



ISSN: 2617-6548

URL: www.ijirss.com



Advancing disability inclusion through social and digital entrepreneurship in ASEAN

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Abstract

Based on explorative case studies from Indonesia and Malaysia, this study examines how inclusive social entrepreneurship can capture the transformative potential required to economically and socially empower persons with disabilities in Southeast Asia. This research study explores Identity Theory and Social Role Valorization (SRV) concepts from theoretical perspectives to understand the relevance and significance of identity formation, co-creation, and digital entrepreneurship in developing a sustainable model for empowerment. This study utilized a qualitative case study methodology through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with individuals and stakeholders, field observations, and thematic analysis, on the two enterprises Rumah Harapan Mulya (RHM) in Karangpatihan, Indonesia, and GOLD (Generating Opportunities for Learning Disabled) in Malaysia. This research shows that both programs work to integrate people with intellectual and developmental disabilities into their communities by providing adaptive vocational training, defining meaningful social roles, and creating multi-stakeholder partnerships. Despite their different approaches, RHM by traditional batik production and GOLD by culinary micro-enterprises both facilitate identity transformation and social inclusion. However, digital illiteracy, heavy reliance on volunteers, and poor infrastructure remain barriers to scaling digital entrepreneurship. The study emphasizes the need for systemic support, inclusive policy frameworks, and local adaptation to sustain the change in the long term. Finally, the research concluded that inclusive social entrepreneurship is both a viable and resilient development model for promoting disability inclusion and economic participation in ASEAN nations.

Keywords: ASEAN, digital inclusion, disability empowerment, inclusive entrepreneurship, social role valorization.

DOI: 10.53894/ijirss.v8i3.6764

Funding: This research is fully funded by Universitas Sebelas Maret under the International Collaboration Research Scheme contract number 369/UN27.22/PT.01.03/2025.

History: Received: 28 February 2025 / Revised: 02 April 2025 / Accepted: 07 April 2025 / Published: 06 May 2025

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Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

Acknowledgment: The authors wish to extend their heartfelt thanks to Universitas Sebelas Maret for the research funding, the founders and facilitators of Rumah Harapan Mulya (RHM) in Indonesia and GOLD in Malaysia for their willingness to be interviewed and to share their experiences. Our gratitude are also given to local communities, volunteers and organizations engaging in inclusive entrepreneurship and supporting disabled people. They are the essential insights and inspiration for this study.

Publisher: Innovative Research Publishing

1. Introduction

Social entrepreneurship has proven to be a crucial tool for combating the enduring social and economic marginalization of people with disabilities (PwDs), especially in low and middle income countries [1, 2]. PwDs globally continue to encounter disproportionate levels of poverty, unemployment and social exclusion [3, 4]. To address these issues, social entrepreneurship provides an innovative and sustainable model that unites business goals with social goals oriented towards empowerment and inclusion [5, 6]. Literature shows how social enterprises turned PwDs from being a passive beneficiary to becoming active economic agents thus, providing opportunity for promising economic participation for individuals with disabilities [7, 8]. In rural areas of Indonesia and Malaysia, social entrepreneurship programs and initiatives that align with cultural values that promote community (rather than individualism) have had promising outcomes [6, 9, 10]. In addition, digital transformation has further accelerated this development by facilitating broader accessibility for market opportunities and educational resources for marginalized groups encouraging identity formation and empowerment among disabled entrepreneurs [11]. While such initiatives have grown significantly, they are often small scale and context specific, highlighting the need for better comparative and contextual studies that examine both institutional contexts as well as community-led approaches.

And yet, systemic barriers still exist that can undermine the scalability and sustainability of disability-led businesses in Southeast Asia, even as attention paid to inclusive entrepreneurship grows. One of the key challenges is the lack of guidelines to be inclusive while developing policies that could help disabled entrepreneurs related to digital capacity building, finance and public awareness [12, 13]. In addition, sociocultural attitudes, particularly stigma associated with disabilities, have continued to be barriers to participation, whereby individuals with disabilities may be perceived as dependent rather than innovators or leaders [14, 15]. In Malaysia and Indonesia, social entrepreneurship has been recognized as part of national holistic development agenda in such a way that the mainstreaming for PwD in national development agenda is still fragmented and largely dependent on civil society or community-based initiatives [16, 17]. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these discrepancies and revealed significant digital and economic fractures, but also emphasized the agile resilience of social enterprises to adapt and harness digital tools to survive and thrive [18]. Based on the critical significance of context-specific and intersectionality to the mainstream inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem literature [19, 20]. Contemporary studies have urged for the use of context-specific and intersectional approaches to inclusiveness in ecosystem design process by considering cultural societal and political differences. This study answers such calls by examining comparative cases from Indonesia and Malaysia, culturally similar neighboring Southeast Asian states, but where institutional responses to occurrence for inclusion vary.

To explore how disabled people navigate their entrepreneurial roles in managed social structures, the study adopts IT and SRV theory. According to Identity theory, self-concepts are developed and maintained via the roles people hold in society [21]. For disabled entrepreneurs, the business owner role may provide a platform through which internal and external perceptions may be altered, encouraging agency and self-efficacy [22]. This lens is particularly salient in collectivist societies, in which participation and legitimacy are alike affect by social identity and status [23]. Supporting this is Social Role Valorization (SRV), which states that marginalized individuals can experience greater social inclusion and recognition by being given socially valued roles [24]. In entrepreneurship, roles such as “innovator”, “employer” and “leader” can help change the societal narrative about disability, promoting more inclusion and respect [25, 26]. Encompassing the aforementioned social theory perspectives is the social validation theory, which captures the broader construct of how society influences the industry and the individuals therein who it serves, in particular, those who may fall victim to the exploitative practices of those within their direct ecosystem; often noted in the entrepreneurial and corporate realms where high impact citizens engage.

While previous research has recognized social entrepreneurship's ability to create transformative change for marginalized communities, little has documented how these models work in South Asian contexts, particularly rural and culturally diverse settings. However, previous studies have mostly emphasized on Western or urban-centric context and hence there is a sparse insight regarding how local wisdom, co-creation, and digital entrepreneurialism overlap and help to empower disabled individuals in developing nations [27-29]. Previous research tends to ignore the internal identity construction of disabled entrepreneurs and how social roles enhance their legitimacy [30-34]. The novelty of this research is that it is comparative, looking at two distinct yet culturally similar cases “*Rumah Harapan in Karangpatihan Indonesia*” (RHKI) and GOLD (Malaysia). Integrating IT and SRV theories in the analysis, this study provides a dual perspective: micro-level identity formation and macro-level societal valorization. This is particularly vital considering that previous longitudinal in-depth qualitative studies exploring the significance of digital entrepreneurship and co-creation in rural and underserved communities are null [35]. This means that this study adds to the rising discourse on the importance of inclusive innovation

in the Global South, with a specific focus on the emerging discussions of disability, digitalization and community-led social enterprise models.

This research seeks to understand how social entrepreneurship empowers people with disabilities in Indonesia and Malaysia through the case studies of Rumah Harapan and GOLD. Using Identity Theory and Social Role Valorisation as frames of reference, it aims to examine how the aspirations of identity formation, co-creation, and digital entrepreneurship contribute to creating inclusive and sustainable entrepreneurial models that challenge structural and societal barriers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Empowerment of Disabled People through Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is a powerful mechanism to promote economic inclusion which is particularly beneficial for marginalized populations including persons with disabilities. Social entrepreneurship differs from the traditional business models in that it brings social goals and entrepreneurial methods together which allows for empowerment and sustainability in the long run [5, 36]. Social entrepreneurship both provides new avenues for employment and fosters independence, creativity, and participation in society among marginalized people, such as those with disabilities [37-39]. Evidence shows that social enterprises can be transformative in providing jobs that match the skill and demands of people with disabilities [40-42]. Such models emphasize inclusion, flexibility, and co-creation, which enables organizations to eliminate hierarchical work structures that lead to the marginalization of disabled people [43]. Moreover, the act of creating disability-led enterprises promotes leadership and entrepreneurship and counteracts the prevailing narrative of dependency, ultimately fostering social change and further legitimizing these enterprises [44, 45].

H₁: Economic empowerment of people with disabilities is positively influenced by social entrepreneurship.

2.2. Disability Entrepreneurship: Identity Theory and Role Valorization

Identity Theory (IT) sees members shaping their identity around these roles and the meanings associated with their roles [21]. The role of an entrepreneur gives an individual a chance to transform their identity from depreciation (dependent) to capability that leads to disability entrepreneurship. This process supports self-empowerment, goal alignment, and higher self-efficacy, which together are essential to growth, whether it be personal or professional [46]. Complementarily, Social Role Valorization (SRV) Theory, posits that people who fill roles that are valued by society experience opportunities for better societal treatment and access to resources [24, 47, 48]. Increasingly, individuals with disabilities become entrepreneurs and business leaders and innovators, which may enhance their status within society and reduce stigma [49-51]. IT and SRV intersect, further supporting the claims that entrepreneurship is an identity-building and social-change-creating act.

H₂: The impact of social entrepreneurship on economic empowerment is mediated through digital entrepreneurship.

2.3. Digital Entrepreneurship and Inclusive Innovation

This refers to innovations that are inclusive and benefit the marginalized groups [52]. Hence, we advance the case for digital entrepreneurship that leverages digital tools and platforms to promote inclusive innovation by diving deeper into markets, communication, and operations where access to these is restricted [11, 53]. Digital tools facilitate remote work, online commerce, and flexible business management for people with disabilities, which enables participation in the workforce without dependence on traditional employment infrastructures [54, 55]. However studies also demonstrate that there are also considerable obstacles, including digital literacy gaps, accessibility issues, and online environment bias [56, 57]. Thus, to successfully implement digital entrepreneurship, the right ecosystem needs to be supported in terms of training, accessibility to technologies, and policy [58, 59]. Co-creation of the digital environment with all the stakeholders, including the persons with disabilities will additionally guarantee that the innovations' processes will be inclusive and contextualized [60-62].

H₃: Co-creation practices strengthen the relationship between social entrepreneurship and empowerment by facilitating inclusion and sustainability.

2.4. Co-creation in Disability-Led Enterprise

Co-creation is a reciprocal value-creating process among stakeholders, comprising consumers, producers, and communities [63, 64]. Drawing in the surrounding community, this participatory process strengthens the ownership, adaptation and sustainability of entrepreneurial projects [65]. In addition, co-creation fosters social learning, creating connections that give disabled people a voice and challenge conventional thinking about their role in society [66, 67]. Notably, it offers a vehicle to cement local knowledge and lived experiences in entrepreneurial practices, leading to contextually appropriate and inclusive solutions [68, 69].

H₄: Identity transformation (according to Identity Theory) mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial engagement and societal inclusion of people with disabilities.

H₅: Social Role Valorization (SRV) strengthens the positive relationship between entrepreneurial identity and perceived legitimacy of disability led enterprises.

2.5. Research Framework Model

This study develops a theoretical framework based on the integration of Identity Theory (IT) and Social Role Valorization (SRV) Theory in a conceptual model to elucidate how social entrepreneurship and digital innovation contribute to empower persons with disabilities in Indonesia and Malaysia. Drawing on the idea that entrepreneurship catalyzes changes in not only one's internal self-identity but also in one's external role in the broader society, this framework identifies social entrepreneurship as the principal independent variable, resulting in two primary dependent variables: economic

empowerment and social inclusion [70]. Identity transformation = Building on IT, which focuses on the re-conceptualization of self through “normal” and “valued” roles that promote inclusion, and role valorization using SRV, which stresses on the process of recognizing the value of being part of “normal” (including employment) roles in society to bring positive change for those who have been assigned devalued status. Digital entrepreneurship, acting as moderation variable, enhances the effectiveness of social entrepreneurship by making it more accessible to have more access to resources, markets, and social capital enabled by technology [71-73]. In addition, co-creating solutions with relevant stakeholders, including NGOs, governments, local leaders and digital platform providers, is an essential contextual facilitator that helps ensure that business models are not only inclusive, but also responsive to the realities, experiences and needs of people with disabilities [74, 75]. Contextually, this theoretical and empirical dimensionalization leads to the construction of a dynamic model exploring the multifarious pathways to empowerment for disabled entrepreneurs in the digital age [76].

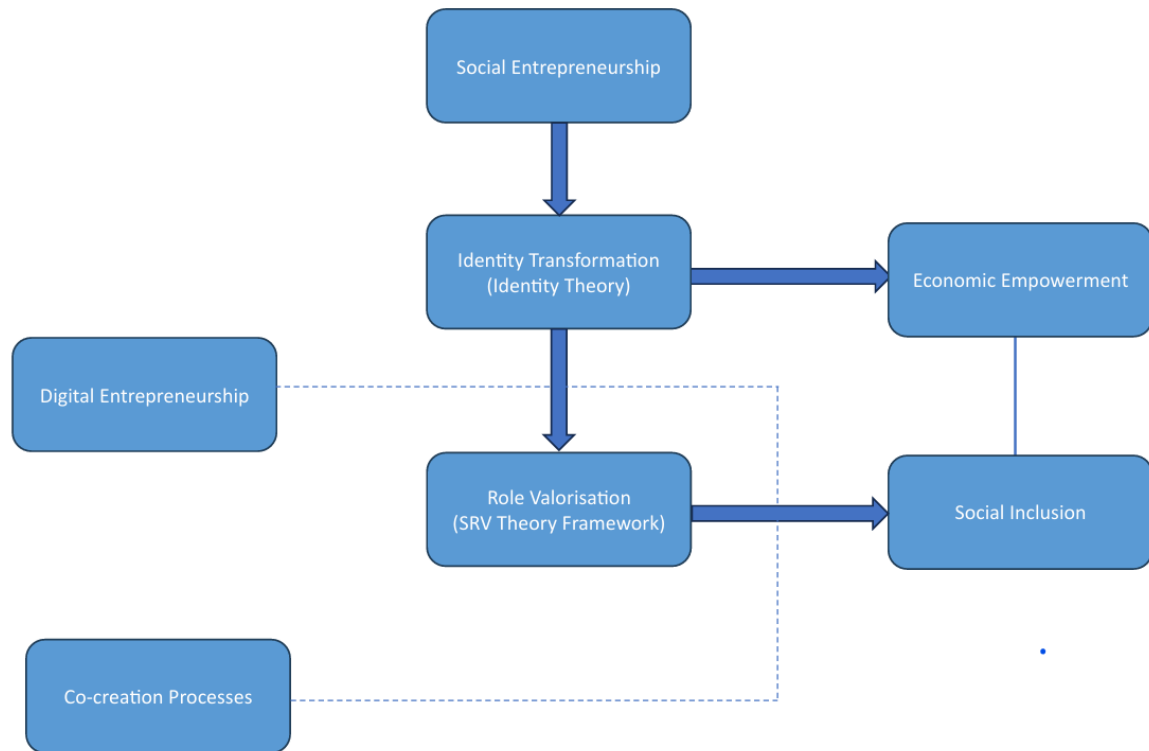


Figure 1.
Conceptual Framework of Social Entrepreneurship and Disability Empowerment.

3. Method

This qualitative case study examines and maps several social entrepreneurship initiatives that economically and socially empower persons with disabilities in Indonesia and Malaysia. When researching complex social phenomena in their real-life context, the case study method is especially suitable [77, 78]. Due to the contextual and experiential nature of disability empowerment, a qualitative strategy was chosen to gain insights into personal narratives, social structures, and organizational strategies. Qualitative research, which encompasses a flexible emerging framework not bounded to predetermined variables, offers an ideal way of contextualizing meaning-making processes among marginalized populations [79-81]. Based on qualitative research involving in-depth interviews, field observations, and thematic analysis informed by Braun and Clarke [82], this study illustrates patterns of motivation, barriers, and novel strategies within disability-focused social enterprises. This approach also reflects a current academic trend emphasizing the importance of the human and situated aspects of entrepreneurship [83, 84].

3.1. Research Design

In this study, we used a multiple case study design to identify and compare two well-known social enterprises, Rumah Harapan Mulya (RHM) in Indonesia and GOLD in Malaysia, that were supposed to empower persons with disabilities in an effort to explore this. A multiple case perspective allows cross-case analysis, which provides insight into how variations in the cultural, economic, and institutional contexts affect social entrepreneurial practices and outcomes [85, 86]. The design is especially useful in analyzing contemporary social phenomena, where the boundary between the phenomenon and its (contextual) environment is blurred, which is often the case in inclusive entrepreneurship. The case study approach also enables an exploration of “how” and “why” questions and provides a rich, holistic understanding of complex social processes [87]. RHM and GOLD were selected based upon their proven impact of promoting economic empowerment and social change for people with disabilities. The two cases cover different geographical contexts, strategic approaches and stakeholder ecosystems, thus maximizing analytical generalizability and providing transferable insights beyond its single context [42]. This methodological choice follows the trend of the contextual sensitivity recognized in entrepreneurship

research, particularly among marginalized populations [88, 89]. Extending the need for flexible, in-depth designs to better capture the way free social innovation falls out in the Global South.

3.2. Methods of Sampling and Data Collection

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants who represent positive disability-focused social entrepreneurship that aligns with criteria emphasizing innovation, empowerment, and social impact. Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research to gain access to information-rich cases providing greater insights into complex social issues. Recommended enterprises met disability-related needs, exhibited innovative empowerment approaches, and generated measurable social and economic benefits, and were led by persons with lived experience or strong stakeholder partnerships. Two great organizations were selected, Rumah Harapan Mulya in Indonesia, led by Eko Mulyadi, which teaches disabled artisans Batik Ciprat art, and GOLD in Malaysia, run by Juairiah et al. [90], who empowers youth with disabilities to create inclusive food products such as the "Kindness Cookies". We collected data through semi-structured interviews with founders, staff and volunteers, and field observations in order to document lived experience, organizational process, and contextual dynamics. Such approaches are well aligned with constructivist grounded theory, Charmaz [91], which emphasizes participants' perspectives and the co-construction of meaning within social contexts. Based on the qualitative research, ethical guidelines [92]. This study maintained the following ethical standards of research as emphasized in the World Medical Association Declaration of Connelly et al. [93], ensuring that all participants of the study were informed and consented, their participation was voluntary, and their confidentiality was ensured. The qualitative entrepreneurship literature has recently also pointed out the methodological anachronism of the entrepreneurship field [42, 94]. Furthering our previous point about deep contextual and ethical engagement with marginal populations like persons with disabilities is of great importance.

3.3. Analysis and Presentation of Data

The data analysis used Thematic Analysis, a qualitative research method that is methodical and flexible [95]. The framework contoured the step-wise process of: familiarity with the data, generation of initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. To promote methodological transparency, data traceability and consistency in the extraction of themes, both manual coding as well as the NVivo software program was used [96]. Iterative comparison in the analysis across and within the two case studies (Rumah Harapan Mulya Indonesia (RHMI) and GOLD (Malaysia)) kept the analysis rooted in participants' lived experience but also reduced researcher bias [97]. Roles were interpreted through the two lenses of Identity Theory [21], which explains transformations of both personal and social identities and Social Role Valorization Theory [24], which provides insights into the broader contexts of legitimacy surrounding disability-led ventures. This layered perspective enhanced the contextualization of themes and enabled a richer, multidimensional understanding of empowerment. Findings were presented including verbatim participant quotations, thematic tables, and visual models to bolster both clarity and analytical depth. This approach to reporting is in line with best practices for qualitative case study research, which emphasize transparency, rich description, and grounded interpretation [98, 99]. Its integration of a current overwhelming of induction and theory specifying this in the population trajectory terms make it an important contribution to inclusive entrepreneurship and disability empowerment literature.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

The study did receive formal ethical approval from the institutional academic ethics review board and was conducted according to international standards of ethical qualitative research. The research design adhered to a rigorous framework of ethical principles, ensuring that informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were maintained during every phase of the research process. Before collecting data participants were comprehensively informed about the research aims, methods, potential risks, and their rights along with explicit consent to take part [100]. All identifying data were removed and replaced with identifiers to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, Hoft [101], thereby preventing identification of participants or their organizational affiliations. All participation was voluntary, and respondents were advised of their right to withdraw at any time without adverse consequence, thus adhering to best ethical practice in social science [102]. In addition, all data (digital and physical) were stored securely in encrypted systems and access-controlled storage to prevent unauthorized access or data misuse. This is part of complying with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), EU Regulation 2016/679, which requires transparency, accountability, and lawful processing of personal data, especially in cross-national research settings [103]. Through the implementation of these strict ethical protocols, the study prioritized the dignity, autonomy and well-being of all participants, especially in the context of a sensitive focus on disability and empowerment.

4. Result

This study identifies the five themes emerging from the comparative analysis of RHM in one case and GOLD in the second, highlighting the role of inclusive social entrepreneurship in empowering individuals with disabilities. Both organizations show clear entrepreneurial motivation and leadership, driven by personal commitment and a transformative vision. This is in line with identity work, a feature of identity theory [104]. These leaders catalyze community change by reframing disability not as a limitation but as an innovation and a value. In the area of inclusive practices, both RHM's Batik Ciprat program and GOLD's "Kindness Cookies" initiative are examples of capacity-building interventions that encourage a sense of agency and the economic inclusion that accompanies it. These programs embody Social Role Valorization, Hammond and Palmer [47], as they allow disabled people to take on socially desirable roles, which helps establish their legitimacy and counteract marginalization. Moreover, both cases exemplify the importance of stakeholder engagement, utilizing partnerships with NGOs, local authorities, and digital platforms to co-create impact, thereby reinforcing Mair and

Marti's [75] theory on institutional embeddedness in social entrepreneurship. Nonetheless, endemic barriers and challenges, including stigma, resource limitations, and infrastructure constraints, highlight structural inequities, consistent with the work of Ayoungman et al. [105] on vulnerabilities of the social business model. Finally, innovation and scalability are observed through their use of digital tools, but both cases indicate a need for long-term sustainability planning. The synergy of these themes further affirms that the supportive ecosystems founded on theoretical learning can lead to increased identity transformation, role shifts, and outcome experiences for people with disabilities in inclusive social enterprises.

4.1. Entrepreneurial Motivation and Leadership

The entrepreneurial drive and leadership exhibited by RHM and GOLD align closely with transformational leadership theory, as these charismatic leaders serve as catalysts for change, empowering and uniting communities through shared values [106]. They are both listed below in Table 1 and highlighted to demonstrate that both Eko Mulyadi and Ms. Juairiah launched their initiatives from a deeply personal (social justice lens). Using his experience as a village head, Eko implemented participatory leadership to tackle boxed economy, which resulted in marginal citizens become productive craftsmen through Batik Ciprat. His leadership is a rich example of locally rooted innovation using culture as the means to economic agency. By contrast, Juairiah, a retired educator, led with a pedagogical and developmental leadership style to GOLD, by centering long-term empowerment through life-skills training whilst reconstructing identity through opportunities, particularly for youth with learning disabilities. This is in line with identity theory, Stets and Burke [21], and Sabila et al. [107], in which leading becomes an internalizing process through which individuals are empowered to take on their leadership identity (i.e., a new, socially desirable identity). Both cases highlight purpose-led leadership as an agent for inclusive change, aligning with Koe Hwee Nga and Shamuganathan's [108] findings that identify moral conduct and emotional intelligence as key attributes of successful social entrepreneurs. In addition, their different but complementary styles of leadership one of institution and one of education, highlight the importance of contextual sensitivity in designing social enterprise. These findings reaffirm that leadership in inclusive entrepreneurship must be much more than a managerial function and develop into a social pedagogy that nurtures individual transformation as well as collective resilience [109].

Table 1.
Entrepreneurial Background and Leadership Attributes.

Feature	RHM	GOLD
Founder	Eko Mulyadi (Village Head)	Ms. Juairiah (Retired Schoolteacher)
Year Established	2016	1997
Initial Motivation	Eliminate dependency on charity	Empower learning-disabled youth
Leadership Style	Transformational, Participatory	Developmental, Empathetic
Community Role	Government-backed community leader	Community educator and mentor
Key Drivers	Social inclusion, economic independence	Identity building, life-skill development

4.2. Inclusive Approaches and Empowerment

The commitment made by Rumah Harapan Mulya (RHM) and GOLD in the inclusive practices and empowerment strategies they undertook through person-centered design, can be mapped on to the principles of Social Role Valorisation (SRV) theory [110]. Recognizing the differing abilities of people with disabilities, both organizations develop their work to ensure the highest accessibility, role division and socio-economic empowerment. RHM uses simplified artisan techniques such as splash-dye batik (Batik Ciprat) that are almost motor skill-free, which allows everyone to participate equally [107]. Weekly training sessions tailored to each person's abilities reinforce a participatory inclusion model for this population. In contrast, GOLD maintains a structured vocational model focused on baking, hygiene, labeling, and collaboration, with specific roles. This promotes cognitive stability and self-discipline in young children with learning disabilities, in accordance with the theory of pedagogies for inclusion [111]. As evidenced in Table 2, both enterprises prioritize role assignment as a central dynamic for building identity/community legitimation and providing income through direct or group-based models. The results heightened self-esteem, greater visibility, and deeper engagement with society show the extent to which inclusive social entrepreneurship can transform personal and public narratives around disability. Dacin, et al. [112] and other reputable studies support these findings, as Kantus et al. [109] and Zahra et al. [89] note that social enterprises are transformative spaces in which socially subordinated individuals reclaim social markers and economic dignity. In this respect, the models act as livelihood producers as much as they do representational media for normalizing the place of and potential for a people with disabilities in their societies.

Table 2.

Design of Inclusive Practice and Indicators of Empowerment.

Indicator	RHM (Indonesia)	GOLD (Malaysia)
Primary Product	Batik Ciprat (splash-dye batik)	Kindness Cookies
Training Model	Weekly sessions tailored to ability	Baking, labeling, hygiene routine
Accessibility Strategy	Simple techniques requiring low motor skills	Repetitive tasks adapted to mental conditions
Role Integration	Artisan identity	Team-based production roles
Direct Income Mechanism	IDR 35,000 per batik piece	Monthly income credited to bank accounts
Average Daily Output per Person	5 pieces/day	Based on group production
Confidence and Social Role Indicators	Enhanced self-worth, visible community respect	Confidence through customer interaction

4.3. Engagement of Community and Stakeholders

The work of inclusive social enterprises like RHM and GOLD is built upon engaging community members and local stakeholders. Both cases illustrate the important role that different forms of stakeholder involvement, such as governmental bodies and family members, have in increasing program sustainability, operational capacity, and legitimacy. RHM exists in a more institutionalized ecosystem, forming partnerships with government and NGOs that deliver funding, technical assistance, and access to wider markets. These types of alliances are necessary for scaling inclusive entrepreneurship [89, 112]. Who explains that social enterprises in emerging economies require strategic partners for their survival? Meanwhile, GOLD is a bottom-up model where parent engagement and community engagement are the primary forms of the support system. This is consistent with Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) theory, Kretzmann and McKnight [113], which prioritizes using what is present in local capacities and networks as the basis for inclusive development.

Interestingly, as reflected in Table 3, emotional and operational contributions from family members who belong to GOLD are well within reach, given that they represent a strong and intimate support system for youth with disabilities. At the same time, volunteers in both types of enterprises are crucial for marketing activities, skills transfer, or customer interaction extending social capital and diverse social inclusion, in turn [25]. Additionally, both enterprises draw on hybrid sales platforms, Instagram, Shopee and Facebook, attesting to the role of digital networks in extending reach and legitimacy. These multi-stakeholder ecosystems not only support the day-to-day of the businesses, but also help firmly root disabled entrepreneurs in their communities, enhancing the social role legitimacy of disabled people, as described by the theory of Social Role Valorization [24, 47].

Table 3.

Types of Support Mechanisms and Stakeholder Involvement.

Type of Stakeholder	RHM (Indonesia)	GOLD (Malaysia)
Government Collaboration	Financial grants, training support	Limited (mostly community-led)
NGO Involvement	Technical and marketing support	Occasional support
Academic Institutions	University student volunteers for digital marketing	Rare involvement
Volunteer Role	Digital platform marketing, skills training	Booth sales, production supervision
Family/Parental Support	Moderate	High—emotional and operational
Main Sales Channels	Instagram, Shopee, village exhibitions	Booths, word-of-mouth, Facebook
Community Integration	Artisan visibility in village rituals	Active participation in community events

4.4. Barriers and Challenges

While both Rumah Harapan Mulya (RHM) and GOLD have seen significant success in terms of empowering individuals and promoting inclusion, they continue to face structural and systemic barriers that limit efficiency in operation and scalability over the long term. A significant challenge was posed by the nature of the social missions of both entities, working with a diverse array of people with different cognitive and emotional difficulties meaning critical and individualized approaches are needed to enable dialogue and ensure individuals understood tasks in context [114, 115]. Moreover, there is also a limited digital literacy of artisans and facilitators, which limits their ability to take full advantage of e-commerce tools that are necessary today for reaching new markets as technology in the digital space continues to grow rapidly. This is in line with, who highlight the importance of technological capacity for scaling social innovation.

Another challenge is the lack of dedicated volunteers, particularly for digital voluntary activities and training, Hustinx et al. [116], which mirrors the other trends of burnout and turnover seen in the volunteer domain [117]. As shown in Table 4, logistics infrastructure level up is low, especially for GOLD, with fragile packaging and poor distribution channels limiting outreach outside of the local markets [118]. Both ventures however, likewise have a financial dependency risk, relying heavily on grants, exhibitions and ad-hoc points of sale, and thus unable to provide them with consistent cash-flow, highlighting a vulnerability that complements those seen in hybrid social enterprise models [119].

These operational challenges underscore the necessity for adaptive capacity and ecosystem backing to maintain the sustainability of disability-focused social enterprises. Seelos and Mair [36] further argue that in order to overcome such

barriers would require external actors to create systemic interventions, policy frameworks, public-private partnerships, and technology transfer, coupled with internal capacity-building efforts.

Table 4.
Operational capacity constraints and barriers.

Barrier Category	RHM (Indonesia)	GOLD (Malaysia)
Communication Challenges	Due to mental disabilities of artisans	Varies by condition (e.g., autism, depression)
Digital Literacy	Low among artisans and facilitators	Moderate among facilitators; limited volunteers
Volunteer Scarcity	Inconsistent digital and training volunteers	Shortage of committed long-term volunteers
Logistics Infrastructure	Adequate for local delivery	Poor, fragile packaging and distribution limits
Financial Dependency Risk	Relies on grants and exhibitions	Reliant on both events and parental involvement
Market Access Constraints	Limited outside social media platforms	Lack of e-commerce scalability

4.5. Innovation, Scalability, and Sustainability

This agile innovation trajectory of RHM and GOLD illustrates how ground-up social enterprises leverage dynamic capabilities to operate on tight budgets in a context where social profit is often sacrificed for the pursuit of social inclusion. Both organizations take inclusive innovation approaches defined by creativity with a conscience and a world focus, which are essential for staying relevant in changing business and societal contexts [52, 120]. RHM's position on product diversification, such as the production of marbled glass and batik garments, is an embodiment of the deepening of its artisanal identity and a pursuit of market segments. Meanwhile, GOLD's unique combination of hospitality training and the Kindness Kitchen initiative showcases innovative service-sector models designed to match the cognitive and emotional capacities of its members [121]. These enterprises epitomize what Landrum [122] referred to as "innovation at the bottom of the pyramid," using constraints as an opportunity to maximize social impact. In both instances, sustainability is sought through hybrid financing models, blending grants and earned income, in keeping with the dual mission approach to social entrepreneurship [123]. The innovations are thus anchored to local culture and legitimacy through community participation, minimizing resistance to change.

In addition, market adaptation strategies, whether through social media (Instagram and Shopee) for RHM or through sensory-rich experiences via booths for GOLD, also show attention to not only digital opportunities but the human aspects of the sales experience. These findings echo the inclusive innovation framework that emphasizes the need for agency (not just access), to enable people at the margins to turn into producers of value rather than just consumers [52]. By creating these mechanisms, RHM and GOLD represent scalable and sustainable models for disability-led social entrepreneurship.

Table 5.
Indicators of Innovation and Sustainability.

Innovation Area	RHM (Indonesia)	GOLD (Malaysia)
Product Diversification	Doormats, marbled glass, batik garments	Barista training, Kindness Kitchen (catering)
Market Adaptation Strategy	Use of Instagram and Shopee	Booth visibility and sensory interaction
Community Involvement	Localized production and marketing	Active family and community engagement
Financial Sustainability	Hybrid: grants + product sales	Hybrid: booth sales + sponsorships
Future Plans	Expanding batik themes and motifs	Hospitality-based micro-enterprise expansion

4.6. Findings Summary and Thematic Matrix

Through the comparative analysis of Rumah Harapan Mulya (RHM) in Indonesia and GOLD in Malaysia, it is shown how such inclusive social entrepreneurship can lead to both economic empowerment, identity transformation and sustainable community integration for persons with disabilities. Both projects attest to how social entrepreneurship can provide meaningful work, skills development, and social roles that subvert stigma and foster inclusion. Having disabled people in roles providing clear structure and identity reinforcement for example, artisans at RHM or members of culinary teams at GOLD, connects to Identity Theory "*Burke & Stets*", where roles in the social context encode the self and agency. In addition, the focus on meaningful contribution resonates with social role valorization theory, Hammond and Palmer [47], which suggests that social respect is earned through engagement in valued roles.

Although both levels of enterprise show significant local impact, the two engaged in digital entrepreneurship are few and far between. RHM uses Instagram and Shopee to reach beneficiaries, but this is limited by digital literacy barriers between facilitators and beneficiaries. This limitation is consistent with Heeks et al. [52] highlight how the local adoption infrastructure and capacity often condition and determine the benefits of inclusive innovation. However, co-creation with communities of commonality and collaboration with local stakeholders are fundamental aspects of reinforcing sustainability both in financial and emotional terms, mobilized through joint community engagement. The findings highlight that

participatory and culturally responsive approaches to inclusive entrepreneurship can drive lasting change in marginalized contexts. But to be able to scale such impact, especially on digital dimensions, it needs investment both into accessible technology and training for inclusion where the digital divide exists across Southeast Asian social enterprises.

Table 6.

Thematic findings and hypothesis testing summary.

Statement	Result Based on Case Analysis
Social entrepreneurship fosters economic empowerment of disabled people	Supported
Digital entrepreneurship mediates the empowerment process	Partially Supported (limited use)
Co-creation enhances inclusive sustainability	Supported
Identity transformation is facilitated through role participation	Supported
Social legitimacy influences enterprise sustainability	Supported

4.7. Discussion

Within the context of inclusive social entrepreneurship and empowerment for people with disabilities, the analysis of Rumah Harapan Mulya (RHM) in Indonesia and GOLD (Generating Opportunities for Learning Disabled) in Malaysia draws in-depth conclusions on how aspects of inclusive social entrepreneurship can function as both an empowering avenue and identity change for people with disabilities. This discourse unpacks the broader implications of such results through the lens of contemporary literature, a relevant theoretical framework and emerging policy discourse in line with the inclusive innovation and social entrepreneurship scholarship.

Primarily, the analysis decisively re-establishes that social entrepreneurship acts not only as an economic mechanism, but as a socio-cultural apparatus for inclusion and identity transformation. The role of a transformational leader, for instance, a founder, is pivotal to establishing the importance of value-driven leadership in building sustainable social enterprises, in both instances. Eko Mulyadi in RHM exemplifies what Bornstein [39] refer to as a “social architect,” a leader who galvanizes community capital towards collective change. At the same time, Juairiah et al. [90], via GOLD, embody a pedagogy of empowerment that grants those with intellectual and developmental disabilities agency in a system that is caring, if institutional. These leadership practices support Dee's [124] main thesis that social entrepreneurs bring together the emotional force of a social mission, with a business-like persona of disciplined innovation.

Second, the results support Wolfensberger's Social Role Valorization (SRV) theory, suggesting that the attribution of a valued social role to marginalized populations increases their perceived social worth. RHM artisans now acknowledge producers of batik art as a culturally valuable commodity; gone are those days when they were identified as passive receivers of charity. In a similar vein, GOLD participants, through baking and barista training, inhabit professional identities that defy extant stereotypes of incompetence or dependency. These findings align with work by Kaehne and Beyer [125] that posits that the development of valued identities necessitates efforts to manage structural discrimination experienced by people with disabilities. Visible roles for incomes earned at market value also serve as vehicles of social capital.

Finally, while both enterprises show significant advancements in inclusive practices, digital entrepreneurship is an area that is yet to live up to its potential fully, especially with regard to its scalability and sustainability. Digital platforms such as Instagram and Shopee have already been used by the groups as part of RHM, but the issue of limited digital literacy is still a stumbling block for artisans and facilitators to get the most out of these digital tools. This echoes Heeks et al. [52]'s concerns about “digital divides within the digital divide”, wherein inclusive innovation does not infiltrate poorly marginalized populations (in education and health, for example) because of infrastructure and skills. Its strengths lie offline, in engaged offline-led communities, but it has yet to make full use of digital tools to further its market or automate components of its business. These results pose important questions regarding the inclusivity of digital entrepreneurship pathways in developing economies and support the call for capacity-building strategies that are contextualized to the socioeconomics of potential entrepreneurs and encompass both technological and cognitive dimensions of inclusion [126].

Also, according to the study, stakeholders (families, volunteers, government bodies, NGOs) play an integral role in establishing an enabling ecosystem for inclusive entrepreneurship. Both initiatives share the participatory nature of their organizations, signaling the sense of a co-creation model as a vehicle for sustainable social enterprises. This corresponds to Austin et al. [127], who defined stakeholder synergy as a social enterprise resilience factor. Government support has been a source of critical resources in RHM, but GOLD relies upon personal family relationships and revolving door volunteerism. These dynamics correspond with the co-production lens suggested, in which beneficiaries and external responders collaboratively influence the development and implementation of services. Yet, erratic volunteer availability and a lack of structured partnering protocols indicate an appetite for institutionalized engagement paradigms that can ensure sustained participation as well as minimize operational disruptions.

Issues including communication breakdowns, scarcity of logistics, and too much reliance on physical marketplaces are tangible threats to sustainability. It requires extended guidance and, due to their mental disabilities, participants are often unable to verbally express themselves or define their own independent plans. This supports findings from Yasuda [128] who argue that accessible workspaces need to repel beyond physical accessibility to more complex interpersonal and cognitive barriers. In GOLD's instance, baked goods tend to be perishable and have limited packaging technology, which inhibits the

bulk growth of e-commerce. While both enterprises have remarkably succeeded in micro level empowerment, they have limited macro level scale due to infrastructural and systemic inadequacies.

5. Conclusion

The focus of the paper is to showcase the transformative power of inclusive social entrepreneurship to empower persons with disabilities through case studies of Rumah Harapan Mulya (RHM) in Indonesia and GOLD in Malaysia. Both initiatives illustrate how innovative, purpose-driven leadership, adaptable training, and collaboration with stakeholders are elevating people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to the point of being seen as contributors in their communities rather than as a social liability. The production of batik ciprat from RHM and a cookie-based culinary enterprise from GOLD are contextual tools that trigger economic participation but also social identity and community integration. Rooted in Wolfensberger's Social Role Valorization theory, these models demonstrate that giving meaningful roles to people with disabilities leads to acceptance and dignity. However, issues of digital illiteracy maturity, volunteer dependence, and infrastructure shocks highlight the necessity of efficient capacity growth and inclusive policies. Notwithstanding these barriers, the results confirm that inclusive entrepreneurship can represent a resilient and socially integrative development strategy, so long as it is supported by systemic innovation, local adaptation, and cross-sectoral collaboration.

5.1. Policy Recommendations

There is a dire need for policy intervention to enhance the impact and scalability of inclusive social entrepreneurship for people with disabilities. Governments should build up inclusive enterprise development programs targeting funding, technical assistance, and digital infrastructure towards marginalized communities over the rest of their lives. This includes training of trainers, improving digital marketing skills, and creating inclusive workplaces. Second, recognition of inclusive social enterprises like RHM and GOLD should be formalized in policy so that they have access to procurement opportunities, tax incentives, and protection by social enterprise legislation. Third, a combination of multi-sectoral stakeholders needs to be institutionalized through partnerships with educational institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector to create a conducive environment for sustainable skill development and employment pathways. It should also promote inclusive education and vocational training curriculum development that can accommodate learning differences. Finally, we conclude with monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that national strategies should include to measure the long-term social and economic impact of inclusive entrepreneurship and ensure accountability and continuous improvement. The result is an environment that encourages such policies across the board [42].

No competing financial interests. The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper [129].

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