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## **DIGITAL PLATFORMS' INFLUENCE ON BRIDGING INNOVATION GAPS IN INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS**

The COVID-19 pandemic and information technology advancement forced a surge in the development of digital platforms in different areas. The open-source software community is a prime example of how digital platforms accelerate innovation and cooperation cross-borders. Digital platforms have changed the way that information is shared, and they have been essential in condensing the innovation gap. The further development of digital platforms holds the potential to advance humanity and close the innovation and information access gap.

Innovation has long been acknowledged as a key factor in economic growth and development. It is essential for forming global supply chains, and networks and determining nations' comparative advantages in the era of digitalization. The latter acts as one of the most crucial factors in today's turbulent economic landscape by extending knowledge-sharing capabilities while also broadening knowledge access disparities. Hence, the issue of the innovation gap, which can be defined as having an upper hand in innovative and technical capabilities, has become a pressing concern for all economic actors. The challenge thus lies in the matter of efficient promotion of knowledge exchange and cooperation to shorten innovation gaps on a worldwide scale.

Despite the acknowledged importance of innovation, there still exists a glaring issue in the form of innovation disparities across countries. These discrepancies have many different aspects and are explained by several variables, including but not limited to variations in research and development (R&D) spending, accessibility of cutting-edge technology, educational opportunities, and policy frameworks. While some nations, frequently referred to as innovation leaders, have flourishing innovation ecosystems and cutting-edge technological industries, others, so-called innovation followers, are lagging.

Digital platforms have emerged as a potentially useful tool for filling up these innovation gaps. In today's highly digitalized and linked world, these platforms enable the transfer of concepts, knowledge, and skills across national boundaries, using the advantages of cloud computing, online

markets, and collaborative workplaces. Digital platforms may also encourage innovation in underdeveloped countries where innovation levels are usually lower than in developed nations by linking them to international supply networks and marketplaces. This promotes local innovation initiatives in addition to fueling economic growth in these areas.

F. Djellal and F. Gallouj identify two types of gaps: the "innovation gap" which refers to the difference between actual innovation and traditional indicators of innovation, and the "performance gap" which measures the difference between actual performance and traditional economic tools [1].

N. Özbolat and N. Harraon the other hand, focus on territorial disparities in research and innovation and offer policy recommendations to address the innovation gap in Europe in particular [2]. Thus, innovation gaps can be defined as multifaceted disparities in a nation's capacity to generate, adapt, and effectively utilize new ideas, technologies, and processes for economic and social advancement.

International economic relations are greatly impacted by the innovation gap. In the global economy, highly inventive nations frequently have an advantage because they are better equipped to develop cutting-edge goods and services, boost productivity, and promote economic growth.

The starkness of innovation gaps between countries can be illustrated through statistics. For instance, the Global Innovation Index (GII), which evaluates a country's innovation capabilities, finds a large disparity between less inventive nations in Africa, South Asia, and portions of Latin America and leading innovators like Switzerland, Sweden, and the United States.

Technical and economic development gaps between countries are as important as ever before: UNESCO states that across the world about 10 countries account for 80% of spending in the field of R&D [3]. To illustrate, despite the dramatic fall in economic activity brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, OECD economies continued to grow spending in R&D in 2020. R&D spending in the OECD region increased by 1.8% in real terms in 2020, according to the most recent information available in the OECD Main Science and Technology Indicators (MSTI) database [4].

Even the EU is no exception in terms of having a digital gap despite the policies and efforts of unification. Based on the the 2023 data from the European Commission's chosen indicators [5], that highlight some of the most important aspects of the European information society (telecom industry, broadband, mobile, internet usage, internet services, e-government, e-commerce, e-business, ICT skills, research and development), there are more people with at least basic content creation skills in the countries where there is a higher number of electronic information sharing, such as Finland, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, Austria, Spain, France that all have a better than EU-average results for both of these indicators.

Digital platforms have democratized access to educational resources and information since it is offered mostly for free or at a cheap cost on websites like Wikipedia, Khan Academy, and Coursera. The COVID-19 pandemic forced a surge in e-learning platforms' development. Additionally, professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn and research collaboration platforms like ResearchGate facilitate global networking and knowledge exchange. Crowdsourcing platforms like InnoCentive and Topcoder enable organizations to tap into a global pool of talent and knowledge. Thus, the open-source software community is a prime example of how digital platforms accelerate innovation and cooperation cross-borders.

However, despite their significant contributions, digital platforms also face challenges related to privacy, misinformation, and accessibility. Striking a balance between open knowledge sharing, research collaboration, and security remains a key consideration.

Digital platforms have changed the way that information is shared, and they have been essential in shortening the innovation gap. Their influence on encouraging creativity, education, and cooperation, despite ongoing difficulties, is highly critical and relevant. The further development of digital platforms holds the potential to advance humanity and close the innovation and information access gap.

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