OTT Platforms

Why in News?

The government has brought video streaming over-the-top (OTT) platforms under the ambit of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. These platforms were so far under the purview of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

Over-The-Top Platforms

- OTT or Over-the-Top platforms are audio and video hosting and streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hotstar etc, which started out as content hosting platforms but soon branched out into the production and release of short movies, feature films, documentaries and web series themselves
    - These platforms offer a range of content and use **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** to suggest users the content they are likely to view based on their past viewership on the platform.
    - Most OTT platforms generally offer some content for free and charge a monthly subscription fee for premium content which is generally unavailable elsewhere.

OTT Platforms and India

- India is currently the world's fastest growing OTT (over-the-top streaming) market, and is all set to emerge as the world's sixth-largest by 2024.
    - At present, the OTT platform's valuation stands at 35 billion INR, with nearly 500 million internet users, expected to grow at 8% per year.
- In January 2019, eight video streaming services had signed a self-regulatory code that laid down a set of guiding principles for content on these platforms which prohibited five types of content. This includes:
    - Content that deliberately and maliciously disrespects the national emblem or national flag.
    - Any visual or story line that promotes child pornography.
    - Any content that "maliciously" intends to outrage religious sentiments.
    - Content that "deliberately and maliciously" promotes or encourages terrorism.
    - Any content that has been banned for exhibition or distribution by law or court.

Issues with OTT Platforms

- **Content regulation:** There is no law or autonomous body to monitor and manage the digital contents provided on these OTT platforms and it is made available to the public at large without any filter or screening.
    - Unlike television, print or radio which follow guidelines released by governments, OTT platforms classified as digital media or social media, had little to no regulation on the choice of content they offered, the subscription rates, certification for adult movies and others.

Regulation of OTT Content

- In a move that will have a far-reaching impact, the Union government has brought Over The Top (OTT) platforms, or video streaming service providers such as Netflix, Amazon Prime and others, under the ambit of the **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.**
- The latest order covers “Digital/Online Media”, including “films and audio-visual programmes made available by online content providers” and “news and current affairs content on online platforms”.
- It will give the government control over these platforms, which were unregulated till now as there is no law or autonomous body governing digital content.
- Online content providers come under the legal framework of the **Information Technology Act 2000** but, unlike print and broadcast media, were not directly under any Ministry.
- However, there are no details yet on how the government will regulate it. But it is learnt that the Programme Code that governs content on TV and which found an outlet in the Cable Television Network Regulation Act, 1995, may serve as a template to frame rules for online content.
- **Impact of regulation:** The regulation of OTT could also mean that these platforms would have to apply for certification and approval of the content they wish to stream.
    - This in itself could give rise to many conflicts as most OTT platforms have content that could otherwise be censored by the certification boards in India.

Way forward

- **Digital Awareness:** Consumers should be made aware of the impacts of their streaming and realise if there is really a need to watch these videos multiple times. Every video viewed consumes energy every time. Rather watching the video with a group can save energy.
- **Viewers’ Responsibility:** The purpose of creating laws for the OTT content is to prevent the underage people from watching certain contents. Ensuring on our part that kids in our home do not access such contents can help fulfill the very purpose.

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