Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Journal (APSDJ)

Special issue: Enabling Accessibility and Inclusion through Digital Trade and E-Commerce



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About the Journal

- The *Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Journal* (APSDJ) is published twice a year (April and October) by UN ESCAP
- Publishes original contributions on themes and issues related to sustainable development that are policy-oriented and relevant to Asia and the Pacific.
- Articles focus on challenges pertinent to one or more dimensions of sustainable development, policy options, and implications, as well as policy experiences that may be of benefit to the region.
- Balances theoretical and empirical studies, welcomes papers with a multi-disciplinary approach and with policy relevance.
- Papers range from overviews spanning the region or parts of it, to papers with a detailed focus on issues facing individual countries.
- Encourages submissions from researchers residing in countries in special situations- LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS
- Provides a platform for policymakers to share their experiences
- Offers opportunities to academics and researchers in their early careers to develop their capacity for policy-oriented and applied research.

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Brief Context

- Digitalization is reshaping trade and commerce across Asia and the Pacific with digital exports nearly quadrupling since 2010
- A key part of this transformation is the expansion of cross-border e-commerce through digital platforms, reshaping production and consumption patterns, expanding market access, and altering value chains.
- But growth in e-commerce also poses challenges
  - Its benefits remain unevenly distributed with significant disparities in digital connectivity, affordability, digital capabilities and institutional capacity.
  - It raises governance challenges risking regulatory fragmentation across countries
- Thus realizing the full potential of cross-border e-commerce requires strong enabling ecosystems
- This volume of the *Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Journal* (*Volume 33, No 2 (2026)),* explores how digital trade and cross-border e-commerce are transforming economies and societies in the Asia Pacific region and associated opportunities and challenges
- It draws upon papers presented at the Asian Think Tank Network Forum 2025 in Tokyo and related discussions.



Overview of the Special Theme Issue

Enabling Accessibility and inclusion through digital trade and e-commerce

Sub-theme 1: State and challenges for inclusive digital trade and e-commerce

Chapter 2: Can economies leapfrog to digital success? Evidence from global e-commerce development pathways

Chapter 3: Digital trade for macroeconomic development: Evidence from ASEAN's e-commerce integration

Chapter 4: The role of digital platforms and cross-border trade in Cambodian firm performance

Chapter 5: Connected for growth: Analyzing the impact of e-commerce adoption on firm performance and labour outcomes in the Philippines through peer effects

Chapter 6: Unlocking economic gains: how e-commerce enhances efficiency, productivity, and market access in Indonesia: Evidence from the 2024 e-commerce survey

Sub-theme 2: Policy and regulatory enablers for digital trade and e-commerce

Chapter 7: An analytical framework to establish convergence in cross-border digital trade rules

Chapter 8: Trade agreements and digitally delivered services: The varied evidence from emerging Asia

Chapter 9: Building inclusive economic growth in Asia with mode 1 finance and insurance service exports: Role of digital trade provisions in free trade agreements

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02 CAN ECONOMIES LEAPFROG TO DIGITAL SUCCESS? EVIDENCE FROM GLOBAL E-COMMERCE DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS

Homer Pagkalinawan

Examines whether an infrastructure-first approach is the only route to success in e-commerce and digital trade.

Highlights the role of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) as a potential driver of inclusive digital transformation

Analyses data from 149 economies using a cross-country quantitative framework that combines indicators of physical digital infrastructure, DPI quality, and e-commerce performance.

Findings show that countries categorized as DPI innovators achieve meaningful e-commerce outcomes despite infrastructure gaps

Concludes that strategic deployment of DPI can help countries to leapfrog and participate meaningfully in digital trade despite existing infrastructure constraints

03 DIGITAL TRADE FOR MACROECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: EVIDENCE FROM ASEAN'S E-COMMERCE INTEGRATION

John Paolo R. Rivera

Examines whether participation in cross-border e-commerce can drive macroeconomic development and the role of different categories of enablers.

Findings show that digital skills and talent are the strongest determinants of digitally delivered services exports

Digital trade and logistics efficiency are the most important drivers of digitally delivered services imports

Institutional and infrastructural readiness alone do not guarantee stronger cross-border e-commerce participation

Overall, greater cross-border e-commerce participation has a strong positive effect on real GDP growth

ASEAN economies can use targeted investments in digital skills, institutions, and ecosystem trust to leverage digital trade and e-commerce for inclusive and sustainable development

04 THE ROLE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND CROSS-BORDER TRADE IN CAMBODIAN FIRM PERFORMANCE

Dina Chhorn, Sivly Houy, Kean Muny Nhim

Examines whether digital platform adoption improves firm performance and facilitates participation in cross border trade in Cambodia, as well as effects of structural constraints and gender-related barriers

Based on firm-level data from the Cambodia Economic Census 2022, covering more than 700,000 establishments nationwide.

Findings show that firms adopting digital platforms perform better than non adopters due to improved market access, lower transaction costs, better information, but the gains are unevenly distributed.

Concludes that digital transformation must be accompanied by complementary investments in infrastructure, digital skills, finance, and regulatory coordination, as well as targeted support for women-owned enterprises and underserved regions for inclusive development

05 CONNECTED FOR GROWTH: ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF E-COMMERCE ADOPTION ON FIRM PERFORMANCE AND LABOUR OUTCOMES IN THE PHILIPPINES THROUGH PEER EFFECTS

Maria Kristina P. Ortiz and Mark Carmelo R. Manguera

Examine the firm-level impacts of e-commerce adoption in the Philippines on various performance indicators.

Based on firm-level data from various surveys

Findings show that the effects of e-commerce adoption are dynamic and evolve over time as firms adjust to digitalization

Concludes that sustained policy support is needed to help firms manage the challenges of digital integration, ecosystem-based policies needed to enable inclusive and sustainable digital transformation.

06

UNLOCKING ECONOMIC GAINS: HOW E-COMMERCE ENHANCES EFFICIENCY, PRODUCTIVITY, AND MARKET ACCESS IN INDONESIA: EVIDENCE FROM THE 2024 E-COMMERCE SURVEY

Andri Yudhi Supriadi et. al

Examines whether digital adoption alone is sufficient to improve firm outcomes and the role of complementary factors to translate digital participation into measurable economic gains.

Analysis draws on nationally representative secondary data from the 2024 E-commerce Survey conducted by Statistics Indonesia, covering 39,736 e-commerce businesses across all 38 provinces and 365 districts and cities.

Findings reveal that while e-commerce can generate economic benefits, these gains are uneven across firms and regions

Concludes that managerial capacity and institutional readiness are more critical than technology adoption alone in improving MSME performance

Highlights the need to strengthen financial literacy, provide practical and sectorally targeted training programs, expand trustworthy digital payment systems, and targeted infrastructure and logistics improvements

07 AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK TO ESTABLISH CONVERGENCE IN CROSS-BORDER DIGITAL TRADE RULES

Paul R. Baker and Loan Le

Explores how economies with differing regulatory priorities and levels of digital readiness can identify common ground while preserving legitimate domestic policy objectives.

Develops a three-dimensional analytical framework based on negotiation theory-Zone of Possible Agreement- to assess areas of convergence and divergence in digital trade negotiations.

Identifies strong convergence in foundational areas such as customs duties on electronic transmissions, personal data protection frameworks, and cross-border data flows, and moderate to high divergence in transactional and emerging policy areas.

Finds that meaningful negotiation space exists while preserving domestic policy space.

08 TRADE AGREEMENTS AND DIGITALLY DELIVERED SERVICES: THE VARIED EVIDENCE FROM EMERGING ASIA

Avik Ghosh

Examines how digital trade provisions in RTAs influence the growth of digitally delivered services exports in emerging Asian economies.

Findings show that RTAs containing digital trade provisions significantly enhance digitally delivered services exports, particularly in economies that are already well integrated into global services trade and maintain higher levels of export and import openness.

Argues that digital RTAs need to be complemented by domestic reforms in digital regulation, infrastructure, skills development, and institutional quality to improve competitiveness, inclusiveness, and sustainable digital trade development across emerging Asia

09

BUILDING INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH IN ASIA WITH MODE 1 FINANCE AND INSURANCE SERVICE EXPORTS: ROLE OF DIGITAL TRADE PROVISIONS IN FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS

Deeparghya Mukherjee

Examines how digital trade and e-commerce related provisions in trade agreements influence Mode 1 cross-border services exports in Asia, with focus on financial services and insurance and pension services.

Investigates whether specific digital commitments, beyond the existence of FTAs, effectively promote services exports, how these impacts differ across ASEAN and East Asia and whether the effects have strengthened in the post 2018 period characterized by accelerated digitalization.

Finds that targeted digital provisions rather than aggregate measures of digital depth are the key drivers of export growth, though these vary for financial versus insurance and pension services, with stronger effects post 2018.

Digital trade provisions significantly affect services exports, although the impacts vary across sectors, regions and time periods.

Concludes that carefully designed and targeted digital provisions within FTAs can significantly support Mode 1 services exports, strengthen post-pandemic trade resilience, and promote sustained long term growth but that different services require different policy instruments

Key Insights & Policy Takeaways

The 11th Asian Think Tank Network forum in 2025 and this Special Issue provide several important insights

- Integrating digital strategies combining infrastructure and digital public infrastructure (DPI):
- Pursuing growth and innovation with inclusive outcomes
- Adopting differentiated and pathway-specific approaches:
- Strengthening the foundational ecosystem
- Addressing affordability and trust barriers
- Focusing on regional cooperation and interoperability
- Focusing on cross-border digital trade facilitation and market integration
- Introducing regulatory reforms and governance frameworks:

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Final Takeaways

- Promoting inclusive e-commerce and digital trade in Asia and the Pacific requires moving beyond access-driven approaches toward integrated, ecosystem-based strategies that simultaneously address infrastructure, capabilities, cost barriers, and trust.

- Inclusive digital trade in Asia and the Pacific will require a holistic and coordinated approach that integrates infrastructure, capabilities, affordability, and trust, while leveraging regional cooperation to scale impact.

- Aligning domestic reforms with regional frameworks and tailoring strategies to diverse country contexts, policymakers can unlock the full potential of digital trade as a driver of equitable and sustainable economic development

- **Role of regional cooperation** remains important in harnessing cross-border e-commerce for inclusive and sustainable growth

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