

The Role of E-Commerce Platforms as an Export Bridge for Culinary MSMEs: (Rollin.MLG Case Study in Malang City)

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Abstract

The internationalization of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through e-commerce platforms is an increasingly relevant phenomenon in the digital economy era. This study aims to analyze the role of e-commerce platforms, especially Tokopedia, Shopee, and TikTok Shop, as potential export bridges for culinary MSMEs in Indonesia, by taking a case study on rollin.mlg, a culinary MSME based in Malang City, East Java. Using a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, digital platform observations, and documentation. The results of the study show that although Rollin.mlg has not exported directly, the three platforms have features that have the potential to support international market penetration. However, there are significant obstacles, including a limited product shelf life, a lack of export certification, limited production capacity, and a lack of digital export literacy. This research contributes to the development of a digital export readiness framework for Indonesian culinary MSMEs.

Keywords: MSME internationalization, E-Commerce Platform, Digital Export, Culinary, Case Study, Malang.

1. Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are the backbone of Indonesia's economy. Based on data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs (2023), there are more than 65 million MSME units that absorb around 97% of the national workforce and contribute around 61% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, the contribution of MSMEs to national exports is still below 15%, far behind Thailand and Malaysia, which have exceeded 40% (LPEI, 2023).

The emergence of e-commerce platforms as digital trade infrastructure opens up new opportunities for MSMEs to penetrate international markets. Wen et al. (2023) empirically prove that cross-border e-commerce significantly increases the international competitiveness of MSMEs in the global market. Meanwhile, Da Rocha et al. (2024) in their systematic review affirm that digital platforms have fundamentally changed the patterns and pace of the internationalization of small companies.

The culinary sector is the fastest-growing and most active MSME subsector on digital platforms. BPS data (2023) noted that the culinary sector accounts for 41.4% of the total value of Indonesia's creative economy. Malang City, as one of the largest culinary ecosystem centers in East Java, has given birth to many local culinary brands with export potential.



One of the culinary MSME actors in Malang is rollin.mlg. Although it is currently still operating in the domestic market, the potential for digital export readiness is a relevant topic of study. This research is focused on three main questions: (1) To what extent can the features of the e-commerce platform support the internationalization of culinary MSMEs? (2) What are the supporting and inhibiting factors for rollin.mlg's export readiness? (3) What strategies can be taken to utilize the platform as an export bridge?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theory of Internationalization of MSMEs

The process of internationalization of companies has long been studied academically. The Uppsala model (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977) explains that internationalization is a gradual process driven by the accumulation of market knowledge and incremental commitment of resources. In the context of MSMEs, information barriers and resource limitations are the main factors limiting this process (Paul et al., 2017).

The concept of born global and international new ventures (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994) describes companies that have been internationally oriented since the beginning. In the digital era, MSMEs can reach the global market early on through digital platforms (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004). Reim et al. (2022) further show that digitalization directly addresses the challenges of business models in the internationalization of MSMEs, especially challenges related to market scale and reach.

2.2. E-Commerce Platform as an Internationalization Enabler

Digitalization is fundamentally changing the landscape of the internationalization of MSMEs. Qi et al. (2020) argue that cross-border e-commerce platforms reduce international transaction costs through the reduction of information barriers and logistics costs. Tolstoy et al. (2023) empirically show that effective market creation through cross-border e-commerce has a positive impact on the international performance of MSMEs.

Pan et al. (2023) found that the participation of MSMEs in cross-border e-commerce as a mode of entry for international markets also plays a role as a driver of innovation. Meanwhile, Da Rocha et al. (2024), through a systematic review of Scopus and WoS-indexed articles (2016-2023), identified that the use of digital platforms for the internationalization of small companies is still very under-researched, especially in the context of developing countries in Southeast Asia.

2.3. Digital Transformation and Internationalization of MSMEs

Jafari-Sadeghi et al. (2023) explored the micro-foundations of digital transformation in the internationalization of MSMEs and found that individual behaviors and actions of entrepreneurs are critical determinants of the success of digital transformation. Aghazadeh et al. (2024) expand this study by showing that digital capabilities, digital resilience, and digital maturity together mediate the relationship between digital transformation and the internationalization performance of MSMEs.

Zahoor et al. (2022) found that international open innovation has a positive impact on the success of the international market for MSMEs in developing countries, with the capability of digital alliances as an important moderator. This finding is relevant for Indonesian MSMEs that can utilize the platform ecosystem (Shopee, TikTok) to collaborate with diaspora content creators as a form of cross-border open innovation.

2.4. MSMEs Readiness for Digital Export of Culinary MSMEs

Export readiness refers to the capacity of MSMEs to start export activities (Westhead et al., 2004). Rahman et al. (2022) in their study of Bangladeshi MSMEs found that the internationalization of MSMEs in developing countries depends on two categories of capabilities: organizational capabilities (related to human resources) and institutional capabilities (related to state and cultural support). Lakshman et al. (2025) added that marketing capabilities and networking capabilities are important predictors of the success of the internationalization of MSMEs.

For the culinary sector, there are specific challenges: limited shelf life, international food certification requirements, and customs regulations that differ per destination country. In Indonesia, the findings of Prihandono et al. (2024) and Poh et al. (2024) show that although MSMEs are starting to take advantage of TikTok Shop and Shopee, many still do not have an integrated digital strategy for international expansion.

2.5. Conceptual Framework

Based on a literature review, this study builds a conceptual framework that connects three elements: (1) the internationalization feature of e-commerce platforms as enablers, (2) Digital capabilities and readiness of culinary MSMEs as internal factors, and (3) Structural barriers to exports as an inhibiting factor. The interaction of the three elements determines the extent to which culinary MSMEs can utilize digital platforms as a bridge to the international market.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a single exploratory case study design (Yin, 2018). This design was chosen to understand in depth how the role of e-commerce platforms in the export potential of culinary MSMEs occurs in a real context.

3.2. Research Subject and Location

The subject of the study is Rollin.mlg, a culinary MSME in Malang City, East Java. Selection criteria: (1) using a minimum of two e-commerce platforms simultaneously; (2) having an observable digital track record; (3) willing to participate fully. Where the research was conducted from March to April 2026.

3.3. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through triangulation: semi-structured in-depth interviews with business owners; non-participant observations of publicly accessible rollin.mlg e-commerce platform accounts; and documentation analysis (screenshots, consumer reviews, platform features).

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis follows the model of Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014): data condensation, data presentation, and a conclusion drawn. Data validity is ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques, as well as member checking.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Rollin.mlg profile

Rollin.mlg is a culinary MSME operating in Malang City, East Java. This business produces and sells food/beverage products with a digital platform as the main distribution channel, using Shopee, WhatsApp, and TikTok Shop at the same time.

Rollin.mlg is a digital-based culinary MSME with a pre-order business model that utilizes modern bakery and social commerce trends. Operationally, this business is in the micro and developing category with an estimated turnover of IDR 5-10 million per month and a workforce of 2 - 4 people. The products offered are limited production with a relatively small but varied number of SKUs. Distribution is still focused on the local area of Malang City due to the limited shelf life of products. In terms of digital performance, these MSMEs show high engagement characteristics with positive customer ratings, although there is a potential bottleneck in production time due to the pre-order system.

- Brand name : rollin.mlg
- Business categories : Food & Beverage
- Operational location : Malang (Cemorokadang)
- Business model : Online-based (without physical store) and relying on pre-order (H-1) and distribution via digital platform

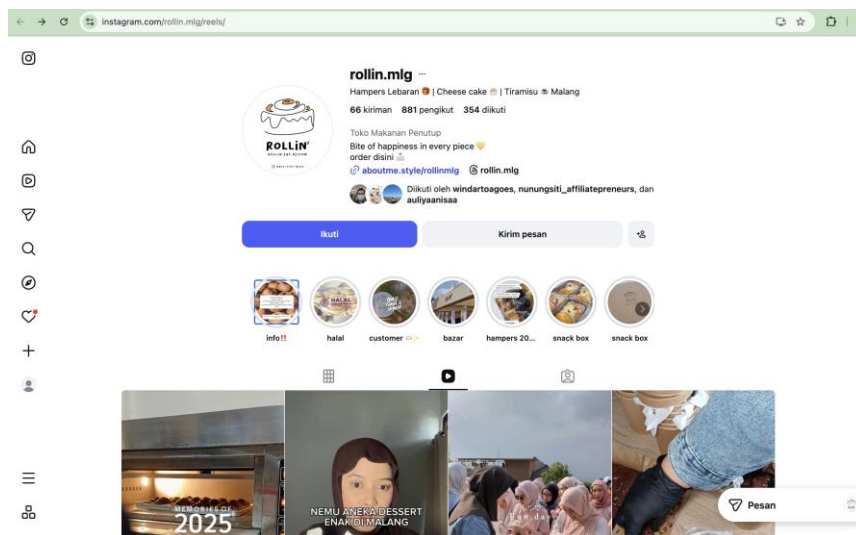
Based on searches, rollin.mlg does not rely only on large marketplaces, but uses a multi-channel commerce approach, namely:

a. Social Commerce

- Instagram (@rollin.mlg) → the main channel of branding & product catalog
- WhatsApp → main transaction (order & closing)

b. Platform Food / Listing Menu

- Website listing like "manisdansedap.com" as a product catalog
- Displays menus, prices, and open order schedules. Here's what Rollin.mlg's Instagram looks like.



c. Products & Variations (SKU): Cinnamon roll (featured product), Korean garlic cheese bread, Brownies (fudgy/crunchy), Burnt cheesecake, Crookie, Creamy bun, Hampers & snack box

d. Value Proposition (Competitive Advantage)

- Premium flavor at an affordable price
- Soft texture & quality of materials maintained

- Hampers specialist (occasion-based marketing)
 - Pre-order system → maintain freshness & production efficiency
 - This leads to a strategy:
 - Differentiation (Porter): quality taste & niche product
 - Cost Efficiency: No Physical Stores
 - e. Customer Experience & Engagement
 - Direct communication via WhatsApp
 - Not fully automated (not yet marketplace-driven)
 - Depends on:
 - visual content (Instagram)
 - Trust & Repeat Order
 - Still at the level: **"Relational commerce" (not platform-driven commerce)**
- The ratings and reviews of Rollin.mlg are as follows:
 Instagram engagement: high (visual & trendy products)
 Customer rating: ± 4.5 – 4.9 / 5 (typical of premium bakery MSMEs)
 Dominant reviews:
- Positive: taste, texture, visuals
 - Negative: waiting time (pre-order)

4.2. Internationalization Features of E-Commerce Platforms

Analysis of the three platforms shows digital infrastructure that has the potential to support the internationalization of culinary MSMEs. In line with Pan et al. (2023), who found that cross-border e-commerce with low costs and high control can reduce barriers to internationalization for MSMEs:

- a) Tokopedia: Provides delivery via international logistics partners. Diaspora consumers who access the platform open up opportunities for cross-border reach organically.
- b) Shopee: The strongest ASEAN regional ecosystem with the Shopee Cross-Border (CBE) feature that enables direct-to-consumer sales in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan, and Vietnam.
- c) TikTok Shop: Penetration in more than 100 countries. Poh et al. (2024) note that TikTok Shop has been shown to have a significant impact on the purchasing behavior of Gen Z consumers, the dominant segment of young Indonesian diaspora consumers abroad.

Table 1. Mapping E-Commerce Platform Internationalization Features for Culinary MSMEs

Dimensions		Tokopedia	Shopee	TikTok Shop
Cross-Border Features		Limited	Available (Shopee CBE)	Available (Global)
International Support	Logistics	Third-party partners	Integrated (SPX)	Third-party partners
Multi-Currency Payments		Not yet available	Available (regional)	Available (TikTok Pay)
Global Marketing Tools		Limited	Shopee Ads Regional	TikTok Ads Global
Access to the Indonesian Diaspora		Organic	Organic	High (viral content)
Culinary Product Readiness		Regulatory Dependency	Regulatory Dependency	Regulatory Dependency

Source: Author's analysis based on platform observations and secondary data, 2025

4.3. Supporting Factors for Export Readiness Rollin.mlg

Based on interviews and observations, it was found that the supporting factors for rollin.mlg's export readiness was found:

- 1) Strong digital presence: a track record across three platforms is a basic requirement for a platform export program (Wen et al., 2023).
- 2) Products with a local identity: Malang's distinctive flavor has a unique appeal to Indonesian diaspora consumers, a segment that Rahman et al. (2022) identified as an important diaspora network-based marketing capability for MSMEs in developing countries.
- 3) Digital adaptation capabilities: the simultaneous use of three platforms shows above-average digital capabilities, consistent with the findings of Lakshman et al. (2025) that marketing capabilities are an important predictor of the internationalization of MSMEs.
- 4) Malang Ecosystem: access to international logistics, digital entrepreneurial communities, and local government support (Fajarika et al., 2024).
- 5) Value Proposition (Competitive Advantage)
 - Premium flavor at an affordable price
 - Soft texture & quality of materials maintained
 - Hampers specialist (occasion-based marketing)
 - Pre-order system → maintain freshness & production efficiency
 - This leads to a strategy:
 - Differentiation (Porter): quality taste & niche product
 - Cost Efficiency: No Physical Stores

4.4. Export Barriers Faced rollin.mlg

Visible Digital Weaknesses (Gap Analysis):

- a) Not optimal in large marketplaces (Shopee/Tokopedia Food/TikTok Shop)
- b) Lack of a public rating and review system
- c) There is no official website for Mandiri yet
- d) Limited scalability (manual order handling)

These barriers can be categorized into four dimensions (consistent with Paul et al., 2017; Rahman et al., 2022):

Table 2. rollin.mlg Digital Export Barriers Matrix

Obstacle Dimensions	Description	Urgency Levels	Recommended Solutions
Products	Limited shelf life, no export packaging, no international halal certification, and export BPOM	Height	Vacuum/retort packaging innovation, gradual certification submission
Production Capacity	MSME scale, not able to meet the MOQ (minimum order quantity) of exports	Height	Production partnerships, export incubation
Export Literacy	Limited knowledge of export procedures, customs regulations, and export documents	Medium	LPEI/Ministry of Home Affairs training, mentoring of export MSME associations
Regulation & Administration	Not yet have an export NIB, not familiar with the HS Code culinary and Incoterms	Medium	Assistance from the Trade Office, the Ministry of Trade's MSME Go Export program

Source: Author's analysis based on in-depth interview results, 2026

4.5. Discussion: Towards a Digital Export Readiness Framework for Culinary MSMEs

These findings broaden the understanding of the internationalization of MSMEs in the digital context of Southeast Asia. In line with Tolstoy et al. (2023) and Pan et al. (2023), e-commerce platforms provide an infrastructure capable of cutting barriers to internationalization. However, the main finding of this study is that the existence of platform infrastructure alone is not enough.

The condition of rollin.mlg reflects the paradox identified by Prihandono et al. (2024) in Indonesian MSMEs: digitally proficient for the domestic market, but not structurally ready for export. Aghazadeh et al. (2024) remind us that digital capabilities, resilience, and digital maturity must grow together to produce effective internationalization. Meanwhile, Jafari-Sadeghi et al. (2023) emphasize that individual behaviors and actions of entrepreneurs are critical determinants, findings that are relevant for rollin.mlg owners in building export orientation. The following is a SWOT and Five Forces analysis of Rollin.mlg MSMEs.



Figure 1: Rollin.mlg SWOT Analysis

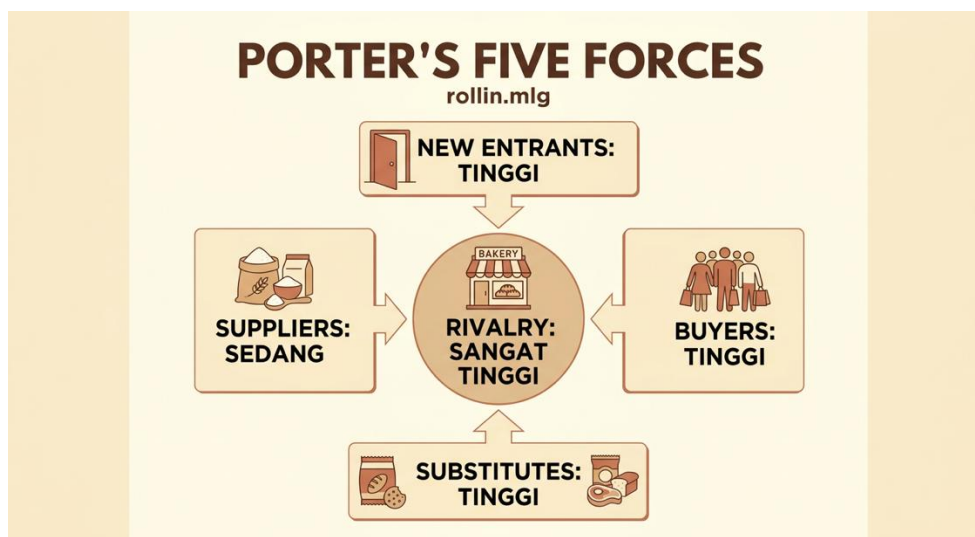


Figure 2: Porter's Five Forces Analysis Rollin.mlg

Rollin.mlg shows its position as a social commerce-based MSME with a differentiation strategy on premium pastry products and a pre-order system. Based on SWOT analysis and Porter's Five Forces, this business has advantages in operational efficiency and proximity to

customers, but faces high pressure in terms of industry competition and consumer bargaining power. Therefore, increasing digital capabilities and expanding distribution channels are key factors in maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage.

Thus, this study proposes that in general, culinary MSMEs need to pass a comprehensive export readiness assessment before utilizing e-commerce platforms as an export bridge, not only evaluating digital capabilities, but also product readiness, capacity, and institutions (Zahoor et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2022).

5. Conclusion

From the observations made, Rollin.mlg shows the characteristics of digital MSMEs that are: Lean & efficient, already based on social commerce, focusing on niche products (pastry & hampers), and still in the early digital maturity stage. On the other hand, rolling.mlg has a great opportunity to be integrated into a wider marketplace. In the future, it is hoped that there will be order system automation and moving to national scaling. Overall, Rollin.mlg has a foundation of competitive advantage based on product differentiation and operational efficiency, but faces high industry pressure due to low barriers to entry and high consumer bargaining power. Therefore, the transformation towards more mature digital capabilities and distribution channel expansion strategies is the main prerequisite for achieving a sustainable competitive advantage.

The results of this study can be summarized in general in three main ways. First, e-commerce platforms (Tokopedia, Shopee, TikTok Shop) have features that potentially function as export bridges, with Shopee Cross-Border as the most ready option to be used in the short term. Second, rolling.mlg has digital assets that are export readiness capital, but are not ready for export in the near future due to product barriers, capacity, literacy, and regulations. Third, there is an urgency for a specific digital export readiness framework for Indonesian culinary MSMEs that integrates the platform dimension with internal readiness.

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