Measuring Television Viewership

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- Information and Broadcasting Ministry has asked TRAI for installing a chip in the new Set-Top-Boxes to measure viewership.
\n
- It is essential in this backdrop to look at how viewership is measured currently and what difference could chips make.
\n

\n\n

What is I&B Ministry's proposal?

\n\n

\n

- I&B Ministry recently sent a letter to Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI).
\n
- This was regarding new licences for Direct-To-Home service providers.
\n
- The Ministry said it was proposed to ask DTH operators to install a chip in the new Set-Top-Boxes.
\n
- The chip could give data about channels watched and their duration.
\n

\n\n

What was TRAI's response?

\n\n

\n

- TRAI has said that installing a chip was not part of the initial reference from the Ministry.

- So, it was not discussed for the recommendations for new DTH licences that it gave in 2014.
- It was on these recommendations that the Ministry had asked TRAI further questions.
- A "new issue" could not be part of a "back reference".
- If the Ministry desires the regulator's recommendation on it, it must ask "officially".
- However, the Ministry has not sent such a request yet.

How is television viewership measured currently?

- The Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) is an industry body.
- It is jointly owned by advertisers, ad agencies, and broadcasting companies.
- They are represented by Indian Society of Advertisers, Indian Broadcasting Foundation and Advertising Agencies Association of India.
- It measures television viewership in the country, using television rating points, or TRPs.

How does it work?

- BARC has installed "**BAR-O-meters**" in around 30,000 empanelled households across the country.
- These **households are classified** into 12 categories.
- This is under the New Consumer Classification System (NCCS), the so-called "new SEC" that was adopted by BARC in 2015.

- The classification is based on the **education level** of the main wage earner and the ownership of consumer durables.
- While watching a show, the members of the household register their presence by pressing their viewer ID button.
- It thus captures the **duration** for which the channel was watched and by **whom**.
- It also provides data on viewership habits **across age and socio-economic groups.**
- This data is one of the most important considerations for advertisers and agencies.
- It influences their choice of channel to advertise their products.

What is the need for a chip-based survey?

- The panel used to capture TRPs should be representative of the country's population.
- Also, the methodology must be economically viable for the industry.
- But there are some concerns in regard to all these:
- **BARC** - There are concerns that BARC was underreporting viewership numbers for Doordarshan.
- Thus there was apprehension that the data produced by BARC was not accurate.
- **Cost** - This could impact the advertising costs of the government.
- As, some channels with low viewership could charge more for advertisements.
- **Monopoly** - BARC was a "monopoly".
- It did not disclose its methodology in sufficient detail.

How effective could chips be?

- A basic chip passively records TV viewership data of households that have set-top boxes.
- It could only capture the duration of viewership for each channel.
- But still it would be able to potentially capture this data for a much larger TV-watching population.
- As per the Ministry, installing chip to Set-Top-Boxes could ensure a more "accurate assessment of viewers".
- This can help advertisers and advertising agencies make more effective choices.

What are the concerns?

- **Groups** - No information about the TV-watching habits of different age groups will be captured.
- Also, the data could not reflect viewership patterns in terms of different socio-economic groups.
- **Quality** - Data from a basic chip could be quantitatively richer, but not necessarily qualitatively better.
- Notably, the latter is essential for the advertising industry and, therefore, the broadcasting industry.
- If the chip is to capture qualitative data as well, each set-top box will have to be equipped with a unique identifier.
- This could naturally lead to concerns over privacy.

- **Coverage** - The proposal is only for set-top boxes of DTH customers.
  \n
- Whereas TRAI recommends that TRP measurements should be platform-agnostic.
  \n
- It means that it should reflect the viewership of cable TV and IPTV, etc., as well.
  \n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: Indian Express

\n