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EMERGING TRENDS IN DIGITAL TRADE: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The article analyzes digital trade of goods and services as an economic category. The author studies definitions of the term "digital trade" presented by international researchers, as well as those established in documents of international organizations.

One should note that there are multiple interpretations of the concept of digital trade, and researchers lack common understanding of digital trade. One of the approaches to define the content of the concept of digital trade implies the identification of its distinctive features or attributes, as well as its advantages over traditional trade.

Thus, according to the scientific works, the main advantages of the digital trade of goods and services include the elimination of the geographic distance between counterparties, a reduction in implementation costs, adding to the price of products, increased delivery speed; the use of demonstration opportunities for product presentations that are not limited by physical boundaries; the organization of simultaneous access to the offerings of all sellers taking part in digital trade; and an unlimited consumer audience.

The author thoroughly examined digital trade trends, including the use of artificial intelligence technologies and business process automation to perform routine tasks, the implementation of blockchain to ensure data security, increase consumer confidence, and combat fraud, the development of interactive online sales methods, voice assistants to facilitate product searches, and predictive user data analytics to anticipate customer preferences and offer them products that meet their expectations; the integration of various communication channels into a single system for continuous communication with customers and target audiences; the introduction of virtual and augmented reality technologies in retail, allowing for product evaluation without the need to physically visit a store; and payment instruments and services that provide a wide range of payment options available to customers.

Keywords: digital trade, emerging trends, global value chains, consumer behavior, demand for innovation, regulatory environment, virtual and augmented reality.

СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ТЕНДЕНЦИИ ЦИФРОВОЙ ТОРГОВЛИ: ВЗГЛЯД НА ГЛОБАЛЬНОМ УРОВНЕ

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Реферат

В статье проведен анализ цифровой торговли товарами и услугами как экономической категории. Автором изучены определения термина цифровая торговля, представленные зарубежными исследователями, а также установленные в документах международных организаций. Отмечается наличие множества трактовок понятия цифровой торговли, отсутствие единого понимания среди исследователей. Одним их подходов к определению содержания понятия цифровой торговли является выявление ее отличительных черт или признаков, а также преимуществ по отношению к традиционной торговле. Так, согласно работам исследователей, главными преимуществами цифровой торговли товарами и услугами являются нивелирование территориальной удаленности контрагентов, снижение затрат на реализацию товаров, закладываемых в цену продукции; повышение оперативности доставки; использование демонстрационных возможностей презентации товара, не ограниченных физическими границами; организацию единовременного доступа к предложению всех продавцов, включенных в сферу цифровой торговли; неограниченную потребительскую аудиторию.

Автором подробно изучены тренды развития цифровой торговли на современном этапе, в том числе применение технологий искусственного интеллекта и автоматизации бизнес-процессов для выполнения рутинных задач, внедрение блокчейн для обеспечения безопасности данных, повышения доверия покупателей и противодействия мошенничеству; развитие методов интерактивных онлайн-продаж, голосовых помощников для облегчения поиска нужных товаров, а также предиктивной аналитики данных пользователей, которая позволяет предугадать предпочтения покупателей и предложить им товар, соответствующий их ожиданиям; взаимную интеграцию различных каналов коммуникации в единую систему для непрерывной связи с покупателями и целевой аудиторией, внедрение технологий виртуальной и дополненной реальности в торговлю, что позволяет оценить товар без необходимости физического посещения магазина, а также платежных инструментов и сервисов, обеспечивающих широкий выбор опций оплаты, доступный покупателям.

Ключевые слова: цифровая торговля, современные тенденции, цепочки добавленной стоимости, потребительское поведение, спрос на инновации, регуляторная среда, виртуальная и дополненная реальность.

Introduction

The current stage of social development is characterized by the decisive impact of digital technologies on all spheres of life. The changes replacing computerization and informatization are not limited to isolated digital transformations. As noted in the report "Digital Trade for Development," prepared by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the International Monetary Fund, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, the digitalization of the economy is fundamentally changing approaches to communication, production, management, and trade [1]. Thus, the introduction of digital technologies increases labor productivity by reducing production costs, leads to cost savings and increased investment efficiency, stimulates the expansion and diversification of export baskets, and promotes sustainable economic growth by fostering innovation.

The Internet and digitalisation are fundamentally changing the way people, businesses and governments interact. This has led to a new phase of globalisation underpinned by the movement of data across national borders, changing the nature, patterns and actors in international trade in goods and services. Digitally related transactions, either in goods or services, have existed for many years. Yet the current scale of transactions and the emergence of new (and disruptive) players transforming production processes and industries, including many that were previously little affected by globalisation, is of particular importance [2].

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Main body (Discussion)

According to R. Baldwin international trade has gone through three stages. The first, often referred to as the 'first unbundling', or 'traditional trade', was spurred by falling transport costs which enabled the separation of production and consumption across national borders. Consumers gained from wider access to new and more competitively priced products from abroad and trade mainly involved final goods. In this context, trade policy was largely concerned with market access to ensure that the benefits from trade in final products could be reaped. The second unbundling, or 'GVC trade', arose from continued reductions in transport and coordination costs enabling businesses to fragment processes of production across national borders and to exploit locational comparative advantages. Trade in intermediate products or tasks flourished and global production relocated, in part, towards emerging economies.

Trade policy became more complex, increasingly involving trade facilitation and behind-the-border issues aimed at reducing bottlenecks along the value chain. Digital technologies have made it increasingly feasible for buyers and sellers to place and receive orders on a global scale. They also enable the instantaneous remote delivery of services directly into businesses and homes, including internationally [3].

Businesses and households make increasing use of digital ordering. Many services that traditionally required proximity between producers and consumers are now traded at a distance. In much the same way that reductions in transport and coordination costs enabled the fragmentation of production along global value chains (GVCs), falling costs of sharing information – relaxing in turn some of the traditional constraints associated with engaging in international trade, be this asymmetric information, hold-ups or contract enforcement – are powering the digital trade revolution. Services can now be fragmented across national borders, through collaborative processes, and delivered via digital platforms as never before. At the same time, falling informational barriers, arising from growing digital connectivity, are enabling more physical, or traditional, trade to take place, increasing access to foreign markets for firms in a way that would previously have been unimaginable, particularly for small and medium enterprises. As a result, more trade in services, including in small-value digital services such as streamed music, e-books and online games, is also taking place [4, p. 67].

The digital transformation is further blurring distinctions between conventional cross-border trade in services, consumption abroad and services provided through foreign presence, and is posing new challenges for the way international trade and investment policy-making is made and how international trade, especially in services, is measured. Emerging technologies, such as distributed ledgers, or Blockchain, have the potential to further change how we trade in the future [5, p. 35].

By making international contracts more transparent and enforceable, and facilitating the transfer of value, the Blockchain has the potential of reducing 'hold-ups' in trade and facilitating just-in-time delivery along GVCs. In parallel, additive manufacturing, or 3D printing, can also change how goods are delivered and the structure and operation of supply chains for parts and components [6].

As firms adopt new technologies they are likely to move towards more knowledge-intensive processes of production, giving rise to new sources of comparative advantage. Automation has the potential to reduce the role of labour abundance or skills in determining comparative advantage in trade in goods, from agriculture to manufacturing, and trade in services. Intangible assets and access to knowledge-based capital (KBC) may become increasingly important, potentially fundamentally changing the way factors of production are allocated both within the firm and across borders through global value chains [7, p. 133].

A tentative typology for digital trade according to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is presented in figure.

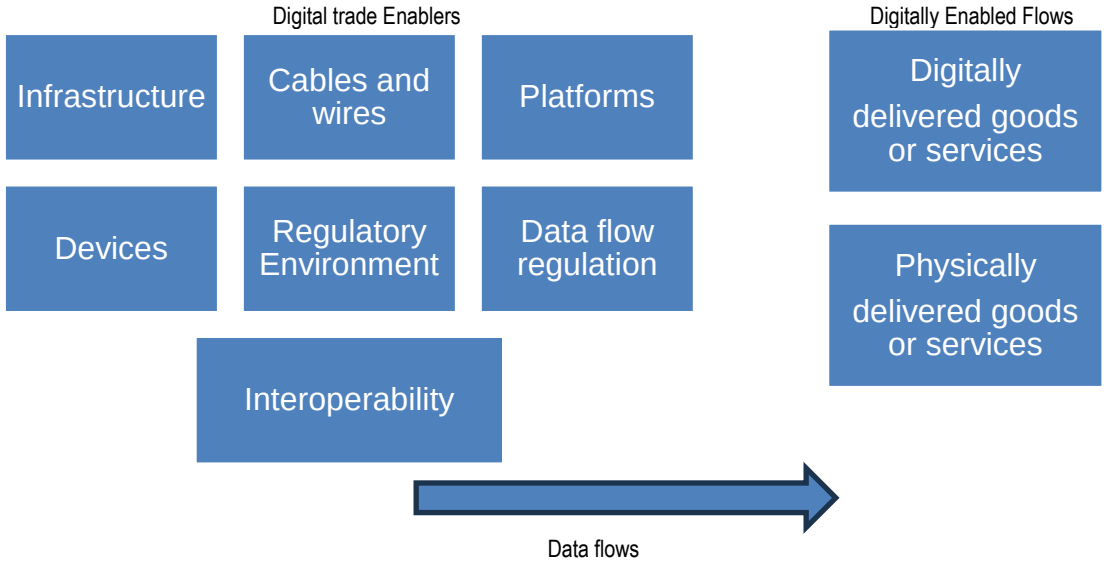

Figure – A tentative typology for digital trade [8]

Digital trade also presents significant challenges for policy makers and businesses. For example, the intangible nature of digitalised services has created strong fiscal incentives for their source (country of origin) to be located wherever that may be most advantageous, in turn further blurring already grey distinctions between conventional cross-border trade in services, consumption abroad and services provided through foreign presence, and posing new challenges for the way international trade and investment policy-making is made as well as how international trade, especially services, is measured. In addition, significant income streams can now be generated through data itself, the collection and dissemination of which is subject to myriad national laws, for example, governing privacy. Data flows – even though these are generally not recorded in international trade statistics, particularly intra-firm transactions – underpin modern trade, both in enabling corporations to manage global production networks under global value chains and in automation for trade facilitation [9].

Despite the growing importance of what is commonly referred to as 'digital trade', little empirical and internationally comparable information currently exists, inhibiting a full understanding of the scale and policy challenges of digital trade. Moreover, economic effectiveness of companies practicing new business models – such as Airbnb, Facebook and Spotify – raise a number of additional complications, including in relation to the nature of the activity, for (services) trade policy.

E. N. Smirnov states that from a trade policy perspective, the benefits of digital transformation, widely described in scientific literature, depend on the seamless and integrated functioning of systems encompassing goods, services, and digital connectivity. However, market liberalization alone is not enough to reap the benefits of digital trade. New technologies often become available through international trade. Therefore, to increase

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production, access to international markets is necessary, which is only possible for companies with competitive digital advantages. In the digital economy, the success of firms is determined by both the adoption of new technologies and their entry into global markets.

Access to new technologies is ensured by the degree of trade liberalization, but the effective use of such technologies requires slightly different strategies. Data naturally moves seamlessly across the internet, reaching a global audience. This allows all companies (of all types and sizes) to gain new opportunities to create new products and enter new markets. However, to access these consumers and markets, goods and services must comply with certain regulatory requirements, such as technical requirements, electronic payment compatibility, privacy, and consumer protection. Regulatory approaches vary widely across countries, necessitating international dialogue to address these differences and contradictions [10, p. 79].

Definition of digital trade

While there is no single recognised and accepted definition of digital trade, there is a growing consensus that it encompasses digitally enabled transactions in trade in goods and services which can be either digitally or physically delivered and which involve consumers, firms and governments. At its most basic, digital trade is underpinned by the transfer of bits and bytes across borders. Data flows connect businesses (e. g. through service links), machines (e. g. the Internet of Things, or IoT) and individuals (i. e. peer-2-peer or social networking) to each other. Increasingly, data itself is generating significant income streams, facilitating the delivery of new, and previously non-tradable, goods and services and, for the latter, blurring the lines between the modes in which these are delivered [11].

To this day there is no generally accepted definition of digital trade. One approach to understanding this concept is to identify its distinctive features or attributes. This approach distinguishes the concept of "digital commerce" from the concept of "traditional commerce," which occurs without the use of the internet (offline commerce).

Firstly, the differences between digital and offline commerce include the composition of the parties involved. Offline commerce is characterized by a large number of intermediaries who provide various services, including lending, freight forwarding, foreign exchange transactions, and others. Digital commerce, on the other hand, is characterized by the possibility of direct exchange between the manufacturer-seller and the buyer.

The next distinction is the subject of trade. In offline trade, the subject matter consists of goods, works, services, and production factors. However, the subject matter of digital commerce includes traditional physical goods, as well as digital products and services sold via the global internet.

Furthermore, the methods of trade and delivery of goods and services also differ. Thus, digital trade takes place on online platforms, and the entire transaction and delivery process is carried out electronically over the global internet. In offline trade, the exchange occurs through physical contact between the seller and buyer, and goods are delivered by various modes of transport [12].

There are also differences in controlling bodies. In particular, there is no unified system for overseeing the global digital trade market. At the same time, the rules for offline trade in goods and services are defined by multilateral agreements of the World Trade Organization and other institutions. The second edition of the Handbook on Digital Trade defines digital trade as all international trade that is digitally ordered and/or digitally delivered. Digitally ordered trade involves the international sale or purchase of a good or service, conducted over computer networks by methods specifically designed for the purpose of receiving or placing orders. Digitally delivered trade only covers services and is defined as all international trade transactions that are delivered remotely over computer networks. This definition goes beyond e-commerce or digital platforms [13, p. 17].

An alternative definition used by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), focused on services and considered trade in digitally deliverable services.

Such a definition is much broader than digitally delivered services and encompasses trade in services such as insurance and pension services; financial services; charges for the use of intellectual property; telecommunications, computer and information services; research and development services; professional and management consulting services; architectural, engineering, scientific and other technical services; trade-related services; other business services not included elsewhere; audiovisual and related services; health services and education services (excluding those consumed during international travel); as well as heritage and recreational services [14].

That definition could be further broadened by considering all international trade enabled by digital technologies, including those that were not ordered or delivered through computers networks. Further, the expansion of the digital economy has enabled novel combinations of goods and services and their delivery forms. For example, an item can cross a border as a service but becomes a good when it is consumed, as it happens with 3D printing service.

Despite global efforts to harmonize international trade statistics, our understanding of digital trade and its implications remains limited. Digital trade volume refers to the total quantity of goods and services traded electronically across international borders, utilizing digital platforms and technologies.

This concept encompasses various forms of transactions, including e-commerce, digital services, and electronic data transfers, highlighting the increasing role of the digital economy in facilitating global trade. The growth of digital trade volume reflects shifts in consumer behavior, technological advancements, and the integration of online markets into traditional trade practices [15].

Emerging trends of digital trade

Digital trade is actively developing due to the latest technologies, including artificial intelligence and virtual reality (VR and AR), making shopping more convenient and interesting. Nowadays consumers are getting used to fast delivery, quality service and safe shopping. The pandemic accelerated the transition of many sellers online, increasing competition. More over new laws protect user data and introduce tax obligations [16, p. 917]. Dynamic growth, customer orientation and demand for innovation define the main trends of digital trade (table 1).

Table 1 – Emerging trends in digital trade

№	Trend	Description of trend
1	Artificial intelligence assistants and automation	The main innovation in digital trade is the introduction of AI-assistants (AI-agents), configured to quickly and efficiently perform routine, repetitive tasks. For example, AI assistants can automatically answer frequent customer questions, process claims, form sales reports, analyze reviews. The development of AI assistants and other automation tools will free time and resources for solving more important tasks and optimizing business processes
2	Creating security and transparency with blockchain	As online shopping continues to grow, so do concerns about data security, fraud and trust between buyers and sellers – this is where blockchain technology comes in. According to Statista, a German online platform that gathers and presents statistical data from various sources on a wide range of topics, the global blockchain technology market will skyrocket from $17 billion in 2023 to over $943 billion by 2032, signaling its rapid adoption across industries, including ecommerce. By providing a decentralized and tamper-proof ledger, blockchain enhances transaction security, prevents fraud, and improves transparency in online shopping [17]
3	Livestream shopping is taking off	Live commerce is redefining how consumers discover and purchase products online, blending entertainment with real-time shopping experiences. Once a niche trend, livestream shopping is now a mainstream sales channel, with platforms like Whatnot, eBay Live, and TikTok Live leading the charge. According to Statista, US livestreaming ecommerce sales reached $50 billion in 2023 and will grow to $68 billion by 2026. As social media and ecommerce continue to converge, brands are tapping into livestream shopping to engage audiences, showcase products in action, and drive instant sales [18]

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Continuation of Table 1

№	Trend	Description of trend
4	Turning up the volume with voice search	With 75 % of US households owning a smart speaker in 2025, it's no surprise that voice search is an up and coming trend in the ecommerce space. Voice assistants like Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant have transformed the way that consumers interact with ecommerce platforms – like BigCommerce and Shopify – offering a hands-free, convenient way to shop. By simply using a voice command, shoppers can search for products, make purchases, and track orders with ease. Harnessing customer data for personalized shopping experiences. As research shows, personalization drives customer loyalty. In fact, a study from Google and Storyline Strategies found that 72 % of consumers are more likely to be loyal to a brand if they offer a personalized customer experience [19]
5	Predictive analytics	What if you could anticipate customer needs, before they even ask? Predictive analytics makes that possible by analyzing patterns in customer behavior, purchase history, and browsing data to forecast what they'll want next. Predictive tools are used to identify high-value customer segments, focus retention efforts where they'll have the biggest impact, forecast demand, adjust inventory and supply chains based on predicted trends, personalize recommendations, suggest products likely to convert based on past and peer behavior
6	Omnichannel	Making purchases becomes more convenient thanks to omnichannel when the boundaries between ordinary and internet stores are blurring. The product can be selected on the site or in the application, and picked up in a store near the house. Or make an order in the store, and arrange payment and delivery via the internet store. Even product returns are now online. To make customers comfortable, companies implement special systems that automatically show the availability of goods in each store and in the warehouse
7	Immersion	Virtual technologies create an immersive environment, bringing online shopping as close as possible to visiting a regular store. This compensates for the impossibility of physical contact of the buyer with the product. VR (virtual reality) – the technology of full immersion in a virtual environment that imitates the real world. For example, special glasses or helmets that create an interactive three-dimensional picture. AR (augmented reality) – augmentation of the real environment with virtual objects. For example, a mobile application that overlays virtual objects on top of a photo using the smartphone's camera [17]
8	Increased speed of delivery	The speed of delivery of goods will become one of the main competitive advantages of trading platforms. To achieve this, companies are investing massive amounts of money in improving transportation infrastructure, building specialized distribution centers, and developing high-tech logistics. Buyers will be able to receive orders literally in a matter of hours or even minutes, especially in large cities. Logistics companies use self-driving vehicles and drones for fast delivery, build a network of automated parcel reception and sorting points, allowing to reduce the waiting time of goods from weeks to hours and minutes
9	Environmentally friendly production	Consumers are demanding environmental friendliness of their products. Therefore, companies are seriously reconsidering their approaches to packaging, materials, and production processes. Products labeled "Eco" and "Organic," packaging made from recycled and biodegradable materials, and products with low carbon emissions are gaining popularity. Companies that support sustainable development policies and participate in waste management and recycling programs have the opportunity to attract customers willing to pay more for high-quality and safe products
10	New payment instruments	Customers have a wide range of payment options: bank cards, the Faster Payment System (FPS), QR code scanning, and e-wallets [20]. The wider the range of payment methods, the easier it is for customers to make purchases, and the easier it is for merchants to increase revenue and improve the customer experience. Limited payment methods and drawn-out processes can be off-putting for customers looking for ease and simplicity. Payment options are evolving, and customers expect multichannel shopping options. Many businesses also offer flexible payment options like "buy now and pay later," mobile wallets, and the option to pay using cryptocurrency
11	Mobile shopping	More and more shoppers use their phones or tablets over a PC or desktop, and this trend continues to grow. According to data from Forbes, 54 percent of online Black Friday sales took place on a mobile device in 2023. Being on top of this trend means optimizing websites and online stores for seamless mobile use [16, p. 920]
12	Subscription models	Subscription models are here to stay. Clothes, cosmetics, socks, consumables, and gym wear are just some of the products available for an e-commerce subscription service. This trend means customers return repeatedly without trying to bring them back to your store, and there seems to be no end to the products and even services you can turn into a subscription model
13	Social media shopping	Over the past couple years, Instagram, Facebook and Tik Tok have grown into more than just social media platforms – now they're also hubs for social commerce. According to Statista 110.4 million people shopped via social channels in 2024. Thanks to the popularity of experiences like one-click-checkout and live shopping, these channels are becoming more and more customer-friendly, making it seamless for customers to search for and purchase products. In addition, social commerce has a low barrier, allowing online businesses, both big and small, to enhance brand awareness, grow their audience, and offer a frictionless buying experience [16, p. 922]

Note – Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of [17–20].

Conclusion

Digital trade is much more than just selling goods online. It offers new horizons for businesses willing to adapt and keep pace with technology. Those who embrace the opportunities offered by virtual and augmented reality, artificial intelligence, ecology, and mobile commerce will discover enormous opportunities for growth and prosperity. These innovations have a significant impact on the formation of business models, the structure and content of technological processes, the forms and methods of trade relations, and the simplification of trade procedures. The key to success in the future is to embrace change and look beyond the typical online store. Success in this dynamic environment requires more than just keeping up – it demands strategic adaptation.

In addition, digital technologies fundamentally simplify and accelerate access to consumers and markets, bring new opportunities for customization and the introduction of new products. By leveraging data-driven insights, adopting new technologies, and prioritizing seamless customer experiences, brands can stay ahead of the curve and thrive in the competitive online marketplace. Digital trade is evolving faster than ever, driven by emerging technologies, shifting consumer expectations, and new ways to shop and engage with brands. From livestream shopping's real-time engagement to AI-powered experiences, the trends shaping 2025 will redefine how businesses connect with customers.

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