Topic: Is Pakistan Ready for Digital Revolution?

Outline:

1. Introduction

Pakistan is ready for a digital revolution as it has been long-time coming and is necessary for development and progress of country.

2. Crunch paragraph

3. Efforts for digital revolution in Pakistan (Thesis)
   a) Large number of users of technology
   b) Promotion of IT exports by government
   c) Expansion of 4G and 5G networks
   d) Promotion of e-payment methods
   e) Increasing number of digital learning platforms

4. Obstacles in the way of digital revolution (Anti-thesis)
   a) Not everyone uses technology correctly.
   b) Poor economic impacts of IT exports.
   c) Only people with latest devices have access to 4G and 5G
   d) Limited number of skilled teachers in industry
   e) People with limited awareness are unable to use e-payment.

5. Digitalization on the way despite hurdles (Synthesis)
   a) Use of technology can be regulated by government
   b) Production of high quality IT goods.
   c) Every citizen has access to smart devices
   d) Promotion of online teacher training workshops.
   e) Introduction of easy to use e-payment methods.

6. Conclusion

In the words of the early internet pioneer Douglas Engelhart, "The digital revolution is far more significant than the invention of writing, or even of printing." These words speak volumes of the importance of a technological revolution anywhere in the world. It is so significant, that there are debates among countries whether they are ready for it or not. In this regard, Pakistan is absolutely ready for a digital revolution. This has been a long time coming for the country, and it is extremely necessary for the development and progress of Pakistan. How Pakistan is ready for it, will be detailed further. Major reasons why Pakistan is ready for this revolution is because of a large number of users of technology. Promotion of IT exports and expansion of 4G and 5G networks by government are important reasons as well. The need of digital learning platforms and e-payment methods also necessitate a digital revolution. However, the detractors say that not everyone is ready for a digital revolution. They say that poor IT exports and limited number of people with access to 4G and 5G connectivity prove this point. Limited number of skilled teachers in the industry and little public awareness show that ~~not that~~ Pakistan is not yet ready for such a giant leap. In response, the government of Pakistan can regulate the use of technology. Almost all citizens have access to some kind of smart device, and government is focusing on IT exports. In addition to that, proper teacher training and introduction of easy-to-use e-payment methods will facilitate the digital revolution in Pakistan.

The debate that whether or not Pakistan is ready for a digital revolution has been going on for quite some time now. Is the public ready? Does Pakistan have the necessary infrastructure to handle it? Do people have enough training in the field to actually benefit from the revolution if it does come? These are just a few of the very pertinent questions in this debate. This essay focuses on the point of view of both sides of the argument and tries to come to a conclusion if Pakistan really is ready and geared up for a digital revolution or if it will still take time and effort for the country to reach that level.

There have been concentrated efforts to usher in digital revolution in Pakistan. This is apparent from the large number of technology users in the country. According to Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), Pakistan has almost 124 million active internet users in 2023, making it the seventh largest user of internet/technology in the world. These users are equipped with modern gadgets to take full advantage of the technology on offer. This huge number of technology users shows that Pakistan is very much ready for a digital revolution.

The efforts by the government to promote IT exports of Pakistan is a major step in achieving digital revolution. IT exports play a major role in improving the digital and technological standing of a country. Ministry of IT data shows that as of 2020, IT exports of Pakistan have surged to $1.1 billion at a growth rate of 20.75%. This growth is projected to increase year on year to $5 billion by 2025. This positive trend in the increase in IT exports will be a huge component of a digital revolution.

The evolution of technology in Pakistan will be facilitated to a large extent by the expansion of 4G and 5G networks. Connectivity is a major need in today's world of technology. According to PTA, the number of 4G users at the end of February 2023 had exceeded 124.16 million people. In addition to that, plans of launching 5G connectivity across the country are in the final stages of formulation and it is expected that they will come to fruition within one or two years. This increased connectivity among the public will be a huge stepping stone towards the digital revolution in the country.

The increasing number of online learning platforms is a clear indication of the efforts of digitalization in

Pakistan. Platforms like these gained particular traction during Covid lockdown. Noon Academy, digiskills, learnonline.pk are some examples of indigenous online learning platforms which offer a wide range of courses and skills to choose from. International platforms like Khan Academy, EdX and Coursera are also extremely popular learning platforms. These digital learning platforms will be a great contributor towards a digital revolution. ~~In a similar manner~~,

In a similar manner, promotion of e-payment methods is perhaps most important among the efforts for digital revolution. E-payment methods are not only a source of ease and assistance, but can also help in keeping track of finances. In this regard, the government, in fiscal year budget 2023-24, announced reducing general sales tax from 15% down to 5% on e-payment of bills. This not only had a positive effect on digitalization process but also will be a contribution towards digital revolution in Pakistan.

However, like with every major initiative, digital revolution in Pakistan also faces a number of ~~~~ obstacles in its path. A major obstacle

is people not using technology properly. A large chunk of population is using increased access to technology for nefarious purposes. According to Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), cyber crimes increased by 83% in the period 2018-2021. This negative trend and the mindset associated with it is worrisome for the authorities and represents a hurdle in the way of digital revolution in Pakistan.

Another problem in bringing about a digital revolution is poor economic impacts of IT exports. Even with the rise in IT exports of the country, they are not up to expectations or standards. Inspite of growing IT exports, a large segment of the population has been unable to reap the benefits and are forced to rely on traditional methods. This creates a large gap among different segments of the society in terms of the capability to use and operate modern tools and technology. This lack of a proper impact of IT exports hinders digital revolution in Pakistan.

Digital revolution in Pakistan is also held back by the absence of infrastructure required for seamless connectivity. This means that the country either lacks connectivity apparatus altogether or only has it in certain locations. This means that connectivity will not be uniform to

all. According to PTA, the first areas to receive 5G connectivity will be those who already possess the infrastructure of 4G connectivity. This means that only major cities will receive the higher level connectivity and the peripheral areas and far flung regions will have to compromise and wait for the necessary arrangements. This will not help in bringing about a digital revolution as a large segment of the population will not be contributing towards it.

Digital learning platforms can be a major source of digital revolution in any country. However, it is impossible for students to learn quality material on their own in the absence of a skilled teacher and mentor. Pakistan faces this same problem. Despite having multiple online learning platforms and many people willing to learn different skills, Pakistan faces a paucity of teachers skilled in online education and the skills required to impart education online. This could be gauged from the fact that teachers in Pakistani universities took at least two weeks to devise a plan to impart education after the onset of Covid. This proves to be a major setback in ambitions of a digital revolution in Pakistan.

A very big problem in the way of digital revolution in Pakistan is the limited awareness among people about the usages of e-payment platforms. Most people do not have access to these methods, and those who do either don't trust it or refuse to fully integrate with it. According to a white paper published by ministry of commerce in 2023, a mere 41 million, or 16% of the total population, used e-payment methods for payment of a total of $100 million. Although the number is quite healthy, it is still petty change compared to the total population size and the potential of revenue collection it holds. This means that a lot of work still needs to be done to bring about a digital revolution.

Despite all the hurdles and challenges, digital revolution is on its way in Pakistan. The biggest objection is usually about the unregulated use of technology. To solve this problem, the government can pass legislation and implement laws in order to regulate the use of technology. A very important step in that direction is the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act of 2022 (amended version). This act of parliament not only sets guidelines for the usage, but also warns against improper use of technology and suggests severe punishments for those who fail to comply. With such legislations and regulations in place, the government can easily put a stop to improper use of technology.

Production of high quality IT goods can expedite the arrival of digital revolution in Pakistan. IT goods are the backbone of a technical industry, and their quality determines the quality of the whole industry. This can be made possible by designating a city as the IT hub of the country, like India has done with Bangalore. The government of Pakistan is already working on a comprehensive IT policy of the country which is certain to bring an end to any ambiguities in laws and to ~~make~~ cut the red tape on any new project. This will be a huge boost to Pakistan's infant tech industry and pave the way for digital revolution.

Another way the digital revolution is on its way in Pakistan is by the number of people who have access to smart devices. Apart from the people who have access to mobile phones, an even greater number of people have access to portable devices such as tablets and laptops. In one way or another, these devices can can be pivotal in the digital revolution and can provide users access to any and all the resources they can get over their mobile phones. This greater availability of technical devices, ~~is so~~ and increasing permeability into society, means that country is well on its way towards digital revolution.

All the online training and skills platforms need teachers and instructors who can effectively educate other people. To increase the number of specialized teachers and instructors, the government is focusing keenly on training with focus on imparting relevant skills so that a greater number of students can benefit from digital learning platforms. In this regard, according to ministry of IT, the government has established 43 different courses in order to train the instructors. These courses are co-sponsored by international organizations with the aim of increasing technical literacy in Pakistan. Increased number of technically literate people will facilitate digital revolution in Pakistan.

Introduction of easy to use epayment methods has brought a new dimension to the spread of technology. The advent of new online banking channels as well as innovation in the existing ones has made digitalization that much easy. A huge example in this regard is the introduction of online digital wallets by the names of Nayapay and Sadapay which provide facility of debit/credit as well as payment of bills. Apart from that, all major banks have launched applications to facilitate their customers. This ease is a sure way of encouraging public to go digital and expedite the pace of the digital revolution in Pakistan.

From the data available and the arguments provided, it looks more than likely that Pakistan is ready for a digital revolution. The government, as a sovereign body, has all the tools it needs to regulate the use of technology such that it is not used to commit crimes. Production of high quality IT goods and services will be a huge boost for Pakistan in this regard as well. The increasing number of technical and mobile devices is a sign that more and more people are ready for the digital revolution when it comes. Increased number of technically literate people will facilitate Pakistan's transformation into a digital-savvy nation. The promotion and advent of user-friendly e-payment methods will encourage large segments of population to take benefit of the convenience. Because of all these reasons, Pakistan looks poised and prepared for a digital revolution.