

ESSAY

Digital Freedom without Digital Responsibility: A New challenge for Pakistani Society.

Outline

1- Introduction

Thesis Statement: In Pakistan, the rapid expansion of digital freedom without a sense of legal, ethical, and civic responsibility has changed cyberspace into an emerging challenge with serious consequences. These consequences are posing serious challenges in the domains of social harmony, political discourse, and overall societal ethics. However, by filling some gaps, it can be managed effectively.

2- Understanding digital freedom without digital responsibility as a challenge for Pakistani society

3- Manifestations of irresponsible digital freedom in Pakistan

- a) Misuse of freedom of expression in Pakistan resulting in challenging governance and rule of law
- b) Political polarization due to digital propaganda as a tool of manipulation and emotional mobilization
- c) Spread of disinformation through digital platforms ignites panic, confusion and mistrust
- d) Character assassination for personal gains through false allegations and deep fake videos

e) Youth radicalization through irresponsible digital consumption in the form of extremist ideologies and unrealistic lifestyles

f) Violation of privacy through data misuse shows societal lack of awareness of digital rights

g) Erosion of family norms due to excessive screen time and online addiction

4- Multi-dimensional consequences of irresponsible digital freedom in Pakistan

a) Posing serious threats to national integration of Pakistan

b) Manipulation of public opinion resulting in political instability

c) Decline of moral and family values impacts youth behavior

5- Way forwards to make digital freedom responsible in Pakistani society

a) Strengthening cyber laws and effective implementation across the country

b) Workshops by governments to boost digital literacy

6- Conclusion

"User should use social media thoughtfully and share information responsibly". This general guideline by Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) aptly underscores the responsibility imposed on the netizen to share credible information and use social media sharply. Digital responsibility is a pre-requisite of digital freedom; however, in Pakistan, the gap between these two is very wide and resulting in digital freedom irresponsible among the masses. Misuse of freedom of expression along with digital propaganda resulting in challenged governance and emotional mobilization of public. Spread of disinformation and character assassination igniting panic, confusion and false allegations respectively. Youth radicalization is also a crucial challenge for the Pakistani society, posed by the deficiency of digital responsibility. Similarly violation of privacy and erosion of societal norms are also critical challenges emerged by weak digital responsibility. Parallel to these challenges, some impact are also there which include: weak national integration in Pakistan, political instability and decline of family values and customs. Consequently, In Pakistan, the rapid expansion of digital freedom without a sense of legal, ethical and civic responsibility has changed cyberspace into an emerging challenge with serious consequences. These consequences are posing serious challenges in the domains of social harmony, political discourse, and overall societal ethics.

However, by filling some gaps, it can be managed effectively.

Digital freedom means the access of internet and social media platforms to the common masses of the country. According to global digital insight report 2024, the internet users in Pakistan was 116 million which is more or less 45.7% of the total population of the country.

Similarly, digital responsibility means the responsible use of social media by the public by obeying the ethical and legal borders of the use of digital space. According to news international report, only 10% of the total digital netizens are aware of the responsibility, posed by the social media on them, in Pakistan. This shows that the gap between the digital freedom and digital responsibility in Pakistan is very wide and posing challenge to the overall society. So, it can be said that the irresponsible digital freedom is posing challenge to the society in Pakistan.

There are many manifestations of irresponsible digital freedom in Pakistan chief among them is the misuse of freedom of expression in Pakistan. Freedom of expression means the liberty of expressing opinions with any fear. The constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan allows freedom of expression but by the elevation of internet users, the freedom of expression is misused heavily. Pakistan has introduced many

legal frameworks to manage the constitutional rights of the people and curbing the misuse of freedom of expression. PECA (Prevention of Electronic Crimes Acts) was introduced by Pakistan to tackle online crimes under the banner of freedom of speech. So, misuse of freedom of expression in Pakistan is the serious threat posed by the irresponsible digital freedom.

Parallel to the inappropriate use of freedom of expression, another issue in the form of challenge is political polarization due to digital propaganda in Pakistan. Political polarization means the deep fragmentation of political parties in a political system which hinders the overall progress of the country. Political polarization is the chronic issue in Pakistan since the inception of the country but a huge number of people think that the contemporary political polarization in Pakistan is caused by the social media. According to a political study by Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI), 62.5% of Pakistanis believe that the modern political polarization in Pakistan is caused by the social media. This shows that the political polarization due to digital propaganda is the manifestation of irresponsible digital freedom.