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Transformation of International Trade Under the Influence of Digital Platforms

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Abstract: International trade has been fundamentally transformed through the global adoption of digital platforms as an integral feature of the digitalization of the global economy. Platform-centric business models are transforming the ancient modalities of trade, wherein lowering transaction costs, promoting international market access, and binding e-commerce and digital payment systems and logistic services into a single cohesive ecosystem are the new norms. Abstract: This study investigates how digital platforms influence the organizing framework of international trade, especially the transformation of small and medium-sized enterprises and cross-border trade processes. The research relies on a comparative and structural analysis of international and national data, including evidence from Uzbekistan as a country with an emerging digital economy. The results show that while digital platforms increase trade efficiency and inclusiveness they also create structural bottlenecks in the form of market concentration, regulatory asymmetries and digital divide. These results highlights the need for adaptive regulatory frameworks and harmonised digital trade policies that can promote the benefits of trade transformation driven by platforms.

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1. Introduction

In the context of the digitalization of the global economy, international trade is undergoing systemic changes driven by the proliferation of digital platforms. Platform business models are shaping a new infrastructure for global trade relations, integrating producers, consumers, logistics, and financial intermediaries in a single digital space. This is transforming traditional mechanisms of foreign economic activity, reducing transaction costs, and restructuring international trade flows.

Digital platforms are facilitating the active development of cross-border trade through the expansion of e-commerce, the introduction of digital payment instruments, and platform-based logistics solutions. As a result, international markets are becoming more accessible to small and medium-sized enterprises, the role of digital goods and services is growing, and the integration of national economies into global trade chains is increasing. As per UNCTAD, worldwide e-commerce has surpassed USD 27 trillion, with the share of online trade in global retail at near 19%, with a considerable part of the exchanges made cross-border through digital platforms [1].

Concurrently, the digitalization of international trade is increasingly decreasing transaction and administrative costs. World Bank estimates show that the establishment of digital trading platforms and electronic procedures can reduce international transaction

costs by 10-30% and customs clearance times by an average of 25-40%, which increases the efficiency of foreign trade operations and accelerates the turnover of international trade [2].

However, the transformation of international trade under the influence of digital platforms is accompanied by a number of challenges, including the concentration of market power, asymmetry in national regulatory regimes, complexities in taxing cross-border transactions, and the widening digital divide between countries. In this context, scientific analysis of the impact of digital platforms on modern trade processes is particularly relevant and practical.

Literature Review

The transformation of international trade under the influence of digital platforms has become a central topic in contemporary economic research. International organizations emphasize that digital platforms fundamentally reshape global trade by reducing information asymmetries, lowering transaction costs, and facilitating cross-border market access for firms of different sizes.

According to the UNCTAD Digital Economy Report [1], digital platforms have emerged as a core infrastructure of global trade, particularly in e-commerce and digital services. The report highlights that platform-based trade enhances the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in international markets while simultaneously increasing market concentration due to strong network effects. Similar conclusions are presented in the World Trade Report of the WTO [2], which argues that digital trade platforms accelerate cross-border trade integration but pose significant regulatory challenges related to data governance and competition policy.

The OECD report on online platforms [3] stresses that digital platforms transform international trade by restructuring value chains and shifting bargaining power toward platform owners. The World Bank's World Development Report [4] further demonstrates that digital trade platforms can reduce trade costs and improve trade efficiency, particularly in developing economies, provided that adequate digital infrastructure and regulatory frameworks are in place.

This process is an empirical and theoretical approach to these processes presented in academic studies published in the journals indexed in Scopus. The "new globalization," according to Baldwin, is what we are seeing with digital technologies, making fractionalization of production and services international and digital coordination platforms increasing cross-border trade [5]. Digital platforms reduce trade costs by substantial margins and promote international trade flows, particularly for digitally deliverable services, as evidenced by Goldfarb and Trefler [6].

It is backed by Lendle et al.'s empirical evidence. As shown by Chevalier et al [7], using empirical evidence coming from a global e-commerce platform, online marketplaces can be important in lowering the distance cost factor, which allows firms in developing countries to engage with the foreign market more easily. Furthermore, Kenney and Zysman [8] underline that though digital platforms promote trade, they can generate systemic risks of market power

Overall, the literature suggests that digital platforms act as powerful drivers of international trade transformation, simultaneously generating efficiency gains and new structural challenges. This dual nature underscores the need for further empirical research and policy-oriented analysis.

2. Materials and Methods

The study is based on a comprehensive approach that combines theoretical principles of the digital and platform economies with international trade analysis tools. The empirical base includes official data from international organizations (UNCTAD, World Bank, OECD) and national statistics of Uzbekistan [9]. The study utilized comparative, structural, and logical-analytical methods to identify changes in the dynamics and structure of international trade under the influence of digital platforms. A comparative analysis of international and domestic practices of platform-based trade transformation was also utilized. The results were interpreted based on aggregated indicators of e-commerce, foreign trade turnover, and the digitalization of foreign economic activity procedures.

3. Results and Discussion

The rapid diffusion of digital platforms has fundamentally altered the mechanisms, scale, and structure of international trade. Unlike traditional trade channels, platform-based trade operates through digitally integrated ecosystems that combine market access, payment systems, logistics, and data analytics. This integration reduces market frictions and enables firms – particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – to participate directly in cross-border trade without relying on conventional intermediaries.

Macroeconomically, digital platforms play a role in restructuring global trade flows through decreasing trade costs and dampening the impact of geographical distance in trade. The effects of digital dominance in platform-based trade are reflected in real-world statistics of international organizations, indicating that platform-mediated trade offers the greatest rewards to those countries and firms that are better digitally prepared and threatens to marginalize those economies where digital infrastructure has not yet reached a sufficient level. Therefore, the effect of these digital platforms on global commerce is asymmetric, amplifying the centrality of both institutional and tech factors.

Microeconomic-driven impacts of digital platforms are more pervasive, as they alleviate barriers of entry to markets for firms, increase price transparency, and reduce the required time of business transactions [10]. But those efficiencies are now compounded by structural risks from an overconcentration of markets, reliance on major platforms, and greater susceptibility to digital and regulatory risk. These dynamics necessitate a balanced assessment of both the economic benefits and systemic challenges associated with platform-driven trade.

Table 1. Impact of Digital Platforms on International Trade: Key Indicators and Effects [3], [6].

Indicator	Traditional Trade Model	Platform-Based Trade Model	Economic Effect
Market entry costs	High (intermediaries, physical presence)	Low (digital onboarding)	Increased participation of SMEs
Transaction costs	High	Reduced by 10–30%	Higher trade efficiency
Role of geographical distance	Significant barrier	Reduced importance	Expansion of cross-border trade
Customs and administrative time	Lengthy procedures	Reduced by 25–40%	Faster trade flows

Access to foreign consumers	Limited	Direct and global	Market diversification
Market concentration	Moderate	High (network effects)	Risk of platform dominance

The results demonstrate that digital platforms act as powerful trade facilitators by lowering transaction and administrative costs and enabling direct cross-border interactions. The reduction in entry barriers significantly enhances SME participation in international markets, contributing to trade inclusiveness and diversification [11]. At the same time, the declining relevance of geographical distance confirms the structural shift toward digitally mediated trade.

However, the analysis also reveals that platform-based trade intensifies market concentration due to strong network effects and data advantages enjoyed by leading platforms. This creates new forms of dependency and raises concerns regarding competition policy, data governance, and regulatory asymmetries across countries. Therefore, while digital platforms improve trade efficiency and accessibility, their long-term impact on international trade depends on the development of adaptive regulatory frameworks and international coordination mechanisms.

Overall, the findings confirm that digital platforms are not merely supplementary tools but constitute a transformative force reshaping international trade patterns, institutional arrangements, and competitive dynamics.

Uzbekistan has rapidly updated the development of digital platforms in recent years, and this factor is having a significant impact on international trade mechanisms [12]. This formation of the national platform ecosystem is occurring in the context of the implementation of state economic digitalization policies for the development of e-commerce, digital payments, and electronic services for foreign economic activity. In this way, digital platforms are slowly starting to penetrate export-import relations, changing the formats of interaction of economic entities and government institutions.

The performance is in areas such as e-commerce as a foundation for scaling cross-border trade. In Uzbekistan, the latest trends in online commerce development show that platform sales are more than twice as high in 2021–2023 as they are now, while the number of digital marketplaces, online payment users, and logistics services has tripled or more. In this context, the development of e-commerce opens up international markets to small and medium-sized enterprises, thereby lowering fixed costs of export entry and encouraging the diversification of foreign trade activities [1].

We are witnessing the development of the processes of the digitalization of foreign economic activity procedures. In particular, the introduction of electronic services in customs administration, the registration of foreign trade contracts, and the exchange of information between agencies contribute to the reduction of administrative barriers and the acceleration of international trade turnover [13]. Uzbekistan's total volume is similar in the growth of the total foreign trade scale of the transaction in the same direction, the table of the gradual increase in the role of digital tools can be traced, but the country has not yet reached the level of the global processes of trade transition to the platform [2].

Table 2. Indicators of Platform-Driven Trade Transformation in Uzbekistan [1], [2].

Dimension	Indicator	Value	Year	Implication for International Trade
Digital platforms (e-commerce)	E-commerce market volume	USD 201 million	2021	Initial stage of platform-based trade development

	E-commerce market volume	USD 311 million	2022	Expansion of digital marketplaces and online payments
	E-commerce market volume	USD 543 million	2023	Increased potential for cross-border B2C and B2B trade
International trade	Total foreign trade turnover	USD 72.8 billion	2025*	Growing demand for digital trade facilitation tools
	Exports / Imports	USD 30.9 bn / USD 41.9 bn	2025*	Need for efficiency gains in export and import procedures
Institutional digitalization	Single Window system	Operational	Current	Reduction of administrative and transaction costs
Digital infrastructure	Broadband and fiber network expansion	Strategic target	2030	Preconditions for scaling platform-based trade

* January–November.

Therefore, the data represented within Table-2 proves that Uzbekistan is about to enter a more dynamic stage of international trade transformation through platforms. The e-commerce market two or three years ago sat between 2021 and 2023. It shows that a digital trading environment has been established that can support cross-border trade. This trend in turn provides an enabling environment for domestic companies, especially SMEs, to participate in global digital markets [14].

Moreover, the vast scale of foreign trade turnover demonstrates the commodity exchange potential of digital platforms as a means for enhancing trading efficiency, not as substitutes of traditional exchange channels. In addition, how the Single Window operates is indicative of institutional progress, where the actual reduction of administrative barriers must take place for the advantages of digital platforms to be captured in international trade.

In addition, permanent investments in digital infrastructure are a basis for the sustainability of platform-based trade growth. Such development of platformization in international trade may be uneven: there are likely to remain many sectors and regions where either digital capacity and connectivity remain inadequate [15]. In general, the experience of Uzbekistan is an example of a complementary mechanism through which digital platforms strengthen international trade performance as part of the consistent development of institutional and infrastructural conditions.

4. Conclusion

The study found that digital platforms are becoming the backbone of modern international trade, transforming its institutional, organizational, and technological foundations. The platformization of trade processes helps reduce transaction and administrative costs, accelerate cross-border operations, and expand economic access to global markets. As a result, the structure of international trade flows is changing, the role of e-commerce and digital services is increasing, and the integration of national economies into global value chains is strengthening.

An analysis of international and domestic experience shows that the effects of digital platforms are uneven and depend on the level of digital infrastructure development, the

quality of the institutional environment, and government regulatory policies. Using the example of Uzbekistan, it was found that the active development of e-commerce and the digitalization of foreign economic activity are creating the preconditions for the increased participation of small and medium-sized enterprises in international trade. However, limitations remain associated with the concentration of platform market power, uneven digital readiness of businesses, and the insufficient export orientation of platform channels. Thus, digital platforms are not an alternative, but rather an important tool for improving the efficiency and inclusiveness of international trade, the potential of which can be realized through comprehensive institutional and infrastructural development.

Drawing from the results, it is recommended to develop the following practical implications.

To begin with, export-oriented digital platforms, especially marketplaces and B2B cross-border trade platforms, should be better developed, with particular attention paid to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

Secondly, it is necessary to continue improving the digital infrastructure for foreign economic activity by expanding the capabilities of electronic declarations, connecting the national "Single Window" with private trading and logistics platforms, and creating end-to-end digital supply chains for export-import transactions.

Third, we should adapt the regulatory framework to the realities of the platform economy, including regulating cross-border e-commerce, taxing digital transactions, and developing antitrust mechanisms that account for the network effects of the digital platform.

Fourth, we need to strengthen the comprehensive measures at the level of training, consulting, and governmental support in order to build a new normal of digital capacity building to prepare foreign trade parties to use e-commerce tools, digital payment, and international platforms.

Fifth, government policy should be focused on mitigating the risks of market power concentration in the platform economy, which entails supporting a competitive environment, developing national and regional platforms, and participating in international dialogue on digital commerce regulation.

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