

## 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**

