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Topic: Digital Transformation in Pakistan: Bridging or Widening the Urban - Rural Divide

Outline

1- Introduction

Thesis Statement: As digital transformation has emerged as an essential element of a modernized world, critics often introspect that either it is bridging or widening the urban-rural divide. With the rapid digitalization, Pakistan is surely bridging the urban-rural divide. The growing dependency on the digital tools is empowering population to reduce urban-rural divide.

2- Digital transformation in Pakistan is bridging the urban-rural divide (Thesis)

a) Digital transformation and growing economic opportunities

- b) Social media as an equalizer for all to present ^{their} grievances
- c) E-governance is saving people from travelling to big cities
- d) E-learning is providing quality education to the students in remote areas

3- Digital transformation in Pakistan is widening urban-rural divide (Antithesis)

- a) Infrastructure disparities in rural areas limit the economic opportunities
- b) Censorship of the social media leading towards the isolation of rural voices
- c) Digital illiteracy prevents the villagers to utilize the perks provided by E-governance
- d) E-learning is expensive for some people

4- Digital transformation is ~~provi~~ bridging the urban-rural

divide gradually (Synthesis)

- a) Use of technology is bridging the urban - rural infrastructural disparities
- b) Mass media is highlighting the rural issues to bridge urban - rural divide
- c) Transition from urban - centric service delivery to more inclusive approach by Government
- d) Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in educational institutions is revolutionizing the education

5- Conclusion

Individual empowerment
leading to community
empowerment; reducing
urban - rural divide

Should I add "Case in Points" in
my outline?

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"I do not fear computers. I fear lack of them" (Issac Asimov).

After the advent of computers and subsequent digital transformation, it is difficult to imagine human lives without computers. The humans have started ^{being} dependent on the digital tools to perform their daily tasks. From relying on internet sources to understand a general topic, to being dependent on internet for entertainment ^{purposes}; the role of computers in human lives is beyond expression. In a country like Pakistan where 44.7% of the population is ^{living} below the poverty line, the role of digital transformation is highly significant. According to Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, there are about 150 million broadband users and 200 million telecom users in Pakistan, along with 2 million FTTH users. As digital transformation has emerged as an essential element of a modernized world, the critics often introspect

that either it is bridging or widening urban-rural divide. With the rapid digitalization, Pakistan is surely bridging the urban-rural divide. The growing dependency on the digital tools is empowering population to reduce urban-rural divide. As a matter of fact, the availability of communication sources to at individual level has empowered the people to showcase their troubles to the world. The role of urban-centric media has decreased significantly. The masses are no more completely dependent on the ^{traditional} ~~other~~ sources of communication which have made them self dependent on their matters, ^{putting} an end to hierarchical modes of communication.

The digital transformation has resulted in growing economic opportunities for all people. These opportunities are not limited to well equipped urban population only. The people can learn and earn through digitalization. The rise of freelancing is the

outcome of digital transformation. According to **Punjab Information Technology Board**, Pakistan ranks 4th globally in the field of freelancing. Moreover, internet has provided an easy access ^{to} of the rural population to the local and international markets. The people can exhibit and sell their handicrafts at reasonable prices.

Secondly, social media has emerged as a platform for all the people to present their grievances before the world. According to American Author **Amy Jo Martin**, "Social media is an ultimate equalizer, it provides a voice and a platform to anyone willing to engage". The use of social media familiarizes the urban population to the rural population and blurs the line between urban-rural communication channels. During the recent, Indo-Pak escalation, social media alerted the world with realtime information from all parts

of the country. In the recent floods of 2025, the villagers used social media platforms to communicate their losses after the disaster. It was the power of social media that compelled the international organizations to release emergency funds for the flood victims.

Thirdly, digital transformation has revolutionized the E-governance. The E-governance is saving the people from travelling to big cities for documentation and litigation. The organizations like **NADRA** has launched an online service delivery application named **Pak Identity** which allows the ~~citizens~~ people to avoid travelling to the offices for the production of their national identity cards. The **Epay Portal of Punjab** allows the people to ^{pay} make their government challans through internet; saving both time and energy.

Furthermore, digital transformation has changed the dynamics of

learning and education. As, E-learning is providing quality education to the students in remote areas. The

Article 25-A of the **Constitution of Pakistan (1973)**, makes it necessary for the state to impart free and compulsory education to every child aged between 5 to 16 years. The learning management systems offered by the educational institutions are beneficial to impart quality education to the students.

Moreover, there are several free online platforms which provides education regarding skill development which provides the level playing field to urban-rural population.

Contrary to this, some critics are of the view that digital transformation is widening the urban-rural divide. The infrastructure disparities between the urban-rural population limits the economic opportunities for the rural population. These disparities exclude the 65% of the Pakistan's population from

economic spheres through underdevelop-
ment. Majority of the villages
suffer from electricity outage
which cuts them off with the
rest of the country. The slow
internet connections do not allow
the rural population to communicate
with their clients properly which
limits their economic gains from
freelancing and ~~electronic~~ shopping
E-commerce.

Secondly, the censorship
policies employed by the state
isolates the rural population by
suppressing their voices. In the
presence of urban-centric electronic
and print media, the ^{urban-} rural divide
intensifies mainly by ^{the} strict scrutinization
of the content. The installation of
firewall does not allow the
content which ~~excludes~~ includes the
criticism of governmental policies.
The fear of abductions and
restrictions by the state, deprives
the people of their constitutional
right of freedom of expression. It

widens the urban - rural divide by not the digital scrutiny of the content.

Thirdly, the digital illiteracy prevents the people from taking advantages of the perks of E-governance. The digital illiteracy make the people marionettes in the hands of the scammers. As the literacy rate of villages is disappointingly low in comparison of the cities, the naive villagers become the victims of digital scams easily. It results in the ~~losing~~ loss of hard earned money which makes people skeptical of online banking. Additionally, ^{owing to} the lack of digital awareness, people tend to spend their time and money on travelling to big cities. It happens mostly because of the trust deficit of the villagers on E-governance.

Apart from this, E-learning is not affordable for all the people. The education industry is based on urban centres. These urban-centric

education institutions are heavily commercialized. As, E-learning requires stable and fast internet connections along with ^{expensive} digital gadgets, ~~hefty~~ amounts to pay, the largest segment of the country remains at the losing edge. This situation further widens the urban-rural divide. ~~The~~ The villagers cannot afford expensive internet connections and poverty deprives them to meet the expenses of the commercialized rates of education. It intensifies the urban-rural divide by inculcating the sense of being unprivileged.

Nevertheless, digital transformation is bridging urban-rural divide, slowly but gradually. In the past few years, Pakistan has tried its level best to improve technology to address infrastructural disparities between cities and villages. The launch of Pakistan's communication satellites **PAKSAT MM1** in 2024, was a first step towards self dependency in the field of communication. The

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concept of "digital haves" and "haves not" is expected to be diminished in Pakistan in a coming few years. The network of submarine communication cables is gradually leading Pakistan towards addressing the infrastructural disparities between urban-rural population.

On the other hand, social media advocacy has started bearing fruits as mass media is showing a subtle but gradual shift ^{from} ~~towards~~ its urban-centric representation to more inclusive approach. The development support communication - the process of socio-economic upliftment of backward areas through the use of mass media; has worked on more inclusive approach. The portrayal of rural characters in the advertisements related to healthcare, family planning, polio eradication, etc., is aimed at awaring rural population ^{regarding} ~~for~~ their health concerns. The dramas serials like "Zard Patton Ka Ban" aimed at

highlighting the deteriorating health conditions of rural population. It gave an insight to the urban policy makers to improve health conditions in villages; a step towards diminishing urban-rural divide.

In addition to this, the policy makers have shifted from urban-centric service delivery to rural-centric approach. The public awareness campaigns by the government aimed at educating rural population regarding government's programmes and subsidies for the villagers.

The **Kisan Card** has been especially introduced to benefit the farmers.

Moreover, **Punjab Telemedicine Initiative** aimed at providing medical facilities to the unprivileged rural population. The use of electronic and print, and social media by the government to communicate with the rural population is a result of digital transformation.

Last but not the least, the use of information and

communication technology in the educational institutions across Punjab, is an outcome of digital transformation. The use of technology helps the students to ~~adopt~~ develop interest in the field of information technology. In Punjab, the state of the art **Daamish schools** are already using the digital tools to educate children in rural areas. At higher education level, **Chief Minister's Laptop Scheme** enables the students to have digital devices for research and skill development.

In a nutshell, Digital transformation is bridging the urban - rural divide gradually. It is quite similar to the progress that developing countries have experienced after the process of globalization. The world which came into being as a result of globalization is known as global village. If digital evolution has power to stage the voices of the fragile third world countries then

it surely holds the power to reduce urban - rural digital divide.

From governments to private entities including the mass media, have shifted their urban - centric approach to more inclusive urban - rural centric communication ~~levels~~ approach.

As, digitalization has empowered the individual at micro - level; the dependency on the traditional forms of communication and service delivery has reduced significantly. The empowerment of an individual is leading to the empowerment of a rural community which is bridging the urban - rural divide.
