

Regulating Online Content

Why in news?

The government will bring video streaming services and online news under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

What will be the impact of this decision?

- It clubs the only sector of the media which has pre-censorship, namely films, with the news media which wasn't subjected to pre-censorship.
- This decision may constrain the free press.

Why did the government take this decision?

- Recently, the Supreme Court asked the government for suggestions toward improving the existing self-regulatory mechanism for TV media.
- The government responded stating that regulating the digital media was more pressing.
- More regulation is usually a problematic idea, bringing with it the real risk of censorship.

What is the merit?

- This decision may bring in a **level playing field** by bringing new digital players within the purview of regulation along with the non-digital ones.
- New movies, before theatrical release, have to get through the certification process of the Central Board of Film Certification.
- In contrast, video streaming services like Netflix, which have gathered several Indian subscribers, have not had to follow any such requirement.
- It cannot be denied that regulation, of the light-touch kind, which serves as an advisory for the content being presented to the viewers, is useful.

What is the concern?

- There is a question of whether the intent is just to create a level playing field, and nothing more.
- There are concerns about the functioning of the regulatory mechanisms.
- The fear is that this will just end up facilitating more governmental interference and problematic censorship in regulating digital news.

What is needed?

- Indian democracy's progress is dependent on free speech.
- So, it is important that regulation is not an excuse to stifle voices.
- The government should recognise that there is really no reason to have a different regulatory mechanism for digital news.
- For decades now, the print media and television media have managed themselves in self-regulation frameworks.
- In these frameworks, one of their main goals has been to maintain their independence.
- **Self-regulation** is a must, and censorship is not needed.

Source: The Hindu

