

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

Answer: No, TSPs must not be allowed to have differential pricing. Telecommunication as a concept puts telephone and internet at the same level by calling them mediums to connect, share and gain information.

When I talk to someone on the phone, I am charged for the duration of the call and not in connection to the person I am talking to. Like, I am not asked and should not be asked that I pay less to talk to my mother over phone and pay more to talk to a stranger. Imagine such a situation which would be disastrous as I would end up talking more to someone where I can talk free even if it is not essential to talk. And I would avoid talking to someone where I am charged for the telephone call. This overall will hamper the communication process in the whole society rather than promoting it.

Now putting the same principle on internet as a medium and looking it from the actual consumer's perspective, he may be tempted initially to see and browse only that content which is free and keeps on seeing only that. However similar content but giving a different view on the same topic may not be accessed by him because that is chargeable. And thus the overall process of communication in a society will be hampered.

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?

Answer : This requires an almost impossible task because content provider is not just website of a big company but an individual writing a blog is also a content provider. In the world where around 3.5 billion are using internet, there are around 1 billion who are providing content in small or big form. It is like a group of 4 people where 3 are listening and 1 is talking; and not a conference of 1000 people listening and 1 people lecturing. So number of content providers is almost as big as users/consumers. Now a few hundred TSPs rather than simply charging the consumer and letting the whole net open for providing content; brings a platform provider in between. This will lead to non discrimination both on the end of content provider (first registering himself) and consumer. Transparency will surely not be there as I as a content provider may be asked to agree to the terms and conditions of the platform provider (which I otherwise may not have agreed) or even be asked to pay (in the later stage) to be heard and seen by the actual user.

TSPs can be allowed to provide differential pricing for data usage by segregating themselves on the basis of duration of pack, speed of the pack, total free usage limit etc. rather than differing prices on the basis of content.

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?

Answer : With growing smart phone and computer usage, the market in terms of people using internet is also growing. Hence, the TSPs anyways have the huge market option of increasing their consumer base. Now, if the TSPs or giant like Facebook are really serious in connecting the underprivileged/less-paying capacity consumers and help them by providing free access and thus knowledge here are the options:-

- (i) Every TSP irrespective of their tariff which is currently based on speed, duration, data limit must provide access to government website free of charge. They can come up with a model where a person pays only 10 Rs. per month and can access **only** government websites. A rural man will be more than happy to get his bank account opened, receive his NREGA payment, receive his subsidy, gets his Aadhar card changed, register his marriage, issue his passport etc. all for free or mere 10 Rs. One, the government website as a content provider is neutral and same for all. Two, such real free internet access will not be discriminatory to any other content provider because government as one stakeholder/content provider is unique and will help people connect in the real sense.
- (ii) If still a website like Facebook thinks that in terms of giving out knowledge, information etc. it is better than a government website then it should provide itself free to every TSP rather than collaborating with one TSP or one platform provider or becoming a platform provider itself.
- (iii) Adding the two above, I may opt for any TSP finalizing my discussion on speed, duration etc. and receive some information free of cost irrespective of which TSP's services I am taking.

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

Answer : Consultation and execution must be with the objective of maintaining principles of transparency and fair competition. I as a consumer can judge the speed of an internet and thus can decide on my TSP accordingly. Transparency will vanish if differential pricing is on the basis of content as I as a consumer can compare speed or data usage limit but can never compare among millions of content providers. **The simple chain of TSP as service provider and end user as paying customer must not be stretched by inserting platform providers as the new salesmen and content providers as the wholesale buyers who first have to satisfying the whims and fancies of TSP and platform user before reaching to the actual consumer.**