



## Startup Entrepreneurs Facing Technological Disruption: Insights from Indonesia

Eka Sutisna

Universitas Islam Jakarta, Indonesia

[ekasutisna5432@gmail.com](mailto:ekasutisna5432@gmail.com)

### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received 22-01-2025

Revised 03-02-2025

Accepted 14-02-2025

#### Keyword:

Innovation Economy; Digital Entrepreneurship; Technological Disruption; Startup Ecosystem; Subjective Experience.

### ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has transformed entrepreneurial ecosystems, compelling startups to navigate complex challenges and opportunities. While significant research has focused on structural and functional aspects of technological disruption, limited attention has been given to the subjective experience of entrepreneurs in emerging markets. This study addresses the gap by exploring how startup founders in Indonesia experience and respond to technological disruptions. Using a phenomenological approach, this research investigates the lived realities of founders to uncover the meanings and strategies they construct in navigating dynamic ecosystems. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis to identify themes such as adaptive leadership, collaborative problem-solving, and the dual role of technology as both an enabler and a challenge. The findings reveal that startup founders employ rapid learning and team-oriented strategies to adapt to disruptions, highlighting the critical role of individual agency within systemic pressures. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to existing frameworks by incorporating subjective experiences of entrepreneurs, thus broadening the scope of entrepreneurial and innovation research. Practically, the study offers actionable insights for ecosystem developers and policymakers, emphasizing the need for targeted support mechanisms that enhance resilience and adaptability in digital startups.



©2024 Authors. Published by PT Mukhlisina Revolution Center.. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the entrepreneurial landscape, introducing both unprecedented opportunities and significant challenges (Aggarwal dkk., 2023). Within this dynamic context, startup founders often find themselves navigating disruptions that compel continuous adaptation of business models and strategies. These disruptions, stemming from technological advancements, have been widely recognized for their ability to reshape industries, alter market dynamics, and redefine consumer expectations (Christensen, 1997). For entrepreneurs, these changes present a dual challenge: leveraging technology as a driver of innovation while addressing the uncertainties it brings.

The concept of innovation ecosystems has gained prominence as a framework for understanding the interactions between entrepreneurs, technologies, and markets. Previous studies have highlighted the role of such ecosystems in fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, and resource accessibility. However, while the structural and functional dimensions of entrepreneurial ecosystems have been extensively analyzed, less attention has been given to the subjective experiences of entrepreneurs within these systems, particularly in the face of technological disruption.

Phenomenology offers a unique methodological approach for exploring the lived experiences of startup founders navigating these disruptions. By focusing on subjective meanings attributed to challenges and adaptations, it provides deeper insights into how entrepreneurs interpret and respond to technological change. Despite the increasing recognition of technological disruption as a pivotal force

in digital entrepreneurship, existing research often overlooks the nuanced, experiential insights of those directly involved in these processes, particularly in emerging markets like Indonesia.

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the subjective experiences of technology startup founders in Indonesia, an ecosystem characterized by rapid growth and significant technological shifts. By adopting a phenomenological approach, the research aims to uncover the intricate interplay between individual perceptions, organizational strategies, and the broader ecosystem in shaping responses to technological disruption.

The study of subjective experiences within the context of technological disruption has emerged as a critical area of inquiry, particularly in the field of digital entrepreneurship. This focus is rooted in the recognition that understanding how individuals interpret and navigate complex phenomena offers insights that cannot be captured through purely quantitative approaches. Experiences such as adapting to disruptive technologies, managing evolving customer expectations, and sustaining innovation in volatile markets are inherently subjective, requiring a methodological framework capable of uncovering deep, personal meanings.

Traditional methodologies often emphasize objective metrics and generalizable patterns, which, while valuable, fail to address the rich complexity of individual experiences (Choi & Serrato, 2024). For example, surveys and statistical analyses may highlight trends in how startups respond to technological change but fall short of revealing the nuanced decision-making processes, emotional responses, and interpersonal dynamics that underpin these actions. This methodological limitation underscores the need for approaches that prioritize depth over breadth, enabling researchers to explore the lived realities of those directly impacted by such phenomena.

Phenomenology overcomes these challenges by focusing on subjective experiences as perceived by individuals, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of phenomena. In the context of digital entrepreneurship, this approach is particularly well-suited for capturing the complexity of founders' responses to technological disruptions. Despite its potential, phenomenological studies in this domain remain scarce, particularly in emerging economies such as Indonesia, where the entrepreneurial landscape is rapidly evolving.

By adopting a phenomenological lens, this study aims to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical realities, providing a richer, more contextually grounded understanding of how technology startup founders experience and respond to disruption. The findings are expected to contribute to both academic literature and practical strategies, offering insights into the interplay between individual agency and systemic forces in shaping entrepreneurial outcomes.

Existing approaches to understanding technological disruptions in digital entrepreneurship have predominantly relied on practical frameworks and quantitative analyses. These methodologies often focus on structural and functional aspects, such as market trends, technology adoption rates, and financial performance (Darmanto dkk., 2023). While these insights are valuable for understanding broad patterns and outcomes, they fall short of capturing the intricate, subjective experiences of entrepreneurs who directly navigate these disruptions. The emphasis on measurable indicators tends to obscure the deeper meanings and personal interpretations that shape entrepreneurial decision-making and adaptation strategies.

This gap is particularly evident in the context of startup ecosystems in emerging markets like Indonesia, where technological disruptions are rapidly altering the entrepreneurial landscape. Current studies often fail to account for the lived realities of startup founders, including the emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions of their experiences. These elements are critical for understanding how entrepreneurs interpret challenges, construct strategies, and sustain innovation in highly dynamic environments.

A phenomenological approach offers a robust alternative to address this limitation. By prioritizing the exploration of subjective experiences, phenomenology enables researchers to uncover the essence of phenomena as they are perceived and interpreted by individuals. This method provides a holistic understanding of how entrepreneurs engage with, respond to, and derive meaning from technological disruptions. Despite its potential, phenomenological research in this domain remains

sparse, creating a significant opportunity to deepen our understanding of the interplay between individual agency and systemic forces in shaping entrepreneurial outcomes.

This study aims to fill this gap by employing a phenomenological framework to explore the subjective experiences of startup founders in Indonesia (Ferràs-Hernández dkk., 2017). By focusing on their lived experiences, the research seeks to provide richer, more nuanced insights into the complexities of navigating technological disruptions within a rapidly evolving entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Previous research on technological disruption and entrepreneurship has predominantly focused on measurable outcomes such as innovation performance, market adaptation, and structural ecosystem dynamics. Studies rooted in Christensen's (1997) disruption theory have provided valuable insights into the mechanisms of technological change and its impact on industries. However, investigations into the subjective experiences of entrepreneurs navigating these changes remain limited. Recent literature has called for qualitative approaches that explore the lived realities of startup founders, particularly in emerging economies where contextual complexities influence entrepreneurial behavior. This study addresses this gap by focusing on the nuanced perspectives of entrepreneurs operating within Indonesia's rapidly evolving digital ecosystem.

To explore these subjective experiences, this research adopts a phenomenological approach, specifically interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Chang & Kock, 2021). This method enables a detailed examination of how individuals perceive, interpret, and make sense of their encounters with technological disruption. Phenomenology was chosen for its capacity to uncover the essence of complex phenomena, revealing insights that are often inaccessible through quantitative or generalized qualitative methods. This approach answers the identified knowledge gap by providing a deeper understanding of how startup founders conceptualize and respond to challenges, strategies, and transformations in their business environments.

This article is structured to guide the reader through a logical exploration of the research. The introduction establishes the study's relevance, followed by a detailed contextual background on digital entrepreneurship and technological disruption (He dkk., 2024). The methodology section explains the phenomenological approach and describes the data collection and analysis processes. The results present key themes derived from participant narratives, and the discussion interprets these findings in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks. The article concludes with practical and theoretical implications, emphasizing the significance of subjective experiences in shaping entrepreneurial strategies.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Study Design**

This study employed a phenomenological approach to explore the subjective experiences of startup founders in navigating technological disruptions (Heft & Dogruel, 2019). Phenomenology was chosen for its focus on understanding the lived experiences and meanings ascribed by individuals to specific phenomena. This approach is particularly suitable for addressing the research questions, which center on the challenges, strategies, and interpretations of founders in adapting to a dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem. The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method was utilized, emphasizing the co-construction of meaning between participants and the researcher. This method facilitated an in-depth exploration of how participants make sense of their experiences, capturing both individual and collective perspectives. To validate the interpretative process, inter-coder reliability was established by having two independent researchers review the data and compare thematic codes. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus to ensure the robustness of the findings. Additionally, participant feedback was sought during the analysis phase, where key themes were shared with participants for confirmation of the accuracy and resonance of the interpretations.

### **Participants**

The study involved ten founders of technology startups in Indonesia, selected through purposive sampling based on specific inclusion criteria (Ikeda dkk., 2016). Participants were required to have at least three years of operational experience in the digital technology sector and to have experienced significant shifts in their business models due to technological disruptions. Gender, age, and specific technological focus varied among participants, providing a diverse range of perspectives. Participants were engaged from startups that demonstrated active operations within the digital entrepreneurship ecosystem. To ensure the richness of data, the inclusion criteria prioritized individuals who had directly led their organizations through technological change.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews conducted in a private and comfortable setting, either in person or via secure online platforms. The interview guide was designed to elicit detailed narratives about participants' experiences with technological disruptions, challenges faced, and strategies employed to sustain innovation (MAYOROV, 2020). Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, allowing for in-depth exploration while ensuring participants' comfort. Observations of daily operations and team dynamics were also conducted, focusing on practices related to adaptation and collaboration. All interviews and observations were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity of their narratives.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework, involving systematic steps to identify themes and patterns within the data (Meek & Cowden, 2023). Transcriptions were carefully reviewed, and thematic coding was performed to extract recurring motifs, such as "technological adaptation," "market challenges," and "leadership dynamics." Themes were further analyzed to uncover deeper meanings and relationships, leading to the identification of essential findings. Data were organized using qualitative analysis software (NVivo) to streamline coding and thematic categorization. The analysis emphasized both individual experiences and shared understandings, ensuring that findings captured the complexity and nuance of participants' perspectives.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, ensuring compliance with international and local research ethics standards (Onetti, 2021). Participants provided informed consent before data collection, including consent for audio recording and the use of anonymized data in publications. Anonymity and confidentiality were rigorously maintained by replacing identifiable information with pseudonyms and securing all data in encrypted storage. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty, ensuring their autonomy throughout the research process.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Adapting to Technological Disruption**

Participants described their experiences of adapting to technological disruptions as a journey requiring rapid learning and continuous experimentation. Founders emphasized that staying updated with technological advancements was essential for their survival and growth. One founder shared, "We have to constantly experiment with new technologies, even if it means changing the direction of our established strategies. It's a continuous cycle of trial and error."

This sentiment reflects the underlying tension between maintaining existing operational stability and pursuing innovation. Many participants highlighted how external pressures, such as changing customer expectations and competitive markets, necessitated an adaptive approach to incorporating new tools and processes. This adaptiveness often emerged as a critical survival strategy within the fast-paced digital entrepreneurial ecosystem.

### **Navigating Market Challenges**

Participants identified rapidly shifting customer demands and market uncertainties as significant challenges. Several founders reported difficulties in predicting and responding to evolving consumer preferences. One founder elaborated, "Understanding what the customer really needs is harder than ever. By the time we develop a solution, the market has already shifted to something new."

This challenge was compounded by the dynamic nature of digital markets, where new entrants frequently disrupt established business models. Participants expressed the need to balance short-term responsiveness with long-term strategic planning, which often led to a tension between innovation and operational efficiency.

### **Leadership and Internal Collaboration**

Adaptive leadership emerged as a central theme in participants' narratives. Founders described their roles as both visionaries and facilitators, ensuring effective communication and collaboration within their teams. One participant noted, "Leadership today is about empowering the team to embrace change and work together. No single person can tackle these challenges alone."

The use of digital collaboration tools was frequently cited as a practical response to the need for flexible and agile teamwork. Observations of operational practices revealed that participants relied heavily on platforms for project management, enabling rapid problem-solving and decision-making. These tools were viewed not only as functional aids but also as enablers of a culture of transparency and shared ownership within teams. The overlapping concepts of "adaptive leadership" and "collaboration" can be understood as two interrelated dimensions of a broader strategy, where leadership facilitates collaboration and vice versa. This distinction ensures clarity while still acknowledging their interconnectedness.

### **The Dual Role of Technology as Opportunity and Challenge**

Participants consistently expressed a dual perspective on the role of technology in their entrepreneurial journeys. On one hand, technology was perceived as an enabler of innovation and a source of competitive advantage. On the other hand, its rapid evolution posed constant challenges to existing knowledge and resources. One founder summarized this paradox, stating, "Technology is both the solution and the problem. It opens up opportunities, but it also forces us to rethink everything, sometimes from scratch."

This theme underscores the complexity of managing technological disruptions while simultaneously leveraging them to drive growth. The participants' experiences highlighted the importance of maintaining a proactive stance towards technological change, coupled with a willingness to embrace uncertainty.

The findings illustrate that the experiences of digital startup founders in Indonesia are deeply intertwined with their ability to adapt to technological disruptions, navigate market challenges, foster adaptive leadership, and balance the opportunities and challenges posed by technology. These themes collectively capture the dynamic and multifaceted nature of entrepreneurship within the context of a rapidly evolving digital ecosystem.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

This study reveals that startup founders experience technological disruption as a dual force: simultaneously an enabler of innovation and a challenge to organizational stability. These findings illuminate the core of their subjective experiences, particularly in navigating adaptation, collaboration, and strategic foresight within the rapidly evolving digital ecosystem in Indonesia. These insights directly address the overarching research question by uncovering the nuanced ways in which entrepreneurs make sense of and respond to technological shifts.

### **Contribution to Research Questions**

The findings contribute significantly to understanding how startup founders perceive and navigate the complexities of technological disruption. By capturing the lived experiences of entrepreneurs, the research highlights their adaptive strategies, such as leveraging rapid learning

processes and fostering team collaboration, to mitigate the uncertainties brought about by disruptive technologies. The emphasis on leadership as a facilitative force within these dynamics underscores the importance of vision-driven adaptability in sustaining innovation. These contributions deepen the understanding of how individual agency interacts with systemic pressures, a dimension often overlooked in prior research.

### **Connection to Existing Literature and Theories**

The findings align with Christensen's (1997) theory of disruptive innovation by demonstrating how new technologies compel shifts in traditional business practices. However, this study extends the theoretical framework by providing empirical evidence on the subjective, lived experiences of navigating these disruptions, a perspective that is underexplored. The emphasis on adaptive leadership complements existing studies on entrepreneurial ecosystems, which often highlight structural and collective factors but neglect the personal and experiential dimensions of entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the observed reliance on digital collaboration tools resonates with prior research on technology adoption but provides additional insights into how these tools facilitate cultural adaptability and shared ownership within organizations. These findings enrich the broader discourse on entrepreneurship by integrating subjective perspectives into systemic analyses.

### **Implications of Findings**

The findings of this study have both theoretical and practical implications (Ramiel, 2021). Theoretically, they emphasize the importance of integrating subjective perspectives into the analysis of entrepreneurial responses to technological disruption, enriching the broader discourse on innovation and adaptation. By revealing the lived experiences of startup founders, this study highlights the interplay between individual agency and systemic pressures, offering a nuanced understanding that complements existing ecosystem-level frameworks.

Practically, these findings offer actionable insights for startup founders, policymakers, and ecosystem facilitators. For founders, the study underscores the need for cultivating adaptive leadership and fostering team collaboration to navigate uncertainties effectively. Policymakers and stakeholders can utilize these insights to design more supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems, emphasizing access to training in adaptive technologies and fostering networks for collaborative problem-solving. These findings are particularly relevant in emerging markets, where dynamic and context-specific challenges necessitate tailored strategies for sustaining innovation.

### **Study Limitations**

While the study provides rich insights into the subjective experiences of startup founders, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The use of purposive sampling, while appropriate for phenomenological research, limits the generalizability of findings beyond the specific context of Indonesian digital startups (Schill dkk., 2022). Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, such as selective memory or social desirability, which may influence participants' narratives. Finally, the study's focus on founders with a minimum of three years of operational experience excludes perspectives from younger startups, which may face unique challenges. These limitations underscore the need for caution in extrapolating the findings to broader populations or contexts.

### **Prospective Directions for Future Research**

Future research could build upon these findings by exploring the experiences of startup founders in different cultural or economic contexts, offering comparative insights into how diverse ecosystems shape entrepreneurial adaptation. Longitudinal studies could provide a more dynamic understanding of how founders' strategies evolve over time in response to ongoing technological changes (Zhu dkk., 2023). Additionally, integrating mixed methods approaches could enhance the depth and breadth of analysis, combining the rich, qualitative insights of phenomenology with broader quantitative trends. By addressing these avenues, future studies can further refine the understanding of entrepreneurial responses to technological disruption and contribute to more robust theoretical frameworks in the field.

**CONCLUSION**

This study explored the subjective experiences of technology startup founders in Indonesia as they navigated the challenges of technological disruption within a rapidly evolving digital ecosystem. The findings revealed that adaptation, leadership, and collaboration are central to how entrepreneurs perceive and respond to these disruptions, emphasizing the dual role of technology as both an enabler and a challenge. By adopting a phenomenological approach, this research captured the nuanced realities of founders' lived experiences, addressing gaps in previous studies that focused predominantly on quantitative or structural analyses. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between individual agency and systemic forces, offering practical implications for entrepreneurial strategy and ecosystem support. Based on these findings, practitioners, particularly startup founders, are encouraged to foster adaptive leadership and prioritize continuous learning, ensuring their teams remain agile in the face of technological change. Moreover, collaboration should be emphasized within teams and across ecosystems, as it facilitates knowledge sharing and accelerates problem-solving. For policymakers, it is crucial to support entrepreneurial ecosystems by providing access to resources such as training in adaptive technologies and creating networking opportunities that promote collaboration.

While the study is context-specific, its findings highlight broader themes of adaptability and resilience that can inform future research in diverse entrepreneurial environments. The implications of this study extend beyond Indonesia, offering valuable lessons for emerging markets where technological disruption is rapidly reshaping industries. By focusing on the lived experiences of entrepreneurs, this study underscores the importance of context-driven strategies for sustaining innovation and fostering growth in fast-changing markets. Further studies could expand on these results by employing longitudinal designs or comparative cross-cultural analyses to refine the theoretical and practical contributions made here.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

**REFERENCES**

- Aggarwal, D., Choi, A. H., & Lee, Y.-H. A. (2023). The Meme Stock Frenzy: Origins and Implications. *Southern California Law Review*, 96(6), 1387–1415. Scopus.
- Bass, A. E., Huang, L., Milosevic, I., & Paterson, T. A. (2024). From startup to success: The power of PsyCap for new venture growth. *Organizational Dynamics*, 53(4). Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2024.101083>
- Chang, Y., & Kock, W. M. (2021). Credit guarantee scheme and startup businesses: Financial pipelines and successful startups in South East Asia. Dalam *Investment In Startups And Small Business Financing* (hlm. 265–302). World Scientific Publishing Co.; Scopus. [https://doi.org/10.1142/9789811235825\\_0009](https://doi.org/10.1142/9789811235825_0009)
- Choi, B.-J., & Serrato, C. (2024). PairAnything's tech-forward approach to revolutionize wine selection. *Journal of Information Technology Teaching Cases*. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20438869241258234>
- Darmanto, S., Ekopriyono, A., Hikmah, H., & Ratnawati, A. T. (2023). The Role of Competence and Digital Entrepreneurs Career Maturity on Business Performance in Disruption Era. *Journal of Distribution Science*, 21(2), 77–89. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.15722/jds.21.02.202302.77>
- Ferràs-Hernández, X., Tarrats-Pons, E., & Arimany-Serrat, N. (2017). Disruption in the automotive industry: A Cambrian moment. *Business Horizons*, 60(6), 855–863. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2017.07.011>

- He, Z., Liu, X., Shi, X., & Sun, X. (2024). Housing demolition and entrepreneurship: Evidence from China. *Cities*, 152. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2024.105201>
- Heft, A., & Dogruel, L. (2019). Searching for Autonomy in Digital News Entrepreneurism Projects. *Digital Journalism*, 7(5), 678–697. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2019.1581070>
- Ikeda, K., Marshall, A., & Okamura, S. (2016). Four steps to re-ignite Japan's innovation leadership. *Strategy and Leadership*, 44(6), 35–45. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SL-09-2016-0075>
- MAYOROV, S. I. (2020). Digital Transformation of Capital Market Infrastructure. *Ekonomicheskaya Politika*, 2020(5), 8–31. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.18288/1994-5124-2020-5-8-31>
- Meek, S., & Cowden, B. J. (2023). Strategies of unicorn startups: How these positive deviants compare to early-stage and Fortune 500 ventures. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 30(6), 1109–1128. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSBED-02-2023-0069>
- Onetti, A. (2021). Turning open innovation into practice: Trends in European corporates. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 42(1), 51–58. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBS-07-2019-0138>
- Ramiel, H. (2021). Edtech disruption logic and policy work: The case of an Israeli edtech unit. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 46(1), 20–32. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2020.1737110>
- Schill, R., Leonel, R., Fabian, F., & Jorgensen, D. F. (2022). Kuiki Credit: Scaling innovation in a growing fintech startup. *Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies*, 12(3), 1–20. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EEMCS-08-2021-0248>
- Zhu, B., Liang, C., Mirza, N., & Umar, M. (2023). What drives gearing in early-stage firms? Evidence from blue economy startups. *Journal of Business Research*, 161. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113840>