

## IS PAKISTAN READY FOR DIGITAL REVOLUTION?

### INTRODUCTION:

- General statement
- Thesis statement: Pakistan is not ready for digital revolution due to several political, social and economic challenges

### MAIN BODY:

- Understanding pre-requisites for digital revolution

#### Political challenges:

- Lack of political stability
- Corruption and mismanagement of funds  
Case in Point: Allegations of misappropriation of fund usage in 2021 USA funds meant for rural and telecom internet expansion
- Internet access restrictions
- Installation of firewalls

#### Economic challenges:

- Low investment in digital sectors
- High import dependency
- Energy crisis impacting tech sectors
- IMF debt and challenges to tech startups

#### Social challenges:

- Lack of awareness about importance of digitalisation
- Unskilled youth

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- Poverty with lack of technological access
- Misuse of digitalization
- Gender disparity in technology access

### Educational challenges

- Illiteracy
- Lack of technical knowledge and expertise
- How Pakistan can overcome these challenges?
- Conclusion

"Digital revolution" implies the infusion of technology in every aspect of life. As of 2024, approximately 5.45 bn people are internet users, accounting for around 68% of global population. Information technology has no doubt revolutionized social and organizational life around the globe. As far as, Pakistan is concerned there is a lot of potential that needs to be explored. Digital revolution can ~~not~~ not only flourish economic conditions but also can lead to problems or even failure of technology. Digital revolution in Pakistan is a faraway vision as it faces many hurdles blocking its way. Firstly, there is corruption and mismanagement of funds allotted for IT. Also there is lack of political stability in country. Secondly, lack of investments in IT and IMF debts challenges tech startups. Thirdly, lack of awareness about importance of digitalization and unskilled youth poses social challenges - last but not the least illiteracy and

lack of digital infrastructure. Keep in view these points digital revolution in Pakistan will end up in failure.

To begin with the discussion, it is essential to understand the digital revolution and how a country can be ready for its adoption. So, the digital revolution refers to the fourth wave of industrial revolution supported by technological advancements and IT advancements, mainly in economic and administrative systems. Further, for a country to adopt digital revolution successfully, it is covered to fulfil proper criteria that would create a feasible environment for the proliferation of digital technologies. According to the article by World Economic Forum "The development of digital policies and laws, digital infrastructure, sound economic support and skills advancements are critical areas for countries to work on to facilitate the digital revolution." These developments are part and parcel of digital revolution. Unfortunately, Pakistan lacks the pre-requisites for digital revolution.

Firstly, political instability in Pakistan is hindering the digital revolution.

Firstly, Pakistan is facing a number of political challenges that are hindering digital revolution. The absence of political stability disrupts the execution of long-term policies and reforms. Frequent changes in government of Pakistan and reshuffling of IT ministers disrupted long-term digital planning. Moreover, corruption and mismanagement of funds in digital projects undermines the initiatives and leads to inefficient use of funds. There have been concerns about the management of Universal Service Fund in Pakistan particularly allegations of misappropriation and misuse of funds meant for expanding telecom and internet services in underserved regions. Furthermore, internet access restriction in Pakistan during the days of political instability disconnects it from the globe world. Recent internet blackout in May 2023 in response to political unrest. It also disrupted the freelance economy affecting thousands of workers dependent on digital platforms. On August 1, 2024

Fewer set unavailability status on accounts of Pakistan's freelancers. Additionally, the installation of Freenet's has disrupted the speed of internet causing slow access to the world. These political challenge should be overcome for digitally revolutionizing Pakistan.

Secondly, not only political challenges but also economic challenges pose significantly hinder its digital transformation. The insufficient public and private investment in IT infrastructure hampers the development digital transformation in rural areas. Pakistan's internet penetration rate remains low with only 36% of population using the internet as of 2023 due to limited investment in rural connectivity. Moreover, Pakistan rely heavily on imported digital equipments and technology increases cost. Pakistan is ~~importing~~ recorded \$2.569 bn in 2023, according to PBS. Additionally, energy crisis in Pakistan is impeding digitalization. Because, many industries are shutting down their business due to high power cost. The shutdown of Telenor company

is one of examples. Furthermore, Another major economic challenge is debt of IMF. As of March 2020, the public debt of Pakistan is estimated to be about Rs 428 trillion which is 98.2% of GDP. You should whenever IMF or World Bank give debt to any state they impose certain restriction on the state and a borrower is inhibited to a great extent from public spending under the conditions of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). Thus, the state has to roll-up most of its social welfare programs. So, Pakistan first have to deal with foreign debt. Thus, such IT or other startups are rolled-up in Pakistan. So, until these economic challenges ~~will~~ <sup>will</sup> not be overcome, Pakistan cannot be successfully digitalized.

Thirdly, another important challenge that Pakistan has to overcome is the social challenge as the society don't know about digitalization and the role it can play in their life. By using digital technology we can answer to any question about anything, we can order food, clothes, shoes and hotels. Digital

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technology can help to communicate regardless of where you are and can help in education as online education is the fruit of digitalization. Digitalization can also be helpful to ease a living as there are many opportunities in the digital world. But even in the present day number of Pakistanis are not knowing about how effectively digital revolution can change their social and economic lives, still rely on traditional methods. Pakistan currently has largest youth population having 60% of people in the age phase 15-64 years. Pakistan can use this force to harness fruits of digitalization but the main problem is that the youth is unskilled. The main reasons of deficiency of skills in youth is the education system of Pakistan that only focuses on giving degrees and not training or passing any skills to student. According to PIDE 16.5% of graduates are unemployed in Pakistan. As Elon Musk said in World Artificial Intelligence Conference "If you want to keep your job in the face of increasing automation you should work on your soft skills."



Another issue to overcome in digitalization is misuse of digitalization. Online frauds such as fake phone calls to retrieve personal information and ATM scanning alone cost upto Rs 1 billion a year. The state has made FIA cyber - security to deal with these crimes but the institution has only been successful in reducing it. but and not been able to fully cope it. Moreover, gender disparity in technology access should also be overcome for successful digitalization of country. Women face additional barriers to accessing digital tools due to societal expectations and cultural limitations, deepening the digital gender divide. Only 13% of Pakistani women have access to formal financial services and their use of mobile banking is significantly lower compared to men. The digital adoption is not possible until these social challenges are fully coped.

Last but not ~~the~~ least, the challenge that is halting the digitalization of the country<sup>is</sup> is educational challenges. In education

most important issue is illiteracy.  
The literacy rate of Pakistan men is only 59% and this rate is even less in case of women, to the precise 49%.  
Until the people of the country are not literate and have basic skills of reading and writing they can easily update themselves into digital world. But if 50% of the country's population does not have the basic ability to read and write they cannot prosper until the literacy issue is not overcome, the digitalization can never be successful. Another important educational issue is that teachers who are shaping the future of country are themselves lacking technological knowledge and skills.  
In 2020, Covid-19, when the pandemic forced the whole world to shift to digital online, the world easily shifted to online, but when we see Pakistan there were many issues from which most important and alarming issue was that the teachers mostly don't even know how to use technology and how

to interact and communicate using online and digital platforms. It shows that the teachers themselves are not except in using technology, how these teachers can teach students and shape their for digital adaptation. The digital adaptation is not possible until there are teachers having expert knowledge and skills in field that they can impart in students. Keeping in view this context the digital revolution of Pakistan is not possible in current scenario.

For solving and overcoming political, economic, social and educational challenges, Pakistan must immediately start telling her people that how much digitalization is important for them and for the progress of country. The Pakistan should try to launch degrees that imports both the knowledge and skills. For successful digitalization of country, Pakistan must improve her economy and deal with foreign debts and different challenges posed by international organisations and then invest a proper number of resources to fulfil technological gaps in country. Moreover, political

System of Pakistan should be stable for continuous and sustainable digitalization of Pakistan. Last but not the least, Pakistan should revise its literacy rates as soon as possible and should appoint those teachers that have expertise in their concerned department. Until all these points are not addressed and all the challenges are not overcome digital revolution in Pakistan can never be successful.

To conclude the whole discussion, it is not wrong to say that keeping in view the present scenario digitalization of Pakistan is not possible. No doubt the government is trying to introduce digitalization but this huge venture cannot be successful until the key issues are addressed properly and are overcome. To summarise the whole discussion, Pakistan has many social, political and economic challenges which are embedded into the society so intensely that without addressing them the fruit of digitalization cannot be harvested.