

TECHNOLOGY

Regulator eyes creation of local OTT platforms



Despite heavy use by Thais, all popular OTT platforms are operated by foreign companies. REUTERS

NBTC clarifies development urgent

KOMSAN TORTERMVASANA

The development of over-the-top (OTT) platforms by Thais is needed to ensure the benefits will not fall solely into the hands of big foreign players, says the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC).

The agency supports the establishment of a working committee to cope with OTT businesses, including crafting proper measures to govern them.

Takorn Tantasith, secretary-general of the NBTC, said OTT business presents both challenges and concerns for authorities in Asean and globally, particularly economic contribution to countries by these platforms and social



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TAKORN TANTASITH
Secretary-general, NBTC

responsibility, which ranges from personal data protection to the prevention of illegal content dissemination.

To handle these issues, all stakeholders — the government, regulators, network providers, OTT players and consumers — need to address the concerns.

“A supportive ecosystem for OTT business in the country is needed, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic when it has been proven that OTT platforms are meaningful players in the

country’s economy,” said Mr Takorn.

Driven by the pandemic, digital transformation is being rapidly adopted by the public, including teleconferencing, telemedicine and online education.

Despite being heavily used by Thais, many popular OTT platforms are operated by foreign companies, he said.

“This is an urgent agenda, particularly with the economy in recovery mode, to ensure the benefits do not flow abroad,” said Mr Takorn.

Technically, OTT refers to digital applications or services operated on internet networks. This includes communication and broadcasting services that can be operated on both wired and wireless internet networks.

The rise of OTT platforms, particularly online video and TV content providers, is creating challenges for regulators around the globe on how to implement proper measures to govern their content and operations.

He said the Thai government must take into account three main issues concerning OTT business.

First, Thailand needs to have its own OTT platforms operated by local firms or developed in partnership with the state.

Several countries in the region have their own OTT platforms. Singapore has Grab, Malaysia has iflix and Indonesia has Go-Jek. These platforms bring in revenue to their home countries while preventing money from flowing abroad.

Second, the government should iron out proper measures to govern OTT businesses, said Mr Takorn. A working

committee may need to be formed to look in the matter with the participation of the Digital Economy and Society (DES) Ministry, the National DES Committee as well as other agencies, such as the NBTC, he said.

Finally, as no Thai-based OTT platforms have been rolled out, the government should lend a hand by promoting sales of products through two web pages created by Chulalongkorn and Thammasat universities to assist merchants during this difficult time, said Mr Takorn.

Somchai Lertsutiwong, chief executive of Advanced Info Service (AIS), the country's leading mobile operator, acknowledged several popular digital platforms heavily used by Thais during the pandemic are run by foreign operators.

AIS is looking to develop its own super app, with intense work planned for the second half this year, he said. The app must be easy to use and have high security, Mr Somchai said.