websouls.

The Pakistan Business Web Index

2026 — inaugural edition

The first nationwide measurement of how many Pakistani businesses have a website, and how good those websites are — covering 19,183 businesses in 51 cities, and measured the same way against India, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Contents

Why I built this

In spring 2026, a security flaw in cPanel — the software that runs much of the world's web hosting — caused problems for websites everywhere, and my support team spent weeks handling customer complaints. During that period I kept hearing the same confident claim from two directions: customers telling me their websites were well looked after, and my own staff telling me the same. Both sides were arguing from belief, not evidence.

After twenty-four years in the hosting business, I decided to stop guessing and start measuring. I began with the websites we host ourselves. When the results for Pakistan came back weaker than I expected, I widened the study to three more countries — India, the United Kingdom and the United States — to check whether the problem was real or whether my measuring tools were at fault. The tools held up. The findings were real.

Some of what the data showed was no surprise: websites quietly die when nobody renews them. What did surprise me was how many businesses have no website at all — and that among the big cities it is Lahore, not Karachi, where the largest share of businesses have a website.

To the exporters of Sialkot and Faisalabad in particular: your buyers study your website long before they meet you. In the age of AI assistants that answer customers' questions for them, being findable online matters more than it ever has.

One rule shaped this report: we published nothing that did not survive our own attempts to prove it wrong. One early, striking finding about AI use failed that test, so we removed it before publication. What remains is only what held up.

If next year's edition shows Pakistan drawing level with India — and it can, because on the quality of what we build we already match Britain — this Index will have done its job.

— Saqib, Founder, Websouls

Why this study exists

Until now, nobody had measured the state of business websites in Pakistan. The big global technology surveys treat Pakistan as too small to report separately, and local discussion runs on opinion and anecdote. So the simplest questions had no real answers: how many Pakistani businesses actually have a website? Is what they build any good? And how far behind — or ahead — is the country really?

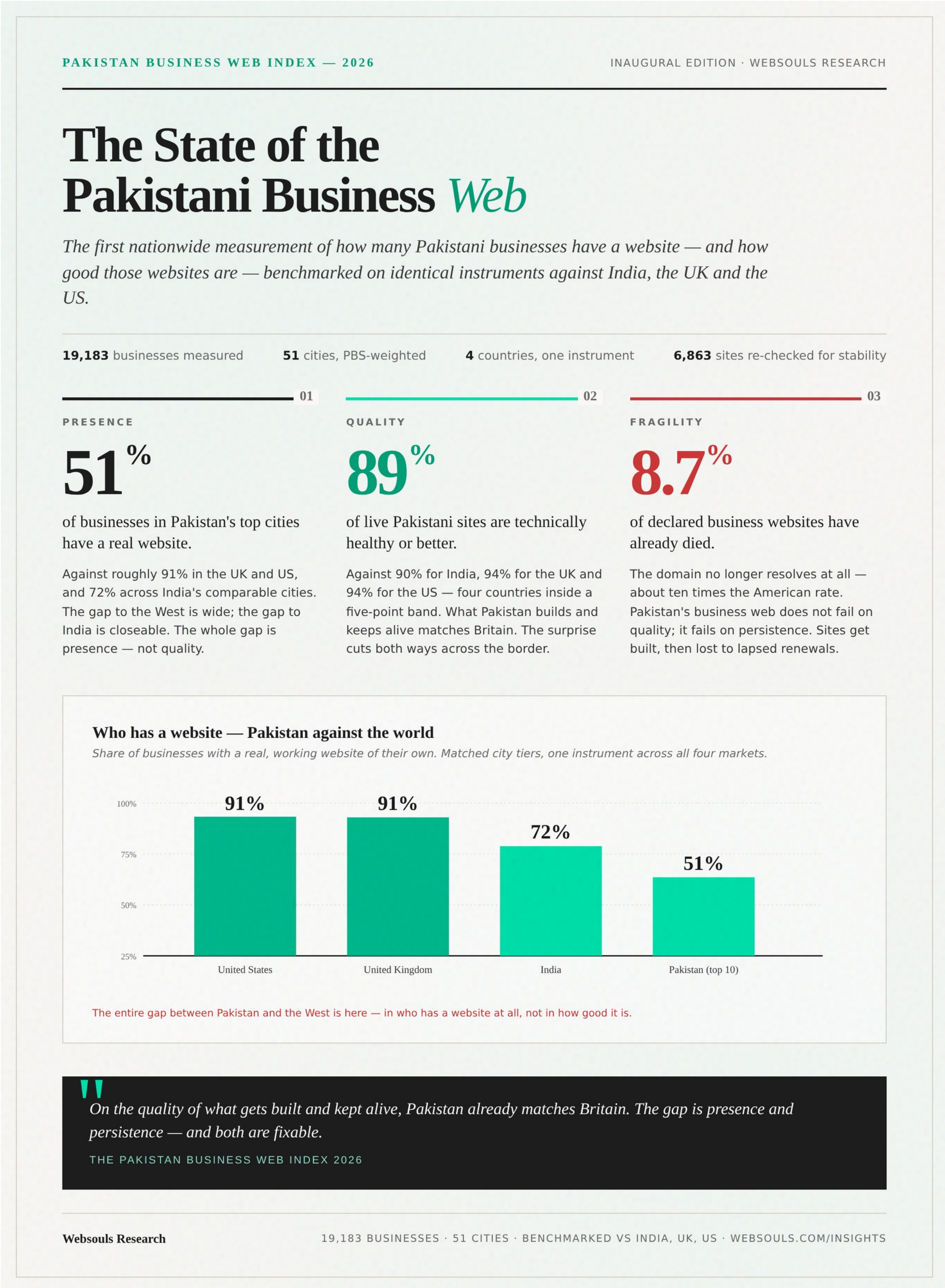
This study answers those questions with measurement rather than opinion. As far as we know, it is the first of its kind for Pakistan. We took a sample of 19,183 businesses across 51 cities and weighted it using the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) count of businesses by region, so that the sample reflects the real spread of businesses across the country rather than just the big cities. We then measured businesses in India, the UK and the US using exactly the same tools, so the comparisons are fair.

It is designed as an index, not a one-off report: the same measurements will be repeated every year, so future editions can show whether things are getting better or worse.

Some of what we found was expected. Much of it was not — and those surprises are the subject of this report.

Executive summary

Four findings stand out from this first edition. The report also breaks every result down by industry, by city, and by business size — those details sit in the sections that follow.



1. The problem is not the quality of Pakistani websites — it is how few businesses have one. In Pakistan's ten largest cities, about half of businesses have a working website (51%). In comparable British and American cities, roughly nine in ten do (91%). Measured against India's cities, Pakistan trails by less — 43% against 72%. The gap to the West is wide; the gap to India is close enough to close.

2. The websites Pakistani businesses do build are as good as anyone's. They run on the same technology as British websites (a system called WordPress), and when we scored each website for technical health, Pakistan reached 89% “healthy or better” — against 90% for India, 94% for the UK and 94% for the US. Four countries, and only five points separate them. This surprises people on both sides of the border: Pakistanis who assume their web is second-rate, and Indians who assume theirs is far ahead.

3. Pakistani and Indian businesses talk to their customers more directly than Western ones — through WhatsApp. In Pakistan, 11% of business websites carry a WhatsApp chat button; in India, more still (between 14% and 17%); in Britain and America, almost none (3% and 1%). Western businesses use website chat boxes instead. Adding up every kind of chat channel, businesses in the subcontinent give customers two to four times as many ways to start a conversation.

4. The AI revolution has not yet reached the business website — anywhere. In all four countries, between 2% and 5% of business websites mention AI in their text, but only about one in a thousand actually runs an AI tool on the site, such as a working chatbot. This is as true of Britain and America as of Pakistan. What little AI-readiness exists is mostly an accidental by-product of other software, not a deliberate choice.

Headline figures

Who has a website (national picture). Across the full national sample of 19,183 businesses in 51 cities, weighted to the PBS business count: 37.4% have a real website of their own, 5.1% rely only on a social-media page such as Facebook or Instagram, and the remaining 57.5% have no web presence at all. (These three figures add up to 100%.)

Who has a website (fair city-by-city comparison). Comparing cities of similar size: in Pakistan's top 10 cities, 51.4% of businesses have a website, against 90.6% in the UK and 91.0% in the US. Comparing Pakistan's top 22 cities against India's, the figures are 43.4% for Pakistan and 71.8% for India.

Websites that have died. Of Pakistani businesses that list a website on Google, 82.8% lead to a working site. The other 17% include sites that no longer load at all: 8.7% of listed websites are completely dead. That dead share is about ten times the American rate (0.8%) and about twice the rate in India's big cities (2.4%).

Technical health of live sites. Among websites that do work: Pakistan scores 89% “healthy or better,” India 90%, the UK 94% and the US 94% — all four within a five-point band.

What sites are built with (WordPress share). Pakistan 52%, the UK 51%, the US 43%, India 34%.

WhatsApp chat button on the website. India between 14% and 17%, Pakistan 11.3%, the UK 3.1%, the US 1.0%.

AI on the website. A working AI tool actually running on the site: about 0.1% (one in a thousand) in every country. Merely mentioning AI in the website text: 2% to 5%. Having any instructions for AI “crawlers” (the automated readers AI systems use): between 5% and 13%.

Methodology & scope

A Pakistan-first study

This Index is built first and foremost for Pakistan, and most of the measurement effort went there. Pakistan was sampled across 51 cities — deliberately including small and mid-sized towns, not just the major cities — and weighted to the PBS business count (Economic Census 2023) so that the mix of cities and provinces reflects where Pakistani businesses actually are. The three other countries are included for comparison and for checking our tools; they are reference points, not equal partners in the study.

How Pakistan was measured

We found the 19,183 businesses through Google's official business-listings service (the licensed Google Places API) and weighted the sample to the PBS business count. To be precise about what the sample represents: it covers registered businesses that can be found on Google. It does not claim to cover every business in Pakistan, and it deliberately excludes the informal sector — the vast number of unregistered traders who cannot be found in any listing. That informal sector is this study's honest blind spot, and we say so plainly.

What "having a website" means here. The website listed on a Google business profile is entered by the business owner. We checked by hand and found errors in both directions: some businesses have a working website they never listed on Google (which makes our figures too low), and some list a website that turns out to be dead, "parked" (an empty holding page), or just a social-media link (which would make our figures too high). We corrected the second problem directly — every listed website was visited and checked, and only real, working websites were counted; social-only links were counted separately. The first problem cannot be fixed from any available source, so our presence figures should be read as a floor: the true number is a little higher. Both effects apply equally in all four countries, so the comparisons remain fair.

How the numbers narrow down. Each stage of measurement uses its own base, and we never mix them: 19,183 businesses sampled → 7,177 of them list a real website → 5,944 of those websites are actually live → technical health is measured only on those live sites. "Who has a website" is measured against all businesses; "how healthy is the website" is measured only against live sites.

One sector, IT and digital services, was measured only in the seven cities where it clusters, and its figures are never projected onto the whole country.

How the other three countries were measured

India: 7,925 businesses across 22 cities, in two groups. Eleven major cities were weighted to India's official small-business registration shares (from the Ministry of MSME dashboard, February 2026 — for example Maharashtra around 13%, Uttar Pradesh around 11%, Tamil Nadu around 8%). Eleven smaller industrial cities were chosen as direct matches for Pakistan's own industrial cities — Ludhiana paired with Faisalabad, Jalandhar with Sialkot, Rajkot with Gujranwala.

UK and US: 2,485 and 2,791 businesses respectively, drawn from their top cities. These are indicative samples, not weighted to the whole country — and we do not present them as national figures.

All four countries were measured with the identical set of tools. The samples were drawn using structured Google searches (over 1,500 for Pakistan, 500 for India, 250 each for the UK and US), each returning up to 20 businesses. The exact search terms are available to journalists and researchers on request.

Comparing like with like. Because Pakistan's sample deliberately reaches into small towns while the other countries' samples cover top cities only, we never compare the full Pakistan figure directly against another country. Instead we compare matched city tiers — Pakistan's top 10 against the UK and US, Pakistan's top 22 against India — and report Pakistan's full 51-city figure separately, as Pakistan's own national number. (A small technical point: about 2% of the India sample are businesses that also appear in the Pakistan sample — cross-border and multinational firms — and each is counted in every country where it genuinely appears.)

Checking the tools before trusting them

Detecting how a site is built. Our main detection method reads the public version of each web page. We checked it against detailed server records for 4,239 websites we could see from the inside, and found that this method catches about two-thirds of the sites actually built on WordPress. So every “built-with” figure in this report is a floor — the real share is higher — but because the same method measured all four countries, the comparisons between them still hold.

How we scored technical health. Fewer than 1% of the sites we rated “healthy or better” were missing basic security (HTTPS) — 357 sites out of 36,664 scored pages across all four countries. We left them as scored and disclose it here rather than quietly adjusting.

WhatsApp and AI counting rules. A WhatsApp figure counts only a real click-to-chat button, never a phone number typed into the page text. AI was measured three ways: mentions of AI in the site's text; a working AI tool detected on the page, checked against a published list of 23 AI providers including India's own (some website-builder AI cannot be detected from outside, and we say so); and whether the site gives any instructions to AI “crawlers.”

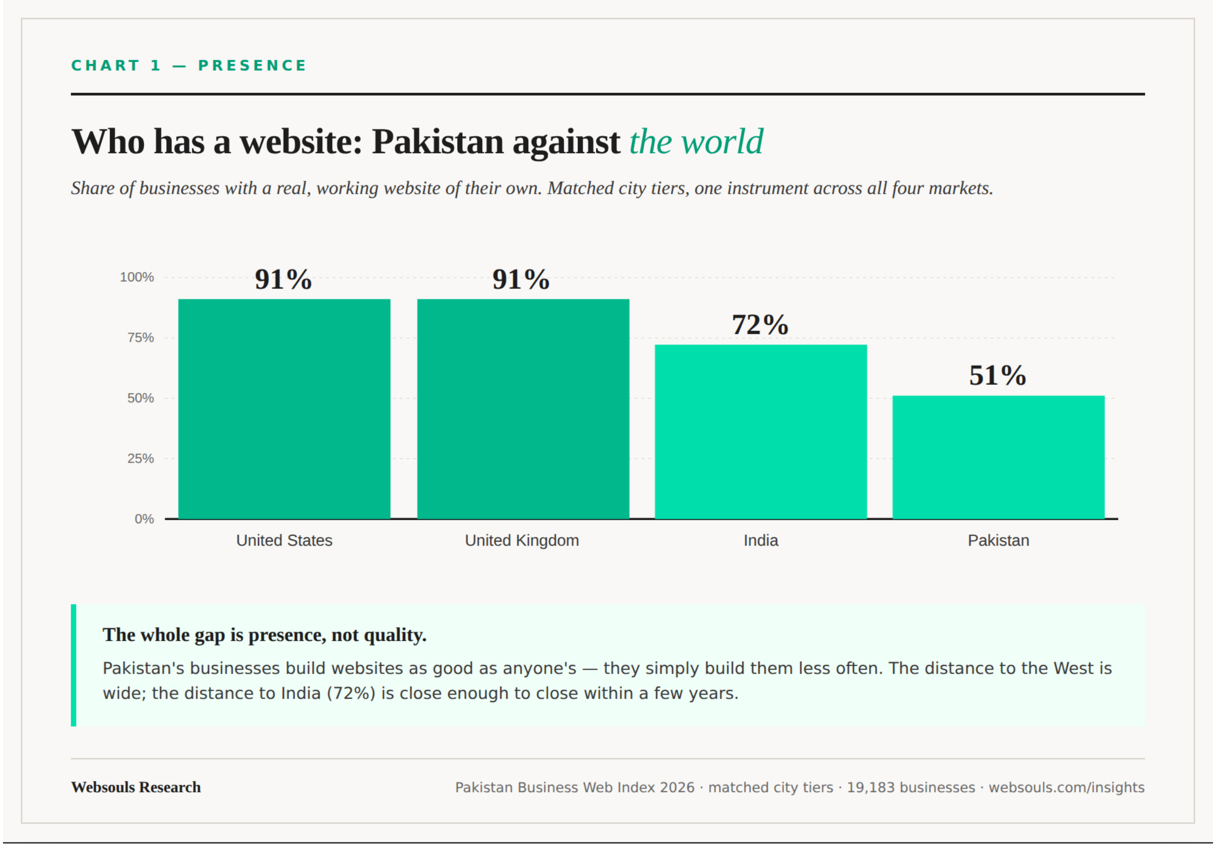
Where we measured from. All the checks were run from a single location in the UK, using an automated reader rather than a human web browser. Some websites reject visitors that look automated or come from a foreign country, and those register as errors. Comparing against a control run inside the target country, this could undercount live websites by up to about 2 points in Pakistan and about 3.5 points in India, with the US as the baseline. The specific “blocked” error codes make up about 38% of all errors, which fits those limits — and importantly, no finding in this report changes its order or conclusion within that margin.

Widgets we cannot see. Some chat and AI buttons are loaded onto a page in a way our reader cannot detect. So all such figures are floors — again, equally in all four countries.

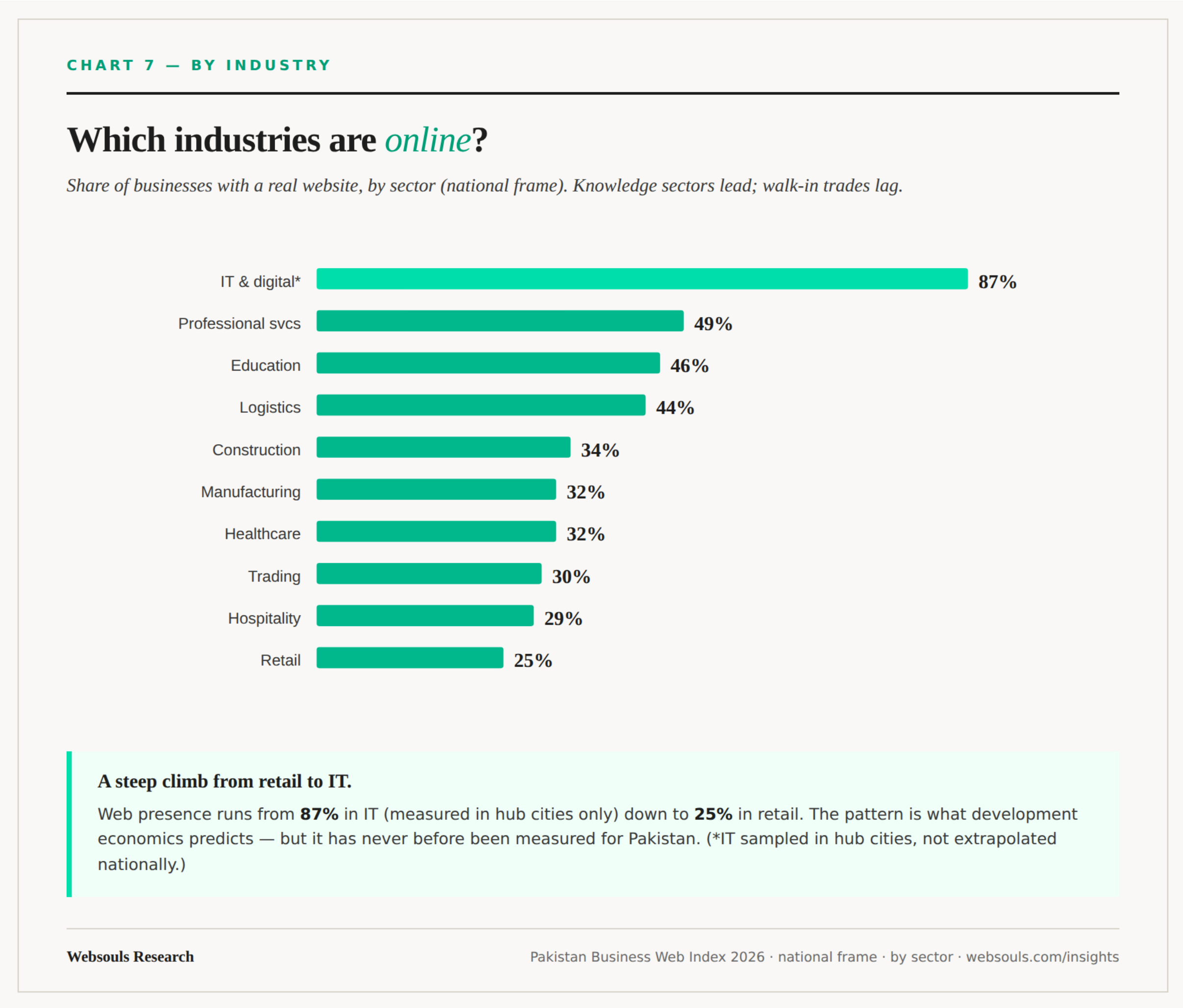
Proof the tools are consistent. We measured 6,863 Pakistani business websites twice, five and a half weeks apart, using two independent readers. They agreed 97% to 100% of the time on every single measurement: WordPress detection 97.9%, chat buttons 98.9%, WhatsApp 99.0%, analytics 97.4%, AI chatbots 100%. This proves the instrument is stable and repeatable. (This particular test used websites we host ourselves; it confirms the tool works, not the national rates.) A small repeat of the business-discovery step follows about a month after the original scan.

1. Who has a website

Across the full national sample — 19,183 businesses in 51 cities, weighted to the PBS business count — 37.4% have declared a real website of their own (a website listed on their Google profile that we confirmed is real and working). 57.5% have no web presence at all, and 5.1% rely only on a social-media page. Behind that single national figure lie two strong patterns: the size of the city, and how established the business is.



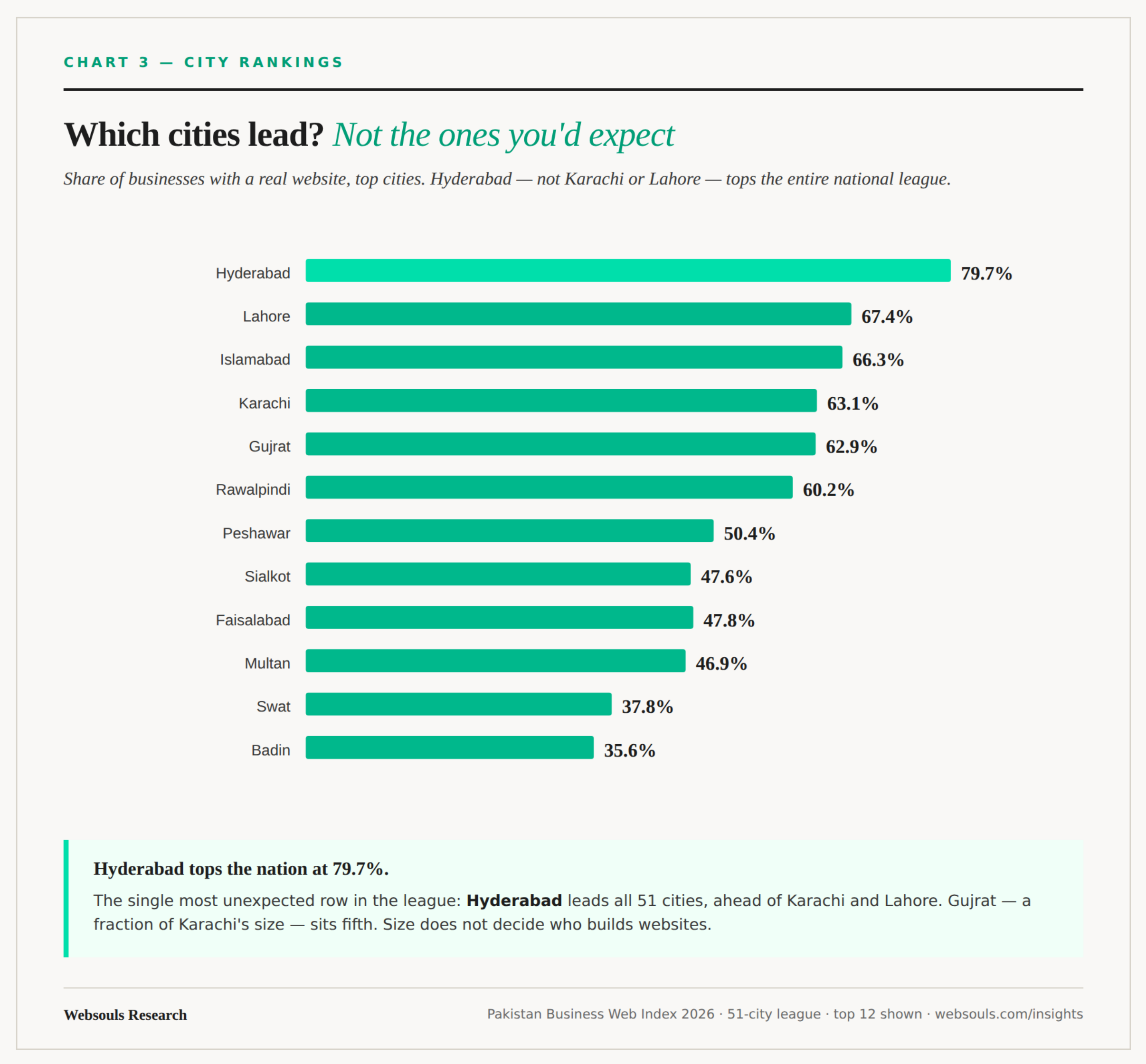
By industry. Web presence varies sharply by sector. IT and digital services lead at 87% (in the hub cities where they cluster), followed by professional services at 49%, education at 46%, logistics at 44%, construction at 34%, manufacturing at 32%, healthcare at 32%, trading at 30%, hospitality at 29% and retail at 25%. This is the pattern economists would expect — knowledge industries lead, walk-in trades lag — but it has never before been measured for Pakistan.



By business maturity. The more established a business, the more likely it is to have a website. Among businesses with very few Google reviews (0 to 9), only 21% have a website. That rises to 43% for businesses with 10 to 49 reviews, 52% for those with 50 to 199, and 58% for those with 200 or more. As a business grows busy enough for customers to review it, a website becomes far more likely — web presence tracks commercial success.

2. The city league table, and the India pairings

All 51 cities were ranked by the share of their businesses that have a website — this is the Index's engine for local stories. At the top: Lahore 67%, Karachi 63%, Gujrat 62% and Rawalpindi 60%. Gujrat is the standout: a city a fraction of Karachi's size, out-performing almost everywhere. The full 51-city ranking is published in the interactive dashboard that accompanies this report; every city's newspapers, chambers of commerce and business community has a stake in where it ranks.



Pakistan's industrial cities against their Indian counterparts

The most telling comparison for a Pakistani reader is not Karachi against Mumbai. It is each Pakistani industrial city set against its direct Indian equivalent — the same trade, similar size, the same kind of family-owned firms:

- **Sialkot 47% vs Jalandhar 64%** — the two great sports-goods and surgical-instrument export cities.
- **Faisalabad 47% vs Ludhiana 63%** — the two textile powerhouses.
- **Gujranwala 39% vs Rajkot 68%** — two heavy engineering and manufacturing hubs.

Same industries, same scale, the same generation of businesses — and a gap of 15 to 25 points. It is a real gap, and a closeable one: these are exporting cities whose customers are overseas buyers who research suppliers online before making contact.

3. Websites that have died

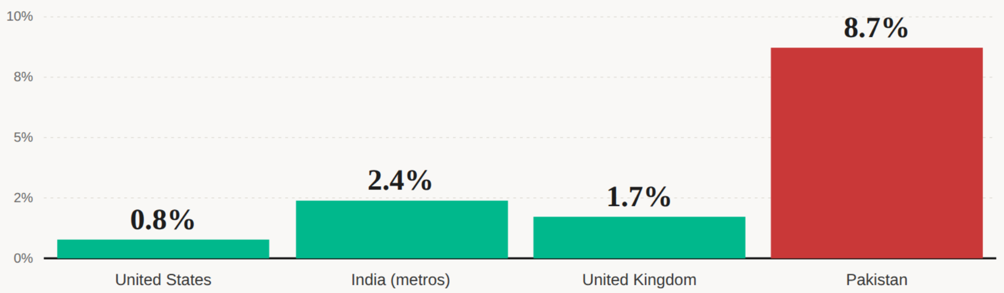
This section measures the final step of the funnel: of businesses that publicly list a website on Google, how many actually lead to a working site?

8.7% of Pakistani businesses that list a website have already lost it — the site no longer loads at all. That is roughly ten times the American rate and twice the rate in India's major cities, and the pattern lines up neatly with each country's level of development. This is where Pakistan's business web really loses ground: not in the quality of what gets built, but in how quickly it dies — sites are created, then lost to unpaid renewals, lapsed hosting and simple neglect.

CHART 2 — FRAGILITY

The websites that have *already died*

Of businesses that publicly list a website, the share whose domain no longer resolves at all. Ordered by market maturity.



Pakistan's web fails on persistence, not quality.

At **8.7%**, roughly one in eleven declared Pakistani business websites has already gone dark — about ten times the American rate. Sites get built, then lost to lapsed renewals and neglect. Why they die is the subject of the companion Hosting Index.

Websouls Research Pakistan Business Web Index 2026 · declared websites · dead-domain share · websouls.com/insights

Why these sites die, and how long a Pakistani business website typically lives, is the subject of a companion study — **the Hosting Index** — drawn from 24 years of domain records.

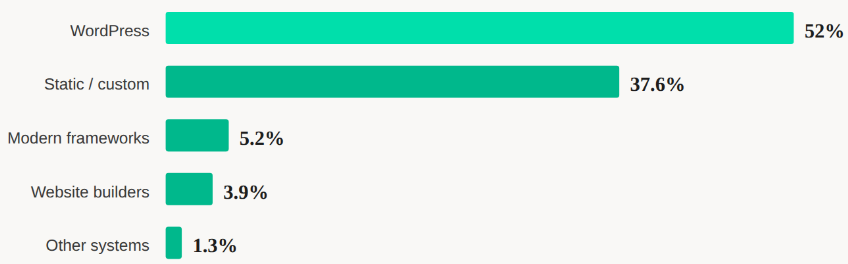
4. What the web is built with

Among websites that are live, Pakistan's web runs mostly on WordPress — about 52% of everything live, rising to 63% in the professional-services industry. And here is the sentence few would have predicted: Pakistan's reliance on WordPress is statistically identical to Britain's (about 51%). The United States runs lighter on WordPress (about 43%) because it uses more "website builder" services. The real outlier is India, at about 37% in big cities and 31% in smaller ones — India builds more custom-made websites where Pakistan and Britain reach for WordPress, the visible mark of the world's largest low-cost web-development industry serving its own home market.

CHART 4 — PLATFORM

What the Pakistani web is *built with*

Share of live websites by how they are built. WordPress dominates — exactly as in Britain.



Pakistan runs on WordPress — just like Britain.

Pakistan's WordPress share (**52%**) is statistically identical to the UK's (51%). Website builders — heavily marketed by international hosts — reach under 4%. Where Pakistani businesses do use a builder, it is usually Shopify: to sell.

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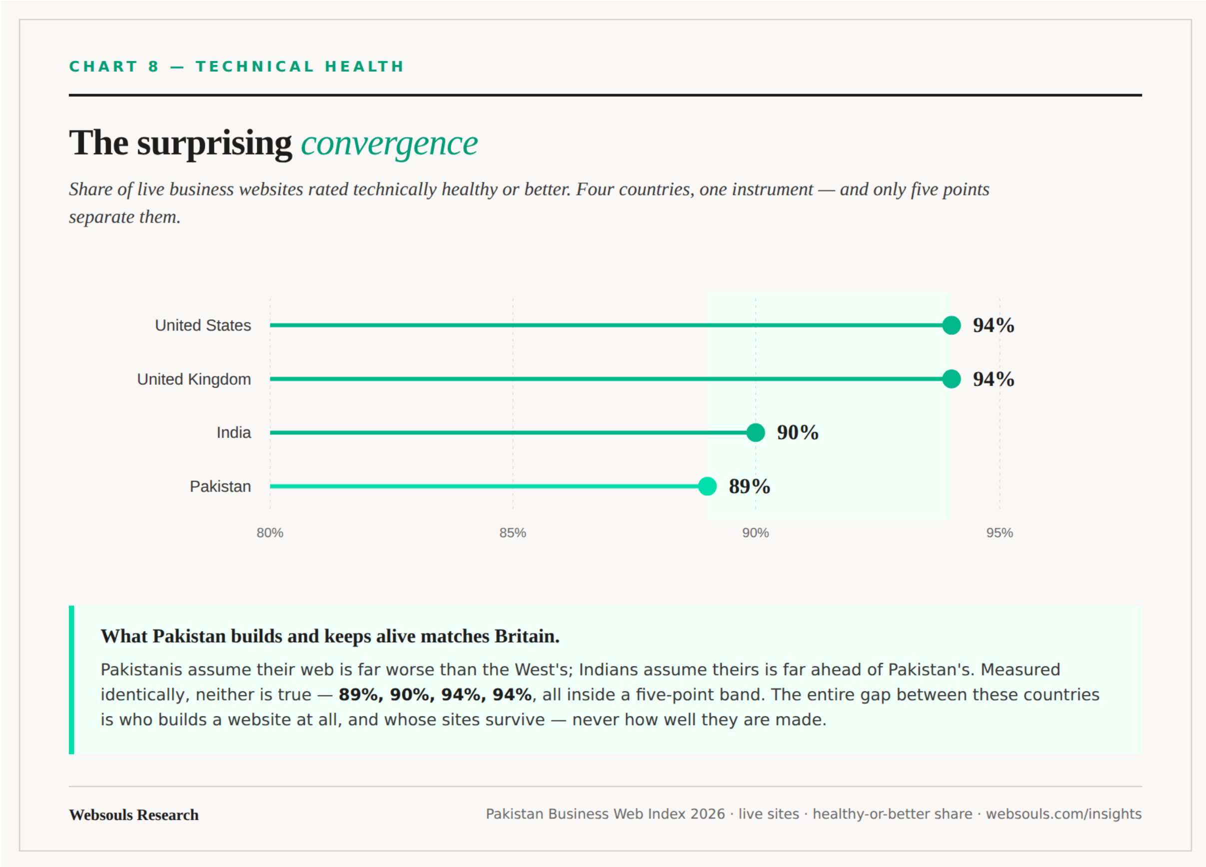
Website builders — a maturity signal. Hosted "builder" services (such as Squarespace, Wix and Shopify) account for 16.2% of the US web but only 3.9% of Pakistan's — a four-fold gap. A different builder leads each market: Squarespace in the US, Wix in the UK and India, and — tellingly — Shopify within Pakistan's small builder segment. Where Pakistani businesses do use a builder, it is usually to sell online.

Two quieter findings. First, Pakistan's use of modern web frameworks (the newest style of site-building) is 5.2% — the joint-highest of the four countries, level with India's big cities and ahead of Britain and America. Second, signs of online-shopping software (WooCommerce) appear on 18.7% of live Pakistani sites, well ahead of every other country (UK 13.3%, India 11.2%, US 9.7%). The Pakistani web that exists is young and built to sell — not old-fashioned digital brochures. Within WordPress, one design tool (Elementor) runs 56% of Pakistan's installations. And in every country, the older systems Joomla and Drupal now sit below 1%: among small businesses, WordPress has simply won.

Two technical notes, disclosed: the "built-with" shares are calculated on unique live websites (4,990 for Pakistan); the by-sector figures use business listings (5,944), and because several businesses can share one website the two bases differ by under three points. Separately, a global crawl by W3Techs attributes about 43% of all websites worldwide to WordPress — a different population (all sites, not just businesses) and a different tool, mentioned only for orientation.

5. Technical health — the surprising convergence

The previous section asked whether a website stays up. This one asks how good the surviving websites actually are — and the answer is this edition's quiet headline. Measured on identical tools, the live Pakistani business web is in materially the same technical shape as Britain's, America's and India's. Four countries, one measuring instrument, one five-point band.



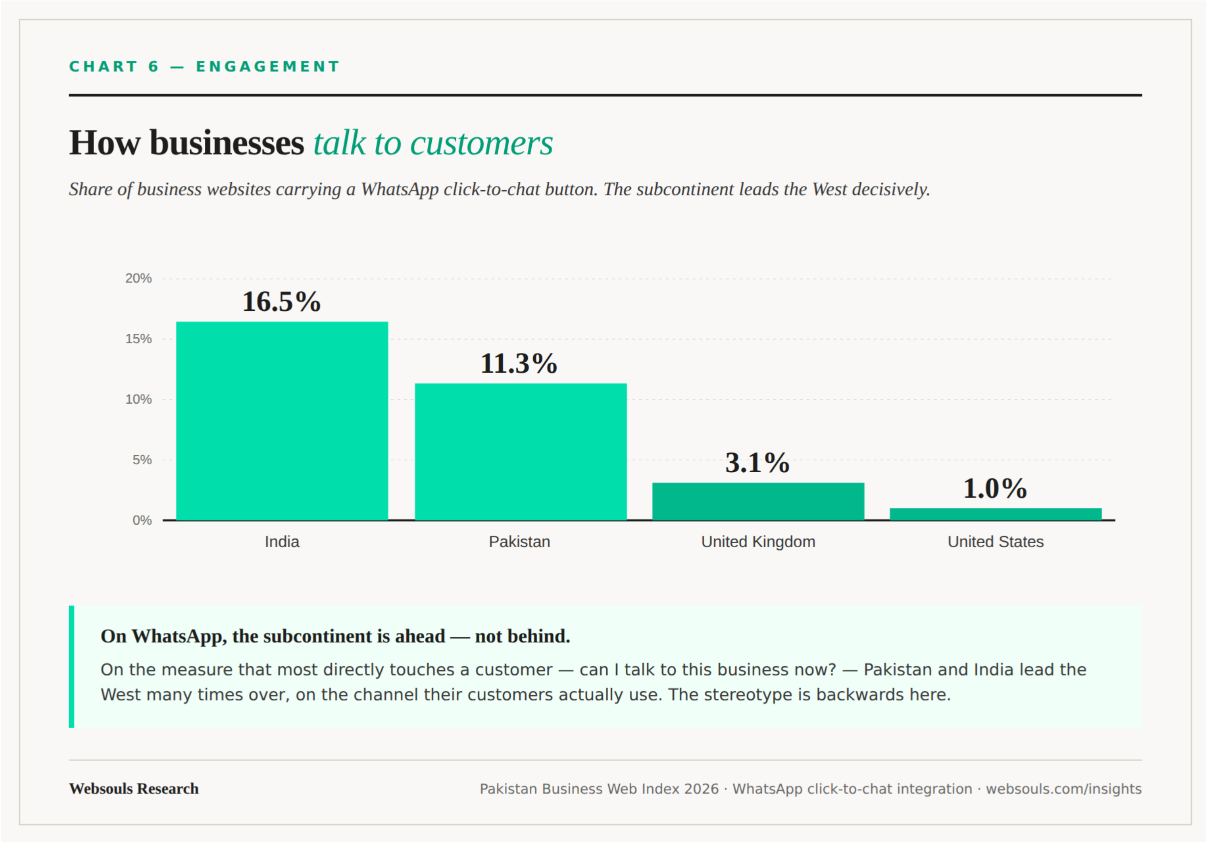
Pakistan's health breakdown: 33.2% “future-ready” (the best tier), 55.8% “healthy,” 8.5% “ageing,” 1.8% “at risk,” and 0.9% “critical or unscored.” Put the top two tiers together and 89% of live Pakistani sites are healthy or better — against 90% for India, 94% for the UK and 94% for the US.

Pakistanis tend to assume their web is far worse than the West's; Indians tend to assume theirs is far better than Pakistan's. Measured properly, neither is true. Whatever gets built and kept alive in any of these countries is built to roughly the same standard. The entire gap between these countries is in who builds a website at all, and whose sites survive — not in how well they are made.

There is no outside benchmark for this particular health score — the health tiers are this Index's own measurement, fully defined in the methodology annex — so the four-country panel is the benchmark, by design.

6. How businesses talk to customers

Here the subcontinent leads. Pakistani and Indian businesses talk to their customers mainly through WhatsApp — India's smaller cities reach 16.5% — while Western businesses use a chat box built into the website. Counting every kind of chat channel together, businesses in the subcontinent offer their customers two to four times as many ways to start a conversation as Western ones do.

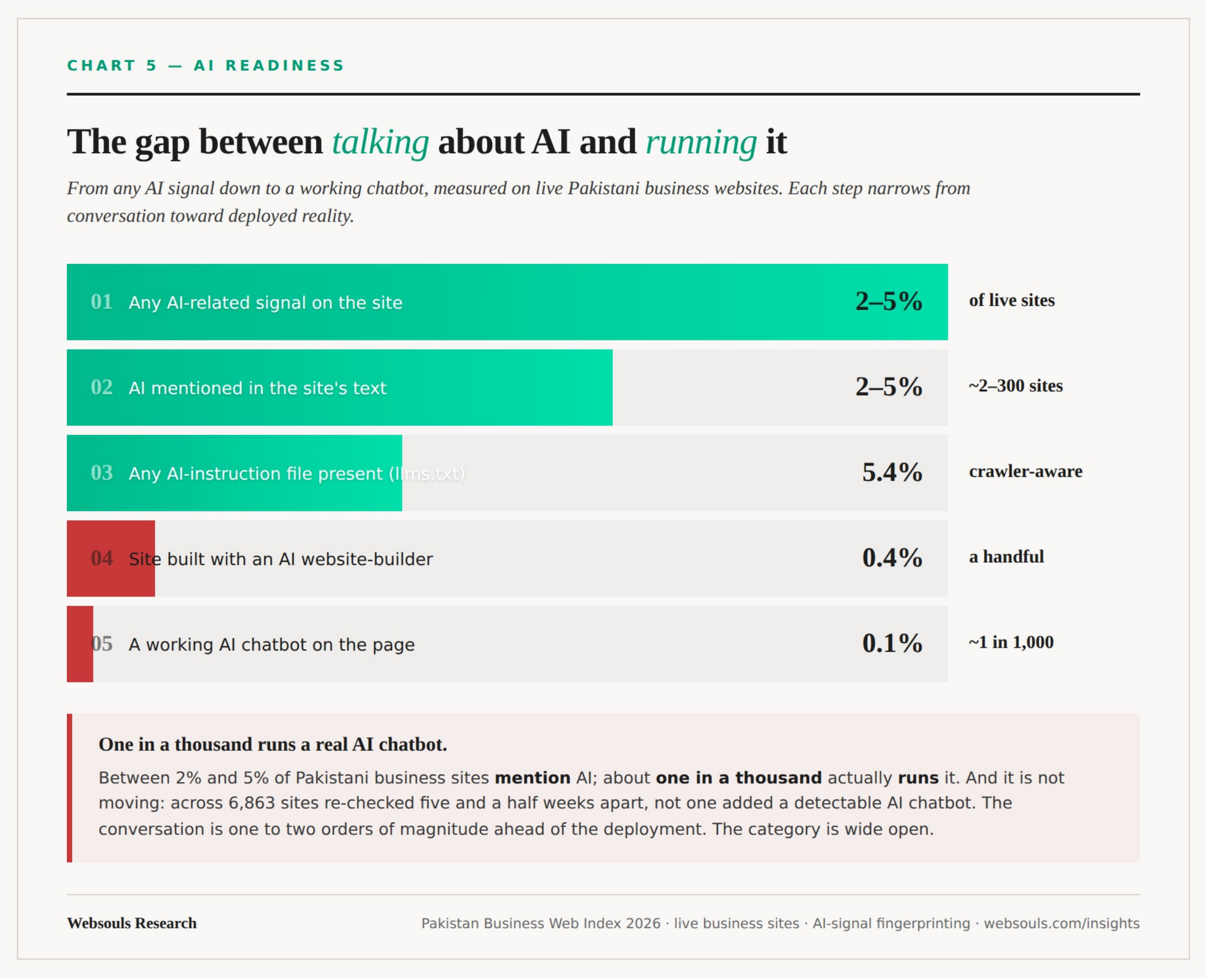


The stereotype says the subcontinental web is behind. But on the measure that matters most to a customer — can I talk to this business right now? — it is ahead, and on the channel its customers actually use.

Where Pakistan genuinely lags: measurement. India's big-city businesses track their website visitors (using analytics tools) at fully Western rates — 57.7%, against the UK's 60.6%. Pakistan sits at 38.7%. Of every gap in this report, this is the cheapest to close: analytics is free to install, and a business that cannot see its visitors cannot learn how to sell to them.

7. The AI reality — loud talk, quiet action

Measured three different ways on the same live websites, the picture of AI use is consistent across all four countries — and it is not a story of adoption. Here is the headline; the rest of the section explains why it is less strange than it first sounds.



The gap between talking and doing. Between 2% and 5% of business websites mention AI somewhere in their text, but only about one in a thousand actually runs an AI tool on the public site — measured strictly, against a published list of 23 AI providers. India talks about AI the most (5.2%) and runs it no more than anyone else.

The finding survived a hard internal test. Our AI detector covers 23 providers, including India's home-grown ones (Yellow.ai, Haptik, Verloop, Engati, Tars and others); adding them changed the counts by only single digits. And the result is not just low, it is unmoving: across 6,863 Pakistani websites that stayed live over five and a half weeks, not one added a detectable AI chatbot in that time.

Awareness of AI readers. Websites can leave instructions for the automated "crawlers" that AI systems use to read the web. Doing so forms a clear ladder by development level: Pakistan 5.4%, India 7.1%, the UK 8.5%, the US 13.1%. Yet even in America, 87% of business websites have never acknowledged that AI reads the web at all.

And most of it is accidental. Where sites do block AI crawlers, a single identical seven-item rule dominates — 86% of Pakistan's blocks — which is a default setting from a hosting platform, not a decision by the business owner. Likewise, about two-thirds of the AI-instruction files found in the subcontinent were generated automatically by search-engine plugins, while nearly two-thirds of American ones were deliberately written. America's AI-readiness looks intentional; the subcontinent's is mostly a side-effect of other software.

What this section does and does not measure. It measures the public website only. A business using AI behind the scenes — answering customers on WhatsApp, designing and coding with AI help, automating its back office, optimising its ads — leaves no trace on its homepage and is invisible here, by design. In India especially, the AI-chatbot industry runs on WhatsApp, not on websites. So these figures do not say businesses don't use AI. They say the public business website is not yet where AI shows up.

The honest headline is that the web's AI posture is being set less by business owners than by the software they already run — plugins writing AI-instruction files, hosting platforms writing crawler rules. Deliberate AI adoption on the business website has not really begun in any of the four countries. Why it is moving so slowly, and what will finally move it, is a question this Index will return to in a later study.

8. The four countries side by side

Pulling it together: Pakistan's weakness is presence and persistence — how many businesses have a website, and whether it survives — not the quality of the sites or the way businesses engage customers. India shows the same subcontinental strengths with about a decade's head start on getting businesses online. The West's remaining advantages are narrower than assumed: better measurement habits, and websites that last longer before dying.

Robustness annex — the questions a critic should ask

Every point below is a fair challenge to this study. The answers are built into the method, not added afterwards.

“Businesses you can find on Google aren't all businesses.” Correct. The study covers registered, Google-findable businesses, weighted by region to the PBS business count. The informal, unregistered sector is outside the study by design, and we name it as the structural blind spot.

“The website listed on Google is entered by the owner, so it's unreliable.” True, and we corrected for it. Every listed website was visited: dead sites and social-only links were reclassified and excluded. Websites that exist but were never listed can't be recovered from any source, so our presence figures are a floor — the same in all four countries.

“Reading the public page can't detect every WordPress site.” Measured, not assumed. Against detailed server records for 4,239 sites, our method catches about two-thirds of real WordPress installations. So the build figures are floors, and the shortfall is disclosed.

“37% against 91% isn't a fair comparison — the city depths differ.” Agreed, which is exactly why we compare matched city tiers (Pakistan's top 10 against the UK and US; top 22 against India) and report the full 51-city Pakistan figure separately.

“Chat buttons loaded in the background are invisible to you.” True — so all such figures are floors, equally across the four countries, and the comparisons still hold. Spot-checks of the most prominent businesses found none missed.

“Industry labels taken from search terms are unreliable.” Industry is assigned when the search is built, which is reliable enough for this purpose. IT is measured in hub cities only and never projected nationwide, and no industry figures are published for the other three countries.

“One snapshot proves nothing.” So we took two. 6,863 sites were measured twice, five and a half weeks apart, by independent readers, agreeing 97–100% on every measurement. The business-discovery step is repeated about a month later, and the whole Index re-runs every year on identical tools.

“Your AI numbers are too low to believe.” They were challenged internally first. The detector covers 23 providers including India's own; every signal was audited; and one early, inflated “AI” figure turned out to be mislabelled ordinary chat software and was removed before publication. AI used off the website — WhatsApp bots, operations, coding — is explicitly outside the study's scope.

“You measured from the UK, so you missed sites that block foreign traffic.” Quantified. At most about 2 points (Pakistan) and 3.5 points (India) of live-rate undercount, checked against an in-country control; the relevant “blocked” error codes make up about 38% of errors, which fits. No finding changes order. The dead-website figure is unaffected by where we measured from.

“Some businesses appear in two countries' samples.” About 2% of the India sample also appears in Pakistan's (cross-border and multinational firms). Each is counted in every country where it genuinely appears, as multinationals are in the UK and US samples.

“Who benefits from these findings?” A Pakistani hosting company — stated openly. The defence is the method: licensed data, disclosed tools, quantified limits, and an India comparison published complete and unedited, including every figure where India comes out ahead.

What this edition deliberately does not claim

- Nothing about the informal, unregistered sector — it is outside the findable frame.
- No nationwide figures for the IT sector — it was measured in hub cities only, and we say so.
- No whole-country website figures for the UK or US from our samples — those are top-city comparisons, clearly labelled.
- The India comparison is complete and unedited — including every figure where India leads Pakistan.
- The “built-with” shares are floors (the calibration is disclosed); some website-builder AI cannot be detected and is stated as such.

- No figures here on how long domains survive over time — that is the separate Hosting Index.
- Chat and WhatsApp figures count real buttons and integrations, never a phone number mentioned in the text.

What follows the Index

- **The Hosting Index** — 24 years of domain survival, with its own launch.
- **The interactive dashboard** — the full 51-city ranking, industry breakdowns and a four-country explorer, published alongside this report.
- **Free tools** — a website health check and an AI-readiness check, built from this study's own instruments and made available to any business that wants to measure itself.
- **Follow-up studies** — why AI adoption is stalled; how customer reviews and ratings differ across Pakistan and India; and a closer look at which website tools each market uses.
- **A city-by-city series** — every one of the 51 cities has its own story, and we will publish them.
- **An annual re-run** — the same tools, the same method, every year: next year's edition turns these levels into trends.