

## BIGTECH AND NOT SO BIG COUNTRIES – EVALUATING EFFORTS OF MEDIUM-SIZED COUNTRIES TO REGULATE THE INFORMATION FIELD AND TO CONTROL GLOBAL BIGTECH COMPANIES: THE CASE OF KAZAKHSTAN

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### ABSTRACT

*Received:*  
February 28, 2026

*Revised:*  
March 17, 2026  
March 27, 2026

*Accepted:*  
March 30, 2026

*DOI:*  
10.56289/ijcsrp.224

This paper examines the ambivalent situation on the information field for medium-sized countries. The main global web platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp play an essential role in the spreading of various types of information and become the main means of communication in the virtual world. This has become the norm and has even resulted in smaller countries, with less than 30 million people, facing the problem of cultural identity preservation and data encrypting. The article deals with the issue of local governments addressing the power of global giants by means of technology. It provides decision-makers with a perspective on the ways to handle the co-existence of innovation, regulation, and cultural identity vis-a-vis the world's technology leaders. The research can be referred to as new or unique digital governance material related to digital e-literacy of the digital population of middle countries, like Kazakhstan, and also not only contributing to the problem of digitalisation, but also to the issues of digital literacy of the local community. The paper researches official governmental documents, including laws, conceptions and other juridical papers. The proposed suggestions cover infrastructure financing, new business encouragement, and balanced legal stipulations. Kazakhstan, for example, must give its best to develop "Digital Kazakhstan", improve local as well as global cooperation, and boost digital sovereignty, by negotiating with BigTech.

*Keywords:* Information security, new media, social network, information distribution.

### INTRODUCTION

Daily life of common people and even whole countries is more and more influenced by the big three dominant global web service platforms – YouTube is the leader in video sharing, Instagram in social networking and photo/video sharing, and WhatsApp in messaging. They have become almost universal, and alongside this, their influence over access to information, social interaction, and communication with others has expanded. The extensive outreach and the huge number of users make these platforms so popular due to network effects. When the users of these platforms are more, the value for each user increases, and such a situation is a push factor to keep using the service at the current level, thus it is a great challenge for new platforms to break through. This situation is a real obstacle for small countries in the promotion of their own local alternatives. The revenue of Meta and Alphabet companies in 2024 was over a few hundred billion dollars, exceeding the GDP of many countries. Accordingly, even a relatively big country like Nigeria or a rich ones like Finland are not in a strong bargaining position with these global dominators (Bruhl, 2023).

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In a country with less than 30 million inhabitants, the distrust in these global platforms gives rise to important strategic questions about the cultural identity, social values, and economic self-sufficiency of such a country. Relying greatly on services developed by companies headquartered outside its territory, it could lead to data sovereignty loss. This is because the user data is often far from being subject to local laws, and therefore, they can be subject to other foreign regulations that can have negative effects on the country data originates from.

For instance, the editorial content guidelines that the global platforms use may not always be in complete agreement with cultural norms or socio-political expectations of smaller countries, allowing for carrying inappropriate or harmful content in the local context. Moreover, the fact that these global players are large and wielding immense market power, they can compete unequally, thus possibly hampering the development and growth of local digital initiatives.

As Kazakhstan is a country with a population of fewer than 30 million, it is an attractive example to consider this hypothesis. The country has not only gone full speed into digital transformation, but it has also taken steps to regulate international tech giants and their activities in its territory. In this context, it has accumulated considerable experience in operating in a multifaceted global digital sphere and thus can serve as an example for countries experiencing similar issues.

This paper aims at examining initiatives of countries to create their own versions of global web services and at the same time attempting to control each and every one of global BigTech actions, focusing on Kazakhstan. It also aims to explore potential ways and instruments that can be used by countries to communicate with each other and collectively negotiate with global web service leaders effectively.

The sections that follow provide a review of the current academic literature, the main research questions, existing policies, and the various policy tools that exist; as well as the strategies for communicating, identifying common challenges and finding solutions. The article concludes with a summarisation of outcomes and a list of recommendations for smaller countries, from the selection of the specific options for Kazakhstan.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research reveals that a global digital divide still exists, as well as the reasons for it; underdevelopment or poor capabilities to serve. The examples of ICQ /skype success story is explained to indicate that the digital divide is real. Small but capable countries like Estonia (Skype) or Israel (ICQ) made digital literacy a source of economic growth. Here we see an example of the digital divide, where we see people who can't afford to be educated above the gap and those who can afford to be educated. Educational programmes will also be given to the adults via the Internet. The small European countries like Estonia, Kosovo and Croatia are creating innovative specialised digital tools in various areas including education, e-government and business administration. It became new source of economy growth for these countries. According to the World Bank in the next half-century, the same can be expected to become the driving force of economic development for countries of Middle East and North Africa, which do not want to rely on BigTech solutions from foreign countries.<sup>2</sup>

Creating new social media platforms can be hard to gain access, mainly because of the prevailing network effects, which existing global participants, for example, YouTube,

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<sup>2</sup> Kosovo's digital revolution: A success story. *World Bank Blogs*. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/digital-development/kosovos-digital-revolution-success-story> 16 March 2024) by N. Gelanovska-Garcia.

Instagram, and WhatsApp, avail of. The value proposition of such platforms is the result of their user base growth that encourages individuals to join and stick with these established networks. Moreover, these huge global corporations are in a position to exert considerable power (Benesh, 2020). In addition, the substantial financial resources commanded by these global giants provide them with a notable advantage in marketing, infrastructure development, and the acquisition of emerging competitors. Small countries that are aiming to replace local sources can utilise the innovative methods and might shift their focus on niche markets or from the unique cultural point of view to achieve a place as a competitor (Chander, 2023).

The number of inquiries about government policy on controlling online media activity is increasing. Two opposing views exist on this matter. One calls for government to control online media activity on the internet and the other calls for more liberal models in order to safeguard free speech. Furthermore, the issues of state censorship in the field of content moderation, combating harmful content like hate speech and disinformation, and data protection bills for data privacy have been the most talked-about.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, government competition policies have also been a major factor in the regulation of digital platforms, as some countries have been keen to protect their markets from being dominated by a few players.

Equally, the "Brussels effect" may create problems for small states in designing and implementing their own regulations effectively without invalidating human rights and environmental sustainability in the cyber world.<sup>4</sup> The implementation of the Online News Act by the Canadian Parliament is a vivid demonstration of the impact that even small countries can have on companies like Apple and Microsoft. However, the effectiveness and the likelihood of the side effects that come with the use of the different designs of the regulations are things that the scholars still argue. Evidence from various sources suggests the existing research has not touched upon the entire range of specific situations faced by small nations and their successful strategies in not only building legislative climate but also regulating the activities done by global platforms that are based on local cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (Swong, 2025).

## HYPOTHESES

Many important questions initially come up in the course of determining the most suitable policy for small countries in the world wide web services realm. One question that is key to local alternatives is: What concrete policy instruments (e.g., financial incentives, infrastructure development, digital literacy programmes) can have the largest effect in fostering their own local video-sharing, social networking, and messaging platforms in the countries with a populations below 30 million people given the high costs and network effects of the global incumbents? This question is guiding local platforms to finding solutions to address the many difficulties they are dealing with in a significant manner.

One of the most critical aspects of regulating global web service providers is how to enforce big platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp to follow the local law. Despite similar basic values and rules each country has some differences. Attitude towards some groups or other countries may vary significantly. For example, the Taliban are banned in the U.S., but

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<sup>3</sup> Freedom House. Kazakhstan, 2024. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-net/2024>

<sup>4</sup> A phenomenon that refers to the possibility of EU regulations such as the Digital Services Act becoming global standards simply by virtue of the EU's market influence and scope (Chander, 2023).

Kazakhstan has to have some relations with new Afghanistan government just due to geographical closeness. Even basic human rights-respecting content regulation can be point of tension, for instance, LGBTQ+ propaganda is banned in Kazakhstan while DEA is promoted in BigTech. This question is an attempt to uncover the difficulties that come with regulating multinationals and at the same time taking care of national interests while adhering to international norms and respecting people's fundamental human rights.

## HYPOTHESES

In connection with communication and negotiation with global web service leaders, a vital research question persists: what are the most effective diplomatic, economic, and technical leverages that countries with populations under 30 million can utilise to engage in meaningful dialogue and negotiation with global web service leaders regarding content regulation, data privacy, and market access, considering the power asymmetries involved? Answers to this question aim to assist in identifying concrete strategies that smaller nations can employ to exert influence and ensure their specific needs and concerns are addressed by these dominant global platforms.

The main idea is evaluating effectiveness of the most important features of the following policies of some relatively small countries. One of the countries assessed is Kazakhstan which has recorded very high levels of usage of its e-government services par ensuring that infrastructure development and the shift to digital identity were the projects that led to such success in the public sector.<sup>5</sup> However, the homegrown alterations to the international social media and messaging platforms as well as the topic of discussing the control policies over the digital ecosystem and the influence of the practice on the people's right to use the Internet are the issues that remain in discussion.

The success stories of Estonia and Singapore are the cases in point. The strength of their actions has given them the power to encourage innovation in certain sectors and to be leaders of digital adoption in these sectors.<sup>6</sup>

### **Kazakhstan's Digital Strategy and Regulatory Approach**

Kazakhstan has been very active in realising its quite comprehensive digital agenda, ambitiously mixed with policies targeted at the nurturing of a new tech ecosystem and the creation of a governance framework for companies that would work internationally. The "Digital Kazakhstan" programme represents the basis of the country's digitalisation vision, a strategic choice implemented through the digitisation of economic sectors, the digital transformation of the state, the development of an innovational ecosystem, the nurturing of human resources, and finally, the realisation of a "Digital Silk Way" (Suominen, 2025). Furthermore, special attention is also given to artificial intelligence centred around the national AI strategy and the release of a Kazakh-language AI model. To assist in this process, efforts are made to attract international professionals and investment by the implementation of the "Digital Nomad" visas scheme.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Kazakhstan adopts law to regulate untamed social media scene.* EurasiaNet (12 July 2023) by A. Kumenov. <https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-adopts-law-to-regulate-untamed-social-media-scene>

<sup>6</sup> THE ONLINE REGULATION SERIES 2021 | KAZAKHSTAN. *Tech against Terrorism* (13 April 2023) by F. McDonnell. <https://techagainstterrorism.org/news/2021/12/20/the-online-regulation-series-2021-kazakhstan>

<sup>7</sup> *Kazakhstan accelerates digital transformation with new visa options.* NE Global Media (18 February 2025) <https://www.neglobal.eu/kazakhstan-accelerates-digital-transformation-with-new-visa-options/>

Nevertheless, the way Kazakhstan regulates online platforms is very much about presenting the authority of state, a situation that has caused worries about the concept of digital freedom.<sup>8</sup>

The Government of Kazakhstan controls the internet and information very strictly. Authorities force internet providers to monitor and block websites they do not like. Official reasons are usually security issues, child protection, terrorist danger and propaganda of non-traditional European values. Some of them is undoubtedly true, such as enormous amount of internet frauds and active radical preachers from deviant Islam sects.

However, others is perceived by society in much more controversial way. When the government use special laws to shut down content quickly without courts, a big share of citizens see it as censorship. All main traffic goes through state-linked systems, so officials can watch and limit what people see. For satellite internet like Starlink and OneWeb, the government is also very tough. At first, they tried to ban or limit these services for security reasons. Now they allow them only after companies agree to follow Kazakhstan's rules. This means placing servers and gateways inside the country so officials can control user traffic and access. As a result, even satellite connections cannot escape government oversight.

While satellite internet providers are flexible due to their efforts to take the market, BigTech like Google or Microsoft do not follow the rules and refuse to locate data-centres in Kazakhstan. So almost all of them are in the grey zone when formally they should be banned in Kazakhstan, but the government saves this as ace up the sleeve, in case if they will need a leverage.

Having in mind that the Law on Online Platforms and Advertising requires that the big ones have their feet on the ground locally and that they meet the demands for the removal of content, the Law on Mass Media does the job of showing that the definition of mass media now includes online publications, that is to say, even those ones that the government have the right to censor in the future.<sup>9</sup>

All the same, it is worth noting that they tried to take some actions regarding the issue of cyberbullying and disinformation through the enactment of these policies, on the other hand, these policies have been resisted by human rights organisations as they may become the tools of massive surveillance and even a threat to freedom of speech.<sup>10</sup>

The modern internet needs proper regulation and moderation to fight cybercrime, protect children, and stop harmful content. However, in Kazakhstan the government controls the internet in a very heavy-handed way. Following old Soviet traditions, there is almost no system of checks and balances on the power of executive state bodies. Officials can block websites, monitor users, and restrict access without real court approval or independent oversight. As a result, necessary regulation can quickly turn into total control, and ordinary people have very little protection from abuse of power.

### **International Case Studies of Digital Development Models**

Singapore as a digital giant created an efficient business-friendly climate successful and that such companies scale up through strong bonds and cooperation rather than strict rules. The

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<sup>8</sup> Freedom House. Kazakhstan, 2024. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-net/2024>

<sup>9</sup> *Digital 2025: Kazakhstan – DataReportal – Global Digital Insights*. DataReportal – Global Digital Insights (3 March 2025) by S. Kemp. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-kazakhstan>

<sup>10</sup> The Online Regulation Series | Turkey. *Tech against Terrorism* (13 April 2023) by A. Southey. <https://techagainstterrorism.org/news/2020/10/23/the-online-regulation-series-turkey>

government prefers correction notices over total blocks and aims to balance economic openness with control (Accenture, 2023).<sup>11</sup>

Singapore uses a “light-touch” but firm system with laws like POFMA (for correcting “falsehoods”) and licensing rules that require platforms to follow government standards on morality, harmony, and security. Kazakhstan also justifies heavy control for similar reasons — security, protecting citizens, and fighting crime.

Although Singapore is often cited as a positive example, but at the level of declarations and external design, it operates in many ways similarly to Kazakhstan. Despite its more modern and polished form, Singapore’s POFMA law is also heavily criticized by human rights organizations. The main concerns are: ministers themselves decide what counts as falsehood without any prior court hearing; the definition of “public interest” is excessively broad and vague; there is a high risk that the law is used as a tool against government critics and the opposition; and ultimately, all of this creates a strong chilling effect and widespread self-censorship among citizens and the media.

Another example is Estonia. It is a small country with a high level of digital technology development and a strong record of success in regulating and working with major technology companies. However, its approach differs markedly from those of Singapore and Kazakhstan. Estonia operates within the common policy framework of the European Union. On one hand, membership in this large union gives Estonia far greater leverage over BigTech firms. As a result, it can do more than simply block websites or specific content. It can also shape the actual policies of companies such as Google, Microsoft, and Apple at the corporate level. The European market is highly important to these firms and remains one of the world’s largest financial markets today. On the other hand, this model has clear drawbacks. Estonia must always align with the overall direction of European Union development. In return for stronger collective control over the actions of foreign technology corporations, the country surrenders part of its national sovereignty to the European Union.<sup>12</sup>

### **What are some of the best policies that are researched about the possible best policies?**

Several main research questions arise when we contemplate the proper choices of the policies pursued by the small countries in the global web services landscape. What the question of alternate local platforms development is about is the best specific policy instruments (e.g., financial incentives, infrastructure development, digital literacy programs) that can be used for local video-sharing, social networking and messaging platforms to encourage the growth of these platforms in countries with populations under 30 million, understanding that it is expensive and the high network effects of the global giants are restraining these platforms? Among the strategies that are inherent in the question, the key one is the practices that local platforms can follow, that would enable them to not only survive but also make progress in the context of a huge competitive disadvantage against them in the form of global players.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Singapore National Digital Identity | Case Study*. (n.d.). Accenture. <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/case-studiesnew/public-service/singapore-revolutionises-national-id>

<sup>12</sup> *Estonia built one of the world’s most advanced digital societies. during COVID-19, that became a lifeline*. WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM (1 July 2020) by Silaškova, J., and Takahashi, M. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2020/07/estonia-advanced-digital-society-here-s-how-that-helped-it-during-covid-19/>

<sup>13</sup> *Kazakhstan’s plan to require tech platform “localisation” opens door to censorship* (13 January 2023) by A. Zhyrmon. <https://www.accessnow.org/kazakhstans-tech-platform-localization-censorship/>

Countries with small populations are making the best utilisation of a multi-channel policy mix that covers measures of both domestic web service promotion and global platform management as long as they fit each particular situation and the instrument has a well-thought design and a good implementation. For the launch and operation of local web service startups, besides financial incentives, the country can employ such instruments as grants, subsidies, rent-, and tax-free zones. South Korea's Global TIPS programme, a tech incubator programme for startups, manifested how an attractive and specific scheme of financial aid can restructure the existing monopolistic and oligopolistic structures in the technology industry, making the industry more competitive and innovative. Nevertheless, these stimulus alone may not be sufficient to counter the powerful network effects and wealth of resources that global platforms wield.

Government support of different projects such as the construction of new infrastructure, especially by ensuring that problems of broadband penetration and the development of various digital aspects are solved, would be a significant policy instrument. Kosovo's KODE project is a showcase that the combination of targeted financial support and the imposition of regulatory requirements can lead to substantial improvements in the internet penetration rate even in the countryside. Also, the fact of such connectivity increases follows that different local web services as well as global services can be offered from such platforms further.

### **Digital literacy programmes are also a key contributor to the improvement of the nation's digital skills**

Where the programmes are generating great impact on the local digital economy and building a more inclusive society, they might not be the exact cause of local web services' wide adaptation if these local web services do not have impressive features or capabilities and/or are not close to global platforms in network effects.

The legal framework that covers such sectors as data privacy, content moderation, and competition are the pillars of a digital state. The case of Canada's Online News Act shows that specific regulations can be used to help reduce market imbalances in favour of local content providers, through rules that can be imposed and the high possibility of negotiations for fair compensation. The formulation and execution of content regulation policies need to be very thoughtful so as not to end up being abrogative as well as assertive to the people's rights.

A country's national digital identity systems are another instrument that ministers should be promoting for the sake of being able to deliver a larger number of digital services without much hassle. At the same time, Estonia e-ID might have been a system that is a reflection of a secure and comfortable digital identity that ensures the development of local services and speeds up the whole process of multi-service coverage and user comfort in various sectors.

The experience of Kazakhstan is a great example of the implementation of different policy instruments. One of the noteworthy initiatives of the country is to create a national digital identity system used to facilitate a significant e-government platform and gain access to infrastructure development. For example, the introduction of electronic identification changes the whole structure of services. It creates a strong extra push for many infrastructure changes in both the private sector and the public sector. The simple fact is that people will know they only need to bring their phone instead of showing a physical ID card.

**Table 1. Comparison of countries under 30 million people and their policies**

Country	Key Policies / Initiatives (Local Alternatives)	Key Policies / Initiatives (Regulation)	Evaluated Effectiveness (User Adoption, Market Competition, Innovation)	Key Success Factors	Major Challenges (including impact on digital freedom)
Kazakhstan	"Digital Kazakhstan" programme, focus on e-government, AI development, digital nomad visas	Law on Online Platforms and Advertising, Law on Mass Media, Communications Law	High e-government adoption, limited local alternatives to global platforms, debated effectiveness of content regulation	Strong government focus on digitisation, investment in infrastructure	Concerns about freedom of expression, potential overreach in content regulation
Estonia	Advanced digital ID system (eID), extensive e-government platform, e-Residency programme	GDPR implementation as part of EU policy	High adoption of digital services, innovative digital economy	High public trust, strong digital literacy, government commitment to digital transformation	Scalability and security of e-Residency for global users (potential concern of losing some independence as a part of EU)
Singapore	"Smart Nation" initiative, focus on digital economy, collaboration with BigTech	No specific platform regulation, collaborates closely with BigTech players	Global hub for BigTech, strong digital economy, strong regulatory hand of executive authorities	Business-friendly environment, collaboration with industry leaders	Top-down governance style may not be universally applicable
Kosovo	Kosovo Digital Economy Project (KODE) - matching grants for internet operators	Prices regulated for internet services	Near-universal internet access, boost to local tourism and businesses	Public-private partnership, competitive grant process, incentives for remote areas	-

Source: Compiled by author based on Pillalamarri (2021).

When citizens visit an institution with their electronic ID, they press a special button to confirm their identity. This means the institution must now have its own special infrastructure ready to check the codes that citizens provide. As a result, this stimulus forces both private companies and government bodies to adopt new technologies, even when the costs are high. If they do not use these technologies, people will simply stop coming to them. The method works well for local electronic government services. However, it does not work very well when a country tries to develop its own alternatives to the world's leading social media platforms or video platforms.

The main problem is the lack of real incentives based on convenience for ordinary citizens. Without enough convenience, people simply do not want to use these new platforms. As a result, ordinary citizens do not create any pressure on other people, institutions and organizations to switch to them. People avoid the new services because they do not see any merit in it.

Besides the issue of media regulation, one more question discussed is the effectiveness of the country's approach to controlling the content of global platforms. As for the above issue, the emergence of new technologies has definitely - among other things- opened new opportunities for Internet users, at the same time, online platforms have a powerful impact on our societies today and this couldn't be ignored. Hence, the subject of global digital governance and policy, related to various other domains, and with a distinctive global aspect, is relevant now.

Like the case of Kazakhstan, small countries also have a multitude of strategies and monetary resources that they can use to make the web giants take more notice of them. By forming alliances not only with similarly-sized countries but also within trade blocs, smaller nations can achieve negotiating positions stronger than their individual ones. Unlike AOSIS, a bunch of leaders formed one organisation to speak the same voice due to their same problems, Kazakhstan is the youngest among them that respects the environment as a friend and not as a problem. Coming together, these countries also have a stronger impact in compelling global platforms to deal with their issues more specifically (Lupel et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the coordination of such regional organisations will be enhanced by the united actions of the member states. Leaders from various countries can offer their expertise and experience for the good of the community, even participation in a global forum or transnational network. With this type of interaction, smaller countries will have the means to counter their positions and allow them to be a part of the foremost arbiters of full digital governance and tech leader best practices, which would certainly encompass standards and principles.

Another way that a smaller country may increase its power is by utilising internationally adopted standards for data protection and content regulation. The introduction of standards such as the GDPR that they are in agreement with will create a new point of reference for bargaining, as those multinational firms catering to these regions will have to conform to these rules. Small countries can join together and create group documents like the GDPR. This lets them work as one team and gain more power when they negotiate with big companies. It also helps them protect their internal markets better. For example, Kazakhstan could make such a document together with Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and maybe even Tajikistan. A common document and a single market of 100 million people would be a strong argument in talks with BigTech. It would create one big market with more freedom and a larger audience. This would make it easier to develop their own local alternatives. Of course, there is a risk. Kazakhstan might lose, and the most popular messenger or video platform in the region could become a

Kyrgyz or Uzbek service. Still, shared rules of regulation would allow much more effective cooperation with it.

If country shows the big companies how it can be of great importance to their home markets, especially if country is small, they might also pay more attention to country's demands. Even if the market in a single small country is not as big as the markets in the others, the total of all of these little countries can easily become a place with an enviable number of (internet) users. Not to mention that the message of market access (potential) and the platform's economic profit make a strong point in negotiations.

Also, one can show the other side of the coin, that is supporting the development, and the spread of local internet service options to other countries against global platforms. A successful local platform, whether regional or national, can be used as a means of communication of the fact that there are alternatives and this activity alone can bring a change in the terms under which global a platform operates in a given market.

What are the possibilities of a smaller country having leverage? The legal system is one of the strongholds on which the power of a country depends, and a smaller nation has significant legal and regulatory authority. The execution and implementation of national regulations in areas such as data privacy, the market, and access to these services and products will force international organisations to start a dialogue with your local authority and give in. The threats of huge fines or the possibility of suspending services can be partially effective, this practice has been demonstrated by countries that have been able to stand their ground against platforms that do not meet their requirements (Lupel et al., 2024).

The collective demand and preferences of the citizens of a nation provide great leverage. Big platforms are easily influenced by the public opinion as well as the possibility of user dissatisfaction or boycotts, which can be spread more widely using social media channels.

Realising the control and ownership of national data can also be a tool in the negotiations especially in the case of data privacy and security. Enforcing data localisation requirements, where data that is generated within a state should be physically kept locally, makes it possible for small countries to be empowered and have more control.<sup>14</sup>

Lastly, by creating partnerships with other countries or groups, the member-countries can show a cohesive front in the negotiations, which will be of great help in raising small states' (rom ru) negotiating position. Planed activities and joint announcements have the ability to have a greater impact and lead to better results in talks with global web service leaders if coordinated. A smaller nation also utilises its public diplomacy and strategic communication tactics to not only shape the story but also to win the international backing of their state.

For countries of less than 30 million people who wish to develop an indigenous web service ecosystem, as well as regulate global providers effectively, it is recommended to use a multi-way approach. Such countries have to prioritise the keeping and execution of a national digital strategy to govern issues such as the empowerment of home-grown innovation and the construction of a much more solid regulatory framework for global platforms. Investment in digital infrastructure and expansion of digital literacy programs are the cornerstone of the local digital services growth trajectory and the conscious involvement of citizens.

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<sup>14</sup> *What is the network effect?* Wharton Online (3 February 2023) by A. Martech.  
<https://online.wharton.upenn.edu/blog/what-is-the-network-effect/>

A joint venture urbanisation policy that would concentrate on public-private partnerships to leverage the different resources and know-how of the public and private sectors can enable greater dynamism and innovation in the digital landscape (Chin-Rothmann, 2024).

The establishment of a local market by local companies which aim at local diversification is a strategy that focuses on niche markets and shows the cultural and linguistic characteristics of small countries or specific regions. Besides, this is a vehicle that makes the local heritage specifically visible (UNCTAD, 2020).

The unified initiative of a compact rule which would be effected by collaboration among small nations for the purpose of establishing common standards and reinforcing enforcement and regulation capabilities would enhance the impact on global platforms of such nations. The implementation of a national cybersecurity strategy and data protection for the entire country is of prime importance as it creates safety and trust and forms the base for regulating the data practices of the global service providers. On the other hand, these proactive communication strategies are aimed at building positive communication with the global web service leaders so that the engagement can be constructive.

## CONCLUSION

More recommendations can be made for the countries like Kazakhstan. The country is required to make investments into the "Digital Kazakhstan" programme and also engage in strategic expansion, but with a higher priority of giving specific support to the local web service startups via financial rewards, mentorship, and provision of the infrastructure. At the same time, Kazakhstan should change the regulatory framework of online platforms to ensure a more balanced approach that not only solves national security issues but still protects freedom of expression and the rights of internet users.

Going further, elaboration on collaboration with the Central Asian countries in setting the digital policy and regulation is of great importance as it would help to reach regional digital integration and give them more power as a collective. The use of the rapidly increasing digital infrastructure in Kazakhstan and the multitude of tech talents to attract foreign investment specifically targeting the local web service sector will definitely have a positive impact on the economy and development of the country.

The participation in international forums and organisations is the most effective way for Kazakhstan to exert its strong influence on the digital governance landscape, therefore leading to more significant achievements in its works for specific interests of smaller countries. Eventually, the establishment of a national AI strategy should not only be limited to the development of technology but consider in addition ethical implications, responsible deployment and the possibility to apply AI to local needs and challenges.

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