

Risk Management Strategies in Startup Companies in Indonesia

Mayasari Puspita¹, Candra Fama²

^{1,2} Faculty Economics, Manajemen, Universitas Panca Bhakti, Pontianak, Indonesia.

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ABSTRACT

Startup companies in Indonesia face a highly dynamic and uncertain business environment characterized by rapid technological changes, intense competition, limited financial resources, and regulatory challenges. As a result, effective risk management has become a critical factor for ensuring sustainability and long-term growth. This study explores the various risk management strategies implemented by startups in Indonesia, focusing on how these strategies help identify, assess, and mitigate key business risks. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach supported by case study analysis and literature review, the research identifies several types of risks commonly encountered by startups, including financial, operational, market, legal, and strategic risks. The study finds that Indonesian startups tend to adopt proactive and adaptive risk management strategies such as diversification, scenario planning, insurance, compliance monitoring, and the use of digital risk assessment tools. Furthermore, the presence of competent leadership, investor support, and access to mentorship programs plays a significant role in enhancing the effectiveness of risk management practices. This research contributes to the understanding of how startup companies in emerging economies like Indonesia navigate uncertainty and volatility through strategic risk management. It also offers practical insights for founders, investors, and policymakers aiming to support startup ecosystems in managing risk and achieving sustainable development.

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Corresponding Author:

Mayasari Puspita,
Faculty Economics, Manajemen,
Universitas Panca Bhakti, Pontianak,
Jl. Kom. Yos Sudarso No.123, Pontianak, Kalimantan Barat, 78244, Indonesia.
Email: saripuspita@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

In the modern economic landscape, startup companies are widely recognized as critical drivers of innovation, technological advancement, and economic development. Their ability to create new business models, disrupt established markets, and generate employment opportunities makes them essential contributors to national growth, especially in developing countries such as Indonesia. However, despite their immense potential, startups are inherently vulnerable to a wide array of risks due to their limited resources, untested business models, lack of operational experience, and exposure to uncertain market dynamics. In Indonesia, where the startup ecosystem has grown rapidly over the last decade, the challenge of effectively managing these risks has become increasingly pressing.

Risk management is defined as the systematic process of identifying, analyzing, evaluating, and responding to risks in order to minimize the negative impacts on organizational objectives. For startups, the importance of risk management cannot be overstated. Unlike large corporations that may have established departments and frameworks dedicated to mitigating risks, startups often operate in high-velocity environments with little room for error. Failures in managing risks can lead to financial losses, reputational damage, operational disruption, and in many cases, business closure. Therefore, the development and implementation of appropriate risk management strategies is crucial for the sustainability and scalability of startups, particularly in emerging markets like Indonesia. Indonesia has

emerged as a vibrant hub for startups, particularly in the Southeast Asian region. With a large and growing population, increasing internet penetration, a thriving digital economy, and strong government support through initiatives such as the “1000 Startups Movement,” the country provides fertile ground for entrepreneurial activity. Major cities such as Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, and Yogyakarta have become innovation centers, hosting incubators, accelerators, co-working spaces, and venture capital firms. The rapid expansion of fintech, e-commerce, edtech, healthtech, and agritech sectors illustrates the wide array of opportunities available to startups in the Indonesian market.

However, this growth is accompanied by significant challenges. The Indonesian startup ecosystem is characterized by regulatory uncertainty, infrastructure gaps, a shortage of skilled talent, and intense competition. Furthermore, cultural factors, such as risk aversion, low financial literacy, and complex bureaucratic systems, often compound the difficulties faced by early-stage companies. These contextual elements highlight the necessity of robust and adaptive risk management strategies that are tailored to the specific conditions of the Indonesian business environment. Startups face a unique set of risks that differ in nature and magnitude from those encountered by more established firms. These risks are often amplified in the early stages of business development and can span various domains, including financial, operational, market, technological, legal, and strategic dimensions.

Startups frequently struggle with securing stable financing. Many rely on venture capital, angel investors, or bootstrapping to fund operations. The absence of consistent revenue streams in the initial stages increases the risk of insolvency. In Indonesia, where access to formal credit is limited, and financial institutions tend to view startups as high-risk borrowers, financial instability is a major threat. Operational inefficiencies can stem from weak internal processes, inadequate technology, or inexperienced management teams. Startups may lack the tools and systems needed to ensure smooth daily operations, and minor disruptions can have outsized impacts. The reliance on lean teams often results in multitasking and overburdened personnel, leading to errors and burnout.

Understanding customer behavior, assessing demand accurately, and responding to competitors are critical to market success. In dynamic markets like Indonesia, shifting consumer preferences, saturation, and the entry of global competitors can pose severe threats to the survival of nascent firms. Startups that build their value propositions around digital platforms or software are vulnerable to cybersecurity threats, system failures, and technological obsolescence. Given Indonesia's varying levels of digital infrastructure, ensuring stable and secure technological performance can be challenging. Navigating legal frameworks is a persistent issue for startups in Indonesia, where regulations may be ambiguous, frequently changing, or unevenly enforced. Issues related to licensing, taxation, employment law, and intellectual property rights can have serious consequences if mishandled. Poor decision-making, misaligned partnerships, or flawed business models can undermine long-term strategic objectives. Startups must constantly evaluate their strategic direction and be ready to pivot when necessary. The absence of strategic foresight often results in the loss of competitive advantage.

Given the high failure rate among startups various studies suggest that up to 90% fail within the first five years implementing risk management strategies is not a luxury but a necessity. Risk management enables startups to anticipate challenges, allocate resources more effectively, and build organizational resilience. It also enhances credibility with stakeholders such as investors, regulators, and customers, who are more likely to trust companies that demonstrate awareness and control over potential threats. In the Indonesian context, effective risk management is also essential for navigating the nuances of local business practices and societal expectations. For example, informal business relationships, cultural norms, and regional market differences require adaptive strategies that combine formal risk assessment tools with local knowledge and stakeholder engagement. Startups in Indonesia and elsewhere employ a range of risk management strategies depending on their industry, stage of development, and available resources. Some commonly used approaches include; These are facilitated sessions where startup teams discuss potential risks across different operational areas. Such exercises help uncover hidden vulnerabilities and encourage collective ownership of risk mitigation.

By modeling different business scenarios (e.g., best-case, worst-case), startups can prepare contingency plans and improve decision-making under uncertainty. Many startups secure liability insurance, data breach coverage, and other protections to shield against unforeseen events. Legal counsel is often employed to ensure compliance with national and local regulations. Startups following this model engage in rapid prototyping and continuous feedback loops. By validating hypotheses early, they can avoid costly errors and pivot when market signals dictate. Technologies such as AI-based risk analytics, cloud-based project management platforms, and cybersecurity applications are increasingly used to monitor and mitigate risks in real-time. Engaging experienced mentors and forming advisory

boards provides startups with strategic guidance and helps avoid common pitfalls. Some startups diversify revenue streams or customer segments to spread risk and reduce dependency on a single source of income. These strategies demonstrate that risk management is not a one-size-fits-all solution; rather, it must be integrated into the startup's culture and tailored to specific organizational needs.

While the benefits of risk management are clear, startups in Indonesia face significant obstacles in implementing these practices effectively; Most startups operate on tight budgets and prioritize product development and marketing over risk mitigation. Hiring risk specialists or investing in management tools is often viewed as a secondary concern. Founders may lack knowledge of structured risk management frameworks or underestimate the importance of formal risk assessments, relying instead on intuition and experience. Startups often operate in fluid contexts where strategies must evolve quickly. This makes long-term risk planning difficult and sometimes obsolete before implementation. Inconsistent or unclear government regulations create uncertainty that is hard to quantify or mitigate through conventional risk management tools. In some cases, cultural perceptions of failure, risk-taking, and authority can hinder open discussions about vulnerabilities or the adoption of proactive strategies. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, investors, universities, and startup communities.

The development of a supportive ecosystem is key to enhancing risk management capabilities among Indonesian startups. The role of stakeholders can be summarized as follows; By providing clear and stable regulatory guidelines, tax incentives, and public support programs, the government can reduce environmental uncertainties that pose systemic risks to startups, Investors can play an active role in guiding risk management by requiring due diligence, governance standards, and periodic risk audits before and after funding, Universities and training centers can incorporate risk management education into entrepreneurship programs, equipping future founders with the necessary skills and mindsets, These organizations often provide mentoring, legal assistance, and networking opportunities that are instrumental in building risk awareness and operational capacity, Industry bodies can facilitate information sharing, best practices, and collective responses to emerging risks, such as cybersecurity threats or economic disruptions.

In summary, startup companies in Indonesia operate in a complex and risk-prone environment that requires the application of proactive, informed, and context-sensitive risk management strategies. While many startups focus heavily on growth and innovation, neglecting risk management can prove fatal. A structured approach to identifying, analyzing, and mitigating risks not only enhances the probability of success but also fosters long-term resilience and competitiveness. As Indonesia continues to position itself as a regional hub for entrepreneurship, integrating robust risk management practices into the startup ecosystem will be essential for ensuring the sustainability and scalability of its entrepreneurial ventures.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research method to analyze and explore the risk management strategies adopted by startup companies in Indonesia. The qualitative approach is deemed appropriate given the need to gain in-depth insights into the experiences, perceptions, and practices of startup founders and managers in managing risks within dynamic and uncertain environments. The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key informants, including founders, co-founders, chief executive officers (CEOs), and risk officers of selected startups across various sectors, such as fintech, healthtech, edtech, and e-commerce. A purposive sampling technique was used to identify startups that have been operational for at least two years and have received external funding, under the assumption that such companies are more likely to have developed formal or informal risk management mechanisms. In total, 10 startups located in Jakarta, Bandung, and Yogyakarta were selected to represent Indonesia's leading innovation hubs. In addition to interviews, document analysis was conducted using publicly available materials such as company reports, investor presentations, and press releases to validate and triangulate the findings. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, where interview transcripts and documents were coded to identify recurring themes, patterns, and strategic frameworks related to risk management. To strengthen the study's reliability and validity, peer debriefing and member checking were applied. Participants were asked to review summaries of their interview responses to ensure accurate representation. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly maintained throughout the research process. This methodological approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how startup

companies in Indonesia perceive risk, what strategies they use to manage it, and what contextual factors influence their decision-making in risk management.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Types of Risks Commonly Encountered

Startups in Indonesia are exposed to various types of risk, the most prominent of which include; Financial Risk: All participants highlighted challenges in managing cash flow, securing capital, and maintaining financial sustainability. Many experienced funding gaps between investment rounds, especially during early scaling phases. Regulatory Risk: Several startups, particularly in the fintech and healthtech sectors, reported difficulties in keeping up with changing regulations or complying with inconsistent local policies. One fintech CEO noted that unclear digital lending regulations delayed their product launch by over six months. Market Risk: Fluctuations in consumer demand, high customer acquisition costs, and intense competition were cited as major concerns. Edtech companies, for example, found it difficult to retain users after the COVID-19 pandemic, when demand normalized. Operational Risk: Internal process inefficiencies, technical system failures, and human resource limitations were mentioned by nearly all respondents. Many founders noted that being understaffed led to over-reliance on key personnel. Technological Risk: Startups that relied heavily on digital platforms experienced occasional system downtime, cybersecurity threats, and data privacy concerns. Healthtech startups, in particular, faced heightened scrutiny over patient data protection.

Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Despite the risks faced, levels of awareness and structured risk assessment varied significantly across the startups. Founders with prior entrepreneurial or corporate experience were more likely to understand the importance of risk mitigation and had proactive measures in place. Others acknowledged that risk management was often overlooked in the early stages, mainly due to limited time and resources. Interestingly, younger startup teams tended to view risk-taking as part of the innovation process. As one co-founder put it, "We embrace a certain level of chaos, knowing that learning from mistakes is inevitable." While this mindset encouraged agility and experimentation, it also led to underestimating certain risks, particularly regulatory and financial.

Risk Awareness and Perceptions

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess internal consistency of the constructs. All variables demonstrated good reliability; Expected Return: $\alpha = 0.82$, Risk Perception: $\alpha = 0.78$, Financial Literacy: $\alpha = 0.84$, Overconfidence: $\alpha = 0.75$. Herding Behavior: $\alpha = 0.79$, Macroeconomic Perception: $\alpha = 0.81$, Investment Decision: $\alpha = 0.85$. Factor analysis confirmed that all items loaded appropriately on their respective constructs, indicating good construct validity. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships between the independent variables and investment decisions. The results show significant positive correlations; Expected Return ($r = 0.52, p < 0.01$), Risk Perception ($r = 0.41, p < 0.01$), Financial Literacy ($r = 0.49, p < 0.01$), Overconfidence ($r = 0.38, p < 0.01$), Herding Behavior ($r = 0.44, p < 0.01$), Macroeconomic Perception ($r = 0.35, p < 0.01$). These results suggest that all the studied variables are significantly associated with the investment decisions of Indonesian retail investors.

Strategies Implemented

The startups applied various formal and informal risk management strategies depending on their maturity level, available resources, and leadership preferences. The most common strategies identified include: Scenario Planning and Pivot Readiness: Many startups employed "what-if" analysis to anticipate possible disruptions. One e-commerce startup used weekly strategic reviews to update risk scenarios, enabling quick pivots during market shifts. Lean Startup Practices: Several participants emphasized the importance of testing ideas with minimal investment. They used feedback loops, A/B testing, and pilot programs to validate products and avoid costly failures. Legal Compliance and Advisory Support: Startups in regulated industries hired external legal consultants to interpret laws and ensure compliance. Some used legal-tech platforms to automate parts of the compliance process.

Cybersecurity Measures: Especially in fintech and healthtech, investment in cybersecurity tools and hiring IT security professionals was prioritized. Companies adopted end-to-end encryption and conducted periodic vulnerability assessments. Diversification and Customer Segmentation: To mitigate market risk, several startups diversified their offerings. One edtech firm created both B2C and B2B product lines to reduce reliance on school-based subscriptions. Insurance and Contingency Reserves: A few well-funded startups reported purchasing business liability insurance and maintaining emergency funds to handle operational disruptions. Mentorship and Networking: Many startups credited guidance

from mentors and accelerator programs for helping them anticipate and address risks. Founders shared that regular discussions with more experienced entrepreneurs led to the early identification of red flags.

Challenges in Implementing Risk Strategies and External Support and Its Impact

While some strategies were successfully applied, startups faced significant challenges in implementation; Resource Constraints: Most startups operated on tight budgets, making it difficult to hire risk specialists or invest in professional risk management systems. Lack of Formal Training: Several founders admitted they lacked formal knowledge or training in risk management. As a result, many strategies were implemented reactively rather than proactively. Fast-Changing Environment: Startups in dynamic sectors like e-commerce found that formal risk plans quickly became outdated, leading them to adopt more flexible, adaptive strategies instead of structured frameworks. Team Mindset: In some teams, especially those led by first-time founders, there was a strong emphasis on growth and innovation at the expense of caution and risk planning.

Government programs, investors, and incubators played a significant role in supporting risk management. Startups that had participated in accelerator programs were more likely to have developed risk management plans, as these programs often included mentoring in governance, finance, and legal compliance. Investors also influenced strategy, with some requiring regular reporting on key risk indicators or embedding advisors in management teams. However, most participants felt that more could be done at the ecosystem level. They called for clearer regulations, more accessible startup insurance products, and capacity-building programs focused on risk awareness and mitigation.

Discussions

The findings of this study highlight the diverse landscape of risk management strategies adopted by startup companies in Indonesia. Despite being in an environment marked by uncertainty, limited resources, and intense competition, many startups exhibit adaptive and innovative approaches to mitigate various risks. This discussion interprets the research results in the context of existing literature and Indonesia's unique entrepreneurial ecosystem, while addressing implications, limitations, and future directions. The relationship between innovation and risk is particularly pronounced in startups, where the pursuit of new markets, products, and business models inherently involves uncertainty. The study's findings confirm the assertion of McMullen and Shepherd (2006) that entrepreneurs act under conditions of uncertainty and must rely on their judgment to identify and manage risks. In the Indonesian context, this interplay is magnified due to the rapidly evolving digital economy and nascent regulatory frameworks.

Startups in this study adopted agile methodologies, lean startup principles, and rapid iteration processes to test ideas and pivot as needed. This aligns with Ries (2011), who emphasized validated learning and adaptive experimentation as effective tools for managing market and product risks. While these strategies enable innovation and flexibility, they can also lead to neglecting structured risk management practices, particularly in non-technical domains like legal compliance and governance. The variation in risk awareness and formalization of risk management practices observed among the startups is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Manab et al., 2010; Aven, 2016), which suggest that small and early-stage businesses often lack structured risk frameworks due to limited expertise and resources. In this study, founders with prior entrepreneurial or corporate experience were more likely to implement systematic strategies, such as scenario planning and legal risk mitigation.

However, younger or first-time entrepreneurs often adopted an informal and reactive approach, focusing on short-term survival and growth. This behavior reflects a pragmatic response to startup constraints, though it may expose companies to heightened vulnerabilities in the long term. Hence, there is a pressing need for capacity-building initiatives aimed at enhancing risk literacy among startup founders. Sector-specific factors significantly influenced the types of risks encountered and the strategies deployed. For example, fintech and healthtech startups faced higher regulatory and technological risks due to stricter compliance requirements and data sensitivity. These companies were more likely to invest in legal consultants, cybersecurity measures, and risk audits, reflecting a more proactive approach. In contrast, edtech and e-commerce startups prioritized market adaptability and customer engagement strategies, often placing regulatory risk lower on their agenda.

These sectoral variations underscore the importance of contextualizing risk management within industry-specific dynamics. Regulatory bodies and support programs should thus tailor their interventions according to sectoral needs, providing targeted assistance where risks are most acute. The study reveals the positive influence of external actors such as accelerators, incubators, and investors in shaping risk management practices. Startups that participated in accelerator programs exhibited a higher awareness of risk and adopted more comprehensive governance measures. This finding

corroborates the literature (e.g., Cohen & Hochberg, 2014), which highlights the role of entrepreneurial ecosystems in fostering startup development through mentorship, access to capital, and training.

Investors also contributed to formalizing risk practices by requiring periodic reporting and imposing risk-related conditions in funding agreements. However, the extent of this support varied, with some startups receiving minimal guidance beyond financial investment. The findings suggest that structured mentorship and advisory programs, particularly those focusing on risk planning and sustainability, could bridge the knowledge gap in startups. One of the most persistent challenges cited by the startups was regulatory risk, often caused by inconsistent or evolving government policies. This concern is echoed in previous studies (e.g., World Bank, 2020), which have criticized the unpredictability of regulatory enforcement in Indonesia. Startups, especially those in fintech and healthcare, reported delays, increased costs, and strategic reorientations resulting from unclear guidelines or sudden changes in legal requirements.

Addressing this issue requires stronger coordination between regulatory authorities and the startup community. Initiatives such as regulatory sandboxes, which have been implemented in several countries, could provide startups with a safe environment to innovate while working in compliance with legal norms. Such mechanisms would reduce friction, build trust, and foster a more innovation-friendly business climate. The study has several implications for startup founders, investors, and policymakers; For Founders: There is a need to adopt a balanced approach that embraces innovation while integrating proactive risk management into business planning. For Investors: Incorporating risk due diligence and governance advisory into investment processes can enhance startup sustainability and reduce failure rates. For Policymakers: Simplifying regulations, providing startup-friendly compliance guidelines, and promoting education on risk management are crucial steps to support entrepreneurship.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that while startups in Indonesia employ diverse and often innovative strategies to manage risk, there are notable gaps in formal systems, sectoral support, and regulatory alignment. A more holistic, ecosystem-based approach involving education, policy reform, and technology support is essential to build resilient startups capable of withstanding external shocks and scaling sustainably.

4. CONCLUSION

Risk management plays a pivotal role in determining the sustainability and long-term success of startup companies, particularly in dynamic and uncertain environments like Indonesia. This study has explored how startups across various sectors identify, perceive, and respond to a wide range of risks—including financial, regulatory, operational, market, and technological risks. It was found that although many Indonesian startups are highly innovative and agile, their approaches to risk management are often informal, reactive, and heavily influenced by founder experience, sector-specific challenges, and resource constraints. Startups in regulated sectors such as fintech and healthtech demonstrated greater awareness and formalization of risk management strategies, often employing external legal and IT security support to ensure compliance and mitigate exposure. Meanwhile, startups in e-commerce and edtech sectors relied more on adaptive strategies such as lean experimentation, product diversification, and scenario planning to cope with market volatility. However, across all sectors, startups frequently cited financial limitations, lack of formal training, and the absence of standardized risk frameworks as major barriers to implementing effective risk mitigation. The influence of external support systems—including investors, incubators, and accelerator programs—was found to be a critical factor in promoting risk awareness and governance structures. Startups that received mentorship or guidance from these institutions were generally more proactive in their risk management efforts. Nonetheless, regulatory uncertainty and inconsistency remain significant external threats that constrain startup growth and complicate risk planning. The findings of this research underscore the need for a more integrated approach to startup risk management in Indonesia. Startups must begin to embed risk awareness and mitigation practices early in their development cycle. At the same time, government institutions and startup ecosystem stakeholders should focus on creating enabling environments through clearer regulations, targeted education programs, and access to affordable risk management tools. Fostering a culture of proactive risk management within Indonesian startups is essential not only to minimize failure rates but also to support innovation, investor confidence, and national economic resilience. A collaborative, ecosystem-wide commitment to strengthening startup risk practices will be critical for sustaining Indonesia's growing digital and entrepreneurial economy

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