

IMPACT OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS ON THE CHANGING ROLE OF INTERMEDIARIES IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Modern international trade is undergoing a profound transformation driven by digitalisation. Digital platforms, notably Amazon, Alibaba and eBay, have become key components of the global economy, reshaping traditional supply chains and the role of intermediaries. Whereas trade previously depended heavily on importers, exporters, distributors, brokers and logistics companies, digital technologies now connect producers and consumers directly, reducing transaction costs and cutting out intermediaries.

Throughout the history of trade, intermediaries have served to reduce information asymmetry, handle logistics, provide financing and manage risks. Digital platforms are radically changing this paradigm. They operate as two-sided markets, creating network effects: the more sellers and buyers there are, the greater the value of the platform. Such structures reduce search costs and facilitate the process of matching suitable partners between exporters and importers [1].

Digital platforms are changing the role of intermediaries in international trade, reducing the need for traditional players through direct access for producers to consumers and the automation of key processes. Some traditional intermediaries are losing their functions, particularly in finding partners, concluding deals and organising sales, though they are not disappearing entirely. Instead, re-intermediation is taking place, with the emergence of new digital intermediaries, notably platforms, logistics and analytical services, which coordinate data and ensure the functioning of ecosystems. As a result, the role of intermediaries is shifting from traditional intermediation to technology-oriented service intermediation [2].

Thus, it can be argued that in the future the dominance of a limited number of global platforms will persist under increasingly stringent regulatory oversight, alongside growing cooperation with traditional intermediaries and the expansion of regional platform equivalents (table 1). Digital platforms in international trade simultaneously expand opportunities and create structural risks. They enhance efficiency, reduce transaction costs, and open global markets for SMEs, yet these benefits are unevenly distributed due to the digital divide and increasing market concentration among dominant platforms. Additionally, traditional intermediaries face significant adaptation pressures. Therefore, to maximise positive outcomes, it is essential to invest in digital infrastructure, particularly in developing countries,

strengthen regulatory frameworks to prevent monopolisation, and support the transformation of traditional actors. Such measures would help ensure a more inclusive and balanced development of digital trade.

Table 1 – Advantages and challenges of using digital platforms in international trade

Advantages	Challenges
democratising access to global markets for small and medium-sized enterprises, including those from developing countries	the digital divide between countries with varying levels of infrastructure development
improving trade efficiency through faster transactions, transparent processes and reduced transaction costs.	market concentration in the hands of large platforms, which creates risks of monopolisation
introducing innovative technologies that improve supply chain management	transformational pressure on traditional intermediaries, who are forced to adapt or lose their market position

Digital platforms transform not only the role of intermediaries but also the very structure of international trade, shifting from linear supply chains to networked ecosystems. Traditional intermediaries do not disappear but gradually adapt or are displaced by new digital players that create added value through the use of data and technologies. The further development of this sphere largely depends on the balance between innovation and regulation and requires international coordination to reduce digital inequality and ensure fair competition. Promising directions include the implementation of blockchain to enhance transparency, artificial intelligence for process personalization, and the development of hybrid models that combine traditional approaches with digital solutions.

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