

Strategic Decision-Making in Small and Medium Enterprises: A Qualitative Case Study Approach

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Abstract :

Strategic decision-making plays a critical role in determining the sustainability and competitiveness of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), particularly in dynamic urban economic environments. SMEs often face challenges such as limited resources, market uncertainty, and intense competition, which require entrepreneurs to make adaptive and effective strategic decisions. This study aims to explore the strategic decision-making processes among SMEs in Bandung City, Indonesia. The research employed a qualitative case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how SME owners interpret business challenges, evaluate opportunities, and formulate strategic responses. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with SME owners and managers, supported by field observations and documentation analysis. The collected data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that strategic decision-making in SMEs is strongly influenced by entrepreneurial experience, market feedback, and environmental dynamics. SME owners tend to rely on experiential knowledge, customer responses, and informal discussions when determining business strategies. In addition, digital platforms such as social media and online marketplaces have become increasingly important in shaping strategic decisions related to marketing and business expansion. The study contributes to the strategic management literature by highlighting the contextual and adaptive nature of decision-making processes in SMEs. Practically, the findings provide insights for policymakers and business development institutions in designing programs that strengthen the strategic capabilities of SME entrepreneurs and support sustainable business growth.

Keywords : *Strategic Decision-Making, Small and Medium Enterprises, Qualitative Case Study, SME Strategy, Business Strategy*

Abstrak :

Pengambilan keputusan strategis memainkan peran penting dalam menentukan keberlanjutan dan daya saing usaha kecil dan menengah (UKM), khususnya dalam lingkungan ekonomi perkotaan yang dinamis. UKM sering menghadapi tantangan seperti keterbatasan sumber daya, ketidakpastian pasar, dan persaingan yang ketat, yang mengharuskan para pengusaha untuk membuat keputusan strategis yang

adaptif dan efektif. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi proses pengambilan keputusan strategis di kalangan UKM di Kota Bandung, Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif untuk mendapatkan pemahaman mendalam tentang bagaimana pemilik UKM menafsirkan tantangan bisnis, mengevaluasi peluang, dan merumuskan respons strategis. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan pemilik dan manajer UKM, didukung oleh observasi lapangan dan analisis dokumentasi. Data yang dikumpulkan dianalisis menggunakan model analisis kualitatif interaktif yang terdiri dari kondensasi data, tampilan data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pengambilan keputusan strategis di UKM sangat dipengaruhi oleh pengalaman kewirausahaan, umpan balik pasar, dan dinamika lingkungan. Pemilik UKM cenderung mengandalkan pengetahuan berdasarkan pengalaman, respons pelanggan, dan diskusi informal ketika menentukan strategi bisnis. Selain itu, platform digital seperti media sosial dan pasar online menjadi semakin penting dalam membentuk keputusan strategis terkait pemasaran dan ekspansi bisnis. Studi ini berkontribusi pada literatur manajemen strategis dengan menyoroti sifat kontekstual dan adaptif dari proses pengambilan keputusan di UKM. Secara praktis, temuan ini memberikan wawasan bagi para pembuat kebijakan dan lembaga pengembangan bisnis dalam merancang program yang memperkuat kemampuan strategis para pengusaha UKM dan mendukung pertumbuhan bisnis yang berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: *Pengambilan Keputusan Strategis, Usaha Kecil dan Menengah, Studi Kasus Kualitatif, Strategi UKM, Strategi Bisnis*

INTRODUCTION

Strategic decision-making has become an essential capability for organizations in an increasingly competitive and dynamic business environment (Zhou, et al, 2018). Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in national and regional economic development because they contribute significantly to employment generation, innovation, and local economic resilience (Gamidullaeva, et al, 2020). In many developing countries, including Indonesia, SMEs dominate the business landscape and act as a driving force for economic growth (Mariyudi, 2019). However, the sustainability of SMEs depends largely on the ability of business owners to make strategic decisions in uncertain conditions (Parnell, et al, 2015). Effective strategic decision-making allows SMEs to adapt to market changes, allocate resources efficiently, and develop competitive advantages (Quansah, et al, 2022). Empirical evidence shows that businesses with clear strategic direction tend to survive longer and achieve higher growth compared to those that rely only on operational decisions (Zhou, & Park, 2020). Therefore, understanding how SMEs make strategic decisions is important not only for improving business performance but also for supporting sustainable economic development in society.

Despite their important role, many SMEs face serious challenges in managing strategic decisions effectively (Cardoni, et al, 2020). Unlike large corporations that have structured management systems and professional managers, SMEs are often managed directly by their owners, who must handle multiple responsibilities simultaneously (Naradda Gamage, et al, 2020). Limited managerial skills, restricted access to information, financial constraints, and rapidly changing market conditions make strategic decision-making a complex

process for SME owners (Kindström, et al, 2024). As a result, many SMEs rely on intuition or short-term considerations rather than systematic strategic planning (Lobo, et al, 2020). This situation often leads to inefficient resource allocation, missed market opportunities, and weak competitiveness (Etemad, 2020). In Indonesia, SMEs frequently struggle to transition from informal decision-making processes to more structured strategic management practices (Eggers, 2020). These challenges highlight the need for deeper investigation into how SMEs actually formulate and implement strategic decisions in their daily business operations, particularly in urban economic centers where competition is intense (Parnell, et al, 2015).

The phenomenon of SME development in Bandung City illustrates both opportunities and challenges in strategic decision-making (Karadag, 2015). Bandung is known as one of Indonesia's creative economic hubs, with thousands of SMEs operating in sectors such as culinary, fashion, handicrafts, and digital businesses (Taouab, & Issor, 2019). These enterprises contribute significantly to local economic activity and employment (De Massis, et al, 2018). However, field observations indicate that many SME owners still rely on personal experience, informal networks, and intuition when making important business decisions (Gölgeci, & Ponomarov, 2015). Strategic choices related to market expansion, product innovation, digital marketing adoption, and financial management are often made without systematic analysis or long-term planning (Baruah, & Ward, 2015). As competition intensifies and consumer preferences rapidly evolve, SMEs in Bandung are increasingly required to make strategic decisions that determine their survival and growth (Zahoor, et al, 2022). This situation creates an interesting context to explore how SME owners interpret business challenges and formulate strategies within their limited organizational structures (Berrone, et al, 2023).

Previous studies on strategic management in SMEs have provided valuable insights into the role of leadership, organizational learning, and resource management in shaping business strategies (Ritter, & Pedersen, 2020). Several researchers have emphasized that strategic decision-making in SMEs is strongly influenced by the cognitive abilities, experience, and entrepreneurial orientation of business owners (Teece, et al, 2016). Studies have also shown that informal decision-making processes are common in small businesses due to their flexible organizational structures (Abdulrahman, et al, 2015). While these studies highlight important aspects of SME management, many of them focus primarily on quantitative approaches that measure relationships between variables such as innovation, performance, and strategic orientation (Zahra, 2021). Consequently, these studies often overlook the deeper processes through which SME owners interpret information, evaluate alternatives, and ultimately make strategic decisions in real-life contexts (Zhang, et al, 2019).

Furthermore, existing research tends to generalize SME strategic behavior without adequately considering the socio-cultural and environmental contexts in which decision-making occurs (Leonidou, et al, 2017). In many cases, strategic decisions are shaped not only by economic considerations but also by local market conditions, personal networks, and cultural values embedded in

the business environment (Huong Tran, et al, 2016). Particularly in Indonesian cities like Bandung, SMEs operate within complex ecosystems that include government support programs, creative communities, digital marketplaces, and informal collaboration networks (Coleman, et al, 2016). However, limited research has explored how these contextual factors influence the strategic decision-making processes of SME owners (Li, et al, 2016). This gap suggests the need for qualitative studies that can capture the lived experiences, perspectives, and reasoning patterns of entrepreneurs when they confront strategic challenges in their businesses.

This study offers a novel contribution by exploring strategic decision-making processes among SMEs in Bandung through a qualitative case study approach (Pertheban, et al, 2023). Unlike previous studies that mainly rely on surveys and statistical analysis, this research aims to uncover the underlying reasoning, perceptions, and experiences of SME owners when making strategic business decisions (Garbellano, & Da Veiga,. 2019). By focusing on real-life decision-making situations, the study provides a deeper understanding of how entrepreneurs interpret market changes, evaluate opportunities, and formulate strategies within their organizational constraints (Schmitt, et al, 2018). This approach contributes to the development of strategic management literature by emphasizing the importance of contextual and experiential perspectives in understanding decision-making behavior in SMEs (Reim, et al, 2022).

Based on the issues described above, this study aims to investigate how SME owners in Bandung make strategic decisions in managing and developing their businesses. The main research problem addressed in this study is how strategic decision-making processes are formulated, interpreted, and implemented within small business organizations that operate with limited resources and informal management structures. It is argued that strategic decision-making in SMEs is shaped by the interaction between entrepreneurial experience, environmental conditions, and available organizational resources. By examining these dynamics, this study contributes both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it enriches the understanding of strategic decision-making in small business contexts. Practically, the findings are expected to provide insights for policymakers, business development institutions, and SME owners in designing more effective strategies to strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs in urban economic environments.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to explore the process of strategic decision-making among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Bandung City. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how SME owners interpret business situations, evaluate alternatives, and formulate strategic decisions in their organizational contexts. The case study design allows researchers to investigate complex decision-making processes within real-life settings, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context

are not clearly separated. Through this approach, the study seeks to capture the perspectives, experiences, and reasoning patterns of SME owners when dealing with strategic challenges. The qualitative case study method is particularly suitable for examining managerial processes that involve subjective judgment, contextual interpretation, and entrepreneurial intuition, which cannot be fully explained through quantitative measurement.

The research was conducted in Bandung City, Indonesia, which is widely recognized as one of the country's major centers of creative industries and SME development. Bandung hosts thousands of SMEs operating in sectors such as fashion, culinary businesses, handicrafts, and digital-based enterprises. The city was selected as the research location because of its dynamic business environment, strong entrepreneurial ecosystem, and high level of competition among SMEs. These conditions create a suitable context for examining how SME owners make strategic decisions in response to market changes, technological developments, and competitive pressures. In addition, Bandung has been actively promoted by the local government as a creative economic hub, which makes it an interesting setting for understanding strategic management practices among small businesses.

Data collection in this study was conducted through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation analysis. In-depth interviews were carried out with selected SME owners and managers who were directly involved in making strategic business decisions. These interviews aimed to obtain detailed information regarding their experiences, perspectives, and decision-making processes in managing their enterprises. Observations were also conducted to understand the operational context of SMEs, including how business activities are organized and how decisions are implemented in practice. Supporting documents such as business profiles, promotional materials, and organizational records were examined to enrich the research data and provide additional context for interpreting the findings. The use of multiple data sources allowed the researcher to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Table 1 : Data analysis

| Data Analysis Stages | Analysis Process | Analysis Objectives |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Data Condensation (Data Reduction) | Selecting, focusing, simplifying, and categorizing data from interviews, observations, and documentation | Identifying important information related to the strategic decision-making process in MSMEs |

| Data Analysis Stages | Analysis Process | Analysis Objectives |
|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Data Display | Presenting data in the form of matrices, thematic tables, and descriptive narratives | Makes it easier for researchers to see patterns, relationships, and themes from the data that has been collected |
| Conclusion Drawing | Drawing tentative conclusions from patterns and themes that emerge in the data | Finding meaning and relationships between research findings |
| Data Verification | Re-testing conclusions through source triangulation and member checking | Ensuring the validity and legitimacy of research results |

The data analysis process followed the interactive model of qualitative data analysis, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw data obtained from interviews and observations. Data display involves organizing the data into structured forms such as matrices, tables, or thematic categories to facilitate interpretation. Finally, verification is conducted to draw conclusions and confirm patterns found in the data. To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the research findings, this study applied several validation techniques, including data triangulation, source triangulation, and member checking. Triangulation was used to compare data obtained from different sources and methods, while member checking was conducted by confirming the interview results with the participants to ensure the accuracy of interpretations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

Strategic Decision-Making in Small and Medium Enterprises

Strategic decision-making in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Bandung City can be operationally understood as the process through which business owners analyze market conditions, evaluate available resources, and determine business strategies to ensure sustainability and competitiveness. In the field context, strategic decisions made by SME owners often involve choices related to product innovation, pricing strategies, marketing channels, and expansion of market segments. Unlike large organizations with formal managerial structures, SMEs tend to rely heavily on the experience, intuition, and personal judgment of the business owner when making strategic decisions. These decisions are also influenced by external factors such as consumer trends, technological developments, and market competition. Therefore, strategic

decision-making in SMEs is not only a managerial activity but also a dynamic process that reflects how entrepreneurs interpret opportunities and challenges within their business environment.

Based on the results of interviews with the owner of a culinary SME in Bandung, the informant explained that most strategic decisions in the business are made based on direct observations of customer preferences and market trends. The informant stated that product development decisions are often taken after observing customer feedback and analyzing sales performance over time. According to the informant, flexibility in responding to market demands is essential because consumer preferences in Bandung tend to change rapidly. The researcher interprets this statement as an indication that strategic decision-making among SME owners is closely related to experiential knowledge and continuous interaction with customers. The reliance on market feedback allows entrepreneurs to adjust their strategies quickly, although the decision-making process is often informal and not supported by systematic planning tools.

Another interview with the owner of a fashion SME revealed that strategic decisions related to marketing and business expansion are strongly influenced by digital platforms and social media trends. The informant explained that adopting digital marketing strategies such as social media promotion and online marketplaces significantly affects sales performance. The informant also mentioned that strategic decisions are often taken collaboratively with family members or trusted employees who are involved in the daily operations of the business. The researcher interprets this finding as evidence that decision-making processes in SMEs often combine individual entrepreneurial judgment with collaborative input from internal networks. This collaborative approach helps SME owners evaluate different perspectives before implementing strategic decisions.

Field observations conducted in several SMEs in Bandung indicate that many businesses implement flexible strategic decision-making processes in their daily operations. SME owners frequently monitor market changes, customer responses, and competitor activities before determining their next business strategies. In many cases, strategic decisions such as launching new products or adjusting pricing strategies are made through informal discussions within the business team. The researcher interprets these observations as showing that strategic decision-making in SMEs is highly adaptive and responsive to environmental changes. This flexibility allows SMEs to survive in competitive markets, although it may also create challenges in maintaining consistent long-term planning.

Based on the data obtained from interviews and observations, it can be restated that strategic decision-making in SMEs in Bandung is shaped by the interaction between entrepreneurial experience, market dynamics, and organizational resources. SME owners tend to rely on experiential knowledge, customer feedback, and informal discussions when determining strategic directions for their businesses. This indicates that decision-making processes in SMEs are not purely analytical but also involve intuition, social interaction, and contextual interpretation.

The findings also reveal a pattern that strategic decision-making in SMEs is characterized by flexibility, responsiveness, and strong dependence on the entrepreneur's personal judgment. SMEs tend to prioritize short-term market responses while gradually developing longer-term strategies based on accumulated business experience. This pattern highlights the importance of entrepreneurial capability and adaptive learning in shaping strategic decisions within small business environments.

Table 2: Strategic Decision-Making Indicators in SMEs

| Informant Position | Interview Excerpt | Indicator |
|---------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Owner of Culinary SME | "We usually develop new menu ideas after observing what customers like and which products sell the most." | Market-based decision making |
| Owner of Fashion SME | "Our marketing strategy changed after we started using social media and online marketplaces." | Digital-based strategic decision |
| SME Manager | "Before launching a new product, we discuss it together with the team to see whether it fits the market demand." | Collaborative decision making |

Interpretation of the Table

The table above shows that strategic decision-making among SMEs in Bandung is influenced by several key factors, including market feedback, digital technology adoption, and internal collaboration. The statement from the culinary SME owner indicates that market-based decision-making plays a significant role in shaping business strategies. Entrepreneurs rely heavily on customer preferences and sales performance to determine which products should be developed or modified. This reflects the adaptive nature of SMEs, where strategic decisions are closely linked to real-time market responses.

Meanwhile, the statements from the fashion SME owner and SME manager highlight the importance of digital transformation and collaborative processes in decision-making. The adoption of digital marketing platforms demonstrates how SMEs integrate technological innovation into their strategic decisions. At the same time, internal discussions among business team members suggest that decision-making processes are not always individual but may involve collective consideration of different perspectives. This combination of technological adaptation and collaborative evaluation strengthens the strategic capacity of SMEs in responding to market competition.

Pattern of Findings

From the data presented above, a clear pattern emerges regarding the nature of strategic decision-making among SMEs in Bandung. First, decision-making processes are strongly influenced by market conditions and customer feedback. Second, digital platforms increasingly play a significant role in shaping business strategies, particularly in marketing and customer engagement. Third, collaborative discussions among internal business members contribute to more informed strategic choices.

These patterns indicate that SMEs in Bandung adopt a flexible and adaptive approach to strategic decision-making. Instead of relying solely on formal strategic planning, entrepreneurs integrate experiential knowledge, digital innovation, and collaborative input when making business decisions. This approach enables SMEs to remain competitive in dynamic market environments while continuously adjusting their strategies based on evolving opportunities and challenges.

DISCUSSION

A discussion of strategic decision-making in micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Bandung City shows that the strategic decision-making process in small organizations tends to be flexible, contextual, and heavily influenced by the owner's experience. The findings of this study indicate that MSME owners often rely on direct market observations, customer feedback, and previous business experience when making strategic decisions such as product innovation, marketing strategy, and pricing. These results align with the strategic management literature on MSMEs, which states that decision-making in small organizations is generally informal and owner-centered. Previous research also indicates that limited resources and a simple organizational structure make MSMEs rely more on intuition and practical experience than on formal strategic analysis. Therefore, the findings of this study reinforce the view that the strategic decision-making process in MSMEs has different characteristics than that of large companies.

Furthermore, the findings of this study also show that external environmental factors such as changing consumer trends, market competition, and developments in digital technology influence the strategic decision-making process in MSMEs. This aligns with several previous studies emphasizing that a dynamic business environment encourages organizations to develop adaptive capabilities in strategic decision-making. However, this study also found that many MSME owners in Bandung still use a relatively intuitive approach to responding to market changes, without being supported by a systematic strategic analysis process. This discrepancy suggests that while strategic management theory emphasizes the importance of structured strategic planning, in practice, MSMEs often develop strategies incrementally through a learning process based on daily business experiences.

Another finding from this study indicates that the use of digital technology, particularly social media and marketplace platforms, is beginning to become an important part of MSME strategic decision-making. This finding aligns with the literature on digital transformation in small businesses, which states that digital technology can help companies increase market reach, strengthen customer relationships, and enhance competitiveness. However, this study also shows that the level of digital technology utilization among MSMEs varies and is highly dependent on the knowledge and readiness of business owners to adopt such technology. Thus, although the literature emphasizes the importance of digitalization in modern business strategy, its implementation in MSMEs still faces various challenges, particularly related to limited resources

and digital literacy.

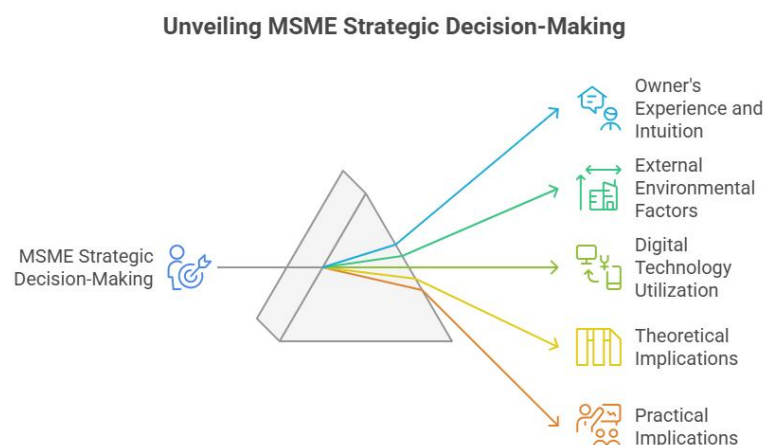


Figure 1 : Unveiling MSME Strategic Decision-Making

In terms of theoretical implications, this study contributes to the development of strategic management studies in the context of small and medium enterprises, particularly regarding the contextual and experience-based strategic decision-making process. This research reinforces the view that strategies in MSMEs are not always formulated through a formal planning process, but often evolve through the interaction between the entrepreneur's experience, market conditions, and emerging business opportunities. Thus, this research adds to the literature on strategic management by demonstrating that a more flexible and experience-based approach can be an important characteristic of business strategy in small organizations.

Practically, the results of this study have implications for MSMEs, local governments, and entrepreneurship support institutions. For MSMEs, this research demonstrates the importance of improving strategic analysis capabilities and utilizing digital technology to support more effective business decision-making. For the government and MSME development institutions, these findings can serve as a basis for designing training programs on strategic management, digital literacy, and strengthening entrepreneurial capacity for small businesses. By improving strategic decision-making capabilities, MSMEs are expected to be more adaptive in facing increasingly dynamic market competition and improve the sustainability and growth of their businesses.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the strategic decision-making processes of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Bandung City using a qualitative case study approach. The findings reveal that strategic decisions in SMEs are largely shaped by the entrepreneurial experience of business owners, market dynamics, and the availability of organizational resources. SME owners tend to rely on direct observations of customer preferences, sales performance, and competitive conditions when determining business strategies. Rather than using formal strategic planning frameworks, many decisions are made through experiential

learning, intuition, and informal discussions within the business environment. The study highlights that flexibility and responsiveness are key characteristics of strategic decision-making in SMEs, enabling entrepreneurs to adapt quickly to changing market conditions. This finding suggests that adaptive decision-making capabilities play an essential role in supporting the sustainability and competitiveness of SMEs in dynamic urban economic environments.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the strategic management literature by providing deeper insights into how strategic decision-making occurs in small business contexts. The findings reinforce the argument that strategic processes in SMEs differ from those in large organizations, where formal planning systems are more prevalent. In SMEs, strategic decisions often evolve through iterative learning processes influenced by entrepreneurial judgment and contextual business realities. The study also enriches existing research by emphasizing the importance of experiential knowledge and environmental interaction in shaping strategic choices. These findings support the view that strategic management theories should consider the unique characteristics of SMEs, particularly the central role of owner-managers and the influence of local business ecosystems.

Practically, the results of this study provide important implications for SME development programs and policy initiatives. Strengthening the strategic decision-making capacity of SME owners can improve business sustainability and competitiveness. Training programs focusing on strategic planning, market analysis, and digital business strategies could help entrepreneurs make more informed and systematic decisions. Additionally, encouraging SMEs to adopt digital platforms for marketing and customer engagement may enhance their ability to respond to market changes. Government agencies and business development institutions can play a significant role in facilitating these capabilities by providing mentoring, training, and access to business information networks.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The research focuses on SMEs in Bandung City, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different economic structures and business ecosystems. Furthermore, the study primarily examines the perspectives of SME owners and managers, while insights from other stakeholders such as employees, customers, and policymakers were not extensively explored. Future research could expand the scope by including multiple regions or industries and applying mixed-method approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding of strategic decision-making in SMEs. Further studies could also investigate the role of digital transformation, innovation capability, and collaborative networks in shaping strategic decision-making processes within small business organizations.

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