



## How Private University Navigates and Survive: Insights from Indonesia

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### Article

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### Abstract

Private higher education has been struggling to survive in the era of change by employing various strategies. The present study takes an archival research approach to analyze how private universities respond, adapt, and adjust their strategies to survive and grow during this disruption. Specifically, the data collection process follows the five stages of the historical method: topic selection and evidence collection, evaluation of the source of the evidence, evaluation of the evidence, analysis and interpretation of the evidence, and evidence presentation and conclusion. A systematic content analysis of the strategies undertaken by the private university has resulted in four key typology strategies: survival, synchronizing, stretching, and supremacy. The four strategies are interrelated and may overlap in some cases. However, survival reflects a survival-based strategy. Stretching and synchronizing facilitate survival and provide potential growth, and supremacy strategy provides potential favorable long-term image and relationships with the key stakeholders. These strategies may assist private higher education to survive and grow further in this era of change.

**Keywords:** Archival method; Private University Strategy; Survival; Strategic Management; Typology Strategy

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### Introduction

Nobody would have expected that digitalization could have created such a global change and uncertainty. Change is a permanent thing that is bound to happen and the ability to change is central to the success of an organization (Deschamps et al., 2020). Digitalization changes everything with transparency, immense reach, and the emergence of a new workforce with unprecedented new talent is part of the current changes. Those new talents are products of educational system. The increasing competition in higher education services results in many private universities being under pressure to compete and collaborate. Private universities strive for their financial resources, talented students, high-quality lecturers, innovative research, good reputation, and status in national and international rankings (Sułkowski et al., 2019). To ensure operational sustainability, most of the private universities in Indonesia rely primarily on tuition fees paid by students. If the number of students is decreased, it will have an impact on the

ability of private higher education institutions to survive (Harususilo, 2021). Private university survival is an issue that both academics and practitioners are interested in. It has been investigated using a variety of constructs (such as bankruptcy, mortality, longevity, business failure, and survival) from a variety of academic fields (Gordon, 2016). The relationship between the order of entry and survival is the focus of strategic management (Golder, 2000). In line with this, the technological management perspective claims that entering the market before an industrial dominant design emerges is linked to a better likelihood of survival (Sushil, 2015).

The decreasing number of private universities in Indonesia from 2018 to 2021 is caused by three factors: moving locations, mergers or acquisitions, and bankruptcy (Putra, 2019). There are still many private universities that have less than 1,000 students, making it difficult to guarantee quality due to lack of resources (Salbiah & Zaking, 2021). Secretary of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Paristiyanti said that there are 336 licensed private universities that have no students at all, 476 private universities with less than 100 students, and 912 private universities with only 100-500 students (Wahyuni, 2021). This indicates that there are still many private universities that have below-average quality and have poor quality both in terms of resources and learning process. Whereas, implementing quality services in higher education is the key to distinguishing competitors and ensuring long-term sustainability (Papanthymou & Darra, 2017).

Despite the fact that these studies may provide insight into private universities' survival. Currently, we are in the middle of a crisis and there are few studies on the long-term economic, sociological, and behavioral effects of a pandemic. Donthu and Gustafsson (2020) observed that predicting the long-term impacts of the Covid-19 epidemic is extremely difficult. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology will encourage more than 1,600 private universities to conduct mergers which will be fully financed by the ministry (Zubaidah, 2021). Therefore, the current study uses an archive study technique to look at how private universities respond, adapt, and modify their strategy to survive in the current era of change.

According to previous research, creativity and flexibility are two crucial components of a company's survival through a crisis (Beraha et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2014). On the one hand, a company's ability to innovate is based on its ability to successfully adapt or execute new procedures or products. This capability helps the organization to respond to its chaotic environment more effectively than its competitors (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000) In essence, innovation improves a company's ability to deal with unpredictability while also providing a long-term competitiveness (Beraha et al., 2018).

Flexibility, on the other side, refers to a company's ability to respond to changing environmental conditions in a variety of ways (Volberda, 1996). Flexibility is essential for innovation (Farnese, Fida and Livi, 2016); it is a multi-faceted concept with numerous interpretations, ranging from responsiveness, adaptability, and adjustment to agility, multiplicity, and contingency (Sushil, 1997). Both flexibility and innovation are essential for dealing with a changing environment and responding quickly to a crisis (Farnese et al., 2016), The current study investigates how private universities in Indonesia responded to the disruption by looking at their creativity and flexibility.

The disruption is still going on, and it's impossible to know for sure when it will end. Everyone wants to move on, but there are a few ways about how or what to do. To learn from those who can persevere and even thrive in the face of difficulty, comprehensive research is required. Survival is a fundamental goal for any organization and is required for success in other key performance indicators like profitability and market share (Sushil, 2015). Human resources in universities, including leaders and teaching staff, must be able to accept change and be able to adapt. Leaders in private universities have an important role in the objective to develop a strategy for change (Doyle & Brady, 2018).

As a result, the purpose of this article is to give insight into how private higher education navigates and survives change by adjusting to new situations. It focuses on Indonesia, the world's fourth most populated country and the Southeast Asian region's largest economy. It was based on archival research that used news from publicly available and accessible sources, such as national and regional newspapers, online media. A typology of four strategies has been proposed based on a comprehensive analysis of strategies employed by private universities in Indonesia. The current study's typology and findings are intended to be useful to other companies in the Southeast Asian region.

## Research Method

The present study employed qualitative research using an archival research approach. Following a systematic content analysis, key themes were identified, and a typology of business response strategies was proposed. Specifically, the data collection process follows the five stages of the historical method developed by Golder (2000): (1) topic selection and evidence collection; (2) evaluation of the sources of the evidence; (3) evaluation of the evidence; (4) analysis and interpretation of the evidence; and (5) evidence presentation and conclusion.

In the first stage, the main topic was selected, for example, private universities' response strategies during the era of disruption in Indonesia. Secondary data were collected from online media, national newspapers, official websites, and regional newspapers both in Bahasa Indonesia and English. The analysis focuses on news published in the period between February 2020 towards June 2021. The chosen time period was selected to allow for an examination of how private universities in Indonesia deal with challenges prior to and during the country's large-scale societal constraints.

The specific data sources are listed in Table 1. Two researchers were tasked with reading each source and selecting news that was relevant. Manually reading the physical and electronic versions of the sources was done by each researcher. During the era of change, the focus was on private university strategies in Indonesia. All news and advertisements were included in the search process. When there was a difference between the paired researchers, a third researcher was asked to check, and a consensus was made. As a result, during this era of change, 602 pieces of relevant information about private higher education strategy were identified.

**Table 1**  
**Data Sources**

No	Type	Number of relevant information of Private Universities Strategies in Indonesia
	Online Media	132
	Official Website	172
	National Newspaper	212
	Regional Newspaper	86
	Total number of relevant information	602

*Note: All analyzed publications include a period of 2018-2021.*

In the second stage, the three criteria of external criticism (originality, authorship, and classification) were met by (1) downloading, scanning, and printing the documents from online versions of the materials published in the selected media, (2) verifying the authorship of the materials (i.e. author, date of publication, publication, and publisher), and (3) classifying the materials based on the chronological timeline. During the third stage, internal criticism was examined by using highly regarded sources, i.e. mainstream publications in Indonesia (e.g., Kompas, Koran Tempo, and Republika), official websites, and scientific journals that are relevant to private higher education strategies. All 602 relevant information was content analyzed and interpreted in the fourth stage. Key themes were identified, and the main results were presented in the following section.

## Results and Discussion

The result section must present how the author ensures the data validity and reliability. Based on a systematic content analysis of 602 relevant pieces of information identified from the sources (see Table 2), a pattern of business response strategies has been revealed. The pattern was developed further into a typology of four main response strategies based on two important dimensions: level of innovation (high vs low) and level of change impacts on business models (high vs low). Innovation can be implemented faster when it has a competitive advantage, is compatible with existing core values, easy to understand, can be tried out by potential adopters, and is observable (Miles, 2012; Rogers, 1995). A private higher education response strategy is deemed to be highly innovative if it represents a significant degree of newness to the company implementing it. The strategy is classified as having a high level of change impacts when it requires a significant adaptation or adjustment of its current business model, operating model, and/or existing products and services. As a result, four business response strategies (4Ss) are proposed: survival strategy, synchronizing strategy, stretching strategy, and supremacy strategy (see Figure 1 for the typology).

**Table 2**  
**Response Strategies and Connotations of Flexibility**

No	Response strategy	description	Agility	Customize	Adaptiveness	Compromise	Responsiveness	Continuity	Adjustment	Resilience	Variability	Localness
1	Survival strategy	Efficiency			x	x		x	x			x
		Customer retention					x	x		x		

		n progra m										
		Intensi ve marketi ng progra ms		x		x			x	x		x
		Quality Assura nce	x						x			x
2	Synchron izing Strategy	Integra tion of new health protoco l	x						x			x
		Digitali zation	x	x	x				x			x
		Innovat ive Learnin g	x	x	x				x			x
		CSR (social initiativ es/com munity service s)		x	x				x	x	x	x
3	Stretchin g Strategy	Restruc turing	x	x	x				x	x	x	x
		Employ ee Develo pment			x	x			x	x	x	x
		Explori ng New Market	x						x			x
		Private Higher Educati on Coachi ng Progra m	x	x	x				x			x
		Strateg ic Collabo ration with more stakeho lders	x						x			x
4	Suprema cy Strategy	Related Diversif ication	x						x			x
		Unrelat ed	x		x	x			x			x

Diversification						
Research Innovation	x		x	x	x	x
Commercialization	x	x	x		x	x

Private higher education in Indonesia has implemented one or more methods to navigate the changing business environments, according to published reports. The four strategies also have strong connections to the strategic flexibility idea, i.e. proactive and reactive strategic steps to change, either internally or externally, by leveraging an organization's core values, culture, core competencies, strategic assets, and strategic positions (Sushil, 2015). More specifically, the four strategies are closely related to ten connotations of flexibility (Sushil, 1997): agility, customize, adaptiveness, compromise, responsiveness, contingency, adjustment, resilience, variability, and localness.

Targeting a growth strategy can help inspire universities in several ways and can increase the impact of the college's mission, and help build universities that are more financially resilient (Shao et al. 2019). Expansion can be regarded as development because of the impact of considerable changes on private universities. To carry out development, private universities must have resources that can support it. According to Simarmata (2019), the resources of an organization consist of physical resources, human resources, intellectual resources, and financial resources. This is a determinant of the success of private universities in carrying out development.

In the midst of the era of change, the first type of strategy (survival) reflects what private higher education has been doing to stay in the market for a little longer (resilient). Both innovation and change impacts are low in survival strategy. To minimize losses during a period of declining sales, most private higher education considered efficiency programs to cut expenses and eliminate unnecessary or non-value-adding activities, such as demonstrated by the University of Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, which reduced costs by implementing electricity cost savings of up to 70%, with the savings equivalent to 15% of UMY's operational costs per year during the pandemic (Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, 2020). Ma Chung University in East Java, must cut a job allowance of around 10% of the total monthly income. Meanwhile, London school public relations in Jakarta chose to limit transportation fees for its staff (Dzulfikar, 2020).

Customer retention is one of the examples of a survival strategy, which means an effort to keep students at the university. To overcome retention related to student fees, BSI University provides a breakthrough in the ease of tuition payments. This is done through the tuition fee installment program through the Danacita application every month (Sari, 2021). Similar to Pamulang University, the University of Surabaya (Ubaya) spent Rp. 40 Million to help its 10,500 students through a scholarship assistance scheme. This was done because Ubaya did not want its students to delay studying (Sofiana, 2020). The restructuring was another popular strategy used by many private higher education in Indonesia during this period. Changing organizational structures, rescheduling working hours, and temporary and voluntary redundancy programs are all examples of this.

Intensive Marketing Program is also done by private universities to survive to obtain optimal results; in this case, universities are actively introduced to the public, especially to prospective students by inviting them to come so that they will know more about the university as an example of the University. Muhammadiyah Malang (UMM) held an open house for prospective students with a virtual concept.

They also invited inspiring students who have succeeded in creating content on social media (Fizriyani, 2021). Quality is one of the determining factors in choosing a private university. Improving the quality of education will be largely determined by many aspects, such as teachers, staff, curriculum, teaching, and learning processes.

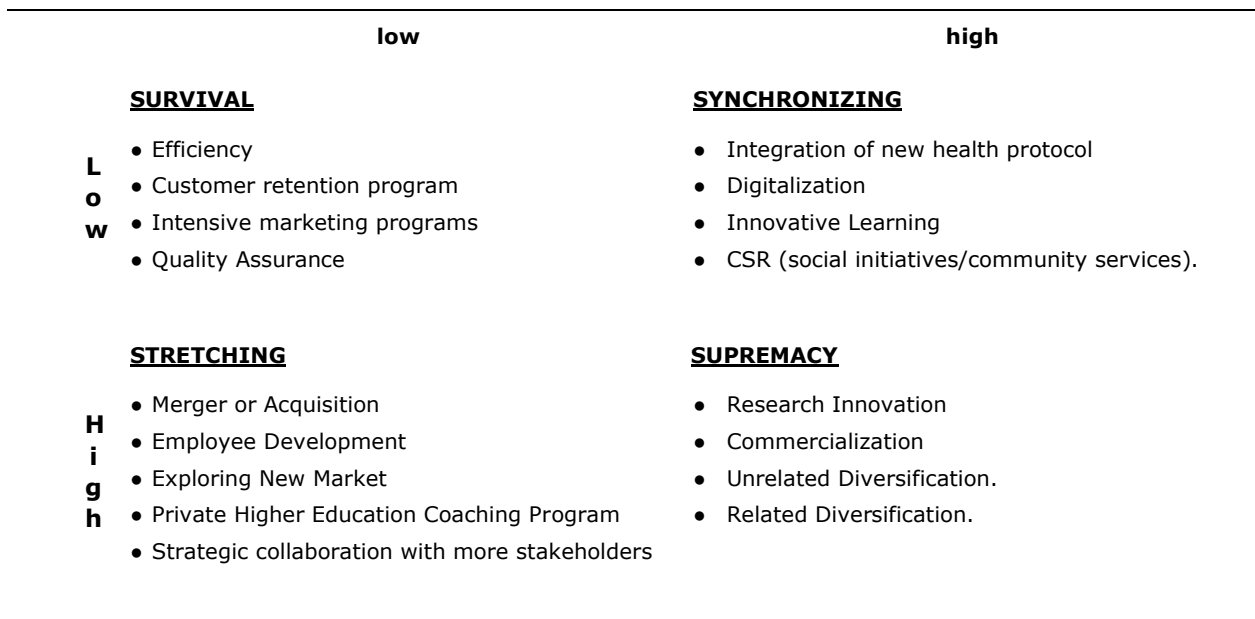


Figure 1. Typology of Private Higher Education Strategy

Within the context of the era of changes, the second strategy is synchronizing refers to adaptation, alignment, or adjustment. In the short term, this includes looking into new prospects and procedures. Synchronizing approach has a high level of innovation, but it does not involve large business model modifications. Integration of a new health protocol, which is a condition where universities must comply with and implement new health regulations to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus in the university environment. Universitas Medan Area applies health protocols such as checking temperature, wearing masks in campus as an obligation, washing hands, keeping distance, and avoiding crowds (Universitas Medan Area, 2021).

Digitalization of operations is one example of a synchronizing strategy. There are several private universities that have implemented an online learning process by utilizing various learning media such as Zoom, Whatsapp, and Google Classroom (Husnul & Suharyadi, 2021). With the presence of this application, it makes it easier for teachers to deliver learning materials and students can carry out the learning process anywhere and anytime without being limited by space and making the learning process more flexible (Tanjung Sari Vocational School, 2020). Digitalization is defined as a learning process that used to be done online. During this pandemic, the Universitas Nasional utilizes modern technology by creating a Cyber Library. This is to fulfill all the literature needs of lecturers and students (Ucu, 2021). Besides, Binus University organizes an online lecture program called Binus Online Learning. The program offers a very flexible lecture time so that students can carry out their activities without being disturbed by class time (Binus University, 2021). Furthermore, private higher education also launches innovative learning, which is a process of creating a teaching and learning atmosphere where students can learn about something new.

The corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy is also an example of strategy in synchronization. CSR has been an increasingly relevant strategic program for several large firms during the Covid-19 outbreak (Jones and Comfort, 2020). Many private universities in Indonesia have participated in community activities or social projects, such as providing donations to medical personnel (money, personal protection equipment, medicines, hand sanitizer, face masks, free lodging, and so on). Pelita Harapan University provides assistance to Siloam Hospitals by sending 50 medical volunteers from new doctors from the medical faculty and 38 volunteers from the nursing faculty (Satriadi, 2020).

The third strategy, Stretching, refers to initiatives to expand current businesses and products (or services) into related businesses, especially for medium and long-term purposes. It has a low level of innovation but a large impact on existing business models. Merger and acquisition, employee development, exploring new markets, private higher education coaching programs, and strategic collaboration with stakeholders are the examples of this strategy. It is the same case as Bina Taruna University (UNBITA) Gorontalo, which is a merger of the Technical College (STITEK) and the Bina Taruna Gorontalo School of Administrative Sciences transforming into a university (Sevima, 2021).

Strategic Collaboration with more stakeholders at universities can add to the network, reputation, and development of universities. Similar to what Pertamina University has done in collaboration with Innovation and New Venture (INV) to conduct collaborative research in terms of developing New Renewable Energy (EBT) by involving several lecturers and students (Warta Ekonomi, 2021). Widya Mataram University Yogyakarta also collaborates with Busan University of Foreign Studies and Dong-A University. Furthermore, exploring a new markets strategy is one of the strategies that can be done to develop the target market and competitiveness of private universities by opening new branches. It was done by Mercu Buana University (UMB) to improve educational services to the community; UMB built a new campus on Jalan Warung Buncit, South Jakarta to provide easy access to education for the community (Mercu Buana University, 2019).

Employee Development covers all aspects of higher education including the development and management of human resources as well as on-campus development. Petra Christian University Surabaya continues to encourage lecturers to have good research performance and community service by giving awards. Moreover, the private higher education coaching program is a mentoring and nurturing activity for private universities that have accreditation under the criteria to continue to grow with the help of universities that have been accredited "superior". For example, Gunadarma University has become a PTS supervisor in a remote region. In addition, Petra Christian University also became mentor for 3 Universities, namely Yudharta Pasuruan University, Dhyana Pura University Bali and Artha Wacana Christian University, Kupang (Sofia, 2017).

Supremacy Strategy is a period of transition in which every activity that was previously carried out conventionally is transformed into a modern one; this strategy is characterized by a high level of change and innovation. Private higher education change into, incorporate, diversify into, and/or add new businesses practices, processes, and/or business models in the fourth strategy. This strategy is innovative and has a significant impact on current company structures. It requires a strategic flexibility paradigm that aims to respond to a dynamic environment in both proactive and reactive ways (Sushil, 2015). Companies with strategic flexibility are able to adapt their learning and innovation processes and can quickly adapt to changing situations (Sushil, 2015).

The first example of supremacy strategy is related to diversification, which is a business development strategy or adding new products by implementing modifications or innovations, The Kalbis Institute provides a certification degree in the form of Associate Wealth Manager (AWM) to students graduating from the Management Program and they must certified Wealth Manager's Association (CWMA) (Arifin, 2020). In contrast, unrelated diversification is a business development strategy or adding new products by implementing modifications or innovations with different segmentation. The Islamic University of Indonesia develops various business units that can support financially and assist the learning process such as the presence of the "JIH" Hospital, gas stations, Center for International Language and Culture Studies (Cilacs), Unisi Radio, and UII Press (Putra, 2014).

Research Innovation focuses on creating new ideas, analyzing problems, and diagnosing and identifying the causes by creating new solutions, strategies, technologies, or business processes. Ibn Khaldun University Bogor built the Bogor Intelligent Technopark (BI-TECH) where their first project was to commercialize SME products in the form of handicrafts and metal crafts made in collaboration with the Business Development Center (BDC) (Bi-Tech, 2019).

## Conclusions

A famous Chinese proverb says that within a crisis there are two elements: danger and opportunity. During this extremely difficult circumstance, there have been many innovative services and responses demonstrated by private higher education in Indonesia. The present study offers insights into how private higher education in Indonesia responded to the era of change such as the Covid-19 pandemic. It proposes a typology of four main strategies: Survival, Synchronizing, Stretching, and Supremacy. These plans are based on two key factors: the level of innovation and the impact of change on the company's current business models.

Sushil (1997) defined 10 meanings of flexibility, which are reflected in the four techniques. Other companies could use the typology as a guide in their efforts to figure out what strategies to implement during the crisis. Flexibility is one of the essential options to survive a crisis, where companies show important capabilities in their actions, such as responsive, versatile, resilient, dexterous, and compromising (Sushil, 1997). Survival requires resilience, adaptability, and flexibility under disruptive situations. It is suggested that organizations with high resilience can adjust timely and shape a new capacity to cope with turbulent environments (Xiao and Cao, 2017). In other words,

innovation is an essential determinant of organization survival and growth (Visnjic, Wiengarten, and Neely, 2016).

Despite the fact that the current study has a number of important theoretical and managerial implications, it does have several flaws that could lead to future research. First, the present study is exploratory in nature and relies on publicly available and accessible data sources, the majority of which were published in Bahasa Indonesia. Future studies may include interviews with a representative sample of different stakeholders (i.e. business owners, managers, customers, government officials, business associations, and others) to gain more insights. Second, it focuses on a single country context, which may limit its generalizability. Exploring the same issue in a multi-country context would be both interesting and important. In addition, the typology of private higher education reaction methods could be investigated in a different country situation in order to produce a more comprehensive classification of crisis tactics.

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