

For Immediate release

TELECOM REGULATORY AUTHORITY OF INDIA

TRAI releases Consultation Paper on "Digital Inclusion in the Era of Emerging Technologies"

New Delhi, 14th Sep 2023 - Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has released a Consultation Paper (CP) on "Digital Inclusion in the Era of Emerging Technologies" today 14th Sept 2023. The consultation paper aims to explore and address the challenges and opportunities presented by the rapid advancement of emerging technologies, with a focus on ensuring inclusivity for all segments of society and industries particularly Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

2. In today's world, being connected online has become a way of life. Connectivity works as an essential tool for everyday functions such as accessing information, receiving basic services, working remotely, pursuing education, conducting financial transactions, and staying connected with loved ones. TRAI recognizes that digital inclusion is crucial empowerment of every citizen of the country at right moment, failing which the gaps in access of digital services may widen further and thereby depriving large segments of the society from an inclusive growth along with others who are well connected and availing the benefits of the digital services. In the consultation paper, TRAI emphasizes the need for a robust policy framework and collaborative efforts among stakeholders to ensure participation of individuals in digital economic activities.

3. India has made remarkable progress in digital transformation, emerging as the world's second-largest telecom market in terms of subscribers. The country has experienced significant growth in mobile broadband subscriptions and internet usage, along with a substantial reduction in data costs. The government's initiatives such as Digital India,

National Digital Communications Policy 2018, National Broadband Mission 2019, BharatNet, Common Service Centres (CSCs), and Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) have played a pivotal role in expanding connectivity and promoting digital inclusion across the nation.

4. The success story of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for an inclusive financial society has been well acknowledged across the world. The Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) trinity has played a pivotal role in transparent direct benefit transfers of welfare subsidies to bank accounts of the underserved. UPI has empowered users to conveniently transfer money from one bank account to another in real-time. Despite these achievements, it is observed that disparities in internet broadband penetration and its effective usage across different sections of society and geographies still persist. There are concerns related to accessibility, affordability and effective & safe usage of the services and applications working on broadband connections, specially by the persons with marginalised communities, woman & girls and participation of micro or small entrepreneurs operating at remote and difficult terrains or in villages, which need to be addressed in a timebound manner.

5. In the consultation paper, TRAI has analysed various gaps in digital inclusion present in the country such as the mobile internet usage gap, rural-urban internet penetration disparities, gender gaps in internet access, etc. as well as gaps identified from some global indices. Proactively prioritizing inclusion can create an ecosystem that benefits every individual, fostering a more equitable and accessible digital economy.

6. The rapid pace of technological advancements and launch of 5G enabled services including Artificial Intelligence / Machine Learning based services and the associated costs of adopting and utilizing these technologies can widen the digital divide further, particularly for marginalized communities and underserved regions. Unequal access of infrastructure, limited digital literacy, and affordability issues could hinder the equitable distribution and utilization of emerging technologies, exacerbating existing disparities in

digital inclusion. To ensure comprehensive digital inclusion, it is imperative to address the gaps which are likely to arise due to emerging technologies.

7. TRAI has also identified various challenges being faced by Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector in the country from the adoption of new and emerging digital technology solutions. As MSME sector contributes significantly towards the nation's economy, it is imperative that the MSMEs are empowered to contribute more towards the digital economy through new emerging technology solutions, especially the micro-enterprises as majority of the MSMEs are micro-enterprises.

8. The Consultation Paper, for seeking inputs from the stakeholders, has been placed on TRAI's website (www.trai.gov.in). Written comments on the issues for consultation are invited from the stakeholders by 16 October 2023 and counter comments by 31 October 2023.

9. The comments and counter-comments may be sent, preferably in the electronic form on email: advisorit@traigov.in, with a copy to ja-cadiv@traigov.in. For any clarification/ information, Shri Anand Kumar Singh, Advisor (CA&IT) may be contacted at Tel. No. +91-11- 23210990.


(V. Raghunandan)
Secretary, TRAI