

Over The Top (OTT) Platforms in India

An OTT platform, or an Over The Top platform is an audio and video streaming and hosting service, offered directly to the viewers, via the Internet.

Initially, major OTT platforms in India, including Netflix, Hoststar, Amazon Prime, etc. were governed by self-regulatory bodies. But, in 2020, the Government of India has moved these Over The Top platforms under the administration of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

This is an important topic for candidates preparing for the upcoming [IAS Exam](#) from the GS II and III Mains perspective. Questions based on the same may be asked in the Government Policies & Interventions, Issues Relating to Development, and IT & computers part of the examination.

In this article, we shall discuss in detail what is OTT, its benefits and disadvantages. Also, the revised Government rules and regulations to govern these platforms have been discussed further below in this article.

UPSC aspirants can also go through the [Issue of Censorship in India](#) at the linked article.

What is OTT?

OTT stands for Over The Top, which is a platform that offers video and audio streaming of content over the internet. It has removed any interference of the cable operators, satellite connection or broadcast mediums.

These media services can easily be accessed through mobile phones, laptops, smart TV, and other audio-visual devices with internet connection.

Anyone with a paid subscription can register themselves and get unlimited access to the media and entertainment sources available on the various platforms. This service is synonymous with video-on-demand (SVoD) services and digital content at International level can be accessed.

One of the biggest boosts that the OTT platforms achieved was during the pandemic period of COVID-19, where this industry flourished many folds. With Indian and International content, it played an essential role in the information revolution and development.

OTT Platforms in India - A Brief Background

In India, no fixed body has ever been assigned to regulate the OTT platforms. But in 2019, amid various complaints and issues raised against the digital content on these online mediums, the Government decided to take actions against the same.

It was in October 2020 that the Supreme Court ordered the Central Government to take up the charge of the digital content showcased on these mediums and finally, the OTT platforms will now be administered by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB).

In January 2019, eight video streaming platforms had signed a self-regulatory code that stated a set of guiding principles for the content which can be displayed online. However, there were 5 terms and conditions which had to be mandatorily followed:

- No such content shall be added on these platforms which would cause any disrespect to the national emblem or national flag
- Display of content which can hurt religious sentiments could not be streamed
- Visuals promoting child pornography to be strictly prohibited
- Content which is banned by the law or order of the country could not be streamed
- Terrorism of any kind cannot be promoted

However, the Union Government disapproved of this code formed by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), and Digital Curated Content Complaints Council (DCCC) as no specific and elaborate set of rules were released.

Thus, finally, the Government decided to undertake OTT platforms and their censorship rights under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Regulations on OTT and Digital Content in India

Before discussing the rules and regulations which have been defined by the Ministry for the function of OTT platforms in India, let us first understand the need for regulating the digital content.

What is the need to regulate the Digital content in India on OTT platforms?

- With the increasing usage of internet each day and multiple genres of media and content being released, the Government had to maintain the standards of traditional and digital/online content
- Multiple complaints and issues had been raised by the people of the country, concerning the things being shown online. Government sought for a third party interference to maintain the content released
- In India, OTT is the only platform that was self-regulatory, thus to make it equivalent to similar platforms like television and radio, the Government shifted the administration of this sector to MIB

OTT Platform Regulations under Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB)

- Since the Supreme Court passed the judgement in October 2020, no final decisions have been revealed as yet by the Union Government regarding the measures which will be taken to regulate the digital content
- Similar directives might be followed as are compiled by Central Board Of Film Certification (CBFC) for movies, News Broadcasting Standards Authority (NBSA) for television and Press Council of India for print media

- A legal framework will be set up to ensure that no body, or producer tends to break the rules set by the Ministry

****Aspirants must also note:** Union Minister for Information & Broadcasting (as in 2020) - Mr. Prakash Javadekar

To get more details refer to the [UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis: November 12, 2020](#).

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Benefits of Over The Top Platforms

There are multiple benefits of using OTT platforms and why they have become so famous within no time in India.

- **Cost Effective** - Anyone willing to watch online digital content, they can register themselves and pay a monthly or yearly subscription amount which makes it cost effective
- **Easy Access** - One can log in to these OTT platforms through mobile applications, smart TV, laptops, tablets, etc. The only requirement is internet connection
- **Creative and Unusual Content** - Through these over the top platforms, various creative ideas have come to forefront which could not be brought across due to censorship or regulatory laws
- **An open platform for Entertainment Industry** - The biggest advantage of this platform is that it has provided a medium for new talent to get more opportunities as the number of projects are much higher in comparison to television or films
- **Platform for International content** - Any Indian content uploaded on these platforms can be viewed internationally. This gives a broader outreach of content and talent

Disadvantages of OTT Platforms

Along with advantages the OTT platforms have various issues and challenges which they need to overcome:

- **May affect social-political harmony** - Since there is no censor board to review the content, there are chances that the content may affect social or political harmony and hurt people's sentiments on certain issues

- **No regulatory board** - No organisation, department or body is held responsible for the content that goes online. This has always been one of the biggest concerns for the Government of the country
- **Threat to Culture and Tradition** - The modern and fresh content releasing on OTT platforms has been accepted and appreciated by the people in India. However, there still are a few who have not been able to accept this unique content. Thus, the government needs to be accountable to them as well

Moving forward, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting shall have to focus on maintaining the quality of content being added digitally, ensure that it does not hurt the sentiments of the people, and promote new and fresh talent and content.

Other Media Regulatory Bodies in India

The entertainment or media industry in India is one of the largest. Each of these are being managed by various bodies which are responsible to ensure high quality and acceptable content to be displayed.

Discussed below are few such media regulatory bodies in India:

- **Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI)** - Aims at expanding the online value added service sector. It is registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860
- **Digital Curated Content Complaints Council (DCCC)** - It was launched in February 2020 and aims at providing a better online viewing experience for the viewers and also open up a complaint mechanism for their assistance
- **Press Council of India** - Maintains the print media
- **Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC)** - It is the censor board for the Indian film industry
- **News Broadcasting Standards Authority** - Body responsible to manage the content on television

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