

Public Wi-Fi Hotspots

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- TRAI has recently invited interested firms to establish nationwide, pay-as-you-go PDOs (Public Data Offices).

\n

- It aims at providing affordable and wide access to data to citizens.

\n

- However, there are certain issues to be addressed to make the initiative more consumer friendly.

\n

\n\n

What are PDOs?

\n\n

\n

- Public Data Offices are conceived more as PCOs that were used for making phone calls by public on paid basis.

\n

- The firms are intended as 'aggregators' and are invited to set up, on a pilot basis, PDOs to function as **public wi-fi hotspots**.

\n

- Any entity can purchase, self-register, set-up and operate a PDO.

\n

- They offer products for consumption, with low denominations ranging from Rs 2 to Rs 20, etc based on data used.

\n

- It is based on an open architecture based Wi-Fi Access Network Interface (**WANI**).

\n

- It allows users to do one-time enrolment into the service through KYC and mobile one time password, and access data.

\n

- Public wi-fi hotspots aims at decongesting telecom networks and ensuring last-mile delivery of broadband to users.

\n

\n\n

What are the concerns with this?

\n\n

- \n
- **Licensing** - Department of Telecom has raised concerns with allowing **non-telecom companies** to operate public wi-fi hotspots.
- \n
- It argues that Telegraph Act mandates that such entities take licences from the government for selling data.
- \n
- Also India's biggest mobile carriers are concerned that the entry of aggregators without licence would undermine the **level-playing field** conditions.
- \n
- **Cyber Space** - the **privacy and security concerns** with cyber space in India, leaves scope for doubting the safety of using public wi-fi.
- \n
- **Gender** - common places like the tea shops and bakeries are currently emerging as favoured locations to host PDOs.
- \n
- The limited geographical reach of wi-fi make these places over-crowded to utilise spots of maximise signal strength.
- \n
- Given the social characteristics of these urban spaces, and the social norms with using public spaces, how gender inclusive these places could be is highly uncertain.
- \n

\n\n

What is the way forward?

\n\n

- \n
- The offer for aggregators and small entrepreneurs is expected to boost employment opportunities and encourage entrepreneurship in rural areas.
- \n
- However addressing the issues with **licensing and authentication** could ensure a level playing field for other service providers.
- \n
- Also, addressing the cyber security concerns and making proper **regulations** would make the service more secure to its users.
- \n

- **Widening the service** to more public spaces which are not gender biased could make the initiative more inclusive.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu, Business Standard

\n

