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Digital Sovereignty and Data Colonialism: Governance, Power, and Economic Control in Platform-Dominated Markets

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Abstract

The global economies have reorganized themselves based on the scale and pace of digitization and AI out of fear regarding issues like data ownership, technological dependencies, and control by the State. This paper investigates the issue of digital sovereignty and data colonialism through examining the structures of governance, politics, and political economy in the digital platform-based market. This research belongs to the type of qualitative research since the information collected is from secondary sources including academic journals, institutional publications, and industry research papers. There are five major themes identified through thematic analysis of data collection process and they include data ownership and extraction, market concentration and regulation, technological dependency and economic value distribution. The list goes on to include the dangers posed by the multinational technology firms, who could potentially affect the digital infrastructure, information, and digital economy even more severely. Technological

innovations built on the platform technology would provide opportunities for innovation and connectivity across the world but would also contribute to economic inequality and limit the technological sovereignty of developing economies due to corporate centralization. The findings clearly indicate the need for stringent regulatory framework such as data security laws and digital competition laws that have to be developed to increase the accountability of nations. The analysis highlights the necessity for an international regulatory approach, investments in technology in the nation, and proper data governance and economic engagement to achieve digital sovereignty.
Keywords: Digital Sovereignty; Data Colonialism; Platform Capitalism; Data Governance; Economic Control.

I. INTRODUCTION

The digitalisation of technology and the platform-based economy has significantly remade socio-economic systems across the globe, governance and ways of social interaction [1]. The way data is collected, processed and stored, as well as being exploited for commercial, revenue-generating purposes, is now increasingly being dominated by key digital platforms, which are establishing new regimes of economic dependency and technological power. This has again sparked debates about digital sovereignty and data colonialism, especially concerning inequitable distribution of power over digital resources [2]. Digital sovereignty means the ability to control an organisation and/or government's digital infrastructure, digital data and technological systems. Data colonialism illustrates the ideas of power-based corporations exploiting personal and organisational data, but failing to involve those who contribute to the data in sharing the economic benefit. Platform markets have increased the power of global technology firms driven by their own algorithms, cloud-based, digital markets and vast data systems [3]. This could lead to a growing reliance on foreign-owned platforms in developing economies and the smaller companies, reducing their technological sovereignty and economic autonomy. Additionally, data ownership creates privacy, competition, national security and digital wealth issues. Overlooking private technology companies' control over critical technosystems and trans-border movement of data, existing regulation is put to the test.

This work intends to determine the relationship between digital sovereignty and data colonialism, using the prism of platform-enclosed governance systems, power structures and economic domination. It talks about the impact that a multi-lateral platform will exert on data ownership and data dependency, regulatory processes and value creation in different economies. Moreover, the research considers the necessity of good data governance policies, collaboration with regulations and local technological resources in order to have digital autonomy. The aim of the research is to support the general reflection on the political and economic footprint of 'platform capitalism' and to seek out forms of governance that consider and foster the right to digital participation in an equitable way. Lastly, it points towards the significance of ensuring a balanced system of digital governance that would protect data rights, reduce dependence on technology, and lead to a more equal distribution of economic benefits in the more interdependent global economy of the digital and technological age.

II. RELATED WORKS

With the growing power of multinationals technology platforms in economic and political systems all over the world, digital sovereignty and data colonialism have attracted attention of scholars for further investigation. Previous literature explores the connection between data ownership with technological dependency and Artificial Intelligence (AI), regulatory control and international power disparities. Researchers should attend to the extraction of critical

information within the region by taking into account political, economical, and social regional lenses, as explored by Grohmann (2025) on critical data studies in Latin America [15]. This study helps to make the topic of data colonialism visible and focuses on the unequal relations that can be created in technology to maintain unequal positions in the world. Likewise, Hamadeh and Amin (2025) look at the role of artificial intelligence in education and digital sovereignty, highlighting the need to keep up institutional and national technology sovereignty [16]. The themes in which they are engaged demonstrate concerns over technologisation and the impacts by external digital infrastructures over the development of education. He and Zeng (2025) present the geopolitical economical analysis of the strategies of transnational informatics governance of two superpower countries (namely China and India) [17]. Their work shows that national interest and national regulatory priorities and geopolitical factors have a strong influence on the international data management. This view is an important one where countries are determined to strike a balance between international cooperation with digital information and control of information resources within the country. The re-evaluation of the concept of digital sovereignty, as discussed by Hung (2026), is to be viewed within the frames of both political and philosophical perspectives towards Artificial Intelligence [18]. The study identifies the possible complications of not transitioning to having humans that make decisions rather than AIs.The study sheds light on the possible problems of human autonomy and state power in response to the growing influence of AIs on the decision-making process. Ilyas (2025) looks at the digital coloniality in the Southeast Asian region and how digital information practices may recapitulate inequality in power [19]. Data colonialism is a research activity that goes beyond economic interests in data extraction, playing attention to its overall political and institutional aspects. Ishkhanyan (2026) investigates digital colonialism, techno-sovereignty and infrastructural power, highlighting the importance of ownership of technological infrastructure in affecting political and economic independence [20]. In yet another research, Ishkhanyan (2026) discusses the concept of virtual power in relation to digital colonialism in the context of AI-mediated “metaverse” environments, highlighting ethical issues related to technological control, sovereignty and resistance [21]. Moreover, Ishkhanyan (2025) examines the sovereignty-internationalism dilemma in AI governance, and proposes the concept of "digital federalism" as a new lens to view the world of algorithmic control [22]. This book demonstrates that, despite the emphasis on technological co-operation, achieving an equilibrium between national regulatory independence and international technological co-operation is far from easy. Ivic and Troitiño (2022) present a study on digital sovereignty and identity in the European Union (EU), which highlights the need for digital sovereignty as a challenge in the European integration and institutionalisation processes [23]. Recently published work also covers regulatory/ jurisdictional aspects of new technologies. In the book chapter by Judite Gonçalves (2026), the regulation of AI using tools from data protection, civil rights and groundbreaking lawsuits is analyzed, with a clear focus on the necessity of regulatory accountability from a fundamental rights perspective [24]. Alongside that, a focus on restoring epistemic sovereignty in the global setting of artificial intelligence is developed by Kakraba, Edmund and Srivastav (2026) who term this cognitive sovereignty and decolonial public health [25]. In international trade and investment, Kgoale and Odeku (2025) explore the jurisdictional issues of bringing the law to the execution of AI in international trade and investment [26].

III. METHODS AND MATERIALS

3.1 Research Design

The study was designed in a qualitative research approach to study the concepts of Data

colonialism, Digital sovereignty and the Governance and power structures in the platform-centric markets [4]. The combination of institutional, political, economic and technological relationships that are discussed in the research are complicated; in the light of these conditions, using a qualitative approach is proper. What is considered in the study is the impact that a multinational on the digital platforms has on data ownership, technological dependency, regulatory autonomy as well as the distribution of economic value between different economies [5]. The descriptive and exploratory research design is used in this study to gain insights into the current governance patterns and how platform-based centralization of the economy may impact it.

Secondary data is the main type of data used for this research and is gathered from academic publications, policy reports, handbooks, regulatory frameworks and industry's research. It allows for insights into existing theories and on-going research and debate in digital governance [6]. The role of the digital infrastructure, the links between the same and the ability of a national government to formulate independent policies are addressed in particular.

3.2 Research Philosophy and Approach

The research philosophy adopted is interpretivist as the conceptions of sovereignty of the digital and data colonialism have different interpretations of the concepts of power and ownership, data governance, and economic dependency. Interpretivism allows explaining and dissecting what governments, businesses, researchers and even regulatory agencies know regarding, and their response to, the process of digital transformation. It also symbolizes an opportunity to create an insight in legislation and policy concerning digital governance.

The assembled secondary evidence is examined using inductive research approach, to reveal themes and relationships that continue to occur. This does not analyze an already existing statistical hypothesis but rather makes generalized concepts by analyzing already published materials, change of rules and trade practices. The inductive method will help ascertain patterns with respect to extracting data and concentrating platforms, regulatory dependency and technology independence [7].

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Various secondary qualitative data provided by reliable sources will be the foundation of the research. Given the character of the articles in academic journals, one could say that the former are the key to understanding the developments within the field of digital colonialism, platform capitalism, and the issue of data governance and technological sovereignty. In addition to that, the International data reports by such institutions as The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), The World Bank, and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) could be viewed as another source of valuable information about the issues of digital economic inequalities and international flows and related regulations.

The study of policies of different countries and legal tools adopted by them could help us understand the regulatory framework between data ownership and privacy and cross-border data transfer and digital infrastructure. In particular, the measures such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) by the European Union, the Digital Markets Act (DMA), and national data protection laws should be studied. Finally, the industry reporting will give us an idea about the market power of technology platforms, cloud computing, online marketplaces, digital advertising, and artificial intelligence [8].

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Table 1: Secondary Data Sources and Their Research Contributions

Data source	**Information collected**	**Research contribution**
Academic journals	Digital colonialism, platform capitalism and data ownership	Theoretical understanding
OECD publications	Digital economy and data governance	Policy evaluation
UNCTAD reports	Global digital economic inequalities	International comparison
World Bank reports	Digital infrastructure and economic development	Development perspectives
Government legislation	Privacy, data protection and digital regulation	Regulatory assessment
Industry reports	Platform concentration and market structures	Corporate power analysis

The selection of the sources is dependent upon the usefulness, credibility, the quality of the publication as well as the relevance to the research aim. Peer-reviewed academic papers and other esteemed institutional reports are given the highest priority. Books published recently are given prominence with a focus on issues that are pertinent to the newest developments, but also on fundamentals of theoretical studies to establish the concept underlying.

3.4 Research Scope and Selection Criteria

The deepest market structure to be targeted by the study is mostly dominated by platforms, such as cloud computing market, social media, e-commerce market, online advertising market and artificial intelligence market [9]. Such sectors are picked because they depict how data benefits their sectors and the implications of their governance on their market and market structures.
Its geographical scope is the world around and one can make comparisons between the developed and the emerging economies. Regulatory capacity is given special consideration, technological infrastructure and dependence on multinational digital companies.
The following criteria are used in making a selection of sources:

- Relevance: Publications must be based on the concepts of digital sovereignty, data colonialism, governing platforms or economic power.
- Credibility: Publications and research of research institutions that are peer reviewed and recognised is highlighted.
- Recent research happens to be a priority according to Timeliness.
- Accessibility: Sources are sufficient enough to give the data required to have meaningful qualitative analysis.
- Comparative value: Publications, which provide another geolocational, institutional or economic valuation are appropriated.

Quations that contain any unverifiable claims, lack of proper methodological information or irrelevant to the purpose of the study are not included.

3.5 Data Analysis Technique

The methodology employed to analyze the data in this study is thematic analysis where the secondary data collected was analyzed systematically. Thematic analysis is able to establish correlations, repetitions and relationships within research literature and policy and institutional documents. This is done by becoming acquainted with the gathered material, initial coding, themes that pop up, categorizing themes, and interpreting the results.
It is discussed based on five central themes; data ownership/ extraction, platform concentration, regulatory sovereignty, dependency on technologies, and platform distribution of economic value [10]. These themes provide a framework of the themes of the impact of data-driven platform on governance and economic relation.

Table 2: Thematic Analysis Framework

Analytical theme	**Key examination areas**	**Expected analytical focus**
Data ownership and extraction	Personal data collection, processing and commercialisation	Data control and exploitation
Platform concentration	Market dominance, algorithms and infrastructure ownership	Corporate power and competition
Regulatory sovereignty	Privacy legislation and cross-border data governance	Governmental autonomy

Technological dependency	Cloud services, AI infrastructure and foreign technology	Digital independence
Economic value distribution	Revenue generation, taxation and digital inequalities	Economic control and fairness

The identified themes are contrasted and compared to discover similarities, differences and possible inconsistencies. A major initial step towards evaluating the effects of digital sovereignty is the analysis of the amalgamation of the interests of corporations, the rules of the game of a nation and international economic institutions with a critical perspective of sovereignty.The significance of this comparison in grasping how digital sovereignty will affect corporate strategies, governmental governance, and international economic institutions is that it is an initial effort to attain clarity on the issue.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

There is no need for human interaction to obtain information for the research as it is completely secondary information. But, there are numerous factors of scholastic dishonesty that one must consider. Using the right reference and citation of any information obtained in any other publication is the way to go. The aim of the study is the presentation of the contentions of the original authors as close to a pure presentation as feasible and to avoid giving anything short of pure primary evidence and to differentiate between evidence and a critical interpretation [11]. What is desired is reliable and publicly available sources to provide both transparency and credibility of their research.

3.7 Methodological Limitations

Though the study cites some of the shortcomings that are associated with secondary qualitative studies. The different sources have their own political, economic and institutional aspects of views that may have a different interpretation. Additionally, the constantly evolving digital economy presents an unfixed environment and the likelihood of modification of the regulation and end-user platform approaches once it is published. Interviews that were conducted were not discovered as primary or surveys, either, in part, which implies that the opinions of individual platform users, companies and most importantly policymakers are not recorded. They have their limitations, but through academic literature, regulatory and institutional reports, a feasible starting point to delve into the problem of Digital sovereignty and data colonialism in what can be termed as platform-based markets is offered.

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Overview of the Findings

The conclusions of the study of secondary literature, institutional reports and digital governance models indicate the strict Lyotardian relationship between the notions of digital sovereignty and data colonialism in the markets controlled by platforms. The findings show that the ever-

expanding amount of information, online infrastructures, cloud computing, artificial intelligence and online platforms to which multinationals have entry are becoming decisive in business activities around the globe. The digital segment can provide new space, global connection and economic growth and development, however, it also brings the disparities between the developed and the developing economies [12].
The thematic analysis demonstrates 5 key themes including Data ownership and extraction, Platform market concentration, Regulatory sovereignty, Technological dependency, Economic value distribution. The information below indicates that there exists an imbalance in digital wealth, and the owner of the channel of digital communication is an even greater powerful agent of economic or geopolitical competency.

4.2 Data Ownership and the Expansion of Data Colonialism

The findings indicate that information has now been transformed into an economic resource which can generate business opportunities, by utilizing the online platform. Platforms collect a significant amount of data based on values from the users on the web and intelligent individuals through web transactions, Internet searches, social networks, location services and customized applications. They transfer the information using advanced analytical systems so that they can make the most out of targeted advertising, predict consumer behavior, recommend products, and make business decisions.
Data colonialism is one concept which can help understand these dynamics and how a disparity can occur between the data provider and organisation that owns the data infrastructure. Individuals generate quality information to support their everyday consumption of online platforms and platforms generally are more in control of the processing and commercialisation of the information [13].
Table 1: Key Dimensions of Data Colonialism

Dimension	Observed practice	Economic implication
Data extraction	Continuous collection of user information	Creation of commercial data assets
Data ownership	Corporate control over collected datasets	Unequal distribution of benefits
Behavioural monitoring	Tracking digital activities	Improved targeted advertising
Algorithmic processing	Analysis of user preferences	Competitive advantage

Cross-border transfers	International movement of information	Reduced national control

The results indicate that personal data is not the only type of data that can be subjected to data colonialism. It also involves the centralization of analytical facilities and economic gains into a comparably few and strong corporations. This results in a situation where users and small enterprises can participate in the creation of value in the digital sphere without corresponding economic returns.

4.3 Platform Concentration and Corporate Power

The second big finding relates to the emerging centralisation of economic power into large digital platforms. The search engines, social networks, online stores, cloud software providers, digital advertising firms are among the companies relying on large networks of users, technology, and large amounts of data. They can have a strong status in the market, which makes for substantive barriers against the competition [14].

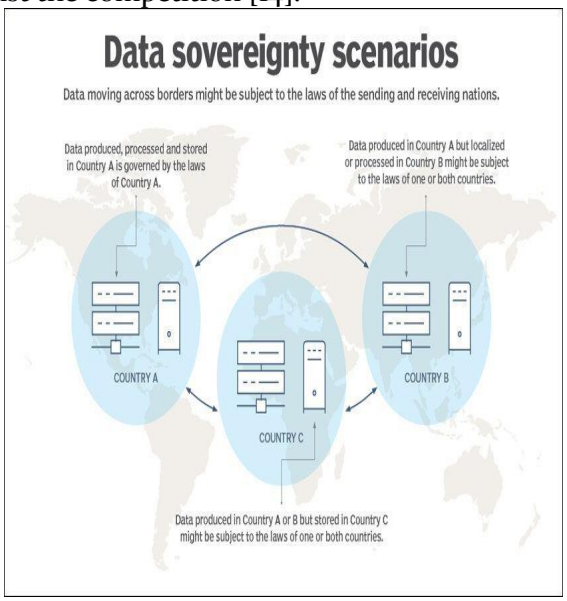


Figure 1: "DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY"

The value of a digital service increases as additional participants and consumers can join the service because the network effects enable the platform to be stronger. This creates the possibility of current platforms to increase revenues, compile more data, enriche their services and create viable businesses and consumer bases.

The analysis is an indication of the existence of governance problems and efficiencies in the concentration of the platforms. Highly concentrated markets have the potential of increasing consumer choice, giving smaller organisations better bargaining power, but the decreasing number of platforms may offer less support and less sophisticated digital services. Therefore, to have a successful digital sovereignty, there must be competition policy and accountability of platforms.

4.4 Regulatory Sovereignty and Governance Challenges

Yet, in the case of the third report, it serves as a pointer to the importance of having the regulatory framework at the national level for protecting the digital sovereignty. It should be noted that the state is conscious about the role of the information control, internet governance, and personal data sovereignty in national security and freedom.

One of the major regulatory frameworks of this type is the EU regulation, named the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). In addition, the Digital Markets Act aims to tackle competitive asymmetry caused by the big digital gatekeepers [27].

It should be noted though that there is considerable variation between the capabilities of different nations in regulating. The more developed the economy of the nation is, the higher its capacity and capability are. High level of digital governance policies might be hard on the developing economies to monitor the multi-nationals and setting policies on them.

Table 3: Regulatory Approaches to Digital Sovereignty

Regulatory framework	**Primary objective**	**Contribution to digital governance**
GDPR (European Union)	Personal data protection	Strengthens individual data rights
Digital Markets Act (EU)	Fair digital competition	Addresses platform gatekeeper power
Digital Services Act (EU)	Accountability of digital services	Improves platform responsibility
India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023	Personal data protection	Establishes a national data protection framework
OECD data governance principles	International policy cooperation	Encourages consistent governance approaches

The outcomes of these findings showed that the national law would not be sufficient to address the issue of data colonialism since there are digital platforms that cross the borders of a country. The level of cooperation between countries, transparency of working rules and of enforcement support, therefore, has to be increased in order to effectively govern. Yet in a situation where there is lack of such co-ordination, there is the advantage to multi-national companies where they may take advantage of differences in the regulations of countries.

4.5 Technological Dependency and Digital Inequality

The next consequence is the dependency of developing economies by multinationals on

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technology. Cloud computing, artificial intelligence, data center, digital payment/enterprise software are used more and more as a part of key economic operations. However, when such technologies are mainly owned by foreign firms, then it might occur that the national organisations are less in charge of these digital structures.

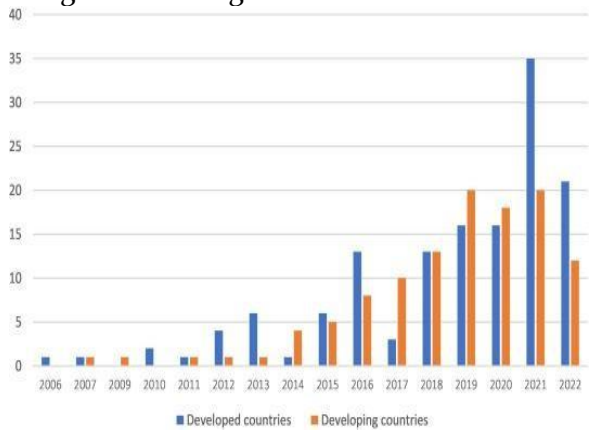


Figure 2: "Digital platforms and development"

This dependency could result in economic and strategic weaknesses [28]. However, those organizations that heavily rely on the services of external cloud service providers, may face difficulties in switching the providers based on both technical challenges, the cost of transferring data and systems between the providers as well as the compatibility issues. This is also applicable to those countries that have not had enough technologies to develop, yet with little self-reliance, it would be challenging to maintain digital infrastructure.

Table 4: Technological Dependency Across Economic Contexts

Factor	**Developed economies**	**Developing economies**
Digital infrastructure	Generally stronger domestic capabilities	Greater variation and external dependency
Research investment	Relatively established innovation ecosystems	Often constrained resources
Regulatory capacity	More developed institutional frameworks	Uneven enforcement capabilities
Cloud computing	Access to multiple providers and domestic initiatives	Greater reliance on external providers in some markets

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AI development	Stronger access to investment and computing resources	Potential technological disadvantages

A comparison has the ability to emphasize the differences which are based on the economic development of an individual country but does not suggest that there should be similarity between the development pattern of all the developed and developing economies. Some of the developing countries have been enhancing their technological capacity by development of their own technological infrastructure besides some having generated their own innovation policies and some of the changes in regulation [29].

A good example of such a change is provided by India, whereby it has laid out plans to digitalize its public infrastructure including Aadhaar and the Unified Payments Interface (UPI). The different initiatives emphasise the role of domestic enabling digital skills of digital markets of greater participation. Nevertheless, the sovereignty needs to be reinforced with more investments in (cyber)security, local innovations, data management, and technological abilities.

4.6 Economic Control and Distribution of Digital Value

The fifth observation indicates an absence of platform-dominated markets has the potential of influencing the formation and distribution of economic value. There is a tendency to have digital platforms acting as an interface between the consumers, businesses, advertisers and service businesses. They can even define the conditions of the deal and the convenience of their contacts with their clients, costs of advertisements and what products and services they can observe.

Although digital marketplaces bring synergies to small businesses through giving them greater access to consumers market, it also results in the small business losing power through the need to be more dependent on the infrastructure of the platform. A business stands the chance of making money and losing money in the platform charges, algorithmic-ranking systems, advertising requirements and restrictions.

Table 5: Economic Consequences of Platform-Dominated Markets

Economic dimension	**Positive impact**	**Potential negative impact**
Market access	Wider customer reach	Dependence on platform rules
Employment	New digital employment opportunities	Unequal distribution of income
Innovation	Improved digital services	Concentration of technological advantages
International	Easier cross-border	Unequal value capture

trade	transactions	
Business development	Access to advanced infrastructure	Switching costs and platform dependency

This analysis indicates that infrastructure of economic sovereignty goes beyond having access to digital technologies. It also demands the ability to engage in democratic value generation in the digital realm and to keep a share of the value created in the region. Thus, the policies on taxation, competition, fair marketplace practices and support of domestic technology driven enterprises are important governance issues.

4.7 Integrated Discussion of the Findings

The multiple results confirm that digital sovereignty is determined by an interaction between the concentration of corporations, the regulatory capabilities, technological infrastructure and economic dependency. Data colonialism is a situation where these arrangements lead to long-term disparities in access, control and commercialisation of digital resources [30].
A crucial point to note is that, “Digital sovereignty does not mean a complete technological isolation, nor a restriction on the international transfer of data.” Rather, it's a matter of national and institutional control that is robust enough to give one the freedom of action to make decisions in order to engage with global digital markets.

V. CONCLUSION

The perspectives regarding digital sovereignty and data colonialism were explored through an analysis of the theories of platform-bounded markets, user-governance and power mechanisms. It is clear how the concentration of the digital infrastructure, data and technologies took place among multinational corporations and how the economic and political relations were reshaped in other parts of the world. Even though the digital platforms contribute to the innovation, connectivity and opportunities, the questions about data rights, dependence on technology, competition and benefits arise. The analysis showed that apart from the collecting of the data as personal data, data colonialism also consists in the accumulation of the technologies and control over them, as well as decision-making. A vast database, complex algorithms, network effects, the winning elements of large digital platforms could boost the significance of these corporations and at the same time limit the independence of the smaller firms and developing countries. Furthermore, there is also the diversity of the influence of regulators on digital transformation, which creates difficulties for the government in creating independent digital regulations. There are already some initiatives in this area, such as GDPR and the Digital Markets Act established by the EU, demonstrating that the law should provide the greater responsibility and protection for the digital platforms.
Furthermore, the study demonstrates the relevance of technology independence through the development of infrastructure and artificial intelligence and Data Governance. Flexibility that will allow for innovations, regulation implementation, and independence from other countries' technology giants may help nations like India to enhance their digital sovereignty. However, digital sovereignty should lead to international cooperation rather than isolation of technologies. As per the results of the research, international cooperation between global institutions, technology providers, businesses, and governments is required to create an efficient digital sovereignty. It is necessary to conduct further research to determine the efficiency of digital

sovereignty measures and influence on small businesses, developing countries, and individuals' data sovereignty. Lastly, the development of efficient digital governance mechanisms is important for lowering data colonialism, solving inequality issues, and balancing economic impacts of digitalization.

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