Volume 6, Issue 7, 2022

Peer-reviewed, open-access journal dedicated to publishing high-quality original research articles, literature reviews, case studies, and theoretical papers that contribute to the understanding of human behavior and social phenomena.

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Developing Scalable Data Infrastructure for Retail E-Commerce Growth in Emerging East Asian Markets

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ABSTRACT

E-commerce has seen rapid growth in emerging East Asian markets such as China, Indonesia, and Vietnam in recent years. However, the supporting data infrastructure in these countries has struggled to keep pace. In order to sustain continued e-commerce growth, scalable data solutions are needed to handle increasing data volume, variety, and velocity. This paper examines the unique data challenges faced by emerging East Asian e-commerce firms and provides strategies for developing scalable data infrastructure. A technology framework centered around cloud computing, big data analytics, and artificial intelligence is proposed to handle the massive amounts of consumer, product, and transactional data generated. Specific solutions discussed include migrating core e-commerce platforms to the cloud, leveraging distributed NoSQL databases for flexibility, building data pipelines and data lakes for storage and analysis, applying machine learning algorithms to drive personalization and recommendations, and utilizing natural language processing for chatbots and customer service. Implementation considerations around data security, privacy, localization, and talent development are also discussed to tailor solutions to the emerging markets. With the right data infrastructure strategy anchored in next-generation technologies, emerging East Asian markets can foster innovation, gain insights into consumer behavior, provide superior customer experiences, and drive the next phase of e-commerce growth in the region. expansion.

Keywords: *E-commerce, Emerging markets, Data infrastructure, Cloud computing, big data analytics, Artificial intelligence*

Introduction

E-commerce, a technological phenomenon, has ushered in a transformative era in the global retail industry, offering consumers the convenience of exploring and acquiring a wide array of products through internet-connected devices. This paradigm shift has left an indelible mark on retail, reshaping the way people shop, and its effects have been felt worldwide [1]. While the roots of e-commerce might be traced back to the developed markets of the United States and the United Kingdom, the developing economies of East Asia have been at the forefront of the e-commerce revolution in recent years. This expansion of e-commerce into emerging markets is indicative of a broader trend where digitalization and increased internet access are driving a significant transformation in the retail landscape. China stands as the preeminent exemplar of e-commerce's astonishing

growth. It has surpassed all other nations to become the world's largest e-commerce market, with more than half of the Chinese population participating in online purchases in 2019. The rise of e-commerce in China can be attributed to a multitude of factors. The country's technological innovation, most notably the emergence of tech giants like Alibaba and JD.com, has played a pivotal role [2]. These companies have not only provided e-commerce platforms but have also ventured into diverse sectors, from financial services to cloud computing, creating a vast digital ecosystem. Moreover, the widespread adoption of mobile payments and the rise of digital wallets have made transactions more accessible and secure, bolstering consumer trust in online shopping [3]. Additionally, the rise of the middle class, urbanization, and changing consumer preferences have fueled the demand for e-commerce in China [4]. The convenience of online shopping and the ability to access a plethora of products from the comfort of one's home have contributed to the immense popularity of e-commerce platforms [5].

Southeast Asia, comprising countries like Indonesia and Vietnam, is another dynamic region experiencing rapid e-commerce growth [6]. The expansion of e-commerce in these markets is primarily driven by the increasing penetration of the internet and the rising middle-class population. As more people gain access to the internet through affordable smartphones and improved infrastructure, e-commerce platforms have become easily accessible. The flexibility offered by online shopping, with features such as product comparison, extensive choices, and the convenience of doorstep delivery, has found resonance among the emerging middle class. E-commerce has thus become a channel of choice for consumers in these markets.

Indonesia, the largest economy in Southeast Asia, has emerged as a vibrant e-commerce market. A youthful population, smartphone penetration, and a burgeoning e-commerce ecosystem have created fertile ground for online retail. E-commerce companies in Indonesia have adapted to local preferences, offering a variety of payment options, including cash on delivery, to address the unique challenges of the market. Moreover, government initiatives and investments in digital infrastructure have further catalyzed the growth of e-commerce in the country [7].

Vietnam, with its fast-growing economy and increasing internet connectivity, is also witnessing a surge in e-commerce adoption. E-commerce platforms in Vietnam have been quick to adapt to the changing landscape, and they have integrated with social media, harnessing the power of these platforms for marketing and sales [8]. The government's supportive policies and initiatives aimed at digitalization have provided a conducive environment for e-commerce to flourish. As a result, Vietnam's e-commerce sector is experiencing exponential growth, and it is expected to continue its upward trajectory in the coming years. However, a key challenge facing e-commerce firms in emerging East Asian markets is developing data infrastructure that can keep pace with business growth. E-commerce generates tremendous amounts of transactional data related to customers, products, fulfillment, and more [9], [10]. Data volume is expanding exponentially as e-commerce sales increase each year. Moreover, data variety and velocity are also intensifying. Customer interactions occur across more touchpoints like social media and mobile apps, generating diverse data types. Firms require real-time data insights to drive timely business decisions and personalization. Legacy data infrastructure in emerging markets often struggles with the 3V challenges of volume, variety, and velocity. Systems are siloed, on-premises storage is limited, and analytics are retrospective versus real-time.

To sustain rapid e-commerce growth, emerging East Asian firms need to focus on building next-generation data infrastructure that is scalable. Scalability entails having the agility to cost-effectively handle increasing data demands. Infrastructure must seamlessly scale up or down to match e-commerce workloads [11]. Companies that develop scalable data platforms will be positioned to innovate faster and provide superior customer experiences. Those that fail to adapt risk losing competitiveness, especially to tech-savvy international e-commerce players. This paper will examine strategies and technologies that can enable scalable data infrastructure for emerging East Asian e-commerce firms. First, the unique data challenges of these markets will be analyzed. Next, a technology framework centered on cloud computing, big data, and artificial intelligence (AI) will be proposed. Implementation factors around security, privacy, and localization will also be discussed. With the right strategic approach, emerging East Asian firms can build adaptive data infrastructure to thrive in the digital economy [12].

Unique Data Challenges in Emerging East Asian E-Commerce

E-commerce data infrastructure in emerging East Asian markets faces distinct challenges compared to developed economies. These challenges stem from the unique characteristics of these markets, as well as gaps in legacy systems. By examining the specific data issues faced by firms in China, Southeast Asia, and other emerging Asian economies, better context can be developed for crafting scalable infrastructure solutions. Some of the key data challenges include:

Data Volume and Performance: E-commerce transaction volumes are expanding rapidly as online purchasing gains adoption across emerging Asia. In China, the e-commerce market grew by 20% to reach $1.93 trillion in 2019, accounting for over a third of global e-commerce spending. Southeast Asia's e-commerce gross merchandise volume (GMV) hit $38 billion in 2019 and is growing at an annual rate of 61%. Accommodating this surge in data volume strains legacy systems. Firms require higher capacity storage and computing power. Yet on-premises servers have limited scalability and performance constraints. Transaction bottlenecks occur during peak sales events like Singles Day. Data infrastructure must be able to seamlessly scale up to accommodate traffic spikes [13].

Data Silos: Monolithic systems create fragmented data silos in many emerging East Asian firms. E-commerce transactions generate data across platforms like online marketplaces, social commerce apps, websites, and brick-and-mortar stores. Often, this data is trapped in isolated systems and databases. Critical Shopper data resides in a CRM system, while Order data lives in an ERP database. Catalog data may be in product content management tools. Valuable cross-channel insights are lost due to fragmented infrastructure. Firms need unified data platforms that break down silos and provide organization-wide access to enriched data.

Real-Time Analytics: To keep pace with fierce e-commerce competition in Asia, companies require real-time data analytics and insights. However, batch-oriented analytics on static datasets are still commonplace. Valuable business moments and opportunities can be missed due to analytics lag. For example, a customer interaction or negative social media post may require immediate response, versus waiting for overnight batch reports. Scalable infrastructure must enable streaming analytics and event triggers to activate real-time responses. Matching data velocity with business velocity is critical.

Advanced Analytics: While transactional analytics are widespread, advanced methods like machine learning and AI remain limited in emerging Asian firms. Few have the data science skills or tools to leverage areas like predictive analytics, recommendation engines, and natural language processing. International players with these capabilities can outmaneuver local incumbents. Developing big data and AI platforms on scalable

infrastructure can help close this analytics gap. This allows emerging firms to turn their data into actionable strategic assets.

Data Security and Privacy Restrictions: As e-commerce data volumes grow in Asia, so do risks related to cybersecurity and privacy. High-profile data breaches have occurred in the region, eroding consumer trust. Stricter privacy laws are also emerging, like China's Personal Information Security Specification. Scalable infrastructure must prevent unauthorized access and enable encryption, access controls, and governance [14]. Data locality laws may require onshore storage and processing - a hurdle for global cloud services. Localization, along with data anonymization and regulated access, helps firms balance analytics needs with compliance [15].

This examination of key data challenges provides essential context for infrastructure modernization. The next section will propose a strategic framework and technology architecture for scalable data platforms in emerging East Asian e-commerce.

Proposed Strategic Framework for Scalable Data Infrastructure

To address these challenges, emerging East Asian firms require a strategic approach to scalable infrastructure anchored around five pillars:

1. Transition to cloud computing
2. Implement big data architecture
3. Enable advanced analytics and AI
4. Unify data and break down silos
5. Ensure security, privacy and localization

Under this framework, legacy systems are modernized with managed cloud infrastructure, distributed big data platforms, and intelligent analytics. Firms can leverage these technologies to create unified, scalable data architectures that drive growth. The strategic pillars are underpinned by a proposed reference technology architecture.

Cloud Computing Foundation: The base layer of scalable infrastructure is cloud computing. On-premise data centers have inherent limitations around fixed capacity and cost. Cloud's usage-based model provides infinite scalability to handle fluctuations in data volume, users, and queries. Leading hyperscale cloud providers like AWS, Azure, and Alibabi offer compute, storage, and services on-demand. Firms can start with public cloud and evolve to hybrid models that integrate private cloud servers [16]. By moving e-commerce workloads to the cloud, businesses gain automatic scalability and optimal performance .

Distributed Big Data Architecture: On the cloud foundation, distributed big data architecture provides scalable data storage and processing. The Hadoop framework with HDFS handles large datasets and workload distribution across clustered commodity servers. NoSQL databases like HBase further scale to accommodate unstructured data. Container orchestration platforms like Kubernetes flexibly scale applications and microservices using cloud resources. Big data architecture eliminates capacity constraints while optimizing cost - key advantages over legacy data warehouses.

Advanced Analytics and AI: Scalable big data platforms enable advanced analytics like machine learning and AI to drive value from e-commerce data. Distributed processing engines like Spark quickly analyze big data for real-time insights. Drag-and-drop machine learning simplifies access to predictive analytics and personalization. Natural language and vision AI extract insights from unstructured content. By leveraging big data with advanced analytics, firms can keep pace with e-commerce competition.

Unified Data: Big data architecture breaks down legacy silos using data lakes and enterprise buses to unify disparate sources. Data lakes store any type of structured and

unstructured data in native formats. Integration tools like Apache NIFI then catalog assets for easy discovery [17]. Using metadata layers, unified datasets can be published to data marts and warehouses to power business analytics. This enterprise data approach ends fragmented silos.

Security, Privacy and Localization: With e-commerce data assets centralized in the cloud, cybersecurity and access controls become critical. Encryption, role-based access, VPCs, firewalls, and event monitoring secure cloud data and infrastructure. Anonymization and tokenization preserve customer privacy when analyzing data. Data localization adherence can be achieved using country-specific cloud regions. A governance framework manages policies and compliance for data usage. With rigorous security, privacy and localization, firms balance analytics goals with regional regulations [18]. This strategic framework creates a foundation for scalable e-commerce data platforms. The underlying architecture uses leading technologies that can be tailored to each firm's infrastructure maturity and analytics objectives. In the next sections, we will dive deeper into technical architecture and implementation considerations.

Detailed Technology Architecture and Components

The following exhibits present a detailed reference technology architecture aligned to the preceding strategic framework. Key components build a cloud-based big data platform that ingests, stores, and analyzes large, fast-moving e-commerce data sources to power customer experiences and business decisions.

Exhibit 1: Scalable E-Commerce Data Infrastructure - Technology Architecture Blueprint

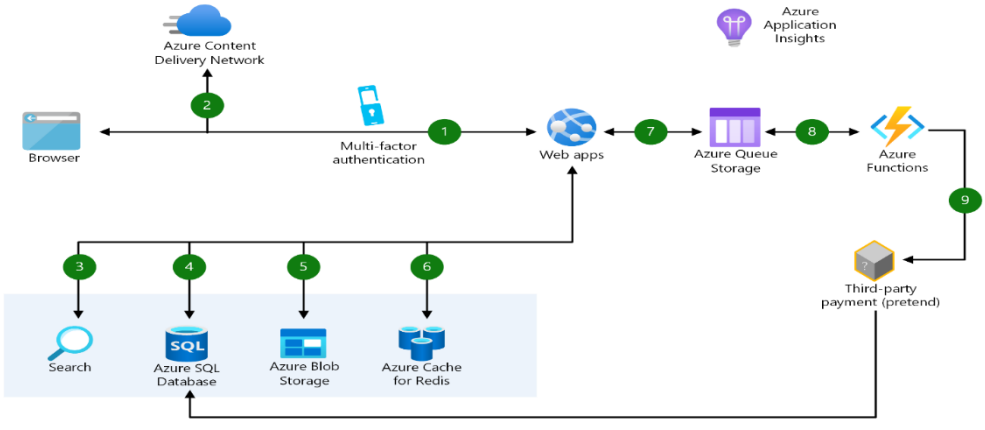

Exhibit 2: Scalable Data Infrastructure - Key Technology Components and Vendors

Component	Description	Leading Vendors
Cloud Infrastructure	Scalable, on-demand computing, storage and services. Options for public, private and hybrid models.	AWS, Microsoft Azure, Alibaba Cloud, Google Cloud
Data Ingestion	Real-time streaming data pipelines and ETL tools to collect and process data from sources.	Kafka, Spark Streaming, Apache NIFI, AWS Kinesis
Data Lakes	Scalable raw storage for structured, semi-structured and unstructured data in native formats.	AWS S3, HDFS, Azure Data Lake Storage

Databases	Distributed NoSQL databases for storage and analysis of unstructured big data.	HBase, MongoDB, Cassandra, DynamoDB
Data Warehouse	Central repository for structured, analyzed data to support business reporting.	AWS Redshift, Snowflake, Azure SQL Data Warehouse
Machine Learning	Managed platform for developing, training and deploying ML models at scale.	AWS SageMaker, Azure ML Studio, Google AI Platform
Analytics & Visualization	Tools to analyze data and visualize insights through dashboards and apps.	Tableau, Looker, Power BI, Databricks
Orchestration	Automates and manages scalable workflows for big data processing.	Apache Airflow, Kubernetes, AWS EMR
Security	Encryption, access controls, firewalls and monitoring to protect data assets and infrastructure.	AWS Key Management Service, Azure Security Center, Ping Identity

This reference architecture demonstrates how disparate data sources can be ingested into a scalable cloud big data platform. The raw lake provides storage for any volume and variety of structured, semi-structured and unstructured data. Databases and warehouses structure curated datasets for business reporting and analytics. Orchestration coordinates and monitors complex data workflows. Finally, advanced analytics and machine learning activate real-time insights from the data. Underpinning the technology is robust cloud security and access control [19].

While the components provide a blueprint, the architecture remains flexible for individual company needs in emerging Asian markets. As firms mature, additional tools can be incorporated for specialized analytics like attribution, location intelligence and customer micro-segmentation. Next we will explore key factors around planning and implementing scalable data infrastructure.

Considerations for Implementation and Adoption: Transitioning to a modern scalable architecture brings both technological and organizational considerations. Data infrastructure impacts processes, culture and employee skills in addition to technology. Leadership must take a strategic approach that balances technology change with human change management. This section outlines important factors and best practices that can drive successful implementation and user adoption.

Phased Roadmap and Quick Wins: Given the scope of legacy modernization, firms should use a phased roadmap that delivers quick wins. Trying to overhaul infrastructure all at once is high risk. Begin with targeted proof of concepts, such as launching a customer data platform or real-time reporting dashboard. Quick wins demonstrate value, secure investment, and create internal advocates. Discreet roadmap phases then expand the architecture iteratively by line of business or dataset. Celebrating milestones along the journey keeps stakeholders engaged. Firms should also leverage managed cloud and SaaS services to accelerate rollout versus building from scratch.

User Enablement and Training: New self-service data access can significantly disrupt existing analytics processes and mindsets. Users accustomed to relying on IT or BI teams for static reports may lack context for leveraging dynamic data platforms. Training and workshops should be integrated into rollout phases to equip business teams. Focus should move from pure technology usage to data-driven decision making [20]. Analysts should

become fluent in querying data lakes and manipulating datasets. Data science skills development can unlock more advanced analytics adoption.

Change Management: A scalable data architecture has ripple effects on people, processes and culture. Change management ensures stakeholders across the business adapt to new data-driven ways of working and decision making. Sustained executive sponsorship provides air cover for the change journey. Incentives and KPIs reinforce adoption of the new capabilities. Overall, the human aspects of organizational change must be proactively managed versus focusing solely on technology implementation.

Data Governance and Policy: As infrastructure gets rolled out, data governance and security policies should be implemented in parallel. This helps ensure compliance with any localization and privacy regulations, while still permitting access to data for business analytics [21]. Governance defines roles and regulates usage of the new data assets. Security controls limit data to authorized uses after anonymizing personal information. Trust in the new infrastructure will accelerate if users know data policies balance analytics needs with obligations to customers and regulators.

In summary, these considerations play a key role in driving scalable infrastructure from blueprint to reality. Technology change combined with organizational change management allows firms to optimize their use of data for e-commerce performance [22].

Conclusion and Future Outlook

Emerging East Asian e-commerce markets have reached an inflection point with their data infrastructure. Legacy systems handicap customer experiences and business growth. Scalable big data solutions on the cloud can break these constraints by ingesting, storing and analyzing exponentially larger and more diverse datasets. Artificial intelligence further amplifies insights from untapped data assets. With the right strategies and data architecture, firms can unlock innovation, personalization and real-time decision making to thrive in e-commerce. While work remains to modernize infrastructure across Asia, positive signs are emerging [23]. Ecosystems of solutions and services partners are growing quickly in the region. Chinese tech giants like Alibaba and Tencent provide cloud infrastructure with built-in data and analytics capabilities. Governments support digital economic development, reflected in initiatives like Indonesia's 2020 merger of ministries into the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Nagy, 2020). These signals point to continued modernization of Asia's data foundations to drive the next phase of e-commerce and digital transformation.

To fully realize the potential of scalable data infrastructure in emerging Asian markets, firms should look beyond foundational big data and analytics use cases towards more disruptive applications. Two high-impact areas to target are artificial intelligence and omnichannel personalization.

Artificial Intelligence Opportunities: AI is moving past early pilots into largescale production usage across industries worldwide. In e-commerce, AI can drive step change improvements in customer experience, marketing effectiveness, and operational efficiency. Emerging Asian firms lag global peers in leveraging AI, with only 25% of Chinese companies deploying it versus 46% of North American firms according to McKinsey research. Scalable big data infrastructure unlocks the potential for AI adoption.

Conversational commerce presents a major growth avenue [24]. Chatbots and virtual assistants powered by natural language processing and generation can deliver personalized conversations that drive sales. Chinese insurer PingAn developed a text-based chatbot that supported over 1 billion customer interactions in 2018 with an over 80% problem resolution rate. Voice-based assistants integrated into apps and connected devices also

provide hands-free interactions. Companies should build knowledge graphs that structure content and data to enhance conversational capabilities.

Computer vision has applications in areas like product recommendations. Catalog images can be tagged with image recognition to understand style, color, and object information. Visual search allows customers to find similar products from a photo. Vision AI also enables video analytics on user behavior for better web design and targeted promotions. Behind the scenes, robotic process automation and deep learning algorithms bring operational efficiencies in logistics and customer service [25]. Overall, AI capabilities require carefully curated datasets for model training. Infrastructure must support distributed development environments and efficient deployment into production. As firms build AI competence and scale successful use cases, they gain sustained competitive advantage.

Omnichannel Personalization: Today's consumers expect ultra-personalized brand interactions. They switch seamlessly across devices and offline/online channels during shopping journeys. This makes true omnichannel personalization critical but challenging, requiring a unified customer profile and consistent experiences. Scalable customer data platforms integrate identity, preferences, and interaction history in one profile. Analytics activate insights to personalize every touchpoint. Location-based personalization is one emerging capability. With customer permission, retailers can combine transaction data with mobile location to deliver contextual promotions when near stores. App notifications can draw nearby customers into stores to complete online purchases. In-store beacons also enable proximity-based promotions. Uniting digital and physical data provides a feedback loop to optimize online/offline experiences. Data infrastructure must integrate datasets and enable real-time activation across channels. Social analytics are another omnichannel opportunity [26]. User-generated content on social platforms provides a wealth of data to understand preferences and influence shopping journeys. Natural language processing gleans product sentiments and trends from unstructured text, photos and videos. Referral programs generate additional social data while rewarding influencer evangelism. Firms should leverage social data for next-product recommendations, community engagement and personalized digital advertising. In summary, scalable data architecture unlocks game-changing applications of AI and omnichannel personalization. As infrastructure modernization continues across Asia, companies can capitalize on these opportunities to dominate e-commerce. Advanced analytics on unified data assets enable transformative customer experiences versus incremental improvements.

Driving Infrastructure Modernization Forward: Accelerating implementation of scalable infrastructure remains imperative to sustain Asian e-commerce growth. Despite progress, adoption lags markets like Europe and North America. Firms face continued gaps around talent, technology integration, and organizational change management. Targeted strategies and initiatives can help overcome barriers:

- Partner proactively with cloud and analytics vendors to complement internal capabilities. Vendors provide accelerated deployment, while transferring technology and analytics skills.
- Acquire firms with specialized e-commerce data expertise to build a center of excellence. M&A brings targeted talent and assets versus broader reskilling initiatives.
- Develop "two-speed" IT to simultaneously optimize legacy systems while incubating next-gen infrastructure. This balances short-term priorities with strategic modernization.
- Launch lighthouse analytics programs with C-suite sponsorship. Quick wins build credibility for larger rollout.
- Foster internal data-sharing culture through executive communication, training, and collaboration incentives. Changing mindsets speeds adoption.

- Implement formal change management frameworks to help people transition to new tools and processes.

With focused efforts across skills, organization, culture and technology, Asian firms can progress their infrastructure.

The growth potential for Asian e-commerce remains substantial. E-commerce penetration of total retail sales is still under 20% for most major markets like Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. Rising digital connectivity, youth demographics and urbanization will drive adoption of online shopping and digital services. Data infrastructure and analytics are imperative to monetize this opportunity. As firms master personalization, innovation and agility based on scalable data platforms, they will dominate e-commerce both in the Asia region and globally [27]. The era of true digital retail powered by deep customer insights is just dawning. Data infrastructure will separate the winners from the rest of the pack. Companies that accelerate adoption of scalable data architecture and advanced analytics will achieve breakaway growth trajectory's that were previously not possible [28].

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