

Resilience and Strategic Adaptation of Gorontalo's Leading MSMEs in Social E-Commerce Governance

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Article History

Received: 12-06-2026

Revised: 16-06-2026

Published: 30-06-2026

Keywords: MSMEs; Digital Resilience; Strategic Adaptation; Social E-Commerce; Governance

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the resilience and strategic adaptation of Gorontalo's leading MSMEs in social e-commerce governance. The development of social commerce provides opportunities for MSMEs to expand their markets through Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Shopee, and Tokopedia. However, these opportunities are accompanied by challenges such as digital literacy, low business legality, limited digital infrastructure, and regulatory changes through Minister of Trade Regulation No. 31 of 2023. Data shows that the number of MSMEs in Gorontalo Province increased from 82,732 units in 2023 to 105,509 units in 2024, or a growth of around 28%. Gorontalo City has 20,319 MSMEs, while Gorontalo Regency is the region with the largest number of MSMEs, namely 38,328 units. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method based on secondary data, policy documentation, limited digital observation, and thematic analysis. Data were analyzed through grouping themes of resilience, platform adaptation, digital literacy, business legality, regulations, and digital infrastructure gaps. The findings indicate that the resilience of Gorontalo's leading MSMEs is demonstrated not only through business sustainability but also through their ability to diversify marketing channels, separate promotional and transaction functions, adapt to regulations, and utilize local product identity as a digital differentiation strategy. This study confirms that e-commerce social governance for regional MSMEs requires attention to digital literacy, business legality, regulatory readiness, and equitable distribution of digital infrastructure.

INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are a strategic sector in regional economic development because they play a role in job creation, strengthening household economies, and developing local products. In the context of Gorontalo, MSMEs play a crucial role because they rely on regional potential, such as food processing, Karawo embroidery, and

crafts. Based on data from the Gorontalo Provincial Government, the number of MSMEs in Gorontalo Province in 2024 reached 105,509 units, an increase of approximately 28% compared to 2023, which amounted to 82,732 units (Cooperatives, MSMEs Office, 2024). This growth indicates that MSMEs in Gorontalo have a fairly strong economic dynamic and continue to develop as drivers of the local economy.

The growth in the number of MSMEs also indicates a new need for business governance, especially in addressing changes in consumer behavior that are increasingly connected to digital platforms (Pitaloka & Kardoyo, 2023). Social e-commerce has become an important space for MSMEs because it combines the functions of promotion, social interaction, marketing, and digital transactions. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Shopee, and Tokopedia are used not only as communication media but also as a means of building trust, expanding markets, and increasing product visibility. (Liang & Turban, 2011) Social commerce emerged from the use of Web 2.0-based social media technology to support online interaction and user contributions in the process of acquiring products and services.

However, the development of social e-commerce has not always been balanced with the readiness of MSMEs. Many regional MSMEs still face obstacles in digital literacy, content management, marketplace utilization, understanding social media algorithms, and increasing engagement. (Widodo et al., 2025). Preliminary data presented in this study indicates that the majority of Gorontalo MSMEs have begun using social media for promotion, particularly in the food and craft sectors. However, engagement rates, such as likes, comments, shares, and consumer interaction, remain low. This suggests that the presence of MSMEs in the digital space is not always accompanied by the ability to strategically manage digital relationships.

In addition to internal capacity challenges, regulatory changes also impact e-commerce social governance. The government issued Minister of Trade Regulation No. 31 of 2023 concerning Business Licensing, Advertising, Guidance, and Supervision of Business Actors in Electronic Commerce (RI, 2023) (Pramesti et al., 2024). This regulation reorganizes the positions of business actors and digital platforms in e-commerce. Legally, Minister of Trade Regulation No. 31 of 2023 was enacted and promulgated in September 2023, revoking Minister of Trade Regulation No. 50 of 2020. The goal is to build a fairer and healthier digital commerce ecosystem, particularly in responding to digital commerce practices deemed detrimental to MSMEs.

This policy has had an ambivalent impact on MSMEs. On the one hand, regulations can protect MSMEs from predatory pricing practices, platform dominance, and unfair competition. On the other hand, MSMEs that already rely on social commerce, such as TikTok Shop, are experiencing disruption as they must adapt to the separation of social media and transaction functions. TikTok Shop ceased its online shopping operations in Indonesia on October 4, 2023, to comply with the regulation prohibiting direct e-commerce transactions through social media platforms. In the regional context, this situation requires MSMEs to

migrate to pure marketplaces, manage promotional channels more disciplinedly, and build stronger digital capabilities.

The situation in Gorontalo shows that the digital adaptability of MSMEs is not evenly distributed. Gorontalo City has 20,319 MSMEs, comprising 17,227 micro-enterprises, 2,692 small-enterprises, and around 400 medium-sized enterprises. Gorontalo Regency has 38,328 MSMEs, making it the region with the largest number of MSMEs in the province. This data indicates that MSME growth centers are not only in urban areas, but also in regencies that face greater infrastructure challenges and access to training. (Liputan6).

Another significant issue is the low level of business legality. Preliminary data shows that only around 21% of MSMEs in Gorontalo have complete permits. Yet, in the e-commerce ecosystem, legality is crucial for accessing financing, participating in mentoring programs, entering formal marketplaces, and building consumer trust. Therefore, e-commerce social governance is not only about the ability to use social media but also encompasses institutional readiness, legality, digital literacy, and the ability to adapt to regulations.

Although various studies have addressed the digitalization of MSMEs and the use of e-commerce, most studies still focus on technology adoption, digital marketing enhancements, or the impact of platforms on business performance. Studies that specifically place regional MSMEs in the context of resilience, strategic adaptation, changing social commerce regulations, and the digital governance gap are still limited. In the context of Gorontalo, this issue is crucial because the growth in the number of MSMEs is not automatically accompanied by legal readiness, digital literacy, and the ability to manage platforms sustainably.

MSMEs are characterized by flexibility, close ties to local communities, and resilience to various economic pressures. However, in the digital era, MSME resilience is determined not only by production capacity but also by their ability to access digital markets, manage customers, and utilize data and online platforms. (Rahmawati, Machmuddin, & Lidya, 2025) found that e-commerce adoption by MSMEs in Indonesia is influenced by perceived benefits, technological readiness, business owner innovation, information technology capabilities, and business owner information technology experience. These findings are relevant to the context of MSMEs in Gorontalo because the main issues faced are not only limited access to technology, but also human resource readiness, business legality, platform management capabilities, and the competitiveness of local products in the digital ecosystem (Tarape & Mardiana, 2025).

The digital transformation of MSMEs can be understood as the process of changing the way businesses operate, interact with customers, market products, and conduct transactions through digital technology (Harto et al., 2023). The Central Statistics Agency (BPS), through its publication of E-Commerce Statistics 2023, also shows that e-commerce development in Indonesia needs to be viewed from a business perspective, including business profiles, activities, workers, and e-commerce business revenues. This confirms that MSME

digitalization encompasses more than just the use of applications, but also changes in business models and governance. (Gea, 2025).

Social e-commerce is a form of e-commerce development that utilizes social media as a space for interaction, promotion, trust-building, and purchasing decision-making (Trulline, 2021). Social commerce thrives because social media allows consumers to interact, produce content, share experiences, provide reviews, and build trust in the purchasing process (Prasetyo, 2026). In the context of MSMEs, social e-commerce allows businesses to reach consumers at a relatively low cost, but also requires the ability to manage content, customer response, digital reputation, and consistent communication. Social e-commerce governance encompasses the relationship between businesses, consumers, digital platforms, and government regulations. In practice, MSMEs do not fully control the digital space because algorithms, platform policies, payment systems, and government regulations influence promotional and transaction patterns. Therefore, social e-commerce governance must be understood as an ecosystem that encompasses MSMEs' internal capabilities and external structures that limit or open up business opportunities. The resilience of Gorontalo's MSMEs can be seen in their ability to navigate changing social commerce regulations, limited digital literacy, unstable social media engagement, and differences in infrastructure access between cities and districts. Resilient MSMEs are not only able to survive but also able to change their marketing strategies, improve their legal standing, participate in training, and utilize alternative digital channels.

The novelty of this research lies in its integration of the perspectives of MSME resilience, dynamic capabilities, and e-commerce social governance within a regional context. This research views digitalization not only as platform utilization, but also as a process of institutional, regulatory, and strategic adaptation influenced by MSMEs' internal capabilities and local ecosystem support. Based on this description, this research is crucial to understand how Gorontalo's leading MSMEs build resilience and strategic adaptation in e-commerce social governance. This research is not aimed at quantitatively measuring the influence between variables, but rather at understanding the processes, strategies, obstacles, and experiences of MSMEs in navigating changes in the digital ecosystem. With a qualitative approach, this research is expected to provide a more contextual understanding of the dynamics of regional MSMEs in facing digital transformation and changes in e-commerce regulations.

Based on this background, the problem formulation in this research is:

1. What is the form of resilience of Gorontalo's leading MSMEs in social e-commerce governance?
2. What are the adaptation strategies of Gorontalo's leading MSMEs in utilizing social media and e-commerce platforms?
3. What are the obstacles faced by Gorontalo's leading MSMEs in managing social e-commerce?

4. What is the role of digital literacy, regulations, business legality, and digital infrastructure in shaping the adaptation of Gorontalo's leading MSMEs?

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method based on secondary data and digital observation. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on understanding the resilience process and strategic adaptation of Gorontalo's leading MSMEs in facing changes in the social e-commerce ecosystem. Research data were obtained from local government documents, data on the development of MSMEs in Gorontalo Province, Regulation of the Minister of Trade No. 31 of 2023, e-commerce statistical publications, scientific articles, policy news, and information related to the use of digital platforms by MSMEs (Fadli, 2024). Digital observation was conducted on a limited basis regarding the patterns of social media and marketplace use by Gorontalo's leading MSMEs, particularly aspects of the types of platforms used, promotional patterns, forms of consumer interaction, use of product catalogs, and the tendency to separate promotional and transaction functions. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis by grouping information into themes of resilience, strategic adaptation, business legality, digital literacy, social commerce regulations, and infrastructure gaps.

This research is a case study because it focuses on leading MSMEs in Gorontalo Province as a specific context. Case studies allow researchers to understand local dynamics, including differences between Gorontalo City and Gorontalo Regency, the use of digital platforms, and MSME responses to changing social commerce regulations.

The data sources in this study consist of secondary data and limited digital observations. Secondary data include statistics on Gorontalo's MSMEs, MSME development data, information on digital platform usage, Gorontalo Regency's Digital Society Index data, Minister of Trade Regulation No. 31 of 2023, e-commerce statistical publications, scientific articles, and relevant policy news. Limited digital observations were conducted on the patterns of social media and marketplace usage by Gorontalo's leading MSMEs, particularly regarding the types of platforms used, promotional patterns, forms of consumer interaction, use of product catalogs, and the tendency for the separation of promotional and transaction functions.

Data collection techniques included documentation, digital observation, and interviews. Documentation was conducted on official government data, policy news, MSME reports, and e-commerce regulations. Digital observation was conducted by examining content patterns, upload frequency, interaction patterns, promotional feature usage, and consumer responses on MSME social media. Data analysis included data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. In this study, data were coded into several main themes: resilience, strategic adaptation, digital literacy, business legality, social commerce regulations, and digital infrastructure gaps. Data validity was strengthened through source triangulation,

which involved comparing data from official documents, digital observation results, and informant interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Gorontalo's MSME Growth and Digital Governance Readiness

Data shows that Gorontalo's MSMEs are experiencing significant growth. In 2023, the number of MSMEs in Gorontalo Province was 82,732, increasing to 105,509 in 2024. This 28% growth indicates increased economic activity and the growing role of MSMEs in regional development. These MSMEs are dominated by food processing, Karawo embroidery, and crafts, which are regional specialty products with significant potential for development through digital marketing.

However, quantitative growth does not fully demonstrate digital governance readiness. Preliminary data shows that only around 21% of MSMEs have complete permits. This presents a challenge because business legality is linked to access to financing, consumer trust, marketplace opportunities, and participation in government development programs. In e-commerce social governance, legality is no longer merely an administrative aspect but also an integral part of a business's reputation and credibility.

Business legality is a crucial prerequisite for e-commerce social governance, as digital commerce demands clarity of business identity, transaction security, and consumer protection. MSMEs lacking adequate legality tend to face limitations in accessing financing programs, participating in formal training, obtaining product certification, and entering the marketplace more professionally. In the context of Gorontalo, the low percentage of MSMEs with complete permits indicates that digital transformation has not been fully accompanied by institutional transformation. Legality issues are also related to consumer trust. In digital transactions, consumers do not always meet sellers directly. Therefore, legal aspects, such as halal certification, business identification numbers, distribution permits, and clear business identity, are part of a digital reputation. MSMEs with more complete legality have a greater opportunity to build market trust, participate in procurement, partner with platforms, and expand their business scale. Gorontalo City has 20,319 MSMEs, dominated by micro-enterprises at 17,227 units. Meanwhile, Gorontalo Regency has 38,328 MSMEs, making it the region with the largest number of MSMEs in the province. This data shows that strengthening e-commerce social governance should not only be centered in urban areas, but should also reach districts with large MSME bases.

2. Social E-Commerce Usage Patterns by Gorontalo MSMEs

Gorontalo's MSMEs have utilized various digital platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Shopee, and Tokopedia. Instagram and Facebook are widely used for visual promotion, building product identity, and interacting with local consumers. TikTok is used to reach consumers through short video content and trend-based promotions. Shopee and

Tokopedia are used as more formal transaction channels, especially following restrictions on in-person transactions on social commerce platforms.

This pattern indicates that Gorontalo's MSMEs are beginning to develop multi-platform strategies. However, the use of multiple platforms does not always indicate a mature digital strategy. Many MSMEs still utilize social media in simplistic ways, for example, only uploading product photos without content planning, interaction analysis, and engagement enhancement strategies (Gintulangi, Rachman, Thalib, & Alhadar, 2025). From a social commerce perspective, this condition indicates that MSMEs have entered the digital space but have not fully optimized the potential of social interactions, reviews, recommendations, and consumer trust, as explained by (Putri, 2026).

Low social media engagement is one indicator that e-commerce social governance still needs strengthening. Low engagement can be caused by inconsistent content quality, a lack of understanding of algorithms, limited ability to create product narratives, and suboptimal use of digital features such as live shopping, stories, marketplaces, product catalogs, and paid advertising. Therefore, the main challenge for MSMEs is not only platform access, but also the ability to manage platforms strategically.

Table 1. Mapping of Digital Platform Functions in the Adaptation of Social E-Commerce for Gorontalo MSMEs

No.	Digital Platform	Main Functions for MSMEs	Forms of Strategic Adaptation	Challenges Faced
1	Instagram	Visual promotional media and strengthening product identity.	Upload product photos and videos, utilize story features, reels, simple catalogs, and build a local brand image.	Content consistency is still low, audience reach is limited, and engagement is not optimal.
2	Facebook	Community-based promotional media and local networks.	Utilize buying and selling groups, business pages, product uploads, and direct communication with consumers.	Promotion is still conventional, less measurable, and not supported by consumer interaction analysis.
3	TikTok	Promotional media based on short videos and digital trends.	Creating creative content, product storytelling, live promotions, and following digital market trends.	Changes to social commerce regulations limit direct transactions and require the separation of promotional and transaction functions.
4	Shopee	Marketplace as a formal transaction channel.	Open an online store, manage product catalogs, use voucher features, payment systems, and delivery services.	High price competition, the need for more professional store management, and platform promotion costs.
5	Tokopedia	Marketplace for market expansion and digital transactions.	Providing a product catalog, strengthening business credibility, and utilizing a more structured transaction system.	Requires better legality, product management, and digital capabilities.
6	WhatsApp Business	Direct communication media and customer service.	Using product catalogs, automated messages, repeat order communications, and trust-based transactions.	Not yet integrated with data analysis and market reach is limited to customer contact networks.

Source: Results of the author's analysis based on secondary data and limited digital observations of the digital platform utilization patterns of Gorontalo MSMEs.

Table 1 shows that Gorontalo's MSMEs' digital adaptation is not taking place through a single platform, but rather through a multi-platform strategy. Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok primarily serve as platforms for promotion, interaction, and building consumer trust. Meanwhile, marketplaces like Shopee and Tokopedia serve as more formal transaction channels. WhatsApp Business is used as a direct communication medium with customers, primarily to maintain personal relationships and repeat transactions. This pattern indicates that Gorontalo's MSMEs are beginning to develop a hybrid strategy in social e-commerce governance, combining social media as a promotional tool with marketplaces and communication apps for transactions and customer service.

However, the use of these various platforms does not fully demonstrate mature digital governance. Some MSMEs still use social media in simplistic ways, such as simply uploading product photos without content planning, measuring interactions, or employing an engagement-boosting strategy. This situation suggests that the primary challenge for MSMEs lies not only in access to digital platforms but also in their ability to strategically manage them. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy, content development, understanding social media algorithms, and marketplace management skills are crucial for strengthening the resilience and adaptability of Gorontalo's leading MSMEs.

3. The Impact of Minister of Trade Regulation No. 31 of 2023 on MSME Adaptation

Minister of Trade Regulation No. 31 of 2023 serves as a crucial context for this research because it changes the governance of e-commerce in Indonesia. This regulation governs licensing, advertising, coaching, and supervision of business actors in electronic commerce. (JDIH Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia) In practice, this regulation encourages a separation between the functions of social media as a promotional space and the marketplace as a transactional space.

For MSMEs, this change has a two-pronged impact. The positive impact is the protection of MSMEs from unfair trade practices, platform dominance, and predatory pricing. The government positions this regulation as part of building a fairer and healthier digital trade ecosystem. (Ministry of Communication and Digital) However, the negative impact is felt by MSMEs that have relied on social commerce for direct transactions, particularly through TikTok Shop. When TikTok Shop discontinues its online shopping service in Indonesia on October 4, 2023, businesses will have to adjust their promotional and transaction patterns.

From a resilience perspective, these regulatory changes represent external disruptions that require coping and adaptation skills. MSMEs with better digital literacy tend to migrate more quickly to other marketplaces, such as Shopee and Tokopedia, or direct transactions through WhatsApp Business and simple websites. Conversely, MSMEs with lower digital literacy tend to experience confusion due to a lack of understanding of the different functions of social media, marketplaces, and digital transaction channels.

4. Infrastructure and Digital Literacy Gap between Cities and Regencies

The digital divide is a significant factor influencing the adaptation of Gorontalo's MSMEs. Gorontalo City has closer access to development centers, training, internet networks, and economic facilities. In contrast, MSMEs in the districts face challenges such as distance, limited internet access, and uneven distribution of digital training programs. Preliminary data shows that Gorontalo Regency has a Digital Society Index of 38.88, slightly above the national average of 37.80. However, the digital empowerment pillar only achieved a score of 21.59, indicating that the use of technology to build community capacity remains low.

This situation demonstrates a digital paradox. On the one hand, Gorontalo Regency's digital skills are recorded as quite high, at 53.77. On the other hand, digital empowerment remains very low. This means that people may be familiar with or use digital devices, but they are not yet fully capable of transforming their digital use into a productive economic force. In the context of MSMEs, this is evident in the use of social media for promotion, but not yet optimally in building brands, managing customers, increasing transactions, and expanding markets.

This gap is also related to infrastructure. While urban centers have relatively better internet access, some rural areas in the district still face gaps or limited connectivity. As a result, MSMEs in the district face not only knowledge barriers but also technical barriers to consistently accessing digital platforms.

5. Resilience and Adaptation Strategies of Gorontalo's Leading MSMEs

Based on available data, the resilience strategies of Gorontalo's leading MSMEs can be grouped into several categories. First, MSMEs diversify their marketing channels. Businesses no longer rely solely on a single platform but have begun utilizing a combination of social media and marketplaces. This strategy is crucial for mitigating risks in the event of algorithm changes, decreased engagement, or regulatory changes.

Second, MSMEs are migrating platforms. Following changes in social commerce regulations, MSMEs need to direct transactions to pure marketplaces like Shopee and Tokopedia, while using social media to build promotions and customer relationships. This strategy demonstrates a reconfiguration process within the dynamic capabilities theory, namely the restructuring of resources and business processes to adapt to environmental changes.

Third, MSMEs are taking advantage of government coaching. Data shows that in the past five years, 11,806 MSMEs have received coaching, and by 2023, 4,079 MSMEs, or approximately 81% of those facilitated, experienced increased turnover. This data demonstrates that coaching plays a crucial role in increasing business capacity. However, the effectiveness of coaching needs to be improved so that it focuses not only on general management but also on social e-commerce governance, content production, digital legality, and marketplace strategy.

Fourth, MSMEs develop local product identities. The food processing, Karawo embroidery, and handicraft sectors possess cultural value and regional uniqueness. These

local advantages can serve as the basis for product differentiation in the digital marketplace. In social e-commerce, local narratives, product stories, production processes, and cultural identities can become attractive selling points that differentiate Gorontalo MSMEs from mass-produced products.

Fifth, MSMEs need to strengthen their business legality. The low number of MSMEs with complete permits demonstrates that legality must be part of an adaptation strategy. Legality helps MSMEs enter a more formal digital commerce ecosystem, gain consumer trust, and participate in government development programs.

6. Research Findings Model

Based on the analysis above, this study produces an initial model that the resilience of Gorontalo's leading MSMEs in e-commerce social governance is formed by four main components, namely:

1. Digital capabilities, including the ability to manage social media, marketplaces, content, and consumer interactions.
2. Regulatory readiness, including understanding of Trade Minister Regulation No. 31 of 2023 and the separation of promotional and transaction functions.
3. Local ecosystem support includes government guidance, training access, internet infrastructure, and MSME mentoring.
4. The identity of superior products, including local specialties such as processed foods, Karawo embroidery, and crafts as a basis for market differentiation.

This model of findings shows that the resilience of Gorontalo's leading MSMEs does not depend on a single factor. Digital capability is the foundation of MSMEs' ability to manage content, platforms, and consumer interactions. Regulatory readiness determines MSMEs' ability to adapt to changing e-commerce regulations. Local ecosystem support acts as an external factor, strengthening access to training, mentoring, financing, and infrastructure. Meanwhile, the identity of superior products serves as a source of differentiation that enables Gorontalo's MSMEs to compete in the digital market without being completely trapped in price competition.

Thus, this model positions resilience as the result of the interaction between MSMEs' internal capacity and external support. MSMEs with superior products but lacking digital capabilities will struggle to expand their market. Conversely, MSMEs that are digitally active but weak in legality and product differentiation are also vulnerable to competition. Therefore, an integrated MSME strengthening strategy needs to be implemented through digital literacy, legality, content development, marketplace strengthening, and infrastructure equity.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This research shows that Gorontalo's leading MSMEs have significant potential for social e-commerce development, as evidenced by the growing number of MSMEs, the strength of local products, and the increasing use of digital platforms. However, MSME

resilience and strategic adaptation still face several challenges, particularly unequal digital literacy, low social media engagement, limited business legality, changing social commerce regulations, and infrastructure gaps between cities and districts.

Minister of Trade Regulation No. 31 of 2023 provides important context for changes in e-commerce social governance. This regulation can protect MSMEs from unfair trade practices, but it also requires MSMEs to be more prepared to separate promotional and transaction functions. MSMEs with better digital capabilities tend to be quicker to migrate platforms, diversify marketing channels, and restructure business strategies.

Theoretically, this research strengthens the concepts of organizational resilience and dynamic capabilities in the context of regional MSMEs. Practically, this research confirms that strengthening Gorontalo's MSMEs needs to be directed at practice-based digital training, improving business legality, marketplace assistance, strengthening local product content, and equitable distribution of digital infrastructure. This research has limitations because it relies on secondary data, policy documentation, and limited digital observations. Therefore, further research is recommended to conduct in-depth interviews with MSME actors, business assistants, relevant agency managers, and consumers to provide a more in-depth explanation of digital adaptation experiences.

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