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"Some of the fast growing segments may not need any FDI limits at all"

DEEPAK KAPOOR

Having said that, the idea is not to discard the concept of uniformity but only help bring in a certain degree of flexibility to apply uniform standards after a practical review. A comprehen-

view. Instead, the entertainment and media sector as a whole would be much benefited by having a comprehensive media policy and framework defining the role of regulators and enabling them to monitor media diversity, review

competitive practices, handle administrative complaints and regulate content and code of conduct across segments. Such a comprehensive framework would also keep pace with the fast changing technology and avoid an overarching media policy.

The writer is leader, entertainment & media practice, PricewaterhouseCoopers

'It's high time we have a single media policy'

Last month Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had called for a "review of media policy", particularly in the context of "information revolution" and "freedom of competition". He wanted the policy review keeping in mind the concerns of "social justice" and of all "players in the media sector". The Cabinet sub-committee appointed in this context should address itself to a holistic "National Media Policy" based on a coherent view of the mass media instead of continuing with ad-hoc and case by case approach and for each medium separately.

Considerations should also be given to the cross-media ownership regulations in line with the emerging convergence within the media sector as part of a need to develop a comprehensive media policy.

In conclusion, a holistic framework to review the relative importance of each type of media segment in the context of its market should be examined and debated. A Comprehensive Media Policy rather than a Uniform Media Policy would address this need more effectively.

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A uniform media policy should help correct the phenomena of "growing mass media, but not expanding the reach". We need another "tipping effect" today similar to the one the country had witnessed a decade ago with cable TV. The reach of all media put together should go beyond two-thirds of the population. The recent increase and qualitative changes in the media sector has been much indecisiveness and many inconsistencies in government policies towards broadcasting and media sector.

Such a policy cannot be expected to do justice without addressing three core issues cutting across all media. These are (a) FDI, not only in "newsmedia" (radio, television, newspapers) but all other media and obligators' conditions that go with the licence; (b) certain polarisation in the pattern of media holdings towards a monopolistic situation, and (c) emerging

cross-media operations. We expect to make much headway. An appraisal of adhoc decisions in the last couple of years, including the ones to do with community radio or FM radio, brings out the urgency of a national policy. We need to be concerned about "commercial viability" of private FM radio as well as about "sustainability" of community radio!

DD and AIR has the best of infrastructure spread across the country. But, for want of financial support, it is hardly being availed to take the media closer to the grassroots and make it more relevant to

people. National concerns and priorities in this regard have to be unambiguous.

An equally important issue that needs to be addressed as part of a comprehensive nation-



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al policy is "viewer-end safeguards" from market driven media operations. The licences to private operators, irrespective of the extent of FDI, cannot be without obligations and responsibilities in the larger and long term interests of viewers. It is rather difficult to understand how a government could have allowed channels to beam into India without even registering in India and adhering to existing provisions, which are applicable to Indian media. The government should not look at licensing as a source of revenue. The national media policy should take into account the Supreme Court's landmark judgment of 1995 that "airwaves are public", implying that they cannot be used for sectional interests. This also implies that "public service" and "public accountability" should not be only for a public service broadcaster, but should also apply to every broadcaster, private or public.

The writer is founder chairman, Centre for Media Studies, New Delhi. He can be reached at nbraocms@vsnl.com

'Each segment has its own unique needs'

The concept of a uniform media policy highlights the need for one common policy addressing requirements of all segments of the rapidly growing Indian entertainment and media industry. The key elements to be looked at include foreign investment, regulatory framework, licensing and taxation laws, cross-media ownership and code of conduct including censorships. A number of arguments in favour of a uniform media policy have been put forward but need to be examined in the context of each segment separately.

One of the main arguments supporting a uniform media policy is that it will attract foreign investment. Lobbying efforts by certain groups in the industry are pushing for a single FDI limit for all segments such as bringing the FDI limits in the print media at par with television as part of the uniform media policy. However, to attract foreign investment, what the industry needs is a transparent and comprehensive guide to the Indian entertainment and media legislation and regular updation of the same. The media

policy to be formulated should ensure that it is not only workable to address the current needs of individual segments but also progressive to address the future needs. For example, for some of the fast progressing segments within the sector, such FDI limits may not be required at all in the near future.

Advocators of uniform media policy also support the demand for a single regulator addressing the needs of the consumers and players across all avenues such as content, distribution, administration and complaint redressal. However, neither the nature of business in each segment nor the inevitably fast changing technology, unique to each segment, supports this

view. Instead, the entertainment and media sector as a whole would be much benefited by having a comprehensive media policy and framework defining the role of regulators and enabling them to monitor media diversity, review competitive practices, handle administrative complaints and regulate content and code of conduct across segments. Such a comprehensive framework would also keep pace with the fast changing technology and avoid an overarching media policy.

Having said that, the idea is not to discard the concept of uniformity but only help bring in a certain degree of flexibility to apply uniform standards after a practical review. A comprehen-



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sive media policy must also keep certain uniformity across all segments. Some of these include uniformly addressing piracy issues across segments such as music, films and software. The comprehensive media policy should ensure standardisation of these policies keeping in mind the current legislations, some of which are state subjects, and the potential for growth of certain segments, which are currently in a nascent stage.

Considerations should also be given to the cross-media ownership regulations in line with the emerging convergence within the media sector as part of a need to develop a comprehensive media policy.

In conclusion, a holistic framework to review the relative importance of each type of media segment in the context of its market should be examined and debated. A Comprehensive Media Policy rather than a Uniform Media Policy would address this need more effectively.

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Such a policy cannot be expected to do justice without addressing three core issues cutting across all media. These are (a) FDI, not only in "new media" (radio, television, newspapers) but all other media and obligators' conditions that go with the licence; (b) certain polarisation in the pattern of media holdings towards a monopolistic situation, and (c) emerging

cross-media operations.

A uniform media policy should help correct the phenomena of "growing mass media, but not expanding the reach". We need another "tipping effect" today similar to the one the country had witnessed a decade ago with cable TV. The reach of all media put together should go beyond two-thirds of the population. The recent increase and qualitative changes in the media sector was mostly on account of regional and decentralised media by way of cable TV and regional language newspapers and channels. This process needs to be boosted further. In the absence of a comprehensive perspective by way of a policy as to the relative priorities of these media, we cannot ex-



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