

Digital Deserts: Surveying the IT Infrastructure Challenges in Afghanistan, Based on the study by Qurban Ali Frugh & Mohammad Fahim Naseri

A recent study by Frugh and Naseri maps the alarming state of Afghanistan's IT infrastructure—what they call a digital desert. With just 18.4% internet penetration and an average speed of 2.25 Mbps, Afghanistan lags far behind its neighbors. While social media use has grown, core sectors like e-governance, online education, banking, and e-commerce remain largely untouched by digital transformation. Despite major investments in a 4,000 km fiber optic “ring” network, over 80% of the population remains offline, especially in rural areas. Contributing factors include limited electricity, no cybersecurity laws, a shortage of trained IT personnel, and very little private sector involvement. Governmental data is fragmented, and most services rely on outdated infrastructure with no national digital strategy in place. The authors recommend a shift toward national digital networks, open-access fiber policies to invite private investment, cross-border fiber collaborations (especially with China), and investments in digital literacy and infrastructure in underserved regions. ■ What do you think: • How can we design low-cost, high-impact digital infrastructure projects in rural Afghanistan? • Could community-based digital centers or solar-powered internet nodes be a game changer?

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