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# More audience rating agencies, the merrier, says TV industry

## ● Draft guidelines find support

**ALOKANANDA  
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**THE TELECOM REGULATORY** Authority of India (TRAI) has long held that India needs more than one television audience measurement system. The sheer size of the category—television remains the highest-reach medium with TV-viewing households estimated at 217 million in FY24—renders the current unified rating mechanism under Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) India redundant.

Experts say the draft amendment to the policy guidelines governing television rating agencies released by the ministry of information and broadcasting on Wednesday aims to

address this anomaly and a range of other issues that were being raised by advertisers and potential candidates waiting to throw their hats into the ring.

In a bid to strengthen credibility and governance in the television viewership measurement system, the ministry has proposed key amendments to its 2014 guidelines for the agencies. The changes—now open to public consultation for 30 days—aim to streamline regulatory oversight, eliminate potential conflicts of interest, and enhance transparency in the television ratings ecosystem.

The notification suggests immediate deletion of Clauses 1.5 and 1.7 of the current regulation that imposed strict cross-holding restrictions, and a modification of Clause 1.4 to prevent rating agencies from taking on consultancy and other advisory services.

## BOOSTING GOVERNANCE

*MIB has drafted key amendments to the existing guidelines:*

- Modification of Clause 1.4 by replacing the earlier requirement that a company's MoA shall not include any activity like consultancy or advisory services
- Remove restrictive clauses (1.5 and 1.7) that were acting as barriers to entry

*The proposed amendments aim to:*

- Allow multiple agencies to foster healthy competition



- Bring in new technologies, and provide more reliable and representative data especially for connected TV platforms

- Enable more investments from broadcasters, advertisers to improve rating tech and infra

- Build a more transparent, inclusive, and technology-driven TV rating ecosystem.

Source: Draft TRP guidelines, MIB

“Taken together, these aim to remove any remaining roadblocks to competition,” said an official earlier associated with BARC, a joint industry body founded by organisations that represent Indian broadcasters (IBDF), advertisers (ISA), and advertising and media agencies (AAAI). It is the world's largest television measurement science industry body.

While television remains a significant medium for ad spends, projected to reach approximately ₹42,431 crore in 2025, what has rankled advertisers is the lack of competitive benchmarking and oversight. “There's limited data granularity,” says Ambika Sharma, founder & chief strategist, Pulp Strategy. “When one agency governs the

methodology, the industry has no comparative lens to challenge data interpretation, regional bias, or methodology drift.” That's risky in a high-stakes, ad-driven ecosystem.

Another challenge is the limited sample size, say analysts. With around 60,000 panel homes trying to represent a country of over 200 million TV households, the data simply

cannot capture the diversity and complexity of Indian viewership. “This has led to legitimate concerns about the statistical reliability of the ratings and the risk of systemic bias,” Charu Malhotra, MD & co-founder, Primus Partners, said.

That apart, the current system is still largely linear-TV focused. As more consumers shift to OTT, mobile and smart

TV consumption, the ratings do not adequately reflect the new hybrid reality of media consumption in the country, aver many.

The credibility of the current system took a serious hit after the 2020 TRP manipulation scandal, which led to the suspension of news ratings for several months. That incident exposed how vulnerable a single-agency setup is to external influence and internal opacity.

Given this backdrop, the industry has three clear expectations from the new system—trust, transparency, and competition. “With another player, no single agency will be in a position to dictate market sentiment or skew data without being cross-verified. This restores trust in the accuracy of ratings,” says Sindhu Biswal, CEO & founder of Buzzlab.

Second, it would bring transparency. “Agencies will have to

clearly outline their methodologies, sampling and data collection practices, reducing the ‘black-box’ approach,” adds Biswal. Last but not the least, the playing field won't just be about numbers anymore, it will also be about who can understand and measure audiences better, faster, and more accurately.

A new system will also require new investments. “The key investment areas would include advanced metering technologies, rural and digital audience measurement, robust panel expansion, real-time reporting systems, and transparent governance,” says Yasin Hamidani, director, Media Care Brand Solutions. Investments in AI-driven analytics, privacy-compliant data collection, and cross-platform measurement capabilities will ensure depth and reliability in audience insights, making the system credible for stakeholders.