

Digital Freedom without Digital Responsibility: A New Challenge for Pakistani Society

Outline

IS

I. Introduction

In Pakistan's fragile socio-political environment, digital freedom divorced from digital responsibility has become not a liberating force, but a profound societal challenge which need to be catered.

II. Understanding the Key Terms

Digital Freedom: Access, Expression, Platforms

Digital Responsibility: Ethics, Accountability, Civic Sense

III. How it poses a New Challenge:

a) Moral and Ethical Challenge

- Online vulgarity, obscenity, cultural erosion
- Digital normalization of immorality

b) Spread of misinformation and fake news

- Mob mentality, character assassination, breakdown of social trust and tolerance

- Punjab College incident

c) Increasing Digital Populism and Political Polarization

- Personality cult

- Opposing views are being demonized rather than debated

d) Propaganda against State-Institution

- Hybrid warfare, Anti-state narratives
- EU Disinfo Lab

e) Rising Trends of Digital Vigilantism

- Trial by Social Media

f) Online Harassment and Blackmail

- 70% of Pakistani women have experienced online harassment

(Digital Rights Foundation)

- Misuse of Personal Data by Loan Applications

g) Growing Yellow Journalism

- Youtubers in the disguise of Journalists
- Journalist Naeem Hanif Vs Saba Qamar's defamation case

h) Surge of Online Scams and Digital Frauds

- Economic Frauds: Phishing
- Social Media Hacking

i) Persecution of Minorities

- Unverified allegations of blasphemy
- Incidents of Jaranwala, Yuhana Abad, and mob lynching of Priyantha Kumar

j) Unrestrained Hate Speeches

- Rise in Sectarian Hostilities

k) Educational Decline and Anti-Intellectualism

- Quick opinions replace deep knowledge
- "When opinion outweighs evidence, ignorance becomes power."
(Hannah Arendt)

III. Pragmatic measures to counter these challenges by ensuring Digital Freedom with Digital Responsibility:

a) Promotion of Digital Literacy
(Incorporating digital ethics in curricula)

b) Digital Responsibility Awareness Campaigns
(Engaging Influential personalities; Media Houses)

c) Effective Role of Regulatory Authorities
(PTA, NADRA, SBP, LEAs)

d) Responsible role of Journalists
(To counter fake NEWS)

e) Prime Responsibility of Government
(Legislations, Funds, Good Governance)

IV. Conclusion

Pakistan's digital crisis is not a crisis of freedom, but of responsibility. The solution lies in civilizing cyberspace through education, ethics, institutions, and law.

Essay:

The city was turned into a battleground. The teenage soldiers in school uniforms were vandalising the educational institutions, setting vehicles on fire and beating security personels. They were enraged on a news circulating online that a female student had been raped by a security guard. Government intervened and assured them a free and fair inquiry. Before the result of inquiry, the girl - who was alleged to be raped - appeared in media and certified that she was not raped and the news circulating online was fake. Inquiry report also certified that the news was fake. Nonetheless the impacts were real: The female education was stigmatised again, and hundreds of girls were barred from going school by their parents for fears of their safety. This incident unearthed the unique challenge for Pakistani

society. While digital freedom in Pakistan expanded at an unprecedented pace, digital responsibility - ethical use of information, verification of content, respect for privacy, and civic accountability - has failed to grow proportionately.

This imbalance has produced a paradox: freedom without restraint, which increasingly threatens social cohesion, democratic stability, and national development. This essay will discuss how digital freedom without digital responsibility is becoming a new formidable challenge to Pakistani society and pragmatic measures to counter these challenges with digital responsibility.

Before discussing these new challenges to Pakistani society, it is imperative to understand the key variables. Digital freedom is a new concept which is emerged in twenty first century. It entails almost all the

fundamental rights in the context of cyberspace. Particularly, it ensures one's freely access to digital services, social media platforms, and expression of his or her views. Likewise, the term "Digital Responsibility" encompasses the responsibilities and duties of a person in accessing and using digital platforms freely. A person must ensure digital ethics and civic sense. He must verify all the news before sharing it with other, and as a vibrant netizen, he must hold all the people, elements, and platforms accountable which are trying to exploit digital freedom irresponsibly.

(Transition paragraph)

This irresponsible use of digital freedom is creating a lot of challenges. These challenges become detrimental in societies ^{like Pakistan} which are already embroiled in political instability, sectarian rifts and gender disparities issues. Hence, it is pertinent to discuss the challenges

of irresponsible digital freedom in Pakistan.

The first challenge to Pakistani society is the moral and ethical decay. This unbridled digital freedom is undermining the ethical codes of the society. Almost everyone is being exposed to the online vulgarity and obscenity. People in the name of V-logs are destroying the cultural values of the society. Multiple digital social-media groups are promoting memes from vulgar videos for maximum likes, shares and comments. People who earn millions via vulgar Tiktok videos and Lives are being heralded as ideal. This digital normalization of immorality has eroded the very civilised and revered values of Pakistani society. Hence, this digital freedom without digital freedom has posed a

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serious ethical and moral challenge to Pakistani society.

(Transition paragraph to Pragmatic Measures)

The above discussion has established that digital freedom with digital responsibility is ~~deleterious~~ socio-political challenges to Pakistani society. So, it is pressing need to counter these measures with pragmatic measures.

First of all, it is mandatory to ensure promotion of the digital literacy. According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan, the general literacy rate of Pakistan is 60.65 per cent. It means forty percent of population cannot read or write. On the other hand, according to PTA 90% of the population is using smartphones and digital platforms. This stark difference reflects the real issue behind digital irresponsibility lies in unawareness

of the people. So, it is need of the hour that the digital literacy of the citizens must be enhanced on war-footing. The courses of digital ethics must be incorporated into the curricula of school, colleges, and universities. Moreover, all the public and private institutions must make digital trainings part of their recruitment process. By engaging the main stakeholder - Pakistani citizens - and improving their digital literacy, Pakistan can effectively counter these new challenges.

In conclusion, digital freedom divorced from digital responsibility has become a profound challenge for Pakistani society. It is destroying ethical and cultural values by digital normalization of immorality.

People are becoming prey to fake news and propaganda. Minorities are being persecuted due to unverified blasphemy allegations spread on digital

platforms. The society has further divided due to algorithm polarization and yellow journalism. Females are being harassed, character assassination is rising, and businesses have become unsafe due to incidents of phishing and digital frauds. The digitalisation of lifestyle has made digital responsibility inevitable for any society. To ensure digital responsibility and cater these new challenges, all the stakeholders - individuals, journalists, regulatory bodies, government - must make sincere collective efforts. These efforts of civilizing digital space through education, ethics, institutions and laws will certainly bear fruit.