected must be derived from a current, independently conducted establishment survey. (d) Independent Third-Party Audit - All viewership and advertising data reported by OTT/ALTD platforms and FAST channels for commercial purposes must be subject to audit by an independent body operating under a defined standards framework prescribed by the Authority.

It is submitted that no single Factor from the above is sufficient on a standalone basis. In fact, all the relevant factors stated herein above have to work in unison in order to generate a meaningful and productive data for the industry to take considered decision of investments in time to come.

In our view, the proposed timeline for implementation of the above would be **90 days** after the methodology is notified by the Authority be adopted by rating agencies.

Ques. No. 13: Under the revised guidelines, television distribution platforms and/or OTT platforms may publish periodic viewership data of broadcasters/channels they carry on their platforms and/or on their websites, without prior registration. In this context, stakeholders are invited to provide their comments on how such an enablement can be aligned with proposed authorization framework for application providers provisioning ALTD services, along with any related considerations.

Response: In our view viewership data and Advertisement details relating to any OTT platform or FAST channels should **not be considered** in the case of such platform(s) which are yet to get their authorization. Such data from unregistered platforms should not be considered for ratings. The amended guidelines issued by MIB with revised policy titled 'TV Ratings policy 2026 – Guidelines for Regulation of television ratings on 27th March 2026. Clause 5.1 titled 'Viewing Platform' under Clause 5 delineating 'Methodology for 'Audience Measurement' which reads as under:

'5.1.1 Ratings ought to be technology neutral and shall capture data across multiple viewing platforms viz cable TV, Direct to Home (DTH), Terrestrial TV, OTT, connected TVs, and any other platform wherever feasible' needs to be followed.

14.3 – TV Distribution Platforms and /or OTT platforms may publish viewership data of Broadcasters/channels being played on their platforms, on their websites, without obtaining registration or permission under these guidelines’.

In our view this data may be published on the respective websites before obtaining registration, but such data cannot be considered for ratings by rating agencies.

In addition, even the viewership data as well as Advertisement data relating to OTT platforms/FAST channels having authorization considered for ratings should also be subject to Audit under the regulatory framework prescribed by TRAI.

Future consideration for 'ALTD Services'

Ques. No. 14: **Considering the scenario wherein application providers provisioning ALTD services may adopt a hybrid business model offering free and /or paid services, stakeholders comments are invited on how such services should be subject to the regulatory framework, particularly with respect to tariff, interconnection and quality of service aspects. Please provide your comments with justification.**

Response: It is submitted that for offering the Pay and/or Free services should be aligned with the declaration submitted by the ALTD service provider to the authorities. Also, it is necessary that the Authority cannot allow any difference in the channel price offered by the DPOs to its subscribers vis-à-vis the price charges by ALTD service provider. The DPO cannot be put to any disadvantage by ALTD service provider by offering channels/content at differential pricing. In fact, the entire service provided by the ALTD platform should be strictly regulated in all aspects relating to tariff, interconnection and quality of service aspects applicable to a DPO, DTH, HITS and IPTV operators with specific tweaking to the regulations applicable to ALTD platform to be in sync with all the distributing platforms.

Any other Issue

Ques. No. 15: **Whether there are other issues (such as channel positioning on home screen, EPGs, revenue sharing, interconnection agreements including marketing and placement agreements, etc.), not specifically covered in this consultation paper, which may be relevant for consideration while formulating the services? Stakeholders are also requested to share relevant international best practices or regulatory approaches, if any, along with appropriate justification.**

Response: Issues relating to,
(i) **Channel positioning on home screen and EPGs:** should be as per regulations prescribed for linear television but it should be separate and distinct for ALTD and Linear TV. An Electronic Programming Guide (EPG) is a digital interface that provides users with detailed information about

television programs. EPGs have traditionally been associated with cable and satellite TV. However, with the rise of digital streaming, EPGs have become integral to over-the-top (OTT) platforms, IPTV services, and video-on-demand (VOD) systems. Further EPG in the context of streaming services should be able to meet the unique needs of digital content delivery. For ALTD services, EPGs should be tailor made for streaming platforms:

- (a) VOD Integration: Unlike traditional TV, streaming services offer on-demand content. EPGs for streaming platforms include sections for VOD libraries, allowing users to browse and access content at any time.
- (b) Live Streaming: Many streaming platforms offer live TV options. EPGs for these services include live channel listings, helping users keep track of live broadcasts and upcoming events.
- (c) Catch-Up TV: EPGs for streaming services often feature Catch-up TV functionality, enabling viewers to watch programs they missed. This is particularly useful for live events or popular series.
- (d) Cross-Platform Syncing: Users can access their EPGs across multiple devices, with their preferences and settings synchronized. This ensures a seamless experience whether they're watching on a TV, laptop, or mobile device.

The evolution of EPG technology is ongoing, with several emerging trends poised to shape the future of content discovery and viewing and therefore ALTD EPG should be developed on the following lines.

1. AI and Machine Learning: Advanced AI and machine learning algorithms will further enhance personalization, offering viewers highly tailored content recommendations based on their behaviour and preferences.
2. Voice Integration: Voice-activated EPGs will become more common, allowing users to search for programs, set reminders, and control playback using voice commands.
3. Enhanced Interactivity: Future EPGs will incorporate more interactive features, such as social media integration, allowing users to share their viewing experiences and recommendations with friends and family.
4. Augmented Reality (AR): AR could be used to create immersive EPG experiences, overlaying program information and interactive elements onto live video feeds or within AR environments.
5. Blockchain Technology: Blockchain could be utilized to secure metadata and ensure the integrity and authenticity of program information, reducing the risk of data manipulation or inaccuracies.

Implementing an effective EPG system involves several key considerations and challenges especially for ALTD platform:

- (A) Data Accuracy: Ensuring the accuracy of program data is crucial. Inaccurate or outdated information can frustrate users and lead to a poor viewing experience.
- (B) User Interface Design: The design of the EPG interface should be intuitive and user-friendly. A cluttered or complex interface can deter users from utilizing the guide effectively.

- (C) Integration with Existing Systems: The EPG system must seamlessly integrate with existing content management and delivery systems. This includes compatibility with different devices and platforms.
- (D) Scalability: The EPG system should be scalable to accommodate growing content libraries and user bases. This involves ensuring the infrastructure can handle increased data loads and user interactions.
- (E) Security: Protecting the integrity of EPG data is essential. Implementing robust security measures, such as encryption and access controls, can help prevent data breaches and unauthorized access.

As EPG technology continues to evolve, we can expect even more innovative features and functionalities that will further transform how we interact with digital content. Hence the EPG for ALTD services have to keep pace with technologically innovative changes to ensure a fulfilling and satisfactory viewing experience for the subscribers / customers on a going basis.

- (ii) Revenue sharing for ALTD platforms: Revenue sharing for ALTD platforms should be mutually decided between the parties.
- (iii) Interconnection agreement for ALTD platform: Interconnection agreement for ALTD platform should be on the lines of linear television.
- (iv) Marketing and Placement agreements etc. for ALTD platform: Marketing and Placement agreements etc. for ALTD platform relating to Free to Air channels should be left to market forces to be decided mutually between the parties.

The above issues have to be considered under any other issues

Concluding comments: It is on account of distortion between OTT platforms and Linear TV channels, Linear TV Distribution Platforms have been coerced to face unfair competition, operate in a non-level playing field, face unprecedented economic challenges, experience unforeseen revenue losses, face decline in employment etc. which has brought the Linear Television sector on the verge of premature end of the business cycle..

It would not be wrong to say that the lacunae lay in the legislative and regulatory inaction to bring these burgeoning platforms within legal and policy oversight in a timely manner.

The legal and regulatory void clubbed with technological advancements in communication technologies proved to be perfect breeding grounds for unchecked explosion of such platforms/services. However, it left the Distribution Platform Operators without any remedy and exposed them to unprecedented challenges, without providing any legal or regulatory support.

By way of the present Consultation Paper, the question regarding regulation of these platforms/services; their interaction with Linear Television and their impact in the entire ecosystem is being considered for the first time in last one and half decade since the time when these OTT services/platforms came into existence. It is a step in the right direction and we are hopeful that requisite regulations will set right the imbalances to recalibrate the regulations for a well-adjusted growth of all the distribution platforms comprising of

Applications -based Linear Television Distribution (ALTD) Services including Free Ad – supported streaming Television (FAST) Services.
