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(IJEMP)**www.gaexcellence.com/ijemp**BEYOND FINANCE: KEY SUSTAINABILITY DIMENSIONS
FOR MALAYSIAN SOCIAL ENTERPRISES**

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Abstract:

Social enterprises aim for long-term sustainability to balance their dual social and economic missions, though they risk prioritising economic goals over societal benefits due to resource constraints. In Malaysia, insecure foundations of finance have severely undermined the sustainability of social enterprise. While studies have brought financial dimensions into the limelight, this study identifies three equally critical non-financial sustainability aspects, which are continuous improvement, structured operations, and leveraging mutual strengths. These insights stimulate the enrichment of existing literature by introducing a critical non-financial dimension, demonstrating that non-economic factors are equally vital to long-term organizational viability. It also offered practical guidance to stakeholders to help social enterprises navigate the intricate issues encountered.

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Keyword:

Social Enterprise, Sustainability, Dual Mission, Financial Constraint



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Introduction

Social enterprises can be referred to as entities that take part in activities associated with entrepreneurial practices and are inspired by financial goals while simultaneously emphasising meeting social needs, which are realised by their establishments (Adro & Fernandes, 2022; Raimi et al., 2022; Sauermann, 2023). Dual mission is where their distinctive features lay on, which are economic performance and social impact, the two factors that make these social enterprises limit apart from commercial businesses that are profit-oriented, and from non-profit organisations that are socially focused (Cagarman et al., 2020; Doherty et al., 2014; Guerrero et al., 2021; Saebi et al., 2019).

Typically, operational failure occurs due to the lack of ability in managing competing demands between both missions, which is deemed an uphill battle. As social enterprises lose their grips on maintaining a durable business structure, which is a sustainable model, they begin to be susceptible to the risk of mission drift (Ebrahim et al., 2014). When social enterprises change course from focusing on their primary objective of giving their utmost attention on their target social groups towards prioritising profitability as a mechanism of survival, mission drift emerges, affecting their organisational identity. This is the reason why scholarly assertions are imperative regarding how important the institutionalisation of sustainability parameters is across operations of social business (Hota et al., 2023; Kulshrestha et al., 2022a; Zainon et al., 2014). Even though there has been heightened academic curiosity on research pertinent to social enterprise, most contemporary studies have focused on financial dimensions, but inadequately investigated other equally important dimensions (André & Pache, 2016; Ranville & Barros, 2021).

Numerous studies have emphasised that social innovation is vital for the sustainability of social enterprises, as it enhances organisational resilience and underpins long-term success (Konys, 2019; Putri Mega Desiana et al., 2022). Even though access to financial resources serves as a critical driver of innovation (Choi et al., 2020), limited financial access can significantly hamper social enterprises' capacity to innovate (Khan et al., 2021). In addition to social innovation, a human-resource aspect scores the importance towards sustainability. Financial resources, particularly initial and operating funds, however, also influence the capacity to attract and retain human resources, yet social enterprises often struggle to offer competitive compensation due to tight budgets (Farhana & Nuren, 2023; Mohd Ali Bahari, 2015; Rahman & Rabi, 2016).

Thus, due to financial constraint faced by social enterprises, it is vital to determine which non-financial dimension drive their sustainability. This research responds to this call by focusing its main objective on exploring other non-financial dimensions that potentially contribute to the sustainability of social enterprises. Since the fact that social entrepreneurship has substantially contributed towards collective public welfare and the fact that there is a dearth of empirical literature focusing on the sustainability of social enterprises, this study is well-timed and indispensable since it strives for elevating the level of understanding in the field, particularly for policymakers, practitioners, and society at large, who should recognise the value of social entrepreneurship that is multifaceted in nature. By exploring other dimensions, this study will offer practical guidance for social enterprises in navigating operational challenges while remaining true to their values. Furthermore, the findings are also expected to inform policymakers in designing supportive frameworks and policies that foster sustainable social-enterprise growth.

Literature Review

For the last two decades, research on social entrepreneurship has gained significant interest due to its remarkable contributions towards socio-economic development (Jayawardhana et al., 2022; Turyakira et al., 2025). Even though social entrepreneurship is commonly considered an extension of the concept of entrepreneurship (Sinthupundaja et al., 2020), it has extended beyond the boundaries of traditional-entrepreneurship literature (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018; Saebi et al., 2019). Social entrepreneurs employ basic entrepreneurial behaviour by identifying promising opportunities to generate valuable impact for society and the environment through the development of innovative business models (De Silva et al., 2020; Sauermann, 2023; Singh et al., 2020). The unique features of social enterprises that integrate dual missions of economic performance and social impacts are what differentiate them from commercial businesses that aim for economic objectives or non-profit entities that focus solely on social objectives (Guerrero et al., 2021; Saebi et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2025).

Strategic decisions in social entrepreneurship are often driven more by social and ethical considerations than by economic and financial factors (Bansal et al., 2023; Doherty et al., 2014). As the hybrid organisations with socially responsible missions, social enterprises are inherently regarded as ethical entities (Bhatt, 2022; Hota et al., 2023), fostering credibility and trust among stakeholders through a socially responsible entrepreneurial conduct (Daradkeh, 2023). This underscores the importance of embedding sustainability within social enterprises (Hota et al., 2023; Kulshrestha et al., 2022a; Zainon et al., 2014) as they often prioritise balancing their responsibilities to supporting beneficiaries with the need to maintain financial stability by managing costs and optimising revenues (Akinboade et al., 2021). The sustainability of a social enterprise to achieve its missions in the long term is always a concern (Henderson et al., 2020), but limited studies have attempted to investigate how this can be retained in a social enterprise (Jayawardhana et al., 2022).

While social enterprises face dilemmas in upholding sustainability within their organisations, existing research has not yet sufficiently explored non-financial dimensions, especially in balancing social and financial missions (Bacq et al., 2016; Battilana et al., 2012; Bhatt, 2022; Demers & Gond, 2020; Doherty et al., 2014; Hota et al., 2023). Hota et al. (2019) have emphasised that these dimensions are largely neglected but act as fundamental factors distinguishing social enterprises from commercial businesses, which is a view supported by Battilana et al. (2012), who have highlighted the limited understanding of sustainability from

a non-financial perspective. Addressing this concern is essential for social entrepreneurs to uphold their core values and create lasting impacts (Bull & Ridley-Duff, 2019). Therefore, it is imperative to be able to balance between social and financial objectives so that mission drift can be evaded, which is a situation where social enterprises' core missions are drifted away from their original trajectory, as highlighted by Jones et al. (2021). The deviation, instigated by mission drift, has deceived them from their originally intended objectives, which have become an obstacle for the social enterprises to drive and undertake their dual missions and compromise sustainability in the long run, resulting in the loss of equilibrium and the potential threat of their ability to sustain their operations or maintain their survival in the demanding landscape of social entrepreneurship. Moreover, Kulshrestha et al. (2022), and Moizer and Tracey (2010) have also highlighted that decisions regarding dual missions and resource allocation are crucial for survival amid challenges, such as funding constraints and financial viability.

To sustain ongoing socio-economic stability, social enterprises require a consistent inflow of revenues or funding contributions (Jeong & Alhanaee, 2020; Mas Ervina et al., 2023). Moreover, to achieve both financial sustainability and social objectives, these enterprises must also generate sufficient revenues to support business operations, as well as social projects (Bansal et al., 2023; Moizer & Tracey, 2010). Beyond financial factors, the literature has also highlighted the importance of social innovations and human resources, both closely linked to social entrepreneurship, as critical elements influencing sustainability, which can be enabled through financial capability (Wang, 2022).

The role of innovations has a direct, significant, positive effect on sustainability over time, and the ability to carry them out is imperative as it acts as a prerequisite (Putri Mega Desiana et al., 2022) for social enterprises' sustainability since they uphold dual missions that require them to be relevant and effective in balancing these two missions to avoid managerial conflicts and stakeholder pressure (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Harsanto et al., 2022).

Financial access and capability are the driving forces behind innovation (Choi et al., 2020). It occurs within the social-enterprise ecosystem and is influenced by different components, such as financial access and capability (Han & Shah, 2020). Unfortunately, the lack of financial access and support faced by social enterprises has hampered their potential and ability to innovate (Khan et al., 2021), and, consequently, their long-term sustainability.

In social enterprises, among the significant factors in the production of products and services is human resource, followed by social-value generation. Generally, social enterprises run their operations based on production systems that are relatively small-scaled, which are typically human-resource-assisted, unlike commercial businesses that rely upon much more extensive scales of equipment due to larger capital owned by them. Having been dependent on human resources for the value of their end products or services, social enterprises must have high-quality human resources (Park & Kim, 2020).

Due to financial constraints, many social enterprises have been unable to invest considerably in human resource (Doherty et al., 2014; McKenzie, 2017), which has compelled them to rely on unpaid employees, such as volunteers, to deliver social values and operate effectively (Ilyas et al., 2020; Kang, 2016). Nonetheless, given that volunteers are not contracted financially, chances for them to withdraw from the services are more likely compared to paid employees, meaning that the loss of volunteers has severe financial consequences (Forner et al., 2023).

In the Malaysian context, several challenges have impeded the sustainability of social enterprises as the ecosystem remains in its infancy, complicating the ability of the social enterprises to articulate a clear vision for fulfilling their business missions and sustaining operations. Most initiatives are currently at a start-up phase, where the social enterprises require targeted support, including specific financial instruments, which are often lacking, thereby undermining their sustainability prospects (Ministry of Entrepreneur and Cooperatives Development, 2022). According to a British Council report, only 37% of social enterprises in Malaysia are profitable, with the remainder either breaking even or operating at a loss (British Council, 2018). Like micro and small enterprises, cash-flow management has been the main issue for social enterprises to sustain their businesses, and to survive, they have been pressured to evolve and adapt their day-to-day business to sustain (Ministry of Entrepreneur and Cooperatives Development, 2022).

Fundamentally, numerous social enterprises in Malaysia have been under immense strain and heavily impeded by a fragile financial foundation. Even though governmental initiatives and academic literature have placed their primary focus on financial dimensions to stimulate sustainability (Jayawardhana et al., 2022; Rahdari et al., 2016), the exploration of other equally important determinants has, however, been restricted due to this emphasis (Putri Mega Desiana et al., 2022; Mohd Ali Bahari, 2015). While social enterprises are oftentimes preoccupied by being financially distressed and sustainability uncertainty, other various factors that are equally important to socially and economically impact sustainability have been scarcely investigated by recent studies (Doherty et al., 2014; Mohd Ali Bahari, 2015; Putri Mega Desiana et al., 2022; Mohammed Faiz, 2023). Therefore, it is essential to guarantee that the idea of sustainability is well-imprinted within social enterprises (Gali et al., 2020; Gupta et al., 2020). Since the concept of sustainability in social enterprises is imperative to perpetuate the benefits provided for communities and organisations per se, it is important to have a framework that is more comprehensive and all-encompassing so that their operations are viable and able to offer long-term impacts (Chang et al., 2017; Leung et al., 2019; Mohammed Faiz et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, Figure 1 below displays the chronologically structured from-left-to-right conceptual framework for this study. The study has commenced its course by using the identification of the dynamics of the dual missions, posing a challenge of balancing both social and economic goals in managing social enterprises. Failure in this balancing phase has pushed the enterprises into an unsustainable phase, subsequently triggering the risk of mission drift, by which leading them to decline or collapse and, subsequently, be unable to meet the objectives.

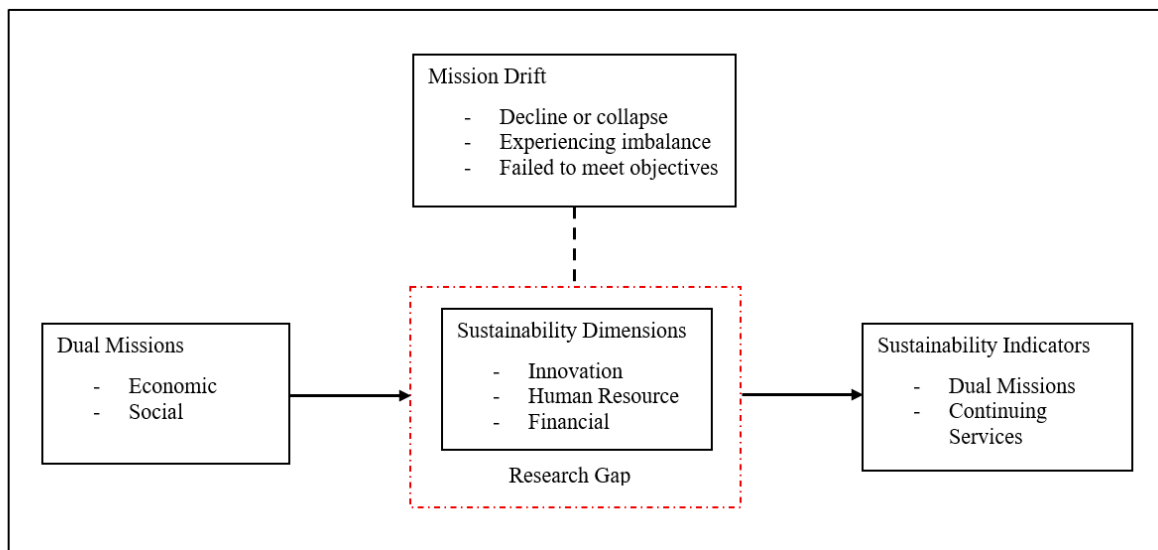


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

For social enterprises to move towards sustainability, conventional enabling dimensions are required, namely, innovation, human resources, and financial strength, as mentioned above. However, this framework posits that these three factors are heavily restricted by financial constraints, which act as a context-specific limitation. Therefore, a dedicated new dimension must be explored to address this research gap, specifically to identify alternative enablers that allow social enterprises to maintain sustainability when traditional factors fail due to severe financial constraints. Altogether, social-enterprise performance is widely evaluated through three core indicators, namely, the triple bottom line, dual missions, and continuing services.

Research Methodology

Qualitative Study

As noted above, this study has sought to discover primary dimensions enabling the embedding of the concept of sustainability within social enterprises. This is viewed as a central phenomenon within a real-world context that requires exploration and understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Eliciting insights about the socially complex phenomenon is feasible using qualitative exploratory case studies. This is imperative especially for researchers who have intention to discover the enlightenment of present-day contexts and a much deeper comprehension of the social phenomenon. As such, given the exploratory nature of this study and the need to discover the social context, the qualitative research approach is deemed appropriate (Bhatt, 2022; Jayawardhana et al., 2022). In addition, qualitative methods, such as case studies, observations, and interviews, are widely used in social entrepreneurship research, as aligned by this study that has adopted the qualitative approach (Gupta et al., 2020).

Case-Study Approach

Since the cases for this study have been social enterprises, it is wise to delve into the phenomenon by taking into consideration the social enterprises with accreditation and their overall settings as the proper contexts for this study. These identified research contexts have

also justified the employment of the case-study approach for this study (Jayawardhana et al., 2022; Yin, 2018). In addition, research questions that seek to explain contemporary circumstances, such as “how” or “why” a social phenomenon works, will make the case-study research more relevant as it focuses on the specifics of an event or situation (Yin, 2018). This study has been supported by the notion put forward by Ensenhardt (1989), a prominent scholar in the qualitative field, who has stated that a range of four to ten cases is necessary for refining underdeveloped concepts derived from case studies.

Data-Collection Method

Case participant. With the multiple case studies as the main approach, this study has successfully analysed four (4) social enterprises that served as the key informants, aligning with the study’s requirements. A set of operational criteria has been defined by the researchers, by which the candidates were dictated as the qualified cases, which are the registered social enterprises that have fit the criteria and requirements of accreditation designated by the government and recognised as the certified organisations. Initially, a lengthy list of accredited social enterprises has been nominated using a database acquired from the Minister of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives (MEDAC). However, the most accredited enterprises with vast experience and exceptional ease of access have been shortlisted and selected. The most experienced accredited social enterprises are those that have been established in the market for at least five years and have been able to survive to continue serving their communities (Weerawardena et al., 2010), of which all the cases have fulfilled one of the dimensions of sustainability for this study, namely, continuing service.

Multiple Source of Evidence.

To attain evidence for the study, the researchers have accessed multiple sources of evidence, namely, in-depth interviews and digital-document reviews. Utilising a wide range of evidence sources, arguments supported by multiple sources are considered superior in quality, more convincing, and accurate (Yin, 2018). To allow a more comprehensive grasp of the phenomenon being investigated, data triangulation from multiple of sources has been employed, making the results much more valid and credible. Additionally, this method helps to mitigate the risk of depending too heavily on potentially biased interview excerpts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Interview.

A proper protocol of case study, combined with ethical consideration, is vital for the protection of the informants and means, which, in return, amplifying the reliability of this study. A series of interview sessions has been carried out at the convenience of the informants’ settings based on the appointment of their designated times. These interviews, spanning ninety minutes each slot, have been recorded with consent from the informants. Prior to the sessions, the researchers have notified them about the nature of the study, and they have expressed their agreement to take part in the interviews.

Document Review.

The increasing accessibility of diverse document types through internet searches enhances this approach, making it particularly advantageous for examining and interpreting complex

research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Morgan, 2022). The comprehensive nature of documentation is essential in the data-collection process of qualitative research (Yin, 2018). A multitude of information and a wealth of relevant data have been collected as evidence from webpages and social media platforms of the organisations. The coverage of the official websites spans around 12 to 24 months, while the coverage of the social media platforms, which are Instagram and Facebook, spans approximately 6 to 12 months.

Data-Analysis Method

Thematic Analysis.

The researchers have successfully analysed and prepared a word-for-word transcription of the verbal exchanges recorded during the interview sessions to capture the “*emerging patterns, categories, subcategories, themes, and concepts*” (Saldana, 2009). Apart from that, the researchers have also reviewed digital documents with the aim to comprehend their contents. As the reviewing process was complete, the researchers have been able to establish a strong concept that is able to decode and interpret the patterns observed and identify a composition of primary themes by conducting a series of systematic analyses and interpretations. Initial codes aligned with the research objectives have been created, leading to the discovery of patterns and themes that have provided new insights into the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Each theme has been refined, named, and summarised to convey a clear central idea and maintain a consistent narrative throughout the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Result and Findings

Description of Informants.

Table 1 below presents the selected accredited social enterprises, chosen based on convenience, accessibility, and geographic proximity, which foster a more extended and less structured relationship with participants (Yin, 2018).

Table 1: Descriptions of Cases

No.	Social Enterprise	Industry	Description of Activities	Beneficiaries
1	Case 1 - PAV1 (Founder)	Agriculture	Creating sustainable cultivation of stingless-bee farming and empowering the local communities.	Local communities
2	Case 2 - IP2 (Founder)	Bakery	Empowering vulnerable and financially dependent mothers, particularly single mothers and those in the B40 income group.	Women
3	Case 3 - PL3 (CEO)	F&B	Striving to strengthen capacity building and economic empowerment through F&B initiatives.	Marginalised community

No.	Social Enterprise	Industry	Description of Activities	Beneficiaries
4	Case 4 - CS4 (Founder)	Healthcare	Empowering vulnerable communities through various educational and socio-economic initiatives.	Stateless and undocumented children

Sources: Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives (MEDAC) and social enterprises' websites

Meanwhile, Table 2 below displays a list of evidence, which has been accumulated from the myriads of sources, presented with the thematically analysed results conducted for this study.

Table 2: Result and Analysis of Cases

Multiple Sources of Evidence		
Participants/ Themes	Interview Excerpt (IV)	Document Review (DR)
Continuous Improvement		
Case 1 PAV1	- Since I was young, I've been exposed to traditional farming without any systems. Slowly, I've applied that background and experience to improve it so that it becomes more sustainable and commercial. I've regularly participated in seminars and conferences, whether international, online, or physical ones. I've attended all relevant events to update my knowledge and then apply what's suitable to PAV and the community. What I've learned and what I've implemented in the field often involve conducting experiments, especially to enhance the SOPs.	PAV have pledged to do their best and continuously improve for the betterment of their community, recognising the importance of self-improvement. The conferences and events attended.
Case 2 - IP2	It's led by Kak XX and Kak XX. It's hard to actually differentiate our product from others. This is a competitive product. But we always stay with our statutes to make our commitment to use high quality within. That one we never sacrifice. It costs a lot because we don't want to keep trialing butter that we've already used only to find that it doesn't work.	The products are crafted and delivered using premium quality ingredients, underscoring their genuine commitment to upholding high standards of product quality.

We've to keep trying again and again. It doesn't just take one attempt for us to complete the R&D; it often takes around ten tries to get it right.

Case 3 - PL3 Initially, we utilised numerous platforms to secure food orders. Now, we've become widely recognised and available. While XX Food is not currently in practical use, it was beneficial during the COVID-19 pandemic. Presently, digital platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, play a crucial role in order acquisition from the community.

PL have expressed their pleasure when given the opportunity to collaborate with other parliamentary members and is willing to commit to this partnership.

We're not only providing them with an opportunity to increase their income but also enhancing their knowledge and skills. While we offered these benefits in the past, they weren't formally documented. This time, we're committed to institutionalising this process. The participants will receive certificates and will've the opportunity to go through a proper graduation ceremony.

Case 4 - CS4 For the module framework, the first step is to hold regular meetings... establish the timeline and approach needed. The framework, however, varies each month because each chapter has its own framework. At the end of the month, we'd conduct a post-mortem to evaluate the results and reach an agreement. At the end of the project, we'd gather everything and discuss it again.

They have engaged directly with children at other learning centres to implement the content module, and gathered feedback for evaluating and monitoring the effectiveness of the PFKK module.

Most of our students have shown improvement. However, when it comes to learning English, they've really struggled because it's not a commonly spoken language. We've taught them and would continue to do so. We'd try our best to educate them because we know that English's an international language.

Structured Operations

Case PAV1	1 - Our centre's located near our home to save costs, especially since we've started using our own funds. By starting at home, which's not in a commercial area, we don't have monthly rent. Here, we also serve as a collection and promotion centre, as well as a teaching space. This includes production for ice cream. To recruit the community, we've conducted interviews. Initially, twenty-eight people have shown up, but we've only selected thirteen people who're compatible with the direction and goals of PAV. We've established a black-and-white agreement for clarity. PAV has developed its own Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to control the quality of its farms and production processes designed with the aim of enhancing the community.	Wellness – the tourism programme involves engaging external visitors interested in learning about stingless bees and their products. Some key pieces of equipment that are commonly used in honey-processing operations.
Case 2 - IP2	We've a very serious recruitment process. It took about one month to actually do the screening, meet them, and get to know them through interviews. We asked so many questions and all relevant documents. Yes, we did the audit, and we brought in the sample food for food taste. Honestly, it wasn't that easy. Some of the mothers were unable to accept their supply. It was due to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), hygiene, and not like we were trying to depict on them. That wasn't the intention because we've customers like hotels that take it from us to support you, but then you changed the recipe to make this cheaper. [IP (IV)]	The mothers have smiled with joy as they received ovens from the module, which would help support their micro-enterprises and allow them to apply the knowledge they have gained. The joyful faces of women who have successfully graduated from the academy and been given capital of up to RM5,000 to support their micro-enterprises.
Case 3 - PL3	We're working closely with the Federal Territories Department, especially their ICU team. They maintain a database focused on hardcore-poor cases—those experiencing extreme poverty. I can't recall the exact name of the database, but it's crucial for our work. Besides, we've	Meetings with the chairperson of the women's club at one of the PPR have been held to gain further insights into the situation on the ground.

also connected with local leaders and coordinators for support and then conducted interviews to gather more information and insights.

We 've recently gone out to scout for spaces and met with all the local YBs, who're the members of parliament in those areas. We've also connected with various associations and their chairpersons.

During our meetings, we've shared a list with them and asked them to reach out to anyone interested in that list. Those who were keen have attended our interviews. Before the interviews, we'd made sure to send them the application link and put up banners everywhere to spread the word.

An informative banner has been put up to announce the opportunity for the beneficiaries to apply as the participants of the programme.

The interview sessions have been conducted for the selection of the participants for the cloud kitchen project.

Case 4 - CS4

We focus on the rudimentary aspect of education, specifically literacy, before progressing to the skills phase. ...individuals must first become literate before they can advance to the next level in terms of skills development.

The skills training's aimed at those who're already literate and need skills for their economic growth. Our framework involves conducting community outreach every year by visiting villages nearby, as we need to identify children who're illiterate and couldn't read. We'd personally engage with them to provide exposure to education, which's very important, especially for their mothers.

Fundamentally, I've a team ready on the ground, and RXX would be the one I'd listen to, as he'd visit it to conduct an analysis.

CS has developed its own roadmap based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to serve as both its advocacy strategy and sustainability framework.

Leveraging Mutual Strengths

Case 1 - PAV1

We've worked hard to apply for a grant from All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development

They have collaborated and received support from the Tuaran Parliamentary Office for

Goals (APPGM-SDG). Thankfully, they loved our project, and we've received funding for two batches totalling RM80,000.

the implementation of the projects under the APPGM-SDG grant.

Among the learning activities is the one aimed at introducing knowledge about stingless bees and raising awareness while fostering interest, and they have also collaborated with cooperatives to implement various initiatives.

They have engaged in knowledge-sharing networking activities with other industry players, which've positively impacted its development.

Case 2 - IP2

That's what makes the programme by McKinsey so interesting. They've a lot of prestigious clients, haven't they? For instance, our industry mentor is the CFO of Sime Darby, and another mentor is the Vice President of Khazanah Nasional.

It is among the interesting events organised, in collaboration with their strategic partners, and it is aimed at empowering women and highlighting their essential roles.

IP provides forms and warmly welcomes any potential collaborators to join forces with them.

Case 3 - PL3

Networking's crucial, and you must continuously build your network. This is very important because both the government and the people are constantly changing. You can't rely solely on close associates; it's not just about having a few close friends. We need to work collaboratively with everyone, including the ruling government and other stakeholders. We've established a good reputation, and ongoing networking's essential. Without it, you won't be able to advance.

The fruitful discussion and meeting between PL and other social enterprises aimed to leverage each organisation's capacity and strengths. [PL (DR18)]

Case 4 - CS4	Our volunteers comprise doctors, lawyers, teachers, and members of the public... a total of thirty-nine volunteers.	CS has posted on social media to call for volunteers, particularly medical officers, for the Medical Outreach Programme (MOP)
	Posting on social media to call for volunteers, particularly medical officers, for the Medical Outreach Programme (MOP)	CS has actively networked with various organisations, both domestic and international ones, large and small, to learn new things and share their initiatives.

Discussion

There are three themes that are substantial, according to this study, which are pertinent to the informants' preferred approaches in their effort to attain organisational sustainability. In general, the key objective of this study is to discover the dimensions that are non-financial, which represent a research gap in recent empirical studies concerning sustainability. The researchers have incorporated these themes into the analysis based on the findings and standpoints of the practitioners whose social enterprises are operating in real life. The identified themes are continuous improvement, structured operations, and leveraging mutual strengths.

Continuous Improvement.

Continuous improvement portrayed as diverse methods employed by social enterprise to improve the performance of their enterprises, with the objective of enhancing efficiency and maximising social impact.

Through a structural commitment to continuous improvement, PAV has systematically transformed traditional agricultural methodologies into those that are systematically commercialised, which are by experientially optimising and using contemporary research from academic conferences. Refining the Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) has also been among the strict field experimentation consistently carried out for the establishment of the data-driven protocols that are adaptive in nature. In the interim, IP has, likewise, shown its structural commitment to continuous improvement by never compromising its product quality, especially by its management, even though there is a fierce competition from its counterparts. Besides, IP has also strictly maintained the finest ingredients possible using stringent specifications, which have been maintained within the organisational statutes, as a means of preserving product differentiation. As a result, extensive research and development (R&D) protocols have been iteratively executed, often requiring approximately ten trial cycles per product to eliminate ineffective materials and systematically establish optimal formulation standards. Through a structural commitment to long-term sustainability in social entrepreneurship, it is discovered that PL has made a huge transformation, which is transitioning from crisis-driven digital platforms into an institutionalised model of social enterprise development. To develop market and financial elasticity, PL has systematically advanced digital tools unofficially used during the COVID-19 pandemic into omni-channel community order acquisition strategies, by which revenue stability can be secured. Simultaneously, the formalisation of social sustainability is

feasible when informal aid for community is transformed into human-capital development pathways that are well-structured and well-documented, complete with certified training milestones. In the meantime, CS chapter-specific pedagogical frameworks are continuously evaluated through systematic monthly post-mortems and project-end reviews. Through this iterative governance, evolving technical and linguistic insights are progressively disseminated to mitigate regional barriers in global literacy, particularly in non-native English acquisition.

Ultimately, the operationalisation of continuous improvement as a mechanism to strategically balance the competitiveness of the market with adherence to the goals of the socio-economic mission has been demonstrated by these cases. To avoid the market being commoditised, these social enterprises have embedded a list of the quality standards that are non-negotiable into their organisational statutes and absorbed the high iterative R&D costs (Jha et al., 2021). As a result, the establishment of a sustainable, dual-bottom-line ecosystem is possible as evolving technical insights are progressively disseminated to foster operational sustainability in the long run (Bruder, 2025; Chen & Tang, 2026). This structural approach ensures that immediate local economic empowerment, institutionalised social equity, and systemic regional advancement are simultaneously protected against short-term financial pressures and shifting market demands.

In general, the strategies used by these social enterprises to achieve continuous improvement have been supported by the literature, underscoring a substantial weight of the findings. This has demonstrated that the social enterprises must not only develop strategies and plans but also continuously improve them to achieve sustainability. Additionally, the social enterprises should also regularly assess and refine their strategies to optimise performance, ultimately contributing to their long-term sustainability.

Structured Operations.

Structured operations are notable emphasis on the structured and systematic strategies, particularly in executing their social missions and projects for the beneficiaries by utilising specific tools, approaches, and implementation methods.

PAV, for example, has implemented the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for stingless-bee-harvesting with the beneficiaries, while IP has developed the comprehensive module and meticulous standards for recruitment. In addition, PL has employed the strategic collaboration initiative that is built on the multi-tiered stakeholder network that connects the top-level government administration with the grassroots community leaders.

These cases have clearly shown that a multi-stakeholder social-enterprise ecosystem that is resilient can be operationalised by structured operations and strategic collaborations integrated altogether. To successfully establish a dual-purpose system for policy advocacy and sustainability in a long run, it is essential to have operational roadmaps placed directly in line with the frameworks of global sustainability.

Based on a business standpoint, standardising its public programmes and making its production processes specialised can make organisations financially viable and institutionally resilient. At the same time, social fairness and inclusivity can be materialised by having partnerships between the organisations and local communities. This is done to ensure that the business initiatives align with what the community members really need.

Apart from that, structural transparency and data integrity are strictly protected using beneficiary selecting and staff hiring mechanisms based on merit. By formalising agreements for partnerships and intellectual property, a system that can be developed is consolidated, which allows social enterprises to use the strengths of their partners, mitigate the ever-changing market challenges, and secure the progress of socio-economy in the long term.

This has aligned with Anand et al. (2021), who have stated that strategic thinking encompasses planning, ideas, and possibilities as primary determinants for a business's future direction and sustainability (Sinthupundaja et al., 2020). The literature has emphasised that, to fulfil social missions, social enterprises are increasingly applying various strategic and managerial practices that help to ensure long-term sustainability (Sabella & Eid, 2016). This necessitates a strategic approach that is innovative but also impactful and sustainable at the same time (Putri Mega Desiana et al., 2022).

Evidently, this study has underscored the significance of strategic organisation and systematic implementation in social projects to ensure alignment with social missions and impacts, which ultimately contributes to organisational sustainability.

Leveraging Mutual Strengths.

This study defines leveraging mutual strengths through the development of networking and partnership collaborations with diverse partners where social enterprises can capitalise on each other's strengths to improve operational efficiency and management, thereby strengthening their sustainability. Consequently, the advantages held by partners can be shared and leveraged synergistically to support social missions.

PAV has clearly exhibited that it is vital for the social enterprise across a broad network to have mutual strengths to survive in a long-term period. By getting funded by the official bodies like APPGM-SDG, the organisation has been able to successfully build a robust financial foundation to organise its programmes. This financial support has further been strengthened by the high-level corporate guidance from the elite firms like McKinsey, which has brought professional executive expertise straight into the strategic planning of the enterprise.

Concurrently, CS has been able to expand its operational capacity by having an extensive volunteer network. This volunteer network combines professional experts like doctors, attorneys, educators, with the public. Rather than relying merely on the trusted close circles, PL has actively built new relationships to facilitate the dealings with political and communal changes. To develop a successful teamwork system that is highly synergistic, the social-media campaigns have been deployed for professional volunteer recruitment for the special projects like the Medical Outreach Programme (MOP), which has been done to ensure that the enterprise has the capacity to survive the external changes and is able to be a driving force for the community to develop.

Past studies have suggested that collaborative effort between social entrepreneurs and commercial entrepreneurs is crucial for connecting and using social capital generated by social networks. Social entrepreneurs should use their networks strategically to secure various resources like funds, knowledge, and specialised skills essential for long-term sustainability (Graikioti et al., 2022; Han & Shah, 2020b). This is because networking assists social enterprises to consolidate resources, share know-how, and magnify their social impacts

(Turyakira et al., 2025; Quaye et al., 2024). Through meaningful connections and collaborations made with various entities and stakeholders, they would be able to reinforce their official trust, reputation (Gigliotti & Runfola, 2022), and the overall organisational performance (Rahman et al., 2020).

Substantiated by the prior studies, this study has managed to underscore that collaboration and networking with key partners are tremendously important to guarantee the sustainability of social enterprises.

Conclusion

This study has contributed to the social-entrepreneurship field by examining the key factors that lead to the sustainability of social enterprises and allow them to consistently deliver social and economic impacts. To bridge the gap existing in the past studies, the study has formulated the additional dimensions, which are non-financial. It has utilised the real-world data based on the real-context evidence derived from the selected examples of the social enterprises to explain the important aspects of sustainability, thereby stimulating new insights and providing a much clearer understanding. This study has evidently shown that the social enterprises can rely upon the other various non-financial factors to survive, which allow them to develop greater capacity and stand a chance to thrive.

In the meantime, the themes identified, which have been supported by the contemporary research, display that thriving social enterprises can be exemplified by others that are seeking to survive and grow their social and economic impacts, thereby contributing towards their long-term survival. The findings of this study offer a practical guide for existing social enterprises to optimise their operations and use the discovered themes strategically within their unique circumstances, which will directly contribute to enhanced sustainability.

Recommendations

There should be more empirical studies using multiple case-study methods to provide a clearer picture, real-world context, and practical ideas for theory-building related to sustainability in social enterprises. Besides, future research should also discover how sustainability is measured beyond social and financial metrics. Since focus placed on sustainability is growing, it is important to establish a complete framework comprising a wider range of indicators. Moreover, future studies could also replicate this study with different categories of social enterprises to enhance our understanding of sustainability. By conducting a consistent study on sustainability, we would be able to develop a comprehensive non-financial model of sustainability.

These research findings are expected to enrich the existing body of literature by offering a much deeper understanding on the ethical practices that support sustainability dimensions in this segment. The sustainability model that has been developed via this study will serve as a practical guide for various stakeholders, comprising social enterprises, to build strategies and make plans for the sake of their growth and sustainability in the long run. In addition, it will also help policymakers to create policies and regulations necessary, while also benefitting ultimate socialenterprise beneficiaries by enhancing the overall impact and competency of these organisations. Finally, its findings are anticipated to advance the industry and help reinforce the social-entrepreneurship ecosystem in our nation.

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Appendix

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