

DIGITAL SILK ROAD: PROSPECTS FOR UZBEKISTAN IN THE NEW EURASIAN ECONOMIC ORDER

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ABSTRACT

The Digital Silk Road (DSR), a technological dimension of China's Belt and Road Initiative, is transforming digital connectivity across Asia, Europe, and beyond. This article explores Uzbekistan's strategic potential within this initiative as the country seeks to modernize its digital infrastructure and integrate into the New Eurasian Economic Order. The paper examines Uzbekistan's progress in digital policy, regional cooperation, and transnational fiber-optic networks. Through qualitative analysis of government strategies, international reports, and infrastructure projects, the study identifies key opportunities and risks. Findings suggest that Uzbekistan, leveraging its geographic and political positioning, can emerge as a regional digital hub if it successfully manages issues such as cybersecurity, digital sovereignty, and international alignment.

Keywords: *Digital Silk Road; Uzbekistan; Eurasian connectivity; digital infrastructure; Belt and Road Initiative; regional cooperation; digital economy*

INTRODUCTION

The Digital Silk Road (DSR), an extension of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aims to enhance global digital connectivity through infrastructure projects, cloud computing, e-commerce, and telecommunications networks. As global economic competition shifts toward digital transformation, countries in Central Asia are seeking new ways to modernize and integrate into this emerging order. Uzbekistan, located at the heart of Eurasia, holds significant strategic value due to its geographical position and increasing commitment to digital development.

This paper explores Uzbekistan's role in the Digital Silk Road and its potential to become a regional digital hub. The study investigates how investments in fiber-optic networks, digital governance, and international partnerships can boost the country's integration into the New Eurasian Economic Order. The analysis also considers the opportunities and risks associated with digital connectivity, including economic benefits, cybersecurity concerns, and political alignment.

The aim of this paper is to assess how Uzbekistan can leverage the Digital Silk Road to enhance its digital economy, strengthen regional ties, and gain a competitive edge in the global digital space.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative methodology based on descriptive and comparative analysis of official documents, international reports, and secondary data. Key sources include policy papers from the Government of Uzbekistan, publications from international organizations such as the World Bank, UN ESCAP, and China's Belt and Road Portal. Academic articles and expert analyses on the Digital Silk Road and Eurasian integration were also consulted.

The study focuses on examining Uzbekistan's digital development initiatives in the context of regional connectivity, particularly within the framework of the Digital Silk Road. Comparative elements are used to assess Uzbekistan's digital infrastructure progress relative to other Central Asian countries, especially Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. The methodology also involves reviewing cross-border fiber-optic projects, digital government platforms, and partnerships with Chinese technology firms (e.g., Huawei, ZTE).

This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of Uzbekistan's position, opportunities, and limitations in integrating into the emerging Eurasian digital ecosystem.

RESULTS

Uzbekistan has made significant strides in digital transformation over the past decade, particularly in expanding digital infrastructure and e-governance systems. One major achievement is the development of high-speed fiber-optic communication networks as part of the Trans-Eurasian Information Super Highway (TASIM) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)-backed digital connectivity projects. These networks aim to connect China with Europe through Central Asia, placing Uzbekistan as a key transit country.

The launch of the national e-government platform ("my.gov.uz") has also enhanced digital public services, improving efficiency and citizen access. According to the UN E-Government Survey (2022), Uzbekistan improved its ranking by 18 positions compared to 2018, reflecting rapid adoption of digital public management.

In addition, Uzbekistan has strengthened cooperation with Chinese tech firms like Huawei and ZTE to modernize its telecommunications infrastructure. Several projects have been launched to build data centers, expand 5G trials, and improve cybersecurity

systems. These developments align with Uzbekistan’s “Digital Uzbekistan – 2030” strategy, which aims to position the country as a digital hub in Central Asia.

Comparative analysis shows that while Kazakhstan currently leads the region in digital competitiveness, Uzbekistan is rapidly closing the gap, especially in broadband coverage, IT talent development, and regulatory reforms.

Benefits of the Silk Road for Uzbekistan and Other Countries

The revival of the Silk Road plays a significant role in enhancing economic, cultural, and geopolitical cooperation. Uzbekistan, due to its central location in Central Asia, is gaining multiple advantages as a key transit country. The following tables present the main benefits for Uzbekistan and other participating nations.

Benefits for Uzbekistan

Area	Benefit	Supporting Facts
Trade & Transit	Uzbekistan earns revenue as a transit country due to its central location.	In 2024, transit cargo volume reached 35 million tons (Ministry of Transport).
Employment	Thousands of jobs created in transport, logistics, customs, and services.	Logistics centers and railway operations expanded across the country.
Investment	Attracted foreign investment for major infrastructure projects.	Example: China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan railway signed in 2023.

Tourism & Culture	Boost in cultural tourism in cities like Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva.	Over 6 million tourists visited Uzbekistan annually.
Digital Expansion	Development of 'Digital Silk Road' – improved digital infrastructure.	International internet connections have been modernized.

Benefits for Other Countries

Country	Benefit
China	Faster and cheaper export route to Europe.
Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan	Increased transit revenue and access to international markets.
European countries	Easier and faster access to Asian markets.
Tajikistan, Turkmenistan	Attraction of foreign investment and greater regional connectivity.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that Uzbekistan's strategic location and growing investment in digital infrastructure place it in a favorable position within the framework of the Digital Silk Road. As global trade and diplomacy become increasingly digitized, the

ability to serve as a digital transit hub between East and West could significantly boost Uzbekistan's economic and geopolitical influence.

However, several challenges remain. Despite rapid progress, the country still faces gaps in cybersecurity capacity, regulatory enforcement, and digital inclusion in rural areas. Moreover, reliance on Chinese technology, while beneficial for infrastructure development, raises questions about digital sovereignty and potential political dependence. These concerns echo broader global debates over digital geopolitics, particularly in regions influenced by China's Belt and Road Initiative.

On the positive side, Uzbekistan's proactive digital policies, such as the "Digital Uzbekistan – 2030" roadmap, and its increasing regional cooperation show a commitment to long-term digital transformation. By improving cross-border connectivity and engaging in multilateral digital governance frameworks, Uzbekistan can mitigate risks and strengthen its role in the emerging Eurasian digital space.

In this context, policy continuity, enhanced digital education, and multilateral dialogue will be essential to ensure sustainable integration into the Digital Silk Road and to protect national interests in the evolving global digital order.

CONCLUSION

Uzbekistan stands at a critical juncture in its digital development journey, with the Digital Silk Road offering both strategic opportunities and complex challenges. The country's efforts to modernize its digital infrastructure, implement e-government systems, and enhance regional connectivity reflect a broader ambition to position itself as a digital hub in Central Asia.

The analysis suggests that Uzbekistan's engagement in the Digital Silk Road can significantly boost its role in the Eurasian economic landscape—provided that it addresses key risks such as cybersecurity vulnerabilities, digital dependency, and rural access disparities. Continued investment in human capital, transparent governance, and

international cooperation will be essential to realize the full potential of digital integration.

In conclusion, if Uzbekistan maintains its current momentum and adopts a balanced approach to foreign technology partnerships, it can emerge not only as a regional leader in digital connectivity but also as a responsible actor in shaping the future of Eurasia's digital economy.

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