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DISH DOCTOR

OTT GROWTH

Q: How has OTT evolved and what has spurred the growth?

Srinivas Venkatswami
Media Consultant, Bangalore

Ans.: India is currently the world’s second-largest telecommunications market. As on 31.03.2023, there were 1.172 billion telephone subscribers in the country. Till about 2012, voice telephony and Short Message Service (SMS) were the flagship telecommunication services in the country. Thereafter, internet services, particularly Broadband internet services, have witnessed a remarkable growth in the country. The broadband subscriber base in the country leapfrogged by 5 times from a modest base of about 15 million in December 2012 to about 832 million in December 2022. The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of broadband subscriber base in India was about 49% during the period from the year 2012 to 2022.

With the growth in mobile and fixed broadband penetration, a wide variety of Over-the-top (OTT) services have become available to consumers. As per International Telecommunication Union (ITU), OTT is an “application accessed and delivered over the public Internet that may be a direct technical/ functional
substitute for traditional international telecommunication services.” The best-known examples of OTT are Whatsapp, Telegram, skype, etc.

In the past one decade, the OTTs have hugely impacted the telecommunication ecosystem worldwide. As a result, the impact of OTTs is being analyzed in many countries. In India, initial attempts to analyze the impact of OTT services were made in the year 2015 separately by Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) and the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Government of India. TRAI issued a consultation paper on Regulatory Framework for Over-the-top (OTT) services dated 27.03.2015 for consultation with stakeholders. The said consultation process remained inconclusive. Besides, DoT issued ‘Net Neutrality DoT Committee Report’ in May 2015. The said report examined, inter-alia, the OTT services, and their impact on the telecom sector.

The OTT landscape is remarkably dynamic and competitive, as users increasingly spread their time between more and more applications. The decreasing cost of high-speed Internet connectivity and the increasing processing power and storage space on personal devices allow people to move easily between different apps, add new ones or use several at the same time. There is considerable overlap between the user bases of competing applications, and OTT technologies impose virtually no constraints on end users from using many similar applications concurrently, a process known as ‘multihoming’. In Germany, for instance, a May 2020 report by the Bundesnetzagentur (Federal Network Agency) found that 65% of survey respondents practise multihoming for communication OTT applications.


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