



Global antitrust and the challenge of Big Tech

Issues: Regulation of Tech Giants, Geopolitics might of Tech Giants

There are ongoing investigations worldwide, including in the European Union and the United States, on the abuse of monopolistic power by the Big Tech firms, especially Facebook and Google.

Challenges: Monetisation models and Threats

1. Internet firms operate globally, thanks to the ubiquitous Internet. Therefore, it is often difficult to lay down international rules of obligation and fulfilment by the different country regulators.
2. The Internet firms provide search, navigation, and social connectivity with no charge to the consumers, and, consequently, making these services non-excludable but there are subtle trade-offs of personal information for availing services of the Internet firms.
3. In order to retain their pole position, these firms may resort to anti-competitive behaviour including acquiring rivals to vertically integrate (Facebook acquiring WhatsApp, Instagram); erecting entry barriers by refusing to interconnect and interoperate with competing firms, and leveraging their capital base, thereby engaging in predatory pricing, and driving out competitors.
4. Due to strong network effects, it is not possible to ban or curtail these services. Even if other options are available (such as Signal and Telegram for messaging), the network effects bind customers to their often used platform (WhatsApp), even if it is not their favourite.

Indispensable applications and Positives

1. Even without our knowledge, these Internet firms have now become an indispensable part of our lives. We cannot do without Google Maps for our day-to-day commute to various destinations.
2. For example, Google Maps Application Program Interface (APIs) is being used by almost all logistic and transport companies.
3. Facebook APIs are used for advertisement by almost all firms across the industry.



4. Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Google, recently announced that its Search is being expanded to provide accurate and timely information on vaccine distribution to enable quick recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hence, the question before policymakers is how to regulate these Internet firms from abusing their monopoly power while at the same time encouraging the positive externalities and consumer surplus they create.

Possible solutions

1. The government can mandate the sharing of Non-Personal Data (NPD) owned by these firms for societal and economic well-being.
2. Google and Facebook must negotiate a fair payment with news organisations for using their content in Facebook's newsfeed and Google's Search.
3. Controlled expansion of products and services without hurting the interests of consumers and smaller competing firms shall be the mantra used by these firms to minimise litigation, lawsuits and, eventually, wastage of tax-payers' money.
4. The other way to control any abusive behaviour of the Internet firms is to use the power of public voice. The huge public outcry and subsequent government actions have delayed the recent changes to the privacy policy relating to the sharing of personal information between WhatsApp and its parent firm, Facebook.

Remembering the Holocaust

Issues: Curbing hate crimes

Every year on January 27, the United Nations honours the victims of the Holocaust by reaffirming its unwavering commitment to counter anti-Semitism, racism, and other forms of intolerance.

Hate speech has intensified

1. Currently, the anonymity of the Internet and increased screen time during the pandemic have intensified hate speech. Greater exposure to hateful discourses online has allowed anti-Semitism and other variants of racism to fester in our societies.

29.01.2021

Friday



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2. The feelings of uncertainty, alienation and dejection brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic have aggravated anti-Semitism and anti-Islam sentiments worldwide by attributing blame to the certain people and using them as a scapegoat.
3. In this crucial time that requires unity, the proliferation of hate sentiments on social media has revived prejudices and stereotypes, further dividing society.

Hate and its impact

The significance of the Holocaust carries great importance today. The Holocaust was a watershed moment in history as it illuminates the many manifestations of hate and its impact.

UN initiatives against Hate:

1. Therefore, whilst urging member states to strengthen the resilience of people against hateful ideologies, the UN emphasises the use of education as a potent tool to inculcate a culture of peace.
2. However, education must not be viewed as a panacea to cure intolerance. Lessons on how racist ideologies and hate speech inform the development of tragedies like the Holocaust must go beyond textbook learning.
3. This is because, oftentimes, we have seen highly educated people perpetuating hatred.
4. In today's polarised world, empowering people to question and engage in critical reflections about the root causes and repercussions of hate crimes is essential.
5. Individuals always have more power than they realise, for better or for worse. Consequently, equipping them to make the rational choice of acting as active bystanders rather than perpetrators is the only way to create peaceful and sustainable societies.