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EMBRACING THE DIGITAL SHIFT: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL PRESENCE ON BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN PAKISTAN'S PANDEMIC LANDSCAPE

Maria Ilyas[1], Rabbia Ilyas[2]

Affiliations:

[1]Research Scholar,
Allama Iqbal Open University,
Islamabad

[2]Research Scholar,
Arid Agriculture University,
Rawalpindi

Corresponding Author(s) Email:
[1]mariaasif5900@gmail.com

Abstract

With its widespread infections and fatalities, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound and terrible effect on communities around the world. Enterprises spanning diverse sectors have not been immune to the pandemic's fury, enduring notable reductions in earnings, profitability, foreign trade, and investment. Global governments have strategically chosen to embrace digital transformation in response to these unprecedented difficulties, moving away from traditional physical businesses and towards digital platforms. This change has turned out to be a crucial one, allowing companies to grow into leaders in the digital space in addition to maintaining existing operations. One of the best examples of this shift is Pakistan, where company executives have quickly prioritised digital transformation, leading to continuous operations and growth in the economy even in the face of the epidemic. This study explores how digital presence affects Pakistani business development. This study intends to provide light on the efficacy of digital platforms in promoting business growth using both primary and secondary data. Secondary data was gathered from relevant research papers and articles published in peer-reviewed journals, while primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire employing a 5-point Likert scale. The findings of this study underscore the feasibility and effectiveness of digital presence, highlighting its multifaceted applications in the context of the pandemic. These applications include government initiatives promoting digital platforms as an alternative to physical work environments, organizational efforts to enhance digital presence to reduce operational costs, and governmental support for IT training programs to empower employees to effectively carry out their work-related tasks through digital platforms. In conclusion, digital presence emerges as a potent driver of business development, paving the way for increased growth and prosperity for a country.

Keywords: Digital presence, Economic development, Pandemic situation, Perspectives

Introduction

A "digital presence" for the development of business simply means how businesses are carried on through digital platforms notably with the help of internet (Kromidha & Robson, 2021). The popularity of digital workplaces has increased recently. Three underlying trends - information overload, the drive for speed, and worker demographics are to blame for this quickening of change. According to Casilli and Antonio (2017), a digital platform is a work-place where there is no existence of physical space. It is usually a network where several workplaces are technologically connected without regard to geographic

boundaries. Digital platforms have experienced significant growth in adoption, diversity, and innovation in the past decade. Many factors have contributed to the rise of platforms, including the expansion of cloud computing, the maturing of the online advertising sector, and advances in internet penetration. Additionally, a sharp increase in smart phone ownership has given users more access to platforms. It has been stated by Asif (2022), Avanade (2017), and Koeffer (2015) that for improving operational efficiency and meeting organizational goals, businesses should use digital transformation to create an alignment among technology, employees, and business processes.

Berland (2015) recommended that the digital workplace means any gadget, device, software, or platform that staff members use to execute their tasks of their jobs without the presence of physical office space at all. According to Gartner Report (2017), through this platform companies can mitigate country boundaries in case of employment or other necessities because cloud services, mobile, and artificial intelligence technologies ensure company information is 24/7 available. However, digital presence is inextricably connected with our modern world and directly influences our economy, especially in the pandemic time when everybody collapsed at home, switched to work from home, and daily life dependent on electronic gadgets.

On 11th of March of 2020, a declaration has been announced by World Health Organization (WHO) regarding COVID-19 pandemic. By this time the WHO has declared Coronavirus as a pandemic, Pakistan had only confirmed few imported cases and was considering various options to lessen the spread of this virus. A few days after Pakistan government also declared the whole country under lockdown procedure after the first coronavirus death occurred and its local transmission rapidly grownup. Overall business activity was shut down and the economy was in a distressed situation. But it cannot be allowed to continue like this to save the people and economy as well. So several companies ordered their employees for working from their home, students are bound to attend classes through the digital platform, shopping completely depended online, and most importantly people's lives were dependent on virtual media. Many giant companies like Unilever Pakistan, Colgate-Palmolive Pakistan, Mobilink, PTCL, and many others corporate firms and companies confirmed their employees to stay home and work remotely.

In response to the "lock-down" measures put in place in Pakistan and other nations to combat the COVID-19 epidemic, many individuals are reportedly working from home during this quarantine period, according to the newspaper. But labour must continue, whether it is done offline or online. The authorities set up online video conferences to link individuals living in any part of the world even when members of an office or commercial organization are unable to participate in a meeting in person (with an internet connection). Though Pakistan government's vision is to make a digital Pakistan and it is near to success of the "Digital Pakistan". The main goal of this vision is to bring every home under the digital network and digitalize government services. For implementing this, the government has taken lots of initiatives like launching Software Technology Parks in different cities across the country. Our present study directly interlinks to the effects of digital presence on business development through government is trying to convert the whole country under digital transformation and corona pandemic also accustomed us to exercise it in our daily uses. So it has been justified that, this background of the study highly recommends there is a high necessity for present research work.

There appears to be limited study on how and why digital platforms are utilized to provide value to the business, despite of this fact that an increasing number of companies are using them to provide outstanding service. Because of the corona virus, digital presence for the development of business is a little bit new concept for Pakistan. People are trying to habituate to it. Moreover, there is no sufficient information regarding the topic though the pandemic situation has occurred after more than hundreds of years. There seems to be little research on how this platform is used to add any value to business development. As a result, it is clear that there is a research gap because so few studies have looked into how digital platforms are adapted. It will need thorough study to close this gap, and it also needs the input of researchers. It is

crucial to comprehend the motivations behind and mechanisms by which digital presence will alter Pakistan's corporate environment.

The current study explores the research question with this objective in mind: "Is there any effect of digital presence on the business development of Pakistan in the pandemic situation?" To fully explore the promising impact of digital presence on Pakistan's company development, a detailed inquiry is required, assisted by a complete literature analysis. A primary survey is necessary to determine whether there is any impact of Pakistan's digital presence on the country's commercial development in the event that the literature currently available does not explore responses to the formulated research question.

The descriptive component of the study states the following hypothesis, which is based on the study of the literature review of a primary feasibility study: H1: there is a positive relationship between digital presence and business development in Pakistan and It is predicted that a comfortable workplace will have an impact on the pandemic, either favourably or effectively, avoiding high payment involvement, unemployment solution, enrichment of living standard, avoiding transportation cost, increasing global competition, efficient business interaction, employee productivity, reduction of fixed cost and technological orientation. In light of the aforementioned claim, the foremost goal of this study is to determine whether or not digital presence has any real impact on Pakistan's company development during the pandemic. The goal of this study is to identify the influencing factors that support business growth and have a beneficial impact on business development. In this regard, the present study is significant and deserves credit because this paper incorporates around 13 variables from multiplex studies that affect the digital presence in the business development of Pakistan.

Literature review

The digital workplace is very convenient because it has no specific location, here employees are thus able to interact in a collaborative working environment regardless of where they are located (Casilli & Antonio, 2015). They also stated that value-adding activities provided by persons on the Internet platforms designate as digital labour. (Maxwell, 2017) recommended that though the occupational opportunities of digital labour moved from traditional ones, internet-mediated precarious on-demand jobs and it has a significant effect on business. Again (Han *et al.,* 2016) said in their research digital or virtual workplace is an augmentation workplace where no office building or no room is needed to run daily operations. According to Euro pound (2017), persons concerned in employment relations and policymakers have begun to under-stand the effects of the "anytime, anywhere character of ICT- based work." Forde *et al.* (2017) have focused that the global pool of workers through digital technologies creates competition among workers around the world and digital presence allows businesses to pay wages that are below the national minimum because there is the availability of workers in this platform crossing the national boundaries. They started growing evidence regarding low payment to many platform workers which is below the minimum wages, (Irani & Silberman, 2013) found that wage dumping has commonly taken place on online plat-forms that serve local communities and rely on offline work that is very easily managed online.

Another research by Euro found, (2015) stated that sometimes in the recruitment process there is an oversupply of comparing demand for jobs and that oversupply of workers allows them to reduce payment rates. Digital platforms like freelancing can be a way of solution to the ever- increasing unemployment problem because the existing scenario of the freelance market in Pakistan is a result of digital platforms (Bahman & Rahman, 2017). A significant number of unemployed people have been receiving training in web development and design and creative field for ending their unemployed life. While the other areas of training including sales and marketing, customer service, etc. are losing their existence because of increasing fascination with digital phenomena (Alam *et al.,* 2021;). Again (Seung Nam, 2017) showed that a virtual work-place enables individuals to work from any place in the world at any time, so individuals can spend much time on other work. This is advantageous not just for the worker but also for the customer (Shin,

2016). Once more, it is essential for a global firm to provide great and prompt customer service. Multi-range industries with multi-job types use the advantages of universal digital benefits that make employees available virtually anywhere with technology access resulting in less reliance on their physical presence.

Workers may now commute less frequently as a result of the benefits of digital presence, according to Eurofound (2017). Independence is linked to increased organisational flexibility, greater work-life balance, and higher productivity. If only a small portion of the workforce needs the training, a virtual training session can save the company money on travel expenses. In the long run, all employees can benefit from the training and become more productive with a quicker learning curve (Eurofound, 2017). In addition, the home-based virtual office has lowered the most competitive and sustainable commuting options in terms of trip time, cost, and macro environmental flexibility. They made an effort to highlight the benefits of virtual workplaces in the information era, when customer demands are satisfied globally without requiring complicated transportation arrangements and technology is developing quickly. A virtual workplace, according to Gilbert et al. (2015), relieves one person from sharing office space and client offices, but it also reduces transportation hassles because an employee's home or a pleasant spot may be utilised as a workspace.

High-quality talent across the world can be managed through Virtual or digital teams and it can promptly respond to customer needs (Kirkman *et al.,* 2012). Digital platforms be able to utilize a broader range of skill sets and members are available for 24/7 operations where one person mayn't be available in the organization's physical locations for 24/7 services. Additionally, a lot of workers connect with co-workers through computer-mediated communication to some measure, regardless of the issue that mobile technology has entered every area of our life (Makarius & Larson, 2017).

Organizations create work-life balance for employees, minimize real costs, and retain high-quality talent through digitalization namely telecommunicating, video conferencing, etc. (Gajendran, Harrison, 2007; Freifeld, 2012). The application of information and communication technology (ICT) in education system has led to broad digitization in education sectors. Virtual Teaching and Learning Environments (VLE) gained a lot of space in higher education institutions as a teaching and also learning tool (Dahlstrom *et al.,* 2014). Moreover with some limitations of the important mediation education process is going on online. But time management and technological skills face a great challenge for education through digitization (Robb and Fisher, 2015). It is tempting to suggest that smart phones and social media bring a digital presence inside schools and the presence of digital gadgets like smart phones, and laptops in schools and colleges, today seems self-evident (Hohti *et al.,* 2019). Companies are increasingly promoting telework, also known as telecommuting, as a way to help workers balance their work and personal lives while also successfully lowering real estate costs (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Additionally, they are capable of to draw in and keep top talent because the fixed costs of an industry can be lowered by using digital platforms (Raghuram *et al.,* 2001).

Virtual work is described as the best output for business because work is done by using digital technologies is indeed new and quite interesting for people through its easy operating system (Holts, 2013). The features of the digital platform have shown that it is a part of larger market trends that involve extreme adaptability, and the shifting of risks to workers by using digital technology.

Methodology

The current study combines primary and secondary data collecting and analysis, with the secondary data coming from current research papers and articles that have been published in reputable publications related to the study's topic (D'Cruz, & Noronha, 2016). A structured, self-administered questionnaire-based extended survey with open-ended, non-forced questions utilizing a 5-point Likert scale was used to gather the primary data from a sample size of 500 respondents, including users of the digital platform, between January 1 and February 28, 2022. The main data that was gathered has been analysed using inferential

statistical procedures. From the literature study, 12 questions that are directly or indirectly connected with the pandemic- related impacts of Pakistan's digital presence on company growth have been selected as variables. These variables are shown in Table 1 from variable 1 (X1) to Variable 12 (X12).

Table 1

Variable List and Description

Code	Items	Source	Description
X1	Convenient workplace	(Maxwell, 2017; Casilli & Antonio, 2017; Han et al., 2016; Europound, 2017)	Having a convenient workplace can provide employees with a comfortable and efficient environment to work in, leading to increased productivity and job satisfaction.
X2	Avoidances of high payment involvement	(Silberman, 2013; Eurofound, 2015; Forde et al., 2017; Eurofound, 2015)	Reducing the need for high payments can help employees save money and manage their finances more effectively.
X3	Unemployment solution	(Bahman et al., 2017; Alam et al., 2021)	Telework can provide employment opportunities for individuals who may not be able to participate in traditional employment due to factors such as location, disability, or childcare responsibilities.
X4	Enriching living standard	(Shin, 2016; Seung Nam, 2017; Eurofound, 2017)	Telework can allow individuals to have more flexibility in their work schedule, which can lead to a better work-life balance and an improved quality of life.
X5	Avoidance of transportation cost	(Gilson et al., 2015; Seung-Nam, 2017; Eurofound 2017)	Telework can help employees save money on commuting costs, such as fuel, parking, and public transportation fares.
X6	Increasing global job competition	(V.Lehdonvirta, 2016; Standing, G, 2016; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2016)	Telework can expand the pool of potential candidates for job openings, as employers are no longer limited to hiring individuals who live within a certain commuting distance.
X7	Efficient business interactions	(Forde et al., 2017; Alam et al., 2021)	Telework can facilitate communication and collaboration between employees who are located in different geographical areas, leading to more efficient business processes.
X8	Employee Productivity	(Symons, J. & Stenzel, 2007; Freifeld, 2012; Salminen & Karlsson, 2013; Eurofound, 2015)	Telework can increase employee productivity by reducing distractions and allowing employees to work during their most productive hours.
X9	Talent Management	(Gajendran & Harrison 2007; Kirkman et al., 2012; Freifeld, 2012; Makarius & Larson, 2017)	Telework can help organizations attract and retain top talent by providing more flexibility and work-life balance options.

Code	Items	Source	Description
X10	Comfortable and safe study zone	(Dahlstrom et al., 2014; Robb & Fisher, 2015; Hohti et al., 2019)	Telework can provide a comfortable and distraction-free environment for studying, which can lead to improved academic performance.
X11	Reduction of fixed cost	(Raghuram et al., 2001; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007)	Telework can help organizations reduce fixed costs associated with office space, such as rent, utilities, and maintenance.
X12	Technological orientation	(Holts, 2013; Moshe & Marvit, 2014)	Telework can promote the use of technology and innovation in the workplace, as employees may need to use new tools and platforms to collaborate effectively with remote colleagues.

Sample size

The sample size for this analysis is 500 respondents, representing Pakistan's lowest, medium, and higher classes. The sample frame of the research refers to the persons of the overall population to be questioned. There are 500 valid samples for this set of variables. The case-to-variable ratio with 500 samples and 12 variables is 42 (app) to 1, which is more than the 4:1 ratio that is advised (Malhotra & Dhas, 2011). The Kaiser Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure's'mediocre' value of.694 in Table 2 indicates that the sample size was sufficient for the factor analysis. The results of the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity indicate that the estimated chi-square statistic, which is more than the table number, is 5103.904 with 78 degrees of freedom. This suggests that the population correlation matrix's identity matrix is not the null hypothesis, according to the Bartlett's test of sphericity. The important result of Bartlett's sphericity test indicated that the population was not an identity matrix. It is important to use Bartlett's Test of Sphericity.

Table 2

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	**0.694**
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square	**5103.904**
df	**78**
Sig.	**.000**

Therefore, the current research has gained a unique proposal that supports the credibility of the suggested model by adding distinctive characteristics from the relevant studies.

Reliability analysis

Table 3

Reliability Analysis.

No of Variables	Cranach's Alpha
13	**0.770**

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Table 3 shows that all variables (12 independent variables and 1 dependent variable) evaluated in the present article have an overall alpha value of .770, which is more than 0.6 and within the acceptable range of .60 to .70 (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Malhotra & Birks, 2007). This supports the study's accuracy.

Multiple regression analysis

Multiple regression analysis has been used to examine whether there is any positive effect of digital presence on the business development of Pakistan during the pandemic situation or not. The dependent variable (Positively affecting business development of Pakistan) has been regressed against First, the multiple correlation coefficients (R) of the 12 independent variables (v1 to v12) on the dependent variable *(Ydv)* in Table 4a are 0.882, indicating that the 12 independent variables or factors have an importance at digital presence. In other words, the R-value 0.882 shows 88% multiple correlation coefficients which means that there is an 88% correlation between the predictors or

Table 4:

Model Summary.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.882a	.778	.773	.375

The regression analysis revealed a strong relationship between the 12 independent variables and the dependent variable. The R-squared value of 0.778 indicates that nearly 78% of the variation in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variables. Additionally, the high values of R (0.882), R-squared (0.778), and adjusted R-squared (0.773) suggest that the model is a good fit for the data. Finally, the relatively low standard error of the estimate (0.375) indicates that the model's predictions are accurate and reliable. Overall, these results suggest that the model effectively captures the relationship between the variables and can be used to make accurate predictions. The R-squared value of 0.778 indicates that 77.8% of the variation in the dependent variable can be explained by the 12 independent variables. This suggests a strong relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The high values of R (0.882), R-squared (0.778), and adjusted R-squared (0.773) further support the conclusion that the model fits the data well. These values suggest that the model effectively captures the relationship between the variables. The relatively low standard error of the estimate (0.375) indicates that the model's predictions are accurate and reliable. This further strengthens the overall assessment of the model's effectiveness.

Table 5

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	240.282	12	20.024	142.320	.000b
2	Residual	68.518	487	.141		
	Total	308.800	499			

Overall, the table suggests that the model is a good fit for the data and that it can be used to make accurate predictions about the dependent variable. It is clear from table 5 F ratio, which is 142.320 and highly significant (P<0.001), that the model greatly enhances the capacity to predict the result variable. The P value in this table is 0.000, which is Table 5 ANOVA[a]. Less than 0.05 and indicates that the model significantly fits the total set of data. This indicates that internet platforms have a favourable impact on Pakistan's economy.

The application of the beta-values in the multiple regression model equation *(YDV* = P0 + P1v1+ P2v2 +

P3v3+P4v4+ P4v5 + P4v6 + P4v7 + P4v8 + P4v9 + P4v10 + P4v11 + P4v12 Or, =.824+.185+.045+(-.105) +.285+(.108)+.015+.146+.162+.085+.009+.078+.445) takes this model to indicate that the importance of digital presence on Pakistan's economy would positively improve by 0.185 for every increase of one unit in v1, if the impacts of v2 to v11 are maintained constant. The favourable influence on Pakistan's business development would increase by 0.045 units for every unit higher v2, if the effects of the other components' effects were held constant.

On the other hand, being other components held constant a single unit increase in v4, v6 to v12 would lead to a .285, 015, .146, .162, .085, .009, .078, .445 will positively affect Pakistan as well. Again v3 and v5 lead to a negative effect of digital presence in business development but in a little manner. As far as the relative importance of the 12 dimensions is concerned, v12: (Beta= 0.445) followed by v1: (Beta=0.185), v7: (Beta=0.146), v4: (Beta=0.285), v9: (Beta=0.085), v8: (Beta=0.162), v2: (Beta=0.045) v1: (Beta=0.78), v6: (Beta= 015), v10: (Beta=.009). And rest of the variables like v5: (Beta= - .108), and v3: (Beta= -.105) have a positive effect of digital presence on the business development of Pakistan in the pandemic situation.

Again, there is more than one predictor (independent variables), and the magnitude of the t-value in conjunction with the significance has been considered to assess the overall contribution to the model. Based on the decision rule "the greater the t-value, the greater the contribution of the predictor", it is seen that v12: (t=8.011) followed by v1: (t=6.554), v7: (t=5.389), v4: (t=4.746), v9: (t=2.956), v8: (t=.2.582), v2:(t=.1.678), v11: (t=.1.500), v6: (t=.289), v10: (t=.178), v5: (t= - .2443), v3: (t= -2.877) are all significant predictors or independent variables have a positive effect of digital presence on the business development of Pakistan in the pandemic situation. In this respect, it can also be deduced from the t-values that v12 has a bigger effect on the result (i.e., DV) than other independent variables. The result suggests that a significant positive relationship between digital presences on business development in Pakistan during the pandemic situation exists. In summation, it may be said that every underlying dimension is good and hence important.

Multiple regression analysis's findings support hypothesis (H) and demonstrate that Pakistan's company development throughout the pandemic has benefited from its online presence. As a result, the link exists as predicted. According to the above - mentioned R, R2, Adjusted R2, F ratio, beta, and t values, the regression model successfully predicted the variance of DV pertaining to the 12 predictors or independent variables. In other words, at least one of the 12 independent variables or predictors of the DV plays a significant role in the beneficial impact of digital presence on Pakistan's company development during the pandemic condition.

Conclusion

The study has investigated the influence of digital presence on business development in Pakistan, especially during the pandemic situation. A survey has been conducted among 500 Pakistani people and put the survey data on SPSS found a significant impact on the business development of Pakistan. Through a scrutinized investigation, it has been seen that the people of Pakistan are not anymore confined to the physical work environment. Despite having various difficulties, they have adjusted themselves to digital platforms during this corona pandemic. A significant effect of it has fallen on the business sector of Pakistan. It is seen that after the announcement of 'lockdown' conditions, most number of the people of Pakistan have started the best application of the virtual platform in the following sectors - Virtual office, telemedicine, virtual classroom, online business, online payment, virtual court, diplomatic meeting, e-ticketing, online skill development course, online groceries, celebrating social and religious festivals, webinar, virtual monitoring of development project, govt. Cash relief distribution, online advertising, etc. Such uses of digital media have been accelerating the business development activity of Pakistan during corona pandemic.

Practical Implications

Though Pakistan has entered into a new era of rapid development in digital methods, a large portion of rural people is far away from this development. Pakistan government must enact the recommended

activities to avail the overall positive effect of digital presence on business. Digitization has pervaded every aspect of life in this 21st century. Particularly in light of the corona epidemic in Pakistan, the growing integration of digital technology into every area of our lives presents both opportunities and difficulties for businesses, employers, and employees. Organizations are gaining advantages from this digital transformation, which includes digitizing the workplace. These advantages include higher productivity, cost savings, a more mobile and adaptable workforce, and enhanced flexibility and market adaptability. Businesses are working with a more diversified and international workforce and cooperating worldwide.

Employees might work remotely, stay connected via cell-phones, collaborate with co-workers, and keep up with emerging technologies. Due to avoid of losing customers, productivity, and workers during and after the corona epidemic, organizations should be proactive in developing new systems and regulations and rethinking their culture around digital changes of the workplace. Directly or indirectly, the Covid-19 pandemic situation has enforced the people of Pakistan to adjust to the digital work platform and brought them into the systematic chain. This pandemic situation has brought revolutionary effects in the working environment. Though Pakistan is one of the best technology based growing economies in Asia, it has to bring developmental changes in digital presence. Such as -

1) The government should place more emphasis on and encourage the use of digital platforms as the best substitute for the physical work environment in both the public and commercial sectors.
2) During this pandemic, the government can use digital media as a key instrument to slow the spread of the corona virus.
3) Companies should make a bigger effort online to save fixed expenses for things like building and upkeep.
4) It is imperative that the government provides IT training facilities to its personnel in order to enable them to efficiently carry out their official duties via digital platforms, hence promoting "Digital Pakistan".
5) For eliminating corruption, each sector of government services must bring under automation system of digital platforms.
6) Government has to upgrade its digital presence at each level of society for increasing the living standard of people.
7) The government must increase the allotment of an annual budget for purchasing virtual education equipment to ensure a comfortable and safe zone study process during the pandemic.
8) The government has to ensure digitalization in rural areas by increasing technological equipment and experts.
9) By developing the easiest mode of financial transaction, the government has to ensure proper participation of lower class and rural people in digital platforms.
10) Local organizations can enrich their management system by hiring high-quality talent from abroad through digital platforms.
11) The government must ensure proper and quality training on freelancing at each IT training centre for effective unemployment solutions through digital platforms.
12) A Speedy connection of the internet is a must for a digital world. So government must ensure high-speed internet service throughout the country.

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