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Q.1 How has the internet become such a necessity in today's world and what is its significance in the micro and macro environment?

In today's world, we are experiencing immense growth and expansion of digital ecosystem; yet it'll never be this slow again! The digital revolution is impacting economies, societies, and governance. Today, technology is presenting the biggest opportunity to contribute towards how we live, interact and work. The internet has brought the world closer, with information about everything just a few taps away. This ease of access to information and connectivity was never available before, and the opportunities that emerge from such resources are immense.

Digitalisation is touching all walks of life. On a larger scale, it is enabling e-governance structures that help in building trust between governments and citizens by ensuring transparency. It also, creates efficiency in processes and makes them cost effective. Social media has become a bridge between people and the public sector, for example appeals for information and reporting of incidents to the police or, in context of the pandemic, NCOC being able to share

timely updates and information. Law enforcement agencies, government bodies and companies are now integrating internet of things (IoT) into their daily routines, for example fleet management purposes, enabling citizen data centers and many more. Internet is also being integrated into many other governance structures in Pakistan such as enabling digital payments for fee collection, traffic challans and digitalising the citizen portal for quick processes.

If we do a quick recap of life as it was a decade and half ago, we were still using dial up internet, digital cameras had recently started taking over film cameras and the primary source of shopping used to be through physical retail outlets. Today, the internet is providing massive opportunities to budding entrepreneurs to reach out to their target audience faster without incurring high costs. It is also providing opportunities to freelancers to reach out to the global market and earn a living from home. Education and health sectors have also transitioned to online mediums

and the pandemic only accelerated digital adoption of these by masses. Agriculture being the backbone of Pakistan's economy has huge potential through digital interventions. Telenor Pakistan's Khushaal Zamindaar is such an initiative that enables the rural community with key information regarding their crops and livestock along with providing insurance options and medical consultations.

Over the past years, technology has been integrated into the lifestyles of people and today, we cannot imagine our lives without connecting with our friends and family based abroad or ordering food online or booking a ride through ride hailing apps. With the fast pace of technological solutions being introduced, smart cities and smart homes are also becoming a reality with IoT. Our future is digital, it has already started transforming the world as we knew it and this is just the beginning.

Q.2 How does access to internet in Pakistan compare to regional neighbors and what can be done to improve access to internet in the country?

Pakistan has immense potential and demand for digital adoption. Currently, Pakistan ranks 90th on the inclusive internet index with India, Bangladesh and Nepal ranking at 49, 82 and 83 respectively. There are multiple factors that contribute to internet adoption in the country including smartphone penetration, literacy and availability of services.

Telecom sector in Pakistan covers over 85% of Pakistan's population however, of the 184 million cellular subscribers, only 100 million are data subscribers. This represents the digital gap where people even with access to internet services are not benefitting from the opportunities. Pakistan ranks 91st on smartphone cost and 34th on mobile phone tariffs which justifies the digital gap in the country.

With a need for digital connectivity, the pace of provision of services in underserved areas can be further accelerated by USF and simultaneously, the USF fund can also be used to temporarily subsidize the provision of smartphones till the local production catches up with the demand. Also, in view of the increasing demand for data in the country, it is important to make telecom infrastructure available at fair prices which also includes spectrum and development of a spectrum roadmap for future demand. The Right of Way (RoW) policy was approved earlier this year to improve internet access as it allows for widespread fiberisation for high-speed connectivity. As a next step, its implementation is crucial for greater penetration of telecom and digital services across the country.

Q.3 What can be done to improve financial inclusion in the country and what is the economic impact of mobile wallets like Easypaisa in Pakistan?

Financial inclusion goes beyond commercial banks and microfinance institutions. The solution for financial inclusion is Fintech which is based on digital channels to reduce infrastructure and geographical barriers. A decade ago, only 10% of the population in Pakistan had access to any form of financial inclusion. Easypaisa was introduced in Pakistan in 2009 and following its footsteps came other mobile wallets and traditional banks integrating digital payment solutions. Today, 22.9% of the population in the country has access to financial services.

To accelerate the uptake of financial services, it is essential for unconventional and technology driven institutions to continue innovating. Alibaba's Alipay is an example of a non-traditional player that capitalized the digital evolution in China. The key to success is to never stop innovating and adapting to consumers growing needs and that is what Alipay did. Not only did Alipay provide payment solutions for the booming e-commerce in China, after its launch in 2004, it also transformed consumer's payment habits.
With a highly unbanked population, strong mobile penetration, along with a high cash-to-GDP ratio, Pakistan represents an ideal environment for

cashless payment platforms to thrive, and Easypaisa has been at the forefront of making this a reality. With a portfolio of payments, remittances, lending, insurance, disbursements coupled with over 1200 partnerships across sectors, we're transforming Pakistan into a cashless and inclusive society. With a massive annual throughput of PKR 1.8 trillion and over 8 million active users, 3.6 million active app users, the highest number for any financial app in the country, Easypaisa is creating a transparent economy that Pakistanis participate in to earn a livelihood, empower lives and remove barriers.

The ambition of financial inclusion cannot be achieved by solely brick-and-mortar banking infrastructure. Low-cost delivery channels such as retail shopkeepers serving as financial agents has proven to cost-effectively provide meaningful benefits to masses. The underserved face unique obstacles and have unique financial needs. There should be ease in the regulatory framework to encourage innovative solutions while ensuring access to affordable smartphones resulting in increased penetration of financial inclusion; which has also been identified as an enabler for 8 of the 17 UN SDGs .

Q.4 How can the telecom sector contribute towards internet for all?

The telecom sector is the backbone of a digital economy and lays the foundations required for the digital ecosystem to thrive. Connectivity is no longer a luxury – it has become a fundamental right! Connectivity tariffs are the lowest in Pakistan in the region and it is also amongst countries with lowest tariffs in the world . Pakistan has close to 100 million mobile internet users and only 2.8 million broadband and fixed internet users. This explains the impact that telecom sector has in relaying the benefits of digital opportunities to masses in the country.

Telecom sector is not only providing ease of access by heavy infrastructural investment in the country, but it is also providing platforms for growth and value added services through applications and partnerships in the form of e-education, M-Agri,

e-health, entertainment, business solutions and many more. Besides the efforts from the industry to ensure connectivity services, we work closely with USF, a private-public partnership, to reach remote areas.

About two decades ago, the cost of acquiring a basic voice sim and paying call charges was a lot more than it is today. While enabling the society with all the mentioned benefits, mobile and data services are connecting masses in Pakistan. To continue reaching the underserved for digital connectivity, it is important to have telecom infrastructure including spectrum, affordable smartphones, and implementation of Right of Way policy for fiberisation.

Q.5 What support does telecom sector need from the government in realizing the dream of the internet for all?

In this increasingly connected world, we do not want anyone to be left behind from accessing opportunities that the new era connectivity brings. The Government is an important stakeholder in enabling the digital ecosystem in the country. Telecom is a sector enabling other sectors and it is the backbone of the Digital Pakistan ambition. Currently, Pakistan is one of the lowest spectrum assigned countries in the region with only Nepal behind us. According to a World Bank study, the total allocation of spectrum in Pakistan equals spectrum allocation

to a single operator in Australia. There is a significant gap in anticipating present and future connectivity needs. Spectrum should be made available at fair prices and there should be a spectrum roadmap to identify and proactively take measures to fulfill future connectivity needs. To improve affordability, penetration and access, telecom services should be subjected to rational and harmonised taxation regimes. Also, the approved Right of Way policy and industry status should be implemented which is instrumental in increasing access internet.

Q.5 What support does telecom sector need from the government in realizing the dream of the internet for all?

As highlighted by GSMA's Gender Gap Report 2021, in Pakistan, there is a gender gap of 34% in mobile phone ownership and this gap increases to 43% in usage of mobile internet. To bridge the digital gender divide, it is important to provide access to digital services, have readily available and affordable handsets and create awareness of how to make the most of opportunities provided through the internet.

To bridge the digital gender divide, it is important to have significant female representation in economic contribution and this can be accelerated by online business models. In partnership with World Bank's Girls Learn Women Earn (GLWE) initiative, Telenor Create, the design academy at Telenor Pakistan, developed a comprehensive curriculum to train and enable aspiring women entrepreneurs on digital

skills. Under this initiative, Telenor Pakistan trained over a thousand women in digital skills including solving the right problems and upskilling females in utilizing digital tools to help scale their business. Besides this, I am also an active member of Male Champions of Change initiative on behalf of Telenor Pakistan. This initiative includes active members who work within and across their organisations to focus and lead on gender equality, diversity, and women's empowerment in the society as a whole. This has had a significant impact on how we see diversity & inclusion in our business sectors. Telenor Pakistan also has a dedicated initiative, Naya Aghaaz, to help transition women into the work-life after a career break.