

# Implementation of a Cloud-Based CRM System to Improve Customer Loyalty in Digital Startups in Indonesia

Agus Purwanto<sup>1</sup>, Anggun Nugroho<sup>2</sup>, Lanang Mustika Bahy<sup>3</sup>,  
Joko Santoso<sup>4</sup>, Shofwan Hanief<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis STIKOM Bali

<sup>3</sup>Univeritas Muhammadiyah Jakarta

<sup>4,5</sup>Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis STIKOM Bali

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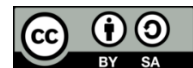
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## ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of digital startups in Indonesia has created a highly competitive market where customer loyalty is critical for long-term sustainability. This study explores the implementation of cloud-based Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems as a strategic tool to enhance customer loyalty in digital startups. Using a qualitative research approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five informants, including founders, managers, and IT specialists from startups in the e-commerce, fintech, and digital services sectors. The findings reveal that cloud-based CRM systems provide significant benefits, including improved customer engagement, real-time responsiveness, personalized communication, and scalability to support business growth. However, the study also identifies challenges related to data security, staff readiness, and system integration. The results highlight that cloud-based CRM is not only a technological tool but also a strategic enabler that helps startups build competitive advantage through customer-centric approaches. This research contributes to the understanding of CRM adoption in emerging markets, offering practical insights for digital entrepreneurs in Indonesia to strengthen customer loyalty.

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## Corresponding Author:

Name: Agus Purwanto

Institution: Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis STIKOM Bali

Email: [agusp712@gmail.com](mailto:agusp712@gmail.com)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital startups in Indonesia has reshaped the business landscape, driven by technological advancements, increased mobile internet usage, and a digitally savvy population. Startups in sectors such as e-commerce, fintech, and digital services compete in a highly dynamic market where customer acquisition is often costly, and retention is

critical for long-term growth. In this competitive environment, customer loyalty has emerged as a strategic priority, as loyal customers not only generate repeat business but also serve as brand advocates who contribute to sustainable profitability. Several factors drive the growth of digital startups, including technological advancements that foster innovation and entrepreneurship [1], [2], supportive government policies and community initiatives that enable startups to

overcome regulatory and funding challenges [1], and Indonesia's large population combined with its growing internet user base, which presents vast opportunities for market expansion and customer engagement [3]. To enhance customer loyalty, startups employ various strategies such as leveraging technological innovation to improve customer experience and engagement [2], building partnerships and collaborations with corporate partners and incubation programs to access resources and expertise for scaling operations and retaining customers [2], and targeting digital-savvy consumers, particularly millennials, who are more inclined to engage with digital platforms and services [3].

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems have long been recognized as tools to strengthen customer engagement and improve organizational responsiveness, but traditional models often require substantial financial and technological resources that can burden startups with limited budgets. The emergence of cloud-based CRM solutions provides a compelling alternative by offering flexibility, scalability, and cost-efficiency tailored to the needs of growing businesses [4], [5]. These systems eliminate the need for expensive hardware and software, significantly reducing initial costs while enabling startups to expand CRM capabilities as their customer base grows. Moreover, cloud-based CRM facilitates enhanced customer engagement by enabling individualized relationships, improving satisfaction, and maximizing profits through identification and targeting of the most profitable customers [6], while integration with other business processes such as ERP allows more efficient lifecycle management [7]. In addition, the cloud platform's advanced data processing enables efficient service discovery and personalization, ensuring that customer-related entities are managed effectively, with startups able to customize CRM models stored in secondary tenant spaces to further enhance personalization. Together, these features position cloud-based CRM as a strategic

enabler for startups in fostering loyalty, optimizing customer experience, and supporting sustainable growth.

In Indonesia, the adoption of cloud-based CRM systems among digital startups is relatively new but rapidly expanding, as many startups recognize their potential to streamline operations, provide real-time customer insights, and improve service delivery [8], [9]. These systems enhance operational efficiency by automating routine tasks and centralizing data access, support better decision-making, and foster customer loyalty through improved interactions and service quality. Real-time analytics further enable startups to tailor services to customer needs, thereby increasing satisfaction and competitiveness. However, the implementation process also presents significant challenges, including staff readiness that demands adequate training and change management [10], concerns over data security requiring robust encryption and compliance with protection regulations [9], and the technical complexity of integrating CRM with existing digital platforms [10]. Understanding how digital startups navigate these opportunities and challenges is crucial for formulating effective strategies to strengthen customer loyalty in Indonesia's highly competitive digital economy.

This study aims to explore the implementation of cloud-based CRM systems in Indonesian digital startups and examine their impact on improving customer loyalty. Using a qualitative research approach, insights were gathered from five key informants, including startup founders, managers, and IT specialists. The research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on technology adoption in emerging markets, offering practical implications for digital entrepreneurs seeking to build sustainable customer relationships through cloud-based CRM solutions.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Customer Loyalty in the Digital Startup Context

Customer loyalty in the digital startup ecosystem goes beyond repeat purchases to include advocacy, engagement, and long-term trust, making it vital for sustainability and profitability in markets with low switching costs and high competition [11], [12]. Retaining loyal customers is far more cost-effective than acquiring new ones, which can cost 5–10 times more [13], highlighting the need for effective loyalty-building strategies. These include rewards programs, personalized marketing, exclusive deals [14], and leveraging digital tools like social media engagement and gamification [12]. Loyalty can be behavioral—seen in repeat purchases—or attitudinal, involving psychological commitment and strengthened through emotional connections and personalized experiences [11], [12]. Key factors such as brand equity, trust, satisfaction, service quality, and reputation also shape loyalty, with strong emotional bonds and tailored experiences driving retention and advocacy [12].

### 2.2 Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a strategic approach that integrates technology, processes, and people to manage customer interactions and data throughout the customer lifecycle, making it vital for startups that face challenges in handling fast-growing customer bases and delivering personalized services. Traditional CRM systems often require substantial infrastructure investment and may not suit startups, yet CRM adoption remains essential for achieving competitive differentiation through improved customer satisfaction and stronger relationships. More than just a technological tool, CRM represents a holistic approach involving cross-functional, customer-focused business process re-engineering, supported by advances in information technology and customer-centric practices [15]. For startups, CRM provides key

benefits such as better customer relationship management, streamlined operations through sales and inventory management [16], and enhanced customer value and profitability through relationship marketing [17]. Cloud-based CRM solutions further strengthen this role by offering cost-effective, scalable, and flexible alternatives that eliminate heavy infrastructure needs and allow startups to adapt quickly to changing customer demands [16].

### 2.3 Cloud-Based CRM Systems

Cloud-based CRM systems have transformed customer relationship management by providing flexible, scalable, and cost-efficient solutions that are especially beneficial for digital startups. Eliminating the need for substantial infrastructure investments, these systems offer real-time access to customer data, supporting business agility and adaptability in competitive markets, with global spending trends reflecting a clear shift toward cloud-based CRM [16]. Their scalability allows startups to seamlessly expand CRM capabilities alongside customer growth [18], while internet-based accessibility enables distributed teams to manage customer relationships effectively [19]. Cost-efficiency is another major advantage, as subscription-based models reduce upfront expenses, making them particularly attractive for SMEs with limited resources [4], [20]. Furthermore, cloud-based CRM systems integrate easily with other digital tools such as e-commerce platforms, social media, and analytics systems, thereby enhancing overall efficiency and enabling comprehensive customer lifecycle management [7].

### 2.4 Cloud-Based CRM and Customer Loyalty

Cloud-based CRM systems play a vital role in enhancing customer loyalty, especially for digital startups that rely on data-driven strategies, by enabling businesses to track customer behavior, preferences, and purchase history to deliver personalized communication and offerings that foster satisfaction, trust, and long-term relationships. Personalization supported by CRM significantly strengthens engagement

and loyalty [21], with data-driven insights proving particularly valuable in the e-commerce sector for tailoring interactions [1]. These systems also improve responsiveness, allowing companies to adapt quickly to customer needs through tools like chatbots and automated personalization, thereby boosting satisfaction and brand loyalty [22]. Furthermore, by integrating advanced technologies such as AI and big data analytics, cloud-based CRM optimizes real-time analysis and customer interactions, providing businesses with a competitive advantage. Ultimately, effective CRM strategies—ranging from personalized experiences to loyalty programs—enable startups to cultivate sustainable customer relationships and secure long-term growth in the digital marketplace [21], [22].

### 2.5 Research Gap

Although there is extensive literature on CRM and its role in fostering customer loyalty, research focusing specifically on cloud-based CRM adoption in digital startups in emerging markets like Indonesia remains limited. Most studies concentrate on large enterprises or developed economies, leaving a gap in understanding how smaller, resource-constrained startups implement and benefit from cloud-based CRM. This study addresses this gap by providing qualitative insights from Indonesian digital startups, highlighting both opportunities and challenges in leveraging cloud CRM systems to enhance customer loyalty.

## 3. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how cloud-based CRM systems are implemented in digital startups in Indonesia and their perceived impact on customer loyalty. A qualitative approach was chosen because it provides an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perspectives, and challenges faced by startup practitioners in adopting technology-driven customer relationship strategies. Rather than testing hypotheses through numerical data, this approach captures rich, contextual

insights into organizational practices and decision-making processes. The research involved five key informants drawn from digital startups in e-commerce, fintech, and digital services, consisting of founders, managers, and IT specialists with direct experience in CRM adoption and customer management practices. A purposive sampling technique was applied to ensure participants possessed relevant knowledge and involvement in CRM implementation, as the study aimed for targeted insights rather than broad generalizations. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, each lasting 45 to 60 minutes, conducted either face-to-face or via online platforms, guided by themes such as motivations for CRM adoption, implementation processes and challenges, perceived benefits for customer engagement and loyalty, and the role of CRM in supporting scalability and competitiveness.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which systematically identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns within qualitative data. The steps included data familiarization through repeated transcript reviews, generating initial codes by labeling significant statements, searching for themes by grouping related codes, reviewing and refining these themes for accuracy and coherence, and finally defining and naming themes while linking them to the research objectives. To ensure credibility and reliability, the study applied triangulation by comparing data across informants, member checking by sharing summaries with participants to confirm accuracy, and maintaining an audit trail with detailed records of interviews, notes, and coding decisions. Reflexivity was also emphasized, with the researcher remaining aware of potential biases and their influence on data interpretation, thereby strengthening the trustworthiness of the findings.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Descriptive Overview of Informants

This study involved five informants from Indonesian digital startups in sectors such as e-commerce, fintech, and digital services, selected based on their direct involvement in the adoption and implementation of cloud-based CRM systems to ensure relevance to the research objectives. The informants consisted of two founders, two managers, and one IT specialist, representing diverse organizational roles and responsibilities. The startups varied in size and maturity, with most operating between two to six years and employing 10 to 50 staff members—reflecting the typical profile of Indonesian digital startups characterized by small to medium team sizes, lean operations, and rapid growth. This diversity of roles and organizational contexts provided a holistic perspective on CRM implementation, encompassing strategic decision-making by founders, operational oversight by managers, and technical integration by IT professionals.

A summary of the informants' profiles illustrates that although the startups were relatively young, they had already recognized the strategic importance of customer loyalty and the necessity of technological tools to support it. Founders primarily viewed CRM adoption as a strategic investment for long-term growth, while managers focused on operational improvements such as enhanced communication and service quality, and the IT specialist highlighted technical challenges in integrating cloud-based CRM with existing platforms, emphasizing the need for alignment between technological and managerial perspectives. This descriptive overview shows that the selected informants were well-positioned to provide valuable insights into the motivations, benefits, and challenges of cloud-based CRM implementation in Indonesian digital startups.

### 4.2 Key Themes from the Interviews

Through thematic analysis of the five in-depth interviews, several key themes

emerged regarding the implementation of cloud-based CRM systems in Indonesian digital startups and their role in fostering customer loyalty. These themes represent recurring patterns in the participants' narratives and provide insight into both opportunities and challenges faced by startups.

#### 4.2.1 Motivation for Adopting Cloud-Based CRM

All informants highlighted that the main driver for adopting cloud-based CRM was the need to strengthen customer retention and loyalty. Unlike large corporations that can invest heavily in marketing campaigns to acquire new customers, startups are often resource-constrained and must maximize the value of existing customers. Informants reported that cloud CRM allowed them to consolidate customer data, understand purchasing behavior, and tailor marketing initiatives. One founder explained, "For startups like us, keeping customers is more important than chasing new ones. CRM helps us personalize offers and keep them engaged."

#### 4.2.2 Benefits for Customer Loyalty

The participants consistently acknowledged that CRM adoption positively influenced customer loyalty. The system enabled personalized communication, improved service responsiveness, and data-driven engagement strategies, which fostered trust and long-term relationships. For example, managers noted that they could respond to customer complaints more quickly, while IT specialists emphasized the value of real-time dashboards for monitoring customer interactions. These benefits align with literature suggesting that CRM enhances both satisfaction and loyalty by creating customer-centric strategies.

#### 4.2.3 Organizational and Technical Challenges

Despite the clear benefits of cloud-based CRM adoption, informants also highlighted several significant challenges that hindered smooth implementation. The first major issue was data security, as startups expressed concern about storing sensitive

customer information on external cloud servers, which raised questions about privacy, encryption, and compliance with data protection regulations. The second challenge related to human resource readiness, where many employees lacked the necessary skills to operate CRM systems effectively, creating a need for additional training and, in some cases, resistance to adopting new technologies. These issues underscore the importance of both technical and organizational preparedness in ensuring the successful utilization of CRM systems.

The third challenge involved integration difficulties, as startups struggled to connect CRM platforms with existing tools such as e-commerce websites, social media channels, and payment gateways. These integration processes often required significant technical expertise, customization, and additional time, which sometimes delayed adoption. As one IT specialist explained, "The CRM tool itself is powerful, but integration with our existing platform was not easy. We had to customize a lot." This highlights that while cloud-based CRM systems offer strong functionalities, their effectiveness in startups largely depends on the ability to align them with existing digital infrastructures and the readiness of human resources to adapt to these changes.

#### **4.2.4 Scalability and Flexibility of Cloud Solutions**

Informants praised the scalability and flexibility of cloud-based CRM systems, which allowed their startups to expand customer databases without large infrastructure costs. The subscription-based pricing model was considered affordable and aligned with startups' financial limitations. Founders valued the flexibility to upgrade or downgrade services according to their growth stage, ensuring that CRM adoption remained sustainable.

#### **4.2.5 Strategic Value in a Competitive Market**

A recurring theme was that CRM adoption provided strategic value beyond operational efficiency. In Indonesia's crowded digital market, where competitors

offer similar products and services, customer experience becomes a differentiating factor. Informants stated that CRM allowed them to build loyalty through trust, engagement, and satisfaction. As one manager noted, "In this industry, customers can easily switch. What keeps them with us is the experience, and CRM helps us deliver that consistently."

#### **4.3 Discussion**

The findings of this study underscore the growing importance of cloud-based CRM systems as strategic tools for enhancing customer loyalty in Indonesia's digital startup ecosystem. Consistent with prior literature, CRM adoption was found to improve customer engagement, responsiveness, and satisfaction, thereby fostering loyalty and long-term trust. However, qualitative insights from informants reveal a more nuanced picture of how startups experience both the benefits and challenges of CRM within their unique operational contexts. A key takeaway is that customer retention emerges as the central motivation for CRM adoption, as startups with limited resources must focus on maximizing customer lifetime value rather than aggressive customer acquisition. This supports previous studies that emphasized the cost-effectiveness of customer retention compared to acquiring new customers [23], and reflects the competitive reality of Indonesia's digital market where switching costs for consumers are low.

The study further highlights the multifaceted benefits of CRM systems, including their role in strengthening loyalty and retention [23], [24], improving satisfaction through personalized services (Prajapat, 2024), and enhancing integrated marketing strategies when combined with digital advertising and discount programs [24]. At the same time, several adoption challenges were identified, notably resource constraints that force startups to prioritize long-term value creation (Ibrahim et al., n.d.), and technological integration hurdles that demand both system compatibility and employee training [25]. Strategically, the findings point to the growing importance of approaches such as Social CRM to leverage

social media engagement [23] and the optimization of CRM processes to sustain customer loyalty in competitive markets [26]. Together, these insights emphasize that while cloud-based CRM systems hold transformative potential, their effectiveness depends on how startups align technology, strategy, and organizational capacity to strengthen customer relationships.

The findings confirm that cloud-based CRM solutions are particularly well-suited for startups because of their scalability, affordability, and accessibility. The subscription-based model allows businesses to manage costs effectively while expanding their customer base in line with growth, supporting arguments that cloud solutions democratize CRM adoption for small and medium enterprises, not only large corporations [4]. In addition, cloud CRM systems provide integration capabilities with other business applications, such as ERP, which enables unified management of critical processes [7]. More importantly, by leveraging CRM insights, startups can enhance customer satisfaction and retention—key drivers of competitive advantage in saturated markets [27], [28].

However, the study also identified several organizational and technical challenges that hinder CRM effectiveness. Data security remains a primary concern, requiring robust technical safeguards to protect customer information [7]. Staff readiness and training are equally crucial, as resistance to new systems and lack of technical skills can impede effective use of CRM [28]. Furthermore, integrating CRM with existing digital platforms—such as e-commerce sites, social media, and payment gateways—can be complex and resource-intensive, demanding both strategic planning and technical expertise [7]. Despite these challenges, the research highlights the strategic role of CRM in building competitive

advantage, where customer loyalty depends not only on repeat purchases but also on customer experience and trust, reinforcing the view that CRM is a strategic enabler of customer-centric business models.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of cloud-based CRM systems in Indonesian digital startups and their role in enhancing customer loyalty. The results indicate that CRM adoption enables startups to consolidate customer data, deliver personalized communication, and improve responsiveness, all of which contribute to stronger trust and long-term loyalty. Cloud-based solutions were also found to offer scalability and cost-efficiency, making them especially suitable for startups with limited resources that must remain agile in highly competitive markets.

At the same time, the research highlights several challenges, including concerns over data security, the need for continuous employee training, and the complexities of integrating CRM systems with existing platforms. These barriers emphasize the necessity of aligning technological adoption with organizational readiness and strategic planning. Overall, the findings demonstrate that cloud-based CRM functions not only as a technological tool but also as a strategic enabler for digital startups in Indonesia's dynamic economy. By overcoming these challenges, startups can maximize the benefits of CRM adoption, build sustainable customer relationships, and strengthen long-term competitiveness. Future studies may extend this work by involving a larger sample size, examining sector-specific CRM practices, or combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive assessment of customer loyalty outcomes.

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