

Submission of Counter Comments on TRAI Consultation Paper on Data Speeds.

Q.1 Is the information on wireless broadband speeds currently being made available to consumers is transparent enough for making informed choices?

While we accept the fact that telecom service providers (TSPs) and internet service providers (ISPs) are transparent in communicating on data usage and billing to consumers, poor Quality of Service (QoS) issues are still prevalent and have rather deteriorated causing inconvenience and dissatisfaction among consumers. Mis-leading advertisements mentioning terms such as 'up to', 'unlimited'; claims of being the fastest internet provider further confuse consumers and aggravate the Quality of Experience (QoE). While TSPs provide Fair Usage Policy (FUP) speed readily, there is no clear information on FUP speeds at point of sale.

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) had recently come out with a detailed consumer perception survey report¹ conducted during February 2017 in the license service areas (LSAs) of Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka, covering all TSPs. This report reveals that none of these TSPs had achieved the benchmark for consumer satisfaction. Infact, the level of satisfaction was around 50% of the TRAI benchmark, with the worst dissatisfaction in the two areas of Data Speed and network, signal and coverage.

Currently, there exists no information disclosure mechanism for consumers to check a TSP's QoS performance in order to choose a broadband service. Third-party applications and TRAI's MySpeed application only project network speed information, which is just one of the many performance parameters of any broadband service. Third party applications are not credible and do not allow consumers to report poor QoS performance. Also, consumers may only check internet speeds through these applications, that too after purchasing the broadband service. Ideally, any consumer must have the preference to check the service before purchase. Hence, it is mandatory to devise a transparent information disclosure mechanism in order to empower consumers to make informed choices.

Q.2 If it is difficult to commit a minimum download speed, then could average speed be specified by the service providers? What should be the parameters for calculating average speed?

While we accept that the dynamic environment of wireless data transfer mode and the very design of 2G/3G/4G standards, a minimum download speed for a wireless broadband consumer at any particular time may be a challenge for TSPs/ISPs to commit. However, calculating an aggregate average download speed across consumers within a specific geographic region and at varying times is surely a feasible option.

As per our response to the Consultation Paper, distribution for both upper-bound and lower-bound measurements may be considered in the form of deciles² or quartiles³, rather than just the average. Difference between the two distributions will give some sense of a measure of unused capacity, which may ideally differ by more than a 50% ratio. With such a measurement technique, a reasonable commitment from providers may be taken to rationalise values. It may be noted that such commitments may not be evaluated on per-consumer or per-connection basis, but may be averaged-out across consumers and across times.

¹ TRAI IVRS Survey Report on QoS Assessment of Customer Perception performed by Cellular Mobile Telephone Service Providers, August 8 2017 is accessible at <http://trai.gov.in/sites/default/files/IVRS_Survey_Report_08082017_0.pdf>

² Decile - Each of ten equal groups into which a population can be divided according to the distribution of values of a particular variable.

³ Quartile - Each of four equal groups into which a population can be divided according to the distribution of values of a particular variable.

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Another mechanism of disclosing 'average speeds' by TSPs and ISPs to consumers is to calculate the average of data speeds already delivered during a specific period (last week or last month). This historic data is already available with TSPs/ISPs as well as reported to TRAI, but not available to consumers.

Q.3 What changes can be brought about to the existing framework on wireless broadband tariff plans to encourage better transparency and comparison between plans offered by different service providers?

While tariff plans for wireless broadband are available at various platforms, ambiguous and/or incomplete information prevents consumers from comparing these plans at point of sale. As expressed in Q1, there is a strong need to implement an information disclosure mechanism that empowers consumers with information in a simple and standard *broadband label* format to compare between plans.

Q.4 Is there a need to include/delete any of the QoS parameters and/or revise any of the benchmarks currently stipulated in the Regulations?

While we also support the 'Light Touch Regulatory' approach for smooth functioning of the telecom sector, poor QoS and QoE performances require a serious course correction. Consumers must have the right to choose and access the best services as well as report poor services. Suitable regulations to enable this right is for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Q.5 Should disclosure of average network performance over a period of time or at peak times including through broadband facts/labels be made mandatory?

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Q.6 Should standard application/websites be identified for mandating comparable disclosures about network speeds?

As expressed in Q1, current third-party online tools and applications have no credibility to measure QoS performance. TRAI's Analytics Tool is too complex with no satisfied and definite information disclosure for consumers to compare and measure QoS performance of TSPs/ISPs. On the other hand, broadband labels will empower consumers to have a credible tool that will help in comparison and making informed choices. The overall intention of having standard and simple broadband labels is to provide transparent and easy to understand information to broadband consumers.

Q.7 What are the products/technologies that can be used to measure actual end-user experience on mobile broadband networks? At what level should the measurements take place (e.g., on the device, network node)?

Some organisations have suggested that crowd-sourced data is sufficient to assess QoS. However, to make this mechanism more robust, data collection should be an amalgamation of all possible sources, irrespective of platform or technology. Moreover, it should also be ensured that data sources are neutral and unbiased.

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Q.8 Are there any legal, security, privacy or data sensitivity issues with collecting device level data? If so, how can these issues be addressed? Do these issues create a challenge for the adoption of any measurement tools?

No counter comments.

Q.9 What measures can be taken to increase awareness among consumers about wireless broadband speeds, availability of various technological tools to monitor them and any potential concerns that may arise in the process?

No counter comments.

Q.10 Any other issue related to the matter of Consultation.

No counter comments.

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