

These comments are submitted by the commenter in his capacity as President of the Internet Society India Chennai Chapter:

Question 1: Should the TSPs be allowed to have differential pricing for data usage for accessing different websites, applications or platforms?

No. The Internet has emerged as a global resource of unprecedented value and enormous benefits because of its non-discriminatory values. Differential pricing would be beneficial to commercial enterprises, but would cause severe harm to the Internet.

Question 2: If differential pricing for data usage is permitted, what measures should be adopted to ensure that the principles of nondiscrimination, transparency, affordable internet access, competition and market entry and innovation are addressed?

None. The very notion of differential pricing is by itself discriminatory and is prejudicial to the fundamental principles of competition and would lead to barriers for market entry.

Question 3. Are there alternative methods/technologies/business models, other than differentiated tariff plans, available to achieve the objective of providing free internet access to the consumers? If yes, please suggest/describe these methods/technologies/business models. Also, describe the potential benefits and disadvantages associated with such methods/technologies/business models?

The alternative is to work towards freeing the wireless spectrum which would eventually bring down bandwidth prices. Government could invest in / subsidize investments in Internet infrastructure on a scale not conceived before, on a new model of public-private partnership, which would make the Internet more affordable. Internet access for the weaker economic sections could be enabled by an intense review of the unnecessary laws created by the Law and Order agencies that have almost eliminated Internet Access Booths in the country. For the weakest of the population, the Government could devise a program that would pay for a minimal amount of bandwidth free, and not encourage complex commercial models of "free" Internet access.

Free basics, as a program, even if possibly prompted largely by a benevolent intent, cause concerns that far outweigh any credit due for the monetary concessions to its potential users:

- a) The size of the target segment for free basics is 3 billion users and, in a country like India, it exceeds over half the population. Hence, Free Basics would become the first, and more likely than to be not, a persistent point of entry to the Internet for over 50% of India's Internet users, covering almost three fourth of India's voters.
- b) Though might not be intended for its value as media, Free Basics could -in effect- emerge as a global neo-media enterprise governed by its own rules over an audience of over 3 billion Internet Users
- c) Free basics, if it operates as an expanded facebook, is likely to have its own 'algorithm' to determine what broad trend, topic or news should form part of its "feed", what gets freely promoted as popular or most popular.

Please see

http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/cover_story/2016/01/how_facebook_s_news_feed_algorithm_works.html?wpsrc=sh_all_dt_tw_top

Any user, within its "Walled Gardens", when repeatedly exposed to a certain trend or certain point of view, would be influenced in a certain way, which is sociologically, economically and politically a cause for a significant concern.

- d) There is a likelihood of Free basics being operated in a manner that is far from that of an environment for the free flow of content, but rather as a controlled environment that would employ well researched content feed techniques to determine what to feed, for commercial reasons, if not for other reasons.

It is exchanged in a public policy email list that at "any given Facebook user is currently involved in about 10 of these experiments at any time without their knowledge".

Please see

<http://www.radiolab.org/story/trust-engineers/>
and

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/30/technology/facebook-tinkers-with-users-emotions-in-news-feed-experiment-stirring-outcry.html?_r=0

and

<http://www.wired.com/2014/06/everything-you-need-to-know-about-facebooks-manipulative-experiment/>

Also, the discussion mentioned "the potential of Facebook manipulating elections"

Question-4: Is there any other issue that should be considered in the present consultation on differential pricing for data services?

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India may find it necessary to count the million comments that it received as submitted by Facebook that of its users, as guided comments, or count it as a singular mobilized statement of support, and not as a million separate comments.

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, in deciding on a huge issue of enormous implications to the country and to the whole world, would attentively consider the inputs received from Business, Academia, Civil Society Organization and Individuals as also involve other departments of the Government and the government functionaries at the highest level.

Thank you

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